

**THE LIFE OF HANNAH NEWTON – MISTRESS MILLER**  
**1793-1875**

Hannah was born as Hannah Potter in the village of Great Bedwyn, south of Marlborough in Wiltshire. She was baptised in the parish church on 27 October 1793.

The Potter family enjoyed a long association with the village, a Thomas potter was elected Portreeve in 1762, the family were also the village Bakers, and brothers Thomas and John worked the Watermill up until 1803, after which it went out of use because it was deprived on water by the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal – all the other mills in the area suffered a similar fate, the River Dun being a modest stream thereafter.

On 27 March 1815, at Great Bedwyn, Hannah married John Newton a Miller from the hamlet of Weston on the River Lambourne in Berkshire. It is not known how the happy couple became acquainted but one possibility is that John had been apprenticed to the Potter family whilst they worked the mill at Great Bedwyn.

Some background on the Newton family is required here. They had worked Weston Mill since 1699 and the lease had been held by 4 generations before it passed to John Newton upon the death of his Father in 1812. It was a 2 pair mill with attached saw bench and was owned by the Jones family of Ramsbury Manor.

John and Hannah commenced married life at Weston and, between 1815 and 1828, Hannah produced six children, but the problem was that all of them were girls and the leasehold document for the Mill was based on male lives.

The Lease in force at that time had been created in 1785 based on 3 lives, John's Father, John himself and a cousin Francis. John's Father had died in 1812 and Francis died young, so when John himself died early in 1823, aged only 50, in some kind of accident, there were no survivors to hold the lease.

Hannah was 20 years younger than John and was left with six young children – she was actually pregnant with the youngest, Hannah, at the time of John's death. Administration of John's estate was actually obtained in August 1823. Undaunted, Hannah is believed to have set off for London on horseback to have the Lease transferred to her name. This would have been a considerable achievement at that time since property normally passed through the hands of male heirs.

She was now faced with the problem of the day to day running of the Mill, coupled with that of bringing up a very young family of girls who could no doubt help around the house but not in the Mill.

It must have been at about this time that religion began to play a part in her life. The Newtons at Weston had been faithful adherents of the Church of England and their names appeared at regular intervals in the Church Warden's accounts at Welford as contributing to several good causes. However, in about 1820 Primitive Methodism gained in popularity and was widely spread through rural areas by itinerant preachers.

One of these, a Mr Russell, states in his book 'Record of Events in Primitive Methodism' that whilst preaching in the Lambourne valley he went to Weston to sleep at Mrs Newton's. "This kind lady's miller and his man had accompanied me nearly all the day and it would have been woe to any one that should have dared to molest me". This occurred in 1830. The life of an Itinerant Preacher was obviously somewhat hazardous as, after being arrested at Chaddleworth a nearby village, Mr Russell spent some time in Abingdon Goal. So Hannah appears to have employed at least two people to run the Mill but the wording of this entry suggests that she was very much in charge.

This observation is enforced by the 1841 census where Hannah is clearly described as the Miller at Weston, with three of her daughters still living with her and only one man, John Gallaway, an Agricultural Labourer, living in the household. He must have helped to work the Mill to some degree. Her youngest daughter, Hannah, is still only 15 in the census; nevertheless in 1844, and therefore aged about 18, she upped and married William Dance, a Miller naturally, whose family worked the Town Mill at Marlborough in Wiltshire.

The marriage took place in the village of Woolhampton, which is some distance from Weston, and on the marriage certificate Hannah's place of residence and also her Father's name and profession are left blank. This suggests that she was possibly estranged from her Mother at this time and the newlyweds did not start their married life at Weston but rather returned to Marlborough.

The reason for this turn of events is not clear. When William Dance died in 1891 his obituary states that he had been a member of the Primitive Methodist Church for fifty years and a Local Preacher for forty-nine years, so there must have been some form of reconciliation in the family shortly after the wedding.

In the 1851 census, Hannah is still head of the household at Weston; she has just one remaining daughter living with her. However, John Evans, a Miller, is described as her servant and lives on the premises. Hannah is described as a Miller in all the Trade Directories of the period.

In 1861 the Census taker now describes Hannah as Miller (Mistress), implying that it was most unusual to find a woman running this type of business. All her children have now left home but she has two grandchildren living with her – they are daughters of William and Hannah Dance. She does employ John Peck, a Carter, as a servant and John Mildenhall, a Miller, lives in an adjacent property.

In about 1868 William Dance moved from Marlborough with his wife and children to live permanently at Weston Mill, and suddenly the house was generously endowed with Millers, as in the 1871 Census both William and three of his young sons are described as such, and a total of eleven people were living in the house. Hannah, however, now aged 78 is still described as Head of the Household.

This must have been a very fulfilling part of her life because she no longer needed to worry about the running of the Mill, and also in 1864, as testified by a plaque over the door, a

Primitive Methodist Chapel was opened on land immediately adjacent to the Mill, and it is presumably here that her son-in-law William Dance must have done much of his preaching.

It has been possible to locate several family photographs from the period. Of particular interest is one of Weston Mill, clearly recognisable as the building that we see today, and the view is enhanced because the building was not separated from the road by a modern fence, and also because several of the family members are in the photograph. There are also photographs of a lady believed to be Hannah Newton and also her daughter Hannah and son-in-law William Dance.

In 1873 Hannah is recorded as paying yearly Tythes to Welford Church, a continuation of a record spread over many years.

Hannah died on New Years Day 1875 aged 81 (her obituary stated 83). She had been a widow for 52 years, and for at least 40 of those years she could quite truthfully be called the Mistress Miller of Weston Mill. Her reward for all this hard work was a modest estate of less than £300. She was survived by four of her daughters – Lydia, Mary Anne, Sarah and Hannah. Hannah actually died very shortly after her mother leaving William Dance, now a widower, in sole charge at the Mill. The business had been effectively run by the Newton family for almost 175 years.

#### Acknowledgements.....

The research carried out by Colin Brown and Elizabeth Ballard , two former members of the Berkshire Family History Society, has been invaluable in the creation of this document.

Great Bedwyn parish records are held at the Wiltshire County Record Office  
Information about Great Bedwyn come from The Book of the Bedwys ,produced by the Bedwyn Historic Society in 2003.

Welford Churchwardens accounts are deposited at the Berkshire County Record Office under reference DP/147/5/1.

Weston rent records are held at the same location under D/EBu M31.