

The Town That Never Was

As an outsider, having moved to Dorset a few years ago, I personally find everything about the area fascinating But if you’re a local and maybe were born here, then it’s probably time you stopped reading since you may well know all of this stuff already and can quite possibly tell me more than I’ve either read or heard about.

You may already know that Poole Harbour is a fascinating place by simply having paddled around enjoying the environment but I’m sure you’ll agree that looking into its history gives some of the places we visit a little extra level of interest. For instance you will undoubtedly have noticed that many of the names of streets and some of the current names of places, include the mention of ‘salt’ in some way (Salterns Marina, Saltings Copse, Saltings Hotel, etc) and this of course goes back at least to the occupation of the area by the Romans, but more likely back to the Iron age and the settlements in the harbour at that time. A recent research paper about the harbour quoted *“it is not surprising that Poole Harbour and the Isle of Purbeck were producing salt on a significant scale (beyond local provision) by the Late Iron Age. This area probably has the best evidence for the development of a salt industry prior to the point when most other areas are just beginning to specialise in other areas of southern Britain. The presence of at least two potential salt production sites with possible Early Iron Age origins in the Isle of Purbeck, suggests that production started in this area and then spread north across the shores of Poole Harbour.”*

So there’s lots of hidden history that can be traced and is recorded – after all Poole was one of the main ‘Staple’ ports along the south coast in the 15th Century – permitted to insist that any vessel’s cargo could be unloaded and offered for sale at the port for about three days, unless a tax was paid of course and as such the port became very wealthy – so records are often very detailed.

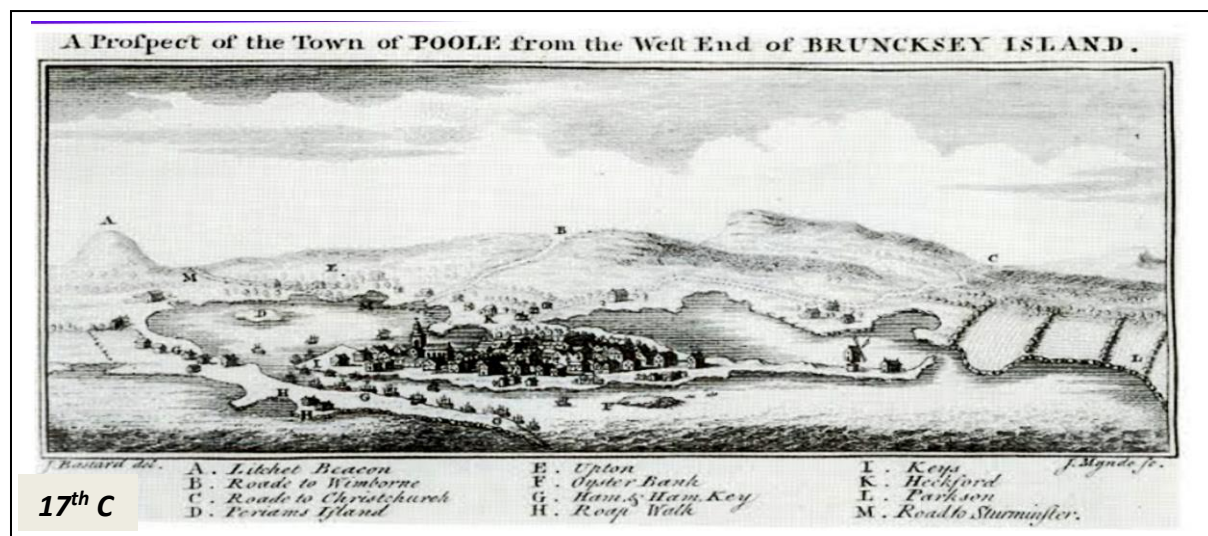
The ‘harbour’ has only been such for the past 7,000 or 8,000 years; prior to that it wasn’t so much a harbour as a couple of rivers twisting and turning their way down to the sea at the eastern end of the Solent but once the area flooded and became a partially enclosed shoreline it not only provided shallow tidal areas, ideal for the trapping of tidal waters and therefore the large scale production of salt, but it also naturally offered protection for fishing boats too - and fishing villages developed. The main Saxon town on the harbour of Wareham (although a little way up the River Frome) also offered significant protection from raiders with it being a few miles inland. Unfortunately no one mentioned that to the Vikings who in the 9th and again in the 11th centuries rowed their way through the harbour on their way to pay a visit – and thinking to maybe stay a while – in Wareham. But as that was one of the topics of the ‘Chapter One’ of the “PH saga” I won’t dwell on it again here – so follow the link on the website and read that some other time.

