

THE TREGEAR FAMILY OF CORNWALL, ENGLAND

Researched and written by David Curtis

Dedicated to Robert Williams who did the genealogical research on the Tregear line and also to Alfred Curtis for the stories.

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PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

The Tregear Family united with the Curtis Family on May 4, 1861, when Thomas Curtis married Louisa Tucker, whose parents were Mary Phillis Tregear and William Tucker. The Tregear history in this account runs from 1544 to 1861.

PART 2 – HISTORY OF TREGEAR FAMILY, 1607-1866, AND REGIONS WHERE THEY RESIDED

The earliest record of the surname Tregear is the burial date of Agnes Tregear, widow of Robert, in 1544 in St. Columb Major, a town roughly in the center of Cornwall.

In 1607, we have the first documented evidence that a member of our Tregear Family was living in Cornwall. Keverne and Margaret Tregear were married on that date at Paul Parish. As many of Keverne's descendants were farmers, he was most likely one too.

The origin of our Tregear Family was Northern France. However, assuming that the emigration of our Tregear Family from France to Cornwall occurred before the birth of Keverne and that he was living at St. Paul Parish at the time, he was witness to the attack and burning of the Village of Paul and its church in 1595 by Spanish raiders unhappy with Queen Elizabeth. Even though he was probably around twelve at the time, the raid must have left an indelible impression on him.

Church parish boundaries cover the entire area of Cornwall. The parishes were named after Cornish saints who spread the faith to

the rest of Britain. Each parish was responsible for recording the christenings, marriages and burials of its parishioners.

The Tregear name is Celtic in origin. The first syllable “Tre” means homestead and “Gear” means fortress. Together, they mean homestead by the fortress. All of the seven Tregear place names in Cornwall are near iron-age Celtic forts. In the 11th century, when people started using surnames to identify themselves, many of the Cornish chose ones that identified the location of their houses.

Keverne seems an odd name for a man except for the fact the St. Keverne is a village and civil parish in the Kerrier district of Cornwall, on the coast of the Lizard Peninsula, about ten miles ESE of Helston. It is famous for the Cornish Rebellion of 1497 against high taxes imposed by King Edward VII to finance his wars against the Scots, started there. The march ended in a crushing defeat by the King’s forces at Blackheath.

In the 6th or 7th century AD, Kieran or Kev Ran, a Christian, came to live in the area from the district of Kerry, Ireland. He built a hut-style church that was later replaced by a more substantial building that survived the Angle-Saxon invasion that occurred in the 9th century. Keverne Parish was named after him.

Paul Parish is a village that is contained within the boundaries of the civil parish of Penzance. The church was founded in 490 by Paul Aurelian, a Welsh saint, founder of the cathedral at Saint-Pol-de-Leon in Brittany, France. Paul is the parish church of Mousehole. It is also notable for being the home of Dolly Pentreath, who died in 1777. Dolly is famous for having been the last person who spoke only Cornish and not English. What this seems to indicate is that in 1607, at the time of the marriage of Keverne and Margaret Tregear, other people must have been speaking Cornish in Paul Parish too.

Keverne died in St. Just on September 15, 1656, and his wife Margaret died at the same place on August 11, 1662.

St. Just is a town and civil parish in the district of Penwith. The most westerly town in England, it is on the coast, about eight miles west of Penzance and the same distance from Land’s end. It borders Sancreed, another parish mentioned in the Curtis history, on the east. It is one of the most ancient mining districts in Cornwall and in the 19th century, one of the most important for copper and tin. The name

is derived from Justus, or Saint Just, who was sent to England by Pope Gregory in 596 AD to convert the Saxons.

Both Keverne and Margaret were alive at the time when Cornish soldiers fought for the Royalist cause in the first English Civil Wars of 1642-1646, which pitted the supporters of King Charles I against the supporters of the Parliament. Some of the battles were waged in Cornwall, culminating in the Royalists' defeat, near Truro, in 1645.

