

CHAPTER 1 - ORIGINS, Pre 1600

The bearing of surnames, or family names, became common in all classes of English society in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, although there was nothing official or static about them. A man may very well be known at different times or in different places by different names. It was not until the introduction of the compulsory keeping of parish registers in 1538, that the process of surnames became fixed.

The name *Genn* can be found in several parts of England and its actual date and place of origin has been shrouded in some mystery. Was there a single individual who chose the name first, and from him all Genns have descended, or was the name created in different places at different times by unrelated people?

In order to assess these questions, a careful examination was made of the occurrence of the name, and similar names, from parish records of christenings and marriages, the data base being the International Genealogical Index (IGI).

In a later chapter, we establish our direct Genn ancestry in Virginia in the year 1684, so for this exercise, we have only considered events that took place in England before 1700. On the suspicion that the name *Genn* had evolved from other similar names, the following names were included in the analysis: *Gyn, Gynn, Gynne, Gyne, Gynes, Gin, Ginn, Gine, Ginne, Gen, Gene, Genne, Genn, Gens, Genes, and Geens.*

This gave us a data base of more than 1100 events (births, christenings, marriages) which took place in some 177 parishes in 15 English counties spanning the time period from 1540 to 1699.

The first step of the analysis was to draw up a chart for each parish showing who married who and when, and what children belong to what parents, and how the name was spelled for each event.

The next step was to print up a very large map of England (scale, 3 miles = 1 inch.) by copying the pages of the Ordinance Survey Motoring Atlas of Great Britain. By taping these together, a map of about three meters square was created. This was spread over the office floor and the parishes where the our selected names were found were highlighted. The map was then marked with the name spelling used in each parish, and the date beside each to indicate the first occurrence of each spelling. Some parishes recorded only a single event (a marriage or a christening) while others disclosed a significant number of related people spanning several generations.

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These larger groups were also located and noted on the map. Having completed all of this, the picture became much clearer, and the following conclusions became evident.

The first set of conclusions was that *Gen* and *Genne* occur somewhat intermixed, and by about the year 1600 they had both evolved into *Genn*. Nearly the entire population of *Gen*, *Genne* and *Genn* was found to occupy a small strip of eastern England 140 miles long by 25 miles wide, extending from southern Yorkshire in the north-west, across Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, northern Cambridgeshire, a corner of Suffolk and ending in Norfolk in the east.

There were two significant population centers. The first one occupies an area between Sheffield and Huddersfield in the West Riding of Yorkshire and centers on the parish of Kirkburton. Before 1600 the spelling for this area was predominately *Genne*. The second population center focused on the town of Soham in Cambridgeshire. The pre 1600 spelling in this area was found to be predominately *Gen*.

An isolated population of *Gen*, *Genne* and *Genn* was also found to occupy the northern tip of Cornwall in the parish of Kilkhampton and the adjoining Devonshire parish of Bradworthy, five miles distance from Kilkhampton. These Cornwall-Devonshire Genns feature given names such as: Abell, Degorie, Nicholas, Theophiles, Monica, Obedience and Honour, names which do not recur in the ancestral sequence leading to the Genns of Canada. The *Genn* name in Cornwall and Devonshire seems intermixed with the name *Jenn*, and may be a spelling variation.

The second set of conclusions was that *Gyn*, *Gynn* and *Gynne* occur quite intermixed, and similarly, about the year 1600, they evolved into *Ginn*. The population of *Gyn*, *Gynn*, *Gynne* and *Ginn* occupy the county of Hertfordshire and the adjoining southern part of Cambridgeshire. This territory adjoins the southern boundary of the *Gen*, *Genne*, *Genn* zone but only a few parishes include persons of both populations. The two name-groups appear territorially quite distinct. Small groups of the *Gyn*, *Gynn*, *Gynne*, *Ginn* population were found south of Hertfordshire in London, Surrey and Sussex. *Ginn* also evolved from *Gynne*, *Gyne* and *Gynes* throughout the rest of Cornwall and Devonshire, but once again, the small group of *Gen*, *Genne* and *Genn* in Kilkhampton - Bradworthy appears to be totally independent.

