

Bilclough: A Surname Emerges

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The village of Winlaton is now more or less a suburb of Gateshead in County Durham, but it has a notable history. It was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution, as the site of the ironworks originally established by Ambrose Crowley around 1690,¹ and the associated school, health provision, and pension arrangements for the workers. Historically it was a township in the parish of Ryton, becoming a separate parish in 1832.² Winlaton is described in John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales (1870-1872).³

“WINLATON, a village, a township, a parish, and a sub-district, in Gateshead district, Durham. The village originated in extensive ironworks, removed to it, in 1690, from Sunderland, by Sir A. Crowley; carries on a great manufacture of anchors, anvils, chains, spades, edge-tools, files, and kindred articles”

By this time the Crowley works had long left Winlaton, taking with them the social benefits for the workers, but smaller manufacturers, especially smiths, chain makers and nail makers

¹ 'Parish of Ryton', The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham: volume 2: Chester ward (1820), pp. 259-283. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=76310> Date accessed: 24 July 2014.

² Durham County Record Office: St Paul Winlaton. URL: <http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/Pages/AdvancedSearchChurchRegistersDetail.aspx?SearchType=AtoZ&SearchStart=W&ItemID=598018>. Date accessed: 4 Aug 2014

³ GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, History of Winlaton, in Gateshead and County Durham | Map and description, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. URL: <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/2782>. Date accessed: 11th July 2014

continued to make Winlaton their home and workplace. It was in Winlaton, among these iron workers, that I was surprised to discover a previously unknown variant of my study name.

The Bilclough name

Bilclough is a rare surname. Parish registers have few examples and there are no Bilcloughs recorded anywhere in Great Britain in the 1841 census. There are none in any United States census. The Public Profiler World Names website,⁴ using data from 2000 to 2005, gives a UK frequency of 2.5 per million, with a heavy concentration in Newcastle on Tyne and adjoining Blaydon. Overseas, only New Zealand registers, with a frequency of .71 per million, and the highest concentration in Hamilton City. The 1911 England and Wales census has 105 Bilcloughs, and the 2002 Electoral Roll for the UK has 139. Where did this rare surname come from, and how and why did it emerge? I hope this article will answer these questions.

Edward Bilcliff

I first encountered the surname Bilclough while researching the descendents of Edward Bilcliff. He married Elizabeth Robson at Holy Cross, the parish church of Ryton, on the 21st February 1736/37.⁵ Edward's origins are unknown, but he may have been drawn to the area by the ironworks, or perhaps he was descended from Robert Bilcliffe, a watchmaker married in Newcastle in 1656.⁶ I do know that he was not a smith or an iron worker, as he is described as a yeoman in the 1762 marriage bond relating to his daughter Ann, for which he stood surety.⁷ Apart from the marriage of Robert Bilcliffe, Edward's marriage is the first record of the name Bilcliffe or a variant spelling to be found in the counties of Northumberland and Durham. Importantly, Edward must have been literate, as he was able to tell the Ryton clerics how to spell his name, which would have been completely unfamiliar to them.

⁴ <http://worldnames.publicprofiler.org/Main.aspx>. Date accessed 29 July 2014

⁵ Ryton, Holy Cross, Marriages; Durham Records Online. URL: <http://www.durhamrecordsonline.com>. Date accessed: 6 January 2012

⁶ Boyd's Marriage Index (SOG) at Findmypast. URL: <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=gbprs%2fm%2f753196534%2f1&highlights=%22%22>. Date accessed: 6 January 2012

⁷ Marriage Bonds, Durham Diocese; Durham Records Online. URL: <http://www.durhamrecordsonline.com>. Date accessed 6 January 2012

Expert opinion agrees that the origin of the Bilcliffe name is locative, from a farmstead at Langsett near Penistone in the West Riding of Yorkshire.^{8,9} Most bearers of the name and its variants have always been found in Yorkshire and immediately surrounding counties, but some, like Edward, did move further afield and extended families can also be found in Kent, in Surrey, and in London in the 18th and 19th centuries, with some spelling variations. In the Ryton parish registers though, and later in those of Winlton, the name is consistently recorded as Bilcliff or Bilcliffe, with only half a dozen exceptions in the one hundred and fifty years from 1736 to 1887.

