

### **Where James Cook lodged**

According to Whitby tradition, Cook's master, Captain John Walker, lodged his apprentice James Cook in the house in Grape Lane which is now the Captain Cook Memorial Museum. It is a long standing oral tradition first set in writing in 1836 by the Whitby historian, the Reverend George Young in his *Life of Cook*. This in turn was based on and enlarged from an earlier short biography of Cook, published in 1817.

In recent years, a number of writers, following J.C. Beaglehole, the doyen of Cook studies, have cast doubt on the tradition because John Walker paid rates on a house in Hagersgate at the time of Cook's apprenticeship, and did not move into the Grape Lane house until 1752, after Cook's 3 year term of apprenticeship was up.<sup>1</sup>

This essay examines the evidence for the Whitby tradition, and the origins of and argument for the Hagersgate theory. It concludes that Cook very probably did lodge at times during his apprenticeship in Grape Lane.

It should be said at the outset that there cannot be satisfaction for those who seek 'proof' of either case, or expect absolute certainty in verifying an oral tradition of this kind. It is a question of possibility and probability based on the best and most recent historical and archaeological research.

### **The context:**

Of crucial importance is a deeper knowledge of the context in which the young Cook came to Whitby to be trained as an apprentice seaman. The key factors include the size of the Whitby fleet, the total number of apprentices, the way indentures were drawn up, and the role of women in the shipping industry and port towns.

By 1746 when Cook came to Whitby, the shipping industry had long outgrown the original source of its prosperity in the alum trade. Statistics of the size of Whitby's fleet are difficult to interpret. However in 1746 the figure lay somewhere between the 120 vessels recorded for 1702 and the peak of 318 in 1782, perhaps nearer the lower end of the bracket after a depression in activity between 1720 and 1730 and before the stimulus of the Seven Years War (1756-63) and the War of American Independence (1775-83).<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless the number of ships owned by Whitby shipowners was very considerable and well beyond the capacity of the harbour to cope with all at one time. Whitby ships wintered on the Tyne and on the Thames as well as in Whitby. Half the crews of the fleet consisted of indentured 'servants', the term commonly used for apprentices. For example the muster roll of the *Freelove*, which is on display in the Museum, shows that out of a total complement of nineteen, ten were apprentices. 1256 boys were entered in the muster rolls for 1747/8. John Walker employed 36.<sup>3</sup> The town must have been awash with boys and young men.

The indenture of apprentices was a long established institution going back to medieval times, where custom and legal obligation bound master and servant in a defined relationship. The indentures of the period give an indication of how the very large numbers of apprentices were managed in Whitby. Cook's own indenture does not survive. However the Museum possesses two similar documents relating to marine apprentices, one from 1735 and a second from 1758, ten years either side of Cook's apprenticeship. Both documents are on pre-printed stationery with spaces left for the participants to complete the detail in handwriting. The stationery is designed for all trades, not just for the sea, and for both sexes. In the printed part, the indenture witnesses that the apprentice 'hath Put and Bound' himself to his master and shall 'dwell and abide' with him (1735), with the wording slightly varied 'dwell, remain and serve...' (1758). At first sight this appears to conform to the traditional idea of apprenticeship in which the apprentice moved to and joined the household of his master. However at the space reserved for the specific terms of the contract, the printed part stops short with the master providing 'meat and drink and in due seasons' (1735) or 'sufficient and enough of meat'

(1758). The terms then continue in handwriting: 'Washing and Lodging ... [pay] ... Apparel excepted which the said Apprentice is to find and provide himself ... and also meat and drink in Winter Seasons while ship is laid up' (1735); and 'Drink, Washing and Lodging except when his Master's Ships shall layby in the Winter Season at which time it is hereby agreed the said Apprentice shall board himself....' (1758).

The terms varied from contract to contract. Though lodging was to be provided, its location was nowhere specified. That the apprentices were to fend for themselves during the winter shows that what was said earlier in the printed section of the indentures about 'dwelling and abiding' with the Master is formulaic, and as out of date in 1746 as the claim in both documents, that King George II was also King of France! The formula continued to be used in indentures until around 1820, when the language used to describe the relationship between apprentice and master caught up with reality.<sup>4</sup>

Additional evidence on the handling of apprenticeship may be found in the notebook covering 1789 - 99 of the Whitby shipowner, Crispin Bean, then towards the end of his career.<sup>5</sup> It may be objected that his notes are too distant from Cook's apprenticeship. However they cast light on how apprentices fared earlier in the century. Bean kept meticulous records of his expenses for each of his apprentices. He boarded out his apprentices and paid 2/6 per week either to women in the town or to the apprentices' mothers. What seems most likely is that the young lads in the documents of 1735 and 1758, not being required by their masters in Whitby during the winter, walked home to their respective families in Wreilton and Rosedale.

