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BOUNCING BACK: MIGRANTS WHO RETURN HOME

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Here's a thought regarding this fine town in which we find ourselves: Frank Stubbings, in *Bedders, bulldogs and bedells*, says: "In a place like Cambridge, no civilized person lives wholly in the present".

This lecture is about migrants who returned home, became "bounce-backers" within England. Many people migrate, but a surprising number then come back home, *as if they had never been away*. If you're compiling a pedigree, you need not even have reasons for supposing that this happened – just bear in mind that it might have done. Bounce-back doubles the questions to be answered: why did somebody leave? Why did they return? Migrants usually returned to a place that is safe, familiar, is home. We will proceed like this: I'll tell one or two simple stories, then in each case I'll explain what source material I've used to create such a story.

This is very self-indulgent: it's based on own male-line ancestry – but that's where I have most data and where I first noticed this phenomenon. An unusual surname is a great advantage!

A quick look at the *Family Search* website makes it clear that during the sixteenth century nearly every parish register entry for the surname Titford or its variants can be found in one of two counties only: Bedfordshire and Wiltshire. We'll focus on Wiltshire. All known Titfords alive today, anywhere in the world, are provably descended from one of two men (brothers or cousins) who were living in the second half of the sixteenth century in the village of Bratton (**Figure 1**), which lies below the western edge of

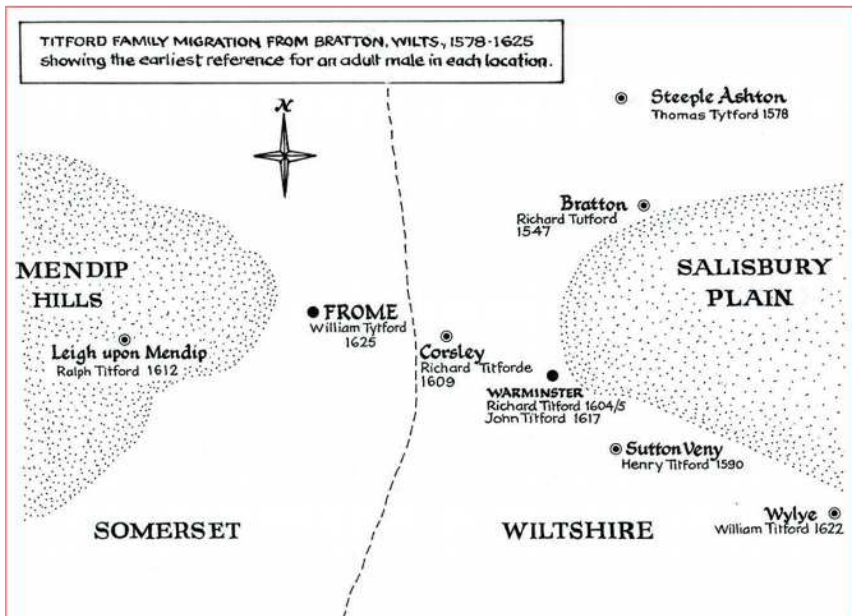


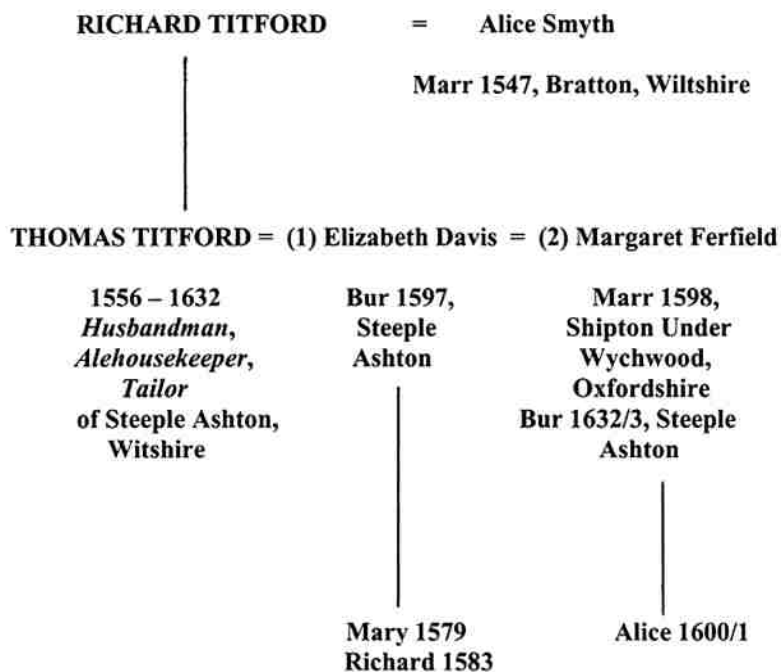
Figure 1: Titford migration map: showing Bratton and its surrounds.

