LIFE AND LABOUR
IN NEWFOUNDLAND
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LIFE AND LABOUR IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Based on Lectures delivered at the Memorial University of Newfoundland

BY

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of Cambridge and Toronto

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PREFACE

These Lectures were delivered at St. John's before the University in the Fall of 1953. They are based on two tours, the first in 1952 around and across Newfoundland, the second in 1953 over and along the Labrador, with intermediate work on the documentary material in London and the West Country. Friends on both sides of the water assisted my researches throughout, but I owe a special tribute of thanks to the officers of the Canadian Fishery Board in St. John's, who planned and facilitated both tours, in so far as they were by sea.

A good map is an indispensable tool of travel, and I hope that the one inserted at the end of this volume will encourage others (and may they be many!) to follow in my footsteps and break new ground for themselves. If this should be the fortunate outcome of the Lectures, no one, I feel sure, will be more pleased than my friend and ally in the venture, the President of the Memorial University of Newfoundland.

C. R. Fay.

Belfast, December, 1955.
Coast lines, like nations, figure by comparison. But how introduce to one another two coastal regions so far apart and seemingly so unconnected as the West Coast of Newfoundland and the West Country of England? Let them do it for themselves. First let West Coast, Newfoundland, speak of "To-day and To-morrow," and then Wessex, time honoured Wessex, shall speak of "Then and Now." They have indeed a common factor of agricultural fertility, but that in Newfoundland has only disclosed itself recently: the traditional contact of the West Country of England was with the East and South of Newfoundland by way of trade and fishery. Many engaged in it, but three are household names, alike in the old country and the new—Newman, Job and Bowring—Newman's of Dartmouth, Job's of Teignmouth, Bowring's of Exeter; and of these more later.

The South Coast of the English West Country from Poole to Dartmouth is not altogether dissimilar from the West Coast of Newfoundland looking north for say 150 (flight) miles.

Poole.  Port aux Basques.
St. Alban's Head.  Cape Ray.
Weymouth with The  Stephenville with Port au Port
Isle of Portland—"The  Peninsula—"The Gibraltar of
Gibraltar of Wessex."  the West Coast."
Exmouth, leading to  Bay of Islands, leading to
Exeter.  Corner Brook.
Teignmouth, Torbay,  Bonne Bay and Lomond.
Dartmouth.
the harbour of Pushthrough from Hermitage Bay, and St. Pierre and Miquelon disappear over the horizon, you see on the hill a green field surrounded by a concrete wall, growing what seem to be giant daisies. On a nearer view it proves to be a cemetery, and the wall was put around it to prevent the contents from slipping into the sea. The sixty-five year old Church is braced down by iron cables to withstand the winter storms. Barrowful by barrowful the cemetery soil was wheeled up. It cannot be gainsaid that much (but by no means all) of the land surface in the Avalon Peninsula and the South Coast is in Pushthrough’s case:—rainfall abundant—and nothing else. The West Coast is very different, as far north at least as Bonne Bay. Here is an abundance of light sandy soil which, when appropriately strengthened, can support an intensive agriculture, as it already provides the gravel from which the Trans-Canada Highway is being made.

Good documentary material based on recent surveys is to hand, but certain over-all observations may be made first.

(1) A country’s agriculture develops in relation not only to the quality of its soil, but also to the performance of its neighbours. As Aguathuna feeds Sydney with limestone, so Prince Edward Island feeds Stephenville with potatoes and milk. In these days of aeroplane freight, ice is not the barrier it was to the transport of essential foodstuffs. And since Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island are now provinces of the same Dominion, there can be no tariff or currency restrictions between them.

(2) Knowledge, too, is unaffected by the round-about route; and carried over the air is instantaneous. At Mount Pearl outside St. John’s is the provincial experimental farm of 280 acres, which conducts a variety of tests on seeds, grasses, dairy cattle, poultry, pigs and vegetables. The results of work done there are at the service of the whole Island. The agricultural officers on the West Coast are men who have trained in St. John’s. There is good land, too, in the neighbourhood of St. John’s: as the people of St. John’s a century ago knew full well—“Not a farm, a mere paddock, a little field, nothing worth mentioning.” “And the garden,” cried the lady, “and the poultry yard, and the sheep pens, and the stables, and the outhouses and the kennels, do you call them nothing?” R. B. McCrea, *Lost Amid the Fogs* (1869), p. 7.

(3) The conflict of labour demand:—summer fishing, summer logging, summer harvesting, is transient. For machine power
economizes the labour force and gives elasticity to it. An increasing percentage of the population, male and female, is engaged in industry and commerce. From these pools an agricultural army, male and female, could in an emergency be raised. Moreover, the drain to industry is compensated by the labour saving devices of modern farming.

