

## NEWTON SURMAVILLE

(PLATE I)

BY SOPHIA W. RAWLINS, F.S.A.

A full account of the medieval owners of the manor of Newton Surmaville, of Robert Harbin who purchased the manor in 1608 and built the present house, and of his descendants in the 17th century was given by the Rev. E. H. Bates Harbin in *Proc. S.A.S.* 56 (1910), ii, 1. The writer is indebted to this paper as well as to three well-illustrated articles which appeared in *Country Life*, 5, 12 and 19 Sept. 1952. Where no specific reference is given quotations are from the Rev. E. H. Bates Harbin's paper.

The small manor of Newton Surmaville lies to the south of Yeovil in the valley of the Yeo, which here forms the boundary between Somerset and Dorset. It is in the ecclesiastical parish of Holy Trinity, Yeovil, which was formed out of the ancient parish of St. John's in 1846, and up to the present has remained outside the borough boundary in a detached portion of the civil parish of Yeovil Without. The manor is not mentioned in Domesday and probably formed part of the estate of William de Eu in Yeovil. De Eu was attainted for rebellion under William Rufus, and some of his property fell to the Crown; at some later date, presumably by a Crown grant, Newton was created a separate manor, "held in petty sergeanty by the annual service of rendering a tablecloth of ten ells measure and a towel of five ells to the Exchequer at the feast of St. Michael".

"Surmaville" derives from the Dorset family of de Sarmonville, who in turn, probably derived their name (which can be spelt in a variety of ways) from the village of Salmonville near Rouen. In 1166 Philip de Sarmunville held half a knight's fee in Dorset of Alured de Lincoln. Philip de Sarmunville, who died in possession of Newton in 1232, was presumably a relation of the earlier Philip. He left three daughters: Johanna, wife of Thomas de Cricket; Margaret, wife of Geoffrey de Warmwell; and Cecily, wife of Henry de Milleburn. In 1318 Michael de Cricket, grandson of Thomas and Johanna, sold his share of Newton to John Musket, whose great-niece Agnes Holme, was in possession of it in 1385. The descendants of Geoffrey and Margaret de Warmwell were, however, certainly living at Newton in the fourteenth century and in the fifteenth were in possession of the whole manor, though there is no record of how this was achieved. John Warmwell died in 1435, leaving a daughter Agnes, who married firstly Ralph Brett, by whom she had no issue, and secondly Tristram Burnell of Poyntington. By her second husband she had a son, Henry, who succeeded to Newton in 1478 when his mother died at what must have been a very advanced age.

Henry Burnell died in office as sheriff of Somerset and Dorset in 1491, directing in his will that he should be buried under the High Altar of Sherborne Abbey. In 1510 his son John Burnell, who is also styled as of Poyntington, sold Newton to John Compton of Becking-

ton near Frome, retaining a life interest in the estate until his death in 1544. The Yeovil parish registers show Joseph Compton, grandson of John, living at Newton in the time of Queen Elizabeth, but on 18 Nov. 1608, he sold Newton to Robert Harbin of Wyke in Gillingham, Dorset, who first appears in the family documents in 1576, described as a mercer of Blandford. He may have been related to the Harbins of Milton Abbas and/or to those of Poole, a prosperous merchant family, whose pedigree appears in Hutchins' *Dorset*, I, 181 (under Bloxworth). According to the date on his portrait, which is that of a man of great age, with a shrewd and lively expression, he was 93 in 1619. He died two years later, leaving property in eleven parishes in south-east Somerset and six in Dorset, all of which had apparently been acquired in his lifetime and "by his own exertions".

