Out of Devon: The Eastlake Surname Comes of Age

Summary
Beginning with an exploration of the origin and meaning of the Eastlake surname, the evolution of the name and its spread through southwest England is followed to the end of the 18th century. By that time, the name was sufficiently established to enable the global distribution seen today. A preliminary map of the surname’s evolution worldwide is presented. This paper was prepared for the Advanced One-Name Studies Course provided by Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd and sponsored by the Guild of One-Name Studies.

In the Beginning
In 1377, Thomas Estlake’s oats were trampled in the Bratton Parish of the ancient Lyfton Hundred. Bratton Clovelly, the modern name for Bratton, is a small Devon village nestled in the southwestern peninsula of England. The area has a long history; ‘Baldwin’ the Sheriff held the manor of Bratton in 1086. Structures still stand today that my early ancestors might recognise. The Church of St Mary the Virgin has overlooked the village since Norman times and the area is still characterised by substantial farmhouses, some dating from the early 15th century. The great Dartmoor rises just east of Bratton Clovelly. In later centuries, the natural resources of this strikingly rugged landscape would provide the livelihoods of Eastlake families as they moved from farming to mining occupations.

From the time of Thomas’ mention in 1377, there is a document trail that points to the Estlake surname originating in West Devon. The trail provides evidence that the Estlake surname, including its later Eastlake variant, has survived in Devon since at least the 1300s. Table 1 lists the medieval references to this surname that I have found to date (excluding a Bodmin family that will be discussed under ‘The Cornwall Identity Crisis’). Following a quitclaim from Richard Estlake to John Shilston of the Estlake messuages in 1452, the lands join the more general property consolidation occurring in Devon at the time, passing to various members of the Shilston family, possibly then to Peter Courtenay and ultimately to the Calmady family. By the early 1600s, the Calmady Manuscripts make multiple references to Sir Shilston Calmady of Eastlake, Bratton Clovelly. Interestingly, a relatively late reference in 1699 refers to the ‘Barton Farm and demesne lands called Eastlake’, supporting the ancient lineage of this property. The transition from the property name of Estlake to Eastlake appears to have taken place in the latter 1500s. As will be shown, the transition of the surname itself was considerably more complicated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1377</td>
<td>Thomas Estlake’s oats are trampled in Bratton Clovelly</td>
<td>Bratton Clovelly Manor Roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1417</td>
<td>Margery atte More &amp; Thomas Nithewode transfer messuages and lands in More and Estbornbury, Bratton Parish to Richard Estlake</td>
<td>Calmady Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1443</td>
<td>Roger Estlake has rank Man-at-Arms on Expedition to France under Commander John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset (Roger’s birth location not specified)</td>
<td>Muster Rolls 1369-1463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1449</td>
<td>Richard Estlake transfers property in Westmore, Bratton Clovelly to John Harry, gent</td>
<td>Calmady Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1452</td>
<td>Quitclaim from Richard Estlake to John Shilston of messuages in Estlake, Godiscote, Westmore, Gatecombe, Estonbury and Westonebury, Broadwoodwidger</td>
<td>Calmady Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1524-7</td>
<td>Taxes paid by Thomas Estlake in Hatherleigh Parish, John Estlake in Sourton Parish and Henry and William Estlake in Bratton Parish</td>
<td>Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1543-5</td>
<td>Taxes paid by Henry Estlake and Roger Estlake in Bratton Parish</td>
<td>Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1551</td>
<td>Grant from Jn. Len of Launceston, gent, to Thomas Browne alias Bevyll, Lake alias Estlake in Holsworthy</td>
<td>Carlyon of Tregrehan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1558</td>
<td>Lewes Easlake, son of Johane (mother), is born in Black Torrington, Devon</td>
<td>England Births &amp; Christenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1559</td>
<td>Lease for term of lives John Arundell of Lanheron, esq, to John Wylle ... Appointment of William Edward and Thomas Estlake as attorneys to deliver herein</td>
<td>Arundell of Lanherne and Trerice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1568</td>
<td>William Eastlake marries Thomsin Lowwilly in Paignton, Devon</td>
<td>England Marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1569</td>
<td>Devon Muster Roll includes Roger Estlake and Walter Estlake of Alphington and William Eastlake of Paynton</td>
<td>Devon Muster Roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1582</td>
<td>John Estlacke is buried in Lamerton, Devon</td>
<td>Lamerton Parish Registers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1583</td>
<td>William Estlake (aka Eastlake) of Devon, matriculates at Broadgates Hall, Oxford aged 18</td>
<td>Alumni Oxonienses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Joan Eastlake, daughter of William, is born in Littlehempston, Devon</td>
<td>England Births &amp; Christenings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. References to the Eastlake Surname prior to 1600 (excluding Bodmin, Cornwall)

**Toward a Surname Meaning**

The definition of the Eastlake surname only appears in a handful of surname dictionaries but they agree that it derives from Old English east lacu, defined as ‘Dweller at the East Lake’, or more generally from the Lake surname, ‘Dweller by the Water’. There is specific mention that in Devonshire a lake is ‘any small rivulet’, so time might not be well spent on a search for any particular lake. However, it is difficult to ignore the massive Roadford Lake just west of Eastlake Farm. The lake is a man-made reservoir but in the beginning, there was the minor River Wolf. With a small adjustment to the suggested surname meaning, might it be ‘Dweller east of the rivulet’?

