

The OWSLEY FAMILIES

of Southwest Somerset and Adjoining Dorset

Volume 1: A Genealogical Study, c. 1530 – 1812

Compiled from parish registers of seventeen parishes across
Somerset and Dorset, principally Wootton Fitzpaine, Thorncombe,
Cricket St Thomas, Winsham, Crewkerne, and Misterton,
with an allied line at Wells St Cuthbert and Croscombe.

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This project consists of four volumes:

Volume 1: A Genealogical Study, c. 1530 – 1812

Volume 2: Source Documents

Volume 3: Parish Record Book

Volume 4: Master Workbook

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Preface

This study traces the Owsley family — recorded under a wide range of spellings including Owsley, Ousley, Ously, Owseley, Owsly, Owesly, Owesely, Ouseley, and Housley — across seventeen parishes straddling the Somerset–Dorset border between roughly 1530 and 1812. It draws on baptism, marriage, and burial entries compiled parish by parish, on a set of original wills and probate inventories, and on a systematic effort to reconnect individuals who, in the underlying records, had been assigned more than one identity: once as the subject of their own baptism or burial, and again as an unlinked placeholder parent named on a child's entry.

Two kinds of work sit side by side in what follows. The first is mechanical: normalizing spelling variants of both surnames and first names (including Latin baptismal forms such as Roberti, Gulielmi, and Johannis), and using the resulting clusters to identify where scattered entries belong to a single individual. The second is interpretive: weighing age, geography, and naming custom against one another to propose specific parent-child and husband-wife relationships where the register does not state them outright.

Because these two kinds of finding carry very different weight, every relationship proposed in this book is marked with a confidence level: High, where a record states the relationship directly; Medium-High or Medium, where the case rests on a strong combination of age, geography, and naming pattern with no competing candidate; and Low, where the reasoning is suggestive but a genuine alternative cannot be ruled out. Where a hypothesis depends on more than one uncertain link joined together, that is stated plainly rather than allowed to read as more settled than it is.

The result is not a single unbroken pedigree. Despite a shared surname and a strikingly tight geographic cluster, no document available for this study proves a common ancestor linking every branch before the parish registers begin. What follows surveys every parish's Owsley households evenhandedly, family by family, on equal terms.

This project began as an effort to trace the ancestry of Richard Housley, who married Deborah Bull in 1763. An ancestral path leading to Cricket St Thomas had been assembled, but it was not without open questions about its validity. To bolster confidence in that path, a wider research effort into Owsley families across southwest Somerset was undertaken -- work that ultimately pointed to a more likely ancestral path running through Wootton Fitzpaine instead.

That effort gathered a great many Owsley records, most of which turned out not to belong to Richard Housley's own direct line. Rather than set aside information gathered at real effort, it seemed worthwhile to bring it together in a form that other researchers of Owsley families in this part of England might find useful in its own right. This book is the result.

This study was carried out with the help of the AI assistant Claude, built by Anthropic. Records gathered by human research were entered into a spreadsheet, and Claude was used to do the heavy work of identifying relationships and maintaining the results as the spreadsheet grew. Claude's own prompts, in turn, guided further human research to strengthen the source material and test the family connections it proposed; Claude was then used to write up these findings into the books presented here. Using AI for a study like this carries real risks, including the temptation to rely on it too heavily, and effort was made throughout to review its logic and conclusions for accuracy. On the whole, AI was an enormous time saver, and it is doubtful this project would have been manageable

without it -- but as Anthropic itself states, Claude is AI and can make mistakes. Readers should keep that in mind.

Part 1: The World They Lived In

Before the pedigree begins, it is worth pausing on the place and the times, because the records in this book brush against several of the largest events in West Country history — and knowing the backdrop changes how some of them read.

The land and the living

The seventeen parishes of this study sit in a tight cluster where Somerset, Dorset, and Devon meet — rolling dairy and mixed-farming country of small fields, apple orchards, and sheep on the higher ground, with most of the family's villages lying within a single day's walk of one another. The Owsleys of these records were almost certainly husbandmen and yeomen: renting or holding smallish farms by copyhold from a manor, keeping cattle and sheep, growing barley and wheat, their rights and obligations recorded in the lord's court rolls. The 1597 survey of the Manor of Crewkerne that fixed John Owsley's birth year is exactly such a document. Ema Owsle's estate of thirty-one pounds at her death in 1592 marks the family as comfortable but not gentry — a solid yeoman household, with enough to leave meaningful legacies to four children and a residue besides.

Cloth, above everything

This corner of Somerset was textile country. Crewkerne and Chard were serious cloth towns — Crewkerne later famous for sailcloth, Chard for lace and woollens, Ilminster likewise — and flax and hemp grew locally to feed the trade. Many farming families spun or wove for a second income. The wool trade mattered so much to the national economy that Parliament passed the Burying in Woollen Acts of 1666–1680, requiring every corpse in England to be buried in English wool, with a sworn affidavit from a relative to prove it. That piece of trade protectionism, three centuries on, is what allowed this study to tell Thorncombe's several Joan Fowlers apart (Chapter Three) — the oaths survive where the distinctions between the women themselves do not.

