
Background of "Moon in Scorpio" by Robert Neill, 1952

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The location

The activity in London is quite straightforward and all the place names are real. The road taken by John Leyburne to the north is not specified until he reaches Warrington and crosses the Mersey. From there he takes the main post road north to Wigan, (which is now the A49 and goes on to Preston, Lancaster, Carlisle, and Scotland). We deal elsewhere with the human element: the Whitakers, Nowells, Barlow/Booth, Mansells, Payne, Hoghton, Gill, Tompion, and Leyburne families. From Wigan the detail of his journey increases, 3 miles north of Wigan he comes to the junction at the Boar's Head (which still exists) and takes a right fork on the road towards Adlington "climbing over hill and dale to the rolling moorland that must be Bolton parish". He does not reach Bolton, but apparently heads east from somewhere around Adlington, "clattering down the slope" to drop down into the valley of the Goit and passes Thornclough, home to the Mansells. This locates Thornclough somewhere in the Goit valley, but we can get closer than that after his first day with the Langleys. After little more than a mile he comes to the parkland of Langley House. We can locate Langley House from his ride the next day when Miss Penelope "led him behind the house and up a steep and grassy track ... up and up ... to a vast and sunlit moor". We now see that the day before he must have crossed the Goit and climbed up the gentle slopes of the valley to the start of the steep approach to the moor. Penelope gives us the name "Anglezarke Moor" which certainly still exists. Looking at the map we can now locate Langley House easily, it must be the Manor House (GR 621171) situated at the top of its park land and at the foot of the steep climb to the moor. At this point we also learn that Park Hall, the home of the Hoghtons, is about 10 miles to the west, "in Standish, just across the post road". So Park Hall is west of the Post Road.

Next we look for Thornclough. "They ambled along the ridge of the moor" until Penelope pointed out "down there .. she was pointing to the valley below; and there on its further slope ... was Thornclough". But which valley were they looking across? There are three possibilities. First there is the valley of the Goit running from slightly west of north down to slightly east of south. (This valley is now completely flooded with Anglezarke Reservoir to the north of Rivington Reservoir. Secondly, at the junction of the two reservoirs the River Yarrow comes in from the east into the small Yarrow reservoir before joining the Goit. And thirdly, there is another valley, to the north east underlying Anglezarke Moor, with another stream that joins the Yarrow close to its reservoir. This third valley appears to be the one Penelope was pointing to, which puts Thornclough "on its further slope". The Ordnance Survey marks a "ruin" on this slope at GR 638165, possibly the site of Thornclough, a little more than a mile from Langley House, but I rather favour a site on the bank of Yarrow Reservoir.

There remains a remote possibility that both houses might have been imagined as under Anglezarke Reservoir, however, these reservoirs were built between 1850 and 1857, and were well established long before Neill visited the area, and the Mnor House park is well above the level of the water. I think we might conclude with confidence that Langley House was based on the Manor House above the Goit and under Anglezarke Moor.

Perhaps more tentatively that Thornclough was based on the ruin across the tributary valley to the Yarrow, as seen from Anglezarke Moor.

On the Sunday after church at Standish (St. Wilfred's) they take "The post-road through Standish to the North" and after a short distance on the Post Road (A49) Penelope turns off "down a narrow lane ... less than half a mile" to Park Hall where Will Hoghton lives. Langtree Old Hall (GR 552120) is about a quarter of a mile down a narrow lane from the A49 about a mile and a half from Standish. We learn that there is a lake at Park Hall, Will's father has the gout, and "It's the lake he thinks". There is a small lake close to Langtree Old Hall. We also learn that Park Hall is "a genial mellowed house" suggesting it is old relative to 1679. (There is a new Langtree Hall (GR 560111) which also has a lake, but it is on the wrong side of the Post Road and closer to Standish (half a mile), and obviously newer than the Old Hall.) I conclude that location intended for Park Hall is confidently identified with Langtree Old Hall. However, four or five miles to the north of Standish, at Charnock Richard there is a Park Hall which was owned by the Hoghtons, which also has a lake, but this is about a mile off the Post Road. This is discussed in more detail below. It seems that Neill might have adopted the real names of Hoghton and Park Hall, but transferred them south to Standish.