(4) The West Coast has high scenic values. It is earmarked for tourism. This means a market at the door for just that class of produce which the soil is suited to yield, dairy produce, vegetables, fruit; and since asparagus is only a cultivated seaweed it should be possible to raise it in quantities on the sandy neck of Port au Port. Bread and cod are necessaries of life. But a country can import bread and export salt cod or cod fillets, as the substratum of its economy, and in addition find its most extensible source of income in the provision of travel and sport. Switzerland is the outstanding example of such an economy.

(5) The West Coast may one day have what Wessex has to overflowing, rich literary associations. Think of what Thomas Hardy has done for Dorset (and notably for Weymouth-Portland in *The Trumpet Major* and *The Well-Beloved*). Think, too, of what Jane Austen did for that little harbour from which Hardy with instinctive delicacy kept away. For she came from Bath to visit Lyme Regis in 1804 and put its Cobb on the map of literature for all time. Scott has done the same for Solway Firth and the Scottish border: Blackmore for the Doone country of North Devon: Wordsworth for the English Lake District.

"Communities are lost, and Empires die
And things of holy use unhallowed lie;
They perish; but the intellect can raise,
From airy words alone, a pile that ne'er decays."

The fellow-countrymen of E. J. Pratt will not be slow to subscribe to this dictum of the Lakeland poet.

B. V. Gutsell in his *Introduction to the Geography of Newfoundland*, Ottawa, 1949, describes the face of the country—Section V.

**SOILS.**

Variety in the soils of Newfoundland has been produced by differences in the parent rock formations. Along the West Coast there are younger Silurian and Carboniferous rocks covered by relatively good soils, but east of the Long Range Mountains, where
the bed rock is of a crystalline nature, the soils are highly acid and unfertile. The highest elevations lack soil cover and the surface is bare rock with many erratic boulders and frost-riven chips of rocks.

Soil surveys are being undertaken, but little of the island as yet has been covered. The chief areas surveyed are those with agricultural potentiality and are confined to the upper Humber Valley, Deer Lake, the Codroy Valley, Grand Falls, the north-west coast and St. Mary’s Bay (S/E of Placentia).


About 5,200 commercial farms on the island: 6 per cent. over 50 acres; average 12 acres: 1,200 full-time farms. In addition to farms, numerous gardens and small holdings.

[The figures for the chief agricultural areas show the outstanding importance of the West Coast.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Acreage Cleared</th>
<th>Suitable for Agriculture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. John's</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastport (Bonavista Bay)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humber Valley</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephenville-Port au Port</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. George’s Bay</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codroy Valley</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18,300</td>
<td>134,000</td>
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In the whole Island, including gardens and small holdings 76,000

[Thus of cleared farm land, over half is on the West Coast, and of potential farm land nearly 80 per cent.]

In the Humber Valley in the west the development of agricultural land is of comparatively recent date, and at present potatoes, turnips and cabbage are the main crops. These find a market in the town of Corner Brook and in the nearby logging camps. A few farms are now producing milk. The growth of population in the Corner Brook area should support an expansion in dairy and truck farming. The potential farm land in the Humber Valley should make this possible.

In the Stephenville-Port au Port area in the south-west, mixed farming is carried out, with the production of cattle and sheep predominating. Although, in general, production of vegetables has not been extensive, one of the largest vegetable producing farms on the Island is located in this area. Beef, mutton and wool are marketed in limited quantity. The hay lands in general yield poor crops and an improvement in soil fertility is urgently required if production is to be maintained.

In the St. George’s district further south there are fairly extensive
areas of cleared and cultivated land. The farms are about 80 acres in size, and have approximately 12 acres of cleared land. Production of vegetables is the chief source of income. Usually 5 to 8 acres are planted with vegetables, such as potatoes, turnips and cabbage, with a lesser acreage in beets, carrots and parsnips. The land is heavily fertilized with mixed commercial fertilizer and good yields are obtained. Land not growing vegetables is used for hay and pasture but yields are, on the whole, unsatisfactory. Milk is produced for consumption on the farm, and some beef and mutton are produced for sale.

The Codroy Valley is one of the main farming areas of the island. Substantial quantities of both live stock and vegetables are grown. More live stock is produced here than in the St. George's area, although vegetables are probably the most important crop. Beef, mutton and wool are marketed. Unfortunately the yield of hay is declining not only on the uplands but also on the soils of the alluvial flats.

But for Treaty restrictions the West Coast would have been developed at least a century earlier. The diary of Archdeacon Wix for 1835 is testimony to this.

"Monday, May 11, 1835.
Between Cape Ray, indeed, and the Bay of Islands, there is decidedly more land capable of being brought, with very little trouble, into cultivation, than in all the parts of Newfoundland with which several pretty extensive tours had made me previously acquainted. There is another advantage, too, peculiar to this part of the coast; there is so little fog and dampness of atmosphere, that fish may be laid out to dry here with much less risk than elsewhere of its becoming tainted."

