

**ENGLISH MEN OF
ACTION.
CAPTAIN COOK**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649412587

English Men of Action. Captain Cook by Walter Besant

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WALTER BESANT

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BY

WALTER BESANT

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1894

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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.

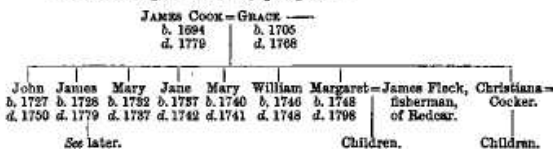
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James seems to have been the second of a large family of seven or eight,¹ or even more. At a very early age he was set to work on the farm of one William Walker, a wealthy yeoman of Marton. Mary Walker, his wife, seems to have taken the trouble to 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.

place a man in charge of a small farm, giving him the farmhouse for his residence, and paying him fixed wages, receiving in return the whole produce of the farm. This tenant or paid labourer is called the landlord's hind. Doubtless this was the position held by James Cook the elder.

At Great Ayton four more children at least were born to the family, and four died and are buried in the churchyard. Here also, in the year 1768, Captain Cook's mother died, aged sixty-three years, happy, we may hope, in the knowledge that one of her sons was in command of a king's ship.

The village of Great Ayton is a much more considerable place than Marton, and far more interesting. It lies close to the north or north-west edge of that splendid stretch of hill and moorland called the Cleveland Hills or the Moors, well known to all who love Whitby and her daughters, the seaside hamlets, each in its glen, built on the slopes of the steep hills beside the sea. The Cleveland Hills begin close to the village of Ayton. North of it runs the long ridge of Langbargh, and east of it rises the picturesque hill called Roseberry Topping, a thousand feet high, crowned with its conical peak of sandstone. Through the village runs a beck, which is crossed by a wide stone bridge. On the south side of the stream, evidently the poorer part of the village, stands the house where Cook's father dwelt. It is said to have been built by him, when he gave up his post as hind and became a stone-mason. It is a stone cottage of three or four rooms, with a red-tiled roof, and through the open door one catches a glimpse of a garden behind. Over the door is a stone with the initials J. C., and