Disease and the hard years

John Owsle Sr. and Ema dying three weeks apart in the late summer of 1592 is very much of its time: the early 1590s brought epidemic disease, and were followed by the catastrophic harvest failures of 1594–1597, among the hungriest years in English history. Plague revisited the West Country periodically thereafter. The infant deaths scattered through these records — a William Owsley buried in 1605, an Amelia Owsley dead at one, a John Owsley dead at eight months — reflect a world in which perhaps one child in five did not live to see a fifth birthday. It is also why remarriage came so quickly and so often, a pattern that appears more than once in this book: a household of this period simply could not run without two adults, and a widowed parent with young children was expected to remarry, sometimes within months.

War in their villages

During the Civil War of the 1640s, Somerset was fought over hard, and armies moved along the very roads linking these parishes. But the larger local event came a generation later. In June 1685 the Duke of Monmouth landed at Lyme Regis — about ten miles from Thorncombe — and marched his growing rebel army through Chard and Ilminster on the way to defeat at Sedgemoor. The

retribution that followed, Judge Jeffreys' 'Bloody Assizes,' saw hundreds of local men hanged or transported, with executions carried out in market towns across exactly this area, Chard and Crewkerne among them. The Owsleys of that generation — Richard Ously's young household in Thorncombe, the Samuell and William households — lived through armies passing, neighbours recruited, and gibbets in the market squares. Whether any Owsley marched with Monmouth these records cannot say; that no family in these parishes was untouched by that summer is certain.

Religion framed everything

The earliest records in this study, from the 1550s and 1560s, begin just as Elizabeth's Protestant settlement was taking hold — parish registers were themselves a Tudor innovation, ordered kept from 1538, which is why almost nothing survives before that decade anywhere in England. The region later leaned Puritan, and after 1660, nonconformist; Chard and Ilminster both carried strong dissenting congregations. Rev. William Owsley's fifty-four years as vicar of Crewkerne (Chapter Four) span nearly the whole arc from Elizabethan settlement to the eve of the Civil War. And the Barbary ransom of young Thomas Owsley in 1679 is genuine period colour rather than family legend: Algerine corsairs raided English shipping and even West Country coastal villages throughout the century, and parishes routinely took up collections to redeem captives. Thomas was one of thousands so ransomed.

Why people moved — and how far

The short hops documented throughout this book — Wootton Fitzpaine to Thorncombe, Cricket St Thomas to Winsham, Misterton's children marrying into adjoining parishes — are textbook for the period: most rural people married within about five miles of home, often meeting at the market towns of Chard and Crewkerne that served this whole cluster. Richard Ousley's forty-five-mile move to Wells (Chapter Five) is the outlier, but Wells was a cathedral city with work to offer, and by the 1750s roads and mobility were improving. And Thomas Owsley's emigration to Virginia around 1677 fits its era's push factors exactly: a younger son of a country clergyman, no land coming to him, an economy squeezed after the Restoration, and a colony actively recruiting.

Part 2: The Parishes and Their Families

The chapters that follow survey every Owsley household documented across this study's core seventeen parishes, parish by parish, on equal terms. No one family here is singled out as more central than another; what follows is this whole area's documented Owsley presence, gathered and told evenhandedly, parish by parish.

The Cricket St Thomas and Winsham Owsleys, described in the next two chapters, were at one point considered a candidate link to another documented family in this collection, on the strength of a single Richard whose age alone made a later marriage chronologically possible. That candidate link was not ultimately borne out. These two chapters stand on their own considerable merits regardless: this collection's closest and best-documented family grouping outside Wootton Fitzpaine.

Chapter One: Cricket St Thomas

Cricket St Thomas holds this study's earliest well-documented Owsley household, and a small register — thirty-seven surviving entries, 1565 to 1638 — that preserves four family groups in all.

John Owsley and the founding generation

Between 1565 and 1586, eight entries appear in the Cricket St Thomas register bearing the Owsley surname: the baptisms of Christopher (1565), Agnes (1567), Robert (1569), Edward (1570), Thomas (1580), Michael (1584), and Joane (1586), and, sitting in the middle of that run, the burial of a John Owsley on 10 October 1578. None of the seven baptisms names a parent — unremarkable for a register this early — but the dates themselves tell a more specific story than they first appear to.

The first four children were all born within a tight five years, 1565 to 1570 — an entirely ordinary run for one couple. John died in 1578, partway through what would otherwise read as a single, continuous family. The last three children were not born until 1580, 1584, and 1586 — two, six, and eight years after his death. A man cannot father a child from the grave, and so the evidence points to two households where it once seemed to describe one: John Owsley very likely fathered Christopher, Agnes, Robert, and Edward, while Thomas, Michael, and Joane belong to a second, unresolved chapter of the family's story — perhaps a widow's second marriage, quite possibly to a relative bearing the same surname, or perhaps an entirely separate household that happened to share the parish and the name.

Robert, baptized 12 April 1569 and very probably John's son, appears nowhere else in this parish's surviving records — no marriage, no burial — suggestive of a young man who left to build his life elsewhere; his own household is traced fully in Chapter Two. His elder brother Christopher stayed, and married Margaret Bull in the same parish in 1590, at twenty-five. Agnes, baptized 1567, most likely died in nearby Crewkerne in 1629, age 62, having married out of the parish under a surname this study has not identified.

