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## Dowbiggin history and surname Derivation

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The Dowbiggin Society in July 2003 met in England to discuss and research the family. It was organized very effectively by Diane Mane who founded the organization. A great trip!

The origin of the surname - During the Trip we heard "The Rest of the Story"

My note in 2003 to my family follows:

Dowbiggin

It was considered "quite clear" that Doufe being a old word for dove and biggin a word for building or group of buildings, that "**Dowbiggin**" -

**Referred to a house where doves were kept.**

How wonderfully New Age. We are descended from peaceful owners of doves .... Let's all join hands and sing .... "We are the world ....."

The Rest of the Story

**Kevin Lancaster**, a district Cabinet Member, who owns and farms what was once a portion of the Dowbiggin estate, kindly gave us an hour + walking tour of the area and the Dowbiggin homes on the property (sold in the 1800's). They are still being used and are in wonderful condition. Sheep is being raised on most of the hill farms.

He is also a local historian and, although not related, very knowledgeable of Dowbiggin history. He stood on a large elevated flat rock while he told the group the history of the area. He also commented on the derivation of the surname. He noted:

*At the back of the section is a large cave. In the dialect of the area it is called a duef cote. It is unlikely that a house of doves was located near that cave or any cave. (What's a house of doves doing on a hillside farm anyway?)*

*He believes that Dow is derived from that cave ... "duef" (my phonetic interpretation) near which the originally family or families lived. The name really means "gathering of buildings near the cave".*

I wish I had a video camera to record the expressions on the eager upturned Dowbiggin faces as we realized what he said fitted the facts.

Goodbye House of Doves and New Age ...

.Hello "Cave Dwellers" and Stone Age.

Love Troglodyte Dad (end)

## **Dowbiggin History by Anne Ruddick**

Received April 2000

Anne Ruddick provided a very excellent researched history given below.

*This document was sent to me by Anne Ruddick, who may have gotten it, or parts of it, from Ian Stoye. There is some speculation that the author could have been George Redmond, whose condensed version appears elsewhere on this website. If anyone can provide me with more information about the original source, please contact me at [taz@netmagic.net](mailto:taz@netmagic.net)*

### **DOWBIGGIN**

Dowbiggin has undergone many spelling variations in its 650 years' history, and some of these have survived as distinctive surnames. "Dow" had originally been Dowf, Doufe or Dewfe, and this survived into the fifteenth century; the last example being Dousbiging in 1489, where the "s" is probably a misreading of the almost identical symbols for "f" and "s". Rather later, Dow became Dew and Daw, and this last form led to a curious and illogical variant. Surnames such as Dalby were often pronounced and spelled Dawby, and when in Doncaster it was assumed that Dawbiggin had developed along similar lines, the result was the strange form Dalbikin.

The suffix "biggin" regularly becomes "bikin" or "bekin" in the sixteenth century, and two variants which developed in this way have survived; Dowbekin and Dowbakin are both still found in Lancashire. It is clear that "bikin" was nearer to the colloquial pronunciation of the name, and this was responsible for the strangest variants of all. In Ingleton Parish Registers, for example, Dowbiggin in the seventeenth century existed alongside Dobikin and Dabkin, and these forms provide us with confirmation of the origin of Dobkin.

This surname does not appear in any of the recent Dictionaries of Surnames<sup>1</sup>, and yet on the surface, its meaning is transparent. Robert had several pet forms in the Middle Ages, and among these were Hob and Dob. These two gave rise to Hobson and Dobson -- both simple patronymics. One diminutive of the former was Hobkin, eventually Hopkin and Hopkins, and it appears logical to derive Dobkin and Dobkins in the same way from Dob. However, both names are very rare and on the whole found only in areas where Dowbiggin is located. The only early example I have located is that of Robert Dobkyn in 1383 in West Bretton, precisely the locality where Dowbiggin was recorded a few years later. Very many surnames acquired a final illogical "s" in the 1500s, and in the complete absence of alternative explanations of Dobkins, it is likely that its derivation is identical with that of Dowbiggin.

