

JOHN NEWTON OF OLNEY AND HIS WIFE.
THE REMOVAL AND RE-INTERMENT OF
THEIR REMAINS, 1893.

BY JOHN T. MAITLAND, M.A., OXON.

IN the reconstruction of the churches in the City of London after the disastrous fire of 1666, special provision was made for intramural interment.

The Church of St. Mary Woolchurch perished in the flames, but that of St. Mary Woolnoth was not entirely destroyed, and having been repaired, became the church of the united parishes. In 1715, however, it was determined to rebuild the edifice, and the work was entrusted to Nicholas Hawksmoor, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren and the architect of Christ Church, Spitalfields; St. Anne's, Limehouse; and St. George's, Bloomsbury. Hawksmoor reared his new church on a spacious crypt, the roof of which, plainly groined, rested on arches supported by massive square pillars, by means of which chambers for coffins were formed throughout the whole of the space; the recess at the eastern extremity, immediately under that in the church above where the Holy Table is placed, being reserved for the Rectors in succession. The church was opened on Easter day, 1727,* and must be considered as Hawksmoor's *chef d'œuvre*.

From the fact that immunity from disturbance could not be assured to remains deposited in the churchyard (which was necessarily circumscribed), the wealthier parishioners (of whom there was a large proportion in those parishes) preferred that their remains should be deposited within the crypt, and so preserved from desecration. Consequently, when some forty years ago

* *New Remarks of London*, collected by the Company of Parish Clerks, 1732.

an Act was passed terminating burials in crowded places, the crypt was found to be very full, and after careful consideration it was closed. During the incumbency of the Rev. Robert Dear, who held the Rectory from a few years before the passing of the above-named Act until his death in 1872, no inconvenience was experienced. On Dr. Irons being appointed his successor, a movement was started (to the disgust of many) for the alteration of the interior of the church. A new warming apparatus was adopted, and a flue carried from the western end of the building in an eastward direction through the floor into the vault. Mischief was soon apparent, and the state of things ably described by the present Rector (the Rev. J. M. S. Brooke) in his letter to *The Times* of Dec. 28th, 1892, occurred. Appended to this very forcible letter was the following appeal:—

“I will only add, in conclusion, that the workmen have just come to, and identified, the coffin and body of the famous John Newton. May I ask through your columns, has he no descendants living, or is he to be buried at the expense of the parish?” To this I replied, by the courtesy of the Editor, in *The Times* of Dec. 30th, pointing out that Newton was an only son, and giving an extract from his will. My communication brought offers of help, and a suggestion that the remains should be transferred to Olney. On my writing to the Vicar of that parish, I received promptly a very kind reply, with the offer of the available ground contiguous to the grave in which Mr. George Catlett (Mrs. Newton’s father) had been interred in August, 1777. The Rector of St. Mary’s warmly supported the efforts being made, and a Committee was formed of the Rector, Mr. Churchwarden Batty, Mr. Hinton, and myself. Messrs. Dove Brothers entered *con amore* into the design, and facilitated by every thing in their power the execution of the work. Henry D. Phillips, Esq. (Vestry Clerk), very kindly undertook to place before the Vestry the request for the transference of the bodies to Mr. Hinton and myself (the acting portion of the Committee), and accordingly he was able to send us, on January 13th, 1893, the “Order of Vestry” to that effect. Whereupon, I wrote to *The Times*, informing the public that the day fixed for the reinterment of the remains of the Rev. John New-

ton and his wife in Olney Churchyard, was the 25th of January.

The coffins had lost every vestige of woodwork, but the original plates were recovered in each instance. Mrs. Newton's lead coffin was crushed and damaged; indeed, one of the leg bones was visible through the fracture. Mr. Newton's coffin, though damaged, was entire, but the plate was broken in two.

It was decided to place the remains in separate coffins of the best polished oak, and to affix the plates thereon. Accordingly, in the presence of several responsible persons, the leaden coffins were enclosed in the new wooden ones, and fastened down at St. Mary's on the 24th of January. They were conveyed to Olney by rail, Messrs. Dove, Hinton, and myself travelling by the same train. Mr. Churchwarden Coles of Olney, met the cortege at the railway station, and the coffins were conveyed singly in the hearse to the churchyard gate, whence they were reverently preceded into the church and placed on tressels at the east end of the nave, Mr. Newton's close to the step of the chancel. The great bell was tolled for a considerable time prior to the arrival of the bodies, and continued tolling till they were safely deposited in the church. Many persons took advantage of the permission accorded them and viewed the coffins at once, but the utmost decorum and reverence prevailed throughout the whole of the proceedings.

