

The earliest records of Newmarket

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The records of Newmarket are stated in the standard place-name dictionaries to start in 1200. In this note I show that this date should be amended to 1218/9. Even if this re-dating is relatively insignificant, an important wider point is illustrated: the use of toponymic surnames as evidence for place-names is only safe when there is independent evidence linking the person to the place.

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At the time of Domesday Book, the region now containing Newmarket was a half-hundred containing only the vill of Exning, which later became a detached part of the hundred of Lackford. The road from Cambridge now forms the southern boundary of this region, and forks after passing through what has become Newmarket High Street, with branches going east to Bury St Edmunds and north-east to Thetford. This road is possibly Roman in some parts (Margary 1973: 262), and has been called Ickniel Way in the past by antiquarians (Harrison 2003). The road forms the only connection to Suffolk of the virtual exclave within Cambridgeshire (Figure 1). The town of Newmarket developed along this road, and the purpose of this note is to clarify the dating of the earliest documents referring to this new market, with special attention to the period 1200 to 1220. The early thirteenth century was a time of establishment of many new markets, and careful disambiguation of the records (especially of surname records) is needed.

Ekwall's place-name dictionary (DEPN) gave the first mention of Newmarket as *Novum Forum* 1200 Cur[ia Regis roll]. This claim has been very influential: the dictionaries of Watts (CDEPN), of Mills (DBPN), and of Briggs and Kilpatrick (Dict Sf) all reproduce it. Moreover, the Suffolk historian Norman Scarfe stated on the basis of Ekwall's entry that Newmarket had a market in c.1200 (Dymond and Martin 1999: 77), and Ekwall was misquoted as if he had referred to *Novum Mercatum* by Beresford in his standard work on medieval new towns (1967: 490). In fact, *Novum Forum* does not occur explicitly in any Curia Regis roll of 1200 or any proximate year; Ekwall must have done no more than notice

