

The
Ancient History
of the Distinguished Surname

**** COFFIN ****

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle related the ancient deeds and exploits of this founding race. It is an ancient manuscript written about 980 by monks describing the Saxon presence in Britain from about the year 380 to the late 10th century.

Research analysts have carefully reviewed ancient manuscripts, such as the Domesday Book, the Ragman Rolls, the Curia Regis Rolls, The Pipe Rolls, the Hearth Rolls, parish registers, baptisms, tax records and other ancient documents and found the first record of the name Coffin, in Devon where they were seated from very ancient times, some say well before the Norman Conquest and the arrival of Duke William at Hastings in 1066 A.D.

Your name, Coffin, occurred in many manuscripts, but from time to time the surname included the spellings Coffin, Coffyn, Colvin, Caffin, Caffyn, Chafen, Chaffine, Cofin, and these spelling versions frequently occurred, even between father and son. For example, it was quite common for a person to be born with one spelling, married with another and for yet another to appear on his or her gravestone. Church officials or scribes spelt the name as it was told to them, phonetically.

Available records indicate that this distinguished family name Coffin is descended originally from this Anglo/Saxon stock. The Saxons were a fair skinned people led by General/Commanders Hengist and Horsa, and settled in England from the Rhine Valley about the year 400 A.D. They settled firstly on the south east coast but by the 5th century they had already begun probing north and westward, slowly advancing to the Welsh border, and during the next four hundred years forced the Ancient Britons back into Wales and Cornwall to the west, and as far north as Cumbria and Southern Scotland. The Angles, on the other hand, occupied the eastern coast, the south folk in Suffolk, the north folk in Norfolk. On the east coast the Angles frequently ravaged north as far as Northumbria and the Scottish border. Anglo/Saxon rule prevailed for five centuries and the nation divided into five separate kingdoms, a high king being elected as supreme ruler. Alfred the Great emerged in the 9th century as the Saxon leader to dispel the Danish invasion. This Viking intrusion, firstly successful, did more to unite England than any other factor. Finally, in 1016, the Danes were massacred and there are few remaining families of this extraction.

England, in 1066, under Harold, was enjoying reasonable stability. However, the Norman invasion from France and their victory at the Battle of Hastings, found many of the vanquished Saxon land owners to be forfeited their land by Duke William and his invading nobles. In 1070, Duke William devastated the north with an army of 40,000 men. Many Saxons and rebellious Norman landowners fled north over the border into Scotland.

As relative peace was restored to the land the family name Coffin emerged as a notable English family name in the county of Devon where they were recorded as a family of great antiquity seated at Porledge with manor and estates in that shire, granted to them by Edward the Confessor, the Saxon King. Within the next century they acquired estates at Alwington in the same county, they also branched into Somerset. By the 15th century they had also branched to Somerset, Lincoln, and Nottingham, and Sir Isaac Coffin became Sheriff of Herefordshire. Notable amongst the family at this time was Sir Isaac Coffin.

Surviving the elements, the plagues and famines for the next two or three centuries the surname Coffin flourished and helped shape the culture of the nation. Later, during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, all Britain was ravaged by internal religious conflict. First Protestantism, then the newly found political fervour of Cromwellianism, and the remnants of the Roman Church rejected all but their adherents, each doctrine fighting for supremacy. These were turbulent times. The conflicts between Church sects, the Crown and political groups all claimed their allegiances and imposed their influence on the population. Clans and families were deliberately broken and disbanded by reigning monarches to reduce their political influence. Many were banished to the north, to Scotland, Ireland or to the Colonies. In particular, many families were freely 'encouraged' to migrate to Ireland. Some were rewarded with grants of lands at prices no one could refuse.

In Ireland they became known as the 'Adventurers for land in Ireland'. Essentially, government sponsored Protestant settlers 'undertook' to keep their faith, being granted lands previously owned by the Catholic Irish for only nominal payment. There is no evidence that the family name migrated to Ireland, but this does not preclude the possibility of their scattered migration to that country.

In the midst of this turmoil the New World beckoned the adventurous. They migrated, some voluntarily from Ireland, but mostly directly from England, their home territories. Some also moved to the European continent. Members of the family name Coffin sailed aboard the armada of small sailing ships known as the 'White Sails' which plied the stormy Atlantic. They were overcrowded ships, pestilence ridden, sometimes 30% to 40% of the passenger list never reaching their destination, dying from illness and the elements, many being buried at sea.

Amongst the pioneer settlers in North America which could be considered a kinsman of the surname Coffin, or a variable spelling of that family name was Francis Coffin who settled in Virginia in 1635; Anne Coffin settled in Virginia in 1650. The Coffins being seafaring people were probably amongst the first families in North America, coming largely from the branch of Collingswell. Tristram Coffyn settled in Boston in 1642, and was the scion of one of the distinguished families of the U.S.A. James Coffyn held Magdalen island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and was later granted lands in Upper Canada.

From the overcrowded settlements of the east coast ports many settlers looked westward, and joined the wagon trains to the prairies or to the west coast. During the American War of Independence, many crown loyalists made their way north to Canada, becoming known as the United Empire Loyalists. They were granted equivalent lands along the banks of the St. Lawrence River and in the Niagara Peninsula. Contemporaries of this surname, Coffin, include many distinguished contributors, Cyril Coffin, Parliamentary Undersecretary.

During the course of our research we also determined the many Coat of Arms granted to different branches of the family name.

The most ancient grant of a Coat of Arms found was;
Blue with gold crosses between three gold circles.

The Crest is;

A blue bird

The ancient family motto for this distinguished name is;
"Ex Stant Recte Factis Proemia"

Grandfather George Coffin - Grandmother Eleanor Coffin

Father George Coffin - Mother Ada Coffin

Great Grandfather Robert Coffin - Great Grandmother Francis Coffin (Francis Bendal)