In contrast, there is much more variability in parish records in Northumberland and the rest of County Durham, in civil registrations of births deaths and marriages, and in census records. The graphic below illustrates all surname variations found among the descendents of Edward Bilcliff and Elizabeth Robson up to 1911. The relative size of each surname indicates the frequency of occurrence, although it is not exactly proportionate for the lower frequency names.



⁸ David Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, (Hambledon and London , 2000) pp. 22-23

⁹ George Redmonds, Turi King, and David Hey, *Surnames, DNA, and Family History* (Oxford University Press 2011) p. 100

Some of these variations are familiar from records in the Yorkshire heartlands and elsewhere, but those ending in “cluf(f)”, “clough”, “cleugh” or “cluff” are new, and have not been found in other places. I had not originally extracted core records of births deaths and marriages for the surname Bilclough and its variants, but needed to do this when I realised that this name was increasingly common among Edward’s descendents. Parish baptisms, marriages, and burials, and any other references to the name, were therefore added to my main SQLite database, cross referenced where relevant with GRO references. Civil registrations of births deaths and marriages were stored in spreadsheets.

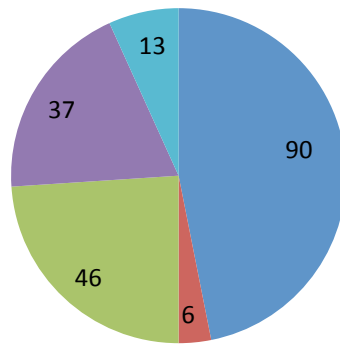
I keep my data in an SQLite database using the Firefox SQLite manager plug-in as an interface, and store all records except civil registrations in one large table. I prefer the flexibility of this to Custodian with its preset fields. I find the table easy to query, and it is useful to be able to include as much searchable text as I wish in any text field.

Parish records

In my Bilcliffe database I have 142 parish baptisms, marriages, and burials in County Durham, and 50 in Northumberland, now including Bilclough and variants surnames. County Durham records are mainly from the full transcriptions provided by Durham Records Online, which are complete in coverage for Ryton and Winlaton but not yet for all parishes, especially for early records. Northumberland records are from the same source, supplemented by FamilySearch and records from Northumberland and Durham FHS online at Findmypast. All may be subject to transcription error, especially Bilcliff/Bilcluff. There is a possibility that other registers not yet available online may contain Bilcliffe or Bilclough entries, but I believe these will be few in number if they exist.

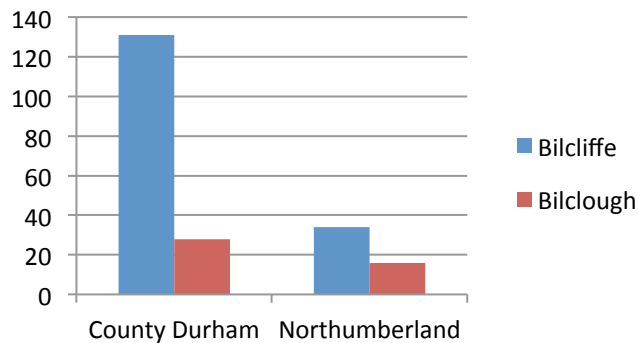
In attempting to discover where and how the name Bilclough arose I first explored the geographical distribution of both names combined in the parish records of County Durham and Northumberland, and then looked at the relative proportions of each main name.

Distribution of Bilcliffe and Bilclough



■ Ryton and Winlaton ■ Gateshead ■ Other Durham
■ Newcastle upon Tyne ■ Other Northumberland

