

REGIONAL PHONETIC DERIVATIONS OF THE NAME

VIVIAN

There are several variations of surnames that have derived from the Norman given name Vivian, though some of these are quite uncommon and probably reflect only phonetic misspelling by the registering clerk rather than a fixed family name. For instance Fiddian was recorded as Fyddian (10) or Fydian (4) between 1550 and 1599; Fydian (8), Fidian (3), Fidians, Phidian, Fidean, Fiddean and Fiddydan between 1600 and 1649; Fidean (4), Fidian (2), Fiddian, Fiddean, Fiddion and Fiddon between 1650 and 1699; Fiddian (13) or Fiddion between 1700 and 1749; and only spelt 100% correctly from 1750 to 1799 as Fiddian (50). Of course all variations from the Vivian name are in essence phonetic errors but at some point the affected family must have opted to take a particular version as their new family name (perhaps without realising it was an incorrect derivation).

For Fiddian overall we see that following the 'F' which is 99% consistent for these records from the Midlands, the initial 'i' or 'y' is universal and a double 'dd' more dominant (77%). It is mainly in the last half of the word that we see the greatest variation until after about 1700. Remarkably Fiddian is the only name from the Midlands that apparently derives from Vivian and was first recorded there before general records began. The only other similar name in England as common as Fiddian that begins with an 'F' is Fidgeon. At first glance this name appears to have a more diverse origin but early records indicate that it first appeared in Hertfordshire. The apparent diversity might have arisen because it is claimed that the name derived separately from both Vivian and FitzJohn. Also deriving from FitzJohn the uncommon names Fidgin, Feedham and Fidian have a similarly mixed distribution, though the latter is found more often in Lancashire and Cheshire than elsewhere.

So what of all the other names that derived from Vivian? There is of course Vivian itself, the similar but less common Vyvyan and a number of other much rarer variants which all seem to have originated in Cornwall. Even as late as 1800 these names were largely confined to the South-West of England. As for Fiddian in the Midlands, we find the initial 'V' to be universal in the South-West followed by an 'i' or less commonly a 'y' and then after another 'v' more variation in the latter part of the name. A number of other names deriving from

Vivian and which are as common as Fiddian include Vidgen, Videan and Vidgeon. However, all of these are largely confined to Kent where they apparently originated. So we begin to see very definite regional differences in the way Vivian has altered.

We are left with names that have also derived from Vivian but followed the route of using 'Ph' to begin the name. This is most commonly followed by a 'y' but there is one notable instance where this is an 'e' (see below). By far the most numerous variant is Phythian which seems to have originated in Cheshire but over time has appeared most often in Lancashire. The next commonest version is Phethean (more numerous than Fiddian) but this did not first appear in records until the 18th century, largely in Lancashire. The third commonest name was Phithian but this has now disappeared as have various other even rarer versions. So much like Fiddian in the Midlands there was probably a family whose dominant name is now Phythian but who were initially recorded as Fitheon (or Phithian) and originated near Crewe in Cheshire (close to the Midlands). As the family grew and then gradually migrated to Lancashire the name changed to versions with 'Phy' or 'Phe' at the beginning, which is most evident as Phythian. The middle 'th' thus appears to have been present from the start rather than evolving.

We can summarise all these findings in a simple table of surnames that have derived from the given name Vivian:

Initial Letter	Middle Letter(s)	Commonest Version	Region in England	Main County
V	v	Vivian	S-W	Cornwall
V	dg	Vidgen	S-E	Kent
F	dg	Fidgeon	South	Hertfordshire
F	dd	Fiddian	Midlands	Warwickshire
Ph	th	Phythian	North	Cheshire/Lancashire

I strongly suspect that an expert would not be at all surprised by these regional differences in phonetics much as we find great variations in regional dialects but in any case the data speaks for itself. More than ever these findings convince me that the Fiddian family probably had its early origins in the Midlands and before that in Normandy. There is still though a more remote possibility of an early

connection with Cheshire, but again from a Norman origin. Indeed from the above table it might be construed that there were at least 5 instances where families needing to acquire a surname for identification chose the given name Vivian, which was probably already used in their family, as a distinctive possibility. Such families might have been familiar with the Cornish Vivian family, particularly if they were of a similar social standing, and in any case would be aware of their own Norman heritage.

Although Vivian was quite rarely used as a given name in the 12th to 14th centuries there were definite places where the name was reported in multiple occurrences and almost all of these are accounted for by the above regions where surnames that were apparently derived from that given name can be traced. So the Vivian surname of course started in Cornwall, Fiddian would be assumed to have originated in Staffordshire or Shropshire, Vidgen from the Kent/London family of de Rokesley, Fidgeon from Hertfordshire and Phythian from one of several families in Cheshire or Lancashire. Although not every family using Vivian as a given name on more than one occasion has been clearly identified the majority have and remarkably there are numerous connections running between them. It is not beyond the realms of credibility to believe that some of these families might have been aware that they were not alone in choosing their surname.

Paul Fiddian – May 2016