

Our WHITE Family History

The surname White is generally of quite ancient origin and may have its roots in Anglo-Saxon or Viking history, meaning pale skinned, which would fit with a family that we first find in the apparently remote reaches of Norfolk. Yet in the 14th century Norfolk was the most densely populated and most intensively farmed region in England. Despite this White was not a very common name in Norfolk with fewer than 200 occurrences before 1600. As we know the earliest parish records are generally found in the early 16th century and we have as our earliest ancestor a John White born around 1515 and his wife Joan who started a family in Thrigby, a largely arable parish near Great Yarmouth. Of their children, John White born 1550 died aged 8 and twins Henry and William White born 1553 both died five days after being christened, leaving another Henry White born 1559 as the sole surviving child we have found. Perhaps because of this family tragedy Henry became a cleric, which in medieval times was a term for a member of the clergy who were one of the few groups who could read and write. In 1583 Henry was appointed Rector of the Church of Thurgarton, All-Saints by the Bishop of Norwich, Edmund Freke. The Church was formerly a rectory under the patronage of the Abbot of St Bennet of Holm since before the Norman Conquest in 1066 and was then under the Bishop of Norwich since the English Reformation in the mid-16th century.

Thurgarton is some 25 miles from Thrigby and five miles inland from Cromer, and here Henry started a family with his wife Elizabeth Beane who was from nearby Gresham. In 1586 they had a daughter Susanna followed by six sons over the next 12 years, the second youngest of whom was Francis White, born 1596. After his wife Elizabeth died in 1601, Henry married again at the age of 54, but his new wife Alice Goggs gave him no more children. He remained Rector until his death in 1617, a total of 34 years. His son Francis set up home with his wife Jane in South Creake, about 25 miles west of Thurgarton, where he was most likely involved in farming of some sort. They had six children in the space of only seven and a half years, the first and last dying within only a few weeks of birth but remarkably twins Richard and Alice White born 1631 appear to have survived (twins are one of several themes in this White family). A second son, James White born 1634 and his wife Mary settled in Elsing, about 20 miles south-east of South Creake, a somewhat larger village which

may have offered a wider range of work. They had only two children that I can find and the eldest of these was Robert White born 1660, the younger son James born in 1664 died within a week of his christening.

Robert White married Mary Hammond at Semer in Suffolk in 1681, some 60 miles south of Elsing, but they returned to his birthplace to raise a family. They had seven children, though three of these died young, and the first Philip White born 1683 in Elsing carried on the family line though he died aged 43. Philip married Helen Palmer at Elsing in 1714 and they had five children before he died. The eldest was another Philip White born 1715, but whatever work had kept the family in Elsing for more than 70 years did not interest him as he moved to Gressenhall a few miles west, having married Tabitha Bush in nearby Scarning. At one time Philip was Innkeeper of the Half Moon Pub on Quebec Street, East Dereham (closed in 1919) but probably moved there after having a family. He and Tabitha had seven children, with six surviving beyond childhood, and the youngest of these was James White born 1755 in Gressenhall. James married Ann Mary Murrell in nearby Billingford in 1783, but they lived in Gressenhall where they had 11 children, nine of whom survived childhood. The youngest was Thomas White born 1807, who moved to Cambridge as a young man. In 1830 he was a leather cutter/currier, in 1841 and 1851 he was a boot/shoe maker and in 1861 he was Landlord of the Royal Oak Pub at 71 Burleigh Street, Cambridge (boot/shoe making and publican are other family themes).

Thomas White married first Mary Pilbrow in 1827, with whom he had five children including Thomas Elijah White born 1842 in Cambridge, and married second Mary Ann Crane in 1852, with whom he had a son George William White born 1860 in Cambridge. Thomas Elijah White married Elizabeth Cann in 1864 and they had 10 children, only one of whom died in childhood, and their fifth child was George White born 1872 in Cambridge. Thomas Elijah was variously a Shoe Maker, Boot Maker, and Milkman/Dairyman (the latter also being a family theme). George White was briefly a Boot Maker before becoming a Dairyman and Dairy Farmer (farming being the last of the family themes). George married Jane Bell in 1896 and they had six children, the first of whom was Doris White born 1897 in Cambridge who was only 18 when she married Dr James Victor Fiddian my grandfather. Doris and James spent most of their married lives after the Great War in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire and had five children including my father Dr James Anthony Fiddian born 1922.

Another of George White's children was Thomas Frederick White born 1903 in Fulbourn, just outside Cambridge, whom we knew as Uncle Tom. Tom was a Dairy Farmer, Farmer and Milkman who in 1928 married Olive May Turvey in Cambridge. They had nine children, the middle one of whom died in infancy, and amongst these were James White (our cousin Jimmy) born 1932 and twins Horace and Helen White born 1943. Several members of the family were involved in farming, initially around Fulbourn, and my father James Fiddian and his younger brother Dick would spend holidays there as youngsters working on the farm. In turn my brother Nick Fiddian and I spent a few summers helping with the harvest as teenagers, working alongside our older cousins John, Horace and David. Between them Tom and Olive's 8 children gave them 17 grandchildren, over 40 great grandchildren and already 3 great great grandchildren, so our White family continues from strength to strength.

Returning to the subject of family themes, perhaps the most remarkable is the occurrence of twins in our White family. Amongst the total of 323 individuals born into the extended White family that I researched I found 8 sets of twins, which compares with 13 sets of twins amongst the other 6,251 individuals on my database. This means that it is about 12 times more likely for a White pregnancy to result in twins than any of the other families I have studied, which is odd given that it is the women who carry the genetic risk for twinning. Of the other themes, I found nine Farmers, six Boot or Shoe Makers, five Dairymen/Milkmen and five Publicans. Overall, White is quite a common name throughout the UK but fortunately for my research it was not at all common in either Norfolk or Cambridgeshire at the dates I was interested in. I was therefore able to trace the family back 14 generations to my 11 times great grandfather John White born 500 years ago and for those of you who are interested I have documented quite a large part of the family who remained in Norfolk before and after Thomas White moved to Cambridge just under 200 years ago. There are now also members of our extended White family in Canada, the United States and Australia. Henry, the only surviving child of our earliest White family, and our first man of the cloth would have been most impressed. More recently we have had our cousin Rev Julia White (now retired) and her son Rev Simon White to try and keep this large family on the straight and narrow.