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Retson Genealogy

Newsletter

This newsletter may interest particular those related to persons related directly or indirectly to Grace and Clifford Retson. My genealogy website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongenealogy.html>

Our Early English Ancestors

The poor have always been with us. Down through the ages they have been subject to classification- the deserving poor, the undeserving poor, the impotent poor -meaning the physically and mentally sick, the old and the infirm, the helpless poor -example single-parent families, out of work-able body men and women who could work if work was available, marginal poor – those on the poverty line and susceptible to any slight change in circumstances such as a bad harvest, higher rent, another child, accidents, illness or a death to pay for. In 1494 in England any vagrant able to work was whipped, or in severe cases had his ears sliced off or was hanged. In 1547 Poor law allowed for branding and slavery as punishment for persistent vagrancy. In 1601 the first permanent poor were passed in England whereby poorhouses were to be erected in each parish for those unable to live by themselves. Sturdy beggars were dealt with harshly, relatives were required to support one another if they were able.

Our English Ancestors were not among the poor. In fact, they were generally among the top 2% to 5% of the economic class. My DNA from Ancestry suggests I am 11% English. My research on our early English Ancestors is far from complete. Every month I discover additional families and facts. But the pattern is becoming evident. Looking at the Tutor and Stuarts reigns, a period of extreme economic inequality, our English Ancestors were well off and their position improved. Relative to our current lot they maintained a higher economic status. At least 6 of their descendants who left for America became Presidents of the United States.

If our ancestors were so well off - why did they leave. The history of the Tutors and Stuart played an important part in determining in providing the answer.

The first Tutor King, Henry VII, through skillful maneuvering established himself securely on the throne. This was no small achievement. Step by step he established his power. Initially, he procured a papal declaration, that not only was he the rightful king, but that anyone who refused to acknowledge him would be subject to excommunication. He brought the nobles to heel stripping their autonomy. He milked the church and the awarding of appointment of bishops became a reward from the Crown. The ecclesiastic hierarchy became dominated by administrators and politicians who were aware that their positions were to him.

Henry VIII displayed as well as his father a keen appreciation of the power and prerogatives of kings while at the same time making a great show of his Catholic orthodoxy and loyalty to the pope. Henry VIII is well known for his problem with Women. He ended up with 6 of them. But Henry also had considerable problems with his lot in life and his desire for power. Henry didn't like sharing power and particularly he didn't like sharing power with the Pope and the Church. There was no question as to who was on top - God. But beneath God there was a question about the power of the Pope and the King. Henry VIII developed a lofty conception of the extent of his authority. He held that the clergy had no power over laymen except the power, through the sacraments to forgive sin. The word of the church had long been accepted as final in many areas of life and in an age of when

religious faith was nearly universal those areas were regarded as more important than the ones under secular jurisdiction.

Henry VIII's first wife Catherine of Aragon was the widow of his dead brother Arthur. This marriage raised questions because under canon law, sexual intercourse created a blood relationship and marriage to a sister-in-law was tantamount to incest. The matter was settled with a papal dispensation to the effect that, in this case, the prohibition could be set aside. However, after 20 years of marriage when Henry Catherine failed to provide Henry with a male heir, Henry wanted out of the marriage. Henry came to believe that the papal dispensation was not valid, that only God could dictate the requirements of a valid marriage and hence he was not married to Catherine. However, Catherine swore that she never had consummated the marriage with Henry's brother and hence she was never married to Arthur. When the pope refused a divorce or annulment, Henry set out to end his marriage without the Pope involving himself in a tangle of religious, political, and historical complexities. In those times, the king not only determined his own religion but also the religion of every subject of the realm.

In 1532, Henry had legislation known as the Statute in Restraint of Appeals, which forbade all appeals to the Pope in Rome on religious or other matters, making the King the final legal authority in all such matters in England, Wales, and other possessions. This was achieved by claiming that England was an Empire and the English crown was an Imperial Crown. This far-reaching measure made accepting papal authority, or following papal rulings in church, faith or other matters illegal. He followed a year later by the Act of Supremacy 1534 which made Henry "the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England called Anglicana Ecclesia". The Acts enabled Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to grant King Henry his long-desired divorce from queen Catherine of Aragon, so that he could marry Anne Boleyn. Finally he enacted the Treason Act of 1534 which made it very dangerous to speak against the King.

Following Henry, there followed a succession of Monarchs, first the young Edward, then Catholic Mary, followed by Protestant Elizabeth I, The James VI of Scotland, I of England and then Charles I. Gradually the population turned not only on Catholicism (Papist) but also the trimmings. Henry VIII reign coincidentally coincident with a broad reformation wave across Europe. Henry VIII gained considerable wealth from the Church, but he and his successors spent considerably more in wars and leisure lifestyles. Henry granted grand estates to favourites and the favourites, and their supporters grew rich.

