Sir Isaac Newton, famous for his work on the theory of gravity, never kept a record of what happened that day, back in 1666 or where in fact it happened!

A number of different stories still survive as to how and where Newton first thought about his theory of gravity, told by a variety of people.

Keith Moore from the Royal Society explained: “The story was certainly true, but let’s say it got better with the telling.”
William Stukely, who was a good friend of Newton’s, wrote about Newton’s Discovery in his ‘Memoirs of Issac Newton’ in 1752.

He wrote:

‘After dinner, the weather being warm, we went into the garden, and drank tea under the shade of some apple trees...he told me, he was just in the same situation as when formally, the notation of gravitation came to his mind. “Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground,” thought he to himself.’
The Site of Newton’s Discovery

Woolsthorpe Manor - Isaac Newton’s home

Newton’s Apple Tree © Nick Harrison, 2006

The tree mentioned in Stukely’s story is still there today!
This picture shows the place where Newton is meant to have witnessed a green apple falling from the tree Outside his family home and first thought of his system of gravity.

You can still visit this place today, as the house and grounds are now looked after by the National Trust.

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Cambridge’s Very Own Newton’s Apple Tree!

As a young man, Newton went to Trinity College in Cambridge to study.

Despite it being very unlikely that Newton actually made his discovery of gravity in the grounds of Trinity College, his college has now placed a special tree to remember him.

FACTOID!
The tree is of the Flower of Kent variety which produces green cooking apples. It was grafted from the original tree at Newton’s home and was planted in 1954.

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Newton’s Theory of Light

From this discovery using a prism he made a ‘Theory of Light’ which states that when light refracts that the colours that are visible are made from the white light itself rather than the object they are visible on.

FACTOID!
It is thought that Newton bought a prism at Stourbridge Fair which he used to discover how white light disperses into many colours!

Dispersion by a prism
Alfredo Louro © 2008

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Newton’s Telescope

This picture shows a replica of it and can be found in the Whipple Museum in Cambridge.

FACTOID!
Newton telescope was 10 times smaller than the telescopes of the time and was much more accurate.

Photograph © Andrew Dunn, 5 November 2004

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Web Resources available at:

http://www.creatingmycambridge.com/history-stories/newtons-apple-tree/

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For further information visit:

Information and Videos

• BBC iWonder - Isaac Newton: The Man Who Discovered Gravity
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zwwgc6m

• Isaac Newton Institute:
  http://www.newton.ac.uk/about/isaac-newton

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