

EMBARKING ON A ONE-NAME STUDY

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A ONE-NAME STUDY would seem to be a far easier undertaking than researching a particular family tree where the number of relevant surnames doubles with each generation uncovered. However, soon after embarking on a one-name study of the Burvilles it was clear that the one-name description was not quite exact and some serious thought would have to be given to the name variants to be included and those to be excluded.

So, what exactly is a one-name study? The general idea is that one collects data, in some spatial and time framework, on people with the chosen surname, in order to create a picture of the people, their location and lives. As a starting point I chose to concentrate on the pre-1900 Burvilles of the UK, with the possibility of expanding the study if the initial phase proved successful. My primary objectives were to find out where they came from and the origin of the family name.

The first step was to get some idea of the distribution of the name in this country. The telephone directories provide a good idea of the contemporary situation but I wished to start with an earlier picture. The Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints international genealogical (IGI) records, which are a partial indexed transcription of the church registers, provided me with a most helpful starting point. It was a relief to find the name appears to be of East Kent origin, although quite a few are found in the London records.

As I went through the IGI records the question of name variants first became a serious matter. Starting with Burville, which variants should be included in my researches? Replacing the *v* with *w*, or a missing *e* no difficulty. Similarly, there is no problem with an *e* replacing the *u*. After all, many of the clerks who recorded the information in the old parish registers were only semi-literate and one can imagine how the differing country and town accents would have led to various spellings. The development of an effective algorithm to decide inclusion and exclusion is still to be completed. In the meantime, a lot of subjective judgement is involved. For example, Burrel is a well-documented surname but in the Sandwich tithe records there are Burvills who turned into Burrills and back to Burvills again, in their life-times. Similarly, in the Clophill, Bedfordshire records, there are Burrells, one of whom appears to have changed into a Burvill when married in another parish, Campton, only three miles away.

In the Birchington records there are Beavells (Bevell, Bevell etc). These could well belong to the set but evidence either way is still sought. In practical terms, as the records show the plague of the 17th century virtually wiping them out, it might be argued that the matter is of no significance. However, this is not so, since when the full results of the study are published, I hope to provide information on such features of the evolution of the name and those who bore it.

Most families have stories, passed down over the years, about ancestors who did great or naughty things. For us there was the ubiquitous suggestion of Huguenot origins but my favourites were about smugglers and highwaymen. One story related to Oxney Bottom, on the Dover to Deal road, where a highwayman held up a Burville and his daughter returning to Dover in their cart. In demanding they "Stand and deliver!" the villain discharged his pistol into the air, causing the horse to shy and the unfortunate father to fall from his seat into the back of the cart, striking his head. Taking the reins and whipping-up the horse, the resourceful daughter avoided the would-be robber and drove her unconscious father home to Dover, only to find, on arrival, that he had died. End of story (no information on arrests or charges). Would my research throw any light on this tale, or perhaps uncover others?

The first suggestion of a possible link with the highwayman story was a carrier's widow, living in the parish of Guston in a cottage under the cliff. The bottom of the cliff, under Dover Castle, seemed a strange place for a carrier to live – a matter for further investigation. Eventually I found an entry in the first edition of the Dover Telegraph & Cinque Ports General Advertiser (16th November 1833):

SHOCKING ACCIDENT ; Yesterday an inquest was taken at the Fox Inn, St James's Street, before J. W. Pilcher, Esq., Mayor and Coroner, on the body of Benjamin Burvill, a poor man who with his wife and several children, resided in a cave beneath the Castle Cliff. The deceased, accompanied by another man, was returning from Deal, with a cart, on Thursday night, and had taken up two soldiers of the rifle brigade. The party rode at the side of the cart, and when near Broad Leas Bottom the float on which the deceased sat gave way, and he fell on his head with such violence as to cause his death within a very short time after his removal from the spot where the accident happened, to the auxiliary poor-house of St. James's parish. Verdict – Accidental death.

That could'nt possibly be the same incident, or could it? Having established a possible distribution for the *Burvilles* the next step was to consolidate the mapping before delving back into the older records. The census returns, covering the period from 1841 to 1881, provide a suitable source but extracting the data is no easy matter, unless it has been indexed. Going through the returns, house by house, street by street, persuades one most forcibly of the value of indexes. At the moment I still have a lot of Kent returns to go through. There is a national project, currently underway, to index the 1881 return. The outcome is awaited with much anticipation. Identifying the whereabouts of indexed records, such as transcribed Parish Registers which are a wonderful source of information, is a task requiring persistence. One has to admire the application of people who spend so much time transcribing and indexing records for others to use.

Sandwich is one of the towns, centred on Langdon Abbey, which the *Burvilles* favoured in the past and I am still hoping to find indexed Parish Records for the several large parishes in the town.

There could well be more than one source for the Burville name but, as mentioned above, it is interesting that as one goes back in time, the name tends to cluster around Langdon. Sandwich has been mentioned. Other locations are Woodnesborough, Worth, Sholden, Deal, Northbourne, Sutton, St. Margaret's, Guston, Dover, Whitfield, Shepherdswell, Barham, Nonington, Goodnestone, Ash and the villages directly around the Abbey. Perhaps the name was taken by workers, on the estates, when it

52 became necessary to have a surname. The name Barville, which still survives in a farm at Tilmanstone, may well be a possible source for the name. Whether it has a connection with Auberville remains to be seen. The Aubervilles also owned land in other counties. It will be interesting to see if the name also has early origins in those areas.

A more remote possible origin for the name may be the French place name Berville, of which there are several in the Le Havre area and elsewhere.

Whilst my expectation of finding smugglers and highwaymen has yet to be fulfilled, there has been the surprising pleasure of finding several 17th and 18th century clerics who were Oxbridge graduates, one being a Six Preacher of Canterbury Cathedral in the Commonwealth period. Perhaps, at some time in the future, I will have the opportunity to record a fuller description of the outcome of these researches.

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