

Origins of the Brooksbank Family – A View

We are concerned here with the West Riding of Yorkshire and the earliest records of the family name are found in the late 13th and 14th centuries. This is not very surprising since first names were only generally used until this time. In 1275 the first Poll Tax was levied and by 1377 full scale Poll Taxes were being used to fund the war against France. The wider introduction of taxation required more specific identification of individuals, so rather than just say Tom we get Tom the baker or Tom Baker. Another way surnames arose was from the local topography, so someone living near the banks of a brook might become known as Tom Bythebokesbank (broke being the genitive form of brike in Middle English, meaning brook). Being a little cumbersome this could become Tom Bythebroke or Tom Brokesbank.

Not surprisingly, the first wider records of the family name are found in the Yorkshire Poll Tax Records for 1379, but there is a single mention of a Thomas Brokesbank in 1273 (in Yorkshire). Apart from a Thomas Bythebroke from Warwickshire (late 13th century to 1317), a Henry Bythebroke from Waterfall, Staffordshire (1327) and a John Bethebrokes, Worcestershire Subsidy Rolls (1332), all the early records are from the West Riding:

- 1309 Adam Bithebroke, Rastrick (Juror, held 8 acres of land)
- 1339 Henry Bythebroke, Rastrick (Manor of Wakefield)
- 1375 Roger Bythebroke, Walton (and wife Magota)
- 1377 Thomas Bi-the-brokes-bancke, Elland
- 1379 John Bythebroke, Wombwell (and wife Cecilia)
- 1379 William Bithebroke, High Hoyland (and wife Elena)
- 1379 John Bythebroke, High Holland (Taylor, and wife Elena)
- 1379 Thomas Brokesbank, Warley (and wife)
- 1379 Henry Bythebroke, Huddersfield (and wife Joanna)
- 1379 William Bythebroke, Huddersfield (and wife Cecilia)

1379 John Bythebroke, Huddersfield (and wife Agnes)
1379 Richard Bythebroke, Huddersfield
1379 John Brokesbank, Allerton (and wife)
1379 Adam de Brokesbank, Yorkshire
1403 Clement Bythebrok, Bradley (land settlement claim)
1405 John Bythebroke, Liversedge (witness to several land grants to 1415)
1409 John Bythebroke, Birstall (witness to will, could be same as above)
1427 John Bythebroke, Crofton (Prior of Nostell to 1472, aka J Huddersfield)

Bythebroke in its various forms has not survived and there appears to be only one Brooksbank clan, but it remains uncertain how many of the above are our ancestors. The Thomas Brokesbank (1379) from Warley is probably the first clear ancestor and the proximity of many of the others suggests at least some were relatives.

Before returning to the Brooksbank family history it is worth looking at the major events in the region since William the Conqueror arrived in England and how these may have shaped our ancestry:

1069-1670. Following the Danish invasion in the North, King William set about isolating and destroying his enemies in York. The 'Harrying of the North' was very extensive and has been called the worst genocide in England. Both side of the River Aire, between the Humber and the Tees, all living things (people and animals) were killed, crops destroyed and houses burnt, then the land was salted. Up to 100,000 people (4% of the population) may have been killed or died of starvation. In 1086 (Domesday Book) large areas of Yorkshire were still described as 'wasted', with an average of 60% of each manor lying idle and only 25% of the population remaining.

1092. King William created the Barony of Pontefract for Ilbert de Lacy, who had fought beside him at Hastings and assisted in the 'Harrying'. Ilbert had built Pontefract Castle in 1070, having been granted the Honour of Pontefract (which

consists mainly of the West Riding of Yorkshire). The Lacy clan were one of the most powerful families in the North, founding religious houses at Nostell, Pontefract and Kirkstall. Ilbert's brother Walter de Lacy founded the first Parish Church of Huddersfield.

1135. King Stephen built the Castle at Almondbury on what is now known as Castle Hill and in 1137 granted this to Henry de Lacy.

1272. King Edward I granted another Henry de Lacy the privilege of holding a weekly market in Almondbury, which remained the most important market in the region for several centuries.

1307. King Edward II's reign saw pestilence and famine, and Almondbury Castle was destroyed.

1311. Almondbury and Huddersfield manors became part of the Duchy of Lancaster. Then in 1315 when Thomas, Earl of Lancaster was executed Sir Richard de Birton became Lord of the Manor.

1349. About one third of the population of Yorkshire were wiped out by the Black Death.

1377. Free warren of Huddersfield was granted to the Prior and Canons of Nostell Priory.

1455. The War of the Roses, which lasted until 1487. The Houses of Lancaster and York (two rival branches of the Plantagenets) fought for the throne of England. The region was at the centre of the action and was the scene of rapine and bloodshed.

1460. At Sandal Magna on the 30 December there was a decisive Battle of Wakefield at which the Duke of York was killed and much of his army destroyed.

1811. The Luddite insurrection started in Nottinghamshire but soon spread to the West Riding, and Huddersfield was deeply involved.

Over the centuries the region has been invaded by the Celts, the Romans, the Vikings and the Normans, but by the 14th century it was finally finding its own identity. The major industry from the middle ages onwards was the woollen

industry which could have produced wool textiles for export from the area. There was also other farm production, but this was most likely only sufficient for local use. It is also worth considering the population of the West Riding over time and this is estimated to have been as follows:

1086 – 16,400; 1290 – 127,400; 1377 – 87,000; 1600 – 197,500

These low figures are also seen for local villages, so in 1379 the population of Huddersfield was 200 and Almondbury was 100.

Thomas Bythebrokesbank of Warley was probably born around 1330 and may well have been of Saxon origin. In 1371, with three others, he was elected to supervise the reparation of the palisades at Erringden Park for a small fee. In 1377 he is recorded in the Poll Tax Records as Thomas By-the-brokes-bancke of Elland. Then, in 1379, as Thomas de Brokesbank, with two others, he is ordered to supervise the removal of the corn mill at Warley, rebuild it at Luddenden and dam up the water. On the occasion of the 1379 tax record mentioned above he is named as Thomas Brokesbank. We know he had a wife, but not her name, and think that the John Brokesbank of nearby Allerton (also mentioned above in 1379) may have been a younger son and possibly first of the family to make the move to Airedale. Others of the family remained around Halifax until the 17th century. They were a leading family in Warley owning two substantial houses, several messuages, two fulling mills and half the timber at Booth Knowl.

The story of the Brooksbank family from this point on is well documented in the book Brooksbank – Yeoman of the Dales by E M Shepherd, which can be found in the Documents section.

Paul Fiddian, April 2014