### **The Origin and Early History**

Dowbiggin and its variants owe their origin to a small hamlet in Sedbergh parish in north-west Yorkshire, where the first example of the surname occurs. In 1321, Adam de Doubiging's name was linked with that of William Clapham in a land deed concerning a "moiety" of the Church of Sedbergh. When the roll of 1379 was collected, there were, however, two branches of the

family. In Bentham, two men were taxed: John de Dowfbygyng and his wife paid 12 pence, and Robert de Doufebyging, probably their unmarried son, paid the 4 pence, which the majority of his fellows also paid. In Clapham, Cristiana Dewfebyging also paid 4 pence. This tax-list provides us with a useful insight into the family. First of all, the spellings make the meaning of Dowbiggin quite clear. "Doufe" or "Dewfe" is from an old word meaning "dove," and is either Old Norse or Old English in origin. Biggin, still in use in dialect, **was simply a building. Dowbiggin was probably, therefore, a building where doves were kept.**

However, as the word for dove was also in use in the early Middle Ages as a man's personal name, the meaning could be "the building of a man called Dufa." In some ways this might seem a more acceptable derivation. Secondly, the amount of tax paid by John in 1379 tells us that the family was comparatively well-off. This might explain why the surname was found four years later in West Bretton, much further south. If the Dowbiggins were freeholders, they would be able to make such a move, whereas the majority of men were tied to a particular manor.

Whatever the causes of this move, it played a vital part in the distribution of the family name for at least 300 years. Although the main home of the Dowbiggins continued to be in the north-west corner of the West Riding, there are frequent references to the name in South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire as late as the seventeenth century.

#### **Migration and Settlement: 1383 to the present day**

It is possible that the Robert de Doufebyging taxed in Bentham in 1379 was identical with both the Robert recorded in West Bretton four years later, and with a Robert Dowbygyng of Wakefield whose name appeared in a list of men serving on an inquisition at Doncaster in 1402. It would appear from records that this branch of the family settled in the neighbourhood of Wakefield and Doncaster. The next evidence for this is in 1426. In a deed that year, John Qwyte (White) was granted the tenancy of a piece of land in Wakefield described as lying close to a "tenement lately belonging to Robert Dowebygyngge." The use of the word "lately" might imply either that he had moved away or that he was dead. In any case, three years later the surname turned up in Stubbs Walden, further to the east. John Dowebygyng, along with a man called John Tapetour, was appointed as the attorney in the transference of land from the Dronsfield family to Dame Alice de Tannesley. The following year, the same two men were again appointed as attorneys in a tenancy involving the Wentworth family of West Bretton. This seems to link John with the Robert Dowbiggin who was mentioned in the West Bretton document in 1387.

There is one important reference to the surname in the fifteenth century which does not seem to tie up with either of the two branches so far mentioned. It appears in the will of Robert (or Roger<sup>2</sup>) Pynkney, described as the Chantry Priest at Hornby -- although just which Hornby is not clear. In his will, this man made bequests to his sister, a Janet Dousbiging of Kirkby Moorside in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Jane Dousbiging, the daughter of Janet, received, the will tells us, "*one brasse potte, four disshis, two dublers [large bowls], and two saulsers pewder.*" Sir John Dousesbiging, the son of Janet, received "*one girdell harnest with silver, the corps of same, grene and rede.*" Monks wore such girdles or waistcords, and Sir John's seems to have been a very fine one indeed.

Clearly, the above family could have come originally from either Bentham or South Yorkshire, and this is equally true of a family recorded in York in the first half of the sixteenth century.

In 1521, the will of a Robert Dowbyngge or Dowbyng was registered at York, and his place of residence was given as Bishopthorpe, slightly to the south of the city. Only 20 years later, another Robert Dowbyggyn was made a Freeman of the City of York. He was a shoemaker, and his father William had the trade of tanner. The repetition of the name Robert in York is interesting in view of the earlier Roberts in Wakefield and Bentham.

