



CONSERVATION AREA HISTORIES:
KING'S NEWTON
DISTRICT OF SOUTH DERBYSHIRE



A general view of Main Street taken by Edward Martin of Melbourne (d 1921). By courtesy of Melbourne Civic Society.

King's Newton has always been part of the manor and parish of Melbourne, but has a distinct character and jealously-guarded identity of its own. Open land around the village physically separates it from Melbourne, except at the west end where the two settlements now meet on Packhorse Road.

Melbourne was a Royal manor at Domesday, and remained in Crown hands until 1604. "Newtons", i.e. new villages or settlements, were plentiful in the 12th century, when the population was rising and the economy was prospering. Lords of Manors set up new settlements to attract newcomers, because they would themselves benefit from sales and rents. Some of these new settlements succeeded and grew; others survived but failed to prosper. Some failed utterly. King's Newton is first mentioned early in the reign of Henry II (c1160) simply as "Neutona". The "King's" prefix, which distinguishes the village from other "Newtons" e.g. Newton Solney, does not appear until later. It is "Neutone Regis" in the Assize Rolls of 1269, anglicised to "Kyngesneuton" in the Assize Rolls of 1306.

There is little documentary evidence to shed light on the early fortunes of King's Newton, but it seems to have been a modest venture and there is no evidence that it was ever expected to become large or important. It has been suggested that one incentive for people to settle there was provided by the option to hold plots by "free socage", i.e. the liberty to do as one liked with one's property subject to a small token rent to a superior lord. This was the mediaeval equivalent of freehold property today. In Melbourne, by contrast, most property in the ancient village centre appears to have been "copyhold". This was a less free form of tenure, finally abolished in 1922.

There is documentary evidence to prove that some plots at King's Newton were held in free socage, while others were copyhold. Perhaps plots in the new village were offered on both terms according to the purse of the prospective settler. The presence of early freeholders in King's Newton might explain the separatist tradition in relation to Melbourne, and may help to explain why it became more prosperous in relation to its size than Melbourne did.

As would be expected of a "new town", the orderly layout of the homesteads along Main Street seems consistent with deliberate planning rather than growth by gradual accretion. The buildings and yards lie along the street frontage, with crofts behind them. North and south of the street there were back lanes (see plan) giving access to the crofts. The northern one is still preserved by Sleepy (formerly Johnson's) Lane and by a footpath through the Park behind the Hall, but the southern one no longer exists. South of the street, the alignment of the plot boundaries followed the 'grain' of the arable lands adjacent to the village, perhaps suggesting that the new village plots were first created by enclosing groups of arable ploughland out of the parish open field system.

A charter of 1231 directed that a market granted to the Bishop of Carlisle at Melbourne on Wednesdays in 1230 should henceforth be held at King's Newton on Saturdays. The change of venue is difficult to explain; King's Newton was part of the manor of Melbourne anyway, so it is unclear why a new grant would be necessary to authorise the move. Was it a recognition of King's Newton's success, or was it an effort to avoid failure?

Despite the relative wealth of King's Newton in relation to Melbourne, documentary evidence shows that the village was thinning out and shrinking as early as the 16th century, and there is plentiful evidence of further unreplaced demolitions in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. A network of small lanes around the village (shown as broken lines on the plan) survived until the Parliamentary Enclosure of Melbourne in 1787-1791. Some were erased by the provisions of the Enclosure Award, and others disappeared shortly afterwards.

The village failed to diversify during the Industrial Revolution, maintaining an almost exclusive dependence on agriculture. Nevertheless, the increasing dominance of the Melbourne Estate as chief owner there, coupled with the houses and lesser estates of King's Newton gentry families such as the Raggs, Beresfords and Cantrells, ensured that King's Newton always maintained an air of gentility and dignity in spite of its dwindling population.

The "deserted" zones of the village can still be identified. There was formerly a string of old houses on the north-south axis of the village i.e. along Trent Lane and Jawbone Lane. A few still survive, including Elms Farm **(24)** on Trent Lane, and "Charnwood" **(26)** on Jawbone Lane. One of the last unreplaced demolitions was of Mrs. Ward's cottage **(1)**, which gave its name to Ward's Lane, in 1863. The village did not start to grow again until after the Second World War.