(<http://www.pooleharbourcanooclub.uk/documents/Poole-Harbour-An-appreciation-Bill-R-fin.pdf>)

We might return to the salt-production a little later though but it’s really the 13th Century that I’d like to time travel back to right now.

The area of the harbour that interests me for this ‘Chapter 2’ has also been the destination for several of the first Saturday paddles that I’ve led in the last couple of years and that’s the

thriving community of the ‘town that might have been’, Newton. Newton lies on Purbeck’s ‘mainland’ just across from St Elyn’s and Bursey Islands ... (you know them of course)... You can sometimes imagine; in the silence, the murmur of the ‘town-that-might-have-been’ through the trees; hidden amongst the bays and peninsulas between Ower and Goathorn – the bustling streets and tightly packed houses – - but actually as you may know, this is a town that never happened, despite the King instructing his ‘Constable’ at Corfe; Richard de Bosco to get moving on the project of creating a rival to Poole – bringing in extra wealth and taxes for the crown.

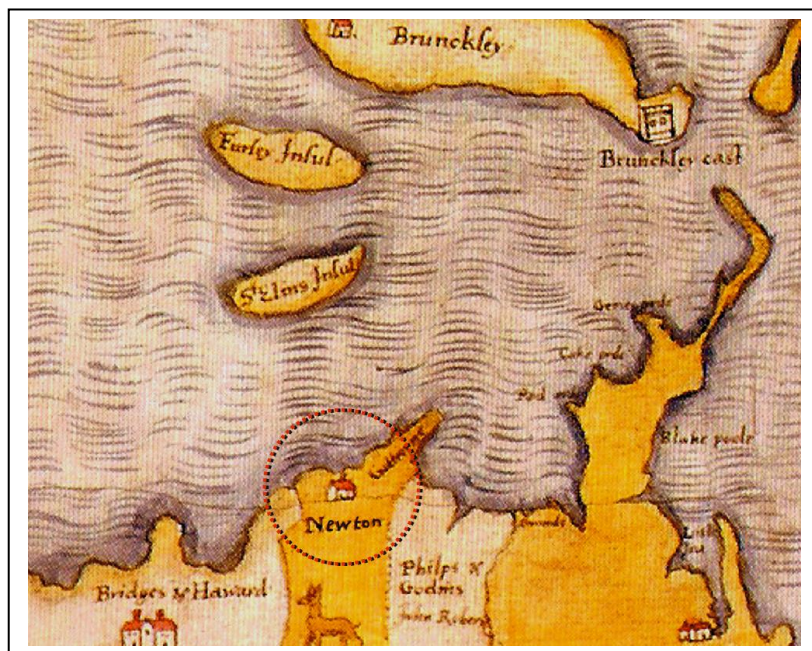


Not that Poole would have been quite such an amazing place back then as it currently now is of course – Even in later centuries the town was not that large. Tudor topographer John Leland when visiting around 1536 commented *“pole is not town of auncient occupying in merchandise; but rather of olde tyme a pooe fisshar village. There be men alyve that saw almost all the town of Pole kyvered with segge and risshe...”*, but following Poole’s being granted a charter by William Longspee the fishing town would have seen a fair level of growth between 1245 when the Charter was sold to the folk of Poole - and forty years on in February 1286 when Edward 1st instructed that ‘Netwon’ – well actually “Gotowre Super Mare” should be built. The demand read : *“lay out with sufficient streets and lanes, and adequate sites for a market and church and plots for merchants and others, a new town with a harbour in a place called Gotowre Super Mare, in the parish of Stodlaunde ”*

Only 3 months later, in May 1286 there must have been some progress perhaps in the building, since Edward 1st granted *“to the burgesses of Nova Villa...of all the liberties granted to the citizens of London as set forth in the Charter to Melcombe.”* And more especially since markets were a great way of raising taxes – the inhabitants were granted permission to hold *“weekly markets at their borough on Tuesday and Friday in each week, and of a yearly fair there on St. Lawrence tide”* ‘St Lawrence tide’ was the feast day in August of St Lawrence of Rome, an early Christian martyr who suffered a grisly death at the hands of the Romans following his lack of cooperation over an instruction about the handing over of the church’s wealth – his cooperation not being as complete as the Romans would have liked in that he gave away all of the church’s wealth to the poor and then announced there was little to hand over to the Romans. A ‘Grisly punishment’ deed if ever I heard of one !

