



I sit by my western window,
As the white-winged memories throng
Into the silent chancel,
To chant their evensong
And the hills are all empurpled,
And the skies are steeped in gold,
For life her crowning mercies
Keeps till the day is old.

Thanks to Mrs. Margaret Walton, great granddaughter of Henry Burton, for allowing us to copy his presentation copy of the programme for the Queen's Jubilee Festival, and to Denis Baker for the cutting from the Coalville Times reporting the interview with Henry Burton in 1922

MR NEWARKE'S INVENTORY

One of the surprise pleasures for the beginner in family history who traces one of his lines back to the first half of the eighteenth century can be the discovery of an inventory of an ancestor's effects. If he is lucky enough to find a detailed one, then, in imagination, he can walk through that ancestor's home looking at the items in the different rooms, noting the ornaments and hangings, counting the cheeses in the attic and checking the contents of the brewery, or going out to the farm to see what animals there were. Even a labourer is likely to have a pig but in Swannington at least hardly any are shown as having poultry. Most village people would certainly have kept a few hens which one would have expected to find in a detailed inventory. Perhaps their value was too small for it to be thought necessary to record them or perhaps they were considered to belong to the wife even though legally she could not own any property.

A perusal of these inventories is of even greater interest to those who look at the lives of the inhabitants of their own village during the period. In Swannington we are fortunate to have such an inventory for one of the local coal masters, William Newarke.



William Newarke died in 1749 and two wives had predeceased him. The inscriptions on the gravestones of Margaret and Sarah can still be clearly read where they lie just by the entrance to Whitwick Parish Church. A large stone for William lies nearby. William, who died in his 61st year, failed to make a will and it is not clear what children survived him but he had a son William who dealt with his estate and carried on the coal mining operation for a short time. In his history of coalmining in Leicestershire and South Derbyshire, Colin Owen details how William Newarke took over a lease of mineral rights in 1741 and worked the coal until 1751. Mr Owen does not, however, seem to have been aware that there were two William Newarkes, father and son, and that it was the son who found himself unable to manage the mines.

The map of Swannington for 1755 shows Mr Newarke as the occupier of land called the Mellows on either side of Talbot Farm, and it seems that that farm was the home of the family. By 1755 Gabriel Holland was the occupier of Snapes and Mr Litherland of Talbot Wood, both of which are mentioned in the inventory of the possessions of William Newarke and it may be assumed that he still held these in 1749.

These inventories were valuations of a deceased's person's effects which had to be submitted to the local church court as part of the procedure for dealing with the estate. Inventories survive in great quantity for the period 1530-1750. They were prepared by local men, neighbours of the deceased, who were deemed to be able to put a price on his belongings from their local knowledge. There would be two or three of these appraisers and in the case of a craftsman one of them should be a man who followed the same trade.

At this time one of the main rooms of a dwelling was itself called "the house" and this is where the cooking was done and in many houses would be the main living room. Among the items in the house were:

Two ffenders, the Grate & Utensils belonging to the Fire	£1.10. 0
The Jack & 4 Spits	£2. 0. 0

Meat would be roasted on the jack, a more sophisticated form of spit which is wound up like a clock or activated by the draught of warm air

going up the chimney. The number of spits seems a lavish provision for the household, but there are no other cooking utensils and there seems a lack of items of everyday use which one would expect to find in the home of a man of the standing of William Newarke.

Meals were eaten from pewter plates with which this household was well supplied:

17 pewter Dishes	£1.15. 0
50 pewter Plates at 9d. each	£1.17. 6
7 pewter Measures & a Salver	4. 8
A pewter Crain	. 6

The crain was unusual and its use is not certain but it was probably "a bent tube used to draw liquid out of a vessel; a siphon."

Pewter contains lead and those who used these plates and dishes would be gradually poisoned, a particular danger was when they were used for acidic food as this caused the lead to leach out.

There were two guns in the house but whether intended for the protection of the inhabitants of the farm in this isolated place or to bring home game to cook on the various spits is something to guess at.

Two luxury items in the "house" were a coffee pot and a long case clock. The clock at £2.10s was the most valuable individual item in the house apart from the beds, far exceeding the price of 15s. put on an escritoire. This word was not used in England until the beginning of the 1700s, and one thinks of it as a delicate piece of furniture perhaps used and treasured by one of William Newarke's wives and allowed to fall into disrepair after her death. It was kept in the Old Parlour, a room which contained little but a few old pictures and some tables and chairs.

