

John Newport & Susannah (née Brookes)

(1754-1813) (1759-1846)

My 4 x Great Grandparents

Starting with the marriage in 1780 of John Newport, my 4x great grandfather, to Susannah Brookes, my 4x great grandmother, at the church in Barham, Kent, I set out to trace both their ancestries back as far as I could. The following information, up to the date of the wedding, is what I subsequently found though it has not been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. I don't know that it ever can be but it does, as regards names and dates, fit into the family tree very well.

I'll start first with the details of Susannah's ancestors, then John's and finally from the date of the wedding down to the burial of both great great great great grandparents.

The spelling of 'Brookes' varies according to which register you read and the period in which the entry was written. I have tried to use both spellings exactly as the particular register entries but I may have made a mistake in places. However, the spelling is really immaterial, as both spellings were interchangeable.

Susannah Brookes

In 1725, on October 15th, a William Brookes married a Mary Goldfinch at the church in Barham. These were, I believe, Susannah's grandparents, which would make them my great great great great great great grandparents (for ease, generally designated as 6x great grandparents).

Over a year later, on December 11th, 1726, a William Brooks was buried at the same church. This was not, I am sure, the same William, but William and Mary's first child. There is no record of his baptism but perhaps the child was dead at birth. It would still have been unusual not to have baptized William even in this case, especially as he was obviously given a name, so, perhaps, there were other reasons, such as baptized at another church.

On February 2nd, 1729, James, the son of William Brooks was baptized, in Barham. The mother's name was not given. This was usual in church register entries at this period in history but by the 1750s there were signs of change as entries began to include the mother's name.

In 1732, on January 30th, Mary, the daughter of William Brooks (probably named after her mother) was baptized in Barham but, in the following May, seems to have died as the following simple entry appears in the burial records.

'1732 May 17th Mary Brooks, buried in Barham'

I don't think this was the mother, as William went on to have other children. He may have got re-married, in a different parish but I don't think so. However, I shall keep searching for more information when I can.

On February 18th 1733, William, the son of William Brooks was baptized in Barham. This starts to get confusing, but I think that what we have here is the baptism of another child, born in late 1732 or in early 1733. Though we wouldn't do that today, rename a new baby after one that had died, this was common practice up until about the middle of the 1800's.

In the year 1736, on February 20th, Elizabeth, the daughter of William Brooks was baptized in Barham. The child was possibly named after her grandmother, who I believe was Elizabeth, the wife of an Emmanuel Brooks. The registers get less informative at his time and it is difficult to tell whether the records were not well kept or whether the family was moving around the parishes, perhaps following where the work was. While I am convinced that Emmanuel and Elizabeth were the parents of William Brooks (the dates are right) I have not found an entry for William's baptism.

In 1749, on June 25th, there is an entry in the burial records as follows:

‘Elizabeth Brooks buried in Barham’

No further information is given. No age, no indication whether the deceased was a child or an old woman. It could be either the child who was baptized in 1733 or the wife of Emmanuel.

On October 15th, 1755 the marriage took place, at the church in Barham, of James Brooks to Susannah Cullen. Both are noted as being ‘of this parish’ and both signed their names (they didn’t have to put a cross).

Four years later, on December 23rd, 1759, Susannah, the daughter of James Brooks was baptized in Barham. Again, there is no mention of her mother, but it seems obvious to me that she was the daughter of James and Susannah Brooks, née Cullen, and was, therefore, named after her mother.

I am also absolutely sure that this is my 4x great grandmother.

John Newport

The ancestry of John, my 4x great grandfather, has been very difficult to discover. It took me six years, from 1991 until now 1997, to prove, at least to my satisfaction, who his parents were and from where they came. Even now there is an element of doubt (very small, but there) because the evidence is only circumstantial.

I have written down, separately, what I believe to be the history of John’s parents and, also, given some idea, at least, of the proof I found and the thought processes which led me to conclude that these people were his parents. You will have to read that to see how I found John. It is a complicated story so I will not try to précis it here. Instead, I’ll start with John’s marriage to Susannah Brookes, in 1780.

