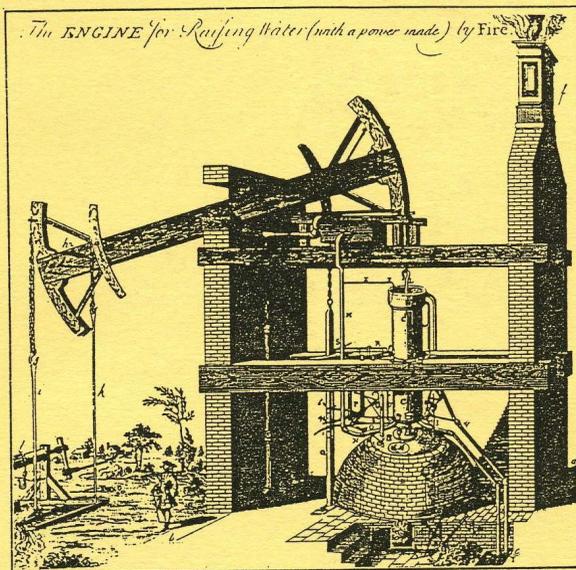


THE
NEWCOMEN
MEMORIALS
IN
DARTMOUTH

BY IVOR H. SMART



DARTMOUTH
HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

Paper 7

NEWCOMEN MEMORIALS IN DARTMOUTH (1851-1991) by
Ivor H. Smart C.Eng., M. R. Ae.S., M. I. E. E.

Introduction:

Robert Cranford and the Dartmouth Chronicle.

Robert Cranford was the founding editor of the Dartmouth Chronicle which was first published in June 1851. He was born in 1830 in Dartmouth, the son of a printer. Robert Cranford was a lifelong Liberal. His newspaper is a truly fine chronicle of events and people who featured in the history of 19th century Dartmouth. The paper was first published in 1855 after the newspaper stamp was withdrawn.

About 1860 the Chronicle absorbed its rival the "Dartmouth Observer", published by Valentine Butteris. In 1871 he began weekly publication which continues to the present day. Cranford continued to be active in the management of the paper until his death in 1901.

It is to Robert Cranford and his newspaper that we are indebted for much of our information on Thomas Newcomen.

1851. The first attempt at a memorial.

The first we know of this attempt to perpetuate the memory of Thomas Newcomen in his birthplace is in the Dartmouth Chronicle for 1864 when a short item appeared in the April issue of the Chronicle It read as follows,

"A proposal was made in 1851. by our townsman, Mr. T Lidstone, to erect a monument in St. Saviours Church, to the memory of one to whom posterity is so largely indebted and an appeal was published solicting funds for the purpose. With the exception of a few local subscriptions promised, the only reply to the appeal was from His late Highness Prince Albert, who readily endorsed the proposal. Not meeting with sufficient encouragement, the design was abandoned."

A copy of the appeal entitled "A proposal to erect a monument to the memory of Newcomin, the inventor of the steam engine in Dartmouth Church. 1851." has survived and is in the Society's archives. It was first published in Butteris's Dartmouth Annual Directory. 1851 issue, and probably Cranford's advertising sheet.

The article continues by pointing out that the last of the Newcomins to live in Dartmouth was "an attorney-at-law, who died in the early part of this century {19th} and is buried in St. Saviours Church."

This would be the William Newcomin after whom the Town Council believed they were naming the recently built street, now Newcomen Road, in honour of the inventor of the atmospheric steam engine. Other William Newcomin deaths are recorded in the Kingsbridge Baptist Register in 1756 and 1791. Note that Cranford, Butteris and Thomas Lidstone all used the spelling of 'Newcomin' for the name of the family.

1864-7. The Newcomen Road.

In the same year, viz 1864, the Dartmouth Town Council began the street improvement scheme known as 'Bell's Plan' (for details see other papers by the author). This was a scheme to improve north-south communication in central Dartmouth and as the new street crossed the site of Thomas Newcomen's house

and workshop, which were demolished at this time, it was agreed that the name of the new street should perpetuate the name of Thomas Newcomen.

At the meeting of the Local Board of Health (the Town Council acting as the sanitary authority) on 6th March 1867 it was minuted that the new street be named the "Newcomin Road in commemoration of William Newcomin". The name of the road was altered to the conventional spelling in the 1890's when street nameplates were introduced into Dartmouth for the first time.

The confusion in the minds of the council members was caused through the descendants of Thomas Newcomin having died or left Dartmouth by 1786, when the inventor's daughter-in-law and her daughter left Dartmouth for Plymouth and the ironmongers shop in Lower Street was closed down.

In the foregoing the spelling of Newcomen as 'Newcomin' has been adopted in order to incorporate the spelling as used by Robert Cranford.

1868 Newcomin Cottage.

In 1864-65 the firm of Thomas Lidstone & Son were engaged along with other Dartmouth builders in the demolition of houses that stood along the line of the new street being built in central Dartmouth. At this time Thomas Lidstone conceived the idea of constructing a house containing items taken from the house occupied by Thomas Newcomen the inventor in his lifetime.