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Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire. Here we have a surname with a single-family origin; my wife's maiden surname is Flockton (from a place-name in Yorkshire), and all Flocktons, like all Titfords, are related, being part of one large family.

Our first little story:

“A couple named Richard and Alice Titford or TUTFORD had a number of children (**Pedigree 1**), including a son called Thomas, who was baptised in Bratton in 1556. In adult life he moved to the neighbouring village of Steeple Ashton, where he was a husbandman, an alehousekeeper and a tailor. He married a widow named Elizabeth Davis, but she died during an epidemic in 1597, whereupon Thomas made a journey northwards to a village called Shipton Under Wychwood in Oxfordshire, where he married Margaret Ferfield. The couple returned to Steeple Ashton, where they had children together”.



Pedigree 1: Richard and Alice Titford of Bratton; Thomas Titford of Bratton and of Steeple Ashton.

Richard and Alice had married in Bratton in 1547, just into the reign of Edward VI. How do we know this story is true? What are the sources?

Wife Elizabeth died during an epidemic in 1597 (**Figure 2**).

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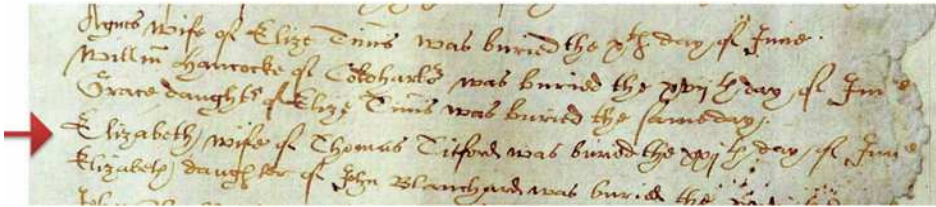


Figure 2: extract from the Steeple Ashton burial register 1597, Wiltshire Record Office.

As with census returns, it's imperative to take a holistic view, to get the full context. The burial register of Steeple Ashton shows an exceptional number of burials at this time, 42 in total from May to August 1597. The year 1597 saw the outbreak of a widespread rural epidemic known (with no attempt at euphemism) as the Great Sweat. What was Thomas Titford to do, widowed and in a village full of sickness?



Figure 3: Thomas Titford's migration.

He made a substantial journey to Shipton Under Wychwood in Oxfordshire (**Figure 3**) and there he married Margaret Ferfield in 1598, returned home, and “bounced back” to Steeple Ashton. Here is the parish register marriage entry for the parish of Steeple Ashton, written on vellum (**Figure 4**).