THE FIRST RIDE

Martin Mere: Speeds map of 1610 shows the mere extending all the way from Ormskirk to the sea. On the first ride, as far as Parbold Hill the description is pretty minimal but accurate. Parbold Hill does slope up gradually from the east, while the west escarpment down to the River Douglas is very steep. The view of Martin Mere would have been exact in the seventeenth century, but most of the Mere has been drained and is now farmland. Once down the hill they cross the Douglas and follow the bank of the river north for about four miles to Rufford, which still exists. Then they follow the mere to the west, past what is now the Martin Mere Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, then up a short rise north to Mere Brow, which is still there. From Mere Brow they head due west for another four miles to North Meols, which is now at the north end of the seaside town of Southport. Meol's Hall still exists. Heading towards the sea and the church by the sea; "there's a church by the sea and some houses". All you will find now is the district called Churchtown, the north part of Southport. Turning south through what has now become Southport, they cross the "river here in winter ... where the Mere drains to the sea". No sign of it now of course as the Mere has shrunk to the small area of the Wildfowl Trust. Most of the year the Mere drained to the sea along the River Douglas, but in winter the Mere was bigger and often enlarged by high winds and tides from the sea: "A good nor'wester sets the seas driving over". Down the coast they come to Birkdale, which was a very small fishing village in the seventeenth century, but is now the south end of Southport. I suspect Water Lane is one of the two unsurfaced lanes south of Hillside station, just south of the present Birkdale, but this is guesswork. There is no mention of Water Lane on the 1850 Ordnance Survey maps at 10 inches to the mile. There is no obvious fictional need to create the name 'Water Lane', so I rather feel I have missed it somehow. After a short time at the sea and in the Hawes they return along the south side of the Mere to Park Hall to see Will Hoghton again. There is no mention of the route they took, but it would probably be to the south of the Mere and north of Halsall Moss. The 10 inch map mentions a house called Jumps at Birkdale, and in the book we meet the widow "Margaret Jump, relict of Robert Jump of Birkdale" a little further down the coast towards Ainsdale. Here they meet the widow Jump and her son, Jimmy, and see the windmill owned by Richard Rimmer, the mill house, and the White Otter pool - see the next ride.

THE SECOND RIDE

Ormskirk. The next day they see Ormskirk from the top of Parbold Hill and head there to the (red) Rose (of Lancaster) where they meet Tom Greenhalgh at the Red Rose, and avoid George Rimmer at the Rising Sun. Ormskirk still exists, a big town, with several inns and pubs, but no "Rose" or "Rising

Sun” that I can find. So I think we have to accept these as fictional creations, possibly inspired by the “Buck i' th' Vine” on Burscough Street (did Neill stay here?).

Tom Greenhalgh. Possibly he picked up the name Greenhalgh on a visit to Greenhalgh's Craft Bakery, also on Burscough Street. Very convenient if he stayed at the Buck i' th' Vine.

Rimmer. An old Ormskirk name, for example:

Marriage: 20 Jan 1829 St Peter and St Paul, Ormskirk, Lancashire, England
James Rimmer - of Ormskirk
Margaret Barton - (X), of Ormskirk
Witness: Thomas Spencer; George Wignall
Married by Banns by: George.W.Bower Curate

There are also many Rimmers in Ormskirk today:

T W Rimmer, chartered Surveyor
G R Rimmer. Builder

Try googling for: rimmer family ormskirk history

“The Scarisbrick road ... being also the road to Martin Mere” is now the A570 to the north west out of Ormskirk. They head out of Ormskirk “as the way wound north and west to the coast”. Past Scarisbrick they have to pass between the south extent of Martin Mere and the northern extent of the smaller Halsall Moss, heading straight for the hawes and the coast between Birkdale and Ainsdale. Then they go south to Ainsdale to find the Widow Jump, the mill owned by Richard Rimmer, the mill house (separate from the mill) and Rimmer's Lane leading to White Otter, the “Otter Pool, a mile or more inland”. All exactly as marked on the 1850 map. White Otter Farm is still marked on the current 1:50,000 OS map (sheet 108).