The Story

In 1780, on September 17th and 24th and on October 1st, the banns were called for the marriage of John Newport and Susannah Brookes, in Barham (which was given in the records as being the parish in which they both were living).

The couple were married, at the church in Barham, eleven days later, on Thursday, 12th October. The entry in the registers gives the following information:

1780 October 12th John Newport, of Upper Hardres, to Susannah Brookes, of Barham.

In the presence of: Elizabeth Browning.

Elizabeth Browning was probably John’s sister-in-law, the wife of Robert Browning at whose marriage John had been a witness. I have no proof of this but it seems a reasonable proposition. I intend to re-visit the archives to check on the signatures of the two Elizabeths (assuming they did both sign – they may have just left their mark) and this may, perhaps, prove the point.

John gives his parish as Upper Hardres which is, obviously, where he was living. His father had married again, in 1777, but exactly where he was living, in 1780, I don’t know.

I looked at the Rate Books for Upper Hardres covering the period from 1780 to 1799. There were no earlier books and none later but the ones I saw gave some interesting information.

From 1780 to 1786, a John Browning is listed as the occupier of cottage – the proprietor being given as ‘Major Hardres Heirs’. Major Hardres, who, by this time had obviously died, must have been a descendent

of the family from which the village and the area around take their names. The cottage was assessed at a rate of 3 shillings, quarterly.

From 1787 to 1788, the occupier was John Newport. This may have been the father (married Elizabeth Browning) but could have been the son (married Susannah Brookes). I have found no way of telling which so far but shall keep looking out of interest just in case there turns out to be some way of identifying who was renting the property.

From 1789 until the 1799 Rate Book (the last available at the Archives Office) John seems to have moved. The occupier, from 1789 onward, is given as Thomas Hitchcock. From 1791 until 1795 the proprietor, who takes over from Major Hardres Heirs, is a Mr. Sammon.

From 1796 to 1799, Thomas Hitchcock then appears as both proprietor and occupier.

The village of Upper Hardres is named after a family which came over with William the Conqueror. Arthur Mee, famous for his books on England states that – ‘Here in the church lies the last of them, Sir William Hardres, who died in his prime at Hardres Court in 1674’.

Well, he seems to have been wrong, unless Major Hardres was, in fact, no relation and his being in the village, just coincidence.

The church is dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul and its first two registers, which began in 1566, were destroyed in a fire in 1908. Luckily, the Bishop’s transcripts have all survived. However, I have found no Newports mentioned here before my 5x great grandfather, in 1754.

Their first child, baptized at Upper Hardres church, on June 9th 1782, was my 3x great grandfather, John. I have written his story, as far as I know it, separately to this so I won’t spend anymore time repeating it.

Their second child, Catherine, was baptized on the 19th. September 1784. She was, eventually, to provide the proof that her brother, John, was my great great great grandfather, and by so doing, moved my family tree up one generation to include her father and mother, John and Susannah. I have always said, and try to use my ‘theory’, that relationships can often be identified or confirmed through other relatives or friends.

Susanna, the third child, probably named after her mother, was baptized on 4th. February, 1786 at the church in Upper Hardres. In the Brookes family the name Susannah was fairly common, going back to a Susannah Brookes born, in the same parish, in 1699. What the relationship was I don’t know as yet but I shall be looking into this during the coming year. Susanna later married but died in the early years, perhaps in child birth.

Another son was born and baptized, James, at the same church, on 14th. June. 1789.

On Oct 7th. 1792, their fifth child, Mary was baptized at Upper Hardres church. I have followed the story of Mary, through all her descendants, down to a marriage in 1963. I contacted the family with high hopes but, while they were polite, it was obvious to me that not one of them was interested in the family history. The story of Mary is written as a separate history so I will not go into it here.

On May 10th 1795, their sixth child was baptized William, at Upper Hardres. William was married in 1819, on August 22nd. He married an Ann Munns and I have written their history as a separate history. It follows them up to the death and burial, in Adisham, on December 6th, of Ann. She was aged 77 years.

