

AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF  
THE NEWMANS OF  
FIFEHEAD MAGDALEN

who held the Fifehead Manorial estate between the years 1530 and 1775  
and who built the Newman Chapel at Fifehead Magdalen Church in 1693

The mortal remains of several members of the family are entombed in the vault below the chapel.



*Left:* Chris Newman, a descendant of Richard Newman (1584 – 1664) on a visit to Fifehead in October 2012. Behind him is Sir Henry Cheere's magnificent Newman 'funerary monument' dating from around 1750.

*Right:* The Newman chapel in 2018 after completion of restoration work.

## THE NEWMANS OF FIFEHEAD MAGDALEN

The Fifehead Newmans derive from a Robert Newman of St. Thomas's Salisbury who died in 1402. From him descended a long line of Newmans (extant to this day), including a Robert Newman who first leased the Fifehead estate from the Abbey of St Augustine's of Bristol in 1530, shortly before the dissolution of the monasteries.

This Robert was succeeded by his son and grandson, both named Thomas, the latter being Thomas Newman of Fifehead who died in 1649 as recorded (in Latin) on the upper half of the memorial plaque on the east wall of the Chapel *[photo right]*. The lower half of this memorial is dedicated to his son Richard Newman who died in 1664.

This memorial probably predates the chapel. Restoration work in 2018 revealed that its central escutcheon (shield) differs not only in shape from the outer two, but is of (expensive) alabaster rather than the (cheaper) limestone used on the rest of the monument. Furthermore the small plaque embedded in its base is of marble with Greek script. It is speculated that these two items probably came



from an earlier monument - perhaps to Richard Newman (d.1695) that was replaced on the north wall by the existing monument (see below).

Around 1618, Richard Newman (d.1664) married Elizabeth Perry, daughter and heir of Christopher Perry of Kern, Somerset, and reputed to have been of Royal descent. According to one source, this marriage established Richard's children in court circles, close to their distant cousins Charles I and Queen Henrietta Marie. Marriage to Elizabeth may have brought Richard a handsome dowry since around this time he purchased the nearby manors of Sparkford and Cadbury in south Somerset. Years later he went on to purchase the Evercreech Park estate in north Somerset.

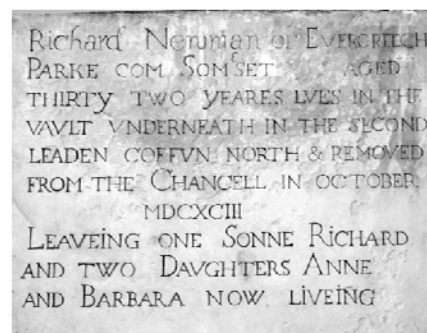
Richard's only surviving son was another Richard Newman (d.1695). It is said that he took the rank of colonel in the royalist army during the Civil War, and distinguished himself by assisting Charles II to escape capture after the Battle of Worcester in 1651 (though no documentary evidence for this has been found). It is also said that following the Restoration in 1660, he was rewarded by Charles through the granting of a royal augmentation to his coat of arms in the form of a portcullis *[see right]*. The arms are described as "quarterly sable and argent: in the first and fourth quarters three mullets argent" (black and white quarters with three white stars in the upper left and lower right quarters).



The Newman coat of arms can also be seen on the escutcheon on the top-left of the monument, however the red mark in the centre of the arms is not the Royal augmentation but a small star said to be a "cadency" mark indicating a junior branch of the family. The decoration on the centre escutcheon is badly eroded but Newman arms are evident on two quarters of the left panel, both of which include the Royal augmentation (i.e. post-1660). The right hand escutcheon contains a barely discernible representation of Newman arms without augmentation (i.e. pre-1660).

It was one or other of these two Richard Newmans who purchased the Fifehead estate soon after Charles II's Restoration. It was the younger Richard who built the chapel in 1693 two years before his own death. It is speculated that there is no memorial to him because his was removed from the north wall to make way for the grand monument to his grandson Sir Richard described below.

Richard Newman (d.1695) divided his estates between his only surviving son, Francis Holles Newman, and his grandson Sir Richard Newman whose father, Richard, had died in 1682. It is this Richard's memorial plaque that hangs on the west wall of the chapel *[photo right]*. Its inscription confirms that in 1693 (when the chapel was built) his remains were transferred from the church to the vault below the chapel.



Francis Holles Newman inherited the Cadbury and Sparkford estates (which remained in the family until 1796), and it is this line of Newmans that remains extant on several continents today. Col. Richard's twenty year-old grandson Richard (later Sir Richard Newman) inherited the Fifehead and Evercreech estates. His lineage would have died with his eldest daughter Frances in 1775 had not the descendants of his sister Anne (who married Ashburnham Toll) subsequently adopted the Newman surname to meet the conditions of her will.