..... So whilst I've always wondered why the town didn't actually materialise – I've also wondered 'What if it had?' – With its new harbour, nestling immediately inside the entrance and out of the prevailing South West winds, with easy access by the 'South Deep' – chosen too, of course, by the 'Iron Age' jetty developers (*see "I Love Poole Harbour" 'Chapter One'*); - how might Poole's trade have suffered had Newton flourished? How different would Poole be? Would we now still have the Chain Ferry that is so much fun to wait for when leaving the harbour by kayak or when waiting in the queue of cars to cross from one side to the other? Perhaps a bridge might have been built in the 18 or 19th Centuries to link the two towns? Would Harry Paye have had so much fun retreating to the hidden parts of the area had the harbour been a busier place – and maybe it might even have been Gotowre Super Mare that would be looted and burnt by the French and Spanish fleets in 1405 in retaliation for Paye's piracy escapades against their ships – instead of Poole?

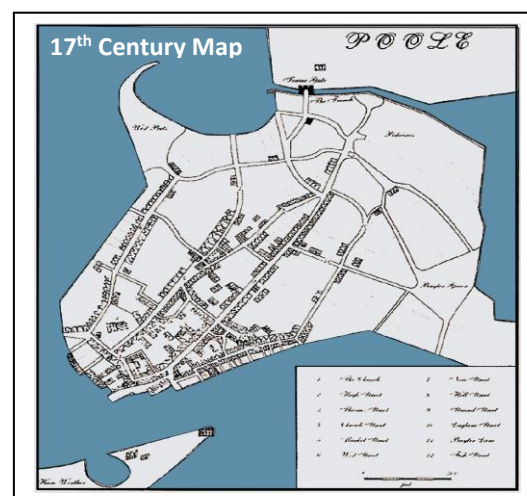
A number of archaeological surveys have never really found much evidence for anything substantial ever existing in the area where it's thought to have been, and even though it is shown on old 16th & 17th century maps around where we now find Newton Bay – its location has been thought to possibly be in various places between Ower and Goathorn. Perhaps the old name for Goathorne; Gottowre, suggests though that we do have the right site when we see 'Newton' where it is on current maps. In the 1980s when 'Oil Money' was readily available and when British Petroleum were exploring the potential oil reserves around Furzey Island (Bursey) a series of crop marks on the Purbeck shoreline were examined to see if they resulted from the presence of the foundations of old buildings or of the layout of a street structure. The results finally assumed they were 'enclosure ditches' and reported that *"on the basis of morphology alone, the evidence for large enclosure circuit with internal minor property divisions in a suitable location for settlement supports the argument that this is the site for the failed settlement"*



One earlier archaeological researcher felt the town may have been laid out, but just failed to attract settlers - although some records do show that taxes were paid by folk living in the 'town' of Gotowre {Newton} suggesting there was a time when there were people living there. In 1326, just 40 years after Edward 1st's order, legal records show the payment of fines to Corfe's Court (Newton wasn't big enough to have a court of it's own) and also payments from Burgesses (merchants or craftsmen who owned property in burghs and were allowed to trade there), paying 9d for the laying out of nets; perhaps fishing nets or perhaps wildfowl nets ? There was a wildfowl trade in the area shown by other records [*"John Haywarde holdeth one tenement with a cottage and divers closes & parcels of lande hereafter followeth with thappurtenances in Newton in the parish of Studland together with a licence to take herdes or fowle as well in the Lordes commons as upon the coostes or river of the sea there and paieth therefore yearely ... "*] – So on the one hand the place seems to be there, but on the other hand it's not looking good for Richard de Bosco when the King comes checking how everything is going with his plans for a busy market town. After all he was responsible for laying out this new town from February 1286 onwards (*" ... with sufficient streets and lanes, and adequate sites for a market and church ... "*) and it doesn't appear exactly to be thriving - but it's probably useful to remember too that the Constable of Corfe was the most important authority in the area below the King, so maybe de Bosco wasn't going to find himself being 'micromanaged'.