"Monday, June 1, 1835.
Started at 3 a.m. in a fishing schooner for the Barrisways [Cormack's Barachois—identifiable as the Fishel's, Crabbe's and Robinson's of to-day], three settlements about twenty-three miles from this harbour [St. George's], and half way down the bay. It is much to be lamented that so fine a nest of settlements should not be acknowledged and recognised by the Government. They have some of the best land in the island, along the shore and in their rear: yet, through the discouragement which the English Government gives to settlers west of Cape Ray, and an over-delicate dread of encouraging any extensive settlements which might discourage the French, this, which is certainly the best portion of the island, is entirely lost to us as regards revenue. . . . They live here, indeed, entirely on the produce of the soil, and of the cattle which they keep, and they live well. They are so far independent of the merchant that they never apply to him for butter, pork or beef. Indeed, if they could only find a market for their produce, they could rear more cattle and vegetables,
and could cure more meat, than their families require. There is no other part of Newfoundland like it."


Thus much for authority; next for a personal glimpse.

James Cook's map of Port aux Basques needs revision now.¹ For they, to wit, Messrs. McNamara of Toronto, are blasting out a new port, which will avoid the awkward entrance to the old one: increase harbour and transit facilities; and make ready for the augmented ferry service of the Trans-Canada Highway age.² This highway, in the rough, runs already with short gaps from Port aux Basques to Corner Brook, and from Corner Brook, without a gap, through Grand Falls to Gander airport. The big gap is between Clarenville (just about where Cormack set off for the interior) and Gander; but we are told that we shall motor in comfort from Port aux Basques to St. John's, with no four dollar ferry tolls on the way, before the 1950's have run their course.

From the dry fog of Port aux Basques (three hours sunshine in the four-and-a-half days of mid-July when I was there) you pass, inside an hour, between the round breasts of "Mae West" to the sunshine, sparkling streams and thick foliage of the Little Codroy Valley. Everyone has a fishing rod at the back of his car, and summer visitors are opening their bungalows. In the winter the wind may be high, and first landmark is the railway hut in which the watchman used to sit waiting for the train of the day, ready to wave it back if the gale was so strong as to make it dangerous to proceed. Little Codroy is one of half a dozen of river systems, essentially the same in type—Little Codroy, Grand Codroy, Robinson's, Humber, South and East Arms (Bonne Bay), leading to the West Coast from the Long Range, with estuaries of varying widths, which in places are deep enough to admit a criss-cross of roads, east-west, as well as the main road north-south.

In the Codroys the terrain is of two sorts, the foothills with trout and salmon streams and wild fowl and rich inter-vale meadows, showing already the ripple of new growth—farmed by the pioneer; and the longer settled coastal stretches—yet not so very much longer settled. I sat with Mr. F. McIsaac in his valley farm on

¹ This map is an inset to Cook's large-scale chart of the South Coast of Newfoundland from Cape Ray to the head of Fortune Bay.

² "The new ferry will have a capacity for 300 passengers and load 25 automobiles, 6 trucks, 2 trailers, 50 head of cattle, and 650 tons of cargo per trip." (Public Relations Release, Ottawa, 1952.)
Grand River Codroy, conning his land grant. After reciting in part the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, 1713, Treaty of Paris, 1763, Treaty of Versailles, 1783, the document concluded, in ink, February, 1899, "one of the orders incumbent on you is that for the present no permanent buildings or establishments of any description shall be constructed on any part of the land in the annexed grant except with the approval of Her Majesty's Government." Fee for grant five dollars. The original grant was to John Blanchard from whom Mr. McIsaac bought it, Blanchard fils signing for his father, since the old man could not write. The present owner commenced farming in 1914. He has now 240 acres, of which one half is cleared; and as in Finland, the wood cut is a valuable source of supplementary revenue. (It goes as pit props to Buchans.)

Between Codroy Pond and Robinson's the railway runs through and over wooded ravines, and by the side are recent clearings, awaiting their road bed. For here, as elsewhere, it is railway first, and highroad later. The embankments are steep and stone faced and must have required a mass of labour. The coastal motor run past Cartyville, Heatherton and Fischell's left one with a curious feeling. On top was the dominant race, a postmaster, a gentleman farmer, a store-keeper with land to sell—clusters of related families, Butts and Leggs galore. Down below by the shore were settlers of French descent, of lower standing economically and socially, but goodhearted and thriving. But this was only a first impression. I went over the ground again in 1953 with the help of a professional friend who had done survey work on the West Coast. There are three streams of French stock—French of Old France, descendants perhaps of deserters from French ships; French of Quebec; and French Acadians. Among the last in particular are numerous families of substance—LeBlancs (now Whites), Gormiers, Gaudets, LeCoeurs, and the Gallant family, whose senior representative died recently at 95, and after whom Stephenville, the American airbase, is named. On the west of the fertile Port au Port peninsula are old world settlers from Brittany. On the south of it is the Scottish settlement of Campbell's Creek: while at Codroy, St. Andrew's and MacKay, Nova Scotian Scots are strongly represented. Much indeed of the West Coast settlement, whether English, French or Scottish, is a back-flow from the mainland.

