

## **THE PARISH of AYTON**

**by Robert A. H. Robinson**

### **TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL HISTORY**

The River Eye or Eye Water as it is known locally — roughly bisects the parish, running from north-west to south-east through the low lying lands of the Eye Valley, turning in a northerly direction to join the North Sea at Eyemouth Harbour. The Ale Water, the principal tributary of the Eye, likewise flows from north-west to south-east, joining the Eye at Millbank. These two rivers, with the various burns and drains, form the main watershed of the parish, the principal burns being the Horn Burn, Biglawburn, Cocklaw Burn and Hill Burn. The Eye and the Ale pass through the fertile lands to the north-west where low banks and grasslands predominate, then on and through the deep, tree and scrub-lined gorges nearer the sea, east of Ayton village and at Millbank, Ale Water Banks and Netherbyres.

The parish is approximately four miles from north to south and about the same west to east, giving an approximate area of 13 square miles. To the north, the parish is bordered by Coldingham Parish, to the east by Eyemouth and the North Sea, while to the south and west the bounds are Mordington, Foulden, Chirnside and part of Coldingham. The coast line extends from the village of Burnmouth to Eyemouth, a distance of about three miles. At the southern end of the parish the ground rises to form a sloping ridge inclining sharply towards the sea south of Burnmouth at Greystonelees, and extending south-westerly towards Foulden and Chirnside, the highest point being Ayton Hill (660 feet). Precipitous cliffs form the coast line, being less high and rugged towards Eyemouth, with small inlets at Burnmouth and along the coast nearer Eyemouth. The remainder of the terrain within the parish is undulating, with minor elevations between the valley of the Ale and Eyemouth, and between the Eye Water and Millerton Hill.

Except within the grounds of Ayton Castle Estate, and at Netherbyres and Ale Water Banks, very few hardwood trees have survived, and of these practically all the elms have been felled, killed by 'Dutch Elm Disease' which renders the timber fit only for firewood and posts. The predominant trees are soft-woods – firs, pines, and larches – mostly sited in man-made plantations providing timber when mature for pulping, chipboards and posts. Scots pine, Norway and Sitka spruce and larch predominate, with smaller plantings of less common types of soft-woods, sometimes bordered by silver birch and the more decorative hard-woods. The main hard-woods of the area are oak, ash, beech, sycamore, willow, alder, chestnut, rowan and gean. There is a sawmill at Littledean, for Ayton Castle Estate.

The frequency and thickness of the soft-wood plantations has not greatly enhanced the wild-life of the area, for few birds utilise the woods before they are thinned. Some birds nest in the plantations and others roost there, but generally the more common woodland species are not attracted to this man-made habitat. This is not so for red squirrel and roe deer, both species of which are found locally and appear to be on the increase. Fox and badger seek sanctuary in the plantations, together with some smaller mammals. Since mink were introduced to the area in the 1930s, when it was popular to raise these animals in captivity for their fur, there have been frequent sightings of the survivors of the many escapees, which thrive and have multiplied in the seemingly ideal habitat to which they were introduced. These ferocious mammals can, and do, cause havoc to fish stocks, nesting birds and small mammals, and are a



**Plate 2.** Ayton Castle.

**Plate 3.** The High Street, Ayton, in the 1950s.



menace to the natural wild-life; so much so that they are regarded as pests and rigorously hunted and trapped.

On the coastal strip of the parish sea-birds such as eider, razor bill, guillemot, oyster catcher, turnstone, red shank, knot, most species of gulls, kittiwake, shag and rock dove frequent the inlets, cliffs and waters. On the lower fields and grasslands can be found sparrow-hawk , kestrel, owls, heron, collared dove, wood pigeon, pied wagtail, chaffinch, blue tit, tree creeper, goldcrest, blackbird, thrush, redwing , moorhen, mallard, dipper, robin, mistle thrush, wheatear, warblers, dunnoek, rook, jackdaw, crow, pheasant, partridge, to name but a few . On the uplands red grouse, curlew, common sandpiper, skylark, lapwing, meadowpipit, wheatear and grey wagtail predominate. In April 1986 a little auk was blown ashore at Fairnieside where snow buntings were also found, and a hoopoe was seen near Hallydown.

The more common mammals are fox, hedgehog, rabbit, brown hare, red squirrel, long tailed field mouse, voles, shrews, weasel, stoat, water voles, brown rat, house mouse, roe deer, badger, and bats, the pipistrelle being the most common. On the rocks and off shore grey seal are frequently seen, while of the fish and reptiles, brown trout, sea trout, salmon, frogs and toads predominate.

### **HISTORICAL SKETCH**

Ayton, or Eitun as it was previously spelt takes its name from the Eye Water, and between 1098 and 1107 was a dependency of Coldingham Priory, together with another small village known as Nether Ayton, which stood to the east of the present churchyard on the south side of the Eye Water and contiguous to the Roman road which extended from Newcastle to St Abbs Head. It is possible that a third small hamlet, known as Hornford or Horford, existed near the site of the present Jubilee Bridge over the Eye Water south-west of Ayton Village, or where the Horn Burn joins Eye Water about quarter of a mile further south.

The first recorded settlers in Eitun, a hundred years after the Norman Conquest, were a Norman family by the name of De Vesci, who formed a settlement on the banks of the Eye, and built a castle or defensive tower for the protection of the family and vassals. Similar small towers were built at Huldie and on the site of the present Wall Tower field. The De Vescis changed their name to de Eitun and gained considerable power in the area. In 1472 the lands were granted to the Homes of Dunglass, but in 1716 the estates were forfeited by the then Earl of Home because of his support for the Jacobite cause and passed to the Crown. The lands were eventually purchased by John Fordyce, who was Commissioner for Lands and Forests of Scotland. In 1834 the lands of the present Ayton Castle Estate and much of the land about Ayton were sold to William Mitchell-Innes who built the present Ayton Castle in 1846. In 1888 the estate of Ayton Castle was bought by the forbears of the present owner, David Liddell-Grainger, who resides in the Castle today.

