

John Newport & Elizabeth (née Browning)
(1726-????) (1730-1754)
(my 5 x Great Grandparents)

Preamble

The following was originally written as a letter to another family historian, laying out the problem of this John and Elizabeth and the proof that they were, in fact, my ancestors – at least, beyond a reasonable doubt. I needed someone to follow my argument and give me their opinion, which they did and we agreed that they were my ancestors – hence they are here!

The letter was written many years ago and I re-wrote it, as a story, some time afterwards (for those who know computers, it was when the BBC micro was the most popular personal computer!) – Obviously, long before I thought of the Internet. I have not re-read the story, changed or modified it, before putting it on this website – mainly because of the work involved in picking up the threads of the argument again, after all these years! I hope it makes sense – it must have done when I wrote!

The Story

The following is the story of how I proved, beyond what I would call a reasonable doubt, that John Newport and Elizabeth Browning were my 5x great grandparents.

After spending, literally, years trying to find out more about my 4 x great grandfather, other than he married my 4 x great grandmother in Barham in 1780, I realised that such information as I had was probably all I was going to find. This meant that my family history was going to come to a stop.

I decided to approach the problem from another direction. I wondered if I could determine who his parents were by a process of elimination. I had, after all, over three hundred baptism records covering the parishes all around the area of Kent, in which my ancestors had lived and worked. These baptisms dated from the early 1500s up to the middle 1900s. I also had nearly two hundred marriage entries, covering both the same parishes and time periods.

I realised, at the time, that my records may not have been complete. When collecting these records, for instance, I could easily have missed the important entry even though I may well have looked in the right register. On the other hand, there was always the possibility that John's parents were married (and he was baptised) outside the county.

I still felt, however, that I had enough information to carry out some initial research which might prove – something.

My idea was, simply, to compare all the baptism records, covering the period when John would have been born, with each and every marriage record over the same period – especially those where the parents had a son baptized, John. I hoped to find a match that even I could not deny fitted the situation beyond a reasonable doubt.

Now, all I knew about my 4x great grandfather, John Newport, was that he was married in 1780, at Barham, in Kent. The marriage entry in the parish registers told me no more than that. In order to progress any further I had to make certain reasonable assumptions.

Civil Registration didn't start until the second half of the year 1837, so there wouldn't be any chance of a marriage certificate to help me.

I guessed that Susannah may well have lived until the early to middle 1800's. Her last child was born in 1798 and her son, William was married in 1845 at which a witness was a 'Susannah Newport'.

In the census of 1851 (which I spent many, many months combing through) there was, however, no sign nor mention of a Susannah Newport who could have attended the wedding – either by name or by marriage.

So what, I thought, if this were her and she had died in the years between the marriage and the census? I asked a professional to carry out a search of St. Catherine's House registers for me and, if possible, get me a copy of her death certificate.

From the registers only one Susannah Newport had died, in Kent, in that period of time. The year was 1846 and she died aged 86, in the hamlet of Derringstone, just outside the village and parish of Barham. Barham was the parish in which she had been both baptized and married.

I have given more details in the story of John and Susannah Newport but this lady had to be our Susannah, simply because of where she had died. Too much of a coincidence for it to be this particular parish out of the four hundred plus parishes of Kent – and the year fitted perfectly.

Assuming, then, that this Susannah was my 4 x great grandmother then she was born in 1760 and married when 20 years old.

With her age virtually determined I could now make certain other assumptions. The first was that she was unlikely to marry a man more than twenty years older or five years younger than herself.

This meant that John's year of birth was most likely going to have been between 1740 and 1765.

I checked my baptism records and listed all entries that I had collected between those years. At the same time, I wrote to various professional people who hold indexes of all (we hope!) baptism and marriage entries which they have extracted from the various church registers. These people, for a fee, will search for any specific name or entry.

Not one person could give me any more information than I already had, so I ended up with the following five baptisms to consider. Each was, obviously, of a John Newport.

No.	Baptised	Parents	Parish Baptised.
1	1748	John & Mary	Lyminge
2	1754	John & Elizabeth	Upper Hardres
3	1755	Thomas & Sarah	Elmstead
4	1758	John & Mary	Bishopsbourne
5	1761	Thomas & Mary	Canterbury

Using entries 1 to 4 and taking the year the children were baptised as the year in which they were born; John at his wedding in 1780 would have been, at the oldest, 32 and at the youngest, 19. These ages were acceptable though some were more acceptable than others.

I, then, did the same with the marriage records of all those couples who had a son, baptised John, over the period **1739-1764**. The idea was that, as I knew so little of John the son, perhaps I could discover who his parents were by a process of elimination – assuming, of course, I had all the necessary marriage records. There may be other marriages I've missed, but I don't think I so.

