

Statement of Significance – St John the Baptist Church Colsterworth

Introduction

Dating back to the 8th century, the evolution of this important building not only reflects changes in architectural styles over the last 12 centuries, but further reflects changes brought about by historic events. From the early spread of Christianity throughout Mercia, through the Norman Invasion, outbreaks of famine and plague, the Reformation, the Civil War, two World Wars to the present, all are reflected in the building we now know as our Parish Church. A closer examination clearly shows that not just the stonework of the walls, but the roof, the decorations, the sloping floor, the raised churchyard, plus all the artefacts, reflect the heritage of this important building from Saxon times through to the modern era. Sited at the heart of Colsterworth village, it has the potential to serve as a community space as well as its prime function of Christian worship.

There are many reminders of the close links with the family of one of history's greatest philosophers, Sir Isaac Newton, including a manorial aisle associated with his family home, Woolsthorpe Manor, now in the care of the National Trust.



Founding of the Church

In his book 'History of the Church St John the Baptist Colsterworth' published by Lavars and Co Bristol 1902, Rev John Mirehouse, Rector of the Parish, put forward a theory that the herringbone stonework to the north side of the nave was in fact Roman in origin. This theory

was supported by observation of the odd square sectioned column at the end of the nave being likened to Roman columns at Bath. However, this concept is not supported by English Heritage in the grade 1 listing (List entry Number 1360309), which conclude: 'the herringbone work, terminating against a line of quoins above a square pier, possibly indicating the extent of the original Saxon church'. This view has since been endorsed by Guy de la Bedoyere, a leading authority on architectural archaeology.



Amongst the artefacts in the church is the shaft of a Runic Cross, which was discovered during reordering works carried out in 1876/7. Other segments of early carved stonework are on hand and may form part of the head of the cross. According to Rev John Mirehouse in his 1902 book, several pieces of the cross were used in the 1876/7 rebuilding of the chancel during 'his absence from the parish'. It is probable that the early Saxon building was on the

site of a preaching cross located on the old Roman road of Ermine Street, and the proximity of the River Witham being significant for baptismal purposes.



Norman Influence and Domesday Book

The existence of Colsterworth at the junction of two main routes from London to Lincoln and to York undoubtedly meant that the building would have come to the attention of the Norman invaders. Though Colsterworth is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1087), no mention is made of the church. In his book of Colsterworth Village History (1990), local historian Kenneth Baird puts forward the concept that churches were only mentioned in the Domesday Book when they 'belonged' to a Lord. As a tax document, the Domesday Book was only interested in property, not community. Most villages were the property of one Lord with one manor. Not so Colsterworth, as it was a common parish of three small manors. The names of Rectors are only recorded from 1242.

The 14th Century Tower

The tower of Colsterworth church was constructed separately from the nave. Today, it can be clearly seen as out of line with both the nave and chancel when viewed from the east. At the base of the south wall of the tower is a weathered inscription 'Fecit Thomas de Somerby MCCCVI'. Somerby, now known as Great Somerby, is a small community on the outskirts of Grantham, approx. 8 miles from Colsterworth.



In a collection of papers entitled 'The Making of Grantham' published in 2011, a stonemason named Thomas (family name unknown), is credited together with a team of 50, with the construction of St Wulfram's Church in Grantham, before leaving in July 1277 for Chester to work on the construction of Chester Cathedral. Could this stonemason Thomas and Thomas de Somerby be one and the same, having returned to the area following completion of work on Chester Cathedral? If indeed Thomas de Somerby and the Thomas stonemason of St Wulfram's Grantham and Chester Cathedral were one and the same, he would have been elderly by 1306.

It would be easy to conclude that the building of the tower was completed swiftly. The English Heritage listing (Listing No 1360309) makes reference to 'the 3 stage ashlar tower of 1305' including 'battlemented parapet with human head corbel table" and 'angle grotesque corbels'. The tower may have been swiftly completed in the early 14th century, but both historic events and architectural evidence may suggest otherwise. (Illustration 5: tower parapet & grotesques). In the early 14th century, it was common practice when constructing

substantial buildings to build over the course of several years to allow settlement to take place and to make adjustments to levels.

The battlement parapet, human head corbel table and grotesque corbels recorded by English Heritage point to the involvement of a later influence of a group of itinerant stonemasons. In the latter half of the 14th century, itinerant stonemasons were active throughout Leicestershire, Rutland and parts of Lincolnshire. According to a paper published in 2013 by Lionel Wall who has researched their activities, it was probably one of these itinerant stonemasons who was responsible for the tower battlement and gargoyles at Colsterworth Church. They are probably best described by the title of Lionel Wall's paper 'Demon Carvers and Mooning Men'. (<http://www.greatenglishchurches.co.uk>)

Why the delay in completing the tower from its apparent inception in 1306? That can be further explained by outbreaks of both famine and plague as well as the ageing Thomas de Somerby. It is well recorded that the population of London (and Colsterworth is on the main routes north from London) had a mortality rate of nearly 40% in 1348. Any such loss of population would have caused delays to any construction work. Such a loss of population in the 14th century may further explain why the churchyard to the south of the church is so much higher than the church floor.



As well as the grotesque gargoyles, there are faces and numerous marks comprising a reversed capital N (Mason's marks). English Heritage also mentions three consecration crosses, one to the north face and two to the west face. In fact in correct lighting it is possible to discern six of these crosses. Significantly, these are sited evenly to the north and south walls and to either side of the west window. Properly known as apotropaic marks, but

also referred to as 'Daisy Wheels', there is also a partial one inside the church on the window ledge on the north aisle. Such marks also feature in the nearby 15th century Manor House at Woolsthorpe, the birthplace of Sir Isaac Newton. (Illustration 7: photo of consecration crosses and reversed N's) (Illustration 8: photo of Tower from the South).





One may ask, was there a spire on top of the tower at Colsterworth? On an internal wall at Woolsthorpe Manor is a scratched picture of a tower with a spire on top. Is this, as local folklore would have us believe, a representation of his childhood church by the young Isaac Newton, or a later representation of St Wulfram's Church in Grantham where he subsequently attended school? If there was a spire, what was its fate? In his role as a journalist in the early 18th century, Daniel Defoe wrote a book concerning the events of November 1703 "The Great Storm". In it he lists damage caused all over Southern England. The storm followed a path north eastwards up through the Trent Valley. Defoe goes on to report that the damage, particularly to church steeples, was too widespread to catalogue fully. Certainly, at that time it was well known that following the Reformation, the maintenance of church buildings had been lax. Such neglect at Colsterworth cannot be ruled out, as it did play a significant part in the later demolition of the north aisle and chancel in 1770, and the rebuilding of that chancel a hundred years later when it was described as a "hideous barn like structure". If there was a spire and it survived the great storm, Defoe's book also goes on to report that within a month of the storm, there was an earthquake in Lincolnshire. What the storm didn't achieve, did an earthquake complete?