Other living rooms on the ground floor were usually called parlours and were often bedrooms but by this date were not so often used for this purpose, certainly there were no beds in either the old parlour or the new parlour in William Newarke's home and in the new parlour was a grate.

There were five upstairs rooms or chambers, most containing an odd mixture of items but all beds and bedding. Items in the servant's chamber included a side saddle, a blacksmith's anvil, a book case with some books and a tub of feathers.

It is always tempting to speculate about how the rooms were occupied. Perhaps the "best Chamber" had been supplanted and the most desirable room at this date was "the new Chamber". So it is likely that, if William Newarke junior and his wife were living at Talbot Farm, they had the best chamber with its dressing table, looking glass and china. There was also a tea table in there. Elsewhere in the property was a coffee pot. Tea and coffee were both still very expensive and this indication that the family could afford such luxuries gives us an idea of their standard of living.

Perhaps, in these his last years, the master of the house preferred to have as his bedroom the new chamber with its Stafford grate. A fire in an upstairs bedroom would certainly be a luxury but not one which the owner of a coal mine needed to deny himself. In addition in this room was a close stool or commode which would add to the comfort of an elderly man who found the stairs difficult. Indeed he may have been confined to this floor, as there was a bureau on which he could have worked at his accounts in the neighbouring room, and that was also furnished with a close stool. This room would have drawn warmth from the kitchen below in which the cooking was done and where there would always have been a good fire.

The principal upstairs rooms are not shown as having bedsteads but feather beds. These were valuable items and two in the best chamber with bedding were together priced at £8.

There was another storey with two garrets one containing "old iron and new iron" and the other a powdering tub in which meat was preserved using salt and spices.



Mr Newarke's land comprising The Snapes,
Mellows and much of Talbut Woods

Talbot Farm and Coal Mining - Mr Newarke's Inventory 1749



There was a well equipped brewing house and the hops were kept in the new parlour. There was also a cellar but by now the appraisers were getting weary for they write "The things there £4" and they may have left the farm stock and the mines for the following day.

This is what was in the stables and on the small farm	
Barley in the Barn	£ 8. 0. 0
33 Sheep	£ 7.10. 0
In the Mallows	
5 Cows	£13. 0. 0
In the Stable	
8 Blind Horses	£ 4. 0. 0
2 ffilleys	£ 5. 0. 0
One Old Horse	£ 3. 0. 0
6 pair of Geers & Collars	£ 1.14. 6
Cart Saddle & Seat	2. 0
a Saddle	4. 0
In the Talbot Wood	
Wheat growing on the Ground	£ 8. 0. 0
A Cart Plow & other things	£ 2. 8. 0
In the Pigstye	
2 Pigs	£ 3. 0. 0
Two Old Wagons & Chains	£10. 0. 0
One Harrow	12. 6
In the Sneaps	
Part of a cob of hay	£ 2.10. 0

But where has all the poultry gone? Would not there have been ducks on the pond opposite the house just as there were seventy years ago when we, as children, passed by on our way to school?

In different rooms are various items for weighing:	
a Box of Small Brass Weights	15. 0
A pair of Scales & Beam	2. 6
and most interesting	
One pair of Stilliards (Steelyards)	4. 0

In the Coal ffield	
2 Ginns & 3 Shafts	£23. 0. 0
2 Wim	16. 0
A Sleck (slack coal) pit shaft	£1. 0. 0

In the Sneaps	
1 Ginn, One Wheel & 2 Shafts	£7. 0. 0
Working Tools	£1. 0. 0
A Stack of Coals	£11.12. 0
A Bing	5. 0
Lumber & other Odd things	4. 0
Pitt ropes	£5. 0. 0

Although so far no reference to blind horses has been found in accounts of mining at this time, it is reasonable to guess that it was they who operated the gins. Blindness would not prove a difficulty, it might even have been an advantage enabling the horses to work better, as they could not see the monotonous circle in which they were forced to move.

Every inventory throws up a series of queries about the items included, about the value placed on them, and about the way of life of the man who had just died. What indeed were the 2 dozen "Maunder Elves" valued at 2s. 4d. found in the Servant's Chamber.

Over a period of 150 years there are inventories of Swannington men who pursued a variety of occupations, the fullest and best is that of the tanner, Edward Orton, but there are also inventories for a wheelwright, a carpenter and a coal miner.

Bibliography

Any one who is intrigued by what an inventory can reveal is recommended to "In the Name of God, Amen, Everyday life in South Derbyshire 1535-1700"