Keverne and Margaret had eight children (four boys and four girls). Their youngest son, James Tregear, born sometime after 1624, married Jane Warne on October 19, 1650. At the time of the Civil War of 1642-1646, James and Jane were probably teenagers. James died on October 16, 1696 at St. Just and his wife Jane died April 12, 1693, at the same place.

They were alive in 1688 when Bishop Trelawny was tried and acquitted for opposing the King's granting tolerance of the Catholics as a first step in granting religious freedom. Trelawny was later immortalized in the Cornish anthem, "The Son of the Western Men." They also weathered the Great Plague that reached West Cornwall in 1667.

James and Jane had six children, all boys. Their fourth son, James Tregear, born in Gulval in 1661, was in his late twenties when the above two events took place. James married a woman by the name of Phillis in 1691.

Gulval is a village overlooking Mount's Bay, one mile north of Penzance. The town is thought to be named after St. Wolvela (Replacing the "W" with a "G" is commonly done.), who was a little-known female saint. Another possibility is that it was named after St. Gudwal, a monk of British origin who lived in Brittany. The church dates back to the 14th century.

James and Phillis had five children (three girls and two boys). Their second child, James, was christened on June 30, 1695. His future wife, Mary Greenfield, was christened six weeks later at St. Just on August 2nd. They were married in 1718.

James was a church warden of the parish of St. Just in 1741 when one of the bells in the church tower was recast. The bell is inscribed "St. Just bell cast at St. Erth, 1741. So Bless King George.

James Reynolds, James Tregere and Admiral Vernon, Ch. Wardens.” Probably Admiral Vernon was named an honorary church warden for that year because of his victories in the West Indies at that time.

Mary Greenfield Tregear died at the age of seventy-five on December 10, 1770. There is no record of when her husband died, but his death couldn't have occurred earlier than 1742 since that was the birth-year of their last child.

Mary Greenfield was forty-eight when, in 1743, John Wesley made his first of forty visits to Cornwall to promote Methodism. Therefore, she could have very well been among those swept up in the religious fervor of the times. Wesley preached compassion to the very receptive poverty-stricken miners who were, in large part, being neglected by the Church of England. Since Wesley was not allowed to preach in the pulpits of the established church, he delivered his sermons in the fields and streets. His following became immense and eventually every town erected a Methodist chapel.

James and Mary had nine children (six boys and three girls). Two of the sons, (Their first child James and fifth child Francis) had children (John and Honour) who married each other despite their being first cousins.

James and Mary's oldest child James Tregear was christened November 21, 1719. He married Honor Chenals on January 17, 1746, at St. Just. Honor was christened on September 28, 1723. Honor died on May 31, 1807, at St. Just. No record has been found of when James died, but it could not have been later than 1764 since that was the birth year of their last child. James and Honor had ten children (six girls and four boys).

James and Mary's fifth child Francis Tregear was christened January 22, 1726, at St. Just. He married Blanche Harvey on February 23, 1754, at Sancreed.

Sancreed Parish is named after the holy place upon which the church now stands. A legend exists that St. Sancreed killed his father by accident. To atone for it, he lived as a swineherd. There were two St. Sancreeds (or Credans), though, and there is confusion as to which one of them the church is dedicated, the disciple of St. Petrock or the son of Illadham. The Parish is in the center of the

Land's End Peninsula. It is bounded on the north by St. Just and on the south by Paul.

Blanch's parents were Richard Harvey and Blanch Lanyon. Blanch died on February 28, 1804, at St. Just. No record has been found for the death of Francis Tregear, but it could not have been later than 1764 since that was the birth year of their last child.

Both of these couples (James & Honor and Francis & Blanche) were fortunate to live during the hey-day of Cornish mining and industry. Like the generation before them, they experienced John Wesley's evangelizing. At least Honor Chenhals Tregear and Blanch Harvey Tregear were around in 1777 at the death of Dolly Pentreath, marking the end of the original spoken Cornish Language. In 1752, the Gregorian Calendar was introduced, replacing the Julian Calendar.