Meanwhile, the settlement of Ayton grew to a village about the estate and to its present extent. In the old and original part of the village to this day known as the Old Town the only known hostelry existed. This inn, the King's Arms, had adequate accommodation and a large assembly room and undoubtedly served as shelter for travellers on the direct route between Scotland and England which passed through the village. Agriculture, albeit primitive by today's standards, became established throughout the parish, with some sea fishing from the hamlet and harbour of Burnmouth leading to further expansion of population and

accommodation. A fair was held twice yearly in Ayton village until 1832. Later a monthly cattle market was established, with dealers from Berwick and surrounds coming to buy and trade horses and cattle. There were four mills in the parish providing flour, oatmeal and barley, and the village and parish became more or less self-sufficient and expanded further. Approximately sixty years ago the population was reckoned to be between 500 and 600 in Ayton village and 1200 and 1400 in the remainder of the parish. There were no fewer than 70 tenemented properties in the village and about 120 men and women were actually employed within the village while today there will be no more than 40. The largest employer in that time was the now disused and converted Bleachfield Paper Mill which was originally a cloth mill but converted to paper making about 1845, and worked in conjunction with the paper mill at Millbank until it was burned down in 1866.

The second major centre of habitation in the parish is at the small fishing village of Burnmouth. The small bay is an ideal haven for small boats and sea fishing has occurred there for many centuries. The harbour's foundation stone was laid in 1831 and the work was completed one year later, at the cost of £2,000. In 1877 an addition was made bringing the structure to its present state. There have been many changes since the beginning of this century; the composition of the village has been completely altered and it is difficult today to picture it as it was in the 'olden days'. There are still three groups of houses within Ayton parish at the foot of the hill at the harbour side. These are Cowdrait, Lower Burnmouth and Partanhall, Upper Burnmouth being the habitation at the top of the hill adjacent to the A1 road. Originally, the houses were of low single-storied 'but and ben' type. Although there was not much accommodation in these houses many held large families. Between the wars Cowdrait and Lower Burnmouth were entirely rebuilt and the picturesqueness of the village was lost. The houses at Partanhall have not been dramatically altered but only two are inhabited throughout the year, the remainder being used as holiday homes.

When the new houses were built at the foot of the braes they were inhabited by young fishermen and their families. However, between the wars the first council houses were built in Upper Burnmouth and gradually the fishermen moved away from the lower houses and today only three families remain there, most of the other houses being occupied by pensioners. Before the introduction of council houses Upper Burnmouth was a very small community; it was however the 'business centre' of the village, Lyall Terrace consisting of four houses and the post office, which looked across to the busy main line railway station and the school. Further up the road was (and still is) the busy inn known as the Flemington Inn. In Lower Burnmouth there were smoke houses and other buildings where fish was cured. It was imperative that such buildings were in close proximity to the harbour. There were also two shops and a ship chandlers business, with another shop in the small community of Ross, which is in Mordington Parish, although situated in Lower Burnmouth.

The fishing industry of Burnmouth has also seen many changes. At the beginning of the century there was a fleet of at least a dozen 'big boats' of up to 60 feet in length, relying on sail power, operating out of Burnmouth Harbour. From May until August these boats fished for herring from Eyemouth, Berwick and North Shields, occasionally venturing through the Forth and Clyde Canal to the West coast and Southern Ireland. In September their nets were overhauled before the boats moved on to Great Yarmouth, to fish off there until November.

A successful Great Yarmouth fishing was a boon to the village. After Great Yarmouth the Burnmouth fishermen commenced fishing, with lines, from their own harbour. For this type of fishing they used smaller yawls or cobbles of about 30 feet in length, with a crew of four, each crewman having a line of 11 hundred hooks which had been baited the previous night by their womenfolk. The tedious business of shelling and baiting the hooks with mussels was undertaken by the womenfolk in addition to their home-keeping functions.

During the First World War only two of the 'big boats' were merchandised and a fleet of motor yawls was introduced. Each yawl had a crew of four and in addition to the line fishing the crew turned to creel fishing, for lobster and crab: until then the fishing had mostly been part-time. New fishing grounds were found in Goswick Bay, south of Berwick, and big catches of up to 400 lobsters were landed at that time. Burnmouth Railway Station was a hive of industry, with large quantities of crab and lobster being loaded on the London bound trains to arrive early the next morning fresh for the London market. Incidentally, the mussels for the line-fishing were brought by rail from Morecambe, Lancs. to Burnmouth Station, then transported to the harbour by horse and cart to be tipped into the sea in the rocky area nearby, to multiply and keep fresh for gathering later as bait. Crab and lobsters were transported to the station in the same horse-drawn carts, with two pair of horses to overcome the steep brae. In 1922 net fishing was introduced and some of the younger fishermen went over to this type of fishing. Larger boats were accordingly necessary and gradually these boats and their crews moved to the larger and nearby port of Eyemouth; this new era sounded the death knell for the line fishing and no-one, especially the womenfolk, was sorry for its passing. Those who preferred to stay in Burnmouth went over to full-time creel fishing, but this too has its drawbacks and the amount of shellfish landed during the past few years has fallen dramatically, perhaps from over-fishing. Fortunately, the market price for lobster and crab has risen sharply but today this industry in Burnmouth provides a precarious livelihood. Looking to the future it seems that creel fishing will revert to part-time, along with the salmon - netting (presently a lucrative trade) and become second to tourism and the provision of holiday accommodation.

