

# Bicket(t)/Becket(t) Branch and Cluster Overview

Version of 31 January 2024

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## I. Global Overview

The Bicket, Bickett, Becket, and Beckett surnames are all used interchangeably to a large extent. There appear to be three major origins of branches carrying these surnames:

- (1) **Ayrshire in Scotland.** There is a fairly well defined tree which originated in Ayrshire, with 28 different branches all shown to be related within a historical timeframe by Big Y testing with Family Tree DNA. This name appears to be a locative name, derived from Biggart, which would have indicated someone from the town of Biggar on a major trade route to Glasgow. Many of these branches used the 'i' versions of the surname originally, but have subsequently moved to the 'e' versions. This tree has been traced back genetically to the period before surnames were established in Ayrshire. Most of the work which has been done so far in this one-name study has been on this Ayrshire tree.
- (2) **Southeast England.** There is apparently a larger tree with upwards of 150 branches which likely originated in southeast England, with Thomas à Becket (1118-1170) being often viewed as one of its early members. However, to-date there has been limited DNA testing to validate the genetic origins and relationships of many current branches which think they may be related to him. There are many published theories about the derivation of this Becket(t) name, including that it came from France. Members of these branches appear mostly to have used the 'e' versions of the surname, but there are also occurrences of the 'i' versions.

- (3) **Surnames adopted by previously enslaved individuals.** There are apparently over 20 branches which are descended from previously enslaved individuals, with the assumption that they had been enslaved by members of trees (1) or (2) above, and had adopted their names as a result. We know that some of the members of those two trees were slave owners. To-date there has been no meaningful DNA testing to validate the genetic origins and relationships of such current branches.

We currently have limited information about trees 2 (southeast England) and 3 (surnames adopted by previously enslaved individuals). We do have considerable information, especially as a result of Y DNA testing, about tree 1 (Ayrshire in Scotland).

## II. Ayrshire Tree Overview

A brief overview of the branches in the Ayrshire tree is given below.

We currently identify 28 living branches (with living direct-line male descendants) as follows:

- **The main group descended from a single person.** There are 22 branches which are all descended from a single common ancestor born around 1400. There are several clusters of branches within this group, which are associated with the locations of Fenwick, Kilmarnock, Kilwinning, and Newton-on-Ayr. There is also one branch within this group which changed its surname to Wylie.
- **The earlier branches.** There are 6 branches which are related a few mutations further back, before surnames were established for common people in Ayrshire. It is possible that these represent effective adoptions when local widows remarried to someone with our surname, and the son(s) by the earlier marriages took on our surname, probably in the 1400s.
- **The one currently being investigated.** There is one further branch still under investigation. This originated, and is still represented, in the area around Ballymoney in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. Previous information indicates that it came from Scotland.

We expect that there will be more living branches of the Ayrshire tree discovered in the future. The Becket(t)/Bicket(t) ONS Branch project is already suggesting further branches based on the origin locations of some branches.

We have documented a further three branches which have gone extinct for direct-line male descendants in the 1900s.

### A. Ayrshire Tree – The Main Group Descended from a Single Person

We estimate that the earliest common ancestor of 22 branches of Bicket(t)s/Becket(t)s (the Most Recent Common Ancestor or MCRA) was born around 1400. This is calculated based on the earliest ancestor we have recorded for any of the branches - the 'K' branch with a son born in 1688, giving us an estimated birth date for the father of ca 1668. There are 3 unique SNP mutations before the cluster including the 'K' branch diverged. Given an estimated 90 years average per SNP mutation, that would take the estimated birth date of the earliest common ancestor of all Bicket(t)s/Becket(t)s to 270 years earlier, to 1398, say 1400.

That earliest common ancestor of all the branches of this main group would have been the single person to have the three signature DNA mutations (SNPs) which ALL subsequent male descendants of those branches have, regardless of which branch they are in. Furthermore, these three signature DNA mutations – out of more than 50,000 Y-DNA locations tested - differentiate members of this group from the rest of humanity. There are additional signature DNA mutations which people – and branches – acquired randomly over time, and these are what allow us to state the relationships between the different branches and clusters of branches. Note that these mutations are cumulative, i.e., you keep all of the mutations of all of your

ancestors. In other words, the mutations do not back-mutate. (It is theoretically possible, but almost unknown in practice.)

One interpretation of how the various branches of this large group descended from this earliest common ancestor, based on DNA evidence plus geographical locations, is given below. There is a DNA chart of the branches which can be downloaded from the website which also shows these relationships.

