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LIFFITON FAMILY HISTORY

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Jane Nowell, the First Liffiton

by Stuart Roberts & Thomas Liffiton

The history of the Liffiton name begins with the story of Jane Liffiton, a woman born Jane Nowell, who lived her first thirty-three years in or around her birthplace, Kingswear, on the southeast coast of Devonshire, England. In 1771, because Jane was a widow without financial support, her parish leaders "removed" her and her ten-year old daughter Jenny to Belstone, a parish nearly forty miles away to the northeast. Jane and Jenny Liffiton were complete strangers to Belstone, but it was the birthplace of Jane's dead husband.

Most of Jane's story comes from her settlement examination and certificate documents from 1771, on file with the Devon Record Office in Exeter. Birth, marriage, and death records complete her tale, as best as it can be completed two hundred years later. It is a story that provides a glimpse of another time. It is also a story which identifies Jane Nowell as the first person to use the Liffiton name the way it is spelled today.

In 18th Century England, removal and settlement orders were used to send people back to the parish of their birth when they became a burden on the parish where they lived. A parish would only support people born in the parish. The removal was done at a "settlement examination," where the person appeared before a sort of court, and all the details were taken. If it was decided on the facts given, that the person had to be removed from the parish, then the removal order was issued and the person was given a settlement certificate. This contained all the information gathered at the examination, and the person took it to his or her new parish.

The new parish would then know all the details of why this person had been sent to them. In Jane Nowell's case, because she was a widow of a man born in Belstone, she and her daughter were removed to the parish of his birth. This may seem harsh, but it was normal practice. Some local girls who married seamen or soldiers were often sent to other parts of the country or even overseas when their husbands died.

A Transcript of the Statement Signed by Jane Liffiton in 1771*

The Examination of Jane Liffiton an Inhabitant in the Parish of Kingswear in the County of Devon, said touching the place of her last

Legal settlement taken in Oath before us William Kitson & Richard Inglott Esquire two of his Majesty's Justices of the peace in the County of Devon aforesaid the 10th day of May 1771. Who saith that she was born in the said Parish of Kingsware as she hath been informed and lived there and elsewhere till she was about sixteen years of age. That she then went into the Parish of Paignton in the said County and was there married to John Liffiton since deceased who hath often told that he was born at Belstone in the said County and Served his apprenticeship there with the Husband of his Mothers Sister and that Belstone aforesaid was the place of his Settlement. And this deponent further saith that the said John Liffiton her said Deceased Husband died about eleven years Since and that She hath resided in the Parish of Kingsware ever since, but hath never lived as a Hired Servant since the decease of her Said Husband nor done any act to gain a Settlement other than the afore Said

Sworn at Woolborough in the Said County the day and year above
written before us-
(Signed) Jane Liffiton
Richd Inglott Will Kitson"

*Note: Note the spelling of names for people and places varies throughout Jane Nowell's story, but each word is true to its particular source document. The punctuation and capitalization in the settlement examination record are also true to the actual document.

1771 Settlement Order Concerning Jane and Jenny Liffiton

Devon to wit: To the Church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the parish of Kingsware in the said County and to the Church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the parish of Belstone in the said county and to each and every of them. Upon the Complaint of the church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the parish of Kingsware aforesaid, in the said County of Devon unto us whose Names are hereunto set, and Seals affixed, being two of his Majesties Justices of the Peace in and for the County of Devon and one of us of the Quorum, That Jane Liffiton widow and Jenny her daughter aged ten years has come to inhabit in the said parish of Kingsware not having gained a legal Settlement there, nor produced any Certificate owning themselves to be settled elsewhere, and that the said Jane Liffiton and Jenny her daughter are likely to become chargeable to the said parish of Kingsware we the said justices upon due Proof made hereof, as well upon the Examination the the said Jane Liffiton upon Oath, as otherwise, and upon due Consideration had of the Premises, do adjudge the same to be true; and we do likewise adjudge, that the lawful Settlement of them the said Jane Liffiton and Jenny her Daughter is in the said parish of Belstone in the said County of Devon. We do therefore require you the said Church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the said parish of Kingsware or some, or one of you, to convey the said Jane Liffiton and Jenny her daughter from and out of your said parish of Kingsware to the said parish of Belstone and then to deliver to the Church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor there, or to some, or one of them, together with this our Order, or a true Copy thereof: And we do also hereby require you the said Church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the said parish of Belstone to receive and provide for them as Inhabitants of your said parish

Given under our Hands and Seals the tenth Day of May in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy one.

(Signed) Will Kitson
Rich Inglett

Jane Nowell's Baptism and Her Marriage to John Liverton

The Kingsweir Parish Register has a record of the baptism of Jane Nowell, daughter of Oads and Susana Nowell, on 4 February, 1738/9. The International Genealogical Index (IGI) indicates there is a record of Oades Nowell's marriage to Susannah Rogers on 24 September 1727, at Brixham. The Parish of Brixham is just north of Kingswear.

According to the Paignton Parish Register, Jane Nowell married John Liverton at Paignton on 30 December 1754. If Jane Nowell was born in 1738, then she was about sixteen when she married John Liverton, just as she indicated at her settlement examination.

While the Belstone Parish Register does not have a record of a John Liverton, Stamford Courtney, a parish adjacent to Belstone, has a recorded baptismal date of 22 August, 1727, for a John Leviton.