Robert Harbin and his eldest son John, who lived with him, seem to have lost no time in pulling down the old manor house at Newton and in building what Thomas Gerard described twenty years later as "a handsome new house".<sup>1</sup> The lead rainwater pipe-heads bear the date 1612, with the initials R.H. and the newly granted Harbin coat of arms. In 1610 John's eldest son, Robert, married Gertrude, daughter of John Stocker of Chilcompton and widow of Christopher Morgan of Maperton. Their first daughter, Bridget, was baptised at Yeovil, 19 July, 1612. Thereafter they seem to have lived at Wyke until it was sold in 1625 to William Pile. In 1639 Robert succeeded to Newton. He was a parliamentarian, took part in the battle of Babylon Hill, between Yeovil and Sherborne, and rose to the rank of Colonel. In 1644 he obtained a pardon from the King and as a result had his estate seized for delinquency in 1647. He was allowed to compound, but when he died in 1659, his son and heir, John, had to obtain an Act of Parliament to enable him to sell most of his property, apart from the manors of Newton and Up-Mudford, to pay off the debts and legacies with which the estate was encumbered. John died in 1672 and was succeeded by his second but eldest surviving son, William (1654-1705) who in the following year married Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Col. Francis Wyndham of Trent by his wife Anne, d. and coh. of Thomas Gerard the antiquary. The Wyndhams were not well off and, when sir Francis (he was created a baronet in 1675) died, his widow promised Elizabeth the whole contents of Trent in lieu of her unpaid dowry. Since the Wyndhams continued to live at Trent, this contract can hardly have been carried out, but lady Wyndham and her younger daughters spent a good deal of time at Newton and it seems likely that some of the Trent furniture was transferred there at this time, together with the portraits of sir Francis and his four sons, some handsome pewter plates with the Wyndham arms, and two needlework caps handed down to succeeding generations as having been worn by Charles II when he stayed in hiding with the Wyndhams at Trent after the

<sup>1</sup> Som. Rec. Soc. 15, 169.

battle of Worcester in 1652. William was succeeded by his second and only surviving son, Wyndham (1685-1741), who erected a monument in Yeovil church not only to his parents, but to his forbears back to John Harbin who died in 1639. In 1714 he married Abigail d. and h. of Richard Swayne of Tarrant Gunville in East Dorset, by his wife Abigail, d. and coh. of Thomas Strode of Maperton, Somerset. Together with a daughter Abigail, married to Robert Goodden of Nether Compton, they had an only son, Swayne (1715-80), high sheriff of Dorset in 1747, who married in 1760 Barbara, d. and h. of George Abington of Nether Compton and Sutton Bingham, by his wife Barbara, d. of William Wyndham of Dinton.

Barbara Abington's parents died when she was a child. Nether Compton had been sold before her father's death and she seems to have been brought up by her mother's relations. She retained in her possession the manor of Sutton Bingham and a few heirlooms, including her father's portrait and some Abington family papers. Swayne and Barbara, though they had married rather late in life had a family of six children, five sons and a daughter. The eldest son, Wyndham (1761-1837) never married; he sold his grandmother's property at Tarrant Gunville and went to live at Fritham in Hampshire. Barbara continued to live at Newton as a widow for nearly thirty years, and, after her death in 1809, the estate was looked after first by her second son, William (1762-1823), who married Rhoda, d. of Edward Phelips of Montacute, and practised as a solicitor at Sherborne, and then by William's elder son George (1800-80) who eventually succeeded his uncle Wyndham.

George Harbin undertook a considerable restoration of the house, which seems till then to have remained untouched since the seventeenth century; he married late in life and had no children; his widow survived till 1898, when the estate passed to Col. Henry Harbin (1829-1909), third but only surviving son of George's younger brother Edward (1803-33), rector of Kingweston, by his wife Jane, d. of John Hooper of Hendford Manor, Yeovil. Col. Harbin, who had served in the East India Company's naval service as a young man and then in the Somerset Rifle Volunteers and Somerset Light Infantry, left no issue and was the last descendant in the male line of the John Harbin who died in 1672. Newton again passed to a nephew, the Rev. Edward Bates rector of Puckington, eldest son of Henry's sister Matilda by her marriage to Thomas Bates, barrister-at-law, of Heddon-on-the-Wall, Northumberland. The new owner took the name and arms of Harbin and moved to Newton. Since leaving Cambridge in 1882 he had spent much of his life in Somerset and was already an authority on its history. He edited three volumes of Quarter Sessions records and his ancestor Thomas Gerard's *Survey of Somerset* for the Somerset Record Society and the Domesday section of the *Victoria County History of Somerset*. He died in 1918, leaving a widow, Hilda, third daughter

of Sir Theodore Fry, bart. who lived at Newton until her death in 1962, when the present writer, their only surviving child, inherited the house and the farm, which, with some additions, still represents the thirteenth century manor.

