

THE ORIGINS OF THE DRAKES OF DEVON

Solving the mystery of the two Drakes

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*Sir Bernard said to Sir Francis,
'You're making a grave mistake
If, now you're a knight,
You think you've a right
To the wyvern gules of Drake'*

C. Scott-Giles, Motley Heraldry'

The possibility of solving a 400-year-old genealogical puzzle has been the recurring focus of my attention for more than 30 years. My interest in genealogy began at age sixteen with a desire to display a coat of arms on the wall of my bedroom. Family legends told of a relationship to the great navigator Sir Francis Drake. I soon learned that in genealogy and heraldry things were not at all simple. A few years work proved that there was no facile link to the family of the Armada admiral.

I decided fairly quickly that I would collect not only information about my own apparent ancestry, but information about any Drakes anywhere. Of course, I worked backwards on my own line, but I also worked forwards and laterally! During my early years of research, I came across the grand mystery of Drake genealogy, the connection, or lack of one, between the family of Sir Francis Drake, centered in west Devon near Tavistock, and the armigerous family of the Drakes of Ashe, whose seat was in east Devon, in the parish of Musbury.

The Puzzle

The Drakes of Ashe recorded a pedigree in the Visitation of 1564 reaching back to a John Drake who married an heiress of Billett of Ashe circa 1400. This union brought the Ashe estate into the Drake family, where it remained for 400 years. The Ashe family descendants included Sir Bernard Drake, another Elizabethan seaman, and a man of some reputation. His great-granddaughter Elizabeth married Sir Winston Churchill and their son,

the first Duke of Marlborough, was born at Ashe House. The arms of the Drakes of Ashe were *argent, a wyvern gules*.²

On the other hand, Sir Francis Drake came from near Tavistock, over in the west of the county, specifically from a small estate called Crowndale, part of the demesne lands of Tavistock Abbey. The earliest Drake tenant of Crowndale was Henry, who was granted a



Sir Francis Drake (?1540 - 96).

Painting by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, 1591.

lease in 1441. Forty years later a new lease was granted to a Simon Drake, who I think was his son, and who was the uncle of the John Drake who had a reversion to the property in 1519. This John was the grandfather of Sir Francis Drake, the circumnavigator.³

² Wagner, Sir Anthony, *Drake in England*, (rev. edn.), Concord, New Hampshire (1970), p21

³ Elliot-Drake, Lady (Elizabeth), *The Family and Heirs of Sir Francis Drake*, vol 1, London, 1911, p11

¹ Scott-Giles, C W, *Motley Heraldry*, (n.d.)

When his fortunes at sea thrust Sir Francis into the limelight, questions of family arose, beginning what I have termed the 400-year-old mystery. Sir Francis was knighted and clearly wished to bear the ancient coat of arms of Drake of Ashe. It seems he attempted to obtain acknowledgment of his right to do so, for in addition to a new grant of arms, *sable, a fesse wavy between two pole stars argent*, there was a grant of a crest whose design included a red dragon, a definite allusion to the house of Ashe. Also, there is an inclusion in one version of the draft heraldic documents prepared for Sir Francis by Clarenceux Cooke which states,

"Norwithstandinge that the said Sr Francys Drake, beinge wellborne and descended of worthie ancestors such as have of longe tyme born Armes as tokens of their race and progenie, which lykewyse to him by just descent and prerogatyve of birth as duly desyred, may for the Armes of his sumame and family beare Argent a Wever dragon volant gules with the difference of a third brother, as I am credibly enfourmed by the testimony of Bernard Drake of '_____' in the Countie of Devon Esquire chief of that Cotearmure....."⁴

Although Sir Francis acted upon this intention, and used the arms newly granted quartered with the older arms, there has been much controversy about his right to do so. It hinges in large part upon the relationship between the Drakes of east Devon and west Devon. One problem is the apparent disparate social standing of the two families. William Camden wrote of Sir Francis that "this Drake (that I may report no more than what I have heard from himselfe) was born of meane parentage in the County of Devonshire."⁵ Certainly no visitation earlier than the 17th century includes the Tavistock family.