the record of a man called *Bertinus de Nouo foro*.¹

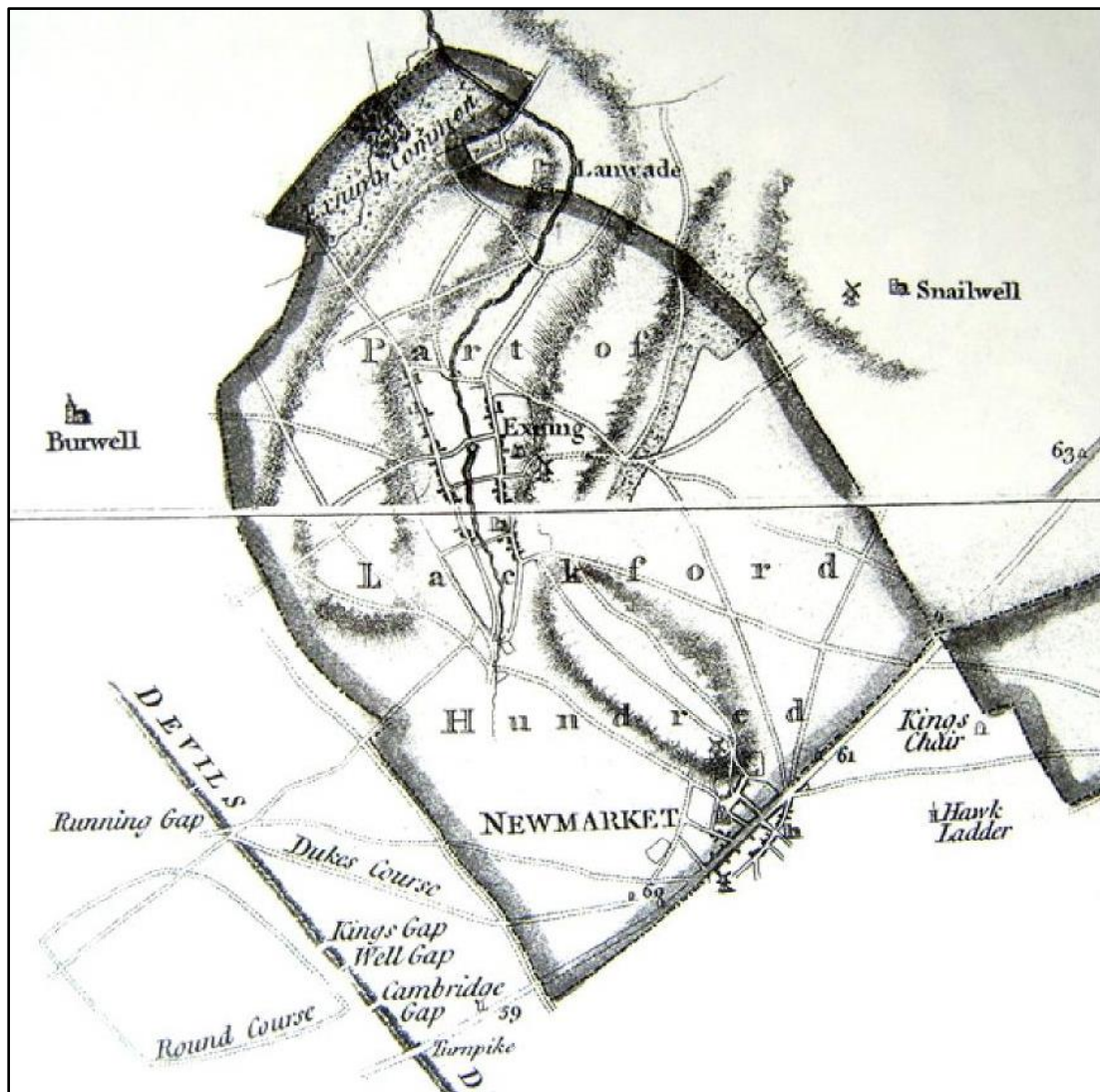


Figure 1: The Exning exclave on Hodkinson's 1783 map of Suffolk (Dymond 1972). Reproduced by permission of the Suffolk Records Society.

However, this *Bertinus* does not occur in an East Anglian context; the record is of a case heard in York concerning land in Ecclesfield in Yorkshire. And it is not clear why Ekwall was happy to assume that *Novum Forum* could be equated with *Novum Mercatum*, the usual Latin term for Newmarket.² In fact, other people with the surname *de Novo Mercato* do occur in the same series of documents and at similar dates, and it is strange

¹ The item has been published in Flower 1922–1957: ii. 165, and in Stenton 1953: 304, no. 3145.

² The question of whether *forum* and *mercatum* can be treated as synonymous has been looked at by Harmer (1950) and Cullen (2006).

that Ekwall did not cite these instead. In the edition of the rolls by Stenton (1953), these are items 3265 and 3335 dated 1200–1, which mention a *Rannulfus de Nouo mercato*, but this is again in a Yorkshire context. Item 3498 of the year 1199 is possibly more relevant; it is a writ concerning Swanton in Norfolk and mentions *Ricardo de Nouo Mercato*, but only in an endorsement which might have been added later, and the surname might still refer to some other place than the Suffolk Newmarket.

The *Bertinus de Nouo foro* mentioned in 1200 thus cannot be safely assumed to have taken his surname from Newmarket in Suffolk. There are apparently no other records of this man, but he may have belonged to the family originating in Neufmarché in Seine-Maritime, a place recorded as *Novo Mercato* c.1060 (De Beaurepaire 1979: 115). This family had extensive interests in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire from the mid-twelfth century, perhaps as early as 1098 (Cawley 2020: s.n. Neufmarche), and this means that their surname must pre-date (and thus be unrelated to) the establishment of Newmarket in Suffolk. The lords of Brecknock in Wales used the same name, and may have been a branch of the same family; the surname is recorded both as *de Nouo foro* and *de Nouo Mercato* (Keats-Rohan 2002: 615–7; Cawley 2020). Apart from the French place, some other new local market might also have given rise to some instances of these surnames; certainly Wisbech in Cambridgeshire had market-places referred to in the thirteenth century as *veteri foro* and *novo foro*; these are now Old Market and Market Place, on opposite sides of the river.³