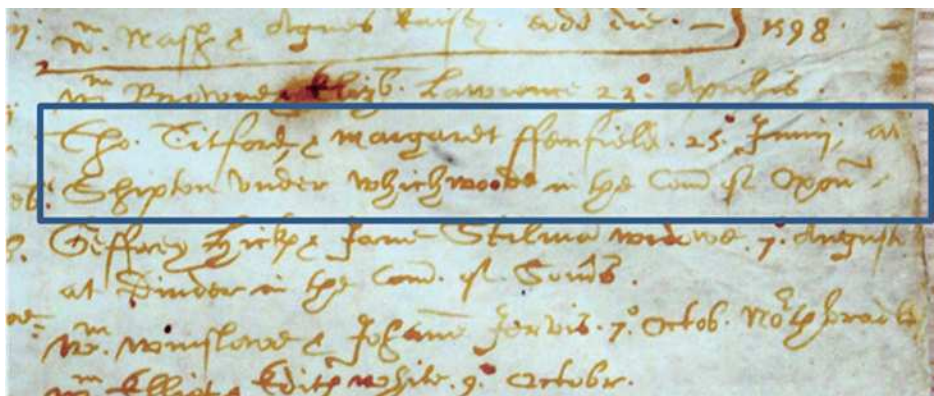


Figure 4: Thomas Titford & Margaret, from the Steeple Ashton marriage register on vellum, Wiltshire Record Office.

In the 1590s parishes were instructed to copy their paper registers onto vellum. Most did so, but often missed out extraneous details, to save time and effort. Here is the *paper* register, which has survived – most have not (Figure 5). Here we find that a series of marriages which had happened away from Steeple Ashton during the abandonment of the village has been entered retrospectively. Had there perhaps been a parish meeting to determine this?

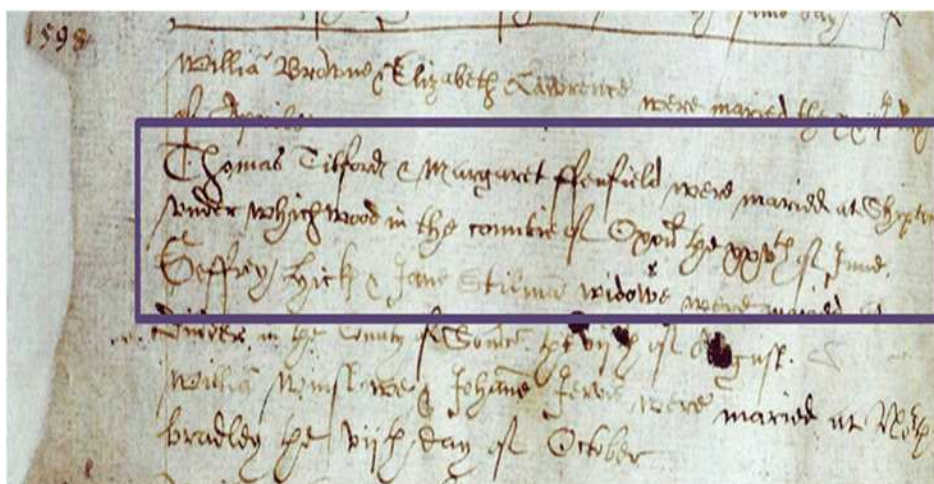


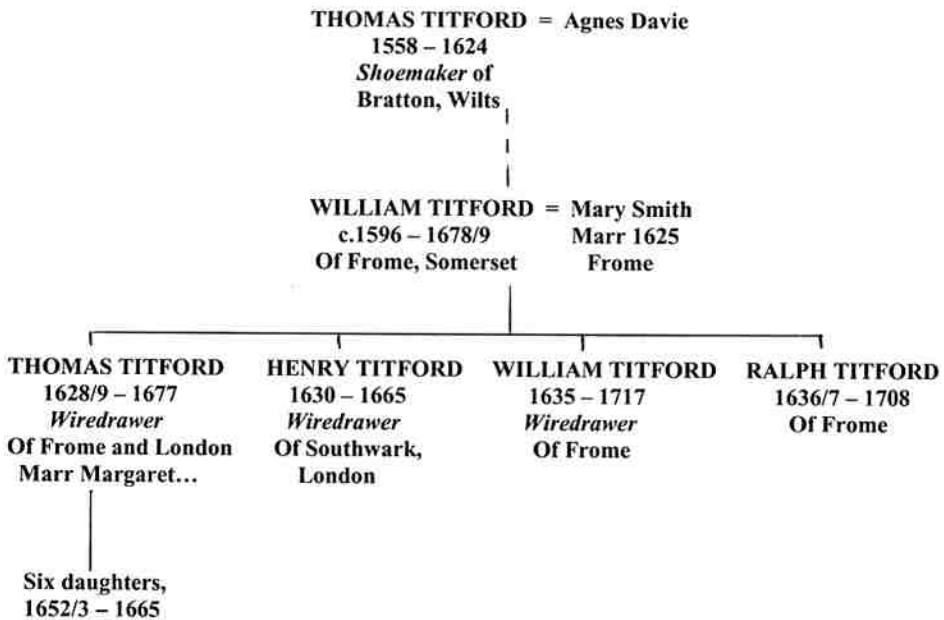
Figure 5: Thomas Titford & Margaret, from the Steeple Ashton marriage register on paper. Wiltshire Record Office.

