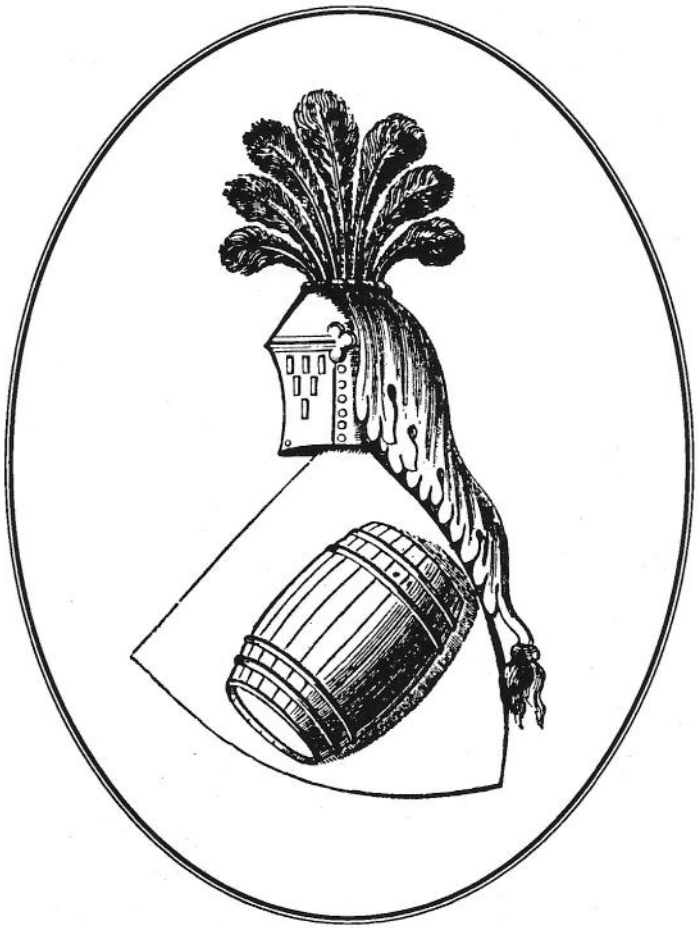
THE NEWTON FAMILY

of Wilmslow

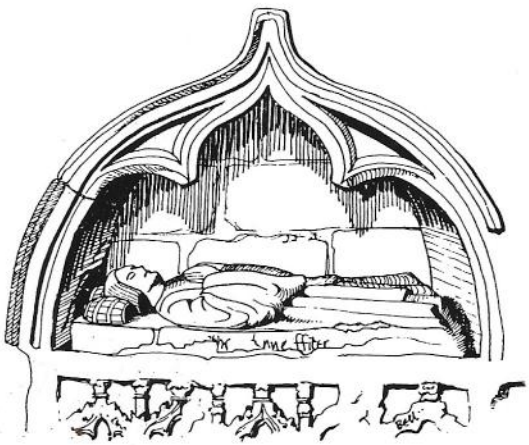


Dorothy Jolley

THE NEWTON FAMILY OF WILMSLOW

The frequent recurrence of certain surnames in the wills of 16th century Wilmslow families is evidence of their importance socially in the locality at that time. One such surname was that of Newton, unsurprisingly, perhaps, if we consider the prevalence of "Newton" in place names in the area - Newton Heath, Newton in the Willows, Newton Hall in Mobberley.

The Newton family lived in Wilmslow, owned land and cultivated it. In St Bartholomew's Church, Wilmslow there is an effigy of Humphrey Newton (1466 - 1537) and his wife, Ellen of Pownall Hall. The casual visitor's interest in their stone faces might be enhanced were he or she to realise that Sir Isaac Newton, the famous scientist and mathematician, was descended from their grandson, William. Indeed, Sir Isaac claimed proudly, in the pedigree which he was invited to present to Trinity College Cambridge, that he was directly descended from the Cheshire Newtons.



Effigy of Humphrey Newton (1466-1537)

William Newton left Wilmslow in 1543 and stayed with his brother, Lawrence, in Sussex, before moving to Southover Priory. He married twice and it was from his second marriage that the line known as the Southover Newtons began and into which Sir Isaac Newton was born.

Sir Isaac Newton

Isaac was born on Christmas Day, 1642 at Woolsthorpe, near Grantham in Lincolnshire. His father died before he was born. Subsequently, his mother remarried and he was left in the care of his grandmother. He seems to have had a lonely childhood and throughout his life gave the impression of being a solitary, forbidding figure. He never married.

He graduated at Cambridge, but during the years 1665 - 1666 his studies were interrupted by the Plague which ravaged London and spread into the provinces. He retreated to his home at Woolsthorpe where he continued assiduously his mathematical studies. From his notebooks it is apparent that before demonstrating his capacity for discovery he proved most of the existing mathematical theorems which he knew for himself. He was soon to invent fluxions - now called the calculus - and to conceive the idea of universal gravitation, testing it by calculating the motion of the moon around the earth.