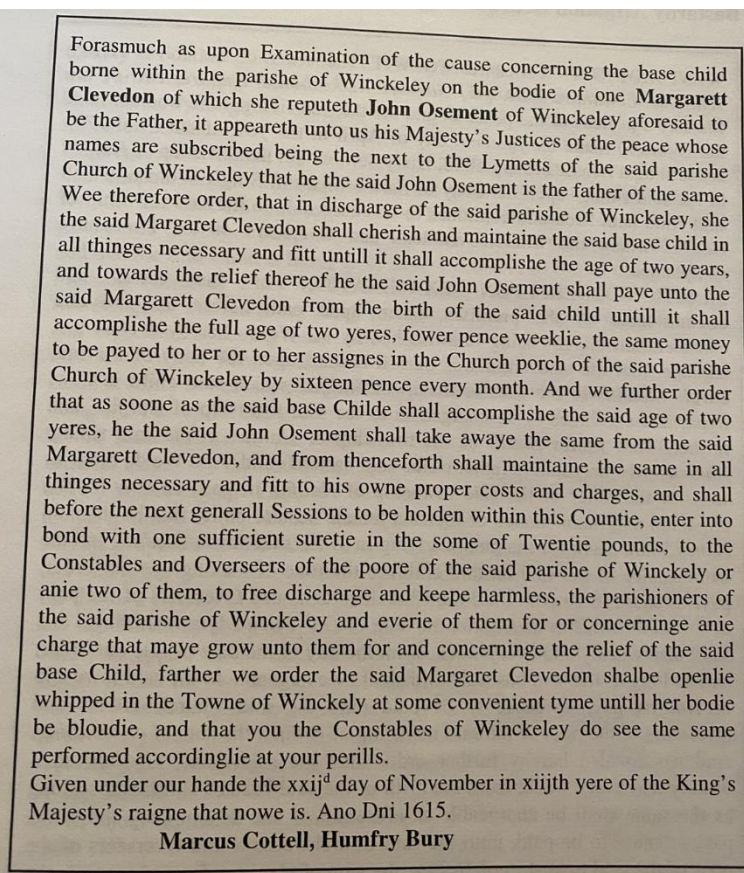
But times were changing. The chain of being was facing ever increasing pressures from the rise of cities, commercial traders and skilled guilds. The power of the church was continued to decline. The Monarchs never lost their desire for power. While they continued to claim the right of power by divine right, they had to negotiate their way with parliament and used religion as a tool. When James VI of Scotland became James I of England he brought his distaste for the Presbyterians who challenged his authority in Scotland. He favoured Episcopalian form of Church government that favoured the established Church of England. Charles I went further and attempted to force conformity of the Presbyterians and critics with the English Church. There were those who simply wanted reform from the rites and rituals which were considered holdovers from the Catholic era. Others, called separatist simply wanted to leave the Church of England to form their own Churches.

Archbishop William Laud, a key advocate of Charles I's religious reforms was the chief antagonist against our ancestors. A firm believer in episcopalianism, or rule by bishops. He opposed Calvinism. He was regarded by Puritan clerics and laymen as a formidable and dangerous opponent. He believed "that there could be no true churches without diocesan episcopacy". Laud saw the Calvinist movement a threat to the episcopacy. His desire to impose uniformity on the Church of England was driven by a belief that this was his office's duty, but his methods seemed persecution to those of differing views. Several of our ancestors suffered persecution under Laud's influence. Religious freedom and relief from the economic consequences of that persecution probably was the biggest factor in explaining the exodus from England.

Did our English ancestors recognize and appreciate their luck in life? A fact of life appears consistent over the last 500 years:

Meritocratic hubris reflects the tendency of winners to inhale too deeply of their success, to forget the luck and good fortune that helped them on their way. It is the smug conviction of those who land on top that they deserve their fate, and that those on the bottom deserve theirs, too. (Sandel, Michael J.. The Tyranny of Merit (p. 25). Kindle Edition.)

Following the next 6 year after 1534 when Henry VIII confiscated monasteries and nunneries, acquiring the great wealth of the Church, without the charity of the churches, the poor became more destitute. Beggars were treated mercilessly. Poor laws were passed starting as early as 1536 first requiring Church Wardens to collect voluntary donations for relief of the poor, following in 1596/7 and 1601 when poor rates were collected for relief of the poor (see poor law at <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/poorlaws/oldpoorlaw.shtml> .



