Ann Neal the Great Grandmother of the Neal Sisters

Written by Sarah Stafford (nee Drake) granddaughter of Mary Rebecca (Becky) Neal *(October 2018)*



Ann Neal the Great Grandmother of the Neal Sisters

Ann Neal born 1832 the grandmother of John Lee Neal is the reason we are descended from Neal sisters and not the Smith sisters.

Ann was born in Newbold Verdon in 1832 and for sometime I have known that she never married but had 7 children. I originally thought she must have been a woman of questionable virtue but more recent research has made me see things differently.

Ann was born in Newbold Verdon in 1832 to William Neale (1801-1843) and his wife Elizabeth (nee Rainer)(1808-?), she was their 3rd child and they went on to have a further 4 children after Ann was born.

In 1841 William who was originally from Hinckley was aged 40 living with his wife Elizabeth then 33 and their young family James (13), Mary (11), Ann (9), Emma (7), Elizabeth (4) and Theophilia (12mnths) in Newbold Verdon. Elizabeth was pregnant with their final child William Jr who was born the following year and also living with them was Theophilia Crosher (72) William Snr's mother who had by this time been widowed twice. William Snr was the only member of the household working and he was working as an Agricultural Labourer possibly for the Dixie family of Bosworth Hall and on his small wage he was able to support his family and mother. The village was small and their near neighbours are listed as the Smith family and the Bevin family.



Agricultural Workers of C19th.

However, by 1843 the family's fortunes would change dramatically. On 19 April 1843 William Neale died of consumption, he was 42. He must have been ill for a while and at the time of his death he and his family were living in the newly built Market Bosworth workhouse. He was buried in Newbold Verdon but rather than the local celebrant the funeral was carried out by Beaumont Dixie a member of the family that owned Bosworth Hall and Rector of Market Bosworth.

Elizabeth and her young family were left to fend for themselves and we next have news of them in the 1851 census. Elizabeth now 44 is living in Newbold Verdon with her daughters Mary (21), Ann (19) and Elizabeth (14) and Mary's baby daughter Mary Ann Neal (6mnths). Elizabeth and the older 2 girls are working as seamers and stitchers in glove manufacturing, work which was very low paid and usually done at home. The youngest daughter is listed as a Nurse girl for the young baby and possibly for the babies of neighbours for a few pennies. Ann's other brothers and sisters were not living with the family. James was married and with a child of his own lived in Whitwick working as a Labourer. Emma worked as a Kitchen Maid for a local farmer in Newbold Verdon and Theophilia (12) and William (9) were living in the Market Bosworth workhouse where they would have lived in separate male and female quarters and been made to work for their keep. As the youngest family members, they wouldn't have been able to contribute to the household income.



The Union Workhouse Market Bosworth built in 1836

Most of the building was demolished in 1979 to make way for houses. Only the front block and board room remain.

At the time of the 1851 census Ann Neal who was working as a Glove Stitcher was pregnant and like her older sister would go on to have the child without being married. Ann's older sister Mary did go on to get married in 1857 and had a further 7 children. However, for Ann life wasn't going to be simple.

In 1851 Ann's oldest child George William was born, followed 3 years later by a daughter Elizabeth in 1854. The father of Ann's first 2 children was a neighbour George Smith who was 20 in 1851 and was working as a Framework Knitter with his parents and brother.

Framework knitters and seamers/finishers in the 1800's



The demand for goods produced by Framework Knitters and Glove Stitchers declined rapidly by the 1850's and with that the wages also fell meaning a dramatic decline in their standard of living. Those working in this industry could only buy food and necessities from certain shops in the village – this was known as the Truck System and prices were kept artificially high increasing the poverty of the workers. For whatever reason George didn't marry Ann and in 1855 Ann put a petition before the Petty Sessions in Market Bosworth charging George Smith with being the father of her 2 illegitimate children. As only one case could be made at a time the older child George William was affiliated, the case proved and the defendant George Smith was ordered to pay 1s6d per week. In 1858 George Smith marries Sarah Timson and moves to Atherstone. So where things had worked out for Ann's sister and she had married, Ann was now the mother of 2 illegitimate children with little prospect of marriage.

In 1858 – the same year that George Smith marries, Ann gives birth to another child Mary Ann Neal, whose father is named as William Bevins in a case of 1860, where he is charged with neglecting to make payments in accordance with an order of affiliation made against him. William who was an Agricultural Labourer said he couldn't pay and was sentenced to 3 months in prison with hard labour. At the time he had a wife of 2 years and small baby to support. Although the court punished William, both his wife and Ann would suffer as they would have no financial support from him.

Ann must have struggled from day to day and certainly spent time in the Workhouse but by the 1861 census she is working as a seamstress (almost certainly working at home) listed as head of the house with her 3 young children George (9), Elizabeth (7) and Mary Ann (2) scraping to keep her family together and fed and housed. Ann has 2 more children in 1866 and 1867, Arthur born in the Market Bosworth workhouse and William born in Newbold Verdon. During 1867 Ann goes back into the workhouse where she is witness to a horrible event recorded by the Market Bosworth Coroner. A young woman Harriet Jowett (29) went into the wash house with her clothes on fire, Ann Neal and another inmate tried to wrap her in cloth to put out the fire but her burns were severe and she died a week later.

By 1871 Ann's older children George and Elizabeth are living independently, George (our ancestor) is lodging in Snarestone and working as a Railway Labourer and Elizabeth is in service in Market Bosworth but Ann is back in the Workhouse listed as a pauper with her 3 younger children. Around this time Ann gives birth to another daughter Emma. Throughout the 1870's Ann continues to struggle to make ends meet, living in Newbold Verdon, working as a Charwoman and sending her son out to work for which she is summoned by the school attendance officer and fined repeatedly in 1879. The boy was working as an errand boy for a local farmer.





