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HERE AT THE COST OF THE RT HON SIR WILL

Shining light: Newton's sundial at St John's, Closterworth, which he carved when he was nine

Newton's church to raise its profile

by Paul Wilkinson

THE church where Sir Isaac Newton was baptised is to host a commemoration service as the finale of a five-day festival celebrating the 350th anniversary of his "Annus Mirabilis", when he made his great scientific discoveries, including the laws of gravitation.

Evensong on Sunday at St John the Baptist's, in the Lincolnshire village of Closterworth, near Grantham, will include a talk by Professor Rob Iliffe, who is Professor of History of Science at Oxford University, and a world authority on Newton.

Sir Isaac was born on Christmas Day 1642, a short walk away at Woolsthorpe Manor. He was bap-

tised in St John's the next New Year's Day. The sundial he carved with a penknife as a nine-year-old is still visible. Both his parents are buried in the church.

In 1666, Newton fled to Woolsthorpe from his post as Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, to avoid the plague, and it is said that seeing an apple fall in the house's orchard led to his theory on gravitation.

The Priest-in-Charge of St John's, the Revd Eric Lomax, hopes that the involvement with the Gravity Fields Festival will raise the profile of the Grade I listed church and its plans to create a Newton heritage and learning centre. "There has always been a tension between science and faith," he said, "but with this place's links to Sir Isaac we can make it a place where young people particularly can explore those relationships in a positive, more creative way."

The centre is part of a £1-million project to refurbish the church, which dates from Saxon times, to make it more useful to the community and become a national asset.

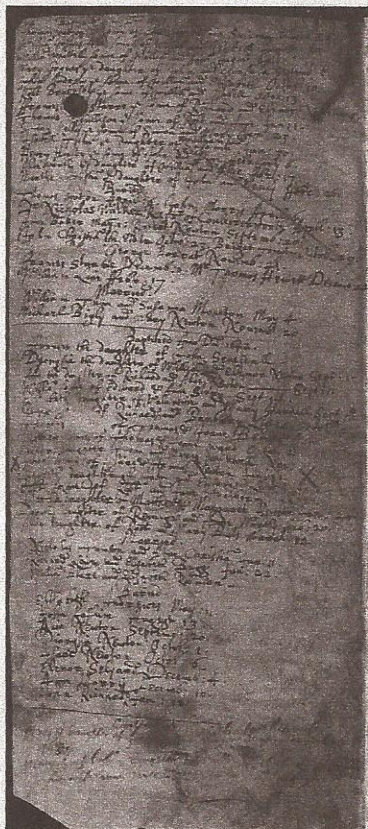
The project also includes reinstating the Newton family chapel, which is currently used as a vestry, and expanding links with Woolsthorpe Manor, now managed by the National Trust.

The project leader, Peter de Voil, said: "We are thinking about the next 100 or 200 years, and keeping the church going. It is not used by many people: the congregation varies between six and 16, and the Vicar has got seven parishes, so has to divide his time. But there are two things we can do.

"First, it could be much better used by the community if we had facilities like lavatories and a kitchen. There is not even running water at present. Then there is the Newton link: people visiting Woolsthorpe Manor could add to the experience by coming to see his family church.

"It's a four- to six-year project, but the Heritage Lottery Fund is on our side and we have the backing of the district and parish councils and various other bodies." Trinity College has pledged £500 towards a new stained-glass window.

Church Times 23.9.16



Register: Newton's baptism and his father's burial are both recorded at St John's, Closterworth