

### The Origin of the Jephcott Name

P H Reaney, a recognised authority on the subject of surnames, in his Dictionary of Surnames, classifies our surname as follows:

Jeffcock, Jeffcoat, Jeffcoate, Jeffcote, Jeffcott, Jefcoat, Jefcoate, Jefcott, Jephcott.

1.

a Geoffrey Geffecoke was recorded in the Subsidy Rolls for Worcestershire in the year 1327.

a William Gefcok was recorded in the Subsidy Rolls for Staffordshire in the year 1332.

an Emota Jeffcockes was recorded in the Subsidy Rolls for Staffordshire in the year 1380.

an Agnes Jeffcott was recorded in Bardsley in the year 1616.

The name is a diminutive of Jeff as Thomas Gepcok recorded in the Close Rolls for Kent in the year 1360.

and,

2.

a Thomas Geuecok was recorded in the Subsidy Rolls for Warwickshire in the year 1332.

a John Jevcok was recorded in the Index of Wills of Rochester in Kent for the year 1454.

The name is a diminutive of Geva (Genevieve). As with the surname Jeeves, Jevcok became Jevcok and was then assimilated to Jeffcock. As often, the suffix 'cock' became 'cott' or 'coat'.

Reaney seems to have uncovered the earliest apparent references to our name in both the West Midlands and Kent areas of England (two areas that are very far apart). The spelling of the name was quite unlike modern versions although the 'cock' ending was used consistently. He seems to be undecided as to whether the derivation is from Jeff or Genevieve.

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What have we to contribute to the subject from our own research?

We know that parish registers began officially in 1538 by order of King Henry VIII.

The earliest reference that we have found in parish registers is for a marriage for a William [sic] Jeycott in 1562 in the parish of Ryton upon Dunsmore (near Coventry). The earliest baptism for this parish is in 1587 and, as the registers have survived since 1539, we must conclude that the Jephcotts were not an ancient family of this particular parish.

However, the parish registers for Ansty (near Coventry) have only survived from 1589. On inspecting these, the very first entry in the baptism register was for an Agnes Jefcocke, daughter of Richard Jefcocke. The will of John Jefcott (in his will, or John Jeffcotte in the inventory to his will) dated 1561, mentioned other Jephcotts in the parish of Ansty and also made mention of his father, one Nicholas Jefcott, who was also of the parish of Ansty.

Nicholas would have been born around the year 1460. We further know, from manorial records, that a Nicholas Geffecote was a customary tenant of Ansty in 1490. These two Nicholas' were probably one and the same!

We have gone on to draw up a large family tree for the Jephcotts of Ansty, the members of which are arguably responsible for the existence of so many Jephcotts alive today.

We are led to assume that the present day Jephcott families (and variant spellings) are derived from a family (or families) that lived in (or around) the parish of Ansty (approx. 6 miles north east of Coventry) in the 15th century. Whether the family thrived in this area in the 14th and earlier centuries, we shall probably never know, although the probability is that they did.

The conclusion is that the different spelling variations that exist today are a result of spelling inconsistencies on the part of the many persons who have recorded the name over the centuries, especially when the families moved away to other parishes. By this we refer to perhaps the vicar of the parish who, upon hearing the name spoken when arranging the baptism of a child, writes down the name as he sees appropriate. This would happen today, if we were not able to spell out our name to assist the writer. It is highly probable that all Jephcotts (and variants) alive today, share a 500 year old link with Warwickshire.

Further evidence that possibly supports these conclusions is that today, the telephone directories for the UK show that the largest number of Jephcotts (and variants) living in one area is in (or around) Coventry. A study of these directories is shown elsewhere in this book.

The 'cock' suffix to the name was gradually replaced by 'cott' in the time period around 1550 to 1620. The 'ph' content in some of the variants appears to have come about around the same period.

Why these changes happened is not known but it is possible that 'cock' ending gave rise to obscene or ribald remarks and the gradual change to 'cott' or 'coat' was more acceptable. Could it have been that 'cock' suffix to the Jeff forename came about as a type of nickname that was to be resented by later generations of the family? So much so that they gradually brought about a change in the spelling. A modern day comparison to this idea might be with the British surnames Bullock (previously Ballock in some instances), De'Ath (originally Death) or Draper (in some cases, originally Diaper). Nowadays, such English surnames as Balls, Crapper, Pratt, etc. can sometimes be a source of mirth to some. Reaney lists some outrageous surnames from past times and it is of little surprise that they have not survived in their original form.

