How they lived then - one family's life in Dummer from the 1540's to the 1740's.

Amongst the treasure trove of documents in the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester are the Dummer Parish Registers from 1541 onwards and these are immensely valuable not just for compiling family trees but also pointing the way to documents such as wills, inventories of possessions and land holdings and court cases. We know what illnesses were prevalent including outbreaks of the plague and smallpox and records were kept of the occasional fatal accident. We are not spared details of illegitimate births, with the occasional acerbic comments of the vicar or clerk, and we see recorded the sad short lives of children who died within a year or two of their birth. We even know that on April 12th 1781 the Rev George Austen (father of Jane) walked from Steventon to Dummer to take the funeral service for the late Rev Thomas Stockwell, vicar of Dummer.

One family who featured frequently were the Neales who from some time before 1542 farmed land in both Dummer and North Waltham. Their family history extends through the reigns of ten monarchs and a Republic, almost continuous wars with France and Spain, periods of domestic growth and decline, constant tensions over religion and attempts by Parliament to control and constrain a growing population through a slew of administrative legislation.

In early records the Neales are listed as husbandmen working land owned by the lord of the manor, but their status grew and they are later recorded as yeomen, cultivating their own land and keeping both sheep and cattle until sometime between 1700 and 1710 when they disappeared from Dummer and continued their lives and business in North Waltham for another century.

To picture their lives in Dummer it makes sense to begin in 1542 when Robert and Alice Neale's son Roger, at just three days old, was christened in the church on 23th October. Another son, Richard, was baptised on 10th July 1544. Robert's namesake, Robert (probably the eldest son, born before Parish Registers were made compulsory), was buried on 24th August 1566 and on 24th January 1569 the registers show that Alice Neale, Robert's wife was buried. On 24th May 1578, some nine years later Robert Neale was buried and a mortuarium fee paid for his funeral expenses. All three were buried in Dummer churchyard.

On the 23rd June 1652 Jone Neale, a widow, was buried in Dummer churchyard. She was most likely the widow of John Neale who was a grandson of Robert and Alice Neale. Very unusually for the time Joane left a will, drawn up only four days before she died, in which she passed on to her grandson, another John Neale, her 'lands and appurtenances in [North] Waltham' and her gold rings. He was a child at the time so Jone left a proviso in her will that each year until he came of age £30 should be paid to his father (Richard) and £4 to his mother from farm income. She made monetary bequests to six other grandchildren as well as dividing specific goods, chattels and clothing amongst them. Richard Neale was left any of her possessions that were not already bequeathed and made executor of her will, but Jone leaves no clues as to why her inheritance skipped a generation. No specific mention was made of a house, so it could be that Jone was living with other members of her family whilst retaining her own possessions.

On the 20th October 1673, over a century after the Neale family was first recorded in the Dummer Parish Register, the wedding took place in the church between John Neale, parishioner of Dummer, and Martha Prior, daughter of a yeoman who farmed in both Dummer and North Waltham, conducted by the Reverend Hugo Davies.

John and Martha were married only thirteen years after the monarchic Restoration of King Charles II when England felt it could at last rebuild itself after the calamity of the regicide of Charles I in1649 and the ensuing Civil Wars. In north Hampshire skirmishes and full scale battles, at Cheriton and Basing especially, were fought but Dummer was relatively unscathed. A growing population and ever increasing army requisitions meant ever more need for food supplies, sheep flocks became larger, wheat and barley was grown extensively and landowners and tenants working together were able to prosper. The Hampshire Hearth Tax return of 1665 shows Dummer reporting 31 dwellings containing 60 chargeable hearths and only five dwellings with one hearth each falling below the assessment rate. As at this time the population of the parish including children was probably around 150, it is evident that compared with other local parishes Dummer had relatively few residents close to poverty..

Over the twenty-one years of their marriage John and Martha had six sons – John (baptised July 1675), Richard (baptised June 1683), William (baptised 1686), Robert (baptised 1689), Thomas (baptised November 1691) and Matthew (baptised 1694). No daughters were recorded in the Parish Register although there was an eight year gap between the first and second sons, followed by four more boys at two to three year intervals which begs the question of whether there were daughters born in the years between 1675 and 1683 who, for some reason, either were not baptised in Dummer or died before baptism. Although the Plague had largely disappeared from England after 1665, there were outbreaks of smallpox and the Dummer Parish Register shows more than the usual small number of infants and small children buried by the Church in the 1670/1680 decade. Cause of death is not given, but it could be that smallpox came to Dummer (it certainly did to Nutley) and any children the Neale's had did not survive or were buried privately.