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Why did these families appear to change their name spelling in the 1500s and 1600s? They probably didn't do this intentionally. Changes in spelling have occurred in many surnames. Usually, when an event needed to be recorded, the person spoke his version of his name to a scribe or cleric and the cleric wrote what he heard. How it was written depended on pronunciation, accents and the literary custom at the time.

Variations were sometimes adopted by different branches of a family. Hence, the connections between *Genn*, *Gen*, *Genne* and *Gene*, and possible connections to *Geen*, *Jenn*, *Jenne*, *Jennes* and numerous others. We must assume that as most communication in those times was verbal rather than written, then how a name was spelled didn't carry much significance to the population at large. When an event had to be recorded, such as a christening or a marriage, the spelling was at the discretion of the church official (the word cleric evolved into clerk) responsible for keeping the records. The English language was changing. Words were losing their final "e", and "i" was replacing "y". To wit, "ye olde curiosyte shoppe". As a result *Genn* and *Ginn* just evolved with the English language.

"A Dictionary of British Surnames" by Percy Hyde Reaney provided the following excerpts:

Henry, Francis de Gene, 1255, Rotule Hundredorum,
Staffordshire.

William Gene, 1275, Rotule Hundredorum, Suffolk.

Thomas Gennes, 1297, Minister's Account of the
Earldom of Cornwall.

Alice Genne, 1327, Subsidy Rolls, Suffolk.

Thomas Genne, 1378, Register of the Free Men
of the City of York.

Some additional early references were documented by Cousin John R. Genn during his visit to the Guildhall, London, as follows:

1236 - Eboracum. Henricus de Dayvill allormaint Gudinum clericum contra Agnetem (Agnes) Genne de consuetudinibus et serviciis de tenemento in Gergrave. Whatever this means, cousin Agnes was in the middle of it.

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1281, 10 June - to Richard Holebrok, the king's steward, order to cause an inquisition by oath of verderers and foresters and others whether William Genn (Genu) of Druyestok, imprisoned at Rokynham for a trespass committed in the forest of Roteland, is guilty or not.

1285, 20 June - Confirmation of the following charters: a charter of Manassas, count of Guisnes, and Emma the countess, daughter of William de Artas, his, wife, in favor of St. Andrew and the nuns of Radigaffeld, dated, AD 1120. Note: The Latin that followed referred to "Emma, comtissa de Gennes" and the place as "Radyngefelde" and "Raddingefeld".

1297, 19 July - to the Abbess of Fontevrault, whereas the king upon the voidance of the priory of Aumesbyay ordered the abbess to send to him in England from her house of Fontevrault a suitable nun for the rule of the priory, and she sent to him lady Joan de Genes for this purpose.

1382 - to Guy de Brien and his fellows, justice of the peace in Somerset. Order not to trouble ... William Gene (and others) ... for a certain trespass, whose names are not delivered in the parliaments of 5 and 6 Richard as principals, ringleaders, abettors or procurers of the late traitorous insurrection to be excepted from the king's grace.

1402 - to William Gascoigne and his fellows. Order by writ of nisi prius to cause an inquisition between the king and Henry de Broghton and Thomas Genne, the younger chaplains, executors of Joan, wife of Donald de Hesilrig, knight, whether Thomas, earl of Kent, who forfeited to the king, did make to the said Joan for life a feoffment of the manor of Aton in Clyvelande, co. York.

1413 - to the sherriffs of London. Like writ, mutalis mutandis, by mainprise of John Genne, 'baker', William Augewyne, 'horner' in favor of William Milton otherwise Barnatynge in regard to Thomas Childe of New Sarum 'mercier'.