### 1. F Branch

The first branch to diverge was the F branch which we can only trace back to County Mayo in Ireland. It has the three signature DNA mutations as all other branches in our tree, but does not share any further mutations with any of the other branches. One interpretation is that this branch might have left Ayrshire for Ireland quite early historically speaking. Furthermore, the fact that it can trace back to County Mayo, which is outside the 'Ulster' area of the north of Ireland which was settled so strongly by people from Ayrshire starting around 1690, suggests that this branch may have gone to Ireland as part of the plantation projects trying to displace the Gaelic Irish nobility and the associated local Irish peoples (before there was conflict with the Catholics), which was in the early 1600s.

### 2. Kilwinning Cluster

The first cluster of two branches to diverge from the main tree was for the 'B' and 'O' branches, both tracing back to Megswell farm in Kilwinning. This cluster has two DNA mutations which are unique to its branches. The 'Y' branch (with no living male descendants) was quite possibly also connected here.

### 3. The Three Clusters plus Wylie

Three different clusters of branches then diverged, but there is nothing in the DNA to say in which order they diverged. There is, however, a signature DNA mutation shared by all of the branches in all of these clusters. This is also the point at which a branch of Wylies diverged.

#### a) *Newton-on-Ayr Cluster*

The first cluster is for the 'D', 'DN', 'X2', and 'M' branches. There is a signature DNA mutation for this cluster. The D branch came from Kilwinning, but then moved to Ayr (especially Newton-on-Ayr). The 'N' branch (now referred to as the 'DN' branch) split from the 'D' branch. Recent work has shown the actual connections between the 'D', 'DN', and 'X2' branches, with the breakthrough coming when we discovered that some early records had used the 'Bicker' variant spelling. The 'M' ('Milhinch') branch (now in Australia) is also connected here, but we are not yet sure exactly how, as there are two main alternatives possible.

#### b) *Kilmarnock Cluster*

The second cluster is for the 'G', 'P' and 'Z' branches, based in Kilmarnock. There is a signature DNA mutation for this cluster. The 'C' and 'L' branches (with no living male descendants) were quite possibly also connected here. The 'Z' branch went to Paisley, Renfrewshire, and then to Canada, before moving down to the United States. We have now identified two further branches of extant Bicket/Becket/Becketts from Paisley who also went to Canada and from there to the United States. However, these are the 'E' and 'J' branches, part of the Fenwick cluster (see below).

#### c) *Fenwick Cluster*

The third cluster is the largest. This is for the 'H', 'R' (now referred to as the 'HR' branch), 'K', 'U', 'E', 'J', 'I' and 'T' branches. There is a signature DNA mutation shared by all of these branches.

Within the Fenwick cluster there is one small sub-cluster, one large sub-cluster with its own sub-sub-clusters, and three branches which are not part of any sub-cluster. It may be easiest to understand by looking at the relationship chart.

The 'H' and 'R' branches form the first small sub-cluster within the Fenwick cluster, and have a signature DNA mutation unique to themselves. Because of DNA testing we have been able to determine where the 'R'

branch links into the 'H' branch in historical records, so we now call it the 'HR' branch. The 'H' branch went to Australia, and the 'HR' branch went to Liverpool.

The second sub-cluster in the Fenwick cluster is quite large and includes the 'K', 'U', 'I', 'S', and 'W' branches. All branches in this sub-cluster share a signature mutation. On the chart this is called the 'Ireland and Maryland Sub-cluster'. This sub-cluster contains two sub-sub-clusters and one branch by itself. The free-standing branch is the 'W' branch, which traces itself back to County Antrim in the north of Ireland.

The first of the sub-sub-clusters is for the 'K' and 'U' branches, which share a unique signature mutation. The 'K' branch (the largest extant branch), although understood to have come from Kilmarnock, is genetically part of the Fenwick cluster, so is most likely also originally from Fenwick, which is only a few miles away. Both branches are found in Maryland in the US in the pre- and post- Revolutionary War period, but the 'K' branch then went to Kentucky, and the 'U' branch went to Ohio. A number of on-line family trees show the two connected but in a way which we consider incorrect.

The 'I' and 'S' branches form the next sub-sub-cluster within the 'Ireland and Maryland Sub-cluster'. They share a signature mutation. They do not share any history of which we are aware, but clearly they are linked because of the DNA evidence. The 'I' branch (the second-largest extant branch) can only trace itself back to County Antrim in the north of Ireland. The 'S' branch traces itself back to County Sligo in the northwest of Ireland.