The terms under which seaman apprentices served in Cook's day were pragmatic, and were what suited the requirements of their Masters and their own circumstances. They did not conform to a quasi-legal formula which was by then out of date.

Finally, it is important to remember that in shipowning families, wives often had an active role in the business, managing the accounts, writing letters, and running the business while their husbands were at sea. There are for example four known instances in the 18th century of widows managing businesses after their husband's death.<sup>6</sup> Quaker women in particular were far from ladies of leisure, even in well-to-do families, and of course there was no concept of 'retirement' as we know it today.

### **The Haggarsgate theory**

The Museum in Grape Lane was established in 1987. Beaglehole's *The Life of Captain James Cook* was published well before in 1974. The Museum's own research was not available to him, nor data on the Whitby fleet. Beaglehole's focus was naturally on the great voyages, and he relied on existing works for the chapters on Cook's early life.

At page 6, he says: 'Quaker dignity and restraint marked many of the stone and brick dwellings of the old town, among them John Walker's own house in Haggarsgate, on the west side of the river, where Cook lodged with his master, and that of John Walker's mother, the late seventeenth century building in Grape Lane on the east side to which Walker removed in 1752.' He adds in a footnote: 'Mrs. Walker's house and its attic in Grape Lane are popularly regarded as the premises where Cook lived and slept, but the dates make this impossible. John Walker's house in Haggarsgate no longer exists.'

It is clearly not "impossible" that Cook lodged in Grape Lane. The argument behind Beaglehole's dismissal of Grape Lane is: John Walker paid rates on a house in Haggarsgate, apprentices lodged with their masters, therefore Cook lodged in Haggarsgate, not in Grape Lane. Beaglehole believed that apprentices always without exception and in all circumstances lodged in the homes of their masters. He also seems to have assumed that because John Walker's widowed mother lived in Grape Lane and paid rates on the property that she owned it.

It may not be generally appreciated that Beaglehole did not originate the Hagersgate theory nor research it. He took it from an earlier life of Cook by Arthur Kitson, published in 1907. Kitson himself relied on G.W. Waddington, the manager of the Aislaby stone quarry and Whitby antiquarian (died 1898) who had found that at the time of Cook's apprenticeship, John Walker paid rates in Hagersgate and his widowed mother, Esther, paid rates in Grape Lane.

It will be immediately apparent that the middle term of the argument is invalid. Not only do the sheer numbers of apprentices that had to be accommodated make it most unlikely that all were lodged in their masters' homes, but the two indentures, discussed above, show that arrangements for looking after apprentices were variable and pragmatic, and that the practice of apprentices always 'abiding' with their masters was long out of date by the time Cook came to Whitby.

### **Where does this leave the question?**

Far from it being certain that Cook lodged in Hagersgate as Beaglehole and those who follow him would have it, shipowners such as John Walker and his brother Henry, lodged their many apprentices wherever they could find room.

It is possible they took some lads into their own homes from time to time. However boys from Whitby were likely to have gone to their parents. Boys from the country probably boarded out in the town if in Whitby during the sailing season, and went home to their parents in winter, as the two indentures above provided. In the case of the Walker brothers, some of their apprentices were likely to have been in the house in Grape Lane. It was available to them. They owned it.

The Whitby tradition is that John Walker lodged Cook in Grape Lane when not at sea.

### **Evidence for the Whitby tradition**

#### **1729 - 1742**

John Walker's father, John Walker 'Senior' bought the house in Grape Lane in 1729. During the subsequent years he developed the shipping business that he bequeathed to his sons John and Henry at his death in 1743. Archaeological work in 2000 uncovered a slipway leading down from the house to the harbour beneath the present courtyard, with deposits above placing the slipway in the first half of the 18th century and demonstrating the integral relation of the house to the harbour. At the same time, work on the cottage wing revealed a confusing jumble of foundations which were interpreted as belonging to storerooms or workrooms. <sup>7</sup>

At some time in this period the sons John (b.1706) and his elder brother Henry moved to set up their families in smaller houses in Hagersgate and Church Street.