1459 - Edward Genne, citizen and draper of London, to Guy Fairfax, 'gentleman', Thomas Belett, 'mercier' and William Dodde 'habberdassher' citizen of London, gift with warranty of all his goods and chattles within the realm or elsewhere, and he has put them in possession thereof by delivery of one

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silver spoon, and because his seal is to many unknown he has procured the seal of Richard Alley one of the aldermen of London to be hereto attached.

It has been suggested that a Genn helped with the stained glass windows in Ely Cathedral, constructed in the early 1100's and located near Soham, Cambridgeshire, a major center of early Genns.

Also mentioned were an Isabella Genn who died in 1603 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, London and a Henry Genn buried in Leicester Cathedral at about the same time.

Other name dictionary evaluations were:

A Glossary of Cornish Names by J.Bannister reports:

Genn, n.f., *Gwen*, white; *Cien*, a ridge; *I.Gen*, a sword; or from St.Keyne.

A Dictionary of Family Names by M. A. Lower suggests:

Genn, this name, which is Cornish, and rare, is believed to be the Celtic form (or rather root) of *Planta-gen-ista*, broom. The *G* is sounded hard. (The *Planta genista* was also the symbol of Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, France. The family was known as the Plantagenets and became the ruling house of England after the Normans.)

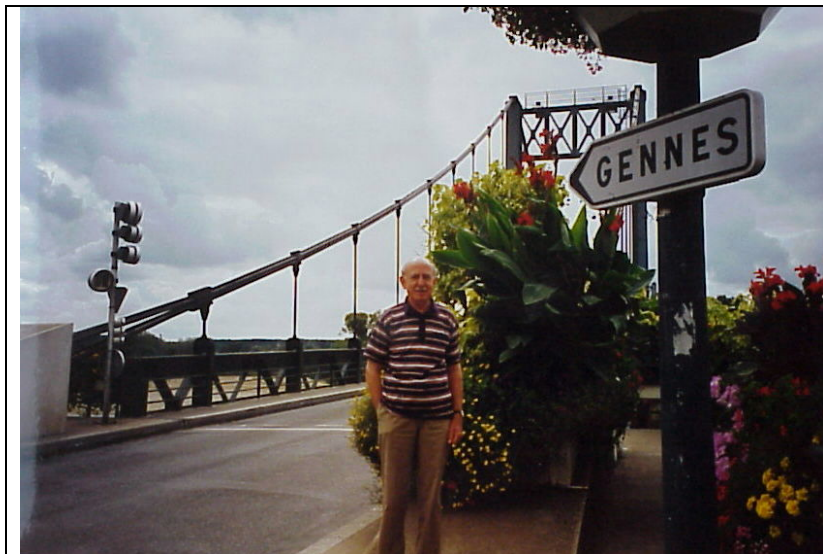
Note that in some villages in Yorkshire, the *G* in Genn is still sounded soft.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *Gin* as a mechanical device or engine. It reports the word as having had a variety of forms over the centuries, such as: *Ginne*, *Gynne*, *Gyn*, *Gyne*, *Gynn*, *Ginn*. This list has remarkable similarities to the *Ginn* group of names found in Hertfordshire and counties to the south. Chaucer made reference to "gynne, gone, nor skaffaut" as equipment for warfare, *gynne* being an engine (catapult) and *gone* being a gun or cannon. From these words can be derived the professions of *ingyners* and *gonners* and the family names of *Jenner* and *Gunner*. Once again we are reminded of the *Jenn/Genn* connection of *Kilkhampton*, Cornwall. This analysis has provided no comfort in discovering the roots of the *Gen*, *Genne*, *Genn* family of Yorkshire and Cambridge.

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Many English surnames find their origin in the inanimate, such as *Hill*, *Rivers* and *Ford*. Some identify a trade or craft, such as *Cooper*, *Fletcher* and *Smith* or as we have seen, *Jenner* and *Gunner*. The Yorkshire family of *Gen*, *Genne* and *Genn* does not fit easily into one of these categories. The Dark Ages saw many people identified by their village or place of origin. A careful search through the index of a large atlas enticed us to take a closer look at a detailed map of France.

