

PART ONE

1 - The Surname, its Origins and Meanings.

The use of the plural may surprise some people, it is generally accepted that all surnames stem from at least one of fourteen basic roots. Whilst it is not my intention to go into all of them here, it is suffice to say that surnames can evolve from, one's father, occupation habit, and place of origin as a starting point.

What is not usually considered is that many surnames have more than one root or meaning, the surname Mills for example could be a person who lived near a mill, or someone who was actually a miller.

As will be shown this also applies to the surname of Yole, what it is hoped to prove is that our connection to the surname is in fact very distinct from any other meaning, location or area indeed from any other possibility.

*"Talk to a very large number of people about their surname and you will find that the family came in with the Conqueror ... William evidently had a very easy time of it. It is clear that he had only a handful of opponents to meet, and that the story of the Battle of Hastings is a gross historical fraud."*¹

Whilst it is quite evident that so far as current research shows, the branch of the Yole family to which we are related had its origins in the West Country, or to be more precise, close to the Cornish border in the tiny hamlet of Kelly in Devonshire, the actual origin of the family or name was not quite so apparent.

To begin with the only clues we had was that it may in some way be connected to 'Yuletide' or Christmas and that in France 'Yole' means 'a flat bottomed boat'. Which could lead to the supposition that our early forebears were in some way connected with craft of this type, as many names are derived from occupations.

Keeping to the French theme as it does not appear to be involved in our family from evidence which we have at the moment. There are two related place names in Brittany namely Camp Yole and Cape Yole this could further the believe that the name is French in origin and that our ancestors in fact lived in one of these places at some time. To enhance this theory further, there exists today a French Theme Park called 'The Yole Experience'.

According to at least one publication there are several persons who appear to bear the surname of Yole still living in France however they use it as a Christian name and not a surname, for this piece of information I am indebted to Ann Blatchford who took the trouble to write to all those who appeared to bear the name in the hope of gleaning more.

Despite the comments in the above paragraph, it will be noted that in chapter two of this part under the entries for the 18th Century that a Yole family were found in the Ardennes.

Thanks to that wonder of the modern world, the internet I have been able to ascertain that between 1652 and 1700 in the town of Laval, which is in the sub region of Isere, some sixteen individuals bore the surname of Yole. This part of France is in the Rhone Alps. In addition to this between 1722 and 1777, four persons bearing the name were at one address in the same locality.

It must not be forgotten that the west county was a favourite place to land many centuries ago for

immigrants from the French shores, [nothing is being said about it being a route favoured by smugglers].

A further interesting theory was put forward by the eminent researchers at Debrett when they were commissioned to research the family of Walter Branwell Yole, that his Grandparents Yole were of German descent and lived in Alsace/Lorraine on the German/Belgian border².

Of this I have found nothing to substantiate this claim any further, as his grandfather was clearly born in Kelly like several generations of his family before him.

However I am more than happy to accept that for some people who bear the Yole surname, a definition of the name and source is that they do have their origins in France, taken as either as a person who built or plied the waters in a flat bottomed boat known as "The Yole" or they originated from one of the two place names in Brittany.

Whilst I cannot subscribe to the theory put forward in some learned works on the definition of surnames, with names that are similar in sound to Yole. That they all have the same root, namely 'Yule' and therefore are connected in some way with the festivities of Yuletide or Christmas. [But I do not disagree with the Christmas theory].

Whilst it is of course possible that Yole is derived directly from Yule and the change of one vowel is not that great given the course of time, for the reasons that follow I cannot agree with this line of thought. However, before making any decisions or jumping to 'easy' solutions we must investigate every theory and avenue which we can.

Also we must consider that Yule is found mainly in Scotland, and as yet whilst I have found the name Yole on the eastward side of the country no connection can be found with the West Country. It is of course possible that we are not only talking about several different 'Yole Families' but several origins of the name.

My own thoughts having studied many works on the subject is that our branch of the name is not connected in any way to that of Yule by way of a change of vowel. The main reasons can be summed up as follows.