The meagre evidence suggests that the built development along the north-south axis of the village was more irregular than in the "planned" part of the village along Main Street. So which part came first? One possibility,

which deserves further study, could be that the “new town” along Main Street was grafted onto a pre-existing settlement on Trent Lane, which gradually migrated to the site of modern-day Melbourne. Strategically, King’s Newton seems to command a better situation than Melbourne, being at the crossroads of a road leading to ferries over the Trent and a road leading east-west along the edge of the Trent valley. Significantly, a Pagan Saxon cremation cemetery **(27)** was found at King’s Newton in 1867 during excavation of the railway cutting. But by the 14th century Melbourne boasted the Bishop of Carlisle’s house and the King’s castle, which may have stimulated a migration there.

It is a tantalising thought that the settlement described at Melbourne in Domesday Book could have been based at King’s Newton, and that there may have been very little on the site of modern day Melbourne, except the manor house and church, until later on. In the mediaeval period, before it had shrunk so significantly, King’s Newton had its own mill. Immediately downstream of a close called Mill Holme, a marshy area and a footbridge recorded in old Ordnance Survey plans **(28)** may indicate a former mill pool with its dam serving as a crossing point of the brook. King’s Newton also had its own mediaeval chapel. Title deeds, and a manorial survey of 1623, suggest that it stood just north of Elms Farm **(23)**. It was ransacked at the Reformation, in 1552.

The preservation of the village in its quaint old-fashioned state today is the result of centuries of stagnation. While Melbourne became a manufacturing town during the 18th and 19th centuries, King’s Newton retained its time-honoured agricultural dignity. Old farmbuildings and some houses were rebuilt or improved, but there was scarcely any new development.

The pattern of ownership in King’s Newton was radically changed by the sale at auction of the Melbourne Estate and Cantrell Estate property there, in 1919 and 1921 respectively. Between them they had owned the majority of the village, though the Melbourne Estate was by far the largest owner. There had formerly been a number of smaller freeholders, but with a few exceptions the larger estates had bought them out by the Victorian period.

The focal point of the village is the crossroads at the centre **(19)**. The space is small, but is presumably the site of the weekly market granted in 1231. The steps of the market cross still remain. The head of a cross, found in a nearby well in the 19th century, probably belonged to it, but the association cannot be proven. It is now in the north transept of the parish church. The cross steps are now surmounted by a modern cross erected to commemorate the accession to the throne of Edward VIII, the King who was never crowned, in 1936. The prime mover in providing the Cross was Sir Cecil Paget of King’s Newton Hall. Previously the cross steps acted as a kerb for a large lime tree, said to have been planted by Thomas Scott of King’s Newton around 1780.

Three handsome houses command the road junction at the cross. King’s Newton House, former home of the Cantrell family, is the most imposing of them **(17)**. It has a continental appearance, with small sash windows in mellow, limewashed walls. It tries to pass as Georgian, but the large central chimneystack and small windows betray its earlier origins. Beneath the render the walls are of stone, raised in brick, partially uncovered during recent



King's Newton House, former house of the Cantrell family, with the cross in the foreground. By courtesy of John Parker.

repairs. The uncovered areas showed no sign that the house ever had stone mullioned windows, except to the basement. Assuming, therefore, that the window frames were always of timber rather than of stone with mullions, a late 17th century date might reasonably be suggested. A notebook in the Cantrell collection at the Derbyshire Record Office (D73) suggests that the Georgian reworking was carried out in 1802-4.

The other two houses by the Cross are Cofton and Cross House. Cross House **(20)** was also built by the Cantrells and was advertised to let in 1809 as “a new and convenient house with out offices for a small genteel family”. An older wing to the rear was pulled down and rebuilt when the house was divided in two in the 1950s. Cofton **(18)** appears to be an 18th and 19th century piecemeal rebuilding of an older house.



This cruck- framed house on Trent Lane was pulled down and replaced by the present “Crown Cottage” in 1888-9. By courtesy of Lord Ralph Kerr.

Trent Lane, running north of the cross, once gave access to ferries across the Trent at Kings Mills and Weston Cliff. It also gave access to the wet meadow and pastureland by the Trent, hence its former name Marsh Lane.

