

THOMAS COOKE

(1570 - 20 May 1614)

know as

THOMAS COOKE, BOWCHER, BOCHER OR BUTCHER

**Father of Thomas Cooke alias Butcher
GGGGGG Grandfather of Henry Freeman Cook**

(Henry Freeman, William, Abial, Job, Thomas, John, John, Thomas, **Thomas**)

THE LAST GENERATION IN ENGLAND

(The following was taken from the book *Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island*, Compiled and published by Jane Fletcher Fiske, Boxford, Massachusetts, 1987, Volume One, pages xiv,1, 11.)

THOMAS, know at various times as **THOMAS COOKE, BOWCHER, BOCHER or BUTCHER**, was born perhaps about 1570, probably in or not far from the parish of Netherbury, Dorset, England, where he was living in 1593 when the surviving register for that parish began. He was buried there as Thomas Butcher 20 May 1614.

It appears that Thomas was married at least twice. The Netherbury registers record the burial on 8 January 1598 of the wife of Thomas Boucher, but her first name is not included. He evidently married, second, in 1599, Joanna ----, who survived him. She married, second, at Netherbury, as Joanna Cooke, widow, 2 February 1614/5, Thomas Tackle of Netherbury, whose earlier wife, Alice, had died in December 1611. He was buried in Netherbury 19 April 1626. (A note in the parish register of nearby Bridport states that the plague came to that place in 1626).

Joanna was living later in the year 1626 when it was noted in the records of the Manor of Yonderover (Netherbury in Terra) that the widow Tackle held a cottage and garden, the rent on which was 8 pence per year, on which there was no death tax, and that her son Thmoas Cooke was the tenant in reversion (DRO, presentments from 34th Henry VI to 7th August 2d Charles I, 7623). Record of her death has not been found.

Probable children, the first hree baptisms at St. Mary's Church, Netherbury, Dorset:

(By first wife):

- i **MARY**, baptized 20 Nov. 1593 as daughter of Thomas Cooke.
- ii **JOAN**, baptized 11 May 1596 as daughter of Thomas Bocher, buried 4 Dec. 1596 as daughter of Thomas Cooke.

(Second wife - Joanna —)

- iii **THOMAS**, baptized 23 April 1600 as son of Thomas Bowcher.

iv **JOHN**, baptized 11 April 1602, at Beaminister, as son of Thomas Cooke.

(*Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island*, Compiled and published by Jane Fletcher Fiske, Boxford, Massachusetts, 1987, Volume One, page 11.)

SPELLING: COOK OR COOKE?

One of the questions that descendants most often ask is, “was it spelled with an ‘e’?” Usually in the earliest records it was spelled Cooke’ those people who did know how to write in the seventeenth century had a habit of putting an ‘e’ on the end of almost anything. Thomas Cooke himself evidently did not know how to write, because he used a mark for all his signatures which are know to have survived. The earliest of these was done 1660, when he deeded land in Portsmouth to his son John, and the latest was on his will in 1673/74.

Spelling was of little or no concern to anybody until recent times, and the name in Rhode Island very soon became Cook. In records it is found both in both forms, Cook and Cooke, sometimes even in the same document. It is safe to say that the spelling has no significance at all. The same thing is true of names like Green(e), Brown(e), or Fisk(e).

When class consciousness, along with literacy, began eventually to invade the popular mind in American, that final ‘e’ on one’s name acquired an importance it had never before had. A few families adopted thee spelling Cooke, usually in the belief that it was the authentic form which had been dropped by an ignorant ancestor. In some cases it became also an accident of geography, depending on an ancestor who moved away from Rhode Island and founded a line of his own which carried on the form of the spelling he used, as in the case of Silas Cooke’s descendants in Texas and Virginia.

There is no clear answer. One spelling is just as authentic as the other, and snobbery about one’s ancestors is hopefully a thing of the past. Cooks or Cookes, all in this genealogy are descended from Thomas Cooke alias Butcher, who signed with his mark: (*Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island*, Compiled and published by Jane Fletcher Fiske, Boxford, Massachusetts, 1987, Volume One, page xiv.)

THE ALIAS

Identification of the English background of Thomas Cooke of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, depends entirely on the fact that there was an alias involved, Cooke Alias Butcher. The use of this alias is found in American Records in only one place, a deed dated 1660 in Portsmouth whereby Thomas deeded land to his son John, and in England it has been found only in the baptismal record of that son John. Calling himself Thomas Cooke alias Butcher, and his son John Cook alias Butcher, he used in the deed the same wording of the name that is found in John’s baptismal record in the parish of Netherbury, Dorset. John was baptized 30 March 1630; his gravestone in Portsmouth is inscribed that he had “lived neere 60 years: when he died in May 1691, which is one year off the mark, but nonetheless close enough, considering the seventeenth century’s sense of time, to inspire confidence that this is the same family.

Most descendants of Thomas Cooke have never heard of the alias. Genealogists over the years have known of the Portsmouth deed, but have generally assumed that both father and son

were butchers by trade, and this error has appeared widely in print. Careful examination of the few facts that are known is required, in order to sweep away the confusion and get the question of the alias into its proper perspective. Any significance attached to it would have been quite different in the seventeenth century than it might be today.

The first question is, why an alias at all? The fact is that aliases were at that time quite common and especially so, for some reason, in Dorset. An illuminating article on the subject by Miss Lillian Redstone was printed in The American Genealogist, volume 17 (1940), pages 68-69¹. She pointed out that there were several logical reasons for the use of an alias, as, for example, when a woman married twice and her children by her first marriage sometimes used the name of their stepfather, or in case of illegitimacy, or when there were no sons to continue a name and the husband of a daughter agreed to have their children bear her surname. Aliases were common in Dorset, and there is a tradition in the western counties that an alias were very convenient to smugglers. The widespread smuggling in the isolated villages along the coast between Bridport and Weymouth made it convenient for men to have alternate names. Surnames had not been too long in use then anyway, and a man frequently was called by the name which applied to his occupation, or the name of the place where he lived. Sometimes a different name was used to distinguish an individual from others of the same name in the vicinity.

None of these explanations can be proven to apply to the Cooke alias Butcher situation, and the reason for it may very probably never be known. It obviously predates existing parish registers, and this was not a family of property that left probate records. If either name, Cooke or Butcher, had been less common in the area from which they came, it might be easier to unravel the puzzle.

It is clear that the name Butcher had nothing to do with the family occupation. Earliest forms of it are spelled Bowcher, Bocher, or Boochoer, suggesting a Norman origin in the name like Bouchier centuries earlier. The spelling Butcher in the Netherbury registers is not found before about 1609, and obviously had to do with phonetic spelling by the parish clerk.

Although Thomas left the Butcher name behind when he came to New England, he was clearly aware of the form of the baptismal record of his son and its legal implications, and he used it just once more in deeding land to John in 1660 in Rhode Island. As mentioned above, this is the only record of the alias found in America — an incredibly fortunate one in that it provided the mission link to the family's background in Dorset. (*Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island*, Compiled and published by Jane Fletcher Fiske, Boxford, Massachusetts, 1987, Volume One, page 1.)

¹For more on the subject of aliases, see Genealogist' Magazine, vol. 15, no. 14 [June 1968], pp. 594-9; vol. 17, no. 6 [June 1973], p. 330, and vol. 21, no. 9 [March 1985], p. 329.