Topographical surnames were common in Devon and by the 1332 Lay Subsidy the surname ‘Lake’ was already prevalent. My first assumption was that ‘Eastlake’ was a topographical surname, as I would have assumed for ‘Westlake’, ‘Karslake’ and other similar names occurring early in the formation of Devon surnames. However, the reference to Richard Estlake’s quitclaim on Estlake property in 1452 and subsequent references to Estlake as a place indicate that the Estlake surname was locative and that those who bore the hereditary surname held at least partial ownership of the settlement in the 15th century. The evidence fits well with one of David Postles’ conclusions regarding Devon surnames:  

One distinctive aspect of naming in the county [of Devon] in the middle ages was the high proportion of locative surnames. Although the level declined over the later middle ages, yet a very large number of surnames – derived from local places in the county – persisted into modern times. Amongst the corpus were surnames derived from place-names which were in turn derived from topographical features.
A key reason that these locative surnames were so prevalent was the dispersed nature of settlement in Devon, especially in areas such as the west of Devon and other rural settings. The names could easily refer to one small hamlet or farmstead.

And then there was Byestelake
Having already drafted the preceding part of this article, I got a new contact from an Eastlake researcher. He asked if I was aware that there was a place called Byestelake amongst the early place names of Devon. Tracking down the reference, Byestelake was identified in the Assise Rolls of 1244 in the Broadwoodwidger parish, a village as close to the Eastlake Farm as Bratton Clovelly only three miles away. Eastlake itself was listed as the modern place name. From independent research, this stunning information corroborates my own findings. The book also confirmed another of my suspicions regarding the meaning of the name:

Names like Eastwood, Northway, have commonly been interpreted as ‘east wood’, ‘north way’. The Devon evidence suggests beyond any possibility of ambiguity that in many of these names we have the short form of old compounds bi eastan wuda, bi nor pan wege, ‘to the east of the wood’, ‘to the north of the way’ ... ‘Walter Bysudebrok’ lived ‘to the south of the brook’.

So Byestelake is interpreted as ‘East of the Stream’. While looking for the place name book, I happened to see a large book on the history of Devon. It contained a map from 1797 which actually showed EastLake, sitting where the modern farm does today. My contact had taken the opportunity to meet the current farm owners and learned that one part of the property, Eastlake Wood, had been lost in a snail race. Several other Eastlake seekers had preceded him in visiting the farm. These discoveries highlight why sharing information is such a critical aspect of my research approach.

Spreading Roots in Devon
The availability of parish registers beginning in the mid 1500s provides the first opportunity for viewing the broader Estlake family rather than just those who held property or paid taxes. The registers show that the Estlake surname had survived the devastating pestilences and dramatic population decrease of the latter middle ages and was slowly permeating West Devon. Eastlake had become the variant of choice in Devon by about 1660, similar to other Est- to East- transitions in the move from older forms of English.
The geography of Devon was a major contributor to the Eastlake migration pattern. As Figure 4 shows, Devon is bounded by north and south coasts and a significant portion of south central Devon is covered by the mostly uninhabited Dartmoor. The River Tamar forms the historic boundary between Devon and Cornwall or, as some would phrase it, between the English and the Cornish.

The surname quickly reached the key port of Exeter and also Plymouth which was growing in importance as a commercial centre. It spread through West Devon to Lamerton as well as Marytavy and Petertavy on the edge of Dartmoor. Near the end of the 17th century, it reached the well-established market town of Tavistock.

Figure 5 shows the Eastlake baptism locations in Devon to 1800. By then, the families had mostly concentrated in the major economic centres of Tavistock, Exeter and the port area of Plymouth and Stoke Damerel. A strong preference for West Devon remains clear. Interestingly, the name doesn’t feature in North Devon which needs investigation.

By this time, the holders of the Devon Eastlake and related surnames could be found in a variety of occupations including farmers, miners, merchants and solicitors. Many were prominent in their communities. John Eastlake (1730 – 1818) and his son Henry were tailors listed as Exeter Freemen. According to the obituary of John’s wife Priscilla (circa 1736 – 1820), ‘[t]his aged couple were amongst the earliest Methodists in this city -- and the first who entertained the Rev. John Wesley, the founder of that numerous and increasingly respectable society which bears his name.’