*"The surname Yule and its variations is mainly a Scottish and Northern English name for someone born on Christmas Day. From Yorkshire, the name seems to have travelled up north rather than down south, and it is most common in Durham, Northumberland and Scotland where the Yules are classed among the followers of the Clan Buchanan"*³

An entirely different theory is that it was changed from Yole to Yule, particularly in the South of the country;

*"All Celtic nations have been accustomed to the worship of the Sun. It was a custom that everywhere prevailed in ancient times to celebrate a feast at the Winter Solstice, by which men testified their joy at seeing this great luminary return again to this part of the heavens. This was the greatest solemnity of the year. They called it in many places 'Yole,' or 'Yiul,' from the word 'Hiaul' and 'Houl,' which even at this day signifies sun in the language of Cornwall. 'Heulo' in modern Welsh means to 'shine as the Sun.' And thus we may derive our word Halo. Some writers, including the Venerable Bede, derive Yule from 'hvoel,' a wheel, meaning the return of the Sun's annual course after the Winter Solstice."*⁴

² Debrett - The Yole Family of Devon & Cornwall, page 1. © Stuart Allen 2005

³ Family History Monthly No. 3, page 27.

⁴ S.W.Partington, "The Danes in Lancashire", page 211, Superstitions.

Given the Devon base where we have found our ancestors, close to the Cornish border this could also provide a most plausible explanation, in which case the surname of Yole is extremely ancient, its meaning having some connection with the Sun.

From our American cousins comes this definition, which is found in the glossary of the American Heritage Dictionary:

"Yule: the festival celebrated about Dec. 21, on the Winter Solstice (shortest day of year). It marks the God's rebirth from Goddess, and reminds us that Death's product is Rebirth!"

The American Heritage Dictionary also says *"modern 'yule' is from Middle English, 'yole' or 'yule'; which comes from Old English 'geol/geohhol'; from Common Germanic, 'jehwla/jegwla', meaning unattested. However, the Ency. of Traditional Symbols, pg 197: 'yule', is from the Gallic 'gule', meaning a wheel. Domi also said it was Germanic."*

The above is shown merely to reinforce the previous theories and research, as a total item they do tend to agree with all the remarks made earlier.

This could be taken a stage further, and persons who were named Yole, were so called as they were connected with the festivities or the celebration of the festival which took place at the winter solstice.

It must not be forgotten however that the ancient Druids also celebrated the sun's rebirth after the winter solstice on the shortest day of the year with festivals that lasted several weeks, these were called *geol* or *yule*. The Druids was the name given to the ancient order of priests in Celtic lands, especially Gaul, Britain and Ireland, derived from a Celtic root word meaning 'magician'⁵. This religion being in place long before the Roman invasion of these shores.

Whilst many of us would be further confused by this statement as most of us associate the Druids with Stonehenge, the ancient monument on Salisbury Plain, it is made clearer by the following statement;

"The supposed association of the Druids with Stonehenge is rejected by scholars."⁶

To amplify this further:

"A small modern revival holds a ceremony at Stonehenge every Summer Solstice"⁷

This would seem to clear the use of Yule as a surname from the South of the country, though it is possible that through dialect they began life as the same word. Given the population distribution of each surname I have to conclude that they are totally unrelated family names as regards origin even if the meaning is similar.

To conclude on the ancient monument its entry in *The History Today Companion to British History* reads as follows;

"Stonhenge, prehistoric stone circle or henge monument on Salisbury Plain, Wilts., and the focus of archaeological and mystical interest since the 17th century".

The Venerable Bede a great scholar, historian and churchman of the 8th Century noted that "The ancient people of the Angli began their year on December 25th when we celebrate the birthday of our

⁵ Adrian Room - Dictionary of Proper Names page 30 © Stuart Allen 2005

⁶ Oxford Encyclopedia of World History, "Druids" - page 201

⁷ The History Today Companion to British History, "Druids" - page 247

Lord⁸

This note was made some seven to eight hundred years after the religion practised by the Druids was stamped out by the Romans [In case it affected their rule]. Again highlighting the word Yole as being connected to the Winter Solstice and more importantly Cornwall.