The inscription on the plate of Mrs. Newton's ran thus:—

M^{RS} MARY NEWTON,
Died 15th Dec^r
1790,
In the 62^d year
of her age.

On that of Mr. Newton thus:—

THE REV^D
JOHN NEWTON
RECTOR OF THIS CHURCH
DIED 21st DEC^r
1807
IN THE 83 YEAR
OF HIS AGE

Beneath each plate a smaller brass plate was affixed with this inscription, "Removed from St. Mary Woolnoth, Lombard Street, to Olney churchyard, January, 1893." Mrs. Newton's plate was in admirable condition, highly embellished with carving, and the letters were curvilinear. That of Mr. Newton was of a rich amalgam, mainly of copper, and at the head above the inscription already given was a triangle bearing the word "Jehovah," in Hebrew characters, with points.

The 25th of January (the Conversion of St. Paul) was the most appropriate day that could have been chosen for the ceremony, but it was purely accidental in its adoption, and the result of an unforeseen circumstance.

It was, however, a privilege not to be forgotten that many of us were enabled to attend the service at Olney church that morning, and so to prepare ourselves for the solemn duties before us. The striking parallel between the great Apostle and the curate of Olney was brought into the clearest light by the Scriptures appointed for the service, and the over-ruling hand of Providence was clearly seen in so appointing this especial day for the interment of one, the marvellous record of whose life perhaps more closely resembled that of St. Paul, than that of any other Christian of modern times.

The great bell commenced tolling at half-past eleven, and the church rapidly filled until every available place was taken in the nave, aisles, and gallery. The chancel was reserved for the clergymen present, visitors from London, and the representatives of the Press. The organist performed several pieces upon the organ until the hour for the service arrived. At twelve o'clock the vicar (the Rev. J. P. Langley) took his station at the north-east end of Mr. Newton's coffin (his son and his curate occupying the prayer desks) and commenced the introductory sentences of the "Burial of the Dead." His son read Psalm xxxix. and the curate Psalm xc., the vicar reading the lesson. At its conclusion the hymn, as it appears in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," was sung with intense feeling by the vast assemblage, to the tune of St. Peter's, Oxford.

The clergy then preceded Mrs. Newton's remains

to the grave, the organist performing the "Dead March in Saul," and on their return into the church they led the way before the coffin of Mr. Newton, the occupants of the chancel and the congregation following closely behind it. A great number of persons were arranged in perfect order in the churchyard; the space immediately round the grave being reserved for those primarily interested in the movement; in all not less than 2,000 persons were present. The Vicar by special request took the whole of the service at the grave. After the benediction had been pronounced every one was permitted to file past and take a look into the grave, which, in fact, was the identical one in which Mr. Catlett had been interred in 1777.

The visitors proceeded to view Cowper's summer-house, and to write their names in the book provided for that purpose; and having seen as much of Olney as was possible in a few minutes, adjourned to the Bull hotel, where Mr. W. H. Collingridge, with his accustomed liberality, had invited a numerous company to a luncheon, which was heartily appreciated. At the conclusion of this repast, Canon Benham traced the history of Mr. Newton, reading his hymn entitled, "The Rebel's Surrender to Grace," No. CXXI. in the *First Book of Olney Hymns*, on Acts ix. 6 (St. Paul's Conversion); and after some forcible allusions, which were applauded, Sir Henry Peek, Bart., briefly intimated the esteem in which Mr. Newton's memory was held by himself, and thanked Mr. Collingridge for his generous hospitality that day. The Rev. Dr. Wilkinson, of Leamington, supported the remarks which had been made; Mr. Collingridge concisely responding.