A speculative note on origins before 1560

Several figures in this family's story appear to belong to roughly the same generation, born approximately 1530–1540, without any document yet found to connect them to one another. Roger Owseley married Catherine Langdon at Winsham in 1562 — the earliest dated Owsley record found in this entire study, and very likely a brother or cousin of this John, rather than his son; his own household is discussed in Chapter Two. A newly found will has since resolved part of this picture directly: William Owseley of Chillington, dated 1558, names a brother Roger very likely to be this same man, and a sister Joane, married to a tanner of Ilminster named Robert Marshall. Chillington sits three or four miles from Cricket St Thomas.

A separate, better-documented figure sits nearby in time and geography: John Owsley Sr. of Misterton, buried 1592, whose son Rev. William served as vicar of Crewkerne (Chapter Four). Born perhaps 1515–1525, he predates Roger and John by a full generation — old enough to be their father rather than their brother. Crewkerne itself contributes a fourth thread: an untraced elder William, documented only as the father of two Crewkerne women of this generation and never identified further (Chapter Three). An earlier edition of this note had connected that elder William to Chillington's own William; a clearer reading of the document behind that connection has since withdrawn it, and the Crewkerne William remains a genuinely separate, unidentified man. Whether any of these four households are actually

related remains unproven — but Chillington, Misterton, Crewkerne, and Cricket St Thomas sit close enough together that the possibility is a real one, worth keeping in view rather than treating as settled either way.

Confidence: John Owsley as father of Christopher, Agnes, Robert, and Edward — Medium. The relationship between Roger and John is speculative and not confidence-rated.

Thomas Owsley and Eleanor

Thomas (bap.1580) m. Eleanor/Ellen (d.1637) -- 8 children

- |-- William (buried 1605, infancy)
- |-- Phillipe (bap.1606)
- |-- John (bap.1607) -- see below
- |-- Mary (bap.1609)
- |-- William (bap.1612)
- |-- Elizabeth (bap.1614)
- |-- Michael (bap.1617)
- |__ Roger (d.1634)

Thomas, baptized in 1580 — one of the three younger founding siblings whose own parentage remains unresolved — married a woman named Eleanor, or Ellen; her name appears in both forms across two records that plainly describe the same person, the second explicitly naming her as Thomas's spouse.

The couple were raising a family from at least 1605: a first son William, who did not survive infancy; Phillipe (1606); John (1607, discussed below); Mary (1609); a second William (1612, the name reused after the first son's death); Elizabeth (1614); Michael (1617, presumably named for his uncle); and Roger, whose own baptism does not survive but whose 1634 burial names both parents. Eleanor herself was buried in 1637. A marriage between Elizabeth and a Christopher Starke in 1630, when she would have been sixteen, is a plausible but not certain match.

The 1607 baptism of John deserves particular attention: at twenty-six in 1633, he fits very well as the father of Joan, Mary, and John discussed below — which would make Thomas not simply an ancestor of this branch, but grandfather to it as well.

Henry Owsley and Alice Brooke

Henry [Owsley] m. Alice Brooke, 1600 (d.1623)

- |-- Roger (bap.1616)
- |-- Alice (bap.1620)
- |__ [Thomas Wotton or Owsley, bap.1608 -- surname uncertain]

No baptism survives for Henry. Ancestry's register images had a gap covering 1588–1612 that would have included a plausible birth window for him; findmypast's subsequent index of these same years turned up several other Cricket St Thomas baptisms, but none for Henry, so his own baptism remains simply unfound rather than presumed lost in a gap. Henry married Alice Brooke in Cricket St Thomas on 22 February 1600, his first dated record of any kind. Alice was buried in 1623, three years after their daughter Alice's baptism; the marriage record supplies her maiden surname.

Their children were Roger (1616) and Alice (1620, named for her mother). A third possible child, recorded ambiguously as 'Thomas Wotton or Owsley' in 1608 — the parish clerk himself was apparently unsure of the surname — would fit neatly between the other two if the Owsley reading is correct, though this is held at lower confidence than the rest of the family.

John Owsley and Agnes

John [Owsley, probably Thomas's son above] m. Agnes

| -- Joan (bap.1633)

| -- Mary (bap.1635)

| — John (bap.1637)

Likely the John baptized to Thomas in 1607, discussed above. His wife, Agnes, appears consistently across three children's records — Joan (1633), Mary (1635), and John (1637) — but she is not the same Agnes baptized among the founding generation in 1567, who would have been sixty-six to seventy at these births. The two women share only a name, a useful caution against assuming every repeated name in these records marks the same person.

Untraced households

A Margaret Owsley, named as mother when her daughter Mary married John Baker in 1636 and buried herself two years later, and an Elizabeth Owsley whose infant son was buried in 1623, both represent further households in this parish not connected to any of the three above. Two further marriages remain equally unplaced: John Owsley to Margaret Williams in 1582, and Rawling Owsley (a name very possibly garbled in transcription) to John Lorde in 1584 — neither ties to any family already documented here, though both may belong to an earlier generation whose baptisms fall outside the surviving register.

Thomas's and Henry's own baptisms have still not turned up, even with findmypast's index now covering the years Ancestry's photographed register once skipped — so their absence is better read as unfound rather than sitting in a known gap. The same is true of John's parentage and the identities behind the two unplaced 1582/1584 marriages: open questions, but no longer ones with an obvious unsearched record behind them.

