**North Newnton Parish & Church History**

**1000 BC**

Bronze Age settlement in Hilcott.

The Ridgeway which has formed part of the western parish boundary is already a major highway.

**1st – 5th Centuries**

Roman Britain – the area was crossed by a Roman track leading to a villa at Manningford Bruce and past another Roman building where Cuttenham Farm now stands.

**6th – 7th Centuries**

A Saxon warrior was buried with his weapons and probably other companions close to the roundabout at the Woodbridge Inn. The site of this grave prevented a previous siting of the roundabout when first planned in the 1960’s. Relics from this grave are in the Devizes Museum.

**892**

Charter of Alfred the Great giving North Newnton to Earl Athelhelm.

**933**

When direct descendants of Athelhelm die out, the manor is granted in a second charter to Wilton Abbey. The Abbess of Wilton holds the manor until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539.

**1096**

Domesday Book – North Newnton is held by the Abbess of Wilton.

**1291**

The church at North Newnton already decribed as ‘old’.

**1300 - 1539**

The revenue from the tithing of the manor of North Newnton was used to support prebends at Wilton Abbey.

**1308**

First record of the parish being served by a vicar.

**1377**

Poll tax – 51 persons registered in North Newnton paying a total of 53 shillings and 4 pence to the Swanborough Hundred.

**1538 or 1539**

The ancient manor house, many farm buildings and the medieval village were destroyed by fire. The manor farm was moved to Cuttenham and most of the village moved to Hilcott.

**1536 – 1541**

At the Dissolution of the Monasteries the manor passed to the possession of George Howard, brother of the Queen Catherine Howard.

**1547**

On the disgrace of the Howard family, the manor passed to Sir William Herbert 1st Earl of Pembroke.

**1576 – 1668**

Churchwardens’ accounts giving details of parish life with entries recording the sale of church ale and a flock of sheep.

**1660**

Restoration of the Monarchy – the return to London of Charles ll.

**1662**

Book of Common Prayer.

**1674**

The original vicarage house of 1567 fell into disrepair and was demolished. The vicars no longer lived in the parish until about 1850.

**1753**

Curate was also rector of Manningford Bruce where he lived. Holy Communion was celebrated 4 times a year but was poorly attended. Mattins were read every Sunday.

**1798**

An independent chapel was built by evangelist George Sloper in Hilcott. It had closed by 1851.

**1831**

Census population of the parish was 330.

**1833**

School for 25 children in the parish plus 30 children at the independent chapel schoolroom in Hilcott.

**1841**

Census shows the populations of the (then) three tithings of the parish as:

North Newnton 61

Hilcott 262

Rainscombe 19

Total 342

**1851**

Plans to rebuild St James’ Parish Church were abandoned in favour of using the money to build a school in Hilcott, also licensed as a chapel.

**1855**

Primitive Methodists open a chapel in Hilcott which was last used in about 1885..

**1862**

St James’ Church extensively restored, the nave and chancel were rebuilt.

**1872**

The Hilcott school closed when the Woodborough school opened.

**1886**

The vicar leases Haywards House as rectory. The house became known as the Old Rectory.

**1894**

The ancient tithing of Rainscombe, part of the parish since 933 is removed from the parish.

**1959**

Parish Church of St James is restored and brought back into use after having been closed for many years while services were held in the Mission Chapel now a private dwelling called Hassocks.

**Thumbnail History:**

The village lies in the Pewsey Vale, 5 miles east south east of Devizes and 3 miles south west of Pewsey. The main part of the parish comprises the two disconnected tithings of North Newnton and Hilcott; the boundaries in the 21st century remain similar to those indicated in the charters of 892 and 934.The majority of the parish follows the course of a tributary of the Christchurch (Salisbury) river Avon, and for about ¾ of a mile the Avon itself is the boundary. There are no steep gradients in the area. The higher ground consists of chalk outcrops whilst the upper valleys are alluvium, with river gravel in the southern corners of the parish. Historically the land has been used for tillage with the outcrops mainly laid to meadow, while there are also some areas of woodland. The highest point of the parish is Cats Brain Hill, this name is thought to be a reference to the rough clay and stone soil of the area.
The Hilcott tithing is a compact area, whilst North Newnton consists of two main areas, one to the south west and the second to the east. The tithing of Rainscombe, 4 ½miles north east of North Newnton was part of the parish until 1885, when it was transferred to Wilcot parish.

North Newnton and Hilcott were granted to Athelhelm by King Alfred in 892. In 934 Rainscombe was added and the three areas were granted to St. Mary’s Abbey at Wilton, by Athelhelm. The three settlements remained in the possession of the Abbey until the dissolution. In 1541 the manor was granted to George Howard, brother of Queen Catherine Howard, and by 1547 was granted to Sir William Herbert, later Earl of Pembroke. The holding remained in the Pembroke family until 1680 when it was sold off in smaller lots.

