

A Short Introduction to the Griswold Family

The Griswold family first appears in Warwickshire, England in the 13th century. The name was spelled various ways. Most early Griswolds spelled their name Greswolde. Since spelling was casual at that time, some forms ran rather far afield, most notably Grissel. So common is this one that when I come across it doing genealogical work, I automatically click in on a Griswold and search farther. So far it's paid off 100% of the time.

How could you get such aberrant spellings? My hunch is that *we* pronounce all the letters clearly, but that the English did not. English history is full of surnames pronounced totally differently from the way they look. I've often wondered if these mangled pronunciations were some sort of secret password that let those around you know that you were a *bona fide* member of the appropriate social group, much as today people name drop by only using first names and expect you to know exactly whom they are talking about. Thus we have names like Chalmondeley pronounced "Chumley", Beauchamp pronounced "Beecham", and Bohun pronounced "Boone". Why not, then might the original pronunciation of Greswolde been "Gresold" or "Grissel"?

The origin of the Griswold or Greswolde name is given in several ways. The family name appeared at a time when Norman French and English were commonly intermixed. "Grès" is "sandstone" in French. "Gris" is grey; griser is to give a grey tint to. "Wold", however is clearly English, most likely from a Saxon form and is understood to mean "wood" or "forest". Thus, one of the most common interpretations of the meaning of the name is "Grey forest". An alternative to the French meaning and a little farfetched (or perhaps less "tasteful") is that the "Gres" stood for the English "grice", which meant "pig." This has caused the name to be variously interpreted as "Wood where the pigs live" or (and far more poetic) "Wood where the wild boars live." I accept the scholarship on the first interpretation over the second. Only those family members who emigrated to North America took the spelling "Griswold". If the variation on the name Greswolde of Griswold did not show up until the 17th century, when the family emigrated to North America (and then only amongst the ones who emigrated), it is rather difficult to derive the "grice" interpretation.

Another reason I accept the "grey" interpretation is that for centuries the Greswoldes had greyhounds on the various forms of armorial bearings (coats of arms in common parlance). They are found running, not sitting or rampant, and the motto often seen is "Swift and Sure".

The life and relationships of the Griswold family in England have been well documented in books that are listed at the end of this essay. Greswoldes were found in a number of towns in Warwickshire, the most well-known of which is Solihull (now a suburb of Birmingham), where the church of St. Alphege contains many Griswold/Greswolde burials. The family has continued to support St. Alphege, making contributions to restoration and maintenance of the property. When the Griswold Family Association makes rips to England, members attend Sunday morning services at St. Alphege as a group. You can read more about the church of St. Alphege in the book *Solihull and its Church by the Rev. Robert Pemberton*, of which we have a copy.

The Emigration

In the 17th century, most families tended to be large. Whatever estates were owned by the gentry passed undivided (by *entail*) to the eldest son (by *primogeniture*). Younger children were sometimes given other lands belonging to the family, but frequently there was not enough for

all and that presented a significant economic squeeze. The establishment of the colonies in North America (and elsewhere) provided an opportunity for many of these younger family members to establish their own lands or livings in other places. While freedom from religious intolerance was a prime motivating factor for many persons to resettle in North America, others came for economic opportunity. Certainly, however, anyone who came subscribed to the tenets of religious tolerance.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony, where Francis Griswold settled, was established around 1630. The period of initial settlement for the Connecticut Colony and the New Haven Colony was about 1640-1646. This was a time in England when the English Civil War was brewing, and life was less appealing for many people.

Four members of the Greswolde, now Griswold, family came to the New England colonies: Francis (Frank), Edward, Matthew and Michael. Edward and Matthew were apparently brothers or half brothers. Francis and Michael were cousins of each other and of Edward and Matthew. Thus everybody who is descended from this lot is more or less related.

The Griswold family was prominent in the colonial and state legislatures and courts of Connecticut. In addition a Griswold has been president has been president of Yale, Solicitor General of the United States, and Dean of Harvard Law school. Many others have been prominent in various professions. One of the most visible at the current time is Frank Griswold, who is the Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States.

The Griswold Family Association

The Griswold Family Association is a lively mechanism for keeping kin together. Through annual reunions in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and on the West Coast, members actively interested in the history of the family communicate and keep in touch. The Association produces a quarterly newsletter, conducts travel experiences in England with Griswold / Greswolde family history destinations and provides scholarship aid to authentic Griswolds. It maintains a good Web Site. Anyone seeking membership can download the application form.

Bibliography

Robert Pemberton. *Solihull and its Church*. William Potter & Co. Ltd., Exeter, 1905.

Robert L. French and Esther G. French, compiled by Coralee Griswold. *The Greswold Family, 12 Generations in England*. The Griswold Family Association, Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1999.

Esther Griswold French and Robert Lewis French. *The Griswold Family, The First Five Generations in America*. The Griswold Family Association, Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1990. This book is expected to be supplanted by a new edition: *The Griswold Family, The First Seven Generations in America*, which is scheduled to appear in 2002.

Charles Edward Griswold. *Studies in the Ancestry of Edward Griswold and Laura Hubbard of the Seventh Generation in America*. Manuscript, privately held. No date.

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