

# BAGWELL Families of the Isle of Wight – Searching for Origins on the Mainland

## Preface

When I first embarked upon the quest to discover my ancestry I had little prior knowledge of my family beyond my grandfather, who died in 1968, and no pre-conceptions about where my findings might take me. I was therefore most surprised to learn that my great great grandfather, George James BAGWELL, was born in Ryde.

For many researchers having roots on the Isle has many benefits, including the vast array of historical records available and the restrictions on movement imposed by island living. For myself there were mixed blessings. BAGWELL is not an established Isle name, and my family can only be traced back through four further generations, to the marriage in 1779 of William BAGWELL and Frances PHILLIPS.

The last male BAGWELL in my lineage to die on the Isle was my 4 times great grandfather George, who was buried in 1878. The last female, Elizabeth Rebecca REED, died in 1937. As a family line we appear to have been passing through, having arrived by other means. But what brought us there, and from where did we come? Although the most likely scenarios to focus on were those related to naval and maritime links and military deployments across Southern England, it is necessary to start further back in time.

## Early Traces

Whilst we can only speculate on the origins of the BAGWELL name, the generally held belief is that the name is of two possible origins. On the Ancestry Web Site you can read that the name is: “English: of uncertain origin. It may be a variant of Backwell, a habitational name from Backwell in Somerset, named with Old English bæc ‘ridge’ + wella ‘spring’, ‘stream’, or possibly from Bakewell in Derbyshire. Alternatively, it may be from a minor place named with an unattested Old English word, bagga ‘badger’ + wella ‘spring’, ‘stream’”

I have yet to be presented with any evidence to support origins in Derbyshire and suspect that this might be a simplistic early (possibly Victorian) attempt to provide an origin. Some of the earliest recorded occurrences of the surname are from the South West, in about 1500, particularly across Devon, Dorset and Somerset. Looking further back we find amongst the Court of Chancery Records the case of a John BAGWELL of Illminster Somerset in 1480.

Into the 16<sup>th</sup> Century we see a spread of the family name to towns and cities with nautical links, such as Rye (East Sussex), St Ives (Cornwall) and London, and during the following century the name appears in America, Ireland, The Channel Islands and Northern England.

## Brick Walls

Having traced my roots to the Isle I was initially unaware that our origins might lie elsewhere and embarked upon documenting every recorded occurrence of BAGWELL on the Isle, none of which date from before 1753. The resulting list of seemingly unrelated individuals has intrigued me for some time:

**William**, my own ancestor, lived in Ryde and would have been born before 1760. His burial record in 1820 states he was 80 years of age, making a date of birth around 1740. This would make him 39 years old when he married. William and Fanny had four confirmed children between 1778 and 1800 (William, John, Hannah and Mary), all born on the East side of the Isle, in Newchurch Parish. This is the most enduring family line which today reaches as far as New Zealand, Australia and the United States.

[I know nothing more of William and looking further afield I have so far identified 6 possible matches amongst the twice as many currently documented contemporaries. None yet are considered as strong contenders.]

**Frances** married William PARSONS on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1818, at Whippingham, making her born before 1800. I can find no record of Frances after the birth of a daughter, Anne, in 1819.

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**James** was born about 1785 in Newchurch and died in the Newport Workhouse in 1857. He married Charlotte GLASSPOOL on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1816 at Arreton.

[Having considered all options known to me at this time it would appear logical (but by no means conclusive) to assume that Frances and James are children of William and Frances. In support of this theory I conclude that: Their birth dates are consistent with the date range for the births of their other children; Their place of birth / residence of Newchurch is consistent with the births of their other children; The names of Frances and James features strongly in later generations and inclusion within this family group is consistent with that thread. If this assumption is correct then for some reason the baptisms of James and have not been documented and further research is required to establish if there are omissions or irregularities in the Newchurch registers.]

**William** was buried at Gatcombe on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1824, aged 72 years. This would make him born about 1752.

[In the absence of the Church Registers and other related documents, and the lack of know contemporaries on the mainland, it is unlikely that any further research can be conducted into this person.]

**John**, who was buried on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1779, at All Saints, Calbourne. It is likely that he was of age when he died, making him born prior to 1759.

**Sarah**, who was buried on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1759, at St James', Yarmouth. It is also likely that she was of age when he died, making her born prior to 1739.

**Robert** married Sarah LAKE on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1763 at Calbourne, so would have been born before 1747. Only two of Robert's thirteen children were boys, neither of which married and had children.

**Jane** married John NICHOLAS on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1747 at Shalfleet, where she was recorded as living. She would have been born before 1731.

**Mary** married Richard COLEMAN on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1753 at Brook, where she was recorded as living. She would have been born before 1737.

Despite an extensive search I am unable to find any earlier references on the Isle for any of these persons. The one common factor is that they all lived or died on the West side of the Isle. When I looked towards the mainland for any contemporaries they were few and far between. However, one family group in Dorset has drawn my attention:

John BAGWELL was baptised July 14th 1699 at Bradford Peverell, Dorset, the son of Robert and Jane BAGWELL. John married Sarah in about 1724. John and Sarah would have died after 1733. John BAGWELL and Sarah are known to have had the following children:

Jane BAGWELL was baptised February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1725 at Bradford Peverell, Dorset.

Mary BAGWELL was baptised April 21st 1728 at Bradford Peverell, Dorset.

Robert BAGWELL was baptised March 10th 1733 at Bradford Peverell, Dorset.

The immediate similarities between this family group and five of my "brick wall" subjects above are apparent. Other descendants of Robert and Jane are known to have migrated eastwards, to Wiltshire, Sussex, Kent and London, but I can find no record of this family after the birth of Robert. Whilst these facts alone are not conclusive, they demonstrate the possibility that the family may have settled on the Isle of Wight.

### Prologue

We were only a minor name on the Isle of Wight but, although lacking in males to continue family lines, we are joined in marriage to over 40 local families. There are only a finite number of historical documents, so the true origins of the BAGWELL name, and those of my own roots, might never be discovered. Hopefully my shared thoughts will generate debate and further research – even perhaps answers – but wherever my ancestors came from, I will always look upon the Isle as 'home'.

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### **Documentary Sources**

Isle of Wight: Parish Register Card Indexes at Isle of Wight Records Office, and latterly on-line indexes on the FHS web site.

Mainland: Parish Register transcriptions and other indexes found on the Ancestry and Find My Past websites.

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