It is known that Louisa May Alcott (1832 - 1888), the author of Little Women, was the daughter of Amos Alcott (1799 - 1888), who had purposely changed the family name from Alcox. That family could trace their descent from an ancestor named Alcocke.

Now, the Ansty family included several educated men and 'ph' may have looked a little more 'upmarket' than the humble 'f' or 'ff' of old. Perhaps it was felt that it would add sophistication and set them apart from other lowlier branches of the family.

Another example of this appeared with the Petifer family in Ansty. Around about the same time, their name was altered in some instances to Petipher. Could the spelling changes simply have come about by an over enthusiastic vicar or rector in Ansty, taking liberties with the spelling of names?

Whatever the true facts are, the surname underwent quite a change and the 'G' as in Geffcocke is now extinct.

It should, at this stage, be pointed out that there are families with the surname Jeffcock\*, in existence today. They appear to have their origins in the Sheffield area and, to date, a link with our families has never been found or indicated.

We can only draw from the research material that we have uncovered back to 1490. However, Reaney has gone back even further and has found references to a vaguely similar name in Kent. Do our modern day Jephcotts have any connection with these 14th century 'Jephcotts' and does the proximity of Kent to France mean that the name has Norman origin? The answer to that, again, we shall probably never know!

Remember that the name Geoffrey is of Norman origin and that our Jeff-Jeph spelling would almost certainly have come from this Christian name. Does that mean that we are of Norman stock? Again, we will never know!

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A further explanation as to the etymology of the name can be found in the opening section of the family BJ. It has not been included in this section as it is considered unworthy of serious consideration. What do you think?

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\* The few references that this book includes to the modern day Jeffcock family is in the family tree CK section and the section covering 'Convicts'.

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### Spelling Variations of the Name

Whilst there are many spelling variations of the name, in this book we have referred to all variations collectively as Jephcotts.

Like it or not, our ancestors were not always literate. What use did a farm labourer (for instance) have for reading and writing? Indeed, well into the latter half of the 19th century, some of our ancestors were still making their mark on documents with an 'X' instead of a signature. It is surely little wonder that there are so many spelling variations of our name existing today when, presumably when asked their name, our ancestor would say it (with their particular accent) to the vicar or scribe, who would, in turn, write it how he saw fit.

There are 44 different spellings that we have found in research, that seem to have been used with varying degrees of regularity in documents of all types. These are shown in the table below. There are also instances of names such as Jeplicott, Jepcott, Jeffecote, Jefciote, etc. where we have accepted them as belonging to our research but, as they do not occur very often, we have taken them to be spelling errors.

The first 33 spellings are the ones that we have considered to be the true variants, the final 11 having only sometimes been recorded, up to perhaps the middle of the 17th century. Now, in the 21st century, any families holding these final 11 names, are considered to be totally unconnected with our Jephcott families and, as such, have not been researched in any detail by us, nor considered to now be accepted variants of the name.

1 Jephcott	12 Jephcoate	23 Jefcoatt	*34 Jeffcock
2 Jephcot	13 Jephcoatt	24 Jefcoatte	*35 Jeffcocke
3 Jephcotte	14 Jephcoatte	25 Jeffcut	*36 Jeffcok
4 Jeffcott	15 Jeffcote	26 Jeffcutt	*37 Jefcock
5 Jeffcot	16 Jeffcoat	27 Jeffcutte	*38 Jefcocke
6 Jeffcotte	17 Jeffcoate	28 Jefcut	*39 Jefcok
7 Jefcott	18 Jeffcoatt	29 Jefcutt	*40 Jecock
8 Jefcot	19 Jeffcoatte	30 Jefcutte	*41 Jecocke
9 Jefcotte	20 Jefcote	31 Jephcut	*42 Jevcok
10 Jephcote	21 Jefcoat	32 Jephcutt	*43 Jevcock
11 Jephcoat	22 Jefcoate	33 Jephcutte	*44 Jevcocke

Today, ignoring the eleven \* names, the telephone directories tell us that there are only 14 variations now in use:

1 Jephcott	11 Jephcoat	18 Jeffcoatt	26 Jeffcutt
4 Jeffcott	15 Jeffcote	21 Jefcoat	28 Jefcut
7 Jefcott	16 Jeffcoat	22 Jefcoate	
10 Jephcote	17 Jeffcoate	25 Jeffcut	

(Refer to 'Abbreviations' section for explanation of numbering system.)