We therefore need to look again at any surnames recorded in the early thirteenth century which may refer to Newmarket. There are several other people with the surname *de Nouo foro* recorded before 1200 in the Red Book of the Exchequer, but none has any association with Suffolk or Cambridgeshire.⁴ There was a land-holding family in the Kedington and Wixoe area of south-west Suffolk (20 km south of Newmarket) using the name *de Nouo foro* apparently interchangeably with *de Nouo Mercato*. *Adam de Novo Foro* 1200 occurs in a Curis Regis Roll in connection with land in Kedington (Flower 1922–1957: i. 319); *Sir Robert de Nouo foro* is mentioned in a Wixoe document in the Suffolk Archives (SfArch HD1538/422, probably of the thirteenth century), and *Amicia de Nouo mercato* was assessed in nearby Kedington in the 1327 Subsidy Roll (SHAH 1906). However, it seems likely that this is a branch of the Yorkshire family which has acquired property in Suffolk; a pedigree of that family shows an *Adam de Novo Foro* born in 1146 (Holmes 1902: 589). In

³ London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B ii, f. 242r.

⁴ Hall 1896; this means that they should not have been included in Dict Sf 101, which also incorrectly associates King John with a charter to Newmarket.

Suffolk Feet of Fines (FF), there is direct mention of *Ric'm de Nouo M'ercato* in 1270/1, *villa de nouo m'ercato* in 1292/3, and *Joh'em de Nouo M'ercato* in 1305/6. If this is one family and named after Newmarket, then they are probably the only significant family so styled. But apart from the single possibility in the name of *Sir Robert de Nouoforo*, it appears that Newmarket was never called *Novum Forum*.

Having rejected several instances of surnames as not referring to the Suffolk Newmarket, we may ask when the earliest non-surname attestations occur. A list is below, in which a close representation of the manuscript forms (maintaining abbreviations) is attempted. There are Cambridgeshire Feet of Fines records of *nouo m[er]cato*, starting in 1218/9 early in the reign of Henry III, and these appear to be the first references to the Suffolk Newmarket.⁵ These are the earliest surviving records of the name in the Latin form; English forms do not appear until the fourteenth century, unless the 1262 form *Neumarch'* is classed as English; it may be French. There are many mentions of Newmarket in Ancient Deeds (AD, Maxwell Lyte 1890–1915), but the published calendar cannot be trusted to maintain the original spellings of the manuscripts, and thus only a few later items are included in the list below. The Henry III Fine Roll items (C60) are taken from images of the originals, and the readings are reliable. An important record from 1223 survives as an original document; in this year Richard de Argentein was granted licence to hold an annual fair in Newmarket (Figure 2). He had come into possession of land in what was to become Newmarket through his marriage to the daughter of Robert de Insula, who is recorded in Exning in 1167 (Conway Davies 1957: 91). It is reported that British Library, Harleian MS 6072, a very mixed volume possibly mostly written in the sixteenth century states on folio 16 that *Rob'tus de Insula dedit Rico de Argent' novam mercatam cum Cassandra*

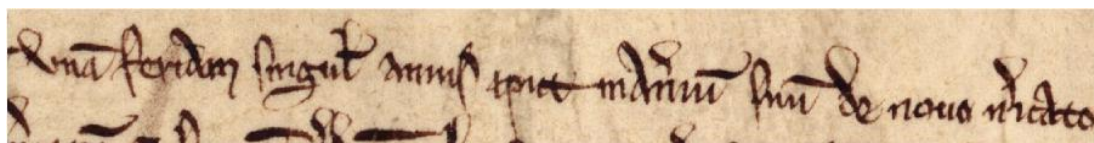


Figure 2: One of the earliest references to Newmarket (*unā feriam singul' anu[alis] apud man'iũ suũ de nouo m'carto*), in the Henry III Fine Roll C60/18 m.3 of 1223. This item records the granting of a licence to Richard de Argentein to hold an annual fair. This was confirmed in 1225/6 and 1226/7 in the Close Roll items (see the list below), and also in the Calendar of Charter Rolls. Image from finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/fimages/C60_18/m03.html, reproduced by permission of The National Archives.

⁵ The readings below are taken from images of the CP25 originals, preserving scribal abbreviations; the edition of Rye 1891 presents expanded forms.

filia sua in lib maritag, with the marriage occurring c.1204 (Nares et al. 1808–12: iii. 320). But this is likely to be a later report, and does not imply that the name *novam mercatam* was in use at the time of the marriage; the poor Latin with the faulty feminine *mercatam* might support such an interpretation.

