

Chapter 2

The Origin of the Fulcher Name

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Introduction

Fulcher is a surname that is well known in East Anglia. This would generally comprise the counties of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. It is a comparatively rare name, making it an ideal one-name study candidate.

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

Fulcher, Fulger, Fulker, Fulscher, Fucher, Fudger, Fugere, Futcher, Folger, Folke, Foker, Foulcher, Foulger, Foulser, Foucar, Volker, Fullagar, Fullage.

However, in our research, the spelling Fulcher is overwhelmingly Fulcher, with the occasional Fulsher or Futcher being found, usually reverting back to Fulcher as the years pass. Thus we assume that most of these are spelling errors, or mis-transcriptions. Hence we do not recognise any serious spelling variants, worthy of pursuing further.

Reaney gives us our earliest Fulcher reference in 1066, the precise year of the Norman Conquest. This would, presumably, refer to a Norman knight, baron or otherwise wealthy personage that came over to England at that time, as part of William, the Duke of Normandy's arrival in these lands. We could delve further, but that is a highly specialised field of research which, so we believe, would be very unproductive from a family tree building perspective.

Next we see a Fulcher around 1095 in Bury, Suffolk. Ralph Fulcher 1182 P (Sf); and the common Old German, Fulcher, translated as 'people-army'.

Various other references that may or may not be connected are given by Reaney as:

Seuuale filius Fulgeri HY 2 DC (L); Fulcarius 12th DC (Lei); Rogerus fiius Foukere 1201 Cur (O); Roger Fulchier 1167 P (Ha); Peter Fulker 1212 Cur (W); Eustace Folchir 1212 Fees (Ha); Nicholas Fucker 1234 Fees (D); Warin Fucher 1235 Fees (ess); John Foucher 1242 Fees (W); Robert Foulgar 1327 SRSf; William Fouger 1327 SRWo; Robert Fowcher 1524 SRSf; OFr Foucher, Fouquier, from OG Fulchar, Fulcher 'people army', OE Folchere, from which these surnames have sometimes been derived, is not recorded after 824. Occasionally we may have ODa Folkar.

Fulk is really a short form of such compounds as OG Fulcard 'people-brave' (Folkard, Folkerts, Foucard), OFr Foucher, Fouquier, which as a surname, has now 19 different forms, including Fulcher, Fulger, Fulker, Fucher, Fudger, Futcher, Folger, Folker, Foker, Foulcher, Foulger, Foucar, Foulagar, Volker, Fullagar. It has a pet-form Fuche, now Fuche, Fudge, Fuge and Fuidge.

Fuche, Fudge, Fuge, Fuidge: Robertus filius Fuche a1170 Gilb (L); Fuche Bassat c1200 Seals (nth). A pet form of Fulcher, or Fucher. Gilebertus filius Fulcheri (c1130 Whitby) is also called Gilebertus filius Fuche (c1125 ib.). Robertus filius Fuch' is identical with Robertus filius Fulcheri 1210 Cur (Db), whilst Henry Fulcher is also called Henry Fouch 1297 Coram. v. FULCHER.

The problem with these several references to the name, and similarly spelled versions of it, is that they stand alone in manorial records, as an indicator of Fulchers that had money, lands, property, etc. and were therefore of interest to

the king as being taxable. Genealogical information about these people is very rare and the thought of us being able to build family trees to show where they all fit in, is pure fancy.

So, where do we go from here? Well, all that we can really do is 'fast forward to the 16th century, to the time when parish registers began officially in 1538 by order of King Henry VIII. He decreed that records should be kept of baptisms, marriages and burials for all his subjects. The more wealthy of them also writing wills to enable their possessions to be inherited or otherwise distributed – less taxes, of course.