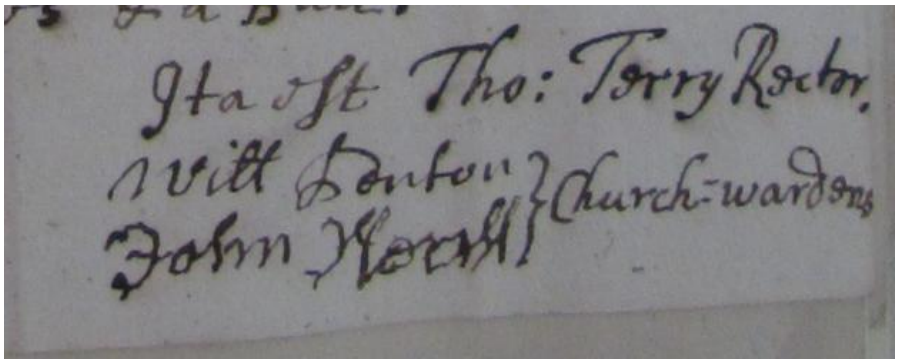
Two years after his youngest son Matthew's birth his father John died and was buried on the 14th May 1696 aged 48 and Martha followed on 7th May 1703. We know from the Parish Register that John Neale was buried in woollen. This fulfilled the legal requirements of the Burying in Woollen Acts 1666-80[1] which provided that:

[1] The intention of the Acts was to protect the immensely valuable woollen and sheep farming industries.

No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague), shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet or shroud or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver, or in any stuff of thing other than what is made of sheep's wool only; or be put into any coffin lined or faced with [...] any other material but sheep's wool only.

Not only was this evidence of status but an affidavit had to be sworn by a relative in front of a Justice of the Peace to confirm that this was done and in John Neale's case the Rev. Thomas Terry, who succeeded Rev. Hugo (Hugh) Davies in 1694, confirmed it. Non-compliers were fined £5 unless they could prove poverty.

By April 1696 John Neale's eldest son (also John, then aged 21) was a churchwarden of Dummer Church; he signed his name in a very shaky hand on a terrier (legal listing) of the glebe lands belonging to the parsonage of Dummer.[2]



In October of the same year young John was recorded as being present at a Sacrament Certificate ceremony on the 6th of that month, performed by the Rev Thomas Terry for Henry Pincke who was the vicar of Eastrop[3].

As far as we can tell from the records, all John and Martha's sons grew to adulthood, and the burial of Matthew in 1740 at the age of 46 predeceased the burials of his brother John (in 1753, aged 78) and Thomas (buried 1754, aged 63).

Tracing the history of the Neale family has been patchy at best. The Parish Registers are relatively complete, so we know some of the major events of their lives – births, marriages and deaths. Other pieces of their lives are less easy to uncover, but a rare Inventory has survived – that of Martha Neale, dated 1703 and seven years after the death of her husband. John's will has not been found so we can only make assumptions as to how his estate was disbursed and it would have been unusual for a widow to make a will of her own although the fact that an Inventory was taken is indicative of there having been a will at some time.[4] So far it has not been possible to pinpoint where Martha lived in her widowhood, although she was buried in Dummer on 7th May 1703, presumably next to her husband. It could well be that Martha was actually

[2] There are three references to 'Neal's acre' in the terrier itself. By 1632 when the Dummer Enclosure Map was drawn up, R Neal's land had expanded to 2.3 acres.

[3] In order to comply with the Test Act of 1673 holders of civil or public offices were required to present a certificate confirming that they had received communion in the Church of England. Obviously this was essential for a Vicar, and was signed by a local minister, churchwardens and two witnesses.

[4] Everything women had belonged to their husband, even down to their clothes, and it was only in widowhood and provided their husband had specified that they should receive property, goods and chattels for use during 'her Naturall Liffe' that women had any say in how their possessions should be divided after their own death.

living in North Waltham for some time before she died, only returning for her burial which required the entry in the Parish Register The majority of the Neale's land was in North Waltham and their gradual removal from Dummer becomes clear when after 1742 there is no further mention of any member of the Neale family in the Dummer Parish Register but there are more frequent entries for family events in the North Waltham Register and the Dummer Enclosure map of 1743 only shows the small triangle of land roughly at the junction of modern day Down Street and Glebe Close as remaining in the family's hands[5].

An Inventory of Martha's 'goods and chattells' was drawn up a month after her passing by three Appraisers, all local men of good repute. The final value, which excludes property and land was £217 3sh. 0d. which roughly equates to £24000 in 2024, a not inconsiderable sum. What it gives us is a miniature snapshot of the lives of an upwardly mobile agricultural couple who through their endeavours had created enough wealth for their sons to be successful after their passing.