In Plymouth, a small but remarkable line had established itself, one that would persist into the 20th century. Amongst other notables, the family included the following:

- Samuel Eastlake (b 1633) was attorney for the Mayor and Commonalty of Plymouth in 1665. In the 1680s, he’s referenced as a ‘Gentleman of Plymouth, publique notary’.

- George Eastlake (c 1759 – 1820) started three generations of Admiralty Agent or Deputy Judge Advocate of the Fleet. He visited Spain in 1813 to discover Wellington’s requirements for naval assistance. He also founded the Plymouth Public Library. George Eastlake (c 1791 – 1853) followed in his father’s footsteps, as did grandson William Eastlake (c 1821 – 1881).

- Sir Charles Lock Eastlake (1793 – 1865) was a painter, first Curator of the National Gallery and first President of the Royal Photographic Society. He was President of the Royal Academy and knighted in 1850. His wife Elizabeth Rigby (1809 – 1893) was a highly regarded art critic and historian who became the first woman to write regularly for the Quarterly Review.
The Cornwall Identity Crisis

Prior to 1600, the Estlake surname was present in only one location beyond Devon, beginning with the birth of Robart Estlake’s son Nicholas in 1566 in Bodmin, Cornwall. This very localised migration pattern continued, with almost 95% of the baptisms, marriages and burials found to date of Eastlake and related surnames prior to 1800 still contained to Devon and Cornwall. A smattering of marriages occurred elsewhere but there is no evidence of a persistent presence of the name in any other location except London until the 1800s.

Unconfirmed evidence identifies that Robart Estlake crossed the Tamar River, the boundary between Devon and Cornwall, in about 1550 with his parents. Robart raised his large family in Bodmin, only thirty miles from Bratton Clovelly, and is almost single-handedly responsible for the survival of the surname in the British Isles today, one of the ‘portal couples’ referred to by Peter Walker. Robart also had a son Robart who had at least four sons. The family was so genetically successful that of the 172 Eastlake baptisms found to date in the British Isles before 1700, Bodmin accounted for well over half of them.

As well as ensuring the survival of the family line, the Cornwall branch made another central contribution to the history of the Eastlake surname. The surname had been quite stable in Devon, gradually evolving from Estlake to Eastlake. However, it was a very different story in Cornwall as Table 2 illustrates for a small sample period 1680-1700. A plethora of variant and deviant names arose, providing an early window into the many variant names that occur worldwide today. The reasons for this divergence are not yet known, whether related to dialect, illiteracy, more general surname instability or perhaps because it was in the process of change from Estlake to Eastlake when Robart left Devon.

Through the 1700s, the surname reached the length of Cornwall, as shown in Figure 6. The variants Eastlake, Eslick, Estlick and Eastlick persisted, and all of these forms can still be found in the British Isles today. Key locations included the communities of Bodmin, Kenwyn, Gwennap and Cubert, where the families engaged primarily in mining and the building trades. The Eslick variant that took root in Kenwyn later became so prevalent in North America that it is listed in the Dictionary of American Family Names:

![Figure 6. Eastlake Baptisms in Cornwall to 1800](image-url)
ESLICK: English (Devon and Cornwall): altered form of Eastlake, habitational name from Eastlake in Devon, named in Old English as ēast lācū 'the eastern stream'.

One family moved to Fowey during this period, a location that would sustain the Easlick and Eastlick variants. Another family settled in Penzance and Madron near the southwest end of the peninsula in the latter 1600s, headed by a merchant named Thomas Eastlake who would serve as the ‘The Wirshipfull Thomas Eastlake, Mayor’ of Penzance in 1693. There is some possibility that this family migrated directly from the Devon Eastlake line rather than from the Cornwall Bodmin line.

The Inevitable London Contingent
Until the 1700s, the Eastlake surname had no footprint in London. However, the economic opportunities of the City finally drew Eastlake families just as it drew migrants from across the British Isles. By 1800, the surname was represented in the ‘square mile’ of the City and various Middlesex and Surrey locations in Greater London. Middlesex remains a prevalent birth location for holders of the Eastlake surname.

Toward a Worldwide Family
From this very gradual and geographically isolated beginning over five centuries, dramatic change was in the making. A handful of emigrants in the late 1600s to mid 1700s were already giving rise to a North American representation far larger today than that found in the British Isles. Of particular note, my own ancestor Francis Estlack was a Quaker minister who settled in New Jersey in about 1680, still the most prevalent location in the world for the Eastlack surname. Figure 7 shows the migration of the Eastlack family across the United States.36 Also, Captain Isaac Eslick appeared in Rhode Island by 1700 whose line started the previously unseen variant name Esleeck. An Eslick family settled as well in North Carolina in the mid-1700s. Whether from this family or later migrations, the North American Eslick surname would come to dominate the worldwide picture of Eastlake surnames by the 20th century with almost 800 occurrences in the 1930 US Federal Census.