In the Humber Valley there are again two types of farming. First, the established farmers of Pasadena—Midland; Mr. Leonard Earle's model farm and strawberry grounds; Mr. Atkinson's Holsteins
and the great barn built by himself (he was a road surveyor and sensed the values to come, and could clear and build with his own hands, the Government helping with bull-dozers): the whole of this area neatly set back behind a belt of trees. Secondly, northwest of Deer Lake the agricultural frontier on the Lomond Road, which was started as a settlement scheme after World War I, and named Cormack after the explorer. They brought up fishermen as settlers, some of whom made good, and the present population owes much to the agricultural officers who lived with them and worked for them.

It is a far cry from West Coast, Newfoundland to West Country, England, and yet there are analogies. The Great Western Railway of England and the Great West Road have their counterpart in the coastal communications by rail and road on the West Coast of Newfoundland. I would think that there are on this West Coast of Newfoundland almost as many gravel pits as farms, and almost as many men employed in road making as in cultivating the land. And what of a Newfoundland woollen industry? Is there any sign of this? There are certainly hundreds of wiry sheep, mostly on the road side, alike on the east and west coast of the Island, which marvellously escape being run over; and in Grand Codroy I went to Gale’s Wool Combing Mill, where the raw wool is carded. “It should be made into jerseys in Newfoundland,” said the foreman, and I heartily agreed.

“Good-bye now! West Coast”: and so over to Wessex.

Bristol on the Severn, the second city of Elizabethan England, just as it was inwards the gateway to the Midlands, so it was outwards the gateway to the High Seas of Empire in North America, the West Indies, the Brazils and the Guinea coast of Africa. At the exit of the Bristol Channel in North Devon are two small ports, famous in their day, Bideford and Barnstaple, situated in what the atlas calls “Bideford or Barnstaple Bay.” They drew their commerce from Bristol and continued to send fishing boats to Newfoundland long after the other ports of the West Country had given this up. Bristol itself soon had bigger ventures in view—sugar, tobacco, slave-carrying, and might there not be a new passage by north-east or north-west to far Cathay? Bristol Grammar School, which in our time has sent out T. R. Glover to profess the classics at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ont., and Sir Oliver Franks to be our ambassador to Washington, celebrates 1534 as its charter year.
Among its founders was Robert Thorne, and he in a letter of 1527 writes: "As some sicknesses are hereditarious and come from the father to the son, so this inclination or desire of this discovery I inherited of my father, which with another merchant of Bristol named Hugh Eliot were the discoverers of the Newfoundlands."

Tradition, says the school historian C. P. Hill, History of Bristol Grammar School, pp. 3-4, attributes the voyage of the father to 1494, and if this is so, it is pre-Cabot: three years before John Cabot sailed on the Mathew from Bristol, May 2, 1497, to make his landfall at Cape Bonavista on the eastern coast of Newfoundland on June 24, 1497. C. Bona Vista a Caboto Primum Reperta (English map of 1617). The ascription of the landfall to Cape North in the Island of Cape Breton is ill-founded, and for sailing reasons highly improbable.

Between Bristol and the south coast of the West Country projected the county of Cornwall and its rocks were as much a grave-yard on this side of the Atlantic, as was the Cape Race coast from Cappahayden to Mistaken Point on the other. Therefore, this south coast was not satellite to Bristol. In so far as its merchants did not get their supplies locally, they drew them from London or abroad, and yet they were not, as maritime adventurers, in the orb of London. They built up their own system, in conjunction with the Channel Islands, rich in uncustomed liquor, and with the south of Ireland, rich in butter, bacon and (human) brawn. Waterford or Cork would be the last port of call on the way to Newfoundland.

As the Victoria County History (Dorset, Vol. II, 203) well says, "The recovery [in Elizabeth's time] of Weymouth and Melcombe and the continued progress of Poole were mainly due to their share of the Newfoundland fishery, which for many of these western coast towns was replacing medieval overseas trade soon to be engrossed by London and other of the great ports. It would be impossible to over-rate the national value of this new school for the production and training of seamen, which with the previously existent North Sea and Iceland fisheries largely created the marine which overwhelmed Spain in the sixteenth century and the Dutch in the seventeenth century, thus clearing the way for trans-oceanic expansion." But Wessex must be prepared to hear the historians of the Coal Industry make claims almost as large for the North Sea colliers.