My conclusion must be that the surname "Yole" as used by members of the family to which I am related has its origins over two thousand years ago in the times of the Celts, being derived from 'Hiaul', or 'Houl', which in Cornish means the sun. Its meaning being that the original bearers of this name were either born at or in some way connected to the festival of the Winter Solstice [Christmas] or were connected by some activity to the sun.

For those who can trace their ancestry to the North of the country, then I believe that their spelling is in fact an adaptation of Yule [The 'o' being substituted for the 'u']. It also my believe that those who bear the surname Yule and originated many centuries ago from the Southern part of our country, have had their name changed from Yole to Yule.

This does not account for the fact that bearers of many other names such as Yol, Yul and other variants almost certainly began life as either a Yole or a Yule.

It is understood that at least one person to bear the name had the right to his own coat of arms, namely one John Yole in the 14th Century, as yet this has not been traced. A Thomas Yole is found under a cross reference to the General Armoury of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. On checking my copy I have been unable to find it.

Whilst on the subject of heraldry and coats of arms, it is safe to say that I hope that Yole is never proven to be connected to Yale.

*" In a twelfth-century bestiary the Yale is described as being the size of a horse and having the tusks of a bear and extremely long horns that could be moved as required - either singly or together - to meet aggression from any direction. "*⁹

When attempting to put together a logical reason for the meaning of a surname when it is quite obvious that several meanings are possible, it can be important to study the location of where such surnames were found.

From the foregoing and what follows, the early bearers of this name have been found in three major regions:

Yorkshire & Durham
France
The West Country

Towards the middle of the last millennium London also figures in our research. However it can be fairly certain that the three definitions mentioned also reflect the corresponding origin for the name.

When studying any form of distribution of the surname in modern times, do not be confused by the large number that are found not only in the North East, but also the North West. As will be found later within these pages, most if not all these good people are descended directly from the Yole forebears described here, and mainly from the direct line of Richard Hill Yole, my great, great grandfather. As will be noticed later most if not all of those whom are found residing overseas, { with the exception of France } are also directly related to this family.

⁸ Family History Monthly No. 3 - page 24.

⁹ Basic Heraldry, Stephen Friar & John Ferguson, page 168.

To assist in this at Figure One will be found a map showing the distribution of the Yole surname according to the 1881 census. This is not accurate inasmuch that no members of the family are shown as being in the North East, this is due to the incorrect spelling used by the enumerator. However it does heighten the fact of just how rare the surname is.

The darker the colour the larger the number of persons bearing the name, a total of seventy eight persons being listed.

To confuse matters further detailed study of the 1881 census shows that spelt as Yoll two people were recorded one in Devon the other in Dumfries.

Looking at differing spellings in that census finds four which could have meant to be Yole, namely Youal, Youall, Youel, and Youell, a map of the four with their distribution can be found at Figure Two, when one looks at the location this also makes interesting reading.

In the late twentieth century Burke's Peerage published a book on the Yole surname in which they gave the distribution for the modern bearers of the name as follows:

United States 36
Canada 32
Australia 42
Great Britain 34
France 5
South Africa 1

These figures are for households and not just individual bearers of the name.

As these notes are being penned I notice on the inter-net, {the modern miracle of science that cuts out the need to put postage stamps on your mail,} that in Scotland funds are being raised to build a replica of the 'Yole' an eighteen foot fishing smack. This appears to have no direct connection to the one mentioned from France, though it is possible that it is in some way connected. Another theory to research when time permits.

From the same source I find that "The virus Yole Rowing boat is made from tough polyethylene so it is vitually indestructible."