To this end he dismantled the woodwork of the ornamental frontage of a house in Lower Street. The house he selected had in the 17th century been occupied not by Newcomen, but by the a member of the Staplehill family and later by the descendants of Granvil Smith. Was this an error on the part of Lidstone or was he misled by the drawing by R.P. Leitch of houses in Lower Street and a photograph taken at the same place about 1860? What evidence we have demonstrates that Lidstone

- a) did not know which was Newcomen's house, but
- b) did know which house had contained Newcomen's workshop.

The evidence is contained in a pamphlet produced by Lidstone and printed for him by the Chiswick Press, in 1869, entitled "Some account of the Residence of the Inventor of the Steam engine."

Lidstone says of the house "The house in which Mr Newcomin lived when he invented the steam engine, was situate in Lower Street. . . . It was sold and taken down by order of the local Board of Health when Mr Thomas Lidstone of that place, purchased the ancient carved and moulded woodwork of its Street Frontage &c, which he rebuilt in Ridge Hill in Dartmouth, carefully replacing in the Sitting-room the Clavel(Lintel.Devonian) of the Fireplace at which Newcomen. . . , s at ."

In notes appended to the text Lidstone confirms that the house was demolished in November 1864 and Newcomin Cottage built in 1868. (The exact date, according to Cranford, was between February and June 1.868) Lidstone also comments in a note that Newcomin Cottage contains, "wood and plaster work from other houses and buildings also; saved during the last quarter century in Dartmouth and its neighbourhood." In a further note Lidstone states, "The plasterwork over the chimneypiece (containing my wives and my own initials) was taken from an old house in Dartmouth; not Newcomin's . ." This is the panel in the sitting room.

Apart from clearing up the mystery of the initials in this panel, the foregoing show the scrupulous regard for historic accuracy possessed by Thomas Lidstone. Regrettably he had the wrong house.

However, included in the pamphlet was a block plan of Dartmouth drawn by Thomas Lidstone and based on a street map of Dartmouth made by his father, Joseph Lidstone in 1833 and updated, about 1860, for the Local Board of Health. Examination of the plan shows major differences between the Lidstone plan and the town map. Lidstone made an error of approx. 40 ft in the relevant area of his plan. Consequently, he places Newcomen's house on the site of the workshop, 40ft to the North stood the 17th century house of Gilbert Staplehill. Correcting Lidstone's plan would place Newcomen's house, as Lidstone believed it to be, on the site of the Staplehill house. In this manner Lidstone took material from the wrong house and incorporated it into Newcomin Cottage.

There is no indication that Lidstone was aware that Newcomen lived in the next house to the north of the workshop and which had a jettied frontage in Higher Street together with a simple vertical 'split' frontage in Lower Street. If Thomas Lidstone took down a carved frontage in Lower Street north of the Guildhall it must be that of the Staplehill House. The ex-Beavis house, containing the workshop of Thomas Newcomen, had a slate-hung frontage whilst the Custom House Inn, north of the Staplehill House, was not demolished until mid-1865. The Guildhall (south of the workshop) was too well-known to have been mistaken for any other building. Therefore, Lidstone was in error when he said that he took down the front of Newcomen's house Lower Street and built the parts into Newcomin Cottage.

It follows that the Cottage has no connection with Thomas Newcomen and should correctly be termed Staplehill Cottage. In 1984 it was advertised as being the house in which Newcomen lived; i. e. the house was extant in 1729 or earlier. This claim was retracted on representations by the author to the house agents.

1873. The Mystery Attempt.

We do not know much about the attempt by Thomas Lidstone in 1873 to promote a memorial to Thomas Newcomen. The Newcomen Society has in its possession a copy of a pamphlet entitled "What is known of Newcomen, Inventor of the steam engine". A paper read before the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland at Exeter 1873. Enlarged with authorities & Notes." A digest of this paper was printed in the Chronicle for August 1873, but it does not add to the sum of our knowledge.



Fig.1 Newcomin Cottage, Ridge Hill, -Dartmouth
an engraving from a sketch by Thos. Lidstone AD.1868



Fig. 2 Drawings of ceiling plasterwork now in Newcomin Cottage, that were saved from houses in Lower Street, Dartmouth

Cranford reported in the August issue of the Chronicle that the paper was read to the Royal Archaeological Society. However, checks by the author have discovered that no such society existed in 1873, and there is no trace of a paper by Lidstone in the proceedings of the Royal Archeological Institute for the years 1873 and 1874. At the time of writing nothing more is known about this paper.

1887. Dartmouth and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Prior to Jubilee year communities across the country were considering how best to commemorate the Golden Jubilee, *The Queen* herself had requested that memorials should be fashioned so as to provide the maximum good for the public .

In Dartmouth, two competing proposals were put forward. One, a Cottage Hospital, and the other, a public pleasure gardens to be laid out on the established New Ground where a large open space existed. From this second proposal came the first real memorial intended to preserve the name of Thomas Newcomen. Unfortunately, the pleasure gardens which were built became involved in a political dispute that removed their reference to their original identity. It came about in the manner now described.