There is also a story related by John Prince, the Devon historian, that Sir Bernard Drake gave Sir Francis a box on the ear for usurping his arms.⁶ This story surfaced in a later generation and may be apocryphal, for there is contemporary evidence that Sir Francis and Sir Bernard were on good terms.

Regarding the interpolated statement in the draft document confirming to Sir Francis the

older coat, there are other documents of the era which fail to include this language, and the suggestion has been made that this draft was never finalized, implying that there was no substantiation for such a claim. There are quite a few Drake pedigrees in print which attach the Sir Francis family onto the Ashe family in a position of a third son, but there is no proof for doing so. Later generations of the admiral's family either did not claim, or were not allowed, the wyvern quartering in the visitations.⁷

The controversy flared again in the late 19th century with a series of articles in several journals, particularly the *Western Antiquary*, advancing contrary positions. One of the chief supporters of Sir Francis' claim to the arms of Ashe was Henry Holman Drake, author of *Hasted's Kent*.⁸ Henry H Drake was descended from the Drakes of Whitchurch, near Tavistock, and seems to have inspired a number of these articles, some of which appeared under the pseudonym of Wyvern Gules.

In recent years, after a careful examination of the evidence, no less an authority than Sir Anthony Wagner, then Garter King of Arms, summed up the evidence as follows, "It seems, therefore, that no relationship was established between the Drakes of Ashe in Musbury, away in the southeast of Devon, and the Drakes of Crowndale."⁹ The operative word here is 'established,' not 'existed', for although no connection was established in the past, this is not to say one did not exist. In fact, it is now possible to suggest a solution.

The Solution

This solution to the problem of the disputed connection between the two main families of Drakes in Devon lay in the discovery that the origin of both was outside Devon! The keys to finding the solution were two and may be summed up with the words perspiration and inspiration. The perspiration part consisted of exhausting work in primary and written sources extracting every possible detail of Drake genealogy and history. This work was certainly not all personal work by this author. Part of it was done on my behalf as I live at some distance from the primary sources.

⁴ Bodleian, Ashmole MS, 834, f.35v

⁵ Camden, William, *Annales, The True and Royal History of the famous Emperesse Elizabeth, Queen of England, etc.*, (edn. II), (1625), p417