Today, the historic character of the village is broken up by a concentration of modern houses here. Nos. 19-21 on the west side occupy the site of an interesting group of 17th century cottages known as “Stone Fronts” **(25)**, regrettably demolished under a clearance order confirmed in 1961.



Elms Farm, Trent Lane, built by Melbourne Estate after an arson attack destroyed the previous house in 1800. By courtesy of John Wesson.

Further down on the west side, Elms Farm **(24)** can be traced back into the mediaeval period first as the probable home of the Elys family and then, from 1423, of the Rivetts. The name recalls the time when this part of the village was referred to as “at the elm tree”. The present farmhouse was rebuilt by the Melbourne Estate in 1802-4 for their tenant John Briggs. The previous house and buildings were destroyed by an arson attack in November 1800, arising out of widespread ill-feeling towards farmers caused by the high price of corn during the Napoleonic Wars. Briggs’ son J. J. Briggs (1819-1876) was a writer of poetry, natural history and local history, and published the first of his three histories of Melbourne in 1839 aged only 20.

At the lower end of Trent Lane, in Hall Close **(22, 22)**, cut in two by the railway in 1867), there was reputed to have been a large mediaeval house. Briggs asserts that it was once occupied by the Radcliffe family, but documentary evidence shows that the close had belonged to the Eyres before 1603, so the house may have been theirs. It is said to have been the predecessor of the present Hall on Main Street, but there is no need to assume any connection whatever between the two. The “Halls” at King’s Newton were simply the residences of the most important landed families, and were not manor houses. Several halls could have existed at once in King’s Newton – and probably did. At the bottom of Trent Lane there is now a storage depot, on part of a large site once occupied by an important Second World War military depot with extensive sidings.

Returning again to the cross, King’s Newton’s Main Street is praised in Pevsner’s “Buildings of England” as one of the most attractive village streets in Derbyshire. It is punctuated with some handsome and characterful houses, enhanced by stone boundary walls. The lime trees planted along the street by the Melbourne Estate in front of their property in 1856 add a formal note, and the street is particularly notable for its mixture of timber-framed and stone built houses.

Moving west along the south side of Main Street, Church House **(16)** is an atmospheric, stylish and prominent building with semicircular steps projecting into the pavement and triangular pediments over the windows. Described as “new built” in 1708, it was originally the home of the Beresford family who occupied it for more than a century. The present name recalls its short-lived use as a Chapel of Ease to Melbourne Parish Church, beginning in October 1850.

The former farmhouse next door at The Limes **(15)** was rebuilt in 1813 by its tenant John Newbold, who noted the payments for his new house in his notebook. It cost £239 17s 0^d. He built the house on Melbourne estate property, but it was not uncommon at that time for tenants to pay for the rebuilding of their houses, as they could reasonably expect to live in them for many years afterwards.

Nos. 54 - 62 Main Street **(12 & 13)** are an attractive range of stone, brick and timber framed buildings, formerly thatched, flanking the public footpath to Melbourne. No 56 **(12)** shows a pair of crucks on the east gable and there are two further pairs inside. This building was once a public house called the Chequer. The buildings at the back were built by the Melbourne Estate for William Astle in 1910. They replaced Astle’s outbuildings and grounds at King’s Newton Hall, sold to Mr. Paget when he set about rebuilding the Hall.

“Four Gables” and the “Hardinge Arms” are another important group **(7 & 9)**, both originally farmhouses. “Four Gables” **(9)** was the farmstead of the Scott family for several generations until 1848, when the farmland was split from it. The “Hardinge Arms” **(7)** was bought by the Melbourne Estate in 1766, having previously been the property of the Bucknalls. William Bucknall had bought it from Elizabethan land speculators Messrs. Branthwaite and Bromley in 1589, suggesting that it may have been chantry property successfully “concealed” from the Crown for some time after the Reformation.

The “Newton Wonder” apple, a combined eater and cooker, was first propagated in the back garden of the Hardinge Arms by William Taylor in the 1880s. Taylor’s wife ran a beerhouse, which became the fully licensed “Hardinge Arms” in the early 20th century. Modern houses **(8)** were built on the former orchard in 2004.