Elizabeth, was the seventh and last child of the couple (at least last of those that appeared in the parish registers of the village of Upper Hardres) and was baptized on 24th. June, 1798. I have for the moment at least had to assume that she was the last child as I have found no reference to other children in any of the parish records I have searched. Family history, however, is full of surprises, and today or tomorrow, straight out of the blue, some other item of information may well turn up to cause me to re-write all this.

About Elizabeth, I still know nothing at all. I believe I have found her but can't prove it - yet. In the parish registers of Herne is a tantalising entry referring to the marriage of an Elizabeth Newport to a James Hammond. The year in which this marriage took place was 1824, by which time our Elizabeth would have been 26 years old - obviously quite an acceptable age to be a bride. However, the entry gives no reference to the bride's father or mother, so no proof of relationship is possible. I checked the banns but these were no more enlightening.

The intriguing part of all this is that the only Newports to be found in the village of Herne, until near the end of the 1800's, are ours - with the possible exception of this one. I find it difficult to believe, but it's not impossible that another family of Newports moved in just long enough for their daughter to marry.

What I believe may have happened, and this could also explain why my great great grandfather settled there, is that John and Susannah moved to Herne (perhaps in search of work) sometime between 1819 and 1824, obviously taking their children with them. Their 'children' would all have been, by that time of course, of marriageable age, if not in fact married. By 1819, my great great great grandfather John was certainly married and had been for fourteen years so he may also have taken his family, at the same time and for the same reason (whatever that was), to Herne.

The result of all this is, I believe, that we are seeing in the parish registers, first the marriage, in 1824, of one of great great grandfather's aunts, and then, in 1830, his own marriage, followed by the baptism of each of his children.

There are several more aspects of this Elizabeth marriage which are difficult to understand. On the seventh of May 1826, two years after the marriage in Herne, there are, in the registers of St. Mildred's church in Canterbury, the banns and marriage of another James Hammond to an Elizabeth Newport! Or are there? Is this the same couple who, for some reason that I can't imagine, is going through the marriage ceremony again! Alternatively, are they another pair of individuals of the same names just put on this earth to make my life difficult? Too great a coincidence? Well, perhaps, but now how can I be sure that any Elizabeth Hammond I find (and I've found several) is, in fact, Elizabeth Newport married in Herne? Well, there is one way. I could comb through the 1851 census looking for all Elizabeth Hammonds, and, should I find a likely candidate, check the parish of birth. If 'Upper Hardres' appears in the appropriate column, I could be reasonably sure that I had found our Elizabeth and solved the mystery. On the other hand if some other parish appears in that column, there would be another mystery to solve.

There are two problems. Problem one is that the 1851 census takes up approximately 50 reels of microfilm and each microfilm takes about an hour to an hour and a half to look through. In addition, the nearest place where these films can be viewed is about 100 miles away from Worthing - in Maidstone to be exact.

Problem two is that Elizabeth, who, in 1851 would have been 53 years of age, might, by then, have died.

In 1813, on February 11th, John Newport was buried, aged 61 years, in the same church in which he had been baptized, in 1754. His stated age doesn't quite fit the facts. Assuming he was born and baptized in 1754, he would have only been 59 in 1813. If, however, he was actually born in 1752 then this would now fit. All it would mean is that he was not baptized until the age of two.

The last part of this story is really the beginning because this is where I began to realize who my 4x great grandmother was.

It started when I was going through the parish registers of Littlebourne.

In 1845, on 31st.May, William Newport (who turned out to be the grandson of Susannah, married an Eliza Bridgeman at Littlebourne. The entry in the parish registers reads as follows:

'William John Newport, of full age, bachelor, labourer, Ickham, father John Maple, labourer, to Eliza Bridgeman, of full age, spinster, Littlebourne, father George Bridgeman, Labourer. In the presence of: A. Sutton and Susannah Newport.'

I have written the full story of William, his mother Mary and John Maple in a separate section so will go no deeper into this marriage, etc., than I have to.