Let's take stock so far: The story has only just begun, yet already we have a man moving away from his roots, marrying in another county, and returning home. Do you believe in "Searching the neighbouring parishes" to find a marriage? Good luck! The fact is that people might get married a hundred or so miles from their home, not just ten miles. Of

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course a rare surname helps no end... Then came a Great Migration. The Titfords had arrived in Bratton from Bedfordshire in the early decades of the sixteenth century, but all adult Titford males had left the village by the 1620s, some long before that. To find out why, do the background reading: the wool trade in Western Wiltshire was in a state of serious decline at that time, and those who could do so moved away.

So what had appeared to be the home village for all Titfords was only a place of temporary sojourn. Essentially they were just passing through. The last to leave was my direct ancestor, William Titford, presumed to be the son of another Thomas Titford, a Bratton shoemaker, cousin to Thomas of Steeple Ashton. William moved west from a village in Wiltshire to a substantial town in Somerset called Frome, and married a lady named Mary Smith there in 1625. Consider what challenges are posed by a family living near to a county or other border – let alone crossing it. William had moved to a different parish, within a different county, located in a different diocese (and this will affect, in particular, wills and marriage licences).

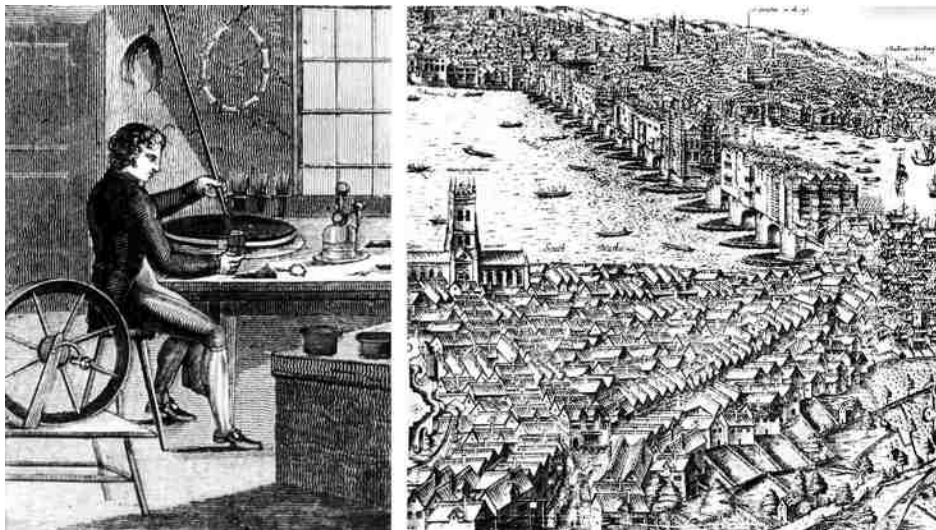


Pedigree 2: William Titford of Frome and his sons.

Times were hard even in Frome – but they must have been better there than in Bratton. William had made a move from a rural parish where dual occupation was the norm (tailor and alehousekeeper, shoemaker and alehousekeeper) and from a largely subsistence economy, to wage dependency in the wool trade, which was controlled by clothiers. William Titford in Frome had four sons, three of whom are known to have been wire drawers (**Pedigree 2**). Wire drawing in this case was the drawing out of wire to be fitted into cards for the carding of wool. This occupation was very particular to the wool trade, and especially to Frome itself. Below is an engraving of a wire drawer

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(**Figure 6**), practising his mysterious-looking trade. Two of William and Mary's sons stayed in Frome. Two made their way to London. One of these, named Henry, settled in Southwark, but he didn't return.