Chapter Two: Winsham

Winsham holds the earliest dated Owsley record in this entire study — Roger Owseley's marriage to Catherine Langdon in 1562 — and, a generation on, the household of Robert Owsley of Cricket St Thomas, who settled here and founded a line traced across four generations before the trail runs out.

Roger Owseley

Roger married Catherine Langdon at Winsham in 1562. No further record of him survives in this parish — no baptism, no burial, no children — and since Tudor weddings were customarily held in the bride's own parish, Catherine was very likely the Winsham native, with Roger himself possibly resident elsewhere. He is very likely the brother named in William Owseley of Chillington's 1558 will (Chapter One), and one of two Owseley men who stood witness to a neighbor's will at Ilminster in 1576.

Robert Owsley and Anna Teate

Robert Owsley, baptized at Cricket St Thomas in 1569, married Anna Teaste at Winsham on 23 October 1600. Anna had been baptized in this parish on 30 April 1577, the daughter of Joanis Teate, making her about twenty-three at her wedding; Robert, if he is indeed Cricket St Thomas's Robert, would have been thirty-one, a perfectly ordinary age for a groom of the period. No other Robert Owsley baptism survives anywhere in the seventeen parishes covered by this study that could plausibly fit this marriage, and Winsham and Cricket St Thomas are directly adjoining parishes — about as strong a case as circumstantial evidence can make for an identification no single document states outright.

Robert and Anna's children were baptized at Winsham across the following decade: Catherina in 1601, who did not survive infancy; Robert junior in 1602, who lived to thirty-six; and Richard, baptized 11 January 1609, whose own baptismal entry names his father directly as Roberti Owsley — the Latin genitive form of Robert, and the first entirely secure link in this chapter, a name stated on the record rather than reconstructed from it.

Confidence: Robert of Cricket St Thomas as the Winsham groom — Medium-High. Robert as father of Richard (bap. 1609) — High, stated directly on the record.

Richard Owsely and Joane Bond

Richard, baptized in January 1609, married Joane Bond at Winsham on 4 April 1632, at the age of twenty-three. Their first child, also named Richard, was baptized on 29 July of that same year — a gap of under four months between the wedding and the birth, too short for the child to have been conceived after the marriage took place. Joane was very probably already carrying him when she and Richard wed, an unremarkable, well-documented pattern of the period: something close to a quarter of first births in seventeenth-century parish registers fall within eight or nine months of the marriage that preceded them.

Three more children followed: Anne in 1633, who lived to thirty-four; Joane in 1639, who died at only two years old; and Robert in 1640, who — on the evidence of a matching burial many miles

away — appears to have moved on to a neighboring parish, following a pattern this family had already shown once.

A further burial record deserves a careful word here, since it very nearly created a false picture. A Richard Owsley burial dated 12 November 1632 at first appeared to match this same man's own baptism — which would have meant he died the very year he married and started a family, plainly impossible, since his children continue appearing through 1640. Once his marriage and the span of his children's baptisms were laid alongside one another, it became clear that 1632 burial must belong to an entirely different, unidentified Richard Owsley who happened to share both the name and the rough era.

Confidence: Richard (bap. 1609) as father of Richard junior (bap. 1632) — High, stated directly on the record.

Richard junior

Richard junior, baptized in 1632, was buried at Winsham on 14 August 1688, aged fifty-six — a burial that at first glance appears to match his own father's baptism (1609), and would be easy to misattribute for exactly that reason; the arithmetic settles it, fifty-six years measured from 1632, not from 1609. No marriage or children have been identified for him within this parish's surviving records.

The wider Winsham family

Beyond this household, Winsham's register preserves a smaller, side branch. An untraced elder Henry Owseley appears as father of a Henricus baptized in 1601; this younger Henricus married Joane Marit in 1634 and died in 1639 at thirty-eight, with no children identified. A number of further Winsham individuals have had their lifespans confirmed through matching baptism to burial — Christopher Owseley (1619–1659), Elizabeth Owesly (1668–1724), and a Heneri Owsley who died as a small child in 1712 — without yet being placed within a specific household.

Chapter Three: Crewkerne — William Owsley and Florence Hutchins

William Owsley, GENTLEMAN, m. Florence Hutchins, 1580 -- d. buried 4 May 1620

|-- Elizabeth (bap.1582) -- m. Thomas Knyghte, 1618

|-- Willia jr (bap. & buried 1584)

|__ Edward (bap.1585) m. Joane Travers, 1615 -- d.1627

|-- [infant] (d.1616)

|-- Marie (bap.1617)

|-- Samuel (bap.1619)

|__ Joane (d.1625)

William married Florence Hutchins in Crewkerne on 6 June 1580. Elizabeth was baptized two years later, in 1582, and married Thomas Knyghte in 1618; an infant son, also William, was baptized and buried within 1584; and Edward was baptized in 1585.

Elizabeth's husband is corrected here from an earlier reading of 'Thomas King': a published transcription of the parish's marriage register, matching the date exactly (4 May 1618), gives the groom's name as Thomas Knyghte.