Then a long ride back to Langley House.

Lathom House: Built by the Stanleys in 1496, was the last Royalist stronghold in Lancashire during the Civil War and was twice besieged by Parliamentary forces. During the first Siege of Lathom House by Sir Thomas Fairfax in 1644, the house was defended by Charlotte, Countess of Derby and 300 men who kept possession until Royalist forces under Prince Rupert of the Rhine arrived in the area en route to attack Bolton. After the siege the countess and her retinue fled to the Isle of Man. In 1645 the house was again besieged by General Egerton with 4000 Parliamentarian soldiers, and was surrendered after a protracted siege after which the fortifications were demolished. James Stanley, the husband of Charlotte was beheaded in Bolton in 1651 for his part in the Bolton Massacre, and the Stanley estates were confiscated by Parliament. The house was rebuilt in 1725-40.

THE THIRD RIDE

The Swelling Moon: On this final ride, John and Will leave Penny at home and ride first to the Rose at Ormskirk, then out by the south of the Mere to the coast again to meet with Jummy Jump. Here Neill throws all caution to the wind and changes the orbit of the moon and the rotation of the earth to fit in with his story:

“to the south the crescent moon hung above the hawes” The moon always rises in the east (give or about 5 degrees) not the south, and when the moon rises close to sunset it has to be full or within a day or two of full, and never a crescent. They ride back by the north of the Mere, hiding on Mere Brow to wath Mansell and his merry men, discover the muskets, and then go back to Ormskirk and home to the final showdown.

The Lancashire plot

The basis of Scorpio is the intention to organise (revolt against the king (Charles II) in 1679. At first sight it is perhaps surprising that the action should take place in Lancashire, far from the centre of the nation's Parliament and the king's household. We have to be a little careful here, the plot of Moon in Scorpio concerns a plot to depose the king and return to the principles of the Republic and a more austere form of protestantism. The king, although nominally protestant was known to have deep personal sympathies with the church of Rome, and was strongly in favour of an authoritarian state governed by king and the Church of England which had close leaning towards the ritual of the Roman church. The opposition to the king was lead by Shaftesbury and his Ge=reen Ribbon Club, and this activity was indeed largely centred in the London and the south east. There was little activity in this matter from the north west which remained strongly supportive of the king and the established church, and was also very sympathetc towards rituals of the Roman church. Indeed, only ten years later than the action in Moon in Scorpio there was an important projected uprising in the north west to depose William III and restore the Stuart line by placing James Stuart, the (catholic) son of Charles II. The plot, known as the 'Lancashire PLot' obviously had a very different objective to the older plans of the Shaftesbury plots: to restore a catholic monarchy in the direct line of descent as opposed to a very restricted monarchy with authority resting primarily in parliament. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of the Lancashire Plot which show marked similarities with the plot of Moon in Scorpio. Neill has moved Shaftesbury's plot to Lancashire and re-directed it to the resoration of the Stuarts. The Lancashire Plot is organised around ships landing on the Lancashire coast, avoiding Customs, with documents (commisions from the 'king', James Stuart) which are to be delivered to those in Lancashire, Westmorland and Yorkshire. The papers were discovered just in time to prevent the success of the Plot. One of the organisers of the Plot, John Lunt, is imprisoned in Newgate for 20 weeks, before being released due to failure of witnesses. Lunt and Treshfold of Goosnargh near present are hidden away in a secret cavity in wall at Ashes Hall at Goosnargh. The Lancashire Plot is described in some detail by Fishwick in his Hisory of Lancashire (1895) which was available to Neill.

Characters and Families

LEYBURNE of Cunswick near Kendal in what was then Westmorland

John Leyburn "was sprung of the old and hourable family of Leyburne of Cunswick, by Kendal in Westmorland" and there are many references to his family's prominent position in the recusant population of England in the latter half of the seventeenth century. It is easy to identify the Leyburne family with the Layburnes of Cunswick, and the position of this family has been explored in detail in the doctoral thesis of Alison Wright at St. Andrews in 2002 (obviously not available to Robert Neill). Much of what follows is taken from this thesis.