It is well recorded that in 1726, a gallery funded by Sir Isaac Newton, was built across the eastern archway to the tower. This gallery was removed in the 1876 reordering in order "not to spoil the view of the western window." Certainly the folklore that somehow a falling spire had destroyed this balcony and the font is just that ----folklore.

The net internal footprint of the tower is less than 8m². With access needed to the tower staircase plus a casing for the clock weights, and with room needed for bell ringers, space for new facilities such as toilets and/or storage is restricted. A suggestion has been put forward that a mezzanine floor could be installed for the bell-ringers, leaving the ground floor free for any new facilities. However, this would restrict the view of the west window from the nave of the church, the very reason given for the removal of the Newton gallery in the 1876 reordering. Some space would also be taken up to provide a staircase to the mezzanine floor, which in turn would raise concerns about the ability of older members of the bell-ringing team to get access. Disability access would also present a problem with the tower floor being two steps up from the floor level of the nave.

Priory of St Martin and St Barbara

Colsterworth was the site of a Priory built c 1128. It was sited near the church on the far, western, bank of the nearby River Witham. It is recorded that the priory was suppressed in 1417, well before the Reformation. All that can be seen now are a few lumps and bumps in the field where it stood. There is no visible remaining stonework. The date of suppression of 1417 invites the possibility that any masonry was 'recycled' to extend the original Saxon nave to the newly completed tower. The roofline of the original join is still clearly visible to the east face (internal) of the tower. The difference in the stonework from the Saxon nave and subsequent clerestory level is very evident.

North and South Aisles

Various theories have been put forward as to when the aisles were added to the original Saxon structure. English Heritage in their listing description refer to a 15th century three-light west window to the North Aisle and a 13th Century North Doorway.



With apparently consistent stonework to both the south and north aisles and extending along the full length of the current Nave, it is reasonable to conclude that both were built at the same time or shortly after the nave extension to the tower. Logically, neither aisle could have been built until the completion of the original nave to the tower. With a 13th century doorway within the outer wall of the north aisle, this could again point to 'recycling' from the priory, or

even from the original separate entrance to the Tower, now no longer needed. The door itself on the north aisle is Victorian and probably part of the subsequent 1876/7 reordering. This 13th century doorway is on the direct route from the Newton family home at Woolsthorpe Manor and likely to have been used by Sir Isaac and his family.

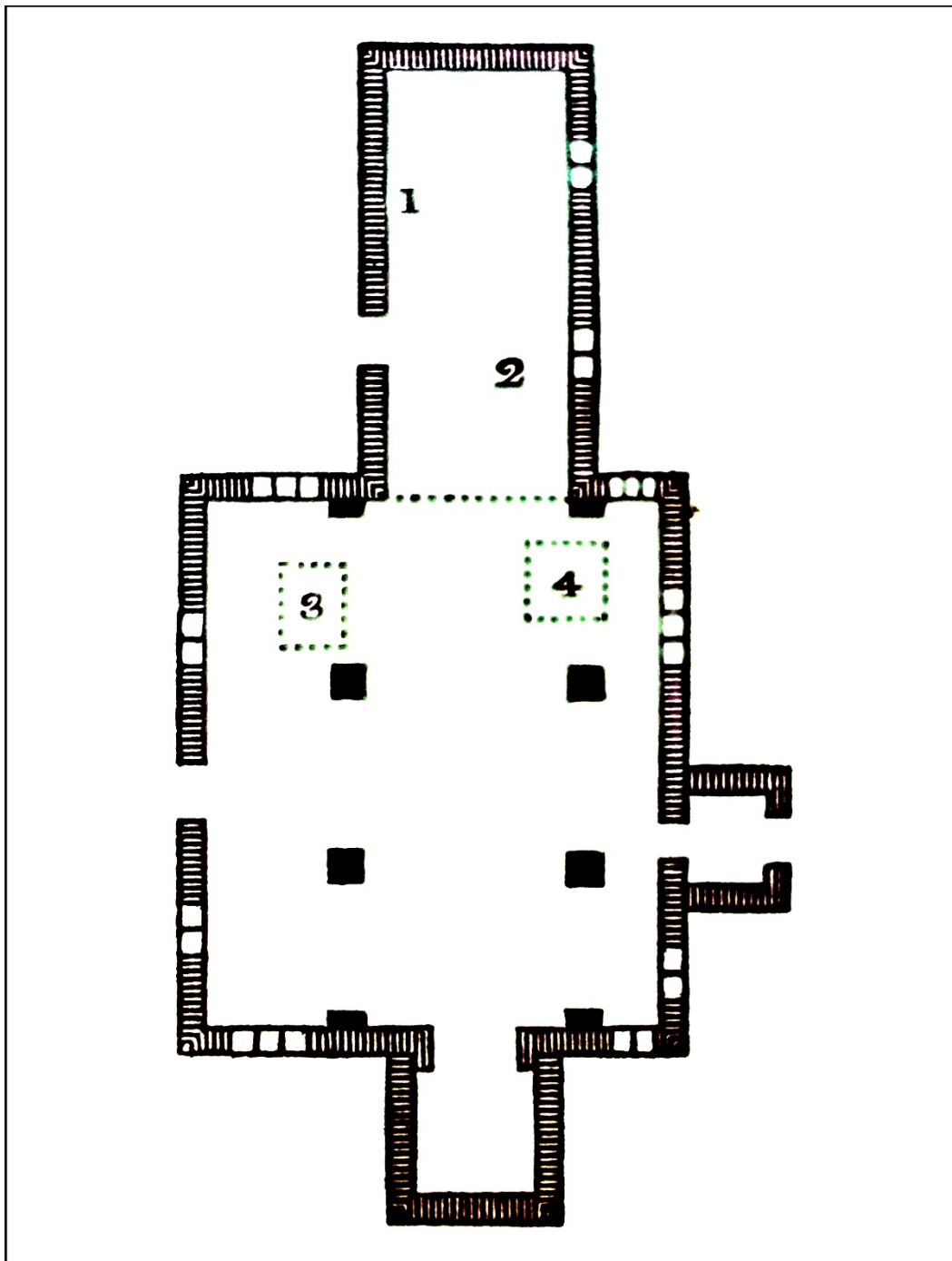
On the window ledges of the north aisle can be found various engravings, including on the central northern window a part 'Daisy Wheel' or consecration mark, cut away at the edge of the ledge. In an article from the Grantham Journal dated 28th July 1877 regarding the reopening of our church following reordering, it makes reference to the fact that "important portions of the Newton aisle windows were found buried in the walls and not in situ, but used as walling stones. It is needless to say that these now occupy their earlier positions."



