

Gayton Ancestry

Origin of the name Guyton and close variants

There appear to be three possible routes to the modern English name **Guyton**.

Gayton and Geyton

This route stems from early English place names. One variant derives from the Old Scandinavian *geit* plus *tuin* meaning 'a farmstead where goats are kept'. At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086, there were three settlements which are believed to have had this origin: Gaitone in the Wirral in Cheshire, Gaituna in Norfolk and Gettune in Lincolnshire. The first two are now known as Gayton and the latter is known as Gayton le Wold. An alternative variant has the meaning 'a farmstead of a man called Gaega': Gaitone in Staffordshire, which is also now known as Gayton, and Geitentone in Northamptonshire, which is now known as Geddington. The wide geographical dispersion of these place names is reflected in a similarly wide distribution of the personal names **de Gayton** and **de Geyton** which are found in early English written records from the twelfth century onwards. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the appellation 'de' had largely disappeared and the majority of people were known simply by their Christian name and surname.

In Norfolk, but not apparently elsewhere, the names **Gayton** and **Geyton** seem to have shifted in a few families to **Guyton** and **Gyton**. The earliest known reference in Norfolk to the latter name is the undated will sometime between 1469 and 1503 of Thomas Gyton of Great Ryburgh which is about 15 miles north east of the village of Gayton. In Norwich, the county town of Norfolk, a Pawle Geyton baptised in 1580 at Heigham, a hamlet just outside Norwich, was recorded variously during his life as Powle Geyton, Paul Gyton, Paul Guiton and Paul Gayton, and one of his sons, Mathew Geyton, baptised in 1608, was also recorded as Mathew Giton and Mathew Guyton. In two other towns, Swaffham and East Dereham, which lie about 11 miles to the south east and 22 miles to the east south east respectively of the village of Gayton, the names Gayton and Geyton in early parish registers in the middle and late sixteenth centuries appear to recede and give way to Guyton and Gyton in the seventeenth century. Another early variant found in several parts of Norfolk is the name **Gytton** but this too appears to have been superseded by Guyton or Gyton.

From the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, when railways began to enable an increase in geographical mobility, the names **Guyton** and **Gyton** are found almost exclusively in Norfolk and the north east corner of Suffolk close to Great Yarmouth in Norfolk. Only one Guyton family has been discovered in London in the second half of the eighteenth century but had disappeared by the time of the first census recording personal names in 1841. Similarly, the name Gyton appears only occasionally and there is just a single reference to a father and daughter in London in 1841 both of whom were born outside London.

Guiton, Guitton, and Guyton

The earliest known reference to the name **Guitton** appears in Anjou, France, in 1172. At that time, following the Norman conquest of England, the western part of France, including Anjou, belonged to the English crown and there were close contacts between the two countries. In 1342 a John de Guitton was mentioned in an English patent roll in the reign of Edward III regarding the French province of Gascony and the declining of a knighthood.

Just over a hundred years later, in 1449, Peter **Gitton** of Blois in France was granted denization in England, a limited form of naturalization with no rights to inherit property or to hold public office. Nearly another century later, in 1544, when England was at war with France and all foreigners had to take an oath of loyalty to the English crown or face expulsion, there are records of two further denizations of people with variants of this name. Thomas **Gytton**, a gardener from Gascony, aged 57, was granted denization after living in England and being married to an English wife for eighteen years and working for Lord Seynt John for twelve years. The other was Robert **Guydym**, a shoemaker born in Brittany, aged 40, who had lived in England for seventeen years and who also had an English wife.

These three are the earliest known immigrants of this name coming to England from France. All three were born and came to England well before the French Protestants emerged as a sect during the 1530s.

Between 1565 and 1580 there was a large influx of Protestant Flemish (Dutch speaking) and Walloon (French speaking) weavers and their families from the Low Countries to Norwich. Known as 'the Strangers', thirty families were initially invited by the city to help revive the ailing local textile industry. As a result of a combination of commercial success and the religious tolerance they found in England, their numbers grew quickly to around 6,000 representing around forty percent of the population of Norwich by 1580. No direct references have been found to Guiton or Guyton but a tax collection from foreigners in Norwich in 1580 included the name Supplus **Geddon**. In 1595 the baptism is recorded of a Jaques de **Gettem** and in 1596 a further tax collection from foreigners included the name Jeames de **Getton**.

In the western coastal areas of France including Gascony, Bordeaux, Brittany and Normandy, where the names **Guiton**, **Guitton** and **Guyton** appear to be most prevalent, there were two lines of minor French nobility in the sixteenth century, **Guyton de Poitier** and **Guyton de Villeneuve**. A descendant of the latter branch, Jean Guiton, became famous as mayor and commander of the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle when the town came under siege from the Catholic royalist forces in 1628/29. The siege lasted fourteen months but the Huguenot defenders eventually had to concede defeat in October 1629. The names **Giton**, **Guiton** and **Guitton** also appear in early records in other parts of France, notably Burgundy and Provence, though the branches are probably unrelated.