Relative Proportions of Bilcliffe/Bilclough

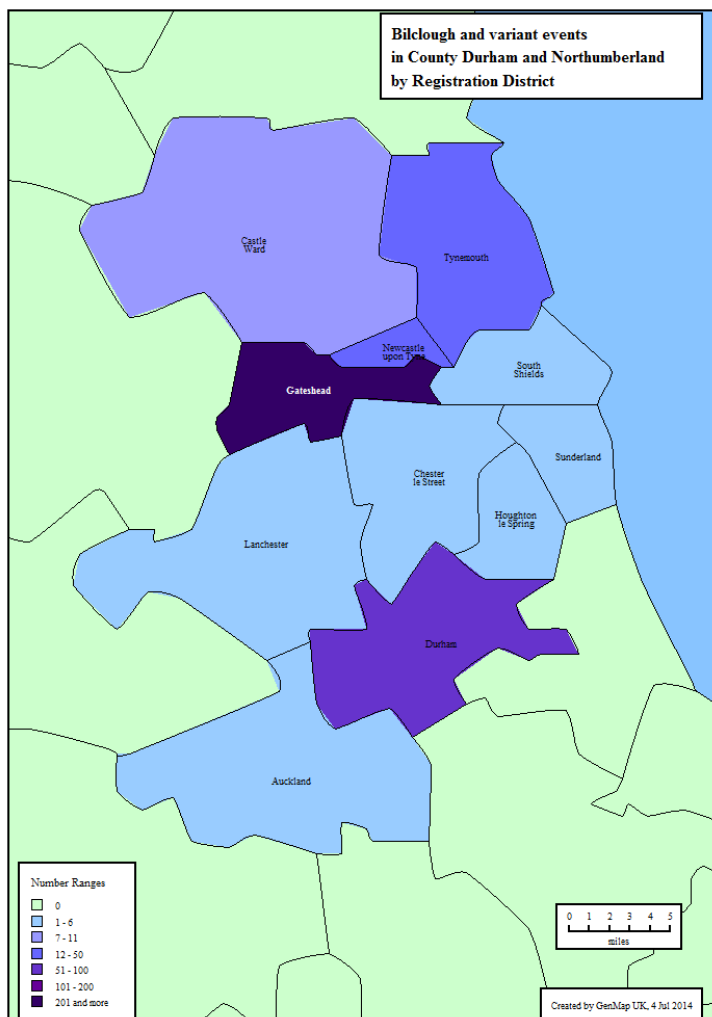


Minor spelling variations have been consolidated into the two main forms.

There is a concentration of both forms of the name in Ryton and Winlaton and adjoining parishes. I also concluded that Bilcliffe remained the primary form of the surname in the parish registers of Ryton, Winlaton, and neighbouring parishes in County Durham, where it had long been familiar, while in Northumberland the two forms appear more evenly balanced.

Civil registrations

Collection of civil registrations for the Bilclough name is now complete. Only 64 birth, death



and marriage registrations out of a total of 784 are outside the counties of Northumberland and Durham, with the earliest a marriage in Biggleswade in 1910,¹⁰ and the majority being after 1940.

The heaviest concentration of Bilclough events is, as expected, in the Gateshead registration district, which includes Winlaton.

¹⁰ General Register Office, Marriage Certificate, Jan-Mar 1910 Biggleswade 3B 606

Civil registrations of births and deaths showing indexed Bilclough and variants (Registration Districts)

	Gateshead	Other County Durham	Newcastle on Tyne	Other Northumberland
1837-1850	Biltcluff 13 Bilclough 1	Bilclough 2		
1851-1860	Bilcleugh 11 Bilclough 4 Bilcluff 2 Biltcluff 1		Bilclough 1	
1861-1870	Biltcleugh 9 Bilcleugh 5 Bilcluff 2		Bilclough 1	Bilclough 2 Bincluff 1
1871-1880	Biltcleugh 10 Bilclough 7 Bilcluff 1	Bilclough 4 Bilcluff 1	Bilclough 2	Bilclough 3
1881-1890	Bilclough 10 Biltcleugh 7 Bilcleugh 3	Bilclough 9 Bincluff 4	Bilclough 1	Bilclough 5 Bilcleugh 1
1891-1900	Bilclough 13	Bincluff 6 Bilclough 3	Bincluff 1	Bilclough 4 Bilcluff 2
1901-1910	Bilclough 25	Bincluff 1		Bilclough 4
Later records all have Bilclough				

Civil registrars seem to have struggled to interpret and write down such an unfamiliar surname, when the person reporting the birth or death could not say how it should be spelled. Some of these surname versions appear to be short lived, a phenomenon similar to that described by Tucker in his comparison of surnames from the 1881 UK census with those of the 1997 Electoral Roll for Great Britain,¹¹ and by George Redmonds¹² in his discussion of Tucker’s paper. Tucker tends to attribute the “disappeared” names to typographical errors, while George Redmonds maintains they are likely to be temporary spelling variations. My Bilclough data supports the latter view, and the spellings which have disappeared may be thought of as transitional forms.