English Heritage dates the South Aisle as 14th century. The entrance porch was rebuilt in 1809 at the same time as the Rectory was built. The Rectory is now a private residence situated to the immediate east of the church. The porch protects a doorway, the main entrance to the church, and is dated by English Heritage as 15th century.

In 1770, the then Rector of St John the Baptist, Henry Dodwell, organised the demolition of the then chancel and associated part of the north aisle. The chancel was replaced with what became later described as the 'hideous barn like structure'. The only record of what the Church looked like in the intervening years before the 1876/7 reordering is from the 1806 book 'Collections for the 'History of the Town and Soke of Grantham containing Authentic Memoire of Sir Isaac Newton written by Edmund Turnor' (a local landowner). The book gives a plan of the church in 1806 showing that the north aisle no longer extended beyond where the nave meets the chancel. The same illustration shows that there were in fact two manorial

aisles, Woolsthorpe to the north side, and Colsterworth to the south.. The south aisle now has a separate altar given by the family of William Modd which was rededicated as a Lady Chapel in the mid-20th century.



Clerestory

There is a six-light Clerestory to the Nave, clearly added after the original extension of the Nave to the Tower. This is demonstrated by the stonework variations and the original rooflines visible still on the Tower.



Roof

In the article dated 28th July 1877 from the Grantham Journal regarding the reopening of our church, it is reported that: 'The works have been of an important nature – the removal of the 'barn-like structure' of the 1770 chancel the construction of a new chancel and Newton's

aisle upon the old lines. The remaining works consist for the most part of thoroughly cleansing and repairing the whole of the walls and roof'. The current roof to the nave is then as refurbished in the 1876/7 reordering. The main trusses are decorated with carved wooden figures including one of a piper. The meaning of these carvings is currently obscure. (Illustration 14: photo of piper on roof truss)



Chancel

Little is known about the original chancel demolished by Henry Dodwell in 1770. It is possible, as reference has been made in the past to the 'Norman chancel' that it was built or

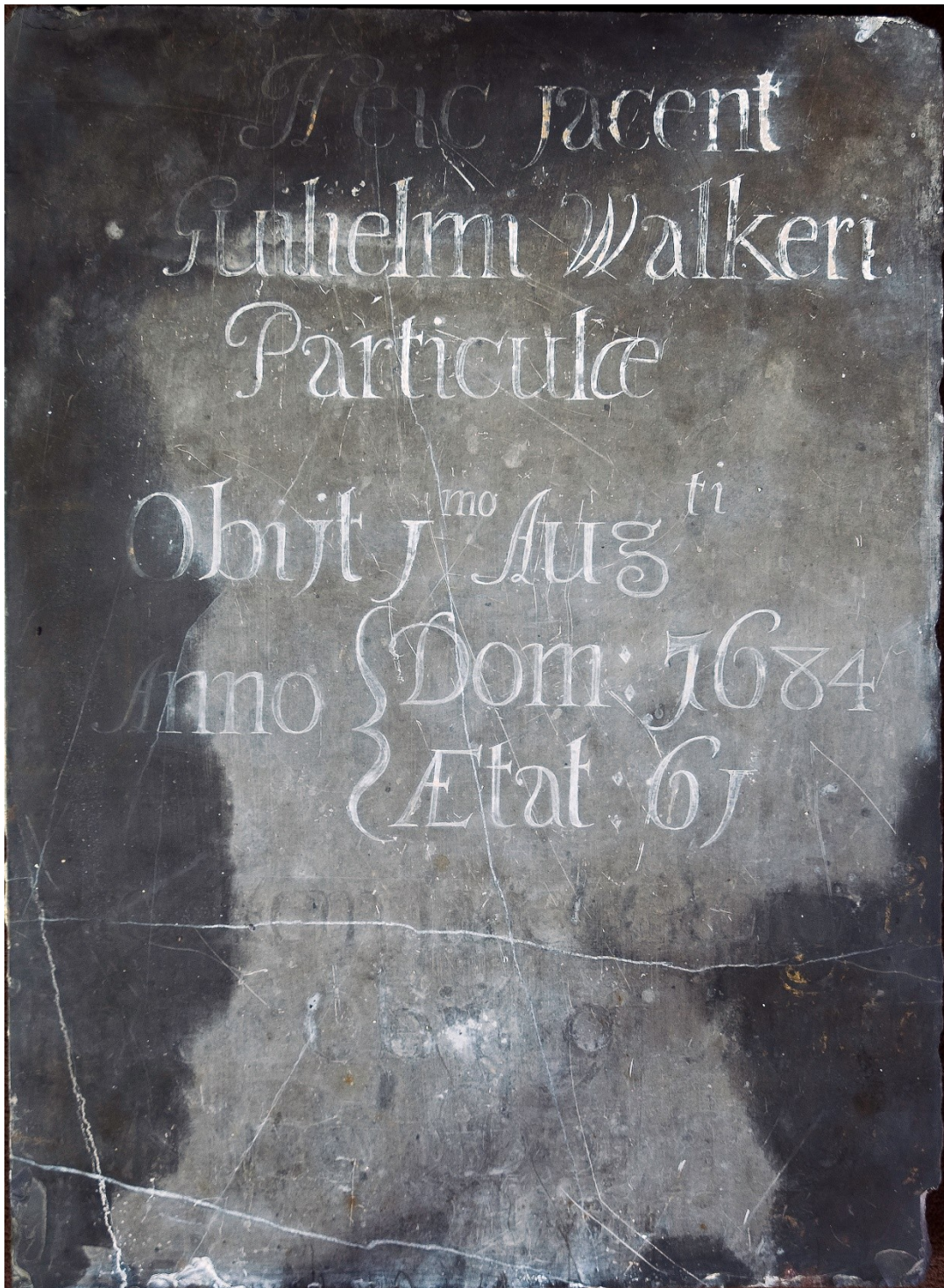
rebuilt about the same time as the tower (14th Century). The first real record was its demolition together with associated part of the north aisle or Woolsthorpe Manorial Aisle which became known as the Newton aisle in the 1876 reordering. Its replacement was described in preparation for the later reordering in 1876/7 as a 'hideous barn like structure'. The need to demolish in 1770 would be consistent with poor maintenance of Church buildings following the Reformation. In William Stukeley's 1752 Biography of Sir Isaac Newton, there is a drawing of the church taken from the south showing the chancel with just three south facing lancet windows. From the text of the biography, this drawing can be accurately dated to November 1722. This is the only record of what this Norman chancel, demolished by Dodwell in 1770, would have looked like. A later drawing of the church, attributed to George Rowe, and held in the archives of the Royal Society, is undated, but estimated by the artist's archivists to be c 1840. (George Rowe 1796-1864, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum).