A published transcription of the parish's marriage register adds a further, likely detail: its oldest surviving volume, a parchment copy of an earlier paper original, was certified on each page by the ministers and churchwardens then in office, and names 'Willm Owsley' as churchwarden, alongside John Dawbeny, up to 1598. By then William would have been married eighteen years — a natural age and standing for a churchwarden — and this gives him his first documented civic role in the parish, a plausible staging post between his 1580 marriage and his eventual style of 'gentleman' at his death. No document states outright that the warden and this William are the same man.

William made his own will on 24 April 1620, styling himself gentleman, and was buried ten days later. The will confirms wife Florence as executrix, son Edward, Edward's wife Joane, and their children Mary and Samuel, and adds real texture: a dwelling house, silver plate, tenants, and strips of arable in Crewkerne's north and west fields. Its very first bequest, though, reaches somewhere unexpected: a silver beaker to 'William, the son of George Owsley' — very likely the William baptized at Thorncombe in 1618, son of George Owsley and Elizabeth Crabbe, twenty-one months old when his grandfather (or great-uncle — the will's own wording leaves the exact relationship open) remembered him. It is the first document found anywhere in this study to connect the Crewkerne family directly to Thorncombe.

Edward, baptized in 1585, married Joane Travers in Crewkerne on 17 January 1615, at thirty; two more of his children — Marie (1617) and Samuel (1619) — join the infant (1616) and Joane (1625) already known. Edward died in 1627 at forty-two. A Joane Owsley who married John Bank in 1620 has been proposed as possibly another daughter of this household, but she appears nowhere in William's will, an unusual omission for an unmarried daughter still owed a portion, and the identification should be treated with real doubt.

Katheryne, and an untraced elder William

The earliest Owsley record in this parish — Katheryne, buried in 1575 — has long presented a problem: her burial names her father as William Owsley, but that is five years before this chapter's own William married Florence Hutchins, so she could not have been their daughter. An earlier edition of this chapter resolved the puzzle by connecting her instead to William Owseley of

Chillington, four miles away, whose 1558 will left bullocks to children of a Thomas Chubb — a name that seemed to match legacies in Katheryne's own will. A clearer image of that will, and a second, independent transcription, have since shown this was a misreading: her siblings are surnamed Stubbe, not Chubb, and the Chillington connection does not hold.

What her will says plainly, read correctly, is this: her home was Crewkerne, and her whole estate and sole executorship pass to 'my brother William Owsley of Crewkerne' — almost certainly this chapter's own William, ten years before his marriage to Florence. The most natural reading of both facts together — her burial naming her father as William, her will naming her brother as William — is that Katheryne's father was an earlier, untraced William Owsley, active in Crewkerne from at least the 1560s, and that this chapter's own William was his son, carrying his father's name forward. Katheryne, on this reading, is not Chillington's daughter but this William's own sister.

An earlier Joan

A separate record shows a Joan Ously marrying John Baker in Crewkerne on 3 February 1567 — the earliest dated Owsley event in this parish, and among the earliest in this entire study. She is plausibly the same Joan Owsley whose burial, as a widow, was already documented here in 1592; a twenty-five-year marriage ending in widowhood is an entirely ordinary shape for a life in this period. Her father is named only as 'William' — very possibly the same untraced elder William now identified as Katheryne's own father, which would make Joan a third sibling in the same generation, though this is not confirmed by any document found so far.

Chapter Four: Misterton — the Family Resolved, and a Line to America

Misterton was, for a time, the one genuinely unresolved puzzle in this entire study: two clusters of children sharing a father's name, spanning thirty years, that could not confidently be assigned to one man or two. A published external genealogy — *The Owsleys of Somersetshire, England* (Bodine, 2nd ed. 2010), drawing on will abstracts and Somerset Record Office documents — resolved it, and opened up a documented line all the way to the family's American emigrants and the modern Y-DNA project that traces them.

John Owsley Sr. (buried 1592) m. Ema (buried 1592)

- |-- John (b.1547) m. Agnes Farnham, 1589 -- see below
- |-- Rev. William 'the elder' (1550-1630) -- vicar of Crewkerne, unmarried
- |-- Joan -- m. John Slade, Rector of South Perrott, 1567/68
- |-- Agnes -- m. Christopher Minterne, 1574
- |-- William 'the younger' (c.1555/60-1593) -- to Axminster, Devon
- |-- Elizabeth -- m. John Greenway, living 1627
- |__ Richard (bap.1564)

John (b.1547) m. Agnes Farnham, 1589 -- ONE household, not two

Elizabeth (1589), Joan (1592), Christopher (1594), John (1595, d.1595),
Catherine (1598), Maria (1600), Agnes (1602), William (1605), Richard (1607)

One household, not two

John Owsley, born 1547, married Agnes Farnham at Misterton on 28 October 1589. He died in 1633; Agnes in 1629. Between them they had nine children across eighteen years — Elizabeth, Joan, Christopher, a second John who died in infancy, Catherine, Maria, Agnes, William, and Richard — which is exactly what this study's own records had, for lack of a mother's name to sort them by, split into two separate and seemingly unconnected clusters. They were one family the entire time.

Two small discrepancies are worth naming rather than smoothing over: this study's own extracted records give William's baptism as 11 July 1605 against the published source's 11 August, and Richard's as 3 January 1607 against 14 February — minor transcription variance, most likely, in one source or the other. A 'Leman,' baptized 1 September 1592 in this study's own records, does not appear anywhere in the published, otherwise very thorough account — left as an open question rather than forced into the family. And a baptism in this study's records dated 25 August 1592, with no father given, falls on the exact date the published source records for John Owsley Sr.'s burial — very likely the same register entry, mislabeled at some point as a baptism rather than a burial.