What we know is that the house Martha lived in had several rooms – a Best Chamber, a Little Chamber, a Hall (which was a living area and kitchen), a Drinkhouse, a Milkhouse, a Backhouse, Another Loft, a Cellar, a Stable and a Gate(house). There is no value ascribed to the property, and without a will there is no way of determining who were the inheritees. There is also no mention of money – many inventories include cash as part of the value of the estate, usually termed 'money in the pocket'.

In 1703 the Neales were working almost seventy nine acres with standing corn and five more acres of grass were identified purely for the value of the growing crops at £83 15s 0d (£11000 in 2025[6]). A third piece of land, comprising nine acres and fallow at the time of the inventory was valued at £1 7s 0d (£150.00). No value was ascribed to either a house or their land.

The first personal item concerns Martha's 'wearing Apparrell' valued at £3 2s 6d (£400). This is far more than most women possessed and may - although it's not specified – have included a ring or two as well as clothes for different occasions.

In the Best Chamber there was a feather bed, five pairs of sheets, three blankets, one rug, four pillows and one bolster. There was also another bedstead, a mat, a chest, a coffer, one form (like a bench), several napkins, a tablecloth and other linen. The main bed and its bedclothing was valued at £5 9s 6d and the other bed and the linens at £1 19s 6d, making a total of £8 9s 0d (£807.02). Martha and John would have slept very comfortably and warmly in their feather bed and their dining table downstairs would have been dressed appropriately for guests.

In the Little Chamber it was not so luxurious – 'one bed with the furniture thereunto belonging', value at £1 14s 0d. (£185.00).

The Hall was the main room and will have covered most of the ground floor of the house. There was a large fireplace which served for cooking as the inventory lists a brass pot, three kettles, two skillets, one pan, a furnace, two iron pots, ten pewter dishes, one dripping pan, five buckets, one firepan and one pair of tongs, totalling £6 14s 6d (£725.00) and the furniture

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[5] This was a small triangular piece of land adjacent to what is now Glebe Close, part of a bigger area named Stoke Field. The map does not show a dwelling on the site. Robert Neal is described as a Yeoman.

[6] National Archives currency-converter, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter. All the totals in brackets after the inventory assessment refer to approximate modern values.

comprised one table and one cupboard, a grate and other lumber worth £1 0s 0d (£110.00). Curiously there is no mention of chairs or even forms (benches) to sit on.

When it comes to the Drinkhouse, the Milkhouse and the Backhouse, it seems that they were not entirely used for their original purposes, rather as storage, as the Drinkhouse had four barrels, one stand and other lumber (£0 18s 6d or £100.00). The Milkhouse contained the salting trough and four trays (£0 18s 6d or £100.00) and the Backhouse had the mill, the cheesepress and other lumber (£3 0s 0d or £350.00). What this does tell us is that these three rooms had at some point been used as a brewery and probably a dairy. By 1703 there were just five cows, two bullocks and two calves valued at £16 10s 0d or £1800.00) so even if butter and cheese were still made it would have been in fairly limited quantities.

The room described by the Appraisers as 'Another Loft' merely contained one bed and other lumber valued at £3 0s 0d (£350.00).

The Cellar was better equipped with one barrel and other lumber and two quarters of malt (£2 5s 0d or £240.00)[7]. In the year the Inventory was taken the growing crops were peas, oats and corn, although it is possible that barley had been grown the year before on the nine acres of land described as fallow.