In his history of St John the Baptist Church, Rev John Mirehouse reports further on the reopening of the church in 1877 following the chancel rebuild: 'The works have been of an important character, involving the entire removal of the barn-like structure which for the last one hundred years has done duty for a chancel, the construction of a new chancel and Newton's aisle upon the old lines, clear evidence of the design and character of which were found when the 18th century building was removed.' The history by Rev John Mirehouse also includes a photograph of the church taken from the south in 1902, showing our church much as we recognise it today.

In Turnor's 1806 book on the Town and Soke of Grantham (published by W. Bulmer & Co Cleveland Row, St. James 1806) a plan shows the church with no aisle to the north of the chancel. It has the accompanying text: 'There has been a north ile to the chancel, which was almost entirely rebuilt and covered with stone coloured slate by the present Rector in 1770'. This plan also shows the location of the Manorial pews of both Woolsthorpe and Colsterworth Manors, Woolsthorpe to the north, and Colsterworth to the south. Turnor also records two significant artefacts, both of which can still be seen today:

1) On a black marble slab against the wall: 'Heic jacent Guilielmi Walkeri Particulae, orbit 1 Augusti Anno Dom 1684 AEtat 61'. (This slab was very recently located in the Tower and moved back in the Chancel).



2) A stone tablet with the arms of Newton between two Saxon arches on the north side of the Nave and erected by Edmund Turnor Esq 1805: 'Sir Isaac Newton who first demonstrated

the laws by which the Almighty made and governs the universe, was born in this Parish on Christmas Day in 1642 and was buried in Westminster Abbey 1727. Three generations of the Newtons, Lords of the Manor of Woolsthorpe, are buried near this place'. In the 1876/7 reordering, this plaque was removed to the newly restored Newton Aisle or Chapel. Sadly it is now largely obscured by the organ, installed in 1897. Further items of interest to be found in the 1876 rebuilt chancel are:-



1) A brass plaque to the south of the main altar. Inscribed in Latin, it records that St John the Baptist Church was the place where Isaac Newton was christened in 1642. Strangely, it does not carry the Newton coat of arms, but that of the Mirehouse family.

2) A bust of Rev John Mirehouse (Rector in 1876) on the column adjacent to the organ.



Rood Screen and Gallery

There was a Rood Screen probably introduced in the early Norman years, and constructed at the same time as the chancel. Dedicated to Mary and John, it was of particular importance, as, unusually for a small parish church, there was also a Rood Loft. The remains of the Rood Stair can still be found at the north-eastern end of the nave. English Heritage records that: 'In the north aisle wall, the opening to the rood stair loft survives and an aumbry'. (Illustration 19: photo of Rood Stair entrance)



Font

In his 1902 book Rev John Mirehouse goes into some detail regarding the font. 'The font in Colsterworth Church is a very interesting one. It was a transitional Norman one, only part of the original one now remaining, viz. the shaft. This transitional font was probably the first one in this church, as the Anglo-Saxons, so Bede tells us in his Ecclesiastical History Book, 2 Ch

14, were frequently baptised in the Rivers Glen or Swale in Northumbria as late as AD 627, and that fonts at that time were not made. This one appears to be about 1170. By the constitutions of Edmond, Archbishop of Canterbury, AD 1236, fonts were required to be placed in every church in which baptisms could be administered, and they were to be large enough for total immersion.

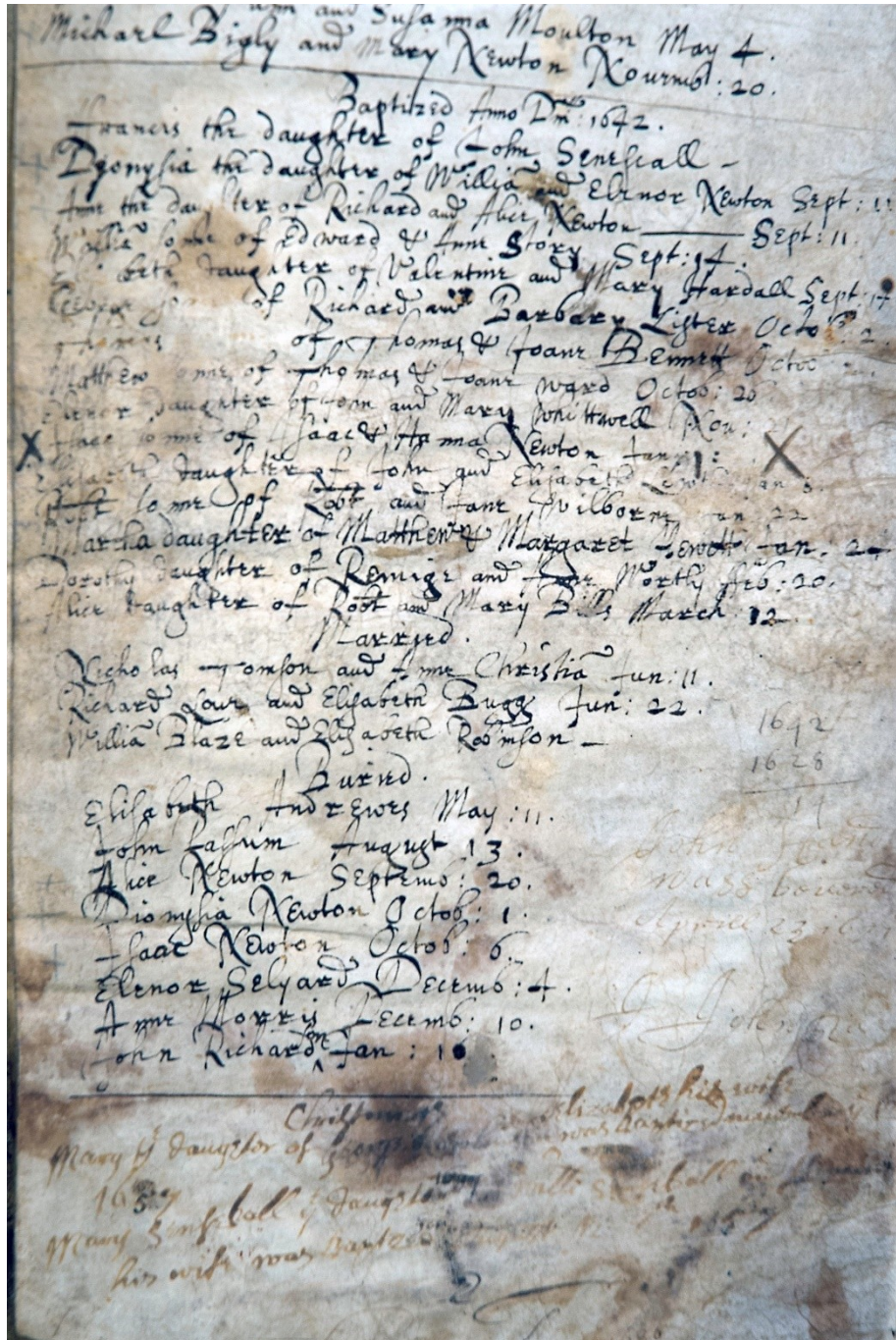
Probably, when the Clerestory was added, the transitional bowl was broken, as a bowl of the decorated period was in existence up to 1876. The font was then placed close to a large stove at the end of the original church, on the north side of the nave, and from the heat, the bowl in the course of time became cracked and charred, so that when it was moved to its present position, it was not fit to use again, and a new bowl was made as nearly as possible as the original one'. What is not explained is just what happened to the original pieces of cracked bowl. Could they be amongst the pieces of stonework currently associated with the Runic Cross? Or were they somehow 'recycled' during the 1876/7 reordering?