Sir Richard Newman married Frances Samwell and was survived by four children – a son Samwell, who inherited the baronetcy and died unmarried in 1747, and three daughters. The youngest daughter Elizabeth married but had no children (she was pronounced insane shortly after the death of her husband in 1753); the other two, Frances (d.1775) and Barbara (d. 1763) never married.



Sir Richard, his wife Frances and their four children are memorialized on the massive funerary monument on the north wall of the chapel *[left]*. This monument was created by the renowned sculptor Sir Henry Cheere sometime between 1747 when Sir Samwell died and 1763 when Barbara died (the date being added to the monument's inscription after its completion). The monument must have been commissioned by Samwell's sisters whose images appear in relief below his bust.

Sir Henry Cheere (1703 – 1781) was the official "Carver" to Westminster Abbey, and was responsible for at least nine monuments in the Abbey. He lived next door to the "town house" in Old Palace Yard, Westminster that the Newmans leased, so he would have known them personally.

Paint particles found on the sculptures during restoration in 2018 suggest that the busts and reliefs may once have been painted.

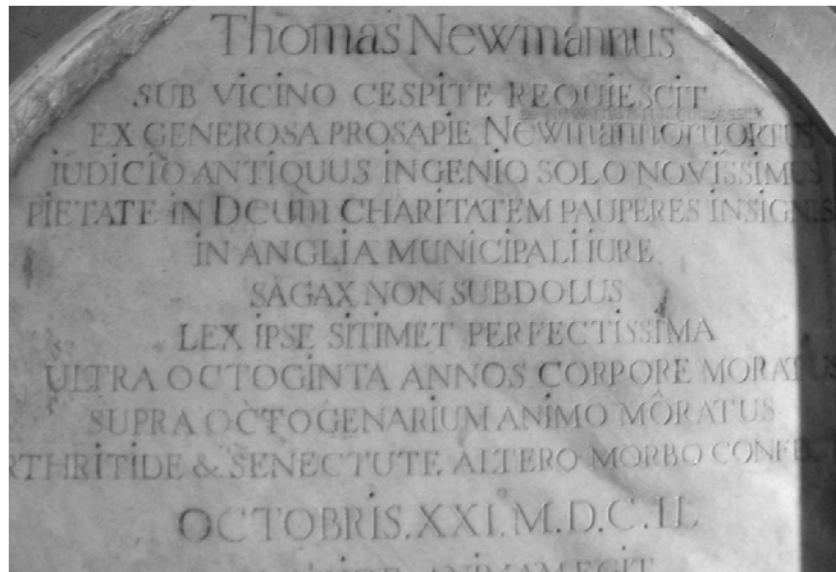
The death of Frances Newman in 1775 severed the 250 year link between the Newmans and Fifehead. In her will, Frances left the manors of Fifehead and Evercreech to Sir James Langham (MP for Northamptonshire from 1784 to 1790) who, in 1779, on-sold the Fifehead estate.

The monument was protected for many years by a pair of iron gates across the entrance that were locked to prevent public access to the chapel. Since there were no heirs, it is thought that the gates were intended to secure in perpetuity the departed dynasty in the vault below. The gates were removed at during World War II and sent off for melting down as a contribution to the war effort. Hinge sockets in the chapel entrance are the only evidence that gates once hung there.

Black funerary bands around monuments were fashionable in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but are rarely found today. The Fifehead monuments offer rare examples of this once common feature.

## MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS

East Wall (upper half) - Memorial to Thomas Newman (d. 1649):



The inscription reads:

*In Latin:*

Thomas Newmannus SUB VICINO CESPITE  
 REQUIESCIT  
 EX GENEROSA PROSAPIE Newmannorum [*De  
 Newman Hall, COT?. ESSEX*], ORTUS  
 JUDICIO ANTIQUUS, INGENIO SOLO NOVISSIMUS  
 PIETATE IN DEUM, CHARITATEM IN PAUPERES  
 INSIGNIS  
 IN ANGLIA MUNICIPALIIURE  
 SAGAX NON SUBDOLUS  
 LEX IPSE SITIMET ET PERFECTISSIMA  
 ULTRA OCTIGINTA ANNOS CORPORE MORATUS  
 SUPRA OCTOGENARIUM ANIMO MORATUS  
 ARTHRITIDE ET SENECTUTE, ALTERO MORBO  
 CONFECT  
 OCTOBRIS XXI, M.D.C.III  
 PLACIDE ANIMAM EGIT