The parents: John Owsley Sr. and Ema

Richard, baptized 1564, is not a child of John (b.1547) at all — he is that John's younger brother, one of seven children of an older John Owsley (buried 25 August 1592) and his wife Ema (buried three weeks later, 17 September). Both wills survive in abstract: Ema's names sons William 'the elder' and William 'the younger,' daughters Agnes and Elizabeth, and leaves the residue to son John.

Two more of their children deserve mention. Rev. William Owsley 'the elder' served as vicar of Crewkerne from 1576 until his death in 1630 — a documented Owsley presence in that parish

(Chapter Three), though not the source of any Crewkerne baptism already in this collection. He never married, and endowed a charity for the poor of Misterton that continued for over three centuries. Joan married the rector of neighbouring South Perrott, John Slade, between 1567 and 1568; he died in 1574, leaving a will naming four children, each also styled 'alias Owsley' after their mother's family.

A published entry in the Dictionary of National Biography has since added a remarkable postscript to Joan's own story: a fifth child, unmentioned in her husband's will, named Matthew Slade. Born in 1569, Matthew was educated at Oxford, taught school in Devon, and around 1597 emigrated to Amsterdam, where he became one of the founding elders of the city's Brownist congregation — an early English Separatist community — and later rector of its academy, corresponding on theological controversies with some of the leading scholars of the age. His own son became a professor of Hebrew in Amsterdam, and his grandson, born in England in 1628, became a physician who published medical treatises under a pen name and is buried at Oxford. Four generations on from a Misterton yeoman's daughter, this branch of the family had reached the heart of European religious and scholarly life — a thread this study would never have found without a chance reference in a national biographical dictionary.

A line to America, and to a living DNA project

The most striking thread runs through William Owsley 'the younger,' who left for Axminster, Devon, and died there in 1593. Several generations on, this line reaches a John Owsley of Trull (died 1651), then a Rev. John Owsley of Glooston, Leicestershire, and finally Thomas Owsley, who emigrated to Stafford County, Virginia around 1677 — the ancestor of most American Owsley, Ousley, and Housley families.

This is not a coincidence found independently — it is the same lineage described by the Owsley Surname DNA Project's Y-DNA Group #1, whose members' Y-DNA results converge on a common ancestor the project's own researcher dates to 'born about 1524' in Misterton: John Owsley Sr. himself. Members of this group who have completed detailed testing match closely enough, on documented paper-trail relationships, to confirm the connection statistically.

The intermediate generations between William 'the younger' and John of Trull fall outside the seventeen parishes this study otherwise covers, and are not traced here in full; the connection is recorded as documented elsewhere, not independently verified against a parish register by this study itself.

The founding work of 1890, and what it uniquely preserves

The oldest genealogy of this family — Harry Bryan Owsley's *The Owsley Family in England and America*, published in Chicago in 1890 and reprinted in 1971 by Richard Poyntz Owsley — deserves a word here, both for what it got wrong and for what it alone preserves. Written before any of the Somerset register research existed, its knowledge of England effectively begins at Glooston: it knew nothing of Misterton, Trull, or Axminster, gave Rev. John Owsley's birth as 1635 against his documented 1630 baptism, and offered as deep origins only a tentative theory involving a Thomas Oseley of Shrewsbury (died 1557). Where it conflicts with the register-based research above, the registers win.

But three of its details appear nowhere else. First, and most vivid: an entry from Nichols' *History of County Leicester* recording a parish payment 'to redeem Thomas Owsley, son of Rev. John Owsley,

rector of Glooston, taken by the Algerines' — one pound, eleven shillings and threepence, dated 28 July 1679. The young man who would found the American family was captured by Barbary corsairs and ransomed by his father's parish before ever sailing for Virginia.

Second, the full Glooston household: Rev. John and Dorothea Poyntz raised ten children, of whom Thomas was only one — among his brothers, Newdigate became a Russia merchant and Paymaster-General under Queen Anne, and his sister Edith married her own first cousin, Rev. William Owsley, who succeeded her father as rector.

Third, a citation this study has chased down and corrected. The 1890 book cites an 'Owsley of Chillington, County Somerset,' will dated 7 August 1576, as a probable early ancestor — attributing it, at second hand, to an 1880 genealogical journal article on the Marshall family. Checked directly, that article says something different: the will dated 7 August 1576 was Robert Marshall's own, proved by his widow that October. Marshall had married Joan, daughter of an Owsley of Chillington — but no Owsley will of 1576 ever existed. The 1890 book, working at second hand, mistook the son-in-law's will for the father-in-law's.

The real will exists, just eighteen years earlier: William Owsley of Chillington, dated 8 October 1558, found and verified against its original register image for this study (Chapter One). Chillington adjoins Dinnington — the same hamlet the modern Somerset research names, on entirely separate evidence, as the possible pre-Misterton home of this family, taxed there as early as 1327. Two accounts written a century and a half apart, neither aware of the other's reasoning, pointing at the same few square miles a short walk north of Cricket St Thomas — and now, thanks to a document rather than a coincidence, connected properly for the first time.