The Newton Connection (& Manorial Aisle)

Sir Isaac Newton (1642 -1728) was an English physicist and mathematician, widely recognised as one of the most influential scientists of all time. Known during his lifetime as a 'natural philosopher' he is revered and respected throughout the world.

In 1627, Robert Newton, the grandfather of Sir Isaac, acquired Woolsthorpe Manor, part of the parish of St John the Baptist, Colsterworth. With it went the Lordship of the Manor. The great philosopher and scientist was born there on 25th December 1642 and baptised soon after in St John the Baptist Church. With the Julian calendar being in operation at that time, the January after his birth in December 1642 would still have been recorded as 1642. On the Parish Record, a copy of which is on show in the church, this christening is clearly recorded, and is the only official documentation of Sir Isaac Newton's birth. Poignantly, on the same page, is recorded the burial of his father Isaac Newton Snr in October 1642. The cause of death is not recorded, but he remains buried somewhere in the north aisle of the church.



Sir Isaac Newton's mother, Hannah Ayscough, remarried in 1645 to the Rev Barnabas Smith rector of North Witham, a neighbouring parish. The marriage is thought to have been arranged by Sir Isaac's uncle, Rev William Ayscough, Rector of Burton Coggles, another neighbouring parish. The infant Isaac Newton was left at Woolsthorpe Manor in the care of his grandmother, Margery Ayscough, whilst his mother went to live at North Witham Rectory with her new husband. That marriage provided Isaac Newton with three half siblings: Mary born 1647, Benjamin born 1651 and Hannah born 1652. Rev Barnabas Smith died in 1653, and Isaac Newton's mother then returned to Woolsthorpe Manor. Sadly, many Parish records from this era are missing due to the onset of civil war in 1642, the year of Sir Isaac Newton's birth.

From the age of twelve, Newton attended the grammar school in nearby Grantham (now known as the King's School) and joined Trinity College Cambridge in 1661 from where he graduated in 1665. As well as being renowned for the discovery of the laws of gravitation, the laws of motion and the spectrum of light, Newton also wrote extensively about religion and the bible. He was a committed monotheist and 'recognised Christ as as a devine mediation between God and man, who was subordinate to the Father who created him'. He did, however, have difficulty with the concept of the Trinity.

Throughout his life he counted amongst his close confidants members of the clergy. His uncle, Richard Ayscough, responsible for early influence on the young Isaac, was rector at Burton Coggles, a neighbouring parish. The family friend, Humphrey Babbington, brother to Mrs Clarke his landlady in Grantham when he attended school there, was rector at Boothby Pagnell, another close-by parish. It was Babbington, who was in part responsible for Isaac Newton's admittance to Trinity College. His stepfather, Barnabas Smith, who left the young Isaac Newton his books on his death in 1653, was rector at North Witham.

William Stukeley, biographer of Newton's early years, was rector of All Saints in Stamford until his death in 1752. It is in these memoirs written by Stukeley, that the next mention of the Newton connection with St John the Baptist Church comes to light. Whilst written during Newton's lifetime, it was not published until 1752, some 25 years after Newton's death. In his book Stukeley recalls a conversation with Sir Isaac:

'Whilst he (Newton) lived at Cambridge, his mother dyed at Stamford in 1679. She went thither on a visit to her son, Benjamin Smith. Her body was bought to Colsterworth and buried in the north isle of the church, where this family were generally interr'd'.

The Rector at that time in Colsterworth was William Walker, who was also Master at the Grammar School in Grantham. He was another close confidant of Isaac Newton, and when he died in 1684 his memorial plaque was funded by Newton. (See memorial and illustration under heading Chancel)

In the same memoirs of Newton, Stukeley also records his drawing of St John's Church in 1722 (see also under heading Chancel) & that he, the author, gave a copy to Sir Isaac of which he was 'well pleased'.

During his lifetime, Sir Isaac was also a generous benefactor to the church. In 1725 he gave £12 towards the construction of a gallery at the west end of the church, and £3 towards repairs to the floor. Regrettably the gallery was removed as part of the 1876/7 reordering, as

'it hid the view of the magnificent west window in the tower'. Communion plate hallmarked 1667 and 1679 may also be attributed to Newton (see also under the heading Church Plate)

It was by use of the Newton connection that Rev William Mirehouse was, in 1876/7, able to raise funds for the rebuilding of the chancel, and, alongside it, the Newton Aisle or Chapel. Whilst artefacts such as the sundial carved by the young Isaac Newton and the memorial to the Newton family still remain in what was then the Newton Chapel, they have been largely ignored over the last 140 years, due, amongst other things, the installation of an organ in 1897, and the creation of a vestry.

It is now incumbent upon us to restore this chapel as a lasting memorial to one of history's greatest philosophers and scientist.