As a result of periodic repressions of Huguenots in France, there were several waves of emigration and many Huguenots fled to Holland, England, Jersey in the Channel Islands, Canada and America. The largest exodus occurred in the latter part of the seventeenth century after the Revocation of the Treaty of Nantes on 18 October 1685. In England, London, Southampton, Canterbury and Norwich were popular destinations and there are records of several Guiton and Guitton families arriving between 1685 and 1700. Later, during the eighteenth century, there are several records of Guiton and Guitton baptisms and marriages in Huguenot churches in several parts of England but none that have been discovered so far were in Norfolk or Suffolk which were the principal centres of the modern names of Guyton and Gyton.

The name **Guiton** is also found in Ireland with the main concentration in County Tipperary, to a lesser extent in Cork, and with a few instances in Dublin at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The latter were Huguenot refugees and it remains a matter of conjecture whether these were the ancestors of the Guitons and a single Guitton family who were later recorded elsewhere in Ireland.

In the nineteenth century, several Guitons and Guiton families emigrated from Ireland to England and America, especially during the desperately deprived years leading up to and immediately after the Irish potato famine in the late 1840s. Some families retained the name Guiton and others adopted the more Anglicised version, Guyton

Going back in time, the personal name Guy is believed to stem from the Old German personal name Wido which in turn is believed to derive from the Old High German word *witu* meaning a wood. In France, the name Guy became popular among the early Normans and several variations and diminutives emerged including **Guion**, **Guyon**, **Guiton**, **Guitton** and **Vuitton**. These variations also

spread to Italy and include **Guido, Guidi, Guidone, Guidoni** and **Guittone**. With a low level of literacy amongst ordinary people and names being recorded as they were heard by clerks, there was no consistency in the spelling of names in early written records. In France, there were also two principal regional dialects, north and south of the River Loire. In the north, the letter *i* tended to predominate, resulting in the name **Guiton** and **Guitton** and, in the south, the letter *y* was more common, resulting in the name **Guyton**. The latter was the written form of the two branches of the minor nobility mentioned earlier but the former version is found more often in immigration records in England, Canada and America.

Gutyn and Guttyn

These names appear to have had a Welsh origin, probably being a diminutive or pet form of **Gruffydd** which, like all Welsh names, was originally a first name but evolved into a surname. Examples of the forms **Gutyn** and **Guttyn** are found in parts of England bordering on Wales, particularly in Shropshire, and further shifts occurred to **Gittin(s)**, **Gitting(s)** and **Gitton(s)** and also to **Gyt(t)on**. In 1452, a Nicholas Gyton was a witness to the transfer of rights to some land in the Hundred of Stodesdon (now Stottesdon) in Shropshire, which is the earliest known record of the name **Gyton**. By the middle of the following century, the names **Gitton** and **Gyton** seem to have spread outwards from Shropshire to Derbyshire, Worcestershire and London. However, there is no evident connection between these versions of the name and the more numerous Guyton and Gyton families in Norfolk and Suffolk.

English, French or Welsh?

The popular tradition in many English speaking Guyton families and countries is that the name has Huguenot origins and was brought to England, America and Canada by Protestant refugees from France. The main alternative theory is that the prevalence of the name in Norfolk derives from the early English settlement of Gaituna, now known as Gayton.

What does appear to be clear from early written records is that initial variants of the name were established in both France and England before the Reformation and the emergence of Protestant and Huguenot churches. There were undoubtedly a number of Huguenot refugees by the name of Guiton and Guitton but all of these arrived a century or more later than the first recorded instances of the names Guyton, Gyton and Gytton in England. The notion that the majority of Guyton families living in England and America today are linked to the heroic mayor of La Rochelle during the siege of La Rochelle in 1628/29, Jean Guiton, is particularly hard to reconcile unless one goes back to much earlier generations of that family. Jean Guiton himself had five daughters but no sons. All the daughters can be accounted for and there were no sons to continue the family name.

This does not rule out much earlier connection with immigrants from France. Unfortunately, no conclusive evidence has been found so far to connect early branches of the family in Norfolk, and particularly in Norwich, with French immigrants or with the early Norfolk habitation of Gaituna. Both routes are possible and, indeed, both could have occurred in parallel.

The Welsh connection appears to be a marginal curiosity. This route explains a number of stray references to Gitton and Gyton in the Welsh border counties and elsewhere but the number of instances is very small and no connections have been found at all with Guyton or Gyton families in Norfolk.

David F Guyton
Springfield, 22 Lache Lane, Chester CH4 7LR, England
E-mail: DFGuyton@compuserve.com