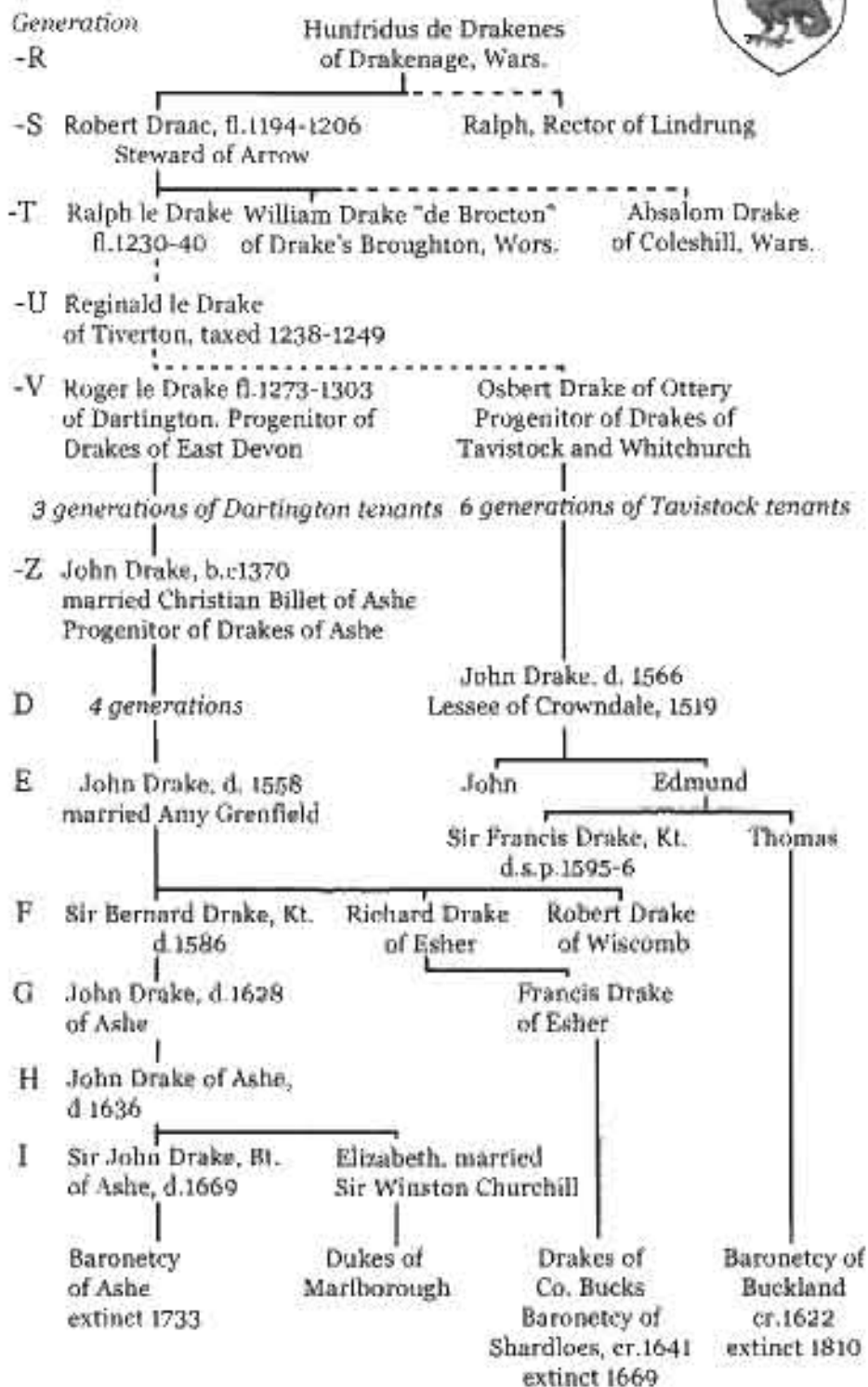
⁶ Prince, John, *The Worthies of Devon*, (1st edn.), p245

⁷ Wagner, *op. cit.*, p21

⁸ Drake, Henry H, (ed.), *Hasted's History of Kent. The Hundred of Blackheath, London, 1886*

⁹ Wagner, *op. cit.*, p21

DRAKE OF DEVON: PRINCIPAL LINES



Much of it was done in the 19th century by Henry H Drake, who devoted many years of his life to the puzzle, apparently without finding the solution. Sources searched have included much original material in the PRO (mostly done by H H Drake), the Patent Rolls, Inquisitions Post Mortem, PCC wills, the Drake wills of Devon (extracted by H H Drake prior to their destruction in 1942), the muniments of the Drake family of Ashe (copied by Sir William Pole prior to the destruction of Ashe House in 1644), printed pedigrees of the Drake family, and manorial records, principally those of Tavistock Abbey.

The inspiration part of the solution was a sudden insight I had while pondering one of the ancient Drake charters, existing only as an abstract, which reads:

"Osberts Drake de North cummer conc
ecclae de Bordes. Test. Sim. Aleine, Willo
Raggelegh, Willo Kyne, Rogo Drake, Rico
de la field. Sans date."¹⁰

I suddenly realized that the 'North cummer' mentioned was North or Little Comberton in Worcester. The phrase 'ecclae de Bordes' refers to the church at Bordesley, Worcester. The name Osbert Drake I had seen before – in the records of Tavistock Abbey! The implications become immediately obvious; a conveyance by a Drake of Tavistock regarding land in Worcester was found among the muniments of the Drakes of Ashe. The instrument is undated, but from its genealogical context, as discussed later, I estimate it at *circa* 1280-90.