On the first page of "Moon in Scorpio"quote> we learn that our hero, John Leyburne had:

1. A father who "had been no papist".
2. An uncle George "who was a papist".
3. An uncle John who "was a most eminent papist, a priest who had been President of the English College at Douai".
4. An uncle Thomas who "had been the sourest of puritans".

Comparing this with the pedigree of the Layburnes produced by Alison Wright, we find a John Layburne (the youngest son of John Leyburne who died 1663) who died in 1702. He succeeded his uncle George as President of Douai after a period as Cardinal Howard's auditor in Rome, and was consecrated Bishop of Adrumentum and served as James II's Catholic bishop from 1685-1688.

This John had three brothers:

1. An eldest brother William who was killed fighting for the Royalists in 1642 at Sheriff Hutton.
2. A brother Thomas who died 1672, who had a son John who died unmarried in 1680.
3. An elder brother James who lived in France and died without issue in 1680.
4. 3 sisters.
5. A half-brother George who was twice married (first to Ann Stanley, then Elizabeth Preston) and who died in 1704 but continued the Layburne line at Cunswick.
6. Two other half brothers, Charles and William (died 1644), both without issue.
7. and four uncles:
8. An uncle John who was head of the family as first born, died 1663.
9. An uncle Thomas (second born) who succeeded to the Cunswick estates, but was very unlikely have been a puritan.
10. An uncle Nicholas who was Vice-President of Douai.
11. An uncle George who was President of Douai.

So either we have a 'real John Leyburne', a catholic, who died in 1702, around age 45, with a papist father, or, we have a 'fictional non-papist John Leyburne' with a fictional, non-papist father. However, both Johns have three uncles John, George and Thomas.

From the history of the Layburnes of Cunswick I am inclined to think that the introduction of a protestant element into such a dedicated Roman Catholic family was purely fictional, and I would like to absolve uncle Thomas from the taint of puritanism.

The John Leyburne of Moon in Scorpio was a fictional son of an additional fictional son of the 'real' John Layburne who died in 1663.

There is a memorial in the Parish Church of Holy Trinity at Kendal in Cumbria to the last of the family, another John, the son of George.

To the Memory of John Layburne, late of Cunswick
Esquire. who died ye 9th Dec. 1737, aged 69. In whom
that Ancient, Loyall and Religious family is now extinct
whose example this inscription recommends to posterity,
for under this stone lies the remains of a most Affectionate
husband, a Charitable Neighbour and a Kind Master. In
dealings Just, in Words, Sincere, was Humble in Prosperity
heroically resigned in Adversity, whose unaffected
devotion, strict sobriety and Unwearied Practice of
Christian Duties, is worthy the imitation of All. He had
two sons who died in their Infancy, so hath left no issue to
inherit his virtues. And that the memory of them may not
perish with ye Name, Lucy, his wife hath placed this
Monument as a memorial of her love and esteem.
Miserimini, Miserimini mei
Saltem vos Amici mei Job. 192

As recorded above, the family name died out with John in 1737, and no family archive remains. However, official records of their affairs are to be found in the Cumbria Record Office at Kendal, the Public Record Office at Kew, the Archives of the Archbishop of Westminster, the Queen's Stuart

Archives at Windsor, and the French Departmental Archives for St. Germain-en-Laye, and printed sources such as the Calendar of State Papers Domestic.

Seventeenth century Westmorland was deeply conservative, and included a profoundly Arminian Anglican-based society which had many pro-Catholic leanings. In this society the Layburnes adhered strongly to the old faith and provided numerous priests for the Catholic church especially throughout the seventeenth century. The strength and persistence of the Tory Anglican model of passive obedience to the Crown as preached by the Restoration Anglican Church was fully apparent in Westmorland. Presbyterianism never thrived in the county.