The whole estate was said to be worth £14 in 1066, this value increased to £18 by 1086 when there was said to be land for 10 ploughs, although only eight were being used. The total population was between 135 and 155 and there were 30 acres of meadow, about 80 acres of pasture, and woodland covering an area approximately three miles square. The mill was paying 12 shillings and 6 pence in 1068 and in 1679 it was said to be in need of repair, but was finally destroyed by fire in 1910.

Taxation returns during the 14th century show the parish as having a below national average population and this situation still existed in 1801 when the two tithings had a total population of 222. This increased to 374 by 1881. The transfer of Rainscombe, as mentioned, reduced the population by 35. In 1911 the number of inhabitants was 330, reducing to 279 by 1921 but in 1971 it had again increased to 365 and in 2011 there were 430 people living in the parish.

There is no evidence of settlement in North Newnton before Saxon times, when a church and houses were built near the confluence of two streams. However this area flooded in winter and in the 1530s the stream passing near the east end of the church was diverted. This may have helped the situation, but when the demesne (manor) farmhouse was destroyed by fire, it was rebuilt at the other end of the parish, suggesting the diversion was not successful. In 1803 there were three farms, a number of cottages, the church and a mill. The church and mill were together at the eastern branch of the Avon, whilst the farms stood off the Amesbury to Avebury road, with the cottages sited between the farms and the church. By 2015 the church together with a late 18th century farm house and 19th century cottage, both thatched were standing. There were two cottages dated 1907 and a pair of cottages from late 19th or early 20th century.

A church stood at North Newnton before 1291, the present dedication to St. James, was recorded in 1442. The construction is of flint rubble, brick and ashlar, with a square tower. The chancel and nave date to the 13th century with the south porch added in the 14th century and the tower in the 15th century. The nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1862.

It is thought Hilcott is the earlier settled site as artefacts from both the Bronze Age and Neolithic periods have been discovered in this area and it was possibly an early British settlement. By 1377 the villages were of similar size with Hilcott having 47 poll tax payers (people aged over 14) whilst North Newnton had 51, but in the 20th century Hilcott was the lesser of the settlements. Hilcott lies along the Avebury to Amesbury road, the main site being to the north of the road, consisting of Hilcott Manor, two 19th century cottages together with the chapel and the village hall. There is a thatched 18th century farmhouse, a house built around 1700 sited next to a 17th century cottage with a further one dated 1729, together with the Old Rectory and a farmhouse form the mid 19th century. On the south side of the road is Hilcott Farm together with 19th century cottages.

A more recent development was at Gores. In 1972 the area was called Gores Lane but in the 18th century the name was Gore, the name meaning ‘angle’ and the parish boundary makes a series of right angled bends here. A number of cottages were built on waste land at the cross roads before 1773. By 1803, five were standing on the west side of the Avebury-Amesbury road, with around the same number on the north side of the Pewsey road. Six houses and a beer house were built about 1838. In 1855 the beer house was known as The Sun. Expansion continued almost to Bottlesford. The Prince of Wales public house was built in 1870, but closed in the early 20th century to become a private house. In the 19th and early 20th centuries more dwellings were built beside the Beechingstoke and Wilsford roads. Along the Upavon Road, in around 1886, the only buildings were the Woodbridge Inn and two cottages, but between the two world wars development in this area commenced and 17 houses and bungalows were built. 1950s saw eight council houses constructed, to be followed by seven bungalows for pensioners in 1960s. In 1971 Gores was the largest settlement with 61 cottages and houses. The 21st century has seen very little change in the parish.

Kelly’s Directory of 1848 lists traders in the parish as a tailor, shopkeepers, a shoemaker, bricklayers, a stone mason and a cooper. By 1867 a miller and a thatcher had been added to the list of tradesmen. The main industry in the area has been agriculture throughout the centuries, mainly land put to pasture for dairy farming, with a small amount of arable land. In the 1880s R.F. Ford established a business supplying seeds, fertilizer and animal feeds to the area. The business was still owned by the same family in 1971, when 15 people were employed.

The hamlet of Bottlesford is now mostly in North Newnton parish although historically it has been a part of Manningford Bohune parish. In the late 18th century there were dwellings on either side of the road between Gores and the present bridge over the railway and the settlement extended eastwards in the 19th century. By the late 20th century houses were on the northern side of the road. The Seven Stars is mentioned in 1822 and is still a major feature at the western end of the village. Despite this, the place-name is not connected with bottles but from the ford on the western boundary stream and in the 9th century was known as botan waelle.