The first intimation of a dispute over the form of the memorial came with the announcement in the Chronicle that the Town Council were to consider a proposal put forward by the Mayor, Francis Charles Simpson, for the building of a Cottage Hospital to be funded by public subscription. Having an absolute majority on the Council his proposal was carried and a committee was set up. Opponents of the scheme pointed out that what was wanted at the time was a fever hospital since there already existed in the town the cottage hospital of Dr. John Puddicombe,

Now the Embankment dispute had polarised political attitudes in Dartmouth from 1879 and would continue to do so until 1892. The dispute arose from the proposal by the Dartmouth Harbour Commissioners to charge the cost of the 50ft wide embankment to the private yachts using the harbour, and to a coal tax on coal brought into the harbour by sea and used within the borough. However, Simpson depended on the rich yacht owners, who were his friends and customers, for his business. :-

If harbour taxes drove them away, it would be a bad thing for Simpson and if the townspeople had to pay more for their coal, then that would be a bad thing for them. Also, the coal bunkering trade was increasing, resulting in large clouds of dust polluting the harbour area..

To add to this, the Commissioners were Liberal and Simpson was a right-wing Tory of the worst sort. By playing on the opposition of the petty bourgeoisie to paying rates and their concern as to the potential loss of trade from yacht owners and visitors alike, Simpson was able to whip up anti-Embankment feeling against the Commissioners and their allies the Town Council. In spite of his efforts the Dartmouth Harbour Commissioners built the Embankment along the river front of the town, although it bankrupted them for a number of years. Meanwhile, Simpson became Mayor, from 1882 until 1891. During this period retrenchment was the guiding principle in Dartmouth.

Meanwhile, opposition to Simpson's proposal was not long in appearing. A meeting was held in the Guildhall on 2nd Feb 1887 when the two ideas were discussed. One idea was to lay out the New Ground as a public pleasure gardens and the other was the Cottage Hospital plan. A third idea was a memorial to Thomas Newcomen. This was put forward by a local engineer John Bovey, "an inventor of sorts". As was usual with Simpson, he had 'packed' the meeting, but even so, on a show of hands, the Cottage Hospital plan was carried only narrowly, by 38 votes against 34. Simpson now announced that a subscription list would be opened.

Not dismayed by the result the supporters of the pleasure gardens scheme decided to press on and to call the gardens by the name of 'Newcomin Park' in memory of the great inventor. The chairman of the meeting that took this decision was Jasper Bartlett, then a grocer and ships chandler, later a Harbour Commissioner and chairman of the Channel Coaling Company. He was motivated by a personal and political dislike of Simpson and his party, as were those who supported him.

The decision was followed by an agreement to set up a subscription list to provide funds for the project. During the course of the meeting it was stated by Mr. Bartlett that the New Ground, some 1.5 acres in size and lying to the north and east of the Butterwalk, had been conveyed in 1873 by the Duchy of Cornwall, in perpetuity, to the people of Dartmouth.

Therefore, it should be used for their benefit and not for Council revenues. A dubious point!

In an editorial a few days after, Cranford pointed out that the two projects were rivals and that the hospital would require annual funding and would serve only a section of the population. The Newcomin Park scheme was more in keeping with the spirit of the Jubilee and would serve all of the community. By this time subscriptions totalled £146-13-0. The Hospital Committee had now stated that the capital cost of their project would be £1000 and provide a 10 bed hospital. The annual costs would amount to £200. To date they had £361 in donations and annual subscriptions of £74-0-6.

By the middle of March increases in funds were drying up. Cranford stated that as the project was intended only to benefit Simpson and his friends it lacked support. Indeed Mayor Simpson, looking perhaps for a knighthood, was moved to desperate measures and took the decision to cut back on the Cottage Hospital plans and to kill off the rival Newcomin Park scheme. Although an engineer himself, making his fortune out of the manufacture of the Kingdon patent compound steam engine, Simpson was too self-centred to have any concern for the memory of Thomas Newcomen.

Having got wind of Simpson's intentions the opposition scheme supporters set up a sub-committee to meet with the Town Council and find a compromise solution. By April their own funds stood at £300 out of £500 required and so they exhibited a model of the plan drawn up by Alfred Chase for the Newcomin Park so that people might see how the area would look when it was laid out.

The meeting was held on 6th April when the Council rejected the scheme, Simpson stating that no scheme involving public property could go ahead unless the Council had control of it. Furthermore, he stated that Mr. Humphrey, a local chemist and a principal sponsor of the Park scheme, had no 'locii standi' until the scheme was approved at a public meeting by a majority of 2/1 as his scheme had been, (by 44 to 18).

By making up new rules, as he went along, as he always did, Simpson said that no scheme that had not been considered by the Council in closed session could be approved. Under Simpson's tenure of office open meetings were few and far between and published minutes even fewer.

Two weeks later the Council issued their terms for approval. They would sanction only 2 avenues of trees and would not permit the urinal which dominated the area to be moved. The area was not to be enclosed nor anything done to stop the New Ground being used for unloading of ships. Nothing must be built that would cost more than £25 p.a. to maintain.