Forasmuch as upon Examination of the cause concerning the base child borne within the parische of Winckely on the bodie of one **Margarett Clevedon** of which she reputeth **John Osement** of Winckely aforesaid to be the Father, it appeareth unto us his Majesty's Justices of the peace whose names are subscribed being the next to the Lymetts of the said parische Church of Winckely that he the said John Osement is the father of the same. Wee therefore order, that in discharge of the said parische of Winckely, she the said Margarett Clevedon shall cherish and maintaine the said base child in all thinges necessary and fitt untill it shall accomlishe the age of two yeres, and towards the relief thereof he the said John Osement shall paye unto the said Margarett Clevedon from the birth of the said child untill it shall accomlishe the full age of two yeres, fower pence weeklie, the same money to be payed to her or to her assignes in the Church porch of the said parische Church of Winckely by sixteen pence every month. And we further order that as soone as the said base Childe shall accomlishe the said age of two yeres, he the said John Osement shall take awaye the same from the said Margarett Clevedon, and from thenceforth shall maintaine the same in all thinges necessary and fitt to his owne proper costs and charges, and shall before the next generall Sessions to be holden within this Countie, enter into bond with one sufficient suretie in the some of Twentie pounds, to the Constables and Overseers of the poore of the said parische of Winckely or anie two of them, to free discharge and keepe harmless, the parishioners of the said parische of Winckely and everie of them for or concerninge anie charge that maye grow unto them for and concerninge the relief of the said base Child, farther we order the said Margarett Clevedon shalbe openlie whipped in the Towne of Winckely at some convenient tyme untill her bodie be bloudie, and that you the Constables of Winckely do see the same performed accordinglie at your perills.
Given under our hande the xxij^d day of November in xijth yere of the King's Majesty's raigne that nowe is. Ano Dni 1615.
Marcus Cottell, Humfry Bury

Single women and illegitimate children were the most vulnerable of the poor and subject to rough treatment. The following order in 1615 is an example of the treatment meted out during this period.

In 1662 the Act of Settlement established the concept of each person being settled in one parish that was responsible for them. Starting settlement was birthplace, and children acquired the settlement of their father. A new place of settlement would be upon most recent of

- Unmarried person working in new parish for one year and receiving full year's wage.
- Serving 40 days of an apprenticeship by indenture to a master in the parish
- Completing 40 days residence after giving notice in writing
- Renting a separate and distinct building worth £ 10 or more per year
- woman married a man settled in the parish.
- Holding a public office in parish
- A legitimate child under seven whose father lived in

the parish.

By inheritance of an estate and living in it for 40 days

The fact that settlement could be acquired by parish of birth explains why pregnant women were removed before birth of their illegitimate child. Unmarried Women were subject to examination and removal orders if they were located in another parish.

The Stories of our ancestors may be found from links located at <http://www.retson.ca/SomeofmyancestorswereEnglish.pdf> and some are noted below:

Francis Cooke (Maternal side <https://www.retson.ca/cooke.pdf>) was born about 1583 in England (Norwich?). He was among separatist who did not wish to share in the religious community of the Church of England. He left England and was residing in Leiden, Netherlands as early as 1603 when he married Hester Mahieu, a member of the Walloon (a Calvinist) church. For some time between 1606 and 1608 he resided in Norwich, which leads some to believe this was his birthplace. As time went on those who had left England for Holland grew disillusioned with the liberal Holland and turned to North America for religious freedom. In England they were joined by a contingency still in England, including our Ancestor Richard Warren <https://www.retson.ca/warren.pdf> and in 1620 left on the Mayflower to establish a new colony in Plymouth. These families were known in England as Separatist and in America as Pilgrims.

Our English Ancestors that followed in the Great Migration between 1629 and 1640 were mainly puritans, well to do, but prosecuted. Some included the following.

The Gaylords Ancestors <http://www.retson.ca/Gaylord.pdf> were among the earliest of the Great Migration emigrating in 1630.

The Chapins <http://www.retson.ca/chapin.pdf>. was another family who emigrated from England to escape religious persecution.

The Belchers were ancestors who likewise established their wealth from commercial endeavours who likewise emigrated to North America in 1635 for greater freedom and economic improvement. They along with the Goulds have the distinction of being ancestors of both my mother and father. Jeremy Belcher born about 1613 had among other children two daughters, Abigail and Dorcus, who married two Gould brothers. There story can be found at <http://retson.ca/belcher.pdf> and <http://retson.ca/Gould.pdf>

Another “strong puritan” family The Phelps, <http://www.retson.ca/phelps.pdf> is interesting from the point of view that those persecuted for religious beliefs, when given religious freedom, do not always support others. It also illustrated that a conservative group in one generation may in time become quite liberal in another.

Our Stebbins ancestors story can be found at <http://retson.ca/stebbins.pdf>. This story is interesting for how ancestors tended to emigrate in groups. A map found at this link shows how many of our ancestors lived in close proximity.

The Rice Ancestors <http://www.retson.ca/rice.pdf> represent another puritan religious family who emigrated and established themselves as a powerful and successful force in the new world.

The Hoares story can be found at <http://www.retson.ca/hoar.pdf> . While they held powerful offices in Gloucester they were persecuted and fined by Archbishop Laud. Charles Hoare Senior died in 1632 and his son in 1638. His widow, Joanna and six children left for America around 1640. Their descendants include President John Quincy Adams and the two Bush. The Parents of the wife of one of their sons Leonard who became President of Harvard University were executed by the English State due to their role in the trial of Charles 1.

Additions to <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html> since February 1, 2022

Our Green Ancestors <https://www.retson.ca/green.pdf>

This newsletter was sent to individuals who have expressed an interest in this genealogy at some time. If you do not wish to receive future updates, please email me at jretson@shaw.ca and indicate so.