I found myself with the following list of marriage entries:

No.	Married	Groom	Bride	Parish
1	1747	John Newport	Mary Holmes	Godmersham
2	1747	Thomas Newport	Sarah Griggs	Canterbury
3	1750	Thomas Newport	Mary Taylor	Canterbury

4	1751	John Newport	Elizabeth Worthington	Canterbury
5	1752	John Newport	Mary Fox	Bishopsbourne
6	1754	John Newport	Elizabeth Browning	Bishopsbourne

Note. For baptism No. 2, in 1754, I had two possible sets of parents – Nos. 4 and 6 in the marriage list above.

Marriage No. 1. I was able to dismiss the marriage of John and Mary Newport (née Holmes), as I had proof that their son, John (No. 1 in the list of baptisms) never married. So, John baptized 1748 could not be my John.

Marriage No. 2. I dismissed this marriage as their son, John (No. 3 in the list), married an Ann Munday, in 1784, and John & Ann then went on to have several children of their own. He, too, couldn't be my 4x great grandfather.

Marriage No. 3. This couple's son, John (No. 5 in the list), was born in 1761 (or at least baptized then). I already had satisfactory proof that he never married though he did survive into his thirties. He would only have been nineteen at the wedding in 1780, however, and I considered him to be too young. This marriage I, also, dismissed as being not reasonable. Again, he couldn't be the John I was looking for.

Marriage No. 4. I wanted to dismiss this entry immediately because *this* John Newport came from London (St. Martin's-in-the-fields) and his wife, Elizabeth Worthington, came from Canterbury, where the wedding took place. I felt that the couple didn't really fit into the family as I had begun to know them and, anyway, it seemed more likely that, after the marriage, they would have moved back to London where John, probably, already had a job. It didn't seem reasonable for him to move into the Kent countryside where his experience (or lack of it) might possibly be of no use in earning a living for his family. However, coming from St. Martin in the Fields which, at that time, would have been farming country, I decided that I ought to investigate him further.

This turned out to be much easier than I thought it would be. Some time before, I had extracted **all** the Newports from the Mormon's International Genealogical Index (IGI) and compiled lists of the baptisms and marriages for the various London parishes. St. Martin's-in-the-Fields was one of those parishes.

When I looked, I found the following baptisms (all refer to the children of a John & Elizabeth Newport).

1751	Nov	24	Samuel
1753	Jan	26	Elizabeth
1754	Mar	4	Ann
1754	May	4	Mary
1755	Jul	17	Samuel
1757	Jul	10	Mary
1759	Jul	8	Benjamin

The first baptism was in November 1751 so the birth would probably have been shortly before that time. There is, however, no entry for the marriage of the parents, which indicates that they probably married in her parish. While this is normal, it is, in this case, especially significant.

It's not proof, but my original theory seems to have been correct; I don't believe that this is a coincidence.

Anyway, I am convinced that this John & Elizabeth could **NOT** be the parents of the John Newport, baptised 1754 in Lower Hardres.

However, there was another couple who could be the parents of this John so the baptism of 1754 could not, in this case, be dismissed. This was 'Marriage No. 6' (see later).

Marriage No. 5. This marriage I dismissed because John and Mary Newport had several children in the parish of Bishopsbourne with their John (baptized 1758) being the last. However, they seem to have moved into the next parish of Lyminge between 1758 and 1761, where they had several more children. Following their family from then on, they don't fit in with the known movements of my family.

Marriage No. 6.

John, according to the marriage licence, was 28 years of age at the time of his marriage, and, as far as I could find, had no brothers or sisters; at least, there's no mention of any other Newport, either in the parish in which he married or where he later went to live.

There's, also, no record of his parents in Bishopsbourne, so, if that was their parish, they had no other children baptized there and none were buried there. So, as far as I could see, they had to have moved. Upper Hardres is the 'next door' parish and an ideal candidate for them to move to.

I thought about this for some time and, the more I thought about it, the more it all seemed to click into place. John and Elizabeth Newport (née Browning) HAD to be my 5 x great grandparents.

The following is my account of what I believe happened.

The Story

In the year, 1754, on August 14th, a John Newport (origin unknown), bachelor, of the parish of Bishopsbourne married an Elizabeth Browning, spinster, of the same parish. The marriage took place at the village church, in Bishopsbourne, by license.

Marrying by license was usually the way in which the gentry were married. This was to separate them from the 'ordinary' people who could not afford a license and had to have the banns called. In time people who were not really 'anybody' began to get married by license so this began to lose its meaning.

However, in 1754, it would still have been something important, so, if this is my 5x great grandfather, did he have money or position or was he the son of a family, which still was important, at least locally.