The following day Simpson called a meeting in the Guildhall to inform the public of the progress of the Hospital scheme which he said was now well advanced. They had rented a house on Customs House Quay at 10/- per week and, by reducing the beds from 10 to 5 and renting out part of the premises, running costs would be reduced to £150 p. a. Of course, said Simpson, these economies would not have been necessary if the Newcomin

Park scheme had not drained off potential contributors. Cranford recorded that opinion at the meeting was divided, but the scheme was approved on a 3yr trial basis.

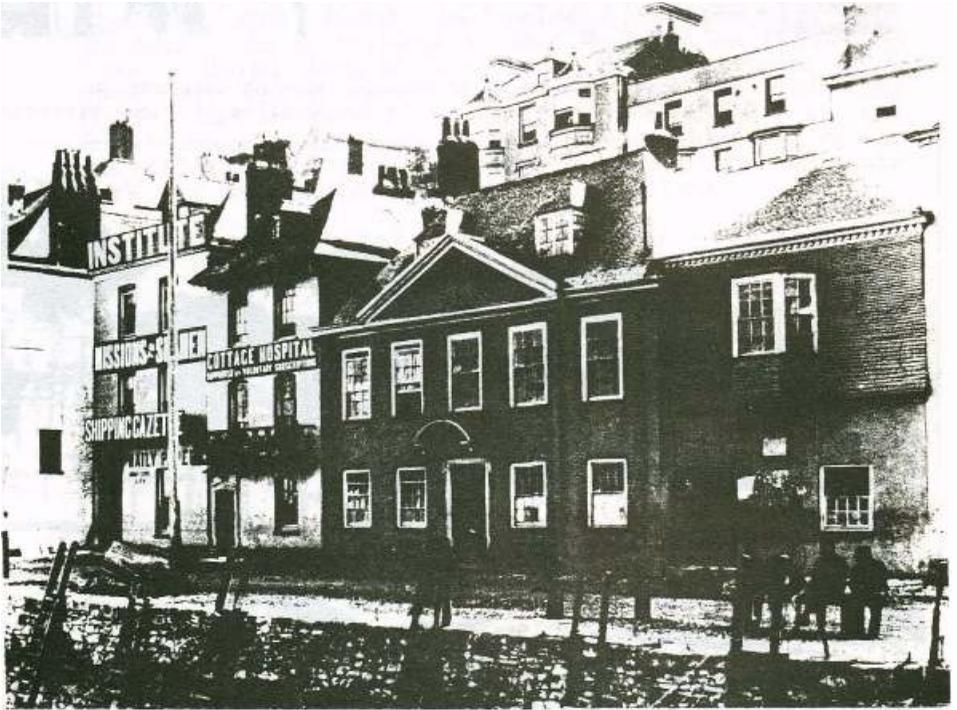


Fig 3 Dartmouth Cottage Hospital, Bayard's Cove, Dartmouth. Opened 21st June 1887 to commemorate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.



Fig 4 Royal Avenue Gardens, Dartmouth, Opening Ceremony on 21st June 1887 to commemorate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.



Fig 5 The new Royal Avenue hardens, Dartmouth, the public pleasure ground and the first Bandstand

On 28th April the Park Committee published a plan for the 'Gardens' drawn up by a Mr. Clare, to be carried out by Mr. Morris, head gardener to Sir T.G.Freake. Apart from avenues of trees and rockeries, there was to be a raised band stand, whilst a gas lamp and a drinking fountain were to be donated by Sir H.P.Seale, a leading member of the political faction opposed to Mayor Simpson. Work on laying out the pleasure gardens began on 13th May 1887, by which time the subscriptions totalled £330 out of the £500 estimated cost. Believing that the Newcomin Park scheme could be realised in perpetuity only with the agreement of the Town Council the promoters decided that the only course of action open to them, in the face of the implacable opposition of Simpson and the Town Council, as shown by their prohibitive conditions, was to hand over the Newcomin Park to the Council.

In this way the pleasure gardens would co-exist with the Cottage Hospital. What they had not bargained for was the decision of Simpson to exercise his right to select a name for the gardens. As a tribute to Her Majesty he chose the name - Royal Avenue Gardens - by which name they have been known ever since. On 21st June 1887 the foundation stone of the fountain was laid in the Royal Avenue Gardens. On 9th September with the installation of a 60 cp Sugg gas lamp the Newcomin Park, as we should call it, was complete.--

The Cottage Hospital opened its door - it had only one - on 21st June - in a house on Bayards Cove Quay. In 1894 the present Cottage Hospital was built on the South Embankment. However, it was never named the Queen Victoria Memorial Cottage Hospital at any time then or since.

Thus ended the most promising attempt up to that time to erect a permanent memorial in Dartmouth to the memory of Thomas Newcomen. Nothing more was to happen for the next quarter of a century.

1911-1913. The Newcomen Institute proposed.

In the autumn of 1911 there was comment on the need for a tangible memorial to the memory of Thomas Newcomen in the town where he was born and which was the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. In October 1911 a meeting was convened under the chairmanship of the ex-mayor, Charles Peek. Discussion began with a suggestion from Mr. E. W. Holdsworth F. Z. S., who was living in Dartmouth at that time, that a statue should be erected.