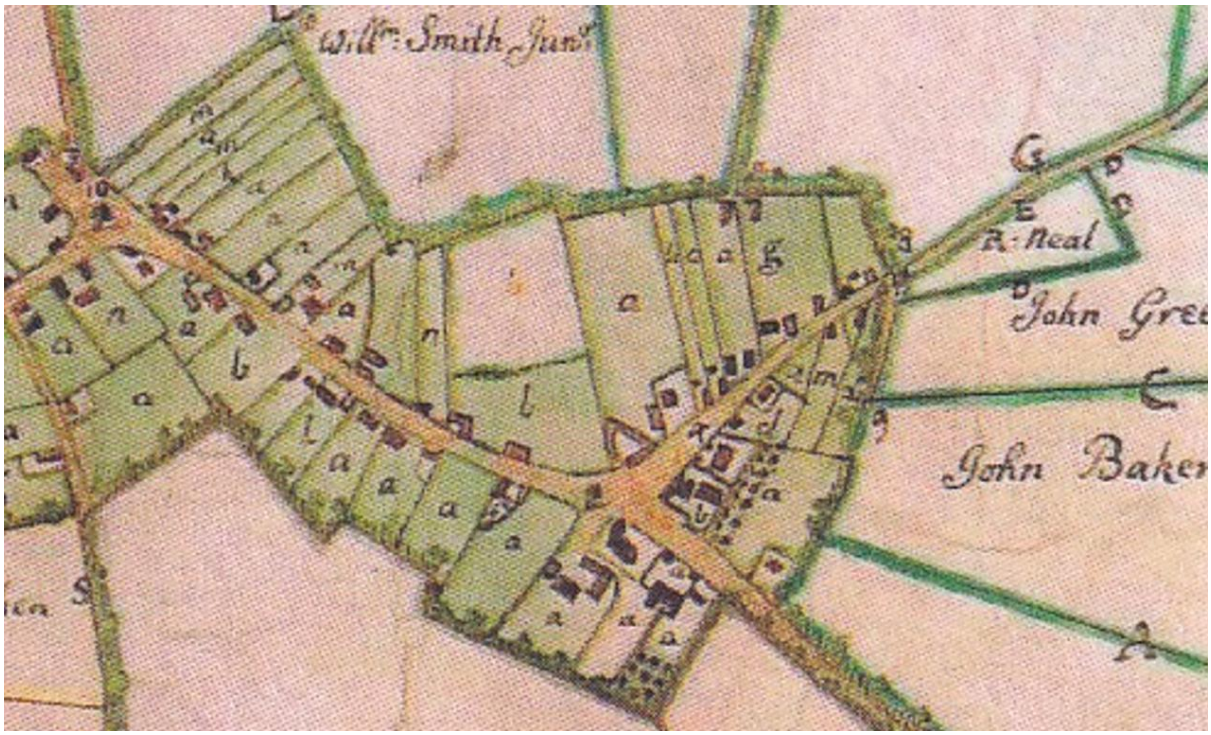
Five horses lived in the Stable, valued at £13 0s 0d (£1450.00). Using the National Archives converter as a guide, their reckoning is that horses were valued at around £6 10s 0d each in 1700, which makes the Appraisers' valuation very low. To some degree this corresponds with their valuation of the cattle (see above) which if the National Archives converter is accurate should be at around £24 0s 0d (£2600.00).

The final items on the inventory relate to farming and livestock management. They owned a waggon, a roller, a plough, some 'garden stuff', some wood, fetters and locks, and 'other things' which together amounted to £6 17s 0d (£750.00). More valuable were five hogs at one guinea each (£5 5s 0d), bacon (£7 0s 0d) and one hundred and thirty sheep (£48 4s 0d) altogether valued at £60 9s 0d or (£6600 in modern currency). Even the dungheap had some value and was appraised at £1 0s 0d (£110 today).

The sum total of Martha Neale's Inventory was £217 3s 0d. In total £24000 at to today's value.

[7] A quarter is the standard measure for barley, equating to 448 lb, which should equate to approximately 80 to 100 lb of extract for the brewer.

In 1743 a map was drawn of proposed enclosures in Dummer, and an extract is shown below.[8]



Enclosure of the common lands in Dummer (1174 acres of open fields and 587 acres of commons) was carried out by an Act of Parliament in 1743 promoted by Michael Terry who was lord of the manor, Rev Thomas Stockwell and other owners of land in the parish. Commissioners were appointed and they awarded Michael Terry 1101 acres and the remaining 688 acres was allocated between sixteen other owners or holders of rights.[9] Of these 688 acres just over two acres was awarded to the last member of the Neale family to remain in the village – Robert Neal. This triangular piece of land is shown (top right) on the map above. It fronts onto what is now Down Street by the junction with the modern Gleve Close.

Whether this enclosure, which took place much earlier than in other parts of Hampshire, was purely coincident with the Neale's ultimate removal to North Waltham can only be conjecture but Michael Terry's actions certainly changed the pattern of land ownership in Dummer for ever.

For those interested, the Dummer Parish Register 1541-1741 is in the Hampshire Record Office repository under the reference 65M72/PR1 (not currently orderable) but can be viewed on www.Ancestry.co.uk. The 1743 Enclosure Map is also available in the Record Office, catalogue reference 120M97/1.

[8] Hampshire Record Office, 120M97/1, Dummer Enclosure Map , 1743.
[9] J. Butler and S. Lane, *Dummer and Kempshott: Two Chalk Parishes*, (Victoria County History, University of London, 2022), 46/7.