We have used these records to build up many individual Fulcher family trees. The majority of these start around 1780 period, and carry through to the modern day. The tradition of naming boys and girls was an interesting one. John and Mary were the top baby names in the 1700s, through to the much of the 1900s. Top 1700s boy names included Thomas, William, James, Joseph, and Henry. Top 1700s girl names included Sarah, Jane, Martha, Ann, Hannah, Alice, and Susan. We are occasionally lucky to find an Isaac, Samuel, Amos, etc. in our research, which gives us a better chance when searching parish records.

These commonly used names, create difficulties for us when we are confronted by two William Fulchers, both of similar ages and locations. It isn't until we get into the 1837 period that marriage certificates name the groom's father and their professions, to help us to clearly identify individuals. Before that date, it is mostly unproven or based on where people lived over several generations, and therefore, we assume, 'it must be right'.

Our attitude to this is, if you can't prove it, is to stop there. Go no further. It's a dead end. Other researchers disagree with this ideology and some of their family trees show some very creative research indeed. We have found many, many, researching errors in other researcher's trees. You cannot do anything about it, other than smile smugly, knowing that you have it right.

Linking Modern and Ancient Fulcher Families.

We have a handful of Fulcher references from the 11th century, possibly for one family only, with one progenitor. By the time of the 18th century, we have over a hundred families of that name and who all possibly connect to our 1066 Fulcher. Sadly, that is all we can say on the subject, maybe, possibly, perhaps. We also have the fast growing 21st century field of DNA, to help us along, to make connections. However, that very much depends on the womenfolk as to who the fathers of their children are. There are many instances of 'broken' DNA families in our records, where illegitimacies, adoptions, by-blows, etc. have clearly taken place. The cuckolded man is ever present.

The Domesday Book – 1086

There are various Fulcher references in this great work. Fulcher the Bowman, Fulcher the Breton, Fulcher of Paris, Fulcher de Mayneris, etc. There were no surnames in those days, so we cannot relate these names to the way we name our children today. Nor, indeed, can we prove any line of descent from these men. Taking Lord Fulcher de Mayneris, as mentioned in the records, as an example, we find the following.

FULCHER (DE MAYNERIS)

This landowner is associated with no places before the Conquest; but 12 after the Conquest. After the Conquest, in 1086, he was the immediate lord over the peasants after the Conquest, who paid tax to the tenant-in-chief.

- Barnham, Blackburn, Suffolk
- [Blo] Norton, Guiltcross, Norfolk
- Gissing, Diss, Norfolk
- [Great and Little] Saxham, Thingoe, Suffolk
- Hepworth, Blackburn, Suffolk
- Hopton, Lothingland, Suffolk
- Knettishall, Blackburn, Norfolk / Suffolk
- Roydon, Diss, Norfolk
- Semere, Earsham, Norfolk
- Shimpling, Diss, Norfolk
- Thelnetham, Blackburn, Suffolk
- Tivetshall [St Margaret and St Mary], Diss, Norfolk

Hopton, for example, was a settlement in the Domesday Book, in the hundred of Lothingland and the county of Suffolk. It had a recorded population of 27 households in 1086, putting it in the largest 40% of settlements recorded in Domesday. It belonged to the land of the abbey of (Bury) St Edmunds. Its households comprised those of 23 freemen and 4 smallholders.

Its land and resources comprised:

Ploughland: 6 men's plough teams.

Other resources: Meadow 4 acres. Woodland 2 pigs. 1 mill. 1 church. 0.1 church lands.

Valuation: annual value to the lord: 1 pound 10 shillings in 1086; 1 pound in 1066.

Owners:

Tenant-in-chief in 1086: (Bury) St Edmunds, abbey of.

Lords in 1086: (Bury) St Edmunds, abbey of; Fulcher (de Mayneris).

Overlord in 1066: (Bury) St Edmunds, abbey of.

Lord in 1066: free men, twenty-three.

FULCHER OF PARIS

An extract from the Domesday Book of 1086 for Fulcher of Paris at Oakham, Rutlandshire. The name is clearly written. He was the immediate lord over the peasants after the Conquest, who paid tax to the tenant-in-chief, who was King William himself. He was shown as the owner of lands in ten different locations.