Left, Figure 6: a wiredrawer; right: Figure 7: Old London Bridge, with Southwark in the foreground.

Here is London Bridge (**Figure 7**). The city of London lies to the north; Southwark is to the south, with Borough High Street trickling through it. In the burial register for St Saviour's parish, Southwark Henry Titford, helpfully described as being a wiredrawer, was buried on 26th August 1665. A holistic view suggests very strongly that he would have died of the plague.

William of Frome's eldest son, Thomas Titford, also went to London, but he bounced back.

Another little story:

“Thomas Titford, a wiredrawer, son of William Titford and Mary Smith, and possibly named after his putative grandfather, Thomas the shoemaker of Bratton, left Frome as a young man and ran into trouble in far-away London. Once this crisis was over he returned to Frome, where he and his wife had a number of daughters.”

Below is an extract from the printed edition of the Middlesex Quarter Sessions (**Figure 8**). We read here of recognizances in Westminster, London in 1651, for “Thomas Tydford of Frome in the county of Somerset, wyre-drawer”, who had been ordered to appear before the justices, with others, “to answer for averring and maintaining diverse erroneous damnable and blasphemous opinions against the Holy Trinity”. Maybe Thomas had

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been apprenticed to a master in London, where he already had some respectable Titford cousins? Patrick Wallis has indicated that “Between 5 and 10 percent of English teenage males entered apprenticeships in London in the seventeenth century.”

12 JUNE, 1651.—Recognizances, taken before Laurence Whitaker esq. J.P., of Elizabeth Sorrell the elder widow and Elizabeth Sorrell the younger spinster, both of Brayntree co. Essex, and Thomas Atkyn and Thomas Baugh, both of Boston co. Lincolne gentlemen, all four in the sum of four-score pounds each ; For the appearance of the said Elizabeth Sorrell the elder and Elizabeth Sorrell the younger at the next Quarter Sessions for the City and liberty of Westminster, “to answere for averringe and meyntheyneinge diverse erroneous damnable and blasphemouse opinions against the Holy Trinity.”—Also, three sets of similar Recognizances, taken on the same day before the same Justices of the Peace, for the appearance of Thomas Tydford of Frome co. Somersett wyer-drawer, Margarett Dunlopp of Martin-in-the-Fields co. Midd. widow, Frances Bedwell of Brayntree co. Essex spinster, and Anne Burley of Margarett’s Westminster co. Midd. at the next Q. S. P. for the City and Liberty of Westminster, “to answer for averringe and meyntheyneinge diverse erroneous damnable and blasphemous opinions against the Holy Trinity.” S. P. (West.) R., 20 June, 1651.

Figure 8: the Middlesex Quarter Sessions in print.

The legal case which followed was so extraordinary that an enterprising printer named Thomas Harper published a pamphlet about it (Figure 9), now to be found in the so-called Thomason tracts in the British Library – a collection of printed ephemera, accessed initially by way of an index in two printed volumes. Imagine the broad Somerset accents up in London. Thomas Titford would no doubt have been regarded by seventeenth-century Londoners as a bucolic peasant. When Shakespeare wanted to indicate that a character in one of his plays was something of a village idiot, he’d give him a “Zummerset” accent.

The case against Thomas Titford:

“All the proceedings at the sessions of the peace holden at Westminster on the 20 day of June 1651, against Thomas Tydford, etc.”

“Thomas Tydford being asked where John Robins, alias Roberts, dwelleth, he saith he knoweth not, nor what trade he is of, but he doth believe that the sayd Robins alias Roberts is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and saith that the wife of the sayd Robins alias Roberts shall bring forth a man child that shall be the Saviour of all that shall be saved in this world.....he affirmeth further, that Caine who slew his brother Abell is the third person of the Trinity, and that those that deny it, deny their own salvation; he saith further that the sayd John Robins, alias Roberts, hath power to raise the dead”.