*This crudely translates as:*

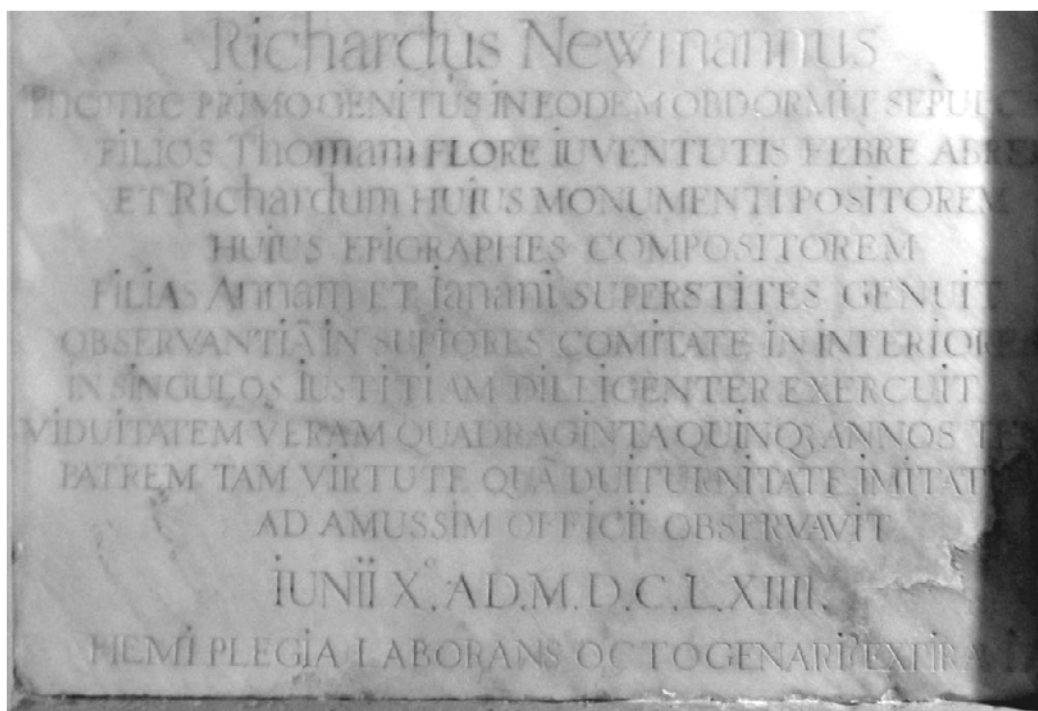
Thomas Newman lies at rest below this  
 neighbourhood,  
 Of the noble the lineage of Newman [*of Newman  
 Hall, Essex*]  
 Combining ancient values with bright new talents  
 Conspicuous in piety to God and generous to the  
 poor,  
 Rightly belonging to England,  
 Shrewd and straightforward,  
 Principled and self accomplished,  
 Over the age of eighty years,  
 Entombed and safe, his illness now ended,  
 October 21, 1649  
 Deliver his soul in peace.

**Note:** the reference to Newman Hall in Essex has been inserted at a later date [*see below*] and is almost certainly erroneous since Newman Hall in Essex is understood to have been built by a Thomas Newman in 1540. If this was the case, then there is no known connection between this Thomas Newman and the Thomas Newman who was buried in Fifehead 109 years later.



It is also noteworthy that all the letters on the memorial are capitalized except for people's names. The reason for this is not known.

**East Wall (lower half) - Memorial to Richard Newman (d. 1664):**



**The inscription reads**

*In Latin:*

Richardus Newmannus  
 Thomae PRIMOGENITUS IN EODEM OBDOORMIT SEPULCHRE  
 FILIOS Thomam FLORE JUVENTUTIS FEBRE ABREP[TUM]  
 ET Richardum HUIUS MOMENTI POSITOREM  
 HUIUS EPIGRAPHES COMPOSITOREM  
 FILIAS Annam ET Ianani SUPERSTITES GENUIT  
 OBSERVANTIA IN SUPIORES COMITATE IN INTERIORES  
 IN SINGULOS IUSTITIAM DILLIGENTER EXERCUIT  
 VIDUITATEM VERAM QUADRAGINTA QUINQUE ANNOS TEN  
 PATREM TAM VIRTUTE QUA DIUTURNITATE IMITATUS  
 AD AMUSSIM OFFICII OBSERVAVIT  
 IUNII X, AD. M. D. C. L. XIII.  
 HEMI PLEGIA LABORANS OCTOGENARI EXPIRAVIT

*This crudely translates as:*

Richard Newman  
 Asleep in the same tomb as Thomas  
 His own son, Thomas, taken in the prime of life by fever,  
 This Richard is the foundation builder  
 This inscription composed [*by him?*]  
 Anne and Jane[?], only daughters to survive birth  
 Watched from heaven with kindness below,  
 Every justice diligently exercised,  
 Forty five years of widowhood endured  
 Father virtuously known so long,  
 To exact service seen,  
 June 10, 1664  
 After eighty years pains to breath the last.