Then again, it could have been his wife's, Elizabeth's, family who were well off. The Brownings do seem to have had some standing in quite a few parishes locally; though there is nothing concrete I have found, to date. I shall keep on looking, however.

The information on the license is different than that given in the marriage register's entry. The license is particularly enlightening because it states that John was a husbandman, which has certain implications. Both entries are given below.

From 'Canterbury Marriage Licenses – 1751-1780' (page 53):

'John Newport of Bishopsbourne, husbandman, bachelor, (28) and Elizabeth Browning of the same parish, spinster, (24) at Bishopsbourne on 14th August 1754'

From the Bishopsbourne church registers:

'1754 August 14th John Newport, bachelor, of this parish, to Elizabeth Browning, of this parish, spinster, by license (the ceremony was performed by a Br. Tansitt – curate of Kingston).

Witnesses: Danial Shivolor and Mary Shoveler Golden.'

All signed their names – no one had to put a cross.

A 'husbandman' is defined, in the dictionary, as a 'tenant farmer' or a 'working farmer' – a farmer who rents a farm. Various books on family history definitions give the additional information that it also designated a small-holder who might also have to work on the land of larger owners to maintain himself (i.e. one step down from a 'yeoman'). A yeoman, at this period of time, would have been a smallholder, commonly a free-holder of the land and the next grade down from a gentleman. He could, also, be a man with a small estate or any small farmer.

Unfortunately, if this is our John, apart from what may possibly be his position in the community, from the license we can only deduce when he was born. We have no idea who his father or mother was or where he was baptized. The witnesses tell us nothing – except, perhaps, that they were brother and married sister - and one of them couldn't spell!

In 1754, on December 10th, an Elizabeth Newport, the wife of a John Newport was buried in Upper Hardres, a parish not far from Bishopsbourne.

Some days later, on December 22nd, 1754, the baptism took place, in Upper Hardres, of John Newport, the son of a John and Elizabeth Newport.

What I think happened here is that Elizabeth Browning married John Newport, in the parish of Bishopsbourne, and the couple then went to live in the nearby parish of Upper Hardres. I cannot prove this but I can find no record of the John and Elizabeth, married in Bishopsbourne, ever having children and no record of the parents of this child ever getting married. I, also, know that there were Brownings living and holding land in both parishes and perhaps the John Newport rented the farm or small holding from them.

Elizabeth, I believe, died in childbirth and her son, twelve days later, was baptised at the same church, in Upper Hardres. He would, therefore, have been an only child of this marriage and this would explain why I have been unable to find any brothers or sisters. His father did remarry, in 1777, and, indeed, had a son, Michael Newport, who eventually moved out of the area, toward Ramsgate. This, however, is a separate branch of the Newport family even though we do share a common ancestor. Out of interest, I am tracing that line, too.

In 1759, on October 16th, a Robert Browning, of Upper Hardres married an Elizabeth Berry, of the parish of Bishopsbourne, at the church in Bishopsbourne. The witnesses were a John Newport and an Elizabeth Long. I believe that this witness was our John and that Robert was his brother-in-law.

In 1777, it appears that John re-married another Elizabeth. Before I found this marriage, I thought that Michael Newport was the full brother of John and was puzzled as to who the Elizabeth was who had died in 1754. The following entry in the registers of Lower Hardres (obviously 'next door' to Upper Hardres) solved the problem.

'1777, November 7th John Newport, widower, of this parish to Elizabeth Austen, widow, of the same parish'

All signed rather than put a cross and, as a matter of interest, both of the 'John' signatures look identical.

The marriage this time was by banns which were called on October 19th and 26th, and November 2nd.

Four years later, their son Michael was born and the baptism entry in the church registers, for Lower Hardres, reads as follows:

'1781 March 10th Michael, the son of John and Elizabeth Newport'

I haven't found any other children of this couple but John was born in 1726, or thereabouts, and we can only guess that both parents were of the age where having children would be less likely. John would have been about 54 while Elizabeth Austen, of course, could have been any age. However, I feel that she would have been around the same age as John and this would have limited the number of children they could have had.

I haven't, as yet, found the farm which John rented but I think I know where it was. I also think I know who owned it. At the moment, though, until I have had chance to visit the Archives Office and investigate my ideas further, I prefer not to say in case I'm wrong. Anyway, the person I think owned the property would only, at the moment, be meaningful to me. That is, until I can put some 'meat on the bones'.

Appendix - 19th December 2008

I must have visited the Archives several times after I wrote the above, but never managed to follow up on the research I planned. Instead, I suppose because of the time, difficulty, and distance in getting to the Archives, I moved on to other branches and, eventually, moved on to Hooe.

There are so many directions I could now go in that it is difficult sticking to one target but that is what I have to do.