After much consultation the monument adopted was a ledger tomb of grey granite, bearing on its four sides inscriptions as follows:—

(1.) John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy; near 16 years as Curate of this Parish, and 28 years as Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth.*

* This is the inscription (with a slight change rendered necessary by the removal of the remains) which by Newton's own desire, was placed upon a marble tablet in the Church of St. Mary Wool-

(2.) John Newton, died 21st Dec., 1807, aged 82.

Mary Newton, died 15th Dec., 1790, aged 61.

(3.) This monument is erected by a large number of subscribers who revere the memory and value the works of this eminent servant of God.

(4.) These remains were removed from the church of St. Mary Woolnoth in the city of London, and reinterred here, 25th January, 1893.

At the request of an influential subscriber, the original coffin-plate was afterwards removed from Mr. Newton's recased coffin, and fixed on the wall south of the tower-arch within the Church of Olney, and beneath it a simple brass plate with this inscribed upon it:—
“The above plate is from the coffin of the Rev. John Newton, Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, London, and for 16 years Curate of this Parish.”

The cost of the removal and reinterment amounted to £45 15s., of the monument £128, of the plate £7 5s.; the incidental expenses being £6 0s. 11d.; in all, £187 0s. 11d.

The vestry clerk of St. Mary's (Mr. H. D. Phillips) having a beautiful engraving of Mr. Newton, in a most handsome manner placed it at the disposal of a member of the Committee in order that each subscriber might be presented with a copy, and Mr. W. H. Collingridge struck these off at his own expense, handing them over ready for despatch. Every subscriber whose address was known has received one of these pictures, and they have been greatly appreciated, serving the purpose of a memorial of this important work, and bringing to mind the interesting nature of the day.

It may not be amiss, in conclusion, to call attention to an error in the tablet in St. Mary's, which has given rise to misconception as to Newton's position at Olney. The tablet runs:—“He ministered near XVI years as Curate and Vicar of Olney in Bucks.”

The Bishop's registers however prove that Moses Browne was presented to the Vicarage by Wolsey Johnson, clerk, June 28, 1753, and that he held this preferment to his death in 1787.

noth. When that church was altered (as above noticed) this tablet was removed from the east end, by the vestry door, and placed in the north aisle.

Mr. Newton was succeeded in the curacy by Mr. Page, who shortly after resigned it, and was in turn succeeded by the Rev. Thomas Scott. That the Earl of Dartmouth, who had become possessed of the manor by his marriage with Katherine, only daughter of Sir Charles Gunter Nicholl in 1755, and, having acquired the advowson with "the Great House" between the years 1755 and 1764 (probably before 1757), intended to present Mr. Newton to the Vicarage, is clear from a passage in a letter from Newton to Mr. Jones of Hull, in which he states that such was his Lordship's promise; but for some reason unnamed Moses Browne still continued Vicar. On the tablet to the latter's memory on the south wall of the chancel at Olney, he is styled "Rector of Sutton, Lincolnshire." There is no such Rectory; but I conclude the place intended is Sutton, a Vicarage in the Deanery of Holland (a large parish known as Long Sutton contiguous to the Wash), of which a very clear account is given in the *Memoirs of the Rev. Charles Jerram*, (London: 1855), pp. 172-195. The patron in or about 1750 was Mrs. Hyde of Enfield, and in Lloyd's edition of Ecton, 1796, T. L. Bennett, but probably Lord Dartmouth directly or indirectly procured his nomination.

NOTE.—A balance sheet, showing all receipts and payments, was published in *The Record* of December 22nd, the Editor of that paper having taken a great interest in the work from the first, and the sub-Editor, Mr. H. C. Hogan, being present at the closing of the coffins at St. Mary's and travelling to Olney in the same train as the remains. He contributed a very valuable account of the proceedings to *The Record* of January 27th, which contained a portrait of Mr. Newton, and some interesting notes on Olney. Mr. Collingridge also distributed the admirable tract, No. 54 of the Religious Tract Society's New Biographical Series, entitled *John Newton of Olney*. The Vicar preached a sermon on the event in the church on Sunday evening, January 29, an abstract of which was published, and the Rev. J. H. Stephenson, of Lympsham, Prebendary of Wells, and grandson of Christopher Stephenson (Vicar of Olney from 1799 to 1815) contributed a pleasing little ode on the subject, which was attached to the abstract and published at the end of it.

CROYDON, Dec. 26, 1893.