Mr.Holdsworth stated that, in his opinion, as no one knew Newcomen personally, a granite obelisk with a commemorative plaque showing a representation of an atmospheric engine upon it together with an inscription would be a suitable memorial. The obelisk should be placed on the New Quay opposite the Castle Hotel. This would be more acceptable than a plaque on the New Ground or a mansion or council building with which Newcomen had no connection.

Col. C. R. Bum, MP for Torquay, moved that a fund be established to provide for the erection of a statue.

The motion was seconded by Major Knollys of Dartmouth. A Mr.J.Wiltshire commented that many Birmingham engineers would like to be associated with the project and possibly many Cornish engineers also as the engine had been widely used in that county. Mr Tangye of Tangye Pumps could be approached too. Mr. F. J.Voisey of Dartmouth, a local builder with a radical line in politics, suggested that the memorial take the form of the 'Newcomen Memorial Baths' to be erected on land shortly to be offered for sale by the Raleigh Estate Trustees. The land in question did not become available until

after the end of the Great War when Council housing began to be built at Townstal. By then Mr. Voisey had become the subject of a Government Report into the maladministration of public health in Dartmouth. Another radical councillor, Mr. Ffolliot seconded this proposal. The Revd. A.K. Moyer proposed a Newcomen Memorial Scholarship in Engineering. Finally it was agreed that a Newcomen Memorial Committee be set up to consider the alternative schemes and to draw up a proposal with a view to a further meeting at an early date.

A meeting was held on 16th Jan. 1912 to discuss the form of the memorial and Major L. F. Knollys proposed that the memorial take the form of a museum to house valuable Dartmouth documents (then lying in the old gaol) and a reading room, for there was then no public library in Dartmouth. The two together to be known as the Newcomen Institute. They should, he thought, be able to raise £500 as a start - if not then they would have to settle for an obelisk. Mr. Voisey seconded the proposal adding that the Town Council ought to make available a site and possibly provide a grant out of Borough Funds. Other proposals were discussed after which the meeting then resolved to issue 5000 copies of a previously drafted letter, dated 23rd Jan. 1912, appealing for donations.

The letter contained a reference to 1913 as the bicentenary of Newcomen's death. !!! This would account for the activity in this year to erect a memorial.

An article appeared in the Dartmouth Chronicle in January 1912 written by Jasper E. Cooper who described himself as an engineer and Town Councillor, living at 'Bonheur' in Dartmouth. Dr Cooper is the same Dr. Cooper whose notes are amongst the papers deposited by the Newcomen Society in the Exeter Record Office. After reciting the life and work of Thomas Newcomen, he suggested that a fitting memorial to the work and memory of the great engineer would be a Newcomen

4 Museum. At this time a letter was published :- stating that the remains of a Newcomen engine were

5 lying between Oldham and Ashton. He added "that some time ago a number of Yankees expressed their desire to remove the engine to America." It was written by a Mr. F. Lovett.

At the same time it was reported that H. R. H. The Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, had sent an unsolicited donation of £5 towards the Memorial Fund and that Mayor Charles Peek, had made a similar donation. George H. Collins, head of the bunkering company that bore his name, donated £20 and offered to increase it to £50 "if any four other gentlemen will do the same." This was the same George Collins who had donated the Newcomen memorial link in the Mayors chain nearly 20 years earlier.

Nothing more was heard of the appeal until August 1912 when the Chronicle printed a letter from Sir William Bailey F.R.G.S; M.I.M.E. past president of the Library Association of the U.K. Sir William pointed out that there was no memorial to Newcomen and that for 100 years before Watt's double acting HP engine the

atmospheric engine was at work for pumping and other purposes. He himself had seen many Newcomen engines at work.

The Memorial Committee was formed as stated earlier, in January 1912, and at a meeting held shortly after, it was decided to ask the Town Council for a Museum site in the Butterwalk. The Town Council agreed, in principle, to offer the lease of No. 3 The Butterwalk (the third house from the eastern end). The lease of this shop and the premises over were then held by Thomas Fleet, a fishmonger, and was due for renewal in 1917.

From August to November 1912 the matter passed backwards and forwards between the Committee and the Council with various public meetings thrown in to keep up the level of interest and support. No final decision was taken by the Council — the problem being that the Committee wanted to insert a clause in the lease allowing the Committee to sublet part of the premises for rent so as to build up a fund from which to maintain the building. The Town Council saw the matter in a different light, indeed one councillor stated that "the memorial committee might turn itself into a private trading company and compete with local tradesmen."

In an editorial, the Chronicle pointed out that, "if the Council do not reach a decision soon then the scheme will have to be abandoned and a hypothetical monument to the great inventor be erected. What has been agreed at one meeting has been reversed at the next."

Here matters rested in a state of impasse. The interest in a Newcomen memorial waned as Dartmothians became more interested in a Free Library, which appeared the more easily attainable and in 1913 such a library was opened in premises donated by the owner of Cromwell House in Lower Street. The funds donated for the Newcomen Institute were invested as there was no chance of a quick resolution with the Council over matters in dispute. During the Great War, Thomas Fleet died and the promised premises were re-leased, but not to the Newcomen Memorial Committee, which was now dormant.

1918 and after.