Plymouth was, and is, the great naval dockyard of the West Country, and it built many ships. But in former days shipbuilding centres were numerous along the coast. Bridport, for example, specialised in making war sloops in the late eighteenth century: as
for Poole, at this time the main builders there were doing so well in the Newfoundland trade that they did not enter for the Admiralty contracts. The threat of invasion and the bathing fancy of a King,\textsuperscript{1} raised Portland and Weymouth to eminence at the turn of the century; and Portland’s place in the scheme of naval defence was enhanced by the construction of the breakwater, 1847–75: completed in the 1890’s by the addition of two new breakwaters to make secure against torpedo attack. In the south of England naval bases and watering places grew side by side and were some compensation for the loss of industry to the North—Portsmouth, Portland, Plymouth: Bournemouth, Weymouth, Torquay; and above all of these in maritime significance was the great port of Southampton, with its superb tidal system and ideal situation \textit{vis-à-vis} Europe. But Southampton rarely enters into the Newfoundland story.

Dorset was never an industrial county \textit{par excellence}. Over the centuries it was a rich pastoral county with strong interests in maritime enterprise. It lived in an atmosphere of piracy, privateering and potential invasion, as did Devonshire also—though the latter, officially, was at once more powerful and law-abiding. Somerset, an Old-Country Arcadia, was in a more sequestered position—"the flower of all the West Country," the saying went, with rich, well-watered soil and ample rainfall. Rich in agriculture, it was richer still in social life; and the clergy, parish priests and monastic foundations (while these remained) were the centre of it. Towns grew up around their great parish churchès. The glow of Glastonbury illumined the whole of Wessex. Fifteenth century Glastonbury to eighteenth century Bath was progress at a price; and Henry Hunt, the radical rebel farmer of Upavon, Wilts, exposed the heaviness of it—poverty in the cottage, and the tortures of Ilchester gaol. The solitary cell, flogging, and loading with irons were frequent punishments as late as 1821: a cat of nine tails in the open air would have been more merciful.

The schools inherited a little portion of the monastic wealth, but the bulk of it passed into lay hands, and the new industrial merchant class of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries too often combined progressive business with abuse of corporate property. The pleasantest feature was the love of sport in all classes, which in the

\textsuperscript{1} In 1748, R. Prowse and J. Bennet of Weymouth secured twenty-one year leases for the erection of two wooden bathing houses on the north side of the harbour, and in 1789 George III visited the town for the first time.
West Country at least, the Puritans failed to quell. Before the days of the mechanical roasting jack turnspit dogs did the work. On the morning of an important feast day in the reign of Charles II the consternation of Wells was complete, all the turnspit dogs were missing. But horror turned into relief, and relief into joy when it was found that a sporting midshipman had taken the pack for a run on the Mendip hills and brought them back in time in the best of form.

The coincidence of rapid industrial change with a generation of war, 1793–1815, left its mark on every part of Britain. In Somerset it gave a fillip to agrarian revolution. War conditions made it profitable to bring under the plough land hitherto below the margin of profitable cultivation, and the urban demand for meat led to the enclosure for stock raising of land hitherto open. But the labourer's standard was not high. Wessex was a region of low wages and generous (customary) allowances. The Tolpuddle Martyrs of 1834 incurred transportation for having the audacity to form a trade union to resist the reduction of their weekly cash wage from 7s. to 6s.

The West Country of England had one county that was altogether inland—Wilts, and a second that was very nearly so—Gloster. In seventeenth century England Wiltshire with Gloucestershire and Somersetshire in its rear was the chief industrial region not merely of Wessex but of all England. Its famous woollen industry survives in select places still, but in Bradford-on-Avon, an ancient centre, it is no more. Only the churches and great stone mansions on the terraced escarpment of this most beautiful town remain as evidence of the "golden fleece" that built them. Centuries ago trains of pack horses took the broad cloth to London by road for sale to factors in Blackwell Hall, who passed them on to merchant adventurers for export to the Continent. The metropolitan tie is still present, but the commodity is liquid milk moving in tank cars by road or rail; and as a side speciality, Wiltshire bacon, the staple product of modern Calne, which came in this curious way. Calne was a stage on the road by which Irish pigs were driven to the London market. When the famine of 1846 cut out Irish supplies, the Harris brothers went to America and learning there the art of modern curing with the aid of ice, took out an English patent for it, and on this built up their famous business.

Famous, too, are the cultural associations of this inland county—Bowood, where Priestley discovered oxygen: Lacock Abbey, once a nunnery, and later the manor house of the Fox Talbots, where
W. H. Fox Talbot of Cambridge University invented modern photography; Corsham Court, the home of the rich clothier Paul Methuen and his son John who negotiated the Methuen Treaty of 1703 with Portugal; Hardenhuish Church with its cenotaph to David Ricardo; Sloperton Cottage where Thomas Moore wrote his Irish Melodies; George Crabbe’s rectory at Trowbridge\(^1\)—where else would you find so close together so rich a cultural feast? For our immediate purpose it is sufficient to note that the ports of the West Country could never lack export goods of a quality order—from Exeter serges to Grandfather clocks. Now, by long established rule, necessaries for the fisheries were free of duty. But what were necessaries—ladies’ stockings, straw hats, wax candles, time keepers? The decision of these delicate points caused Poole and St. John’s many a headache.