The western extremity of the conservation area is marked by the Pack Horse Inn **(2)**, originally built on land encroached from the public highway. As such, the property there belonged to the Lord of the Manor and the occupants were there by his sufferance in return for a rent. John Ince, a former tenant of the pub, gained ownership of it by an exchange agreement in 1791. Over the door are the date 1727 and the initials WCM. Manorial rentals and papers, complemented by the parish registers, reveal that the initials must represent William and Mary Cartwright, who had several children baptised from 1726 onwards. The property was in existence by 1687.

“The Old Alehouse” next door **(3)** is said to have been the “doss house” for users of the packhorse. Its constructional details suggest that it may have started out as an outbuilding, converted to a dwelling later on.



*King's Newton Hall, photographed shortly after its destruction by fire in April, 1859.
By courtesy of Philip Heath.*

The north side of Main Street is dominated by the grey stone gables of King's Newton Hall **(10)**. The Hall stood in ruins for fifty years after a fire in 1859 destroyed all but the outer walls of the early 17th century building. The present building dates largely from a rebuilding in 1910 by Cecil Paget (Sir Cecil Paget from 1923), General Superintendent of the Midland Railway. The original masonry was carefully preserved where possible, including the four main gables and some of the external chimneystacks.

The Hall and its lands had been purchased by Nicholas Harding from John Newton in the mid 16th century. It was "Aunciently called Newton Hall", and was probably named after the Newton family rather than after King's Newton itself. It remained in the possession of the Harding family until the King's Newton branch became extinct in 1729. The house as it existed before the fire was probably all of their making, and as the house evolved and became larger the family bought up neighbouring land and property to create the beginnings of a park at the back of it **(5)**. Buildings were cleared away and old ridge and furrow ploughlands were converted to pasture. Surviving deeds suggest that most of the purchases took place in the period 1649-60. It is interesting to note that the fossilised remains of buildings cleared away to create the park can still be seen in the park wall against Main Street, including a substantial barn with ventilation slits **(6)**.

The superstructure of the holywell **(4)**, reached by a path off Ward's Lane, was probably part of the creation of the park. The present stone structure is a modern one of 1984, based on the design of its 17th century predecessor, destroyed by vandals in 1948. The original structure had a lintel with an inscription in Latin, recording that it was built by Robert Hardinge in 16^{**}. The last digits, made indistinct by weathering, were interpreted as 62 when the inscription was recut in 1868. The Holywell, perhaps messy and unkempt before, would be transformed by the new wellhead into an attractive feature on the edge of Robert Harding's new park.

The park never developed beyond its present embryonic state. The purchase of King's Newton Hall and its estate by the Cokes of Melbourne Hall in 1735 meant that rapid development of the Hall and its grounds was arrested, because there was no longer an owner-occupier in residence.

Chantry House **(11)** was the ancient family home of the Ragg family, major owners in King's Newton until about 1800. It was purchased in 1848 by

Mr. Henry Orton, who set up a pottery and brickworks in the village. The old house was quite plain when Orton bought it, but was transformed in 1851 into the Tudoresque confection we see today, to designs by Henry Stevens of Derby. Its name “Chantry House” seems to date only from this remodelling, apparently taken from no better authority than the name of a field belonging to it, called Chantry Close. Orton may not have known, or cared, that Chantry Close had only belonged to Chantry House since an exchange agreement of 1708, long after the Chantries had been dissolved.



*This cottage on Ward's Lane, pulled down in 1863, was occupied by the Ward family.
By courtesy of Margaret Jackson.*