Four buildings in the village appear much as they did one hundred years ago: the Church, half-way up the hill between Lower and Upper Burnmouth, has a service every Sunday officiated by the Rev. Heberton of Ayton Parish Church, but the congregations are considerably smaller than 50 years ago. The school, at the top of the hill, has a roll of some 25 pupils and a staff of two, whereas in earlier days it catered for 120, with likewise a staff of two. The post office is in the same premises today as it was originally, having moved four times throughout the village according to the residence of the presiding post master. The hostelry, the Flemington Inn, is in its original location and relies much on passing traffic as does the adjacent licensed restaurant, the Gull's Nest. There is a village hall and a public telephone in the village and there are public toilets. Several houses give bed and breakfast facilities, and in Upper Burnmouth there is a site offering holiday accommodation in chalets. All tourism is by passing trade, pre-booked accommodation or permanently owned holiday homes, the A1 road being the dominant factor as the railway station on the main London/Edinburgh line, and branch line to Eyemouth, closed in 1962. The population today is approximately 250, having fallen by about 100 over the past 50 years. A character of note in the village is Robert Johnston of Cowdrait, who is a hale and hearty 103 years of age! (1986).

## **AGRICULTURE**

Many far-reaching changes have occurred in land management and agriculture during the century, with mechanisation perhaps being the main factor, followed by changes in methods and demand. The number of persons obtaining their livelihood from the land has altered correspondingly, as has the type of crops grown and breeds of stock maintained. The following are details of the farms in Ayton Parish showing the present situation, with comparisons where applicable.

### **AYTON CASTLE ESTATE**

The history of the Estate has been given under Historical Sketch: the lands were purchased by the forebears of the present owner David Liddell-Grainger in 1888. The estate, including the grounds about Ayton Castle, encompasses the farms of Littledean, Redhall, Ayton Cocklaw, Whitfield and Linthill. Of the 3,500 acres of the original estate 400 acres were sold in 1984, the remainder being utilised as grasslands, arable and woodlands. Ayton Cocklaw and Redhall are tenanted farms and are recorded below. Emphasis is now on arable farming but formerly 'mixed farming' predominated. Today, 50 per cent of the arable land is wheat and barley, the remainder in oats, oil-seed rape and peas for human consumption (freezing and canning), and grasslands. Some 500 acres are in woodlands, mainly softwoods which are felled when mature for pulping, chipboards and posts. Some planting of hardwood is presently under way and softwood plantations are replanted once clear-felled. There is no resident forester, timber management being given to contractors. The shootings of the estate are let to syndicates. Formerly the estate employed four persons in the gardens, four in estate forestry, one in estate maintenance and nine in agriculture, with 45 as indoor staff of the Castle. Today five persons are employed for all aspects of agriculture, with no garden staff nor forestry personnel. One full-time cook and five part-time domestics form the staff today in the Castle. Therefore, within 50 years the workforce, mainly found from the locality, has fallen from 63 full-time to six full-time and five part-time.

Many years ago there were 32 mills situated on the Eye Water and today the remains of two can be found on Ayton Castle Estate. One mill - at Old Flemington - was buried by silt in the severe floods of 1948, but is presently being excavated with possible restoration in mind, for its historical interest. This mill was a corn mill while the other on the Estate, Bleachfield Mill, started as a cloth mill before being converted to a paper mill and was the largest employer in Ayton and district. Although standing today it has long been disused and is now a substantial dwelling house.

The Castle and grounds are open to the public on Sunday, from May until October.

## **AYTON COCKLA W**

Ayton Cocklaw, a farm on Ayton Castle Estate, is tenanted by Norman Steel whose family have farmed the lands since 1929. An ancient farm once standing beside the original road from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Ayton via Lamberton Moor, the lands are of 590 acres of mixed farming. Stock consists of 250 beef cattle, 100 cows and 400 sheep, with crops of wheat, barley, oil-seed rape, swedes, vining peas for canning and beans. The acres of grassland are for summer grazing and hay, while the cattle are wintered in large cattle courts in the farm steading. Twenty years ago, 15 persons were employed full-time on the farm, with additional assistance at harvesting times provided by squads of itinerant workers. Today, but two full-time workers operate the farm. Eighteen years ago eight of the farm cottages which housed the farm workers were demolished and four new ones erected. At one time a forge was sited in the steading, for use by the visiting blacksmith who regularly called to attend to the ten or more horses. The farm draws its water supply from a spring on Ayton Hill; there is a farm pond near the steading. Red squirrel have been seen near the farmhouse this year, an animal not previously noticed in the vicinity although there are some in Ayton Castle grounds lower down .

## **AYTON LAW**

The farm was formerly part of Ayton Castle Estate but in 1984 part was purchased from the Estate by the present owners R. H. and D. H. Allan and is farmed as a unit in conjunction with farms situated outwith Ayton Parish. Of the original 700 acres of the farm 437 were acquired for the present farm lands while about 30 acres were purchased by the local authority as the site for housing in Lawfield Drive, Ayton.