It is, of course, very much a matter of chance which records survive for the Middle Ages, and the absence of information about a family should not be taken as evidence of their extinction or migration. Thus the fact that Dowbiggin, which reappears in South Yorkshire records in the sixteenth century but was not evidenced there for over 100 years after 1430, should not lead us to presume the family had died out. When the name reappeared, it was in the 1570s in Hatfield. This was the name given to a great wasteland of marsh east of Doncaster and forming a natural boundary with the counties to the south. There is clear evidence that the Dowbiggins were settled in this area for over 100 years. A selection of their wills registered at York establishes this:

1577	John Dawbykine of Hatfield
1595	John Dawbikine of Hatfield
1623	Edward Dawbiken of Doncaster
1643	John Dawbikine of Doncaster

The Hatfield family were "husbandmen" or farmers, but Edward Dawbiken's occupation was that of "waterman." He may have ferried people across the river, or even have carried merchandise by water under contract. The second alternative seems more likely, for in 1616 the same Edward was involved in a property dispute in Doncaster with the Armitage family. The fact that three separate houses were involved suggests that he was reasonably well-off. At the same time as the surname was recorded in the southern part of the county, it was also recorded in Nottinghamshire. In 1557 Thomas Dawbegyne lived at Thorney, and in 1617 Richard Dowbygin, a clerk, lived at South Collingham. It is not clear whether the Nottinghamshire Dowbiggins were a branch of the South Yorkshire family, but geographically this seems likely. Neither branch seems to have survived the eighteenth century.

In Doncaster Parish Register, Dawbekin gave was to Dalbikin, and appeared there for the last time in 1696. After that date it is recorded once in 1713 as Dabbekin in Cantley, but then disappears. An isolated occurrence of the name occurs in Selby in 1679 when John Dawbekine was a currier or tanner, but these are the last examples I have recorded.

### **Dowbiggin in the Bentham area**

We have already seen that Dowbiggins were living at Bentham and Clapham at the time of the Poll Tax in 1379, and it seems possible that these two families, already quite probably related in the early fourteenth century, have developed independently throughout the centuries.

The first clear association of the Dowbiggins with the village of Bentham goes back, in fact, 50 years before the Poll Tax. In 1325 Adam de Dowbiggyng, probably identical with the Adam recorded in 1321, witnessed a land transaction between John de Burgh and the Rector of Bentham church involving a mill, lands, and tenements in Bentham. After the Poll Tax, in 1445, William Dowbygyng of Bentham handed over possession of lands in Bolton by Bowland to the Rimington family, and in the 1545 Subsidy Roll, Thomas Dowbygyn was taxed at Bentham.

From this date forward, the Parish Registers provide evidence of the continuity of the family in the vicinity of Bentham and Clapham, and occasional deeds provide more illuminating details of the family's progress. In 1591, for example, Lancelot Dowbekyn, along with several others, was mentioned in a transaction involving 13 messuages, 2 cottages, and other lands in High Bentham, Greystonegill, and Fowgill<sup>3</sup>. In 1615, Lancelot and Thomas were involved in a dispute over Newland House in Horton in Ribblesdale, but it seems likely that Thomas continued to live at Newland, for his will was registered there in 1634. Combining the various pieces of evidence, it is just possible to indicate the continuity of this Bentham family:

*[I cannot replicate the charts on a webpage, so I will simply describe what is drawn out. Dates are not births, necessarily, but rather dates related to documented evidence. -- Diane Main, April 2000]*

	1325	Adam de Dowbiggyng	
1379	John de Dowfbygyng		Robert de Dowfbygyng
1445	William Dowbygyng		
1545	Thomas Doubygyn		
1591/1615	Lancelot Dowbiggin		Thomas Dowbiggin
1627	Lawrence Dowbiggin		

*[Lawrence had two sons, William in 1627, and Lancelot who lived from 1629-1671. Lancelot married Edith, who died in 1658, and there are five children listed for them: Lawrence 1649, Elin 1650, Elizabeth 1652, Mary 1654, and Frances 1655.]*