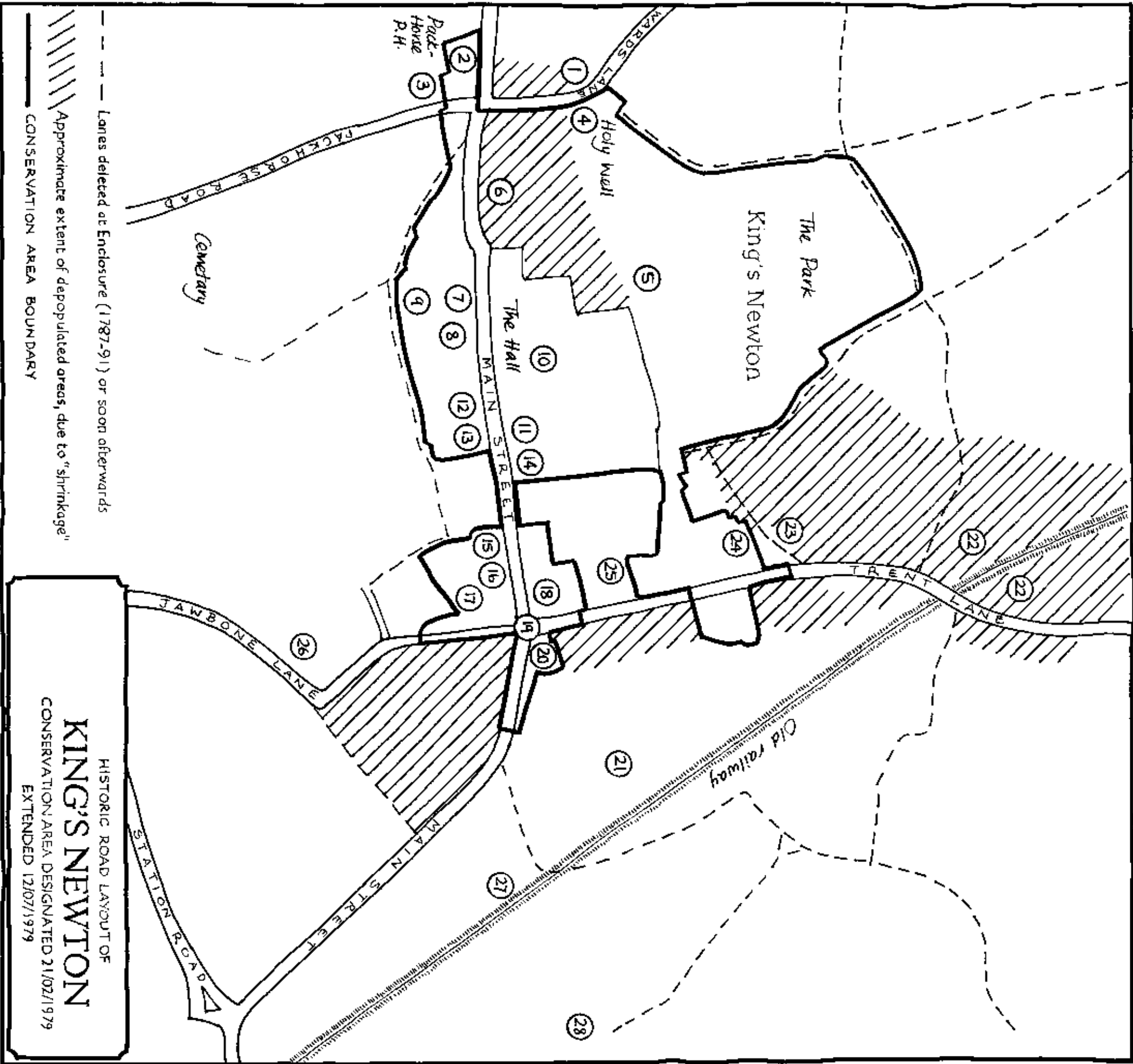
Orton's pottery enterprise began in 1853, when he discovered a fine bed of red clay on his land (at **21**). Trial pieces of pottery were sent to Stoke on Trent to be fired, with promising results, and a pottery works was set up. Orton advertised his extensive products in White's Derbyshire directory of 1857, but the pottery failed after a few years and Henry Orton sold his King's Newton property in 1861. He died in 1878 at the County Lunatic Asylum, of cancer of the face and neck. The brickmaking side of the business continued, run for a time by R. R. Bennett of Derby etc., but had closed by 1899. The “brick hole”, as the clay pit was known, was later used as a landfill site.

East of Chantry House, nos. 63-67 Main Street (**14**) have ancient origins but were much altered and rebuilt in the 1960s. In the 19th century they were still part timber framed and thatched. The party walls that separate no. 65 from the adjacent cottages each still contain a fine pair of cruck blades.

Philip Heath.

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--- Lanes deleted at Enclosure (1787-91) or soon afterwards
 // Approximate extent of depopulated areas, due to "shrinkage"
 — CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

HISTORIC ROAD LAYOUT OF
KING'S NEWTON
 CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATED 21/02/1979
 EXTENDED 12/07/1979