After the end of the Great War the members of the Dartmouth Newcomen Association, as the Memorial Committee had become known, were rallied by the efforts of a pre-War member who had taken over as Secretary in 1917, a Mr. Bernard Magenis. Earlier he had been a pupil of Dr. H.W. Dickinson, author of the paper entitled 'Thomas Newcomen, 1633-1729', published by the Dartmouth Newcomen Association. What happened then is best related in a report which appeared in the Transactions of the Newcomen Society for 1963 which states :-

"The 1914 war had disturbed the working of this Committee but Mr. Magenis rallied the members and the Haytor granite obelisk in the Royal Avenue Gardens was set up in 1921. At the unveiling, Engineer-Captain Edgar T. Smith, R.N. (ret'd) laid a chaplet on behalf of the newly-formed Newcomen Society.



Pic 6 The Thomas Newcomen Memorial in Royal Avenue Gardens, Dartmouth
an obelisk of Haytor granite set up in 1921.

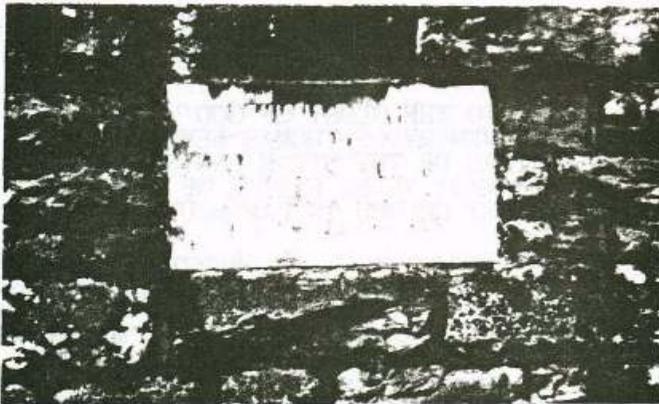


Fig 7 The Memorial Plaque in Lower Street Dartmouth.

"This is the site of the house where THOMAS NEWCOMEN lived when he built his famous engines".

The Dartmouth Association and the Society held a joint summer meeting in Dartmouth in 1929 to celebrate the bi-centenary of the death of Thomas Newcomen. Dr. Dickinson was present then, and that year published the brief biography on Newcomen referred to above."

1921. The Memorial plaque in Lower Street.

The balance of the funds remaining after the unveiling of the memorial stone in the Royal Avenue Gardens was used to erect a memorial plaque on the site of Newcomen's house in Lower Street. The site of the front of Newcomen's house has been shown by the author in an earlier paper to have been in Higher Street. Consequently the plaque has been placed on the site of the back door of that portion of the house occupied from 1768 to 1786 by the inventor's daughter-in-law, Hannah.

1953. The Memorial Plaque in Dartmouth Baptist Church.

Following the discovery in this year of a second letter written by Newcomen, which letter made clear that he had been the leader of the Dartmouth Baptists and had opened his house as a place of meeting and worship, the Dartmouth association resolved to place a memorial plaque in the Dartmouth Baptist Church which was then sited in Meeting House Lane (later Baptist Lane) and now Chapel Lane, off the old Higher Street at the southern end of the Newcomen Road. The 1953 Transactions comment on this event continues as follows:-

"Mr. Bernard Magenis then unveiled the Memorial before the dedication by the Minister. The Tablet was inscribed with the words :-

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY OF
THOMAS NEWCOMEN
"FATHER" OF THE STEAM ENGINE" AND FOR MANY
YEARS PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN
DARTMOUTH

In a Press interview, Mr. Magenis, who is 88, recalled the unsuccessful attempt to obtain a Newcomen engine. He was outbid by Mr. Henry Ford, who secured the two engines that Mr. Magenis had located, and one of them went to the Edison Institute in America, where it was erected and is in working order."

1960 - 1964. The Newcomen Engine and the Engine House.

The final chapter of the story of Newcomen memorials in Dartmouth began in 1960 when the Council of the Society appointed a committee, under the chairmanship of Charles E. Lee (Past President) to consider what would be the most appropriate manner in which to celebrate the Tercentenary of the birth of Thomas Newcomen. Amongst the items considered was the form of a permanent memorial in Dartmouth. It was decided subsequently that an early example of a Newcomen beam engine should be acquired and re-erected in Dartmouth.

No doubt it was a 'chicken and egg' situation for a suitable engine existed at Hawkesbury Junction, long disused, where it had been a pumping engine on the Coventry Canal. It was known that this engine, then owned by the British Transport Commission, was available. On enquiry, the B. T. C. stated they would be prepared to transfer the engine to the Society as a gift. In order to find a location in Dartmouth suitable as a permanent home for the engine the co-operation of the Dartmouth Corporation was sought and secured. The Corporation set up a sub-committee to find a site or building in which to house the engine. Over the succeeding months the Society completed the transfer of ownership of the engine from the B. T. C. to the Newcomen Society and launched an appeal for funds to cover the dismantling transport, restoration and re-erection of the engine.