Poole itself was little more than an expanding fishing port with a very different structure to the town of today. A much smaller town and a far easier target to match by creating the proposed new town across the harbour than it might be today.

So what sort of world and society was Poole and Poole Harbour witness to back then and what else was going on in England that might have been a distraction for both Richard de Bosco and for Edward 1st himself – distractions enough that the creation of Gotowre Super Mare - or Newton, might have found itself at a much lower priority level than the initial command would suggest ?



Well, for one thing, just over the Purbeck

Hills Corfe Castle was still being added to – lots of workers with the 13th Century equivalent of yellow hard hats adding major bits here and there to improve the Castle's structure. Since the castle was owned by the crown, this restructuring work had been going on during the reign of Henry III and continued under Edward 1st too after he was crowned King in 1274.

Perhaps more especially, what might be considered a monumental chain of distractions for Edward lay both immediately preceding and immediately following the idea of creating "Gowtre Super Mare" Around this time Edward was at war with the Welsh Princes as well as the Scots and following Llywellyn ap Gruffydd's refusing to acknowledge Edward he had seized Simon de Montfort's daughter Eleanor, whilst on her way to marry Llywellyn in 1276.

This led to open war between Wales and England and continued until 1282. In 1284 Edward's son had died and this was also followed by the death of his newly born daughter in 1286 – the year of his instruction to Richard de Bosco regarding the creating of Newton. Between 1287 and 1289 Edward was in France expelling the Jewish community from Gascony and in 1290 he had another daughter who also died when young – and in the same year he arranged a marriage between his son and the Norwegian heir to the Scottish throne. On her way to Scotland she too died (thwarting Edward's attempts at embracing the Scottish crown) and later in 1290 Edward lost his wife Eleanor to whom he was devoted; his devotion is shown in the renowned chain of 'Eleanor Crosses' he built at each town at which her body lay on the route from Harby in Lincolnshire where she died and Westminster Abbey where she was buried. In 1291 Edward lost his mother and the rest of the 1290s were spent warring against the Welsh Princes, Scotland and their alliance with France (for which alliance he attacked Berwick) and subsequently removed the Stone of Scone to London where it is still used in coronation ceremonies. 1297 saw Edward preparing to fight France and arranging an alliance with Flanders as well as continued warring with Scotland throughout the early 1300s – and the capture and execution of William Wallace (1305). As an extra distraction Robert the Bruce had aligned himself initially with Edward but claimed the throne of Scotland in 1306 for himself - and in 1307 Edward I himself died.

Edward I's son Edward (II) was of course well known for his controversial associations with his favourite, Piers Gaveston who he created Earl of Cornwall and in so doing also created enormous tensions between himself and his Barons. Edward II's priorities may not have lain with ensuring the town conceived a little over 20 years previously by his father finally came to fruition. Maybe a few cottages and a little activity, but nothing on the scale originally anticipated. So I believe there's a fair case for a few overwhelming distractions having existed for Edward 1 – but what of Richard de Bosco ?

Richard de Bosco was Constable of Corfe until he died in 1301 and the calendar of patent rolls records that on February 1st 1301 he was followed by Henry de Lacy the Earl of Lincoln [a Kingston Lacy link] (*“Appointment of Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, to the custody, during pleasure, of the castle of Corf, rendering at the Exchequer the same amount as Richard de Bosco, deceased, late constable.”*) A recent research document discussing the building work at Corfe commented on Richard de Bosco's dedication to the improvements at Corfe Castle *“.... Richard de Bosco who served Edward I in the 1280s-90s. shines out as the Castle's Project Director in the parchment account rolls which survive in the National Archives in London. He made sure that what was required got done.”* It seems that his medieval latin documents are a useful record *“Month by month they detail the repairs to the Castle, naming nearly everyone involved and how much they got paid. Some good touches too.. like the candles bought to enable the craftsmen to work at night “in preparation for our Lord King's arrival” “.*

So maybe de Bosco had his focus elsewhere too and in the absence of any pressure – from a King who seems to have had enough preoccupations of his own - allowed it to stay there ?? But what about Henry de Lacy – with becoming Constable at Corfe he would have inherited the requirement to ensure the new town was built. It seems though that he was even busier than Richard de Bosco as he was “Chief Councillor” to Edward and during the time of war with the Scots he was also appointed “Protector of the Realm”. He had only just returned from Rome having petitioned the Pope on Edward's behalf with regard to the

injury to England done by the Scots - when he was appointed to Corfe Castle. He was also Lord of Pontefract, Lord of Denbigh, Lord of Bowland and Baron of Halton – but maybe more especially and or more relevance, his main home was in Lincoln's Inn Fields in London.