There can be no objection to the idea that John Walker Senior lodged apprentices in the attic, and that his wife Esther, in charge of his household would have their managing whilst ashore. Such a household would also contain at least one resident domestic servant.

#### **1742 - 1746**

Falling ill in 1742, John Walker Senior wrote his will. The original of the document was found in 2003 in the Borthwick Institute in York. In the will he did two things. He provided for his dependents, and he provided for the continuation of the shipping business to which he had devoted his life. He did so by giving two of his ships to the elder brother Henry, and one to the younger John Walker. The house which we infer was his place of business as well as his home could not be so divided. He left it to his sons as tenants in common.

At Walker senior's death in 1743, the house became the brothers' to use as the base for their operations, for servicing their ships in the harbour, lodging apprentices, or whatever purpose they wanted. It is not disputed by anyone that John Walker Jnr. continued to live in Haggarsgate, but that house did not face onto the harbour, whilst the Grape Lane house had a slip for boats and the ships could lie close by and take the ground at low tide. There was also a large attic area where the brothers were clearly entitled to lodge some of their many apprentices, who would be near their work on the ships when not at sea. The fact that Walker's mother wished to continue to live in her old home is not relevant.

If you follow the Haggarsgate theory, all apprentices would have been withdrawn from the house after the death in 1743, and the widow continued to live there in splendid isolation. Or did life continue there much as it had done before with the Grape Lane house remaining at the centre of the shipping business, and the widow continuing to perform for her sons a similar role that she had performed for her husband?

We think the latter much more likely. We have the evidence of the rates, the archaeology of the house, the will and its terms, and the later Whitby accounts that the Walkers lodged their apprentices in the attic, among them Cook.

#### **1746 – 1755**

In 1746 Cook came to Whitby and was apprenticed to the younger brother, John Walker. As mentioned, his indenture does not survive. It was likely to be similar to the indentures of 1735 and 1758 described above. Walker would have been obliged to find lodgings for him from time to time during his apprenticeship, particularly when he required Cook to fit out his ships, a requirement which is attested. Where Cook lodged after the expiry of his indenture is not known. Walker moved into the house in 1752 after the deaths of both his mother and brother. Cook left Whitby for the Royal Navy in 1755.

#### **1755 – 1779**

It is most unlikely that in the years after Cook left Whitby that anyone was the slightest concerned where an obscure apprentice had lodged – that is until the apprentice returned to Whitby, a celebrity, in the winter of 1771-72 after the First Voyage and his reception by the King. The house in Grape Lane was the scene of the visit. The gentlemen are said to have ridden out to meet Cook on his way from Great Ayton, and the household was lined up to greet him formally. The story of Mary Prowd, the 'family servant' breaking ranks to address Cook fondly is well known. It was no doubt a time for celebration and for reminiscence.

The sons of John Walker, Cook's former Master, children during Cook's apprenticeship, were young adults at the time of the 1771 visit. Were they present? We do not know. It is possible as it was not in the sailing season, and probable that Cook's lodging in the attic was recalled, and then became fixed in memory. Alternatively, no one may have been interested until after his death. We cannot be certain.

#### **1779 – 1836**

The Whitby historian, the Reverend George Young, came to Whitby in 1806. He published his *History of Whitby* in 1817. The second volume contains a short biography of Cook. He later expanded the biography into the *Life of Cook*, published in 1836. He does not identify the house in Grape Lane as Cook's lodging in the earlier short biography. However in the *Life*, Grape Lane is so specified in the text and the chapter includes an illustration of the house and its surroundings seen from across the harbour.

He bears witness to the tradition saying that people view the attic, though much changed, with great interest as Cook's lodging place. It is therefore certain that the tradition was well established in 1836; if it were not, Young would have risked contradiction by Whitby people to whom he hoped to sell the book.

John Walker, Cook's master, died in 1785. Twenty years later, (Young arrives in 1806) the Grape Lane tradition is common place in Whitby. There was no competitor.

Furthermore the evidence suggests that this oral tradition comes from the Walker family. Until shortly before the publication of the *Life*, John Wakefield Simpson, lived in the Grape Lane house. Simpson was a great grandson of John Walker. It was a member of the family who had been showing the attic to visitors as Cook's lodging.

Young also says something about his sources for Cook. In the *Life* he speaks of 'intercourse with his relations, friends and relatives'. A footnote in the 1817 biography states 'My information is derived from the sons of that gentleman (John Walker) Henry Walker Esq. Whitby and John Walker Esq. Wallsend to whose politeness I am indebted for the use of Capt. Cook's original letters, addressed to their father, and for several particulars relating to our great navigator'. The particulars specified are the issues of whether Cook was apprenticed to Sanderson in Staithes, whether apprenticed to both John and Henry Walker, and the length of his apprenticeship.