The outstanding British scientist Sir Isaac Newton whose view of the Universe prevailed for 200 years.



Signature of Sir Isaac Newton, copied from the Newton Pedigree in the Heralds' College.

Isaac returned to Cambridge in 1667 and soon became a Fellow of his college Trinity. Two years later, at the tender age of 26, he was given the Chair of Mathematics. At that time, he was inventing the reflecting telescope. he had begun his investigations of light and optics during his enforced stay at Woolsthorpe, but it was not until 1704 that he published his seminal work, "Opticks". "Principia Mathematica", his book of gravitation, had already been published in 1686. The delay in publishing "Opticks" is accounted for by the controversies aroused by his fundamentally new ideas. To many of his learned contemporaries his theories were inaccessible. The acrimony was so intense that Isaac, in high dudgeon, refused to debate the matter and in consequence reinforced a misplaced reputation for arrogance and unapproachability.

In 1696, he went to London and subsequently became Master of the Mint. He was President of the Royal Society in 1703 and was knighted by Queen Anne in 1705. He died in 1727. Nobody had done more to encourage the spirit of rational enquiry than Newton and to stem the tide of intolerance and dogmatism long since intimately associated with religion. It is of no small interest for us to observe that the man who made an immense contribution to promoting ideas in science which have endured to the present day should have been descended from the Cheshire Newtons whose family can be traced back to 1150.

The Newton Family, 1150 - 15377

It would appear that the name of Newton is rooted in the possession of a manor of that name. About 1150, the manor was trisected, one portion of it being received by one, Trevorus de Hopehall, who subsequently left it to his son, William, who became known as William de Newton. Thus began the line of Newtons later to be described as the Cheshire Newtons. The land was to change hands several times before the manor was secured by Thomas de Davenport, who, in 1302, gave it in frank-marriage with his daughter, Sybyll, to Thomas de Newton. By 15th century, the Newton family had increased considerably in size and by judicious marriages much land had come into its ownership, not merely in Fulshaw, Willow, Prestbury, Gawsworth and Mobberley, but in Lancashire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire. In our study of 16th century wills we have come upon the will of Jeffrey Burgess, dated 6th May 1607, who leased land in Styal from his "friend and landlord, William Newton". The will of Margaret Newton, daughter-in-law of Humphrey Newton, dated 10th May, 1606, left her son, William, the lease of the corn mill, known as Northcliffe Mill, Styal. Today, there is a block of flats on the site where the mill once stood. Pownall Hall, now a boys' school, was the home of Sir Thomas Fitton, who gave it to his daughter, Ellen, on her mar-

riage to Humphrey Newton on 7th April 1490. Four generations of Newtons lived at Pownall until the line ended, there being no male heir to succeed.

The effigies of Humphrey Newton (1466 - 153) and his wife, Ellen, in St Bartholomew's Church are testimony of their importance in Wilmslow. Humphrey's father, Richard de Newton, had married Jane, daughter of Jeffrey Lowe of Denley, Derbyshire a wealthy landowner. Richard, himself, now well endowed with land, obtained lands from Ralph Davenport for the purpose of creating an entail.

Humphrey Newton inherited these lands in 1500. In the same year, he acquired from the Willots, Foxwist Heath in Lancashire and half of Newton Heath. Humphrey wrote the cartulary himself and, indeed, other detailed notes associated with earlier deeds. In the words of a 19th century historian, T. Herbert Noyes, "the very minute details of the transactions in which he was himself concerned, sufficiently bespeak his methodical character."

Humphrey married Ellen, daughter and coheiress of Sir Thomas Fitton of Pownall Hall. They had ten children, six daughters and four sons. Thereafter, his descendants quartered the arms of Massey of Dunham Massey, Pownall, Olton, Leighton, Wrenbury, Aldelym and Cradock, all families of considerable distinction in the County of Cheshire. After the visitation of 1566, they were granted their coat of arms into which was incorporated the tun from the coat of arms of the Fittons.

According to the Parish Records of Mobberley, Newton Hall in Mobberley was believed to have been owned by Francis Newton the elder at the end of 16th century.

An indication of the Newton family's eminent social standing is conveyed in the words of the Reverend Thomas Newton, Rector of Ilford, Essex in 1607 and great-grandson of Humphrey Newton, who, in "Pact and Divine", wrote

"From honoured house 'tis honour to have sprung,

Greater to tred where honour points the way.

He whose proud title to all there is known,

How truly honoured ! Let the wide world own."

References

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PUBLISHED BY
Wilmslow Historical Society
© October 1993