Crops produced currently are wheat, barley (for stock feeding and as a cash crop), potatoes, protein peas for stock feeding, and vining peas for canning. Stock held at present are some 260 bullocks for fattening, which are wintered in covered cattle courts in the steading and graze in summer on the 55 acres of grasslands maintained for that purpose. About 250 Suffolk Down Cross ewes are also held. In 1947 stock consisted solely of 100 beef cattle. Silage has been made since 1961 and today the process is 'high-dry matter' which ensures that when placed in the silage pits the grass is nearly moisture free. Some hay is made, for stock feeding. Two persons are permanently employed today, contrasting with 14 in 1947, in addition to itinerant workers, Irish labourers, who stayed in the farm bothy throughout the crop gathering seasons. The ten existing farm 'cottages' are all presently occupied, most being let to non-farm workers. The farm has its own stock transporters which may be hired to others when farm needs permit.

The water supply is via the mains and there are underground pipes to each field for irrigation, the water being drawn from the nearby Eye Water. In 1947 sowing of autumn cereal crops was 5 per cent of the total, while today it is 75 per cent; this increase is due mainly to the availability of better and hardier strains of winter barley giving a good yield, the seed being particularly suited to the gravelly soil of the area. The original farmhouse was some 15 yards from the present. A site of antiquity on the farm is recorded as a Roman hengiform ditch with rectangular post holes set in a 100 metre square.

## **BASTLERIDGE**

During the 15th century this estate belonged to the Homes and there is a deed in which the Home of Bastleridge is styled as Bailiff of the Barony Peelwalls. Sometime prior to 1834 the farm was purchased by James Sherri, Merchant, of Leith. The farm is presently owned by William G. Cowan, who runs the farm together with his family and one full-time employee. Twenty years ago there were three full-time workers plus assistance from part-time squads as required.

The 317 acres are utilised mainly for crop growing, barley, wheat and protein peas with 53 acres in grasslands, for grazing, and 11 acres in woodlands. Thirty beef cattle, of Hereford cross Frisian, are kept for fattening. There is no dairy herd. Until 22 years ago water was taken from a well on the farm but today it is from the mains supply. The original farmhouse still stands near the present which was built in 1962.

On a map dated 1645 reproduced in Coldingham Parish and Priory by A. Thomson, F.S.A., the house is marked under the name Bafleurigg, probably because the lands once formed part of the Lands of Fleurs, some of the extensive possessions of the Earls of Home. The ancient Roman Camp at Drumaw or Habchester is situated within the farm bounds. Recently, a peregrine falcon was seen taking pigeons near the farm.

## **CHESTERBAN K**

A former compiler of the Statistical Account for Ayton parish, in 1794, was one John Renton of Chesterbank, who appears to have been a person of some standing in the community. On the ancient map dated 1645 it is possible that the farm is marked under the name Crailfledd. In 1830/35 simple hand-mills, known as querns, believed to have been left behind by Leslie's army, were recovered on the farm lands.

The farm has been in the Wood family for very many years and is to this day in the hands of James Wood & Sons. Forty acres of the land s are presently set in wheat, mainly for stock feed, with 70 in spring barley, for malting. Stock consists of 300 head of beef cattle which are wintered in covered cattle courts. Fifty years ago there were six full-time workers on the farm, with casual workers hired as required; today the farm is worked by the owners (two persons) with contract labour utilised as necessary.

The farm includes that under East Flemington.



## **FAIRNIESIDE**

Situated between Ayton and Burnmouth just east of the A1 road and with lands bordering the coast, this ancient habitation is shown on most maps dating back to 1645. It was undoubtedly a fortified dwelling and perhaps a smugglers' retreat. It is possible that the present farmhouse is not on the original site, which may be on a small hill to the north of the present house. It is also probably that the original name was Farndum but it is not known when this was changed to the present title. In 1876 a stone-age celt (a prehistoric cutting or cleaving instrument in stone or bronze) was found in Blaikies' Field on the farm, and in 1968 a stone-age grave containing the bones of an adult male, estimated to be 3,000 years old, were uncovered by a plough in Station Field. The present farmhouse and steading have beneath them the remains of a lade from the farm pond which at one time led water as power to turn a water wheel for a threshing mill. In 1981 the lands were acquired by the present owner, John Wilson & Son. They consist of 533 acres utilised for the growing of wheat, barley, oil-seed rape and potatoes, as cash crops but with some cereal retained as feed for the 300 head of beef cattle which are fattened for the meat market. The principal breed of cattle are Charolais cross Hereford, wintered in cattle courts in the steading. Stock feed is kept in silos with additional feeding from chopped straw enriched with molasses.

The present day staff of the farm consists of the farm manager and two full-time employees, with squads hired from contractors for harvesting potatoes. Fifty years ago there were at least ten full-time workers who resided in the adjacent farm cottages. There was a forge available for the visiting blacksmith who tended the ten pair of farm horses.

The coastline within the bounds of the farm is designated a nature reserve and in the winter of 1985/6 a little auk was found alive near the farm having been blown during a severe gale, a similar fate overtaking snow buntings seen at the same period.

## **WEST FLEMINGTON**

This farm is owned by Ian Liddell-Grainger and managed in conjunction with Fairnieside. It is 155 acres and almost entirely arable, cropping wheat, barley and potatoes. It is one of the Flemingtons which feature in historical accounts and maps, seemingly taking the name from the Flemish weavers and merchants who established a community in the district. Their markets were known as redhalls, hence the name of the nearby farm of Redhall, also part of the Flemish settlement in the parish.

## **GREYSTONELEES**

This farm is the most southerly in the parish and is adjacent to the A1 and thus was near to the old post road between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Edinburgh, passing over Lamberton Moor. It appears that it was once a coaching inn. The farmhouse and farm cottages are let and the farm lands of 130 acres are farmed in conjunction with two other farms outwith the parish, the owners being Andrew S. and John Davidson. Barley, wheat, protein peas and oil-seed rape are cropped. Sixty head of beef cattle are kept in two cattle courts. Three men are employed to work the combined farms, whereas in the past five were employed at Greystonelees alone. The farm takes its water from the mains supply, but formerly the supply was from a spring on Lamberton Moor. An additional 14 acres belonging to the farm form a coastal strip which is not grazed or cropped but is part of the nature reserve.