¹¹ Ken Tucker, ‘What happened to the UK 1881 Census Surnames by 1997’ *Nomina*, Volume 27 (2004), pp 91-118

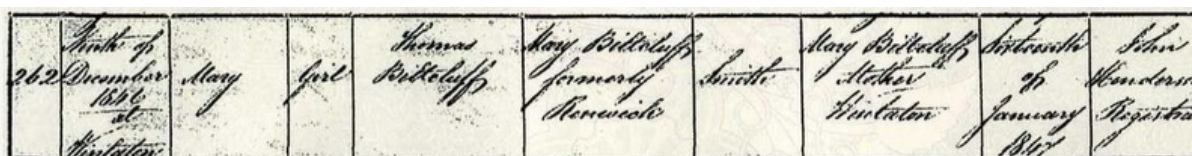
¹² Redmonds, King, and Hey, *Surnames, DNA, & Family History*, (2011), pp. 71-72

Bob Hilborne in his discussion of Hilborne surname variants¹³ concludes that surname spellings did not become standardised until a family became literate towards the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth. It is difficult to estimate the level of literacy of the inhabitants of Winlaton in the early civil registration period although there was certainly a school there in the time of the Crowley works¹⁴.

1724 A doctor is appointed by John Crowley and is based at Winlaton. The position was first held by William Rayne who was succeeded by his son John. Around this time a school teacher was appointed in each village to instruct the village children, 'From the 29th of September to the 25th of March, from 8 in the morning till 12 and from 1 till 4 in the afternoon.' In the summer months the times were adjusted so that teaching would be from, '6 till 11 and from 1 till 5 and to be constantly in his school except Sundays and other holy days appointed by the Church and the twelve days of Christmas.'

This school closed when the Crowley works left Winlaton in 1816, and although shortly after the Blacksmiths Friendly Society was established to provide some of the social support which had been lost, schooling was probably then dependent on night schools, Sunday schools, and home teaching until the 1870 Education Act. The date of closure of the Crowley school would suggest that people born before about 1805 would have benefited from it, meaning that many heads of households in 1841 might have been literate. Literacy may have been higher among men than among their wives, the people most likely to have registered births and deaths.

An example of a Biltcluff birth registration¹⁵



This child was baptised as Mary Bilcliffe at Winlaton on 18th December 1846.¹⁶

¹³ Bob Hilborne, 'Hilborne Surname Variants', *Journal of One-Name Studies*, Vol 11 Issue 11 (July-September 2014), pp. 26-28

¹⁴ A.L.Brown, 'A Lower Derwent Valley Timeline', URL: <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/DUR/Ironmasters/history.html> . Date accessed: 25 Jul 2014

¹⁵ General Register Office, Birth Certificate, Jan-Mar 1847 Gateshead 24 166

¹⁶ Baptisms, Winlaton, St Paul; Durham Records Online. URL: <http://www.durhamrecordsonline.com>. Date accessed 15 July 2012