The Vestry

In the 1806 plan of the church (see illustration no12 –Edmund Turnor- 'The Town and Soke of Grantham') no vestry is shown. At the time of the 1876/7 reordering with the rebuilding of the chancel and associated north aisle, it was the aisle to the north of the new chancel that was designated as the Newton Chapel. The sundial carved by the young Isaac Newton and presented by Charles Turnor, the then owner of Woolsthorpe Manor, and the relocated memorial from 1806, formed part of this new chapel. The only other remaining artefact from the 1876 reordering is a Gothic Cross in memory of Isaac Newton. (Illustration 22 –photo of Gothic Cross in memory of Isaac Newton). It now lies forgotten in a corner of what became the modern vestry, when an organ built by Vowles of Bristol was installed in the centre of the chapel. This effectively divided the chapel up into the modern day vestry to the east and a storage area to the west. The current vestry is separated from the chancel by two arches and a carved oak screen dedicated to members of the Mirehouse family. The total gross area taken up by the current vestry, organ and storage area amounts to just under 33m². In 1876, at the time of the Newton Chapel reconstruction, and some 20 years prior to the installation of the organ, it is likely that a vestry was not considered necessary with the close proximity of the Rectory to the church. Today, a space for secure storage of clerical vestments and other sacred objects is a necessity.

So why was the organ sited in the middle of the restored Newton Chapel? The thinking behind the location of the organ in 1897, and the division of the rebuilt Newton Chapel into a vestry and storage area, can probably be better understood from a postcard from that time illustrating the Victorian chancel with the newly installed organ.

The organ pipes to the west are just visible. The Newton memorial cross, now lying forgotten in the present-day vestry, appears on the ledge of the east window, and the menorah, donated by Rev John Mirehouse, is strategically placed in front of the altar.



A similar photograph appears in Rev John Mirehouse's book on the history of the church published in 1902. As well as the absence of the Newton cross, there is no mention of the memorial to Newton's confidant, William 'Particles' Walker, former Rector at St Johns and master at the Grammar School in Grantham. This memorial tablet was recently discovered in the tower and placed back in the chancel. So why was the organ sited in the middle of the restored Newton Chapel? Whilst a vestry is a key requirement of the present day church, it was not a necessity in the 1890's with the proximity of the then rectory next door. It can only be surmised that the new chancel of 1876, built with funds raised using the Newton connection, was slowly being transformed into an area to the glorification and memory of the Mirehouse family, sidelining the Newtons. The evidence includes:

- 1) The Mirehouse coat of arms in all 5 chancel windows.
- 2) Dedications to members of the Mirehouse family on all 5 chancel windows.
- 3) The Mirehouse coat of arms on the eastern outer wall of the chancel.
- 4) The Mirehouse coat of arms to churchwarden's staff.
- 5) The Mirehouse coat of arms to the brass plaque in the chancel, inscribed in Latin, recording Newton's christening in 1642.
- 6) The effective masking of the Newton sundial and the 1806 memorial to the Newton family.
- 7) The choice of inscription over the chancel arch, long since removed, but illustrated in the postcard/ book photograph from that era:-

'MY HOUSE IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER'

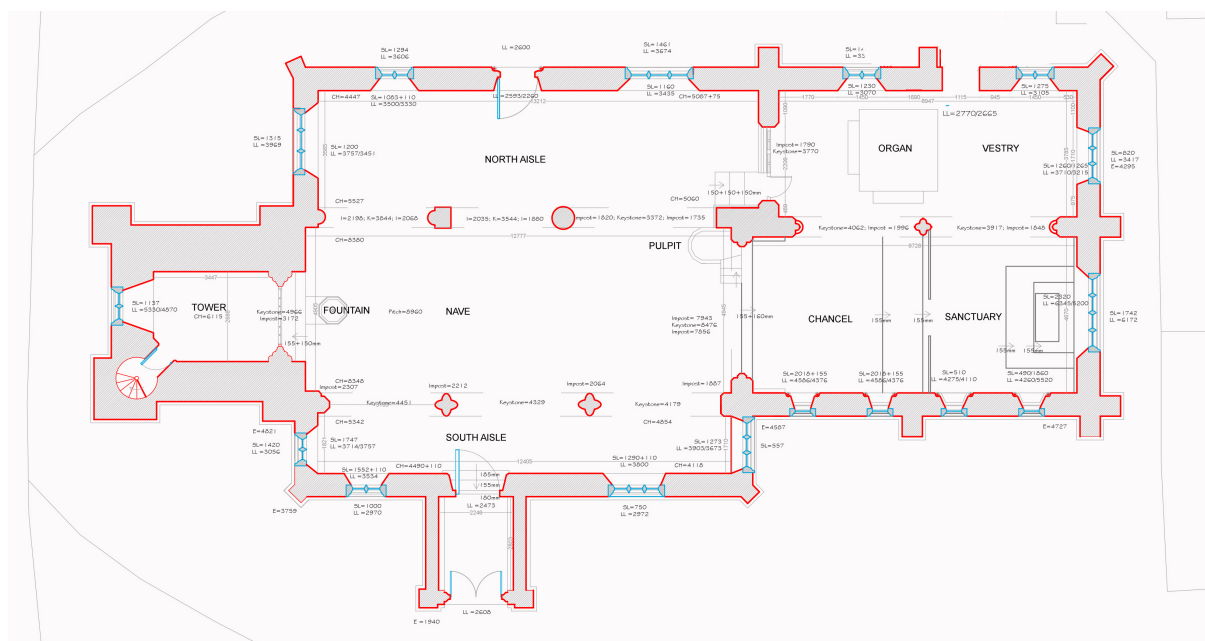
Does this reflect the thinking of John Mirehouse to play on the English language as Newton had done in 1684 with the reference to William Walker as 'Particles'? Was it John Mirehouse's intention that 'My House' should be read as Mirehouse?

Ideally, it is now desired to return the whole of this area (Vestry, Organ, Storage area) back to the intended purpose of the 1876 reordering, to include a Newton Memorial Chapel. Whilst still acknowledging the great input and influence of John Mirehouse in the late 19th century, a memorial aisle or chapel for one of history's most famous scientists, mathematician and philosopher is of utmost importance for future generations. The chapel should not be allowed to be consigned to Victorian self-aggrandisement.

This can only be achieved by relocating or removing the organ and allocating space elsewhere for a vestry and associated facilities. It is envisaged that the restored Newton Chapel should be multifunctional, not just paying homage to Isaac Newton, but also to the burial of his parents, Isaac senior and Hannah Ayscough, a space for quiet reflection, and for educational seminars. By default, the restored chapel would incorporate the important Newton artefacts of the sundial and family memorial.

Accepting the historical significance of the organ (see separate report of Paul Hales DAC advisor), the only apparent practical solution is for the organ to be relocated to the west of its current position, and opening up the whole of the Newton Chapel as envisaged in the 1876 reordering. It would mean that the Vestry and administration office would also have to be relocated elsewhere in the church.