Meanwhile, at Dartmouth, the Corporation had located a suitable building for conversion into an Engine House. The building had been an electricity substation built by the Borough of Torquay when they were the supply authority for the area; they handed on the lease of the building to their successors, the South Western Electricity Board. The building was situated on the Reclaimed Land, just to the north of the Royal Avenue Gardens, conceived as the Newcomin Park, which was first embanked in 1685 as the New Ground. No site more appropriate could have been found for the building since it is located within 100 yards of the house where Thomas Newcomen was born in 1663/4. At that time the young man would have had an uninterrupted view of the spot, albeit it was water in those times, from the rear windows of his father's house.

The Council of the Society appointed Mr. Arthur Pyne and Mr. J.A. Crabtree to supervise the work of dismantling and removal of the engine from its site at Hawkesbury to Dartmouth. They began their task with an inspection visit to the site in June 1962. It was after this visit that Mr. Pyne accepted the task of carrying out the work, which he subsequently described in a paper presented to the Newcomen Society in October 1965. The engine in its dismantled state reached Dartmouth in March 1964, having undergone some needy restoration en route. Temporarily it was stored in the Corporation Depot.

Thanks to a generous gift of £1750 from Mr. Percy Russell of Dartmouth to the Appeal Fund the work of dismantling the engine began at once. The sum donated by Mr. Russell was sufficient to cover all the work being undertaken by Mr. Pyne up to the re-erection on prepared foundations at Dartmouth. Mr. Russell, an engineer himself, and a pioneer historian of Dartmouth, had long cherished the hope that one day a permanent memorial, such as that now envisaged by the Society, would be established in Dartmouth. He had been a stalwart supporter of the Dartmouth Newcomen Association and a publicist for its aims and objectives. Now he could do something practical.

The first tangible sign of the memorial was the laying of the foundation stone of the Engine House by the President of the Society, Mr. Percy Jump, at the annual chaplet laying ceremony on 26th July 1963. Throughout 1963 and early 1964 re-erection of the engine was carried out under the supervision of Arthur Pyne and J.A. Crabtree, assisted by Mr. E. E. Harvey (Borough Engineer) and his staff. Finally, on 24th July 1964 the Engine House was formally declared "open" by the President of the Newcomen Society, Mr. W.K.V. Gale. Amongst those present, including civic dignitaries, was Mr. Percy Russell. To pay tribute to the contribution of Mr. Russell to this project one cannot do better than to quote the Transactions in recording the event.:-

"Mr. Russell had for many years been an ardent propagandist for the adequate recognition of the work and genius of Thomas Newcomen. He must have regarded this day as a gratifying reward to labours in which he had taken a very active part; his timely and generous personal contribution to the Memorial Fund, indeed had made possible an immediate start on the work as soon as the engine became accessible. We are glad that he was able to see this memorable day, so shortly to be followed by his lamentable decease."

On this bitter-sweet note the story of the Newcomen memorials in Dartmouth was nearly at an end, but in a final flourish came the international recognition of Dartmouth as the true birthplace of the Industrial Revolution.

In 1981, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in pursuance of its Landmark Program of recognising sites of international importance in the unfolding history of Engineering awarded this accolade to Dartmouth as the birthplace of Thomas Newcomen, whose invention of the atmospheric steam engine was a turning point in history. This being the definition of a Landmark event, and the location a Landmark site.

The event was described and reported in the Bulletin (No. 121.) by the Editor, John H. Boyes, and the following report draws heavily on his text.

On 24th October 1981, the presentation of a bronze memorial plaque was made by Professor J.J. Ermeneck, Chairman of the ASME National History and Heritage Committee. Describing Newcomen's engine as a strategic invention for western civilisation, Prof. Ermeneck said the award recognised Newcomen's nerve and speed in developing the engine and Newcomen's place as & progenitor of the rational knowledge of heat engines. He pointed out, also, the relative position in history of Thomas Newcomen and James Watt vis a vis the steam engine and the the separate condenser. A point made also by John S. Alien in his address on the biographical details of the great inventor.

Dr. Robert B. Gaither, ASME President, presented the memorial plaque of behalf of his Society which reads:-

International Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark

The Newcomen Steam-Atmospheric Engine

The unprecedented innovation of the steam-atmospheric Engine (c.1712) by Thomas Newcomen and his assistant, John Calley, stands at the beginning of the development of practical thermal prime movers in the world.

It was indeed one of the strategic innovations in world history and the single greatest act of synthesis in the ensuing history of the steam engine.

Accepting the plaque, Dr. Angus Buchanan, President of the Newcomen Society, suggested that this was an occasion of singular significance and a secular sacrament. He emphasised:-

That the plaque recognised Thomas Newcomen as an engineer who changed the face of the world,

That the plaque recognised as a technological leap forward Newcomen's¹ invention.

That the international gathering there that day reflected the place of Thomas Newcomen in the common inheritance.

However, it was not to be the end for in 1989 the Council of the Society decided that the responsibility for the custody and administration of the Engine & Engine House should be handed over to the Dartmouth Town Council. A delegation of the Society's officers visited Dartmouth for discussions with the Mayor and the Town Clerk to finalise arrangements. In 1991 the formal handover took place. In late 1991 the Town Council decided to carry out an extensive redecoration • of the Engine House and to arrange better signposting about Dartmouth.