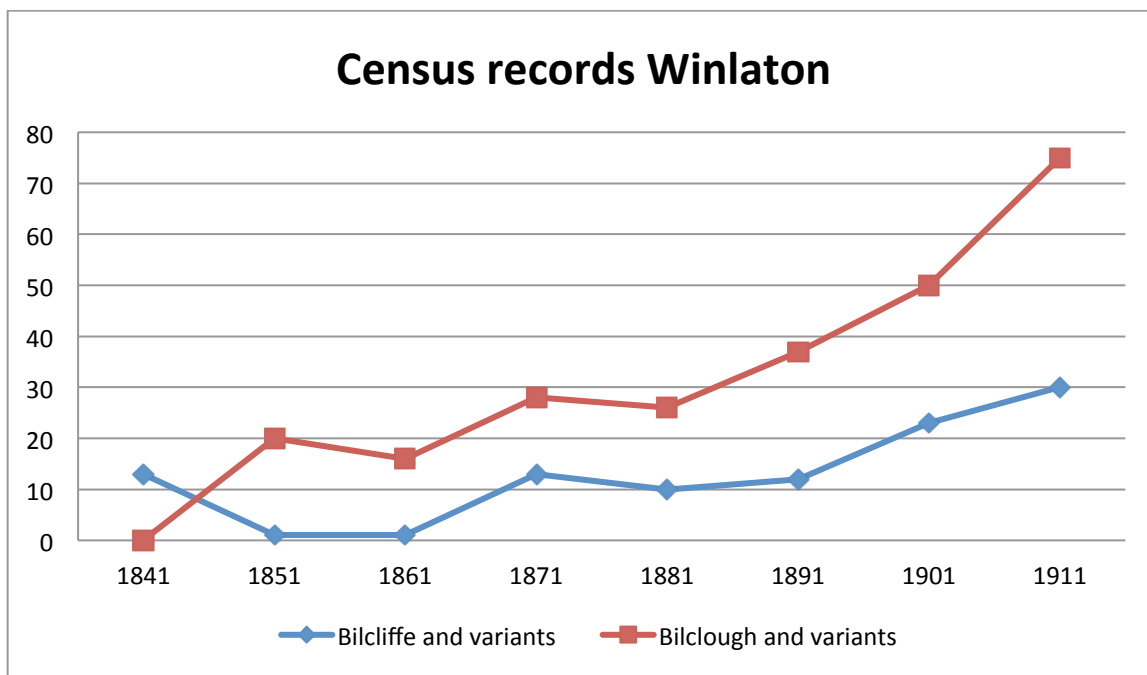
Civil registrations of marriages showing indexed Bilclough and variants (Registration Districts)

	Gateshead	Other County Durham	Newcastle on Tyne	Other Northumberland
1837-1850	Bilclough 1	Bilcluff 1	Bilclough 3 Bilcluff 2 Bilcleugh 2	
1851-1860	Bilclough 1		Bilclough 2	Bilcleugh 1
1861-1870	Bilclough 1		Bilclough 2	Bilcleugh 1
1871-1880	Bilclough 2 Bilcleugh 1	Bilclough 1		Bilclough 1
1881-1890	Bilclough 5	Bincluff 2		Bilclough 2
Later records all have Bilclough				

At least in theory, civil marriage registrations should reflect parish registers, although clearly there may be copying errors, so it is not surprising that there is very much less variability in marriage registrations than in births and deaths, especially in Gateshead Registration District, where Bilclough was a rarity in parish records until towards the end of the 19th century.

Census records

The 1851 and 1861 censuses both have only 1 Bilcliffe recorded, although there are 14 Bilcliffe marriages and baptisms from 1841 to 1851. The families involved have been recorded as Bilcleugh in 1851 and Bilclough in 1861. There is a steady advance of Bilclough through the period.



Elsewhere in County Durham and Northumberland there is a slightly different picture. In Durham parishes other than Winlaton, and in Newcastle, Bilcliffe predominates, whereas in the rest of Northumberland, as in Winlaton itself, Bilclough becomes the more numerous form. The rather slow movement of both names out from Winlaton is apparent.

	Winlaton	Other County Durham	Newcastle	Other Northumberland
1841	13	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0
1851	1	4	3	0
	20	4	5	0
1861	1	6	12	0
	16	0	0	6
1871	13	5	3	0
	28	0	1	2
1881	10	17	12	0
	26	2	0	3
1891	12	17	9	0
	37	0	0	10
1901	21	11	18	6
	50	0	0	11
1911	31	10	23	9
	78	6	0	20
	Bilcliffe and variants	Bilclough and variants		