The 'J', 'E' and 'T' branches are part of the Fenwick cluster, but they do not share any DNA mutations additional to the signature DNA mutation for the Fenwick cluster. The 'J' and 'E' branches are circumstantially closely related, as both of these branches emigrated from Paisley in Scotland to a very small settlement in Otonabee, Ontario, Canada, in fact to adjoining plots. We cannot yet prove in historical records how they are related. There is a status report in the 'branch stories' section about work to try to connect these two branches. The 'T' branch can be traced back to Fenwick, but emigrated to southern Illinois in the US. There was also a sub-branch of the 'HR' branch which also emigrated to southern Illinois in the US at almost the same time, indicating how closely these different branches were linked not just genetically but physically.

#### d) *Wylie*

There is another branch with the same signature mutation as the three clusters of Newton-on-Ayr, Kilmarnock, and Fenwick, but it is not in any of those clusters. This branch carries the surname Wylie. There were major branches of the Wylie surname in the Fenwick area at the time. Indeed, the Wylie surname (and variant spellings) had appeared at the same time as the Bicket(t)/Becket(t) surname appeared, many SNPs earlier. This Wylie branch is clearly in the Bicket(t)/Becket(t) tree. However, the reason for the surname change is probably because a widow who already had a son by someone in the Bicket(t)/Becket(t) tree remarried to someone in the local area with the surname Wylie, and the child took on the stepfather's Wylie surname.

### B. Ayrshire Tree – The Earlier Branches

There are (at least) six further lineages of the surname which do not descend from the single individual mentioned above, but rather from slightly earlier in time. (These multiple lineages may relate to fewer discrete branches, but we cannot yet trace them back in historical records to connect them.) These branches use the surname spellings Becket (X1 branch), Beckett (various V sub-branches), and Bichan (pronounced 'Bickan' – X6 branch). The X1 branch can trace itself back to Kilwinning in Ayrshire, one of the core geographical origin locations for the Ayrshire tree. The V sub-branches can be traced back to the small area where the Counties of Antrim, Armagh, and Down in Northern Ireland come together. The X6 branch traces itself back to the north of Scotland, to Orkney. The Vb branch which can trace itself back the farthest firmly understands it came from England. This branch could indeed have come from England, but the DNA shows that it originated in the Ayrshire tree.

All of these branches originated genetically before surnames were established for common people in Scotland. We know this because there was a single person with the SNP Y13224 who then had descendants with 5 different surname groupings, each with its own additional and unique signature SNPs. That ancestor had descendants who went on to adopt not only the surname Bicket/Bickett/Becket/Beckett, but also the surname groups of Faulkner/Falconer (and Reynolds); Wylie/Wilie/Wiley (and Findley, Hendricks, and Brown); Culverson/Culbertson (and Graham); and Adams.

A likely explanation for this situation is that these branches resulted from 'Non-Paternity Events' (NPEs) probably in the 1400s after the Bicket/Bickett/Becket/Beckett surname had become established. Some males in the fairly small community which existed at the time, related several SNPs back, but not themselves with this surname, had one or more sons, and died. Their sons (or their descendants) took on the Becket(t)/Bichan surname. This could have been because a widow married someone with the Becket(t)/Bichan surname, and the boy(s) took on that surname. The plague may have been a factor at the time that these possible NPEs happened.

See also the DNA diagram for a visual representation of this situation.

### C. Ayrshire Tree – Others Being Investigated

There is currently one branch that is being investigated. (There will probably be more found in the future.) This is:

- **X3.** This is a branch based in Ballymoney, County Antrim, which believes it comes from Scotland. There is also a sub-branch which went to the US.

### D. Ayrshire Tree – The 3 Extinct Branches

We have information and lineages for the following branches which became extinct in the 1900s for direct-line male descendants. They are:

- **C.** This was a branch of US east coast Bickets from Kilmarnock.
- **L.** This was a branch of Liverpool Bickets from Kilmarnock.
- **Y.** This was a branch of US west coast Bickets from Stewarton.

## III. Overview of Ayrshire Branches by Letter

The table below gives a summarized view of the Ayrshire tree branches which are known to have male direct line descendants alive today (2024), plus several where the male line has died out.