After making this discovery, it only took steady effort to put together a pedigree, although it must be considered conjectural, and much more work needs to be done.

The Lineage

The first who has been traced was one Humphrey de Drakenage, called 'Hunfridus de Drakenes' (born probably *c*1140), who was mentioned in the Pipe Rolls of 1183-84 and 1184-85 as owing for failing to pledge.¹¹ He may be related to one Gamel de Drakenech found in the same 1183-84 record. Using the

¹⁰ Davidson, James. Abstracts from the muniments of 'Mr. Drake of Aish,' from Davidson's *Ancient Deeds*, MS. Exeter City Library, ref no B-R q 009.935/106063; 'Extracts from Sir William Pole's MS, *Collection of Deeds relating to Devon*.' Transcribed from the copy of J Coffyn, by James Davidson, 1846, p109. From an extract in the K C Arrington manuscript collection, University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina

¹¹ *Pipe Roll Series*. vol. 33, p48; vol. 34, p100

'Generational Grid System'. Humphrey can be designated generation -R, as noted in the accompanying chart.

Drakenage was then a small manor in the parish of Kingsbury, Warwickshire. In the 13th century it was held by the Marmions of Tamworth Castle via an intermediate lordship of Nether Whitacre. It is not known if Humphrey held any land at Drakenage, but he seems to have derived his surname from there. We do know that his descendants contested land at nearby Coleshill somewhat later. Drakenage may be accounted for by the 1/5th Knights Fee held by Ralph de Keila of Robert Marmion in 1166 (*Liber Rubeus*).¹² I can find no evidence of a connection between Ralph and Humphrey.

Humphrey's son was Robert (born *c*1165, died after 1209 – generation -S), once styled 'Robertus Draac', and his parentage is proved by a statement in a case tried in the feudal court of Arnold de Bosco in 1198.¹³ Robert appears to have been active in the Stratford area as reflected by appearance in a number of records in the 1190s,¹⁴ but he was also involved in a plea for land at Coleshill, near Drakenage in 1206.¹⁵

Robert was the steward for William de Camville on his manor of Arrow, Warwickshire, and is mentioned in 1194 in a suit brought by Camville against several intruders who committed robbery there.¹⁶ The Camvilles provide another important connection associating the Drakes of Warwick, near Tamworth, with those of Worcester, near Stratford, and subsequently Devon. William de Camville, for whom Robert Drake was steward, was the youngest son of Richard de Camville (d1191), founder of Combe Abbey. William married Albreda, daughter of Geoffrey Marmion, of Tamworth (near Drakenage), and through her he inherited Arrow. Their issue included Galfridus de Camville of Clifton Camville, later Baron Camville, William de Camville of

¹² Hall, Hubert (ed.), *The Red Book of the Exchequer*. London, 1896, p327

¹³ *Curia Regis Roll*, vol. 1, Easter Term. 9 Richard I (1198), p59

¹⁴ *Pipe Roll Series*, vol. 41(3), p106; vol. 44(6), p188; vol. 45(7), p51; vol. 46(8), p172; vol. 47(9), p155

¹⁵ *Curia Regis Roll*, vol. 4, p291; *Pipe Roll Series*, vol. 60(22), p196

¹⁶ Palgrave, Francis (ed.), *Rotuli Curiae Regis: Rolls and Records of the Court Held Before the King's Justiciars*, vol. 1, Pleas for the Thursday before the Octave of Saint Martin, 6 Richard I (17 November 1194), London: Public Record Commission, 1835.

Arewe (Arrow) and Seckington, and Thomas de Camville, *presbyter*.¹⁷ Geoffrey's grandson subsequently became possessed of lands in Devon in right of his wife Maud de Bryan.¹⁸

Robert Drake died after 1209. His issue included Ralph, William, and probably Absalom Drake. Absalom Drake was the plaintiff in an assize of novel disseisin regarding property at Coleshill in 1229,¹⁹ land probably inherited from Robert.