Children: Richard and Jenny Liffiton

In 1771, Jane Liffiton testified her husband had died about eleven years before, or about 1760. That Jane seems to have separated from her husband prior to his death seems probable, as the Kingsweir Parish Register indicates Richard Liffiton, the son of Jane Liffiton, and "a reported base child," was baptized at Kingsweir on 3 April, 1758. The term "base child" was used to describe an illegitimate birth, but a "reported base child" is unusual. Richard was either a base child or not. Perhaps it was reported as Jane was still married to John, and the vicar would have had to take Jane's word for the fact that her son was illegitimate. There is the possibility that Richard was John's child, and that Jane left after she became pregnant. But in this case why did she baptize him as illegitimate? The first son was normally named after his father's father, and as John's father was Richard, this raises another question. Or was Richard's unknown father also a Richard? These questions will remain unanswered.

The reason for Jane Nowell leaving her husband can only be guessed at. Perhaps the Livertons were not nice people, as John's brother Arthur also separated from his wife. This was quite rare for this period, though common today.

Two years later, also at Kingsweir, Jenny Liffiton, "a base child" and the daughter of Jane Liffiton, was baptized on 19 May, 1760. These two baptismal records are the first use of the current spelling of Liffiton, and were probably based on the way Jane Liffiton pronounced Liverton. While it is possible Richard and Jenny Liffiton were the children of Jane's husband, John Liverton, the wording "a reported base child" and "a base child" undermine this theory.

The Baptism of Jane Leverton in 1760, and the Burial of John Liverton in 1764

The matter is made more confusing because there is no record of John

Liverton's death in 1760, to correspond to Jane's examination statement that her husband had died eleven years before. However John Leverton's burial just south of Paignton at Dartmouth, St. Savior, was documented in the Dartmouth Parish Register on 21 September, 1764. And the Dartmouth Parish Register on 14 January, 1760, documented the baptism of Jane Leverton, daughter of John and Jane Leverton. Certainly none of these events fit easily with Jane Liffiton's testimony to the King's Justices of the Peace, but it does appear that Jane used the Liffiton spelling while her husband John used the Leverton spelling.

The Settlement of Jane Liffiton and Her Daughter Jenny to Belstone: 1771

So because Jane Liffiton had no means of making a living in her home of Kingsweir, because she had married John Liverton of Belstone, Jane and her daughter Jenny Liffiton were to be conveyed to the Parish of Belstone. When and how they traveled there is not known, and little is known of their lives there. Jane was literate, as she was able to sign her name on the examination certificate. Most people of her era just signed their names with a cross. And as her son Richard is known to have used the name Liffiton, so she must have taught him to write his name as she did, even though it was not the same spelling as her husband's. That Jane did make the journey to Belstone is known as parish records document that Jane Liffiton was buried at there on 26 January, 1812 at the age of seventy-four.

No record of Jenny Liffiton has turned up, although the marriage of a Jane Leverton to George Rogers in 1785 is documented in the Belstone Parish Records. This is baffling, though Jenny is a diminutive name for Jane. In 1785, Jenny Liffiton would have been twenty-four or twenty-five years old, of marrying age. But if this is Jane's daughter Jenny, why did she use the name Jane? Or Jane Leverton could be the daughter of John and Jane Leverton baptized 14 January, 1760, in Dartmouth, but why would she go to Belstone? We remain in the dark about Jenny's fate.

Richard Liffiton (1756 -1821)

Jane Liffiton's son, Richard, was at least thirteen in 1771, when Jane and Jenny were removed to Belstone. To date, there is no record of him between his baptism in 1758 and 1781, the year when Richard Liffiton married at Littleham at Exmouth. Littleham at Exmouth is on the Devon Coast about thirty miles northeast of Kingsweir, and about thirty miles east of the inland Belstone.

Richard Liffiton and Mary Copp married on 28 September 1781. They had five children, and are linked to two others. The eldest of the Liffiton children was named John. That raises a question. Was John Liffiton named after Richard's father, John Liverton? The pieces of this puzzle do not fit neatly together. Nevertheless, Richard and Mary Liffiton, the ancestors of today's Liffiton descendants, prospered as tenant farmers in Littleham at Exmouth, Devonshire.

Throughout the years Littleham land tax records spelled Richard's last name as Liffiton (1782), Liverton (1783, 1787), Liffiton (1786, 1817-21), and Lifforton (1795, 1796), but all of the children associated with Littleham at Exmouth were baptized as Liffiton. When Richard died, the parish register recorded, "14 September, 1821, Richard Liffiton of Littleham was buried age 65 years."

Note: The Leverton and Liverton surnames are the great interest to Mr. Stuart

Roberts of St. Austell, Cornwall, England. At last count he had thirteen trees of family connections comprised of over six thousand Levertons, not counting spouses. He has an additional one thousand names not yet accounted for. Mr. Roberts conducted the majority of the research which resulted in the English Liffiton information being brought to light, and he explained the historical context of the settlement examination, the practice of removing someone to another parish for indigence, and the meaning of Base child." The article on Jane Nowell was compiled and edited from Mr. Stuart's letters on his Liffiton research. Thanks go to him for his efforts and his willingness to share his work.

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