The Examination of Thomas Tydford Elizabeth Sorrell the elder, Margaret Dunlape, Anne Burley, Frances Bedwell, Elizabeth Sorrell the younger, & Thomas Kearby, &c.



Thomas Tydford being asked where *John Robins, alias Roberts* dwelleth, he saith he knoweth not, nor what trade he is of, but he doth believe that the sayd *Robins, alias Roberts*, is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ*, and saith that the wife of the sayd *Robins, alias Roberts*, shall bring forth a man child that shall be the Saviour of all that shall be saved in this world; he affirmeth further, that *Caine* who slew his brother *Abell* is the third Person of the Trinity, and that those that deny it, deny their own salvation; he saith further, that the sayd *John Robins, alias Roberts*, hath power to raise the dead.

The marke of M *Thomas Tydford*.

All the above named Examinants agree with *Thomas Tydford*, and affirme the same, and put thereto their hands at the same time.

The marke M of *Margaret Dunlape*.

Anne Burley.

Thomas Kearby.

Elizabeth Sorrell senior, her marke.

Elizabeth Sorrell junior, her marke.

A 2

Frances

Figure 9: Thomas Tydford: the legal case.

“Erroneous damnable and blasphemous opinions against the Holy Trinity” indeed!

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Thomas Tydford signed his mark to this amazing statement, as did all the other accused. All eventually signed a grovelling recantation, except Thomas Kirby, who remained obstinate, entered the court like a mad man, cursed all present, and was sentenced to six months' hard labour with corporal punishment for his pains.

Thomas "Tydford" and several of his female co-accused had clearly fallen under the spell of John Robins, the so-called "King of the Ranters" (for whom see DNB). Robins had hoodwinked his followers and gone off with their money. This was not untypical of life during the years after the Civil War – the old certainties had vanished, bishops had been abolished, everything was up in the air, political and religious "nutters" were everywhere. Nowadays Thomas would have joined the Moonies or the Branch Davidian (in Waco, Texas). He was clearly an impressionable young man... And then what did Thomas do after this unsavoury episode? He bounced back home, as if nothing had ever happened; he was having children in Frome one year later by his wife Margaret (perhaps Margaret Dunlop, one of his co-accused?).

In my book *The Titford family 1547–1947* (**Figure 10**) I recounted all that I then knew about Thomas: "He paid the Hearth Tax". Slim pickings; I'd sold him short. I should have known: you always discover some riveting fact the day after your book is published!

My male-line family had bounce-backers in nearly every generation from the 1570s to the 1750s. We may say that the Titford family bounced back no more nor no less than other artisan families. They weren't tied to the land, and in Frome they had skills which were not especially easily transferable to other parts of the country, being very specific to the wool trade. In theory wire drawers and cardmakers would be less mobile than more general craftsmen such as carpenters, tailors or masons. But here in the seventeenth century were West Country artisans on the move, making their way to the capital, where no doubt they would hope that the streets were paved with gold. In short, never take your ancestors for granted – many of them were not as boringly rooted to the spot as you may think.

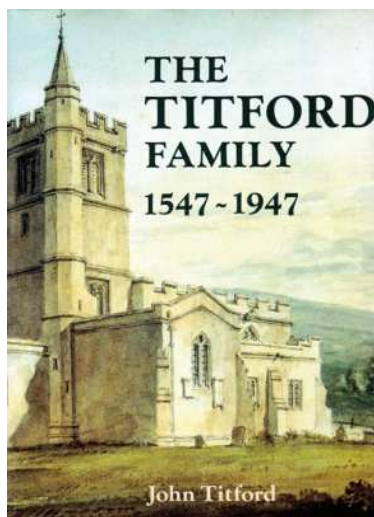


Figure 10: Bratton church, Wiltshire, on the cover of the author's book on the Titfords.