

## Help needed to Rescue the Newman Memorial in the Fifehead Magdalen Church

**Background:** The little church in the village of Fifehead Magdalene in north Dorset is famous among Newmans for the magnificent Newman memorial inside the tiny chapel built onto its northern wall.

According to John Hutchin's History of Dorset<sup>1</sup> the church dates back to 1495, being “a small building of a chancel, body, north chapel and tower of two stages, with embattled parapet, on the south side of the nave, through the base of which is the principal entrance. ... On the north side of the chancel is a small chapel built by Richard Newman, afterwards Sir Richard, in 1693 which contains the following inscription on a black stone against the west wall:

Richard Newman of Evercreech Park, com. Somerset, aged 32 years,  
lies in the vault underneath in the second leaden coffin north,  
and removed from the chancell [sic] in October M.D.CXCIII (1693);  
leaveing [sic] one sonne Richard, Anne and Barbara now living.”

The chapel contains several other Newman memorials, including one magnificent one mounted on its north wall dedicated to the memories of Sir Richard Newman, his wife Frances, his son Sir Samwell Newman and his three sisters, Frances, Barbara and Elizabeth (see photo right).

Other wall memorials are dedicated to Thomas Newman (d.1649) and Richard Newman (d.1664).

Near the entrance to the graveyard to the south west of the church, there is a tombstone dedicated to Thomas Newman (gent) which (according to Hutchin's History of Dorset) is dated 1668, though this has now become illegible due to decay.

For further information and illustrations, see <http://www.newman-family-tree.net/fifehead.htm>.



### **Restoration Fund**

Problems with the roof of the old church have been discovered and an architect's report has been received by the parochial church council. The report recommends that almost the entire roof would have to be replaced at a cost of around £127,000 and whilst this work is being done the PCC would also like to repair cracks that have appeared in the walls of the Newman chapel (visible in the photo above) which they estimate would cost in the region of £10,000.

<sup>1</sup> John Hutchin's History of Dorset, Third Edition 1870, page 58

After much effort, the PCC has been offered a grant of £100,000 by English Heritage and a further £5,000 each by the Dorset Historic Churches Trust and the Erskine Muton Trust, leaving a shortfall of £27,000 which the parish will have to raise itself.

However the village of Fifehead has only 50 houses and perhaps 90 residents, of who around 15 are regular church attendees, so even £27,000 is a large sum for such a small group to raise.

The members of the council are therefore appealing to anyone who is prepared to help, and given the long connection between the church and the Newman family, they are hopeful that Newmans from around the world will be willing to contribute to help save the church and its chapel for future generations of the family to visit and enjoy.

### **Donations**

Donations can be sent to Rosemary Redwood at Three Farthings, Fifehead Magdalen, Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 5RR (please make cheques payable to “Fifehead Magdalen Church Roof Fund”).

### **Post Script – who sculpted the Newman memorial?**

Rosemary Redwood has tried without success to find out who was the sculptor who fashioned the Newman memorial in the chapel at Fifehead. If anyone can help her with any information regarding the provenance of the memorial, she will be very glad to hear from you.