Just a mention of some earlier Layburne prominent Catholics:

1. James Layburne, was hanged, drawn and quartered in 1583 for denying Queen Elizabeth I's legitimacy and also for his support for Pius V's declaration that she had no right to the throne.
2. Roger Layburne, consecrated in 1503 was a pre-Reformation bishop of Carlisle.
3. John Layburne was admitted to St Alban's College in Valladolid in 1593.
4. George Layburne was active on behalf of Charles I in the Civil War, but more significantly he was one of Queen Henrietta Maria's Court Chaplains.
5. John Layburne (died 1663) married twice. He had four sons and four daughters by his first wife. The eldest, William, was killed fighting for the Royalists early in the Civil War. The second son, Thomas, inherited the estates of Cunswick and Witherslack. The third son, James, went to live in France and was possibly employed in Louis XIV's army, the fourth son, John was a possible candidate for the John Leyburne of Moon in Scorpio. Their father's second marriage produced five sons and two daughters. We have no record of two of the sons, or of the daughters. Three of the sons played influential, but less well-documented roles in seventeenth-century politics. George, the eldest, had considerable influence on Catholic affairs and local politics in Westmorland and North Lancashire. He eventually inherited the Cunswick estates as the main male line died out in 1680.
6. George's younger brother, Charles, served at another Catholic queen's court (Mary of Modena). In 1688 Mary and her infant son fled to France. Charles accompanied the royal family and spent the rest of his life in exile at St. Germain-en-Laye. The youngest son, William (born in 1644 after the death of his half-brother), was ordained and probably assisted his elder half-brother John in Rome as secretary to Cardinal Howard. The last Layburne to inherit Cunswick was George's eldest son John. From a long line of Catholic Gentry, whose family had served James II, it was natural for him to join the 1715 Jacobite rising at Preston on 10th November. He was taken prisoner there when the Jacobite army surrendered. In London he was tried and attainted for treason, although not executed. He died in Kendal close to the Parish Church where, on his death on the 9th of December 1737, he is remembered.

WHITAKER of Holme

NOWELL of Read

The LANGLEYS of Agecroft or Edgeworth

(There is an Edgeworth which is a little village in Lancashire near Darwen and appears to have no relevance to Moon in Scorpio.)

There is an Agecroft in Pendlebury on the northern outskirts of Salford which has an association with the family name Langley.

The lord of Pendlebury married Alice de Woolley daughter of Richard son of Henry de Pontefract, the eventual heir was his daughter Alice, wife of Jordan de Tetlow. Her heir was her daughter, Joan,

who married Richard de Langley, and the manor descended with the Langleys until Agecroft (also known as "Achecroft" or "Edgcroft") was the manor house of Pendleburg (Pendlebury - now part of Salford) being the residence of the Prestwich family until Johanna de Prestwich married Roger de Langley - subsequently the Langley's, formerly of Middleton, are recorded as residing at Agecroft Hall in 1389. The Langleys married well and propitiously, having sons and daughters wed into the de Trafford family, the Hollands, and the Asshetons. These connections and their considerable land holdings in the region made them a powerful local family for several centuries. Sometime around 1340 Richard de Langley married Joanna, sole heiress of the Prestwich family, and subsequently the Prestwich and Heaton estates came into the possession of the Langleys. The Langley family history had already achieved notoriety by the early 15th century, when in October 1404, Charles Langley was elected Bishop of London and Archbishop of York, despite opposition from Rome - the Pope went on to excommunicate Langley as well as the King, who had promoted him. At the end of the 16th century. Robert Langley died 19 September 1561, leaving four daughters as co-heirs. On the division of the estates, Agecroft, and lands in Pendlebury, became the portion of Anne, who married William Dauntsey, from Wiltshire, and the Langley name expired. Agecroft and Pendlebury are at least fifteen miles from the Langley House.

It appears that Neill just borrowed the name to create Penelope's father Richard Langley.

HOGHTON of Park Hall

Will Hoghton really did exist!