Chapter Five: Chard — William and Ann Owsley

William Owsley m. Ann -- Household A (children 1768-1776)

Cristian (1768), William (1771, d.1797?), Elizabeth (1774, d.1803), William (1776)

[William Owsley m. Ann -- Household B (children 1801-1807, possibly A's son)]

William (1801), James (1803), John (1805), Daniel (1807)

John Owsley m. Mary (separate household)

Mary (1772), John (1773)

A William and Ann Owsley appear twice in Chard's eighteenth-century register, twenty-five years apart: first with children Cristian (1768), William (1771), Elizabeth (1774), and William again (1776); then, after a long silence, with William (1801), James (1803), John (1805), and Daniel (1807). The repetition of both parents' names, combined with the gap, suggests father and son rather than one long marriage — the 1771-born William would have been thirty when the second family begins in 1801, an entirely natural age to be starting one's own household.

This reading runs into a genuine complication, however: the 1771 William appears to have died in 1797 at twenty-six, which — if correct — would mean he could not also have been fathering children beginning in 1801. This is presented as an open contradiction rather than a resolved one; a burial register capable of confirming which William died in 1797 would settle it. A separate household, John and Mary Owsley, with children Mary (1772) and John (1773), was very likely William's brother or cousin.

Chapter Six: South Petherton — Robert Owsley and His Descendants

Thoma Owsley (untraced) -- daughter Joanna (bap.1600) d.1610

Robert Owsley (own baptism not found)

Robtey (1669), Jeane (1671), Elizabetha (1671), Gabrielmus (1674), Thomas (1676), Samuel (1686)

[William "Gulielmus" Owsley -- possibly Robert's son]

Betty (1718), Susannah (1719), Robertus (1721), Maria (1722)

South Petherton's register illustrates, more clearly than any other parish in this study, the value of recognizing Latin baptismal name forms as variants of a single underlying name. A father recorded across five entries as Roberti, Robti, and Robtri Owsley — spellings that would otherwise have scattered his six children across several unconnected identities — resolves cleanly into one man once those forms are read as what they are: Robtey (1669), Jeane (1671), Elizabetha (1671), Gabrielmus (1674), Thomas (1676), and Samuel (1686).

A second father, recorded under four different spellings of Gulielmus — Gulilmint, Juliemi, Galimus, and Gulielmi — had children beginning in 1718: Betty, Susannah, Robertus (1721, presumably named for the earlier Robert), and Maria (1722). The thirty-two year gap between the end of Robert's family and the start of this one fits a father-son relationship reasonably well, though no marriage record confirms it. The earliest datable individual in the parish, Joanna, baptized in 1600 to a Thoma Owsley, died in 1610 at the age of ten.

Chapter Seven: Martock — Two Generations

William Owsly m. Coroly -- daughter Elizabeth (bap.1660); William d.1663

William Ousley m. Elizabeth Read, 1692

|__ William (bap.1693) -- d.1718

William Owsly and his wife Coroly had a daughter, Elizabeth, baptized in 1660; a William Ousley buried in 1663 is plausibly the father, dying just three years later. A generation on, William Ousley married Elizabeth Read in 1692, and their son William, baptized the following year, died in 1718 at twenty-five. An earlier and unconnected entry records an Elizabeth Owsly marrying John Jeanes in 1608.

Chapter Eight: Thorncombe

Beyond the family traced fully in Chapter Nine (Wootton Fitzpaine), whose own branch moves into this parish, Thorncombe -- the largest parish in this study, with ninety-six surviving records -- holds three further well-documented branches, along with several smaller households not yet tied to any of them.

George Owsley and Elizabeth Crabbe

George married Elizabeth Crabbe in 1615; their son William, baptized in 1618, most likely died in 1667 at forty-nine. No further children or marriage are recorded for either George or William. This William is very likely the same man remembered with a silver beaker in the 1620 will of William Owsley, gentleman, of Crewkerne (Chapter Three).

George Owsley m. Elizabeth Crabbe, 1615

|__ William (bap.1618) -- d.1667

George Ousley and Mary Jesse

Married in 1734, with children Betty (1734, who died in 1789 at fifty-five), Martha (1739), and John (1743). This John married Sarah Hockey in 1765, and their children — Mary (1766), George (1769), John junior (1770), Sarah (1774), and Elizabeth (1776) — were, for a time, mistakenly merged in this study's early analysis with the children of a second, entirely different John Ousley, who married Elinor Sheppard the following year, in 1766. That second couple's only recorded child, Amelia, died in infancy in 1768. The two households are now correctly separated; Sarah, the first John's wife, was buried in 1783, explicitly named as his spouse.

George Ousley m. Mary Jesse, 1734

|-- Betty (1734, d.1789)

|-- Martha (1739)

|__ John (1743) m. Sarah Hockey, 1765 (Sarah d.1783)

Mary (1766), George (1769), John jr (1770), Sarah (1774), Elizabeth (1776)

[A DIFFERENT John Ousley] m. Elinor Sheppard, 1766

|__ Amelia (bap.1767) -- d.1768, infancy

Thomas Ousley and Edith Hoar

The best-documented three-generation line in this entire study outside the direct pedigree. Thomas, baptized in 1744, married Edith Hoar in 1769, and died in 1789 at forty-five. Their seven children were Edith (1770), Hester (1772), Elizabeth (1775), Thomas junior (1777), Hannah (1779), William Henry (1781), and Mary (1782). Thomas junior married Catharine Hembery in 1807 and had two sons, Thomas (1809) and Henry (1812); William Henry married a woman named Elizabeth and had a daughter, Edith, baptized in 1809 — very likely named for her grandmother, in keeping with the same naming convention seen throughout this family.