Given the limitation of space elsewhere, the unsuitability of the tower, and the further need for 21st century facilities including toilets, hand washing etc. the only viable solution would be to add a small extension. It could be argued that this concept would be in keeping with the historic evolution of the building over the last 12 centuries, taking into account changes in need over time. With the importance of both the south and north entrances to the church (see English Heritage grade 1 listing), the least intrusive location to build such an extension would be to the north of the current Vestry, which is Victorian built in the medieval style.



Church Plate and Silver

Amongst the sacramental plate belonging to the church is a Charles II silver chalice and paten, hallmarked 1678, maker WG London. There is also a Charles 11 paten hallmarked 1679, maker SR London. According to Rev John Mirehouse in his 1902 history of our parish church, this latter paten was donated by Rev William Walker, Rector at that time. Rev Walker was also known as "Particles" a name allegedly ascribed to him by Newton. In his book, Mirehouse also states that a similar paten was donated to St Wulfram's Church in Grantham. Unfortunately, the church no longer has it. It is, however, intriguing that this gift is dated 1679, the year of the death of Hannah Ayscough, Newton's mother. Rev William Walker would have presided at the funeral, at which Isaac would have been present. Was the plate then another gift from the ever generous Isaac in memory of his mother and made via his friend and confidant, William Walker? Even more intriguing is a Charles 11 paten and chalice hallmarked for 1667. This was the year following Newton's 'Annus Mirabilis' when he spent a year back at his family home at Woolsthorpe Manor away from the risk of plague in Cambridge. Was this another gift from a known benefactor to the church?



Organ

The two-manual organ was built by Vowles of Bristol and installed in 1897, unfortunately dividing the freshly restored eastern end of the north aisle, or Newton Chapel, into a Vestry at the eastern end and a storage area to the west. The organ also hides Newtonian artefacts, including a sundial carved by the young Isaac when he was just aged 9, and donated to the church in 1876 by the then owner of Woolsthorpe Manor. (Illustration 26: photo of Newton sundial)

The condition of the organ and its historic importance are covered in a separate report, dated July 2014, by Paul Hale, Organist at Southwell Minster and DAC advisor. In his summary, Paul Hale reports: 'I was delighted, and frankly surprised, to find an instrument of

such quality, in original condition at Colsterworth, an impression heightened when I played it, as the touch is light and responsive and the tone particularly beautiful.



Bells

There are six bells. As is the custom of each maker to decorate and mark date each with his own name, the bells can be listed as follows:-

Treble: Tobias Norris cast me in 1684

2nd: God save the King. Hardell J Whittle. Tobias Norris cast me in 1674

3rd: Non clamor sed amor cantat in aure Dei 1613 (From constant use, this bell became cracked and was recast by Taylors of Loughborough in 1859. It is not in tune with the other bells)

4th & Tenor: Cast by Taylors of Loughborough. The bells were rehung in a steel frame in 1911.

6th: God save the King . Tobias Norris cast me in 1684. (The King referred to by Tobias Norris was Charles 11 who was restored to the throne when the Puritan era of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell ended.) Today the bells are regularly rung by a team of local bell-ringers.

Floor

St John the Baptist is one of just a handful of Anglican churches with a sloping floor. Slanting from East to West, its location on a sloping hillside was likely based on the proximity of the River Witham and the junction of the two major routes from London to York and Lincoln. The Chancel, rebuilt in 1876/7, has a floor of Minton tiles. The Nave is paved in limestone along

with some concrete infill. Raised wooden platforms for the pews over an earth floor.



Stained Glass

With the demolition of the original Chancel and associated part of the north aisle in 1770, the main east window was omitted when the replacement "barn like structure" was erected. In the 1876/7 reordering, a new East Window was introduced. According to Rev John Mirehouse, some elements of the original tracery, retained from the original Norman chancel demolished in 1770, were included in the design of the new window. This east window now has four lights and was carried out by Messrs Bell of Bristol. The first light depicts Christ with his cross with a text 'They led him away'. The second is that of the crucifixion and the text 'They crucified him'. The third represents the resurrection with the text 'Him God raised up'. The fourth has the three Marys at the Sepulchre and the text 'He is not here. He is raised up'. Above the lights, there are six angels, each representing an event in Christ's passion.

The dedication at the bottom of the window is to Rev William Mirehouse by Eliza Brunetta, his widow.

On the south wall of the Chancel there are four Lancet windows, each representing scenes in the life of St John the Baptist, the patron saint of Colsterworth church. These windows were executed by Messrs Hardman of Birmingham and Messrs Warde and Hughes of London. All the stained glass windows to the chancel incorporate the Mirehouse coat of arms.

Elsewhere in the church, a window in the south aisle represents scenes from the Good Samaritan. It is dedicated to Elizabeth, wife of Bennet Beeson. Like the east window, it was installed by Messrs Bell of Bristol.

The West window to the tower shows Christ blessing children with the text 'Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God'. It is dedicated to Elizabeth Ord who died on July 12th 1878. Her grave is in the churchyard close to the south eastern corner of the church.

The window at the western end of the north aisle shows the patron saints of England (St George) Scotland (St Andrew) and of France (St Denis). It is dedicated to Captain Bland who died at Ypres on St George's day in 1915. A resident of Colsterworth House, his widow lived on there until her death in 1956. Her memorial window is close by on the north wall of the north aisle and depicts St Patrick and St Hugh.



Seating/Furniture/Fittings

The seating, lectern and pulpit can all be dated back to the 1876/7 reordering. The altar, lectern, pulpit and choir stalls are all of English Oak and largely in sound condition. The seating for the main body of the church consists of fixed pine pews, best described as 'catalogue'. Installed in 1877, some of them are badly affected by woodworm. They are uncomfortable, fixed, and a hindrance to the use of the floorspace for community purposes. It is not known what seating arrangements were in place prior to that date, the only record being of Manorial pews in 1806. Replacement seating is required for the nave and associated aisles and should allow flexibility of use not just for Christian worship but for community events such as exhibitions, concerts, and children's workshops, particularly concerning the historic importance of the building.

There is a seven-branch candle holder or menorah, which is said to be unique in England. Donated by Rev John Mirehouse in the final quarter of the 19th century, it was to improve

lighting in the chancel. It is said to be a copy of one to be found in the Tabernacle of Jerusalem. (See earlier postcard.) The menorah is in excellent condition.

There is a Victorian oil painting of Salome with the head of St John the Baptist on a plate. In need of restoration and under a protective cloth, it was supposedly hidden from view on the grounds that it was too upsetting for children (Illustration no 28: photo of St John the Baptist oil painting). The Bishop's chair dates from 1939, when it was donated by parishioners in memory of Canon Mahon, Rector of Colsterworth 1911 to 1939. At the east end of the south aisle is an altar given by his family to commemorate William Modd. Originally, this south aisle was the manorial aisle for Colsterworth, but was rededicated in the mid 20th century as a lady chapel.