Figure 7. North American Births of Descendants of Francis Estlack (born circa 1635)
Dramatic change was also to take place within the British Isles, most notably with the Cornwall family groups and the ‘Great Migration’ that accompanied the collapse of the Cornish mining industry in the second half of the 1800s. The massive upheaval of families in southwest England led to new families, sometimes part of whole Cornish communities, in North America, Australia and New Zealand. Although primarily ‘hard rock’ miners, many also found their way to the coal fields of Northern England and Eastlake births are still prevalent in the northern counties.

While the high-level picture of the surname is now taking shape, much research remains to come to a deep understanding of the global picture. Figure 8 shows my current understanding of the evolution of the Estlake surname worldwide, an understanding that I look forward to improving through further research. I have to wonder as well at what the next chapter might bring. Being an American Eastlack now raising my English children less than an hour from Bratton Clovelly, perhaps someday a section may be warranted on the ‘Re-patriation of the Emigrants’.

![Figure 8. Evolution of the Estlake Surname (preliminary)](image)

Endnotes


3 *Calmady Manuscripts*, Reference 372, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. Also available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk [Accessed 13 Jul 2011]. See, for example, documents 372/7/2/6A and 372/8/5/2.

4 *Calmady Family Papers*, Reference 1221/19 15 Apr 1699, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. Also available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk [Accessed 13 Jul 2011].


[13] Lamerton Parish Registers Baptisms 1545-1735, Marriages 1538-1732, Burials 1549-1726, Reference 889/1 MF 2, Devon Record Office.


[16] The Devonshire Lay Subsidy of 1332, Audrey M. Erskine ed., (The Devonshire Press Ltd., 1969). Note that there are multiple occurrences of the ‘Lake’ surname but no ‘Estlake’ occurrences. See, for example, pp. 5 and 7.


[23] For example, in my other one-name study on the Estall family, it seems likely that the family originated in Norfolk along with a wide variety of Est- and East- forms of the name, e.g. Estall/Eastall, Estowe/Eastowe, Estell/Eastell. Name transitions appear in a similar timeframe to the Estlake/Eastlake transition. Also see Figure 8 with the Estlack/Eastlack transition in North America.


[26] Distribution map is based on 180 baptisms of Eastlake and related surnames in Devon prior to 1801. Includes full coverage of Devon baptisms at www.familysearch.org [accessed Jul 2011] and non-duplicate entries found to date in the Devon parish registers at Devon Record Office. Tools used to produce the map include GenMap UK ver 2.2, MS Excel 2010 and MS Access 2010.


[32] An Eastlake contact informed me that a 19th century book exists, possibly in Australia, that documents Robart crossing the Tamar River with his parents in the mid 1500s. To date, I have not been able to identify the name of the book. Still, it seems highly improbable that the name would arise independently in Bodmin only 30 miles from Bratton Clovelly and at a time when surnames were already largely formed (excluding variants). In addition, the surname is not consistent with those of Cornish origin, Celtic surnames which tend to be very different from the surnames found in Devon.


[34] Distribution map is based on 254 baptisms of Eastlake and related surnames in Cornwall prior to 1801. Includes full coverage of Cornwall baptisms at www.familysearch.org [Accessed Jul 2011] and non-duplicate entries found to date in the Cornwall parish registers previously available at pilot.familysearch.org [Accessed 2010] and supplemented by the Cornwall Online Parish Clerks database at cornwall-opc-database.org. Tools used to produce the map include GenMap UK ver 2.2, MS Excel 2010 and MS Access 2010.


[36] Distribution map is based on family reconstitution of the descendants of Francis Estlack born circa 1635 and includes 1020 descendants holding the Eastlack or Estlack surname. Reconstitution represents at least 80% of the nameholders from the 1850-1930 US Federal Censuses at ancestry.com as well as a substantially complete representation of pre-census nameholders based on John William Eastlack Sr., The Eastlack Family, (Baltimore, 1971) and the Gloucester County (New
Jersey) Historical Society Database at gloucestercountyhistoricalsociety.org [Accessed 2010-2011]. Tools used for the reconstitution and map include Legacy 7.5 Family Tree, MS Excel 2010 and Map My Family Tree ver 1.4.10.

37 Payton, op. cit.

38 Surname map is based on family reconstitution of over 3500 Eastlake and variant nameholders, including at least 80% coverage of English and Welsh nameholders 1837-2005 based on census and birth, marriage, death records at ancestry.co.uk as well as US Eastlack/Estlack nameholders described in the previous endnote. Reconstitution includes over 400 nameholders with baptisms prior to 1837 based on parish registers, records at familysearch.org and other early record sources. Limited coverage of further US and worldwide records based primarily on ancestry.com collections.