Although some of the Ham stone of which it is built may have been re-used, no trace now remains of the medieval manor house and its chapel except possibly in the rounded arches over two courtyard windows. The present house is built round a central courtyard, though whether the domestic buildings at the rear were originally linked up as they are now, seems doubtful. "Instead of the wings enclosing a court before the front entrance as is the plan usually adopted, the front looks due north and is backed by a wing on either side, so as to form an apparently solid mass of building" which was in fact only one room thick. The design is plain and carefully symmetrical, the north front being divided into five bays, in which three gables are separated by two square projections, with flat lead roofs surrounded by parapets. One projection contains the front door, with the arms of Harbin impaling Pert over it, commemorating the marriage of John Harbin and Isabella Pert in 1647. "The windows in the other projection extend the length of each side, giving an impression of lightness and grace".<sup>2</sup> The east front shows "three projecting chimney stacks, reminiscent of an older style, which divide the face into four panels, each containing two mullioned windows, one above the other and finished off with balustrades". No two houses of this period resemble each other in detail; the gables of the north front recall the old manor house at Kingston Maurward and the smaller house of the same period at Wraxall in Dorset. There seems to have been some resemblance too, in the design of the chimneys, between Newton and the long-demolished Stalbridge House, illustrated in Hutchins' *Dorset* III, 670. This was built about the same time and would have been familiar to the Harbins at nearby Gillingham.

The front door opens on to a narrow entrance hall. On the right is a small panelled room, which has served successively as buttery, justices' room, morning-room and dining-room. To the left is the hall, originally stone-floored and with a large open fireplace; out of this leads the drawing room, which occupies the north-east corner of the house and retains its Jacobean panelling, carved overmantel, and plaster ceiling. Much of the panelling is now concealed by two pieces of Flemish seventeenth century tapestry, depicting the story of Elijah. A doorway on the south side of the hall leads to the lobby which originally contained the main staircase, and to the dining-room, where, on the eighteenth century panelling, hang a series of family portraits, including those of Robert Harbin, the builder of the house, and his second wife Margaret Drewry, née Mervyn, in Elizabethan dress.

<sup>2</sup> *Country Life* (5 Sept., 1952), 676.

One of the interesting features of Newton is that it appears to have remained untouched for nearly two hundred and fifty years after it had been built. William Harbin records in the 1670s that he had spent more on his estate than he dared to put down, but this must have been mainly on repairs, since except for the construction of a "cockloft" somewhere at the rear of the house, there is no reference to any structural alterations. Nor, except for the panelling of the dining-room and some bedrooms, do any changes appear to have been made in the eighteenth century. George Harbin's alterations, already referred to, seem to have been aimed at increased comfort, rather than any fashionable modernisation. They probably started after his mother's death in 1846 and may have been made in contemplation of his marriage with a neighbouring heiress, which in fact did not take place. His principal addition to the house was a corridor built out into the courtyard on the south side of the hall, so that this and the bedrooms over it were no longer passage rooms. The staircase was moved into the new passage; some doors and windows were blocked and others opened to fit in with the new plan; and a number of new stone fireplaces were installed.

About 1870 a large room was built at the end of the east wing on a level intermediate between the ground and first floors; it has a projecting bay window, copied from the gatehouse at Montacute Priory, and a range of conservatories was attached, forming a new south or garden front. The new room was converted by Prebendary Bates Harbin into a library to house not only the books already in the house, which included a number of interesting and handsomely bound volumes of classics, theology and history, once the property of the Rev. John Phelips, vicar of Yeovil, 1756-66, but also his own considerable collection of books on Somerset and Dorset and on general and ecclesiastical history.

Unfortunately no inventory of the contents of the house exists before 1809, and the one taken then, if accurate, shows it to have been at this date somewhat sparsely furnished. It is possible that some of the furniture had been given by Barbara Harbin to her younger sons as they left home and married. Some pieces still in the house can, however, be identified from this list and date back to the seventeenth century; but it is clear that a good deal was added by George Harbin. He had presumably inherited some, if not all, of his parents' furniture (his father had had a house at Sherborne), and he was residuary legatee under the wills of his uncle Wyndham Harbin and his aunt Mrs. Maria Goodford; he also bought a new set of dining-room chairs and had oak furniture reconstructed from ancient pieces of carving. Edward and Hilda Bates Harbin brought possessions of their own when they moved in in 1909, and so did the present writer and her husband in 1963.

The contents of Newton thus represent at the present time the tastes and interests of many generations — a family accumulation

of which many items, such as the Queen Anne walnut cabinets and tallboys, are of intrinsic beauty. Books, pictures, china, needlework, yeomanry uniforms and equipment have been acquired in the same way, forming a collection of objects of interest covering 350 years of a kind that is today becoming increasingly rare.

In 1910 Prebendary Bates Harbin ended his article on Newton by expressing the hope that its ownership might not in future become "a penalty too grievous to be borne". It is a problem to which in the circumstances of 1965, it becomes increasingly difficult to find an answer.