

# Classification of Becket(t)/Bicket(t) Branches

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This document presents a view about how best to classify the many Becket(t) and Bicket(t) branches that exist in the world today, for the purposes of the Becket(t)/Bicket(t)/Bichan One-Name Study (ONS) which is registered with the Guild of One-Name Studies ([one-name.org](http://one-name.org)). This classification scheme relies in large part on dozens of Y-DNA results from different branches of people carrying one of the surnames in the One-Name Study. It also relies on extensive work which has been done collecting and working on the lineages of people with these surnames who have shared their lineages with us directly or via their on-line publicly available trees.

Anyone who has any of the main variant surnames Becket, Beckett, Bicket, and Bickett (and also Bichan) is considered part of the Becket(t)/Bicket(t)/Bichan One-Name Study, regardless of how that name has been acquired. There are also some others included because of genetic connections.

This document has been produced for the Becket(t)/Bicket(t)/Bichan one-name study at <https://bicket.one-name.net> and <https://bicket.one-name.blog>. Feedback will be appreciated. Please write to [bicket@one-name.org](mailto:bicket@one-name.org).

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The two main classifications of Becket(t)/Bicket(t) branches, and their sub-classifications, are as follows:

**A. Branches with the Becket(t)/Bicket(t) surname.** The following appears to be the easiest way of classifying all of the Becket(t) and Bicket(t) branches we have identified to-date:

1. **Established lineages which can be traced back genetically to the period when surnames were adopted.** There are currently two sub-classifications of these:
  - a. **The Ayrshire tree.** This Scottish tree has a common genetic origin for all of its branches, in approximately 1200, although the surname itself was not established until approximately 1400. The origin of the name is not clear, although one theory is that it derives from Biggart, designating someone who moved to the area from the nearby town of Biggar.
  - b. **The English tree.** This tree appears to originate at the time of William the Conqueror (1066 and later) and was used to designate people who were associated with Bec Abbey in France with which William was closely associated. Because this was a location-based name, there will potentially be many different lineages all with this name, but who are not genetically related within historical timeframes. Incidentally, surnames were not meaningfully established in England until the time of William the Conqueror, so this is almost certainly as far back as the English surname can be taken.

There is no evidence to suggest that there is any genetic connection within historical timeframes between the Ayrshire and English trees. The surnames in each tree appear

to have arisen independently, but converged simply through evolution in usage, including through surname spelling migration between spelling variants.

2. **Lineages which have taken on the surname, but which cannot be traced back genetically to the period when surnames were adopted.** There are currently four sub-classifications of these, two of which at present have only one example each.
  - a. **Enslaved people.** There were slave owners in both the Ayrshire and English trees. It is considered likely that most Black Becketts are descended from or otherwise associated with formerly enslaved individuals. No Black Becketts have been genetically tested yet for the One-Name Study. In some cases Black Beckett branches might be genetically linked to their slave owners, and consequently they would belong directly to either the Ayrshire or English trees. But other Black Beckett branches would probably not be genetically linked, and consequently their genetic trees would reflect their historical origins. The expectation is that there will be many different genetic lineages amongst these Black Becketts. A challenge in DNA researching these lineages, however, is that we appear to have many examples of surname descent through the female line.
  - b. **Surname spelling migration.** Just as there has been surname spelling migration within the Ayrshire and English trees towards the Beckett spelling, there also appears to have been surname spelling migration from unrelated but similar surnames to the Beckett spelling. One example is of an unrelated Bigott lineage which traces itself back to Normandy in France which changed its surname spelling to Beckett in the 1500s. Others which appear to have changed from similar but unrelated names, based on on-line lineages, are Beckwith and Pickett. In some cases it is unclear whether earlier records reflect truly unrelated surnames, or whether they reflect only deviant spellings of the main project surnames. For example, there was a line of Bequettes that used Bouquet and Bequette before changing to Beckett.
  - c. **Official adoption.** We have one case of an Australian Beckett of Aboriginal descent who became a Beckett through adoption. We expect that there are more cases of official adoption. This sub-classification is separate from unofficial adoptions. In particular, unofficial adoptions of closely related individuals were apparently a major factor in the early years of the Ayrshire tree, prior to 1500, possibly driven by high death rates due to the black plague. However, these unofficial adoptions occurred shortly after commoner surnames were established in Ayrshire, and there are no official records of them, so they are not considered part of this sub-classification of official adoptions.
  - d. **Self-adoption.** We know of one recent case where someone has taken on one of the main surname variants, without any genetic or adoptive relationship. There may be other cases.

**B. Branches without the Becket(t)/Bicket(t) surname.** The branch classification above is for lineages using one of the main variants of Becket, Beckett, Bicket, or Bickett. There are also lineages using different surnames which are definitely part of either the Ayrshire or English trees. These include:

1. **Major surname spelling change (Bichan).** The Bichan tree is definitely part of the Ayrshire tree based on Y-DNA, but does not use one of the four main surname variant spellings. It appeared in the Orkney Islands of Scotland in the early 1600s.

2. **Historical adoption (Wylie).** There is one Wylie branch which is definitely part of the Ayrshire tree based on Y-DNA. However, it has had the name Wylie for hundreds of years. It is likely that the surname change occurred around 1500 due to an effective adoption of an Ayrshire tree son by a Wylie stepfather.
3. **Recent illegitimacies.** Illegitimacies in the past hundred years or so have resulted in some people who are genetically in one of the main trees, but who carry different surnames.

#### **Other observations**

1. **Spelling fluidity.** There is considerable fluidity in the spelling of the surname, often within the same branch, and even at the same time. However, the Ayrshire tree (as described above) initially had more spellings with 'i' (e.g., Bicket and Bichet), whereas the English tree (as described above) has always had more spellings with 'e' (e.g., Beket and Becket). Overall, the Beckett spelling predominates today. It is not clear when the Beckett spelling first became an established variant, or how it came to become the predominant variant.
2. **Female lines of descent.** Female lines of descent can greatly complicate things. Y-DNA is the only realistic way of determining branch relationships when historical records are poor or missing, and Y-DNA is just for the male line of descent. Surnames are sometimes passed on through the female line of descent (including as a result of illegitimacies) which is fine for genealogical purposes, but it cannot be confirmed using Y-DNA. In other words, Y-DNA tests are useless if a lineage has passed through the female line at any point. The cases of which we are aware of female lines of descent are all fairly clear-cut, and during fairly recent history. However, if in the future we get unexpected results from a Y-DNA test, they may be the result of an unknown female line of descent at some point in the past. To-date this has not been an issue.