Behind the main altar is a magnificent mosaic reredos flanked either side by St Peter and St Paul. It depicts the last supper and was installed by Messrs Powell of Blackfriars, London. Like the west window to the tower, it is dedicated to Mrs Elizabeth Ord.



There is also a bust of Sir Isaac Newton, said to be a copy of one by Roubiliac held at Trinity College Cambridge. Other sources claim it was made and donated by students at a nearby Teachers' College at Stoke Rochford.

Finally, there are two hatchments, currently stored in the vestry and dedicated to members of the Mirehouse family. They are in urgent need of restoration before they can be rehung. Originally they adorned the walls of the tower.

The Mirehouse Influence 1826 - 1911

William Squire Mirehouse was Rector of Colsterworth from 1826 until his death in 1863. His son John took over the incumbency in 1863 and held it until his death in 1911. Their influence on the parish of Colsterworth is worthy of consideration and epitomises the

standing of clergy in the Victorian era. The Mirehouse family came from Angle, Pembrokeshire, South Wales. William Squire Mirehouse lived mostly in Bristol where he was the first, and only, Perpetual Curate of Trinity Chapel, which opened in 1821. Now known as St Mary's Fishpond, its registers show that he spent most of his time in Bristol, leaving a curate to see to the spiritual needs of the people of Colsterworth. (<http://stmarysfishponds.org.uk/about/history>). His home at Hambrook Grove in Bristol is now a Grade 2 listed building and part of a hotel complex. It still bears the Mirehouse Coat of Arms. William Mirehouse was also chaplain to Princess Sophia (Aunt to Queen Victoria) and a magistrate.

When William died in 1863, his son John became Rector of Colsterworth, and was at that time one of the youngest incumbents in the Anglican Church, having only just graduated. His influence on the parish was immense and he is now buried in the churchyard at the south eastern corner of the building in the only marble tomb. It was he who had Colsterworth House built, the Rectory apparently not being good enough. It was he who organised the 1876/7 reordering with the restoration of the Newton Manorial Aisle. It was he who published a book dedicated to his parishioners on 'The History of Colsterworth Church'.

He was quite a character. Whilst, unlike his father, he did spend time in Colsterworth, he did leave his mark. He was famously once fined at Grantham Magistrates Court for striking a parishioner with a horse whip for not having attended church the previous Sunday. Even more famously, in 1878 with the churchyard full, and problems finding space for new burials, he forwarded the body of a stillborn child by post to the Home Office! Whilst his actions did initiate the opening of a new burial ground on School Lane in 1878, his actions did not go unnoticed. The following report appeared in the Times: 'The resumed inquest on the body of a female child whose body was sent to the Home Secretary, was held at the Westminster Sessions last evening. A label on the box containing the body showed that it was consigned from Colsterworth Lincolnshire. The Rev John Mirehouse, rector of Colsterworth, recognised the box which he addressed to the Home Secretary on November 1st. The child's parents asked him what was to be done with the body as the churchyard was closed by order in the Council. Witness told the father that he might send it to him, and it was brought in a starch box by a servant. Having no burial place, he sent it to the Home Secretary, to call his attention to the matter. The parents were not aware of this. Since August 31st when their churchyard had been closed, they had to beg to have their dead buried in a neighbouring burial ground. He had been in touch with the Home Secretary about a new burial ground. Dr Charles J. Evans, Colsterworth proved that the child was stillborn. Jerry Cooper, labourer, father of the child, said he was much annoyed at what had been done with the body, and written expressing his regret to the Home Secretary. On behalf of the Rev John Mirehouse, a full and ample apology was now offered to the Home Secretary. The jury found that the child was stillborn, and severely censured the Reverend gentleman for his conduct in the matter. The coroner disallowed the expenses of the rector and his witnesses.

The Reverend John Mirehouse was the driver of the 1876/7 reordering of the church with reinstatement of the north aisle and rebuilding of the chancel. He did appear to have high self-esteem. He organised the funding and rebuilding of the chancel and associated north aisle (or Newton Chapel) on the basis of the Sir Isaac Newton connection. The reality today is somewhat different and probably reflects John Mirehouse's self-importance. The chancel windows incorporate his family coat of arms. The family coat of arms was cut into the outer wall of the rebuilt chancel. The Mirehouse coat of arms featuring on the Latin plaque

commemorating Isaac Newton's christening. The Mirehouse coat of arms on one of the churchwarden's staffs. The bust of John Mirehouse on a column in the rebuilt chancel. And, needless to say, the two hatchments awaiting refurbishment before rehung in the tower are dedicated to members of the Mirehouse family!

Whilst he did use the Newton family connection to good effect raising money for the reordering, and giving us the chancel we can see today, one can only wonder why it was permitted to position the organ in the north aisle in 1897, hiding Newton memorabilia.

The Churchyard

The level of the churchyard to the south of the church is considerably higher than the level of the church floor. This is likely to reflect the number of burials over 12 centuries. The earliest tombstones only date from the start of the 18th century and reflect the introduction of new legislation that then required the levelling and clearance of overcrowded burial grounds.

Though he campaigned for a new burial ground in 1877, the Reverend John Mirehouse was buried in the churchyard in 1911, a full 24 years after its closure. His is the only marble tomb. There are other graves which reflect society in the 18th and 19th centuries. One tombstone is for John Wyer, blacksmith, killed falling from a mail cart on 2nd May 1852. On another is an inscription for three sisters, Mary Jane Hardy (10), Sarah Jane Hardy (8) and Emma Hardy (4), who all died within days of each other in 1853, apparently as a result of Scarlet Fever. With Colsterworth located on the Great North Road, many travellers were also buried here. One intriguing record from the parish register, now in Lincoln Archives, is for the burial of John Christian on June 6th 1813, a traveller from Botany Bay.

Conclusion

When dealing with a heritage and history going back over 12 centuries, it is not easy to summarise in the course of a few pages. Only after time spent on site, absorbing the changing architectural styles, the artefacts, and studying the topography, can one begin to appreciate how the humble parish church of St John the Baptist Colsterworth reflects not just Christianity from Saxon times to the modern day, but further reflects changes in society over the centuries. It is now the main church in a group of five, soon to become seven, reflecting changes in 21st century society. Even without the Isaac Newton connection, it is a treasure. With the Isaac Newton connection, it becomes a treasure of not just national significance, but of international importance. It is now in need not just of restoration, but of an ongoing conservation plan to help maintain it and its connection with Sir Isaac Newton for generations to come.

Simon Jowitt

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