\(^1\) George Crabbe, 1754–1831, of Aldeburgh, Suffolk, author of *The Village* and other poems. In 1814 he went to Trowbridge, where the rest of his life was spent. Edmund Burke was his patron and good friend.
CHAPTER TWO

SOUTH DEVON AND THE NEWMAN RECORDS

EXETER AND DARTMOUTH:

The Devonshire volume (economic and social) of the Victoria County History has yet to be written. South Devon is the southwest of the West Country; and here one half at least of the Newfoundland story was enacted (most of the balance belonging to Poole). Fortunately we can supplement the Customs Records of Poole, Dorset, from those of Plymouth, Exeter and Dartmouth, and we also have the business papers of the Newman firm and the excellent history of Dartmouth by Percy Russell (Batsford, 1950).

Plymouth was a naval headquarters; and on the supremacy of the Royal Navy, from the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 onwards, the trade and fishery of Newfoundland depended. Sir Bernard Drake by falling on the Spanish fishing fleet off Newfoundland (1585) made the English, who had got off to a slow start, masters of the harbour of St. John's. In the Napoleonic War the suburb of Dock grew into the great shipbuilding centre of Devonport and was incorporated eventually with the parent which it had outgrown. Plymouth, like Portsmouth, was important to Newfoundland because it was a seat of naval power; and the Navy provided the convoys.

Exeter and Dartmouth were interested as merchants in the Newfoundland trade. Indeed it was this which brought them wealth and reputation. Exeter in addition was the centre of the serge trade (serge meaning a durable cloth with warp of long wool and weft of short wool). Teignmouth, an outpost of Exeter, midway between Exeter and Dartmouth, was like Dartmouth concerned primarily with maritime trade and the fishery.

Dartmouth has a deep fiord-like estuary, with a good sheltered harbour and no bar. From it sailed Richard I's flotilla of 110 vessels on his Crusade, and later the first English ship to East India. At Dartmouth the Mayflower put in for refreshment on her way to Boston. It was a famous harbour of refuge and by the same token the stronghold of a famous fourteenth century buccaneer, John Hawley. The Customs Records are full of references to British or foreign ships that were wrecked on the coast or took refuge in the
harbour. The Newfoundland trade is no more, but for compensation Dartmouth has the Royal Naval College, and on D-day in the flotilla that sailed from here and hereabout for the beaches of Normandy there was many a Newfoundland skipper.

Dartmouth's first fishery was the pilchard, and in the days when England held Aquitaine the merchants of Dartmouth exchanged their fish for the wine of Bordeaux. The first cod was obtained from Iceland, and the cod fishery then was based on East Coast ports. But with the discovery of Newfoundland the West Country came into its own. 1580–1640 was an era of high prosperity, when the harbour of Dartmouth was deepened, quays built, churches enlarged and noble merchants' houses erected.

Dartmouth and Exeter were influential in mercantile policy, being themselves early examples of merchant capitalism. The West Country, with its high parliamentary representation, was at the height of its power around 1700. By an Act of 1698 the Newfoundland trade was regulated in accordance with the wishes of the Western Adventurers—"by West and by law"; and in the same year the Irish woollen industry was sacrificed to that of the West Country—Irish wool could be exported to England only, while its woollens were excluded by a prohibitive tariff.

In time Exeter's interest in the Newfoundland trade became secondary to a growing coastal trade, especially in coal, which came at first from Wales and Newcastle; later, mostly, from Liverpool and Sunderland. Its cloth industry brought contacts with Holland and Germany. There was a profitable two-way trade in English woollens and German linens. The Barings came from Hamburg to settle in Exeter and their descendant, Sir Francis Baring, became the first merchant of London. From the woollen trade came the first local bankers. But by 1800 as a manufacturing centre Exeter was losing ground to East Anglia (Norwich) and the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Dartmouth's merchant capitalism was maritime. Moreover, the Newfoundland trade was free to all; and this offered a premium to industrial enterprise. It was a true nursery of seamen and marketing adventure. Its citizens explored and invented. It was proud to number among its great ones John Davis, the discoverer of Davis Straits, and Thomas Newcomen, the inventor of the fire-engine and predecessor of James Watt. By trade the West Country, with Dartmouth at its head, erected a great triangle of ocean commerce—salt, wines and fruits from Latin Europe to England: ships with
personnel and materials (calling at South Ireland for a part of their supplies) to Newfoundland: fish to the West Indies, Brazil, Spain and Portugal and the Mediterranean: oil and skins direct to England. There was no company monopoly. Its place was taken by the trading community acting through the corporation of the town. The town controlled the parliamentary representation; and merchants, not land-owners, controlled the town. Families like the Roopes, Hunts, Newmans, Holdsworths intermarried. The corporation was virtually a perquisite of the Holdsworth family from 1700 to the era of municipal reform (1835). The second Arthur Holdsworth, born 1668, was the recipient of a famous trophy, the Holdsworth Punch Bowl, with its motto “Prosperity to hooks and lines.” He was for long “admiral of the fishermen” at St. John’s—the last and most powerful of the fishing admirals. Theoretically the first-comer was admiral, but in fact the lot fell year by year to the representative of this veteran. For he controlled the town authorities to whom appeals from the admiral lay; and so year after year he sent out fishing ships and fishermen for whom he secured the handiest rooms and beaches. It was only when French expansion threatened the safety of the fishery that the need of a royal governor, himself an admiral of the Royal Navy, was recognized.