It seems thus that Newmarket had an informal market for some unknown period until 1223 (perhaps only for a short period), and this was formalised under Richard de Argentein after that date. May, citing TNA C133/33/16, states that Giles de Argentein had a weekly market in Newmarket by 1283 (May 1982: 7). In fact, in that record, the market is said to be worth 100 shillings yearly, but is not said to be weekly (Anon. 1898–1955: ii. 275). An annual market is also recorded in a seventeenth-century copy of a 1286 plea roll (SfArch HD1358/100 f.24). The exact date of the establishment of the weekly market thus seems to be unknown, though it was probably between 1223 and 1283, and very likely quite close to the earlier date.

My conclusions concerning the earliest records of Newmarket are summarised in the list below. This should remove the confusion and errors in the standard reference works; it could serve as an example of how getting the history of the name right is a key to the wider history of a place. The later history of Newmarket has been better treated by historians (Hore 1886; May 1981, 1988, 1982).

The early records of the name of Newmarket:

- (*in nouo m'cato* 3 Henry III (1218/9) FF CP25/1/23/9 (Rye 1891: 10)
- Novum Mercatum* 1220 E179/239/242 (Maxwell Lyte 1920: i. 331),
1316 FA (Maxwell Lyte, Maskelyne, et al. 1899–1920), 23 Edward
III (1349/50) AD B831
- (*maneriu' suu' de*) *novo mercato* 1223 TNA C60/18 m.3
- (*maneriu suu de*) *Novo M'cato* 10 Henry III (1225/6) Close Roll (Hardy
1833–1844: ii. 106)
- (*apud man'iu suu de' Novo M'cato* 11 Henry III (1226/7) Close Roll
(Hardy 1833–1844: ii. 175)
- (*in nouo M'cato* 24 Henry III (1239/40) FF CP25/1/24/20 (Rye 1891:
23)
- (*apud*) *nouum m'catu'* 24 Henry III (1239/40) FF CP25/1/24/20
- (*apud*) *novum mercat* 1244 C60/42 m.15
- (*Joh'es Le Petit de*) *Neumarch'* 1262 C60/59 m.17
- (*in villa de*) *nouo m'cato* 21 Edward I (1292/3) FF CP25/1/216/42
- novo mercato* 1334 Lay Subsidy

Newmarket 1400 leet court roll SfArch 1476/1/2, 1524 Subsidy Roll (SHAH 1910)

Newemarket 6 Richard II (1382/3) AD B3832, 10 Richard II (1386/7) AD B3787, 15 Richard II (1391/2) AD B3812, 35 Hen VI (1456/7) AD B1244

Newmarketh 17 Richard II (1393/4) AD B3779

Newemarkat 1399 market court roll SfArch 1476/1/1

(*John Langham de Nouomercat*) 1418 SfArch HD1538/9/61

le Newmarket 6 Hen V (1418/9) AD D966

(*in Campis de Newemarket* 1472/3 account roll SfArch HD746

nywmarkett 15C Gough Map (1996)

Newmerket c.1610 Speed Map⁶

The Newmarket entry in the Dict Sf should be replaced by the following paragraph.

Newmarket TL640634 (Lackford Hd). (*in nouo mercato* 3 Henry III (1218/9), *Novum Mercatum* 1220 Fees, 1316 FA, *Newmarket* 1227 Ch, 1524 SR, 1535 VE, 1783 Hods. ‘New market (town).’ ME *neue* + *merket* ‘market’, often rendered into MLat *novus* ‘new’ + MLat *mercatum* ‘market’. A market is recorded here c.1220. Apparently, Newmarket replaced Exning as a market site due to its position on a significant highway known in late medieval times (probably not before), as the Icknield Way. Newmarket is divided into two parishes, All Saints and St Mary. Newmarket is nearly surrounded by Cambridgeshire; the parish of St Mary is part of Suffolk, whereas the parish of All Saints is in Cambridgeshire. Newmarket is most famous for thoroughbred horse racing, training, and breeding, and royal interest in the sport led to the building of a palace here in the seventeenth century, of which fragments still survive.

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⁶ <<http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-ATLAS-00002-00061-00001/56>>, visited 14 February 2014.

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