Bilcliffe to Bilclough – an explanation

How and why did the suffix pronounced [clif] become an ending pronounced [cluf], when this change has not been found in any other part of the country? Spelling variations for the core name Bilcliffe are common, usually involving single or double [l] and/or [f], and the presence or absence of a final [e]. In early records [i] is frequently written as [y]. Sometimes the initial [bil] becomes [bel], and changes in the consonant cluster [lcl] in the middle of the word are often found. These variations, alone or in combination, give rise to such surnames as Bentlif, Bincliffe, Billiffe, Biltcliffe, Bintliff and my own birth surname of Bintliffe. The [t] which is inserted in some variants represents a glottal stop pronounced either before the next sound or co-articulated with it. The [lif] ending is almost always preserved, although it does not carry the stress when spoken. George Redmonds¹⁷ discusses the vulnerability to change of an unstressed final syllable in a surname by another, giving as one example the –(c)liffe and –ley confusion which certainly resulted in some Bintliffs becoming Bintley in the Huddersfield area, and Bentley elsewhere.

I believe the local Tyneside pronunciation holds the key. The British Library website has a section on Geordie pronunciation¹⁸, which among other interesting information states that the vowel [ɪ]¹⁹ in an unstressed final syllable in words like biscuit, office, cricket (and Bilcliffe), in the Geordie dialect becomes the neutral vowel [ə],²⁰ as in “the”. So we have Bilcl[ə]f, for which a reasonable spelling is Bilcluff.

So why did Biltcluff or Bilcluff come to be written as Bilclough? I suggest this was by analogy with other surnames which were more familiar in the Gateshead registration district, such as Brough, Clough, Fairclough and McGough, which would be pronounced in a similar way. Other surnames ending in “uff” are relatively much less frequent among Gateshead civil registrations, and are single syllable with the exception of Woodruff. Increasing literacy, greater familiarity with the surname on the part of civil authorities, and a push towards conformity would all have played their part in standardising the spelling of the name.

¹⁷ George Redmonds, *Surnames and Genealogy: A New Approach*, (The Federation of Family History Societies, 2002), p. 145

¹⁸ British Library, Sounds Familiar, Geordie Phonology. URL: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/geordie/vowel-sounds/>. Date accessed 30 July 2014.

¹⁹ International Phonetic Alphabet

²⁰ International Phonetic Alphabet

Bilclough lineage

Searching the 1911 census for Bilclough on Findmypast returns 105 records, with the majority in Winlaton, Only one is outside the counties of Northumberland and Durham, namely John Bilclough, a 36 yr old gunner in the Royal Artillery found in barracks at Devonport.²¹ He is recorded as born Winlaton, Durham. 21 of the 105 individuals recorded as Bilclough are wives and widows, leaving 84 born with the name.

Family reconstruction has shown that all of these individuals are descendents of Edward Bilcliffe and his wife Elizabeth Robson, through their oldest son John. The family tree coming forwards from 1911 has not yet been fully completed, but I am confident that every Bilclough will prove to belong to this tree, as no other possible origin of the name has been found. New Zealand Bilcloughs have the same family origin, as does William Bilclough, transported to Tasmania in 1850 for larceny “native place Win Leighton”.²² Although he married there, there appear to be no Australian descendents.

Conclusion

Bilclough is a surname which arose as a new variant of Bilcliffe in the Gateshead registration district, more specifically in the village of Winlaton, in the second half of the 19th century. A version of it first appeared in the civil registrations of births and deaths in the 1840s, and from the 1851 census onwards, while Winlaton parish registers retained the original Bilcliffe until much later in the century. Bilclough spread slowly into Northumberland and the rest of Durham, co-existing with Bilcliffe, and only into other areas of England from the middle of the 20th century. It remains overwhelmingly a Tyneside name. Additionally, family reconstruction complete up until 1911 has shown that all Bilcloughs are descended from Edward Bilcliffe and his wife Elizabeth, who are therefore a true “portal couple”²³

²¹ The National Archives (TNA): RG14/13060/SN9999

²² Tasmanian Archives Online CON14/1/14. URL:

<http://search.archives.tas.gov.au/default.aspx?detail=1&type=l&id=CON14/1/41>. Date accessed 14 July 2012.

²³ Peter Walker, ‘What does it all mean?’ *Journal of One-Name Studies* Vol 9 issue 5 January-March 2007 p. 10

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