## **GUNSGREEN HILL**

Farmed in conjunction with Redhall, this land of 200 acres is owned by Jean D. Glen and has been in her family for many years. Cropping barley, wheat, potatoes, swedes and hay, and with a beef herd of 80 cattle, it employs three persons today, whereas in 1940 the number was 20.

## **PEELWALLS FARM**

Formerly part of Peelwalls Estate, the mansion house on the opposite side of the B6355 Duns/Eyemouth road is now used as a local authority home for the elderly. The farm was purchased from the estate by the Brown family in 1933 and is now farmed by Gordon Brown. The farm and estate are of ancient origin and shown on maps of 1645, when they formed part of the estates of the Homes.

Of 135 acres, the farm is mainly arable, with seed potatoes as a cash-crop and barley for feed for the Frisian herd held under 'intensive feeding', i.e. in covered cattle courts. The owner plus one full-time worker operate the farm, with contract labour as required. Fifty years ago there were five full-time and several part-time employees. There is no dairy herd. The farm has its own water supply from a bore-hole of 100 feet, believed to tap into an underground river entering the sea near Burnmouth - but this is not confirmed.

## **PRENDERGUEST**

Shown on a map dated 1645 as 'Plandergaist', this ancient farm land is steeped in history. It is referred to as part of the lands granted by Charter of Edgar, King of Scots, and thereafter belonged to Swain, priest of the ancient parish of Fishwick, who renounced his title in favour of the monks of Coldingham. A Charter of 1190-1200 is signed by Helio of Prendergust, and Henry of Prendergest, knight, subscribed to a Charter of 1276. In 1538 the lands, extending to 'fifteen husband lands', were sold to William Hume of Lochthullo, and the lands thereafter appear to have remained in the hands of the Home family for centuries. The records of Lindisfarne Monastery show that in 1326 William de Prendergust being somewhat of a Border reiver rendered himself notorious by plundering the brewhouse and bakehouse of that religious establishment. The present farmhouse of Prendergust was the former mansion house, the original farmhouse being sited in the existing farm steading.

Today the farm is the property of Alastair W. Lindsay, whose forebears acquired the lands in 1915. Of 653 acres of which 60 are in grasslands, the principal crops are wheat, oats, barley, potatoes and vining peas (for canning). Stock is beef cattle - Simmental cross - the 110 head grazing the grasslands in summer and wintering in the covered and enclosed cattle courts in the farm steading. There are 35 acres of woodlands, mainly hardwoods. Present employees are three full-time, with part-timers engaged as necessary. In 1930 no less than 45 persons were dependent upon the farm for shelter and livelihood, ten being employees and the remainder their families, all of whom occupied the farm cottages on the farm. The bothy in the steading provided shelter for two itinerant Irish workers who came for the seasonal harvesting of crops and the singling of turnips. Water supply is from a spring on the farm and as the lands are mainly on sloping ground natural drainage occurs. The farm has its own silos and grain drier. The closing of the nearby Ayton Railway Station in October 1966 affected

the farm in that the sidings were used for the loading of farm crops on to railway wagons for transport to markets, the system being that one or two empty wagons were allocated to the farm, into which sugar-beet, potatoes and other crops were loaded, for removal at a later date. Nowadays, contractors transport produce from the farm by motor lorry.

### **NETHERBYRES**

Netherbyres was once the home of Captain Brown, the inventor of the suspension bridge. One of his first experiments was carried out across the Eye Water on his estate, but the most noticeable in the district is the Chain Bridge over the River Tweed at Horncliffe.

The estate was purchased by Sir Christopher Furness, Bt. in 1928, from Mr Hewat Pate, of Boston, U.S.A. Sir Christopher died in 1974 and the estate is now owned by his son, Lt. Col. S. Furness, who resides in Netherbyres House and maintains the very fine oval walled garden.

The estate is of 110 acres of which 50 are arable, 20 permanent grasslands and the remainder maturing woodlands and shelter belts. The arable is rotated between grass, for grass park lets, corn, potatoes, turnips and cabbage, let to a sub-contractor. Eyemouth Mill Farm, part of the estate, was once a dairy farm but ceased to be so about 15 years ago, and the farm buildings and steading are now used for storage. South Lodge, Netherbyres, is now derelict. The water supply is from a combination of mains and spring water from the estate.

Prior to 1939 the estate employed 14 workers, as inside and outside staff: today there are one permanent and four part-time.

### **REDHALL**

Farmed together with Gunsgreen Hill, this farm is part of Ayton Castle Estate and is tenanted to Mrs Jean D. Glen. It comprises 200 acres, with crops of barley, wheat, swedes and potatoes. Together with the Flemingtons it is believed to have inherited its name from a colony of Flemish weavers and merchants who established themselves in the district. Fifty years ago the farm cottages housed a work force of ten: today three persons manage the farm.

### **WHITERIG**

Owned by James W. Scott & Sons, this ancient farmland is shown on maps dated 1645, under the name of 'Whyterigg'. It comprises today 601 acres which are utilised mainly in the growing of crops, malting barley, wheat and swedes. About 600 Cheviot sheep and 120 beef cattle are held on the farm, the latter wintering in enclosed cattle courts. There is a crop store (silo) and grain drier. Today four persons are engaged full-time on the farm, while in the 1970s ten such employees worked the lands. Formerly, itinerant work squads were engaged as necessary while today part-time workers are engaged from the locality.