The letter assignments to the different branches were quite arbitrary, and it was never imagined that there would be more than 26 branches. Consequently, there were problems when we approached and then passed 26 identified branches. There are now some 'workarounds'. New independent branches being found now are being called X1, X2, etc. Perhaps we will come up with a better way of identifying branches in the future.

Branch	Description	Main Spellings	DNA Cluster
A	Used for notional connecting ancestors	N/A	N/A
B	Current Kilmarnock Bickets from Kilwinning	Bicket	Kilwinning cluster
C	US East Coast Bickets from Kilmarnock (extinct branch)	Bicket	unknown because extinct

D (includes N branch)	Scotland Bickets and Bicketts from Kilwinning to Newton-upon-Ayr	Bicket Bickett	Newton-upon-Ayr cluster
E (was ZQ1)	Paisley to US via Canada	Bicket Bickett Becket Beckett	Fenwick cluster
Fn (was IQ3)	Canada Becketts from County Mayo – Nathaniel was earliest ancestor originally identified.	Beckett	Not in any cluster – first branch to diverge from common ancestor of the 22 branches
Fw (was FQ1)	Ireland and New Zealand Becketts from same location in County Mayo as Fn branch. William was the earliest ancestor originally identified.	Beckett	In same branch as Fn
G	USA Becketts from Kilmarnock	Beckett	Kilmarnock cluster
H (includes R branch)	Australia/Liverpool Bickets from Fenwick	Bicket	Fenwick cluster
I	USA Bicketts from brothers Adam and William from County Antrim	Bickett	Fenwick cluster, in the same sub-sub-cluster as the S branch
J (was ZQ2)	Canada and US Becketts from Paisley	Beckett	Fenwick cluster
K	Kentucky Bicketts from Kilmarnock	Bickett	Fenwick cluster
L	Liverpool Bickets from Kilmarnock - extinct branch	Bicket	unknown because extinct
M	Milhinch Bicketts in Australia	Bickett	Newton-upon-Ayr cluster
N	See D branch	Bickett	
O	Glasgow Bickets from Kilwinning	Bicket	Kilwinning cluster
P	Glasgow Bickets from Kilmarnock	Bicket	Kilmarnock cluster
Q	Was previously used for 'question' lineages.		
R	See H branch	Bicket	
S (was IQ2)	US Bicketts and Becketts from County Sligo, Ireland	Bickett Beckett	Fenwick cluster, in the same sub-cluster as the I branch.
T	USA Bickets from Fenwick	Bicket	Fenwick cluster
U	Bickett branch from Mass, USA at same time as K Bicketts	Bickett	Fenwick cluster, in same sub-sub-cluster as the K branch
Va	Ireland Becketts from Agahadavy, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.	Beckett	Branch from before surnames were established. DNA confirms this is part of the V branch, but we have not yet found the link in historical records.

Vb	Ireland and US Becketts from Upper Ballinderry, County Antrim, Northern Ireland	Beckett	Branch from before surnames were established. DNA confirms this is part of the V branch, but we have not yet found the link in historical records.
Vb-cousin (was VQ2)	Ireland Becketts, part of the V branch because the wife was from the V branch, but the husband was a Beckett of unidentified origin. He was likely a cousin, but pending DNA testing and proving his relationship in historical records, it needs to be identified as a potentially different branch for the purposes of male descent.	Beckett	No tester at present, but living male descendants exist.
Vm (was X5)	Becketts which can be traced back to Moira in County Down, Northern Ireland	Beckett	Branch from before surnames were established. DNA confirms this is part of the V branch, but we have not yet found the link in historical records.
Vo	US Becketts. Family information says the branch originally came to Opequon, Virginia in 1730, from the area around Banbridge, County Down, in Northern Ireland.	Beckett	Branch from before surnames were established. DNA confirms this is part of the V branch, but we have not yet found the link in historical records.
W (was IQ1)	US Becketts from County Antrim, Northern Ireland	Beckett	Fenwick cluster
X1	US Becketts from Kilwinning	Becket	Branch from before surnames were established.
X2	New Brunswick Canada Becketts from Ayrshire	Beckett	Newton-on-Ayr cluster
X3	Ireland Becketts from Ballymoney, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, which believes it is of Scottish descent	Beckett	Being researched
X6	Bichan which can be traced back to Orkney in the north of Scotland, especially Deerness.	Bichan	Branch from before surnames were established.
Y	US West Coast Bicketts from Stewarton - extinct branch	Bicket	unknown because extinct
Z	US from Paisley via Canada - Mac Bicket branch	Bicket	Kilmarnock cluster