Authors Note:

I first met Percy Russell in 1958 when I was researching the history of the Dartmouth & Torbay Railway. At that time he was disillusioned by the reception that his history of Dartmouth had received from his fellow Dartmothians, Their apathy towards their history and heritage, particularly that of Thomas Newcomen, saddened him.

I asked him if he had any objection to my researching and writing about Dartmouth, He replied to the effect that I was welcome to the place. As a result of his encouragement I have persisted in researching and writing about 18th and 19th century Dartmouth, and Newcomen in particular, for the last 30 years. I still have in my possession some of his notes on Dartmouth history, which he gave me on one of the last occasions that we met.

December 1991.

Notes and References.

Abbreviations.

DCr	Dartmouth Chronicle.
DRO	Devon Record Office, Exeter. Dartmouth Corporation Archives.
SM	Stuart Moore catalogue:
T. N. S	Transactions of the Newcomen Society.
B. N. S.	Bulletin of the Newcomen Society.

General: The principal source of information for this paper has been the files of the Dartmouth Chronicle.

DCr.Ref. 1 .

A complete set of volumes from 1873 is held by the present owners of the paper beginning in 1873. Another complete set starting in Sept 1869 are held in the Newspaper Library, Colindale, London.

DCr.Ref. 2 .

For the earlier period a unique copy, covering 1855 to 1863 inclusive, is held in the Reference Section of Torquay Central Library, together with a similar volume for the period from 1869 until 1872 inclusive. These two volumes were purchased and presented to the Library on long term loan by Mr. J.E. Horsley, founder Curator of the Brixham Museum.

DCr.Ref.3.

For the period from 1864 up to 1869 inclusive a unique copy is in the possession of the Author.

No files have been traced, nor are any thought to exist for the Dartmouth Observer or the advertising sheet that preceded it.

Chapter references.

1851. The first attempt at a memorial.

DCr. Ref 1. After the merger of the two papers, Valentine Butteris became sub-editor of the Dartmouth Chronicle.

1864-7. The Newcomen Road.

DCr.Ref.3 . Reference to Bell's plan is noted in I.H. Smart. " The Dartmouth Residences of Thomas Newcomen & his Family" T. N. S. Vol. LX. 1988 - 89. pp 145 - 160.

1868. Newcomin Cottage.

For details of Lidstone's claims, see W.A. Young "Lidstone's Pamphlets on Newcomen". T.N.S. Vol XV. pp 67 - 71. For further comments see also my paper quoted above.

1873. The mystery attempt.

DCr. Ref. 1. It is possible that Lidstone's paper was presented as a section paper and so not printed, or based on his 1871 pamphlet, already published.

1887. Dartmouth and Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

DCr. _ Ref 1. Due to the Embankment dispute the publication of Council minutes was restricted. The Minute book _ containing details of decisions taken was lost during legal proceedings arising from the Embankment dispute.

1911-1913. The Newcomen Institute.

DC. Ref 1. There was a large influx of mechanical and marine engineers into Dartmouth in the period from 1897 to 1922. This was due to the expansion of the works of Simpson, Strickland, the establishment of a small naval yard attached to the Britannia Royal Naval College and the establishment of a Torpedo Factory by Robert E. Froude. It was this community that was behind the pressure for a memorial to Thomas Newcomen.

SM.2035. Dartmouth Leasebook. 1858 onwards. Lease No. 679, renewal of a lease of 1838 in 1917 for 56 years to the Executors of Misses. Skelton.

1918 and After.

H.W. Dickinson. "Thomas Newcomen 1663 - 1729." Revised by Percy Russell, 1951. Pub. Dartmouth Newcomen Association, should be read with care.

T.N.S. Vol. XXXV. pp 217 - 218. The references to the history of Sandquay dockyard are incorrect. Only the dockyard complex was built by the Seale family in 1792. Wooden shipbuilding began later and effectively ceased in 1837. It was restarted by Wm. Kelly in 1855. George Philip began building in a part of the yard, in 1863. Philip & Son bought the bankrupt works of Simpson Strickland at Noss in 1919 and ran both yards until 1963.

1921. The Memorial Plaque in Lower Street. T.N.S. Vol XXXV, p218.

I.H. Smart. "The Dartmouth Residences of Thomas Newcomen and his Family", T.N.S. Vol LX. 1988-89. pp 145-160.

1953. The Memorial Plaque in Dartmouth Baptist Church

T.N.S. Vol XXXV, p218.

1960-1964. The Newcomen Engine and the Engine House."

References in the Transactions are:-

Vol.XXXIII p.148. Annual Report of the Council.
1960-61.
Vol.XXXIV p.166. do.1961-62.
Vol.XXXV p.1-2.Tercentenary Celebration Report. Ibid. pp. 217-221. Summer Meeting Report.1963. Ibid. pp. 244. Annual report of the Council. 1962-63
Vol.XXXVI. p.147 and Plate XXXVI. Newcomen Memorial Engine.Vol.XXXVIII. p. 1-3 and Plates I-IV. " From Hawkesbury to Dartmouth " . b y Arthur Pyne.

1981. The ASME Presentation Plaque. A Landmark Site.

B.N.S. Vol.CXXI.p.3-4.Report by John H.Boyes.

DECEMBER 1991.