Though there is no mention of Grape Lane, the point is that in his early years in Whitby, Young overlapped with members of the Walker family who were contemporaneous with Cook. It is reasonable to conclude that the oral Whitby tradition of Cook's lodging can be traced back into the 18th century, and that it was confirmed to Young by the sons of John Walker, and other members of the Walker family.

### **Anomalies in Young**

Young says that 'In the course of his apprenticeship he (Cook) spent several intervals at Whitby, chiefly in the depths of winter, when the coal vessels are laid up. At those times, according to a custom then general among the ship-owners in Whitby, he lodged in his master's house'. Here Young, in 1817, is saying the same as Waddington in the 1890s. He is of course right in that Grape Lane was in 1746 the property of Cook's master, correct to suggest that masters sometimes lodged apprentices in their homes, but wrong (as we have seen) if he was suggesting that that was the only practice or indeed the most common practice. The remark is best treated as evidence that in Young's day apprentices did not lodge with their masters, not as evidence of the practices in this respect of ship owners in 1746.

Young does not mention Hagersgate or that Walker was living there in 1746. It is not that he was unaware of the property. There is an anecdote in Kitson, derived from Waddington, but otherwise source unknown, that Young once tried to buy the Hagersgate property from one of the sons of Walker (he was refused). There are several possible explanations. One is that Young had been told that Cook was lodged in Grape Lane, and that he considered Hagersgate to be irrelevant.

### **Conclusion**

Whereas the influence of Quakerism on Cook and its effect on his subsequent conduct is a subject of continuing debate among historians, where Cook lodged has little historical importance. It is not surprising that Beaglehole appears to have relied on earlier local historians. It is only the existence of the Museum in the Grape Lane house that gives the point an importance. Some further research might be helpful: to find more seamen's apprenticeship indentures of the period, either for Whitby or for other ports; to check over all the properties mentioned in John Walker Sr.'s will and who paid rates. However it is doubtful if such research would greatly disturb the conclusions of this essay:

- 1 The Hagersgate theory is flawed; not G.W Waddington's observations, but his belief that apprentices in 1746 had to be lodged in their masters' homes. The indentures of 1735 and 1758 coupled with the sheer number of apprentices in Whitby prove that by 1746 this was not so, and on that ground alone the Hagersgate theory fails.

- 2 The Whitby tradition was current in 1836, and as an oral tradition is traceable back into the 18th century through the sons of Cook's master John Walker and other members of the Walker family
- 3 What is known of the house before Cook's arrival and the arrangements of John Walker's will, point to the use of the house for lodging some if not all apprentices.
- 4 That Cook was lodged during periods of working ashore in the attic of the house in Grape Lane is highly probable. The Whitby tradition, an oral tradition until 1836, is reliable.

It does not detract from the magnitude of Beaglehole's achievement to point out the occasional errors and gaps in the evidence available to him. No historian is omniscient. Interpretation and research move on, and this essay is a contribution to a continuing process of discovery and interest in the life of one of Britain's greatest explorers and navigators.

The writer of this essay is Charles Forgan, a member of the Museum's Management Committee. He is indebted to Rosalin Barker and Christiane Kroebel of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society for their kind help, knowledge and advice.

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- <sup>1</sup> For example, Frank McLynn, *Captain Cook, Master of the Seas*, 2011; Tony Horwitz, *Into the Blue: Boldly going where Captain Cook has gone before*, 2002.
  - <sup>2</sup> Rosalin Barker, *The Rise of an Early Modern Shipping Industry, Whitby's Golden Fleet*, 2011, pp. 52, 80, 105, 125, and Appendix 1, *The Size of the Fleet*.
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. ix, 138.
  - <sup>4</sup> Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society: A sailmaker's indenture of 1822 uses the formula 'dwell abide and serve'. Later seaman's indentures, of 1827 (0035/5/1) and of 1837 (0048/1) omit it.
  - <sup>5</sup> Apprentices notebook in Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society.
  - <sup>6</sup> Rosalin Barker, *The Rise of an Early Modern Shipping Industry*, p.112
  - <sup>7</sup> Colin Briden, Archeological report on works in Captain Cook Memorial Museum, Grape Lane, 2000; copy in Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society.