We found the town of Gennes located in Anjou on the south bank of the Loire River between Angers and Tours. Its population is currently less than 10,000. Just north of Angers we find Gennes-sur-Seiche, Gennes-sur-Glaise, Gene and Gennteil. South of Angers is Genneton. Further afield we find Genneville, Gennevilliers and Gennes Avergny in the vicinity of Havre and Paris. Further east, toward Switzerland we find two places called Gennetiens and another small village called Gennes.



**GENNES FROM THE NORTH BANK OF RIVER LOIRE
(Cousin Lt. Col. Robert S. Genn)**

A review of the documentation provided in the chapter on Yorkshire suggests that the usual spelling of the name before 1600 was *Genne*. This realization led us to an investigation of the name in this form and it was found that *Genne* was a distinguished family from Anjou, a former province of France with its capital at

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Angers. This would account for the concentration of places that have incorporated Genne in their name. The name in this form is decidedly French.

The French use of the name is pronounced with a soft *G* as in *general*. The Canadians, Americans and Australians pronounce Genn with a hard *G* as in *gun*. We note, however, that in some parts of Yorkshire Genn is still pronounced with a soft *G*. This suggests that the switch to the hard *G* was a more recent event and, therefore, does not challenge the Anjou hypothesis. The Cornish also appear to use the hard *G*.

The *Genne* spelling is found among the Huguenots (French Protestants) who migrated to England and other parts of the world after 1685. This event would be too recent to have accounted for our beginnings, but it does suggest a connection worthy of investigation. Chapter 2 provides some background information on the *Genne* family of Anjou.

The *Genne* spelling appears in American colonial records at the time of the Revolutionary War with Elnathan Genne who was enlisted as a private in Colonel Thomas Marshall's regiment on 11 June 1776 and also Ignatius Genne who was enlisted as a private in Colonel Abijah Stearns' regiment of guards on 14 April 1778.

The *Gen* spelling was also investigated. It was noted that this is the common form of the name before 1600 in Cambridgeshire and also in Lincolnshire to the north. This spelling is also thought to be French, and from the Languedoc region of southern France. It is considered to be an uncommon variant of Geon, Geans, Jean, Jeane, Jeans. The pursuit of a meaningful connection between the name in this form and our Yorkshire cousins was less than fruitful. The occasional appearance in Yorkshire of the *Gen* form might better be explained as an early attempt to anglicize *Genne*.

The name *Genn* is also found in eastern Europe. Genns, seemingly from Vilna, Lithuania, and of the Jewish faith, have migrated to Germany, Russia, Israel, South Africa and United States. We are told that Genn in Hebrew is spelled Gan, means garden, and refers to the Garden of Eden. Leo Genn, the British film star of "Quo Vadis" may have been of this extraction. There is the remotest possibility that the Vilna Genns also have their roots in Anjou.

There are 107 addresses listed for Genn in the USA. Most of the ones in the New York area are of the eastern European - Jewish

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extraction. Several eastern seaboard families from Maine to Virginia are of original American Colonial stock, and therefore, connected to the Canadian variety. Genns are also scattered across the mid-western USA. Many of these claim their descendancy to a Denton Genn who appears in Gosberton Parish, Lincolnshire, England in 1794.

There are also 53 addresses listed for Genn in Australia. Many of these claim their heritage from two brothers who emigrated from Yorkshire in the 1860's. These may eventually prove to have a kinship with the Canadian Genns.

It would appear that two Genns had arrived in Australia as convicts considerably before 1860. George Genn arrived on the *Duke of Portland*, 10 November 1807, sentenced to life. James Genn of Sheffield arrived on the *Morley*, 3 March 1828, age 24, educated, Protestant, single. His trade was steel drawer and soldier. His offense, desertion and his sentence, seven years.