No new woodlands have been planted. The farm takes its water supply from the mains.

## AGRICULTURAL (SUMMARY)

Once the farming industry was the principal employer of local labour in the parish, but this has changed drastically. Mechanisation has affected nearly all aspects with most 'manual' functions now done by machine, and consequently a more highly-skilled and technically-minded work-force is today found working the land. An analysis of present and previous numbers so employed is included in this summary. Traditional breeds of cattle have been practically replaced by cross-breeding with continental strains, giving faster-maturing and heavier stock. Fewer sheep graze the fields and no pigs are accommodated, nor are there any dairy herds. Hay is made, but silage predominates as stock feed, with molasses enriched straw and grain, and protein peas forming additional winter diet. Apart from mechanisation other factors of change are the demand for new crops, and increased existing crops, by the home-food frozen vegetables and fruit industry, and E.E.C. requirement policies and subsidies.

Traditional crops of the parish consisted of sugar-beet, swedes and cereals, but with the closure of the sugar-beet processing plant in Cupar, Fife, in the 1960s local farmers looked to an alternative source of cash crops and land usage, hence the vegetable freezing and processing industry based in Eyemouth. The processing and freezing plants, at Ayton Mains within the parish, and at Eyemouth, are supplied with peas and beans, soft fruits, brussel sprouts, cauliflowers and cabbage, all grown in the Eastern Borders. Oil-seed rape is another 'new' crop, for stock feed and oil extraction. Much of the arable land in the parish is devoted to barley for malting and stock feed wheat, oats, turnips and potatoes. Cattle, mainly reared for fattening, are wintered in large, covered cattle courts, to be fed on protein-enriched silage/hay/straw/cereals, and summered in the lush grasslands. When mature they are transported by road (previously by rail) to central markets and abattoirs. No longer are local butchers able to buy their "fat stock 'on the hoof' in local markets or direct from the farmer, to slaughter them in their own killing-houses. Few poultry 'free range' the farm steadings and there are no deep-litter egg producers in the parish.

Many local farmers own their farm machinery and implements, grain driers, silos and stock transporters, and use powerful tractors which can be put to many functions, six or more sheared ploughs, and a variety of tilling, sowing, fertilising and harvesting implements. Gone are the hay rakes, threshing mills, byres, potato pits, large squads for singling turnips, potato-picking and root-crop harvesting. Several farms are managed as units in conjunction with other farms in the district, and few farm 'cottages' (new, all-modern houses with all facilities) are occupied by farm workers, the majority being let as accommodation to local residents or as holiday homes. At least two of the farmhouses, once the home of the farmer or landowner are not occupied by people of the farming community.

The average wage for farm workers has increased from £66 in 1981 to over £100 today, and is enhanced by over-time, an unheard of thing 50 years ago. Farm workers still enjoy an allocation of potatoes as in the past, or an allowance in lieu. It is interesting to note that perhaps the only aspect of farming which has not altered drastically over the centuries is that of the shepherd; flock husbandry and herding is still very much a 'man and dog' operation, the only differences possibly being that he may have a motor vehicle for transport instead of a horse or bicycle, and the increased use of preventative medicines and dips.

There are no gamekeepers, drystone dykers, hedgers and ditchers, mole or rabbit trappers, thatchers or blacksmiths resident in the parish, trades and crafts which employed more than 15 persons in the past.

The following shows the decrease in agricultural employment (excluding associated industries).

Previous (50 years ago)	Present
130	35

### **INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND TRADE**

Fifty years ago the parish was a self-sufficient community boasting two doctors, a hospital at Millerton, a veterinary surgeon, police station and Justice of the Peace Court, two churches, a post office at both Ayton and Burnmouth, a school in both villages, a gas works, paper mill, two sawmills, a market garden, a lemonade factory, a railway station at Ayton and at Burnmouth, five dairies, three bakers, three grocers, two butchers, three sweet shops, one draper and dressmaker, one tailor, one barber, one watchmaker, one bootmaker/saddler/cooper, one newsagent, one wallpaper supplier, two cycle shops, three blacksmiths, one joiner, one stone mason, one slater, one plumber, one painter, one carter and coal merchant, one carter for hauling fish and coals, a thriving fishing industry in Burnmouth, and two banks in Ayton. The Royal Bank of Scotland was situated in Beanburn while the Commercial (later the National Commercial) occupied the building of the present Royal Bank of Scotland. In the 1970s the National Commercial and the Royal Bank of Scotland amalgamated, retaining the title Royal Bank of Scotland, and this bank occupies the building which has housed a bank in Ayton for 130 years or more. There was one hotel and public house in Ayton and one public house in Burnmouth. There was one solicitor's practice, and one chip shop. Today there is the one bank, a post office in both villages, local primary schools in Ayton and Burnmouth, a police station, automatic telephone exchange, one sawmill, one engineer and welder's, one precision engineer's, one upholsterer, two painters, two joiners (one undertaking welding), one plumber, one heating, plumbing and electrical engineer's, one toy maker, one hotel, one public house in both Ayton and Burnmouth, one licensed restaurant, two grocers in Ayton and one in Burnmouth (at the post office), one newsagent, one solicitor's practice, one fish and chip shop, two garages/ petrol filling stations, one garage for sales and repairs, one vegetable processing plant at Ayton Mains, two transport firms, a small lobster/crab/white fishing industry at Burnmouth, and oil storage depots at Biglawburn and the former Ayton Railway Station, supplying domestic, agricultural and fishing fleet fuels. There is a small holiday complex in Burnmouth and several houses in the parish offer 'bed and breakfast'. There is no resident doctor or veterinary surgeon.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

Factors adversely affecting employment in the parish include the closure of the main line and branch line railway stations, the decline in the fishing industry, the vast decline in agricultural workers, the closure of the paper mill at Bleachfield, and the general reduction of employment in the smaller trades and industries. On the plus side, the frozen and package vegetable, fruit and fish industry in Eyemouth employs considerable labour from the parish, as does the nuclear power station in Torness, various trades, industries and facilities in Berwick-upon - Tweed, the local authority roads depot at Peelwalls, shops and trades in Ayton, the fishing industry in Burnmouth, and the hotel, public house and holiday business. There is a small number on the Youth Training Scheme.