William Drake, styled 'Willelmus Draco de Brocton' in 1221²⁰ lived in Worcester at Drake's Broughton, in the parish of Pershore Holy Cross, giving his name to that place.²¹ He was referred to as the son of Robert Drake of Brocton in the charter of Constance de Lega, which she granted to Roger of Pershore.²²

Ralph Drake (born c1190 – generation -T), son of Robert Drake, was given land at Knicteton by Ralph, rector of Lindrug (Lindridge), who was his uncle.²³ The younger Ralph held lands at Evesham which he later granted to the Abbey as proved by another charter from Ashe:

"Sci ant &c. Rads. Drake filis Robti' Drake remisit Abbati de Evesham in oibis' terr' quae fuerunt patris sui in villa de Evesham. Sans date."²⁴

I believe Ralph began to hold lands in Devon in the early years of the 13th century at about the same time the Camvilles developed an interest there. Ralph Drake's charter found its way to Ashe House, and a Ralph le Drake appears in the Devon Assize Roll of 1237-38.²⁵

From this point, our good fortune with charters which mention relationships ends, and the next few descents can only be inferred. Ralph's successor in Devon was one Reginald le Drake who was at Tiverton in 1238, 1244, and 1249.²⁶ Reginald was, in turn,

followed in Devon records by Roger Drake and Osbert Drake, who were obviously closely related as their names appeared on the same charter from Ashe as previously mentioned.

Roger Drake, who would be generation -V, sometimes styled 'Roger le Drake', occurs in the Devon Assize Roll of 1273-74 at South Brent²⁷ and is mentioned as holding 1/2 Knight's Fee nearby at Dartington in Stanborough Hundred in 1303.²⁸ He is likely to be the same Roger who was assessed in the tax of 1275 in Tenbury in Doddingtree Hundred in Worcester. Roger Drake witnessed several grants of land to the Abbey at Bordesley around 1274-75,²⁹ in addition to the charter involving Osbert, which helps fix its date.³⁰

Descent from Roger can only be inferred, but there was a succession of Drakes, a Robert and then two John Drakes who were taxed in Dartington and East Budleigh in the 14th century, as well as appearing in other records. Their successor in East Devon in the -Z generation was John Drake of Otterton, who married c1400 Christian, daughter of John Billett of Ashe and inherited the manor through her. At this point we reach the pedigree recorded in the visitations and various of Burke's publications and which there seems little reason to doubt, as it is supported by contemporary evidence.

The senior representative of this line in the E generation was yet another John Drake, who married Amy Grenfield, and was the father of Sir Bernard Drake, Richard Drake of Esher, and Robert Drake of Wiscomb. Sir Bernard Drake was the ancestor of John Drake of Ashe (d.1636 – generation H) whose descendants included Elizabeth, his daughter, who married the cavalier Sir Winston Churchill, as well as the Drake baronets of Ashe. This baronetcy became extinct in 1733 with the death of Sir William Drake, sixth in succession (generation K). Cadet branches from Sir Bernard Drake of Ashe have survived.

Richard Drake of Esher (generation F) was the ancestor of the Drakes of Shardloes, Buckinghamshire. There was a baronetcy in this line, but it expired with the grantee in 1669.

Osbert Drake (generation -V) conveyed land in Worcester to the Abbey at Bordesley

¹⁷ Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*; DNB, 'Camville'; Burke, *Dormant and Extinct Peerages*¹⁶ Page, William (ed.), *Victoria County History of Devon*, vol. 1, p567

¹⁸ *Patent Rolls*, vol. 2, p283, 13 Henry III [1229]

¹⁹ *Selden Society Publications*, vol 53, p623; *Pipe Roll Series*, vol. 81(43), Beauchamp Cartulary, Charter # 120, p72

²⁰ *Victoria County History of Worcester*, vol. 4, p156

²¹ Augmentation Office, *Miscellaneous Books*, LXI, folio 86d, (PRO reference E315/6)