In my notes, made at the time I extracted this entry from the parish registers (in August 1989), I recorded that the actual spelling of 'Susannah', was 'Susannh'; the second 'a' was missing. I also noted that the handwriting itself was "very shaky as though written by someone who was either ill, not used to writing, or old and perhaps infirm". Well, I'm very glad I made that note as, many years later, it started me thinking and eventually lead to my identifying my 4x great grandparents.

It happened this way. When I discovered, some years later, the relationship between the bridegroom at this wedding and my own ancestors, I began to wonder who this Susannah was. I felt that she, too, had to be a relative of some description. With the marriage taking place only six years before the national census of 1851 I decided to check these records first for all possible Susannah Newports.

I had better explain here that one of the projects which I set out to do in the early years of beginning my family history was to comb through this census extracting, and recording, all the information relating to any Newport living in Kent at the time of the census. Maureen helped me, and, I must admit, without her help I may well have given up. Kent has something like four hundred and thirty parishes with some, like Canterbury, Rochester, and Gravesend, being very large indeed. Spending a complete day, from nine o'clock in the morning until chucking out time at four o'clock in the afternoon, doing nothing else but reading list after list of names requires both patience and concentration! In all it took roughly a couple of years to complete this particular project, but it was worth it.

Anyway, I searched my records and found only one entry. However, she was a woman of 38, living in Elmstead at the time of the census, and had been born in Dorset. I could see no earthly reason why she would attend a wedding of one of our Newports, but if I dismissed her as unlikely then who was left? As there were no other Susannahs recorded I was left with only three possibilities; the one I was looking for had either died by this time, moved out of Kent, or had been missed by me when searching the census.

I felt that I had been thorough enough not to miss anybody in the census, but this must always be a possibility however many checks are made. Never-the-less I put this on one side for the moment.

If she had moved there was nothing I could do about it. She could have gone anywhere - even emigrated. I also decided that this idea could be safely put on one side!

I was left with only the first possibility, which was also the easiest to check. She had died. It was at this time that I also realized who she could be. There was, after all, one person who could be expected to be at the wedding, who would have a reason for having a shaky hand, and who may well have died before the census. That person would be my 4x great grandmother, Susannah Newport.

The next step was to try to prove this. I had to start somewhere so I first tried to get an idea, from the data I had, of how old our Susannah would have been in 1845. I assumed that she was twenty years of age when she married in 1780 (she could have been older or younger but it gave me a reasonable starting point). The year in which she would have been born, therefore, was 1760. By 1845, therefore, if my assumption was correct, she would have been eighty-five years old, which was an acceptable age that would obviously help to explain the shaky handwriting.

Based upon the same assumption, her first child was born in 1782 when she would have been twenty-two, and her last child (at least the last that I have been able to find), in 1795 when she would have been thirty-five. These statements caused no problems with the theory.

The next move was to check the St. Catherine's House Registers where the recording of all deaths officially commenced in July 1837. Only one death entry was found between early 1845, before the wedding, and December 1851, after the census. I sent for a copy of the certificate and when it came it gave me the following information.

This Susannah died, on the 20th. August, 1846, in the little hamlet of Derringstone, which is in the parish of Barham, and in the registration district of Bridge. This all fitted very well indeed. Our Susannah was baptized in Barham church and also married there. Why Derringstone, however, I don't know for sure, but I would suggest that this is most probably where she came from, where her roots were. Not Barham at all. After all, Derringstone was a hamlet and Barham a village.

The difference between a village and a hamlet is that the former has a church while the latter hasn't. Therefore, those living in Derringstone would have to use the nearest parish church for all occasions from baptisms to burials. The nearest one is in Barham, less than half a mile away.

This Susannah was also eighty-six when she died which made her eighty five years old in 1845, and therefore born in 1860! Not a bad guess on my part!

She was also a widow which, while being likely anyway (women then as now tending to live longer than men), fitted in with what I suspected.

In conclusion, I believe that the lady who signed as a witness at the wedding in 1845 was my 4x great grandmother, Susannah Newport, the wife of John Newport.

I haven't as yet found where Susannah was buried but I believe that this must be either Upper Hardres or Barham. However, I have so far been unable to find any entry in the registers.