Despite current national trends of high unemployment the parish is fortunate in having three centres of employment close by (Berwick, Torness and Eyemouth), and consequently unemployment in the parish is minimal.

## **TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Much change has occurred in this area. The A1 road passes through the parish on a roughly north-south line, with the B6355 from Duns to Eyemouth bisecting the southern end of the parish. Via the A1 road travel is possible to Berwick-upon-Tweed (seven miles), Edinburgh (50 miles) and Newcastle (60 miles). With the closure of the railway stations at Ayton and Burnmouth in 1966 and 1962 respectively, the nearest railhead is Berwick-upon-Tweed, with airports at Edinburgh and Newcastle (60 miles both). Eastern Scottish Bus Company provides a regular service between Berwick and Edinburgh, Duns and Eyemouth, while a courier service links Ayton with Coldingham and St Abbs. A considerable proportion of the population have their own transport, enabling them to travel to larger centres for shopping and supplies. Ayton village, until the opening of the A1 by-pass in November 1981, suffered from the considerable volume of heavy traffic passing on the village main street; today it is, much quieter and safer, but some trade has been lost from the reduction of through traffic.

There are two transport firms operating from within the parish, which is well served by the many supply vehicles and delivery vans calling daily – or - frequently to maintain supplies to all trades and businesses. Two taxi firms operate from Ayton.

Postal services are now centralised in Eyemouth, but sub-post offices remain in Ayton and Burnmouth, with mail collected from boxes within the parish, to be sorted and dispatched from Eyemouth, where all postmen are centred. The last resident postman in Ayton finished in October 1955, and the last mail from Ayton Post office bearing the franking of Ayton postmark was dated 29th April 1972. Ayton Post Office was once the head post office for the district. Four clerks, four or five postmen and a telegraph messenger were employed from Ayton under a postmaster; mail for the outlying areas being delivered by pony and trap. There were three deliveries daily and the office was open for one hour on Sundays for collections. There was a manual telephone exchange with five operators, this facility remaining until the installation of the automatic exchange in Ayton in 1956. There are full dialling facilities today from the automatic exchange, which became digital in 1986/ 7.

## **MEDICAL SERVICES**

There is no resident doctor in the parish, the last, Dr Duff, leaving in 1953. In Ayton there is a clinic provided by Borders Health Board which is used as a consulting room and surgery by two medical practices; Dr Aitken of Chirnside and Dr Nichol, of Eyemouth each having consulting hours twice weekly. For hospital treatment and examinations Berwick Infirmary and Roodlands Hospital, Haddington are available. There is a dental clinic in Eyemouth and the area ambulance service is centred there. Ayton has a resident district nurse, Nurse Herald, and there are health visitors together with social workers, remedial and ancillary medical services in Eyemouth. Borders Regional Council maintains Peelwalls House, Ayton, as a home for the elderly, with accommodation for 29 patients and a staff of 16, full-time and part-time.

## **EDUCATION**

In the early 19th century there were no fewer than five private schools in the parish, each dependent upon school fees, and one supported by the Mitchell-Innes family. It is known that in the Parish School French, German and Latin were taught in addition to the normal school subjects. The school fees in 1830 were £84 per annum in the Parish School but were somewhat lower in the private schools.

Today there is a primary school in Ayton and another in Burnmouth. Education thereafter is continued in Eyemouth High School. A headteacher and three teachers are in attendance in Ayton while at Burnmouth the staff consists of one head teacher and one teacher. 'Civilian' staff, full-time and part-time, is employed in both schools. No meals are provided in the schools, but pupils can bring their own mid-day meal.

The school hall of Ayton School is much used for functions and meetings (taking the place of the now demolished Volunteer Hall), and the surrounding and adjacent playing fields are available for out- door activities and as the 'home' ground of Ayton Amateur Football Club. The school hall is set out for use as a badminton court.

Further education classes in various academic and vocational subjects are held during the winter in Eyemouth, Duns and Berwick-upon-Tweed. The former school in Ayton, used as a primary school until replaced by the present school in 1974, together with the old school-house, is unoccupied and put to no useful purpose despite its central position in the village. Fifty years ago it was a thriving establishment with over 100 pupils and a staff similar to that of today. At present there are 78 pupils in Ayton School and 25 in Burnmouth: in 1930 the figures were 118 and 120 respectively.

## CHURCHES

Ayton Parish Church stands at the foot of the village, on the north bank of the Eye Water. In the beginning of the 13th century records state that a chaplain was stationed in Ayton, but no details of the cell or chapel are on record, only that the chapel was dedicated to St Dionysius. The ruins still visible in the churchyard are said to occupy the site of the nave of an earlier building whose chancel wall stood firm until well into the 19th century. It is possible that this was the church of the district within the walls of which John O'Gaunt met the Scottish Commissioners appointed by King Robert II and confirmed the prolongation of the truce between the two kingdoms in 1380. The English and Scottish representatives are said to have met again in Ayton Church in 1384.