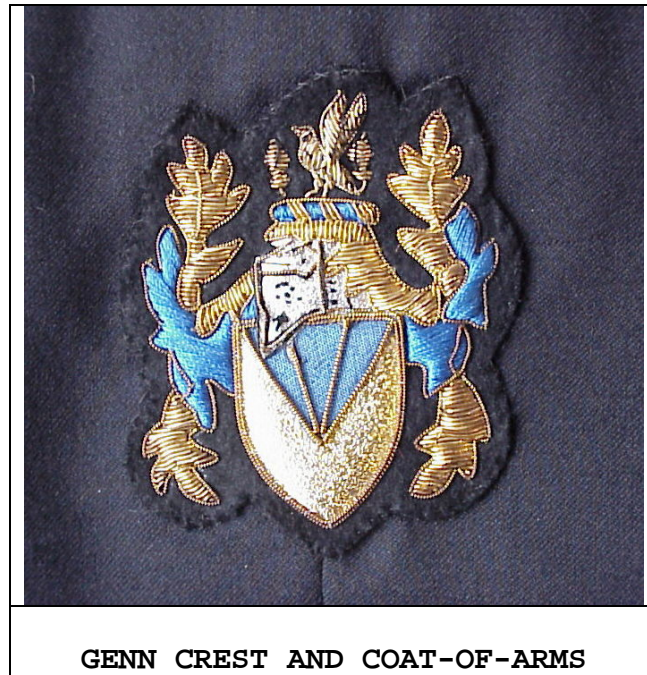
A review of current English telephone directories gave the following count for households with the name Genn: Yorkshire 17, Kent 7, Derbyshire 4, Cleveland 3, London 3, East Sussex 2, Devon 2, Hertsford 2, Lancashire, Dorset, Middlesex, North Humberside, Surrey, Hampshire, Staffordshire, and Cornwall, each with 1, but none in Cambridge. After 668 years of continuous propagation the Genns are, at least on English soil, an endangered species.

And finally, Joe Woy Genn was buried in the Chinese Cemetery in Victoria, Canada, 3 September 1930, the funeral being conducted at Sands Funeral Chapel. His father is identified as Joe Yen Foun. We construe from this that Joe was the family name, Genn was a given name, and therefore, we need not concern ourselves at this point, with Oriental cousins. Joe Woy Genn was born in China in 1880 and arrived in Canada at age 30.

The crest and Coat-of-Arms for Genn are listed in Burke's *GENERAL ARMOURY* (1884) and Thomas Robson's *BRITISH HERALDRY* (1830), but not in William Berry's *ENCYCLOPAEDIA HERALDICA* (1828). The crest is described as "a Cornish chough rising between two spear heads in pale, proper." *Pale* means two lines drawn vertically from top to bottom. *Proper* means in natural color. The Coat-of-Arms is described as "or, three piles meeting in point, az." *Or* means gold, *Az* stands for azure or blue. A *Pile* is a triangle with the base at the top. A record search by the College of Arms, London, disclosed that the Genn crest and Coat-of-Arms are unofficial and have never been given Royal approval. However, the use of the

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Cornish chough as a symbol, and the earliest recording dated at 1830, might suggest that our William Genn of Falmouth may have assumed the use of the Crest and Coat-of-Arms but never had it formally registered at the College of Arms.



The Genne family of Anjou do, however, carry an ancient Coat-of-Arms, described as "a silver background with pieces of ermine and a red band in the center."

Also listed in Burke's *GENERAL ARMOURY* is the name Le Genn and described as "Argent 3 lions rampant sa. William le Genne (Acre Roll dated AD 1192). Acre (now Akko) is a seaport on the north coast of Israel. The Third Crusade to the Holy Land, led by Philip II of France and Richard I (Richard, Coeur de Lion) of England, landed at Acre in 1190. They took the city on 08 June 1191. Acre then became the headquarters of the Knights of Saint John, the Hospitalers. The German Crusaders, the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary, of Jerusalem, was created here at that time by an edict of Pope Celestine, dated February, 1192. It would seem that William le Genne was well in the middle of the fray.

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