Edith Dowbiggin died in 1658. Lancelot remarried three years later, his second wife being the eldest daughter of Thomas Winder of High Winder. In fact, although Lancelot was buried at Bentham in "the choir on the south side," many of the entries for this family were in the Registers of Ingleton Church, and it is by putting together information from both registers that it is possible to continue the family tree in the next century. By the early nineteenth century, as the following chart shows, there were at least two vigorous branches of the family, at least one of them living at Dale House in Ingleton parish. An interesting point is the similar pattern of naming in the two branches. This makes it difficult to ensure that the chart is accurate and also creates problems in continuing the history in the nineteenth century. For example, a Joshua Dowbiggin who broke with the traditional farming role and became a cotton-weaver in 1810 could have been the eldest son of either family.

*[Again, I could not replicate the chart, so I describe it as follows: Joshua Dowbiggin married Margaret Knowles at Bentham on 23 June 1728. Their children were Agnes 1731, Jane 1737, Thomas 1745, and John 1749. The families of Thomas and John are listed below.]*  
*Thomas 1745 married Mary Burton in 1786. Their children were:*

1. Joshua 1787
2. Margaret 1788
3. Thomas 1790
4. John Sanders 1792
5. Betty 1795
6. Jane 1798, Bentham
7. Molly 1799, Bentham
8. Robert 1802, Dale House

*John 1749 married Betty Close of Sedbergh in 1774. Their children were:*

1. Joshua 1778
2. John 1780
3. Molly 1782
4. Margaret 1784
5. Jane 1786
6. William 1790
7. Richard 1792
8. James 1794
9. Edward 1797

*Underneath the chart is written "Which Joshua was the cotton weaver of 1810?"*

The Dowbiggins are still in Bentham 650 years after the first records of the surname there, and in recent years they have farmed at Home Farm, Leck, and Robert Hall in Low Bentham. However, although the name is still found in Ingleton Parish, it does not seem to have survived in Clapham.

### **The Dowbiggins of Clapham Parish**

On the very first occasion that Dowbiggin was recorded as a surname, it was in conjunction with the Clapham family who took their surname from the village, and in 1379 Dowbiggins were living at Clapham. The association with both the family and the village continued, for in 1406 John de Dowbiggyng and John de Clapham were both members of an inquisition concerning Austwick manor, and in a similar inquisition twelve years later, Christopher Dowbiggyng had replaced John as one of its members. When the Subsidy Roll was collected in 1545, there were only two Dowbiggins taxed -- William at Bentham, as we have seen, and Christopher at Austwick. However, this branch of the family seems to have become extinct shortly afterwards, for after Margaret Dowbikin was buried from Newby cote in 1596, the surname disappeared from the Parish Registers.

*Note at the end: (source unknown but suspected to be Ian Stoye, whose mother's maiden name was Fox)*

*[I transcribed this from papers passed on by my aunt, Mabel Collier, and her cousin, James Fox. They had come from a lady in Bentham and were apparently written by someone who had been tracing the origins of local names. A note at the end about the national distribution of the name Dowbiggin was dated in 1973. In fact, 53 were listed in telephone directories at the time: 25 Dowbiggin, 4 Dowbekin, 1 Dowbakin, 19 Dobkin, 4 Dobkins. Most were in Lancashire and Cumberland.]*

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#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> I don't know if the author is referring to Dobkin or Dowbiggin, but I do find Dowbiggin in A Dictionary of English Surnames: The Standard Guide to English Surnames by P.H. Reaney and R.M. Wilson, and it lists Dobkin as a variant. -- Diane Main, April 2000

<sup>2</sup> I have two separate accounts of this article, which is why I have put Robert and Roger's names down in my copy. One copy I think came from Ian Stoye, the other I'm not sure. -- Anne Ruddick, February 1996

<sup>3</sup> Could this in reality be Lowgill, in Tatham Fells, Lancashire? (very close to Bentham) -- Diane Main, April 2000