Scenes of Newbold Verdon



We catch up with Ann again in the 1881 census, she is aged 50 still in Newbold Verdon and is living at the back of the George and Dragon Pub in Dragon Lane. She is working as a Char Woman almost certainly at the pub for free/cheap lodging and has her sons Arthur and William, both farm Labourers with her. There is also a younger son Benjamin born in 1875 who is at school. In 1882 the pub is sold at auction and Ann is listed as a tenant of a tenement at the rear of the pub.



The George and Dragon Newbold Verdon

Ann is further prosecuted in 1882 for not sending Benjamin to school and fined 2s6d.

By the time of the next census Ann (59) is living as Ann Kenny in Aylestone and is listed as the wife of James Kenny. James' children from a previous marriage are living with them as is Ann's son who is now listed as Benjamin Kenny, indicating James is the likely father of Benjamin. I can find no evidence of any marriage between Ann and James but it is not unusual for people of this time to say they are married when they are

not. In 1901 Ann and James are still together in Aylestone and this is the last reference I can find for Ann and James is listed as a widower on the census of 1911.

I like to think that after all the hardship of her early life Ann found happiness at the end. It seems to me that Ann was strong and fought hard to feed, clothe and house her seven children, it was the men that came into her life that were weak and let her down. Her life could have been very different if her father had survived or if the first man she was in a relationship with (George Smith) had married her. But that would have made us all descendants from the Smith sisters, so it is Ann we have to thank for giving her children her surname Neal/Neale and starting off a strong matriarchal family.

Written by Sarah Stafford (nee Drake) granddaughter of Mary Rebecca (Becky) Neal

October 2018

Some Additional Information on Ann Neal(e) and her mother, Elizabeth

The Montague Charity

Both Ann and her mother Elizabeth were the recipients of the 'dole', a small amount of charitable money distributed each year to some of Newbold's parishioners at Christmas. It had been started in 1748 on the death of James Montague the lord of the manor. He bequeathed in his will the sum of £100 to be used to support the 'industrious poor' (words used in his will).

The trustees of the charity purchased 11 acres of parish land, which they rented out to a local farmer. Most of the rent money made up the 'dole'. Later, six cottages were built and the rent from these was added to the annual funds.

As with many philanthropic acts of charity of the 19th century, the monies came with a certain amount of moralising baggage. Not everyone in the parish would deserve to be given any money, and below is part of the rules laid down in 1851 in the new Town Charity Accounts Book.

Qualifications of Recipients

All married persons, widows or widowers actually belonging to the parish of Newbold Verdon that are poor and industrious unless disqualified.

The disqualifications of the recipients are the receipt of Parish Relief regularly. The residing in the Poor Houses on the Brascote Field without paying rent and proving to be of an idle or disorderly character.

Later, in 1887, more qualifications were added that touch upon perceived immoral actions:

1) Men living with women who are not their wives.

2) Husbands and wives, who are living separate from each other.

Women having children out of wedlock were not specifically mentioned, though qualification 1 comes close, but, given that having illegitimate children was a chargeable offence in law, it was probably a given.

In the book Elizabeth Neale (name shortened to Betty) received the dole from 1853 to 1858, indicating she had left the Workhouse sometime between 1851 and 1853. In 1853 Betty received 2 shillings, but from 1854 to 1858 the figure was 3 shillings. The 2 shilling and 3 shilling doles were some of the lowest payments in the village; why this was the case for Betty is not categorically known. It may have been to do with others in the family earning money, or possibly as a partial punishment for Ann's illegitimate child, Mary Ann.

On Elizabeth's death (or leaving the parish) in what looks like 1859, the dole was not given to Ann until 1880 (2s 6d) and 1882 (3s), some 21 years after he mother's death.

Why Ann was not given the dole for the full length of this time may be due, in part, to some or all of the following:

a) She was living elsewhere for some of the time (Market Bosworth Workhouse.
b) Such was her level of poverty she was receiving Poor Relief, excluding her from the dole.
c) She was living possibly living in one of the parish's 12 poor houses rent free, so any possible dole went to pay the rent.
d) Illegitimate children were regarded as a drain on the parish and their parent should be punished for bringing them into the world.
e) She was deemed to be a person of 'disorderly character.'

No records were kept that stated any reason for withholding the dole except if a renter of one of the village's poor house had not paid his or her rent that preceding year.

Footnote

Just to demonstrate how harshly women who had babies out of wedlock could be treated, below is a summary of the trial and conviction of a Newbold Verdon woman in 1854.

Her name was Mary Beresford and she appeared before a judge at the Leicestershire Summer Assizes on the 22nd. July 1854 charged with "attempting to conceal the birth of her child which had been delivered at Newbold Verdon on the 9th June." Initially she pleaded not guilty but was persuaded by her council to withdraw this and to plead guilty, which she did.

"His lordship consented, and said, on looking over the dispositions, he found there was no suspicion of the prisoner having committed a more serious offence and sentenced her to six weeks' hard labour.

Leicester Chronicle July 1854

<u>Where did Ann Live in Newbold</u>

It is not easy to pin point exactly where Ann or her mother lived for most of the time they resided in the village. The rear of the George and Dragon (1881 census) is easy to identify, so too Market Bosworth Workhouse (1871). The 1851 census has Ann living with mother and probably very close to George Smith. I have attached a map to show where were the 1851 and 1881 residents.