The present church, the foundation of which was laid in 1864, is of Gothic structure. Seemingly, Ayton was blessed with two congregations, for as early as 1771 one such gathering, Ayton Springbank, was reputed to have worshipped in a 'disused carpet factory' in Ayton, but records of such a factory have not been unearthed. The second congregation, Ayton Summerhill, held services in a building which is now a large house in Beanburn, Ayton. The congregations combined in 1895 and held services in the present church. The minister, the Rev. Hebenton also officiates at Burnrnouth, Reston, Houndwood and Grantshouse. Burnmouth Church is situated on the hill between Upper and Lower Burnmouth.

## CLUBS AND FACILITIES

Ayton once boasted a nine-hole golf course in Ayton Law and it had a cricket club at Ayton Castle, a quoiting club in the yard behind the Red Lion Hotel, a tennis club on the site where Mossman's Garage now stands, a football club which played in Ayton Law Field, a curling club using the pond at Littledean (winter conditions permitting), a reading and billiard room in the Beanburn, situated in what had been the hall and vestry of Ayton Summerhill Church, and held annual sports in the Garden Park, Ayton Castle, on almost professional lines. The annual flower show was a grand occasion, with an orchestra providing music throughout the day-long proceedings, held in the Volunteer Hall, with fine trophies and prizes to be won. After the 1914-18 war the Ex-Servicemen's Club was erected in the Old Town, which led to the decline of the reading and billiards room. Today the club is principally used for indoor bowling.

Ayton today has its football club, pigeon club, leek and onion clubs, indoor bowling club, darts teams, and a fine new outdoor bowling green which opened in 1985 after much effort on the part of local enthusiasts. The parish retains the annual flower show, still a fine event, and Ayton has its Civic Week, with numerous functions and activities. There are Scouts, Guides, Women's Rural Institutes in Ayton and Burnmouth, Woman's Church Guilds in both villages, an Evergreen Club, Masons, and Community Councils in both Ayton and Burnmouth. Sea-fishing is available from Burnmouth and fresh-water angling is still much favoured in the Eye and Ale. The County Library van calls fortnightly and there are libraries in Eyemouth and Berwick-upon-Tweed.



There is no local roadman in the parish, attention being given from the local roads depot at Peelwalls. There are two refuse collections weekly and mains water supply is from the Watch Water Reservoir.

### **POLICE AND FIRE SERVICES**

Ayton Parish comes under the Eyemouth Section of 'G' Division of Lothian and Borders Police, and is policed by officers from Eyemouth Section. Until regionalisation in 1975 it was under Berwickshire Division of Berwick, Roxburgh and Selkirk Constabulary. Ayton Police Station was built in 1939 and remains one of the two county stations in the Section, the other being at Coldingham. It is presently occupied by one of the sergeants of Eyemouth Section, and is the local station for Ayton and district although not providing 24 hour coverage.

Prior to regionalisation minor offences and court matters were dealt with by Ayton justice of the Peace Court, which presided quarterly in the Court House at the Clock Tower, Ayton. Nowadays, such matters are dealt with by the District Court, or Sheriff Court at Duns.

Fire cover is by part-timers retained at Eyemouth from the Eyemouth Section of Lothian and Borders Fire Brigade, with back-up from appliances stationed at Duns, Coldstream and Galashiels.

### **POPULATION**

Some factors affecting the fluctuations in population are family size, availability of and changes in employment, the health of the community and standards of living. All these plus two world wars may be reflected in the fluctuations depicted in the table given below. It has already been shown how considerable is the decrease in the numbers of agricultural workers in the parish, but this has not led to an overall decline in the population. Undoubtedly the size of families has decreased, from a norm of four to six children to an average of two today. To offset this people are generally healthier and live longer, and whereas 50 years ago a considerable proportion of the population of the parish was under 16 years of age today a corresponding proportion is over 60 years of age.

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**Census Year:**

1851    1861    1871    1881    1891    1901    1911    1921    1931    1951    1961    1971    1981

**Numbers:**

1959    2014    1983    2040    1827    1629    1577    1521    1413    1483    1769    1956    1880

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The figures for 1981, the latest census, show a reduction of 76 over the ten-year period; since 1971 Torness Power Station and other new industries have attracted people to the area and it is possible that the figure for today could be in the 1900s. There are 402 occupied properties (dwellings) in the parish.

## **OTHER OBSERVATIONS**

It is a considerably more comfortable and healthier life in the parish today than it was 50 years ago. Houses are generally better constructed and designed, with damp-proofing, wall and ceiling insulation, double -glazing and central heating. Gas supply is now by pipeline, from the North Sea fields, and electricity has been in general use since 1936. Telephones are an accepted part of the home, as is the television set, video recorder, hi-fi system and radio, washing machine, dishwasher, and, more recently, home computer. Social and medical services are such that no person should be homeless, cold, hungry or uncared for, and there are facilities for the less fortunate, blind, handicapped and elderly provided by the local authority and the state. There is more leisure time and facilities, with swimming pools at Eyemouth and Berwick, squash courts, tennis courts, badminton, indoor games and fitness classes. Football, cricket, hockey, rugby are there for those wishing to participate – or spectate - and green bowls, horse riding, sub-aqua diving, sailing and many other competitive sports or pastimes are available. It is sad to record that despite the increase in facilities, crime, vandalism, and the spread of litter have not diminished. Nevertheless, there is still much community spirit and involvement and it is satisfying to find that village and rural life, although quicker nowadays in pace and style, has many benefits and much to offer.

**1986**