

CAPTAIN COOK

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Captain Cook by Walter Besant

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WALTER BESANT

CAPTAIN COOK



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CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND EDUCATION

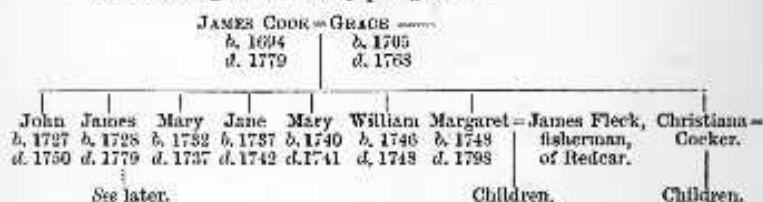
JAMES COOK was born in the little village of Marton, in that part of Yorkshire known as Cleveland. He came into the world on the 27th day of October, in the year 1728. His father, an agricultural labourer, removed by a single step from the lowest level, is said by one writer to have been a native of Northumberland, and by others to have come from the village of Ednam in Roxburghshire, the birthplace of Thomson the poet.

The village of Marton presents few points of interest. The cottage in which Cook was born was taken down a hundred years ago, and part of a great house, which in its turn is now gone, was built over its site. The place is at present occupied by a plantation. The only relic of Cook's childhood is a pump, called Captain Cook's pump, constructed, it is said, by his father. Probably it was the pump in use by the tenants of the cottage. The village consists of a long street of red brick houses, few of them old. The church was rebuilt in 1848, and most of the tombs in the churchyard are new.

James seems to have been the second of a large family of seven or eight,¹ or even more. At a very early age he was set to work on the farm of one William Walker, a wealthy yeoman of Marton. Mary Walker, his wife, seems to have taken the trouble to teach the child his letters. This is the origin of the dame's school and the village dame of which so much is made in Hartley Coleridge's Memoir. Mary Walker lived to the age of eighty-nine, dying in the year 1789, ten years after her pupil. It is hoped that this good lady knew that the lad to whom she had shown a little kindness was none other than the great sailor who filled the world with his name.

At the age of eight, in the year 1736, the boy was removed to the village of Great Ayton, between four and five miles south of Marton. Here his father became hind to Mr. Skottowe, then lord of the manor. Great Ayton, which boasts an illustrious roll of proprietors, had passed by marriage from the Coulsons to the Skottowes. It was sold early in the century to a family named Richardson. The word "hind" is generally interpreted to mean bailiff. The practice in the Cleveland district was then, and is still, for the landlord to

¹ The following is the family pedigree:—



There were perhaps other children who died in infancy. The four between James and Margaret are commemorated on the tombstone in Great Ayton churchyard.