THE NEWMAN FAMILY.

For over 300 years, say from 1604, when John Newman bought train oil from the fishing ships for sale to London, down to 1907 when the fishing establishments in Newfoundland were sold, the Newmans played a leading part in the trade: especially “to the Westward,” as the South Coast of Newfoundland was designated.1

Thomas Newman, 1740–1802, assisted by Robert Newman and William Newman, made the fortunes of the firm. In the parliamentary enquiry of 1793 William Newman was recognised as the doyen of the trade. The family had interests in Dartmouth, London, Oporto and St. John’s; and as partners changed, the style of the several businesses was altered. Thus Thomas’s son, Sir Robert William Newman (1776–1848), first baronet and M.P. for Exeter, was a partner in Newman, Hunt & Co., London: in Hunt, Roope,

1 J. Oldmixon in *British Empire in America*, 2 vols., 1708, says in his preface, p. ix, “To begin with the History of Newfoundland, all the Account of its Trade and Present State was communicated to him by Mr. Newman, lately a servant to His Grace the Duke of Somerset, who dwelt there as a merchant several years.”
Teage & Co., Oporto; and in Newman & Co., Newfoundland. In the next three generations came:


And the present representatives: Sir Ralph Alured Newman, 1902–, and his brother Mr. Thomas Newman, 1906–.

I was privileged in March, 1953, to spend some days, studying the firm’s records both in the London office, now 11 Eastcheap, E.C.3, and in Sir Ralph’s London residence, 36 Wilton Crescent, S.W.1. But before dealing with these, two things must be made clear.

(1) The style of the firm.

The periodic changes of name, and the relation of one part of the business to the others, as they are puzzling to the historian, so they were puzzling to contemporaries. Thus in December, 1894, the London Office writes to a St. John’s correspondent:

"Please take note in case of future mutual transactions that our firm in London is Newman, Hunt & Co.; in Newfoundland Newman & Co., and in Oporto Hunt, Roope, Teage & Co."

And to their new agents, Baine Johnston, they write at the same time:

"We wish to keep two accounts as stated:

1. Newman, Hunt & Co. comprise everything connected with our business at the Westward and with the stock of wines in St. John’s, but you must be careful not to confuse our stock of wines with those of Hunt, Roope, Teage, as the latter are not for sale at St. John’s.

2. R. L. Newman’s account will comprise all buildings and rent charges, connected with any and all buildings in St. John’s."

(2) The matter of port wine.

Mr. Tom Newman, whose early training was in Portugal, has obliged me with a short report on the Shipping of Port Wine from Oporto to Newfoundland:

There are two types of Port Wine in Portugal, viz.:

(a) Port Wine from the Wood, which is a blend of different years.
(b) Port of a Vintage year, which is shipped two years after the Vintage.

1 Cf. McCrae, Lost Amid the Fogs, p. 271. "If tha’s a’, banker, I’ll send ye a turkey and a dozen of port" said the Governor; "some of that cask Walter Grieve imported for us. It’s vera fine?"
With regard to (a). The older vintage years are refreshed in cask with a younger wine, to give the older wine body and something to “feed” on. A wine say 15 years old is refreshed with a 14-year-old wine, and a 12-year-old wine is refreshed with an 11-year-old wine, etc. This is the sequence. Old wine is never refreshed with a very young wine.

In olden times, Port Wine was shipped as ballast in sailing vessels across the Atlantic to Newfoundland, and was there bartered for Cod (Bacalhau). It was found that the shipping across the Atlantic had a very beneficial effect on the wine. The rolling of the vessel blended the wine very well, and made the different blends very “married” into one wine.

It was also found that the climate in Newfoundland had a very beneficial effect on the wine, and gave it a very special flavour and character. Hence this wine was shipped to England and became very popular as a high-class wine in English clubs and amongst the Aristocracy, and was known as “Hunt's Port Matured in Newfoundland.”