Figure One - Distribution of Yole Surname - 1881¹⁰

To illustrate the point further on similar sounding names the following maps may be of some interest

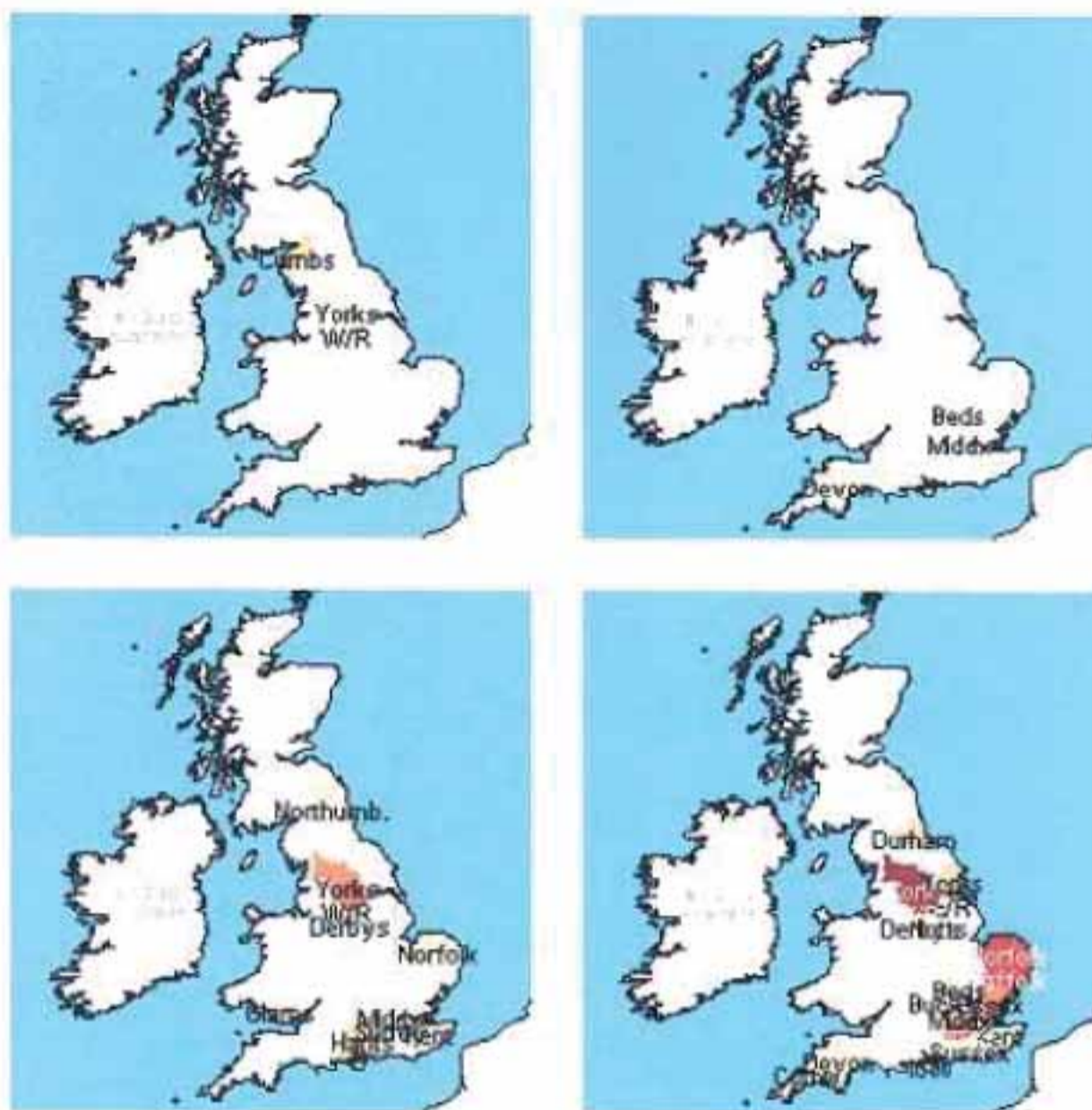


Figure 2 - Distribution of Youal, Youall, Youell and Youel¹¹

By studying the above it would appear that some of the spellings especially in the West Country, should read Yole.

Also that if Yole should be the correct spelling for the majority of these cases then my notes of earlier are seen as even more accurate, regarding at least three starting points for the name, the North, France [those in East Anglia] and the west Country.

Someone else might like to continue this theme at a later date!

¹¹ The British 19th Century Surname Atlas. [reading clockwise from the top left]