A final layer of reasoning for why the town never happened was mentioned in the opening few paragraphs; salt production occurred in many places along the shoreline and this may have been ongoing in this particular area too. Landowners would not have wanted to disrupt that production voluntarily. Edward II also had a different range of interests to his father too – hunting took place across this whole area as it had been designated a 'Royal Forest' since around 700 AD and the heathlands and boggy ground around the harbour's southern shoreline were home to deer and wild boar. The King jealously controlled the right to hunt these heathlands with his guests and had strict laws, enforced of course, by the Constable ***“ that no man ought to erect or build up any new houses in the heath or else where with out licence of the Lorde Constable or the court”***



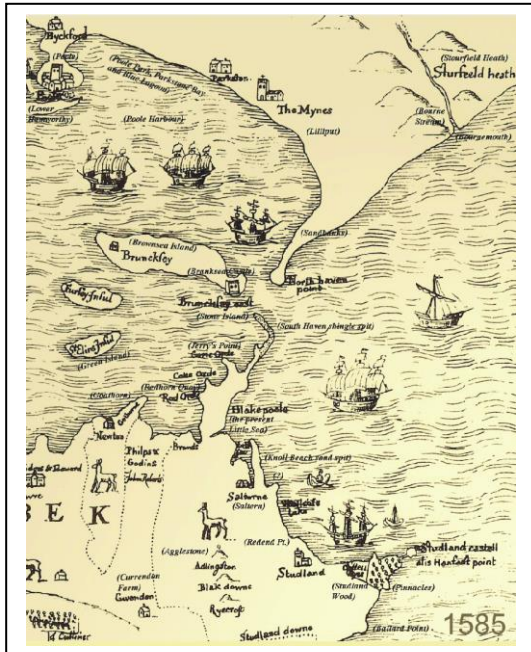
PHCC paddle to 'Gowtre Super Mare' - Newton Bay



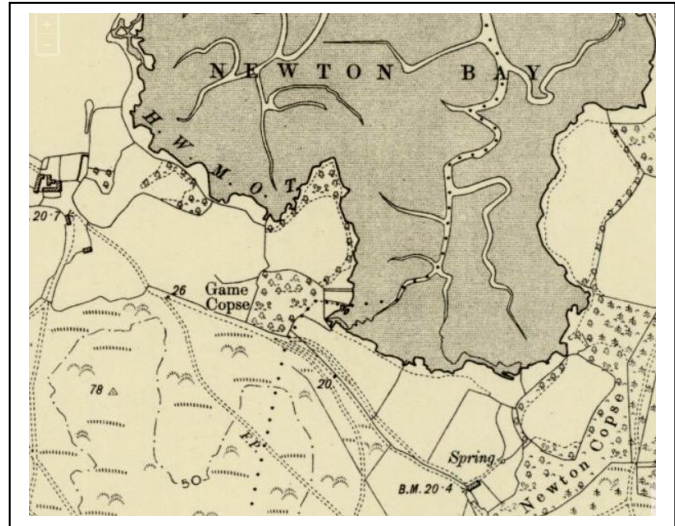
Newton Bay

So ... when Summer does finally arrive and you find yourself on the shoreline of Newton Bay – give a thought to Edward I and all his troubles; give a thought to Richard de Bosco and his preoccupation with Corfe Castle and the Royal Chase; and of course give a thought to Edward II and his controversial favourite Piers Gaveston – and the troubles that awaited both of them in the years to come.

Maybe no surprise then that Gowtre Super Mare - or Newton, just isn't there ! The story only now preserved in the names on old maps, the name of a farm and of a bay.



Treswell's Map of 1585



1890 map – Newton & Newton Bay

Bill Richmond
March 2018



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