The wine was shipped to a Bond either at Harbour Breton or St. John's, Newfoundland, the latter is still in existence, and the practice of shipping wine from Oporto to St. John's is still carried on to-day. The wine stays in Bond in St. John's for four years, and is then shipped to England, where it has great popularity.1

**The Newman Records.**

Except for 1809, the extracts which follow are from the Newfoundland Letter Books, i.e., Letters from the London House to Newfoundland. These run to several million words, and they are but part of a much bigger collection of General Letter Books, Cash Books, Ledgers, etc. There can surely be no other firm in Great Britain with such full and continuous records yielding, as they do, a unique insight into the working of the business mind over a long period of time.

The firm’s monograph, prepared for the Festival of Britain, 1951, gives the following foundation years:

1679. Dartmouth House.

1 Hence the lettering R.L.N. (Robert Lydston Newman) on the metal boundary mark at the corner of the Liquor Control Board’s store on Water Street. For this was once the agent’s house, and next door to it is the Bonded Warehouse, where the port matures.
War Trade.

1794. "This country is drained of all kinds of cattle for the Navy at Plymouth and large Fleets so continually at Torbay."

"The French cruisers are making great havoc to the Westward."

1808. "We have account from Spain of the Northern Provinces being in arms against the French. If it becomes general and they keep their ground, we shall give all the assistance by sea that can be done, and their success will give a sudden turn to the trade of Newfoundland."

1809. Letters to Oporto.

Jan. "The disastrous news of this day from Spain makes us hope you will have attended the directions to sell for ready money, even if obliged to make a considerable sacrifice to obtain it."

British residents, fearing disaster, are offering high rates for evacuation of their property.

"Tho' we have reasons to credit a report that Sir John Moore has written to his particular friend that at some particular passes he should retire to in Galicia he will defy Bonaparte, still we hear Portugal is in a critical condition. . . .

If you have to quit, bring a parcel of good wine."

May. "If Sir Wellesley and the British troops are gone against Soult, I have little doubt they will free Porto from the French. While our troops remain in Portugal, exchange will naturally be high: when they are removed, it will go down again."

Nov. "If troops are sent over from England and the Portuguese armies kept up, they will use much wine and brandy in Portugal."

From this point onwards the letters are to Newfoundland.

1812.

Aug. "The Americans have formally declared war, but we flatter ourselves it will cease when they receive the news of the Orders in Council being revoked."

1813.

April "An order goes out by the Admiral to sell all the American prizes at St. John's, and we think you may be able to purchase a good vessel or two for us there. On no account buy a low-built vessel, as they do not answer."

Nov. 3 "We have great news to-day from Saxony. The allies beat the French and on the 19th stormed Leipsic. . . . Bonaparte saved himself by flight."

¹ Torbay and the Westward here refer to England.
1814.  
June Announcing return of St. Pierre and Miquelon to the French.
   "All idea of our having a small store to the N. of Cape Ray must of course be given up and we must leave it to your judgment whether it will be prudent to build a small store at Port aux Basques or other place in that neighbourhood. At present there are not sufficient inhabitants along that coast to make it worthy of our attention, but if the people who are now to the N. of Cape Ray are obliged to leave their habitations, they probably may come to places to the East of Cape Ray and settle there if they are assured of having a store from where they can be supplied with goods and that we will take their fish, etc., in return."

1815.  
April  "The landing of Bonaparte in France and being joined by the army has thrown everything into confusion again. All the powers of Europe are again preparing for war; and provisions, freight and insurance are again advancing very much. Therefore everything will be high that is sent to Newfoundland."

June 23 "We have this day accounts from Lord Wellington who with Blucher has had a sanguinary conflict with the French army commanded by Bonaparte in person, who was defeated with the loss of upwards of 200 pieces of cannon and part of Bonaparte's luggage... We think he will soon be done up now."

Youngsters.

1813.  "We have agreed with a young man at Dartmouth as a clerk for 3 years, to the 15 November, 1816, at the salary of £35, £40 and £60 and his passage home at the expiration of the term if he returns in one of our ships."

1814.  "We shall be glad to send out English youngsters, if we can get them, which we could not do last year. If we have peace with America we may probably be able to get some next year, as men will be wanted neither for the Navy or Army as they have been hitherto."

   "The vessel that loads with oil this year for England should... likewise bring the men who are to come to this neighbourhood, as there is a difficulty in getting men to go out if they have no opportunity of getting home without going to St. John's. One vessel must suffice both for Little Bay [Fortune] and St. Lawrence [Burin]."

1815.  "We have desired between 60 and 70 youngsters to be sent from Waterford in the Resolution. Mr. Thorn wants 20, including a master of voyage, a mason, and 2 youngster