**Note:** Richard did have a son Thomas who died young, and he had a daughter Ann who was born c.1617. However there is no evidence that he had a second daughter (nor any certainty that *Ianani* translates into *Jane*). Richard did live for 45 years after the death of his first wife (Ann's mother) Elizabeth Symonds who died in 1619. It is nevertheless odd that his second wife, Elizabeth Perry, and her surviving son Col. Richard Newman, are not mentioned in the inscription.

North Wall - Memorial to Sir Richard Newman (d.1721), his wife Frances, their son Sir Samwell Newman (d.1747), and their daughters Frances, Barbara and Elizabeth.

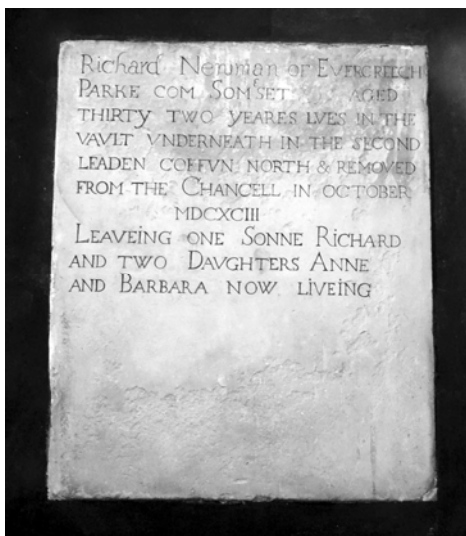


The inscription reads:

In Memory of  
 S<sup>r</sup> RICHARD NEWMAN, Bar<sup>t</sup>., who died Dec<sup>r</sup> the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1721.  
 Also of Dame FRANCES his Wife, who died Dec<sup>r</sup> 4<sup>th</sup>, 1730.  
 Also of S<sup>r</sup> SAMWELL NEWMAN, their Son, who died June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1747.  
 And of FRANCES and BARBARA NEWMAN, and ELIZABETH KITCHEN,  
 Three of their Daughters, who died,  
 Viz, FRANCES, on 27<sup>th</sup> Day of August 1775  
 BARBARA on 6<sup>th</sup> Day of January 1763  
 and ELIZABETH on 26<sup>th</sup> Day of May 1774.  
 S<sup>r</sup> RICHARD and his Lady had three other Children,  
 Viz RICHARD, GRACE and EDMONDS,  
 All of whom died Young.

As noted above, the monument was created by the renowned Westminster sculptor Sir Henry Cheere (1703 – 1781) after the death of Sir Samwell Newman in 1747 and before that of his sister Barbara in 1763. The work would have been commissioned by Frances and Barbara who lived next door to Sir Henry in Westminster. Their dates of death were added to the monument after its completion.

**West Wall - Memorial to Richard Newman (d. 1682):**



The inscription reads

"RICHARD NEWMAN OF EVERCREECH PARKE COM SOM<sup>e</sup>SET ??? AGED THIRTY TWO YEARES LIES IN THE VAULT UNDERNEATH IN THE SECOND LEADEN COFFIN NORTH & REMOVED FROM THE CHANCELL IN OCTOBER M.D.CXCIII [1693] LEAVEING ONE SONNE RICHARD AND TWO DAUGHTERS ANNE AND BARBARA NOW LIVING"

**Tombstone in Fifehead graveyard for Thomas Newman (d. 1668)**



Just inside the gate of the churchyard is a large tombstone that was once inscribed with the words:

THE CORPES OF THOS. NEWMAN GENT  
IS HERE INTERRD APRIL V 1668  
WHILST TOWER REMAINE OR SPRING MY YEW  
HERE I SHALL LIE AS GREEN YOUNG NEW  
ERE NEWS TO US GOOD TIMES MAY BRING  
ONE SWALLOW DOTH NOW MAKE THE SPRING."

The stone is now damaged and some of its words are lost and some are almost illegible, the words above being taken from John Hutchin's 1870 "History of Dorset".

This Thomas Newman is believed to have been the son of the Thomas Newman (and brother of the Richard Newman) whose combined memorial plaque hangs on the east wall of the Newman chapel.

## LINEAGE OF THE NEWMANS OF FIFEHEAD

*(outline only)*