²² Nash, Treadway Russell, *Collections for a History of Worcestershire*, vol. 2, p94 facing page i, footnote H; Hale, William, *Registrum Sive Liber Irrotularius Et Consuetudinarius Prioratus Beatae Mariae Wigorniensis*, Camden Society Publication, OS, vol. 91, p13a

²³ Davidson, *op. cit.*, p109

²⁴ Wagner, *op. cit.*, p16

²⁵ Wagner, *op. cit.*, p16; Assize Roll, 22 Hen III, M 1:32: 1a., mem 9 in dors

²⁷ Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 16

²⁸ *Inquisitions and assessments relating to Feudal Aids*, vol. 1, 1284-, p350

²⁹ *Catalog of Ancient Deeds*, vol. 2, B2470, 2461

³⁰ Davidson, *op. cit.*, p109

around 1280-90²¹ He was active in the Tavistock area from 1293 until 1306 and obtained lands at Ottery in Lamerton from the Abbot of Tavistock, being styled 'Oshert Drake de Oddetrew'.²² He was the progenitor of the Drakes of Tavistock and his heirs can be traced through many descents and branches in the manorial records of the abbey.

His son John Drake (born c1285 - generation -W) leased land at Crebor or Crewbear adjacent to Crowndale from the abbot in 1327.²³ He appears in a number of other records between 1327 and 1357.

Richard Drake (born c1315 - generation -X), was the principal heir and apparent son of John. His assessment in the lay subsidy of 1374 was the highest in Tavistock Hundred.²⁴ He was in turn followed by John Drake, his son.²⁵

John's son was William Drake (born c1375 - generation -Z) who held a large number of properties at Tavistock, including land in the manor of Morwell.²⁶ He is noted as deceased in the court for Hurdwick Manor for 9 October 16 Henry VI (1437).²⁷ His principal heir was his son John who inherited his land in the manor of Morwell. However, from circumstantial evidence, it is likely that Henry Drake, lessee of Crowndale in 1441, was a younger son.

The descent from Henry Drake to Sir Francis Drake (generation F) has been noted above. Sir Francis Drake, Kt, died childless in 1596 and in his will made his brother Thomas his heir. Thomas Drake's son was the first Sir Francis, Baronet. Five more baronets

followed, counting a second creation. Interestingly, they were all called Sir Francis, a trap for the beginning Drake genealogist and many have been caught within it. Sir Francis Henry, the fifth baronet of the first creation, died in 1794, and was the last holder generally recognized. There was a sixth baronet *de jure*, John Savery Drake, who died without issue in 1810, and with him the baronetcy and all the heirs male of Thomas apparently became extinct. There are some well-publicized American claims to descent in this line, but I have examined none that seems to me to meet the test of proof. The pedigree published by Colonel Vivian,²⁸ aside from its speculative early portion, is useful for this family in the 17th and 18th centuries. Henry II Drake was a contributor, and the Drake pages reflect his vast knowledge of the family.

The name Drake was extremely widespread in Devon by the 17th century, being found in more than 100 parishes, and only some branches have been traced. Only the principal lines referred to in this article can be illustrated on the accompanying chart.

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²¹ *Ibid*

²² Devon R O, Devonshire Estate Office Records W1258, D421-5

²³ Alexander, J L, "The Birthplace of Sir Francis Drake," *The Devonian* November, 1977 p51

²⁴ *Wigorn*, no. 100 p18

²⁵ PBr's, *In Brevi*, 1 Bar B, (PBrax) 100 1418

²⁶ Devon R O, *Services* Series, (1300-1400) D64-44

²⁷ Devon R O, *Hurdwick Manor Court Rolls*, 1467-3

²⁸ Vivian, J L, *The Baronets of the Counties of Devon* - with additions - 1895

Addendum

Hengler family (vol 26 no 12 Dec 2000 p481)

In addition to the children shown Albert Henry Hengler (1862-1937) also had a son Geoffrey Charles Sterne, b. 1902, Liverpool, m. (1) Lois BROWN, (2) Elizabeth Costley WHITE, d. 1984, Keswick (no issue).