The old family of de Hoghton (or Houghton) had their country seat at Hoghton Tower, sometimes known as Houghton Castle, a few miles east of Preston. This old family is of Norman descent, tracing its history back to before the Invasion of 1066. It is reputed that a Houghton came over on the same ship as William the Conqueror himself, and that the Houghton coat of arms is the oldest in Cheshire and the second oldest in England. By the mid-16th century the Houghtons were fervent supporters of Catholicism, at a time when the Catholic Faith was outlawed. William Shakespeare stayed with the Houghtons for a while in the role of school teacher and actor. Richard de Hoghton was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. The Houghtons of Park Hall are an offshoot of this family. Henry de Lea in 1284 obtained a royal charter for a market every Friday at his manor of Charnock, and an annual fair on the eve, day and morrow of St. Nicholas; also free warren in his demesne lands. The market and fair do not seem to have prospered, but the grant of free warren led to the formation of a park, and the distinguishing name of the Park or Park Hall for that share of the manor. In 1606 was acquired by Richard Hoghton, an illegitimate son of a Sir Richard Hoghton of Hoghton. Richard Hoghton of Park Hall died in 1622, his eldest son Alexander had died before his father, and Park Hall descended to Richard's younger son William. This branch of the family had long belonged to the Roman Catholic faith, and William Hoghton supported the king's cause on the outbreak of the Civil War. He was made a lieutenant-colonel, but fell at the first battle of Newbury in 1643. The estates were at once sequestered by the Parliament, and in 1652 John, William's son and heir, petitioned for an allowance from his inheritance, as he was "in no way guilty of delinquency, but was a recusant." The estates were sold under the third Confiscation Act of 1652, but were regained by John Hoghton who recorded a pedigree in 1664. His son William was born in 1659 (making him 20 years old in 1679). The fit for Will Houghton in Moon in Scorpio is perfect. So Will's father with gout was called John.

THE MANSELL (MAUNSEL) FAMILY

There is a recorded Mansell family of the period which had considerable noble connections, but they had no connection with Lancashire. In Moon in Scorpio, "Henry Mansell, was a gentleman of the lesser sort" who rode with the Parliamentarians in the 1640-42 and was "left with Thornclough ... and not enough wealth to keep it": hardly the status of the Mansells.

Sir Edward Maunsell (Mansel) was appointed Chamberlain of Chester upon the death of Sir Rhys Mansel in 1559, and held it until 1565. Sir Edward married Lady Jane Somerset, daughter of Henry Somerset, Earl of Worcester, by whom he had a very numerous family. In 1569 he was made Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire and Cheshire. He died 1572, and his son Henry, fourth earl, succeeded him in these offices, dying in 1593. His 4th and most famous son was: Sir Robert Mansel, b. 1573, d. 1656,

commenced his sea-training at an early age, became Treasurer of the Navy (1604-1618) before he was appointed, May 14, 1618, Vice-Admiral of England, a post second only in rank and importance to that of lord high admiral Mansell played no active part in the civil war. The parish register of St Alfege, in East Greenwich, where he lived, indicates that he was buried on 21 August 1652, so it is difficult to explain why licences to export horses were issued in his name in October 1655. He died childless and intestate, letters of administration being granted on 26 June 1656 to his widow, who died in 1658.

We must conclude that Neil borrowed the Mansell name, with no direct relevance to the Mansell family.

NEVIL PAYNE

Henry Nevil Payne (died 1710?) was a dramatist and agitator for the Roman Catholic cause in Scotland and England. He wrote *The Fatal Jealousie* (1673), *The Morning Ramble* (1673), and *The Siege of Constantinople* (1675). After he finished writing plays, he was heavily involved in the Montgomery Plot in 1689, and was captured and put to torture on 10 December 1690. He was finally released in February 1701, and commenced further plotting.

JOHN GADBURY

John Gadbury (1627–1704) was an English astrologer, and a prolific writer of almanacs and on other related topics. Initially a follower or disciple, and a defender in the 1650s, of William Lilly, he eventually turned against Lilly and denounced him in 1675 as fraudulent.[1] His 1652 '*Philastrogus Knavery Epitomized*' was a reply to Lillie's '*Ape Whipt by the pseudonymous Philastrogus*', defending Lilly, Nicholas Culpeper and others. He became a High Tory and Catholic convert. He had a number of brushes with the authorities: imprisonment (wrongful) at the time of the Popish Plot (as in *Moon in Scorpio*) and was suspected later of plotting against William III of England (Lancashire Plot). He was in trouble for omitting Guy Fawkes Day from his almanacs.