Francis and Blanche had five children (four boys and one girl). Their youngest child John, and Honour, who was the ninth child of James and Honor Tregear, married on January 15, 1791, at St. Just. John was christened on April 8, 1764, and Honour on August 30, 1761. Honour died July 13, 1827. No record has been found for the death of John Tregear, but it could not have been later than 1804 since that was the birth year of their last child. When they were alive, Cornish mining was booming too. The miners know-how and engineering was the best in the world. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 marked the beginning of the emigration of Cornish miners for the purpose of exporting their technology and expertise to the rest of the world.

John and Honour had six children (four boys and two girls). Their youngest child Mary Phillis Tregear, was born on March 26, 1804, at St. Erth Parish and christened on June 2, 1805, at the same place.

St. Erth is a village and civil parish in the Penwith district of Cornwall. The parish shares boundaries with St. Hilary to the south and district of Kerrier to the east. The village takes its name from Saint Erc, one of the many Irish saints who brought Christianity to Cornwall in the Dark Ages. The current church of St. Erth was built around 1215, though an older church is said to have stood on St. Erth Hill overlooking the village.

Mary Phillis's future husband, William Tucker, was christened on June 10, 1810. They married March 27, 1834, at St. Hilary Parish.

St. Hilary village and civil parish is located five miles east of the City of Penzance. This former little mining village of granite cottages lies northeast of Marazion. It is bounded on the north by the Parish of St. Erth and on the east by Breage and Germoe. Prussia Cove in Mount's Bay is located within its boundaries. The cove played an important role in smuggling in the 18th century. The village is named after the dedication of the local church of St. Hilary of Poitiers, a 4th century bishop. Its original 13th century church burnt down in 1853. The area abounded in mines, the most remarkable being Wheal Fortune.

The register of the marriage of William and Mary Phillis is, as follows:

William Tucker, of this parish, bachelor, and Mary Phyllis of this parish, spinster, were married in this church by Banns this twenty-seventh day of March in this year one-thousand eight-hundred and thirty-four by me Thomas Taller, the bride, groom and witnesses made marks instead of signatures.



William Tucker

William Tucker's parents were Henry and Jane Tucker, who hailed from Brittany, France. He also had a sister, Jane (c. 1817). William was a hearty soul. The only day he was sick in his life was the day he died. He lived to be 103 years old. Mary Phillis died one day after her husband at the age of 105.

William's mother was from Brittany, France. The Tucker surname, with the meaning of cloth weaver, is of Saxon origins. At the time of daughter Louisa's christening, William was a laborer. But he was also a fisherman and ship pilot in the Coast Guard. When he was in his twenties, his jet-black hair turned instantly white one day. Two different versions exist of why it happened, though. The first account says that it was a result of a harrowing and failed attempt to save drowning people. The other says, when he was fishing, he witnessed a meteor of stars fall into the sea. Apparently, though, the change to white hair was so dramatic and sudden his family did not recognize him.

Mary Phillis and William lived during a time (1805-1913) of great happenings in Cornwall, such as the start of the great emigration of Cornish miners to mines in all corners of the world.

They witnessed the Hungry Forties (1845-1851) in England, a period of poor harvests that led to food riots, the death of over twenty percent (1.2 million) of the population and mass emigration to the colonies. In 1848, the average age of death was twenty-eight. Another factor involved in the mortality rate was the very few families had privies. Epidemics of cholera and small pox appeared in West Cornwall in 1849-1850.

Another catastrophe William and Mary Phillis experienced was the exodus of workers from Cornwall in 1866 due to tin replacing copper as the most important material.

William and Mary Phillis had four children (three girls and one boy). The third child Louisa, by marrying Thomas Curtis, joined into this Curtis Family history. Louisa was born April 14, 1839. She was christened June 9, 1839, at St. Hilary Parish. Louisa's brothers and sisters were William Henry (c.1835), Emily (c.1837) and Grace (b. 1843).

When Louisa Tucker married Thomas Curtis the families of Tregear, Tucker and Curtis merged.