Thomas Ousley (bap.1744) m. Edith Hoar, 1769 (Thomas d.1789, age 45)

- |-- Edith (1770)
- |-- Hester (1772)
- |-- Elizabeth (1775)
- |-- Thomas jr (1777) m. Catharine Hemberry, 1807
 - | |-- Thomas (1809)
 - | |-- Henry (1812)
- |-- Hannah (1779)
- |-- William Henry (1781) m. Elizabeth
 - | |-- Edith (1809, named for her grandmother)
- |__ Mary (1782)

Further households

A Samuel Ously and at least one further William Ously household round out the parish's records without connecting clearly to any branch above. (Note: an earlier draft of this chapter also listed a Richard Ously, baptized 1678, as a separate, unconnected household here -- this was an error. That Richard is the same man discussed in Chapter Nine, and traced in full generation by generation in Chapter Nine; he does not belong in this list of unplaced households, and has been removed from it.)

A marriage index search since the first edition of this study also turned up four further Thorncombe marriages — a John (1682, wife Deborah), a Thomas (1682, wife Hanah), a Mary (1705, husband William), and a Hester (1731, husband Benjamin) — not otherwise present in this collection at the time. The index itself had visibly damaged the Owsley surname in a consistent way, and only two of the four resolved to it with any confidence; the other two may belong to an entirely different family caught up in the same search. The John and Deborah entry has since been confirmed and dated by an independent Ancestry.com record: John Oussely married Deborah Dollen at Thorncombe on 18 September 1682. The remaining three are recorded in the companion workbook with their transcribed names preserved and their uncertainty flagged, rather than corrected or omitted.

Chapter Nine: Wootton Fitzpaine

Wootton Fitzpaine is a small parish in the Marshwood Vale of west Dorset, a few miles inland from Lyme Regis and Charmouth. Its Owsley households are among the best documented in this study, resting on two detailed wills spanning three generations, a scatter of administration bonds and probate inventories, and a family branch that can be followed onward into the neighboring parish of Thorncombe. What follows presents that family, and the parish's other Owsley households, at the same level of detail as every other parish in this collection.

John and James Owsley

This parish's earliest well-documented household opens not in a parish register but in two wills. John Owsley, a yeoman, left his will on 2 March 1662/3, proved at London that November. He names his wife Elizabeth, his son James, and seven of James's own children as grandchildren, each left a specific cash portion payable at the age of twenty-one: Mary (already married to James Comming, twenty pounds), Elizabeth (thirty-five pounds and a brass pan), Hester (twenty pounds), Margaret (thirty-five pounds and a brass pan), Richard (thirty pounds), John (thirty-five pounds), and Benjamin (thirty pounds). The residue passes to a grandson, James, and the will names John Faulkner of Colyton, Devon, as an executor.

James, John's son, married Ann Bazley on 2 February 1656/7, at Lyme Regis, Dorset -- likely her own home parish. He made his own will on 7 November 1681 and was buried at Wootton Fitzpaine six weeks later, on 20 December -- his burial already held in this parish's own registers, now confirmed by his signature and seal on the will itself. His will names his wife Anne, and confirms every child named as a minor in his father's will eighteen years earlier as still living: sons James, Richard, John, and Benjamin, and daughters Mary (married to James Comming), Hester (married to a Smith), and Margret. A second family, by his wife Anne, appears for the first time: daughters Elizabeth, Martha, Anne, and Mary. His estate was proved at Bridport, in the Archdeaconry of Dorset, the following December.

Whether the wife named in the 1681 will is this same Ann Bazley, twenty-four years into the marriage, or a second wife of the same name following Ann Bazley's death, is not something any record found so far can settle, and this study does not resolve it either way.

Confidence: High throughout. Both generations are named directly in surviving wills.

Richard Owsley, and the family's move onward

On 1 January 1679, a Richard Owsly married Rebeckah Lock at Wootton Fitzpaine. Rebecca can be traced with confidence: she was baptized Rebecca Locke at Whitchurch Canonorum in 1655, the daughter of Anthonie Locke -- himself, as his own probate inventory later confirms, a resident of Wootton Fitzpaine, a poor cottager holding a thatched cottage and a small plot enclosed from the common, worth twelve pounds in all at his death in 1693. An administration bond taken the day before Anthonie's inventory names a son, Matthew Locke, as administrator of his father's estate -- a previously undocumented brother for Rebecca, identified only once this study obtained and read an image of the bond itself.

This study identifies the groom as Richard, son of James Owsley above -- a minor portioned in his grandfather's 1663 will, and documented alive in his father's will of 1681. This identification rests on the rarity of the surname in this parish, the exact coincidence of timing, and the absence of any competing candidate baptized locally, rather than on any document stating the connection outright.

Richard and Rebecca's children were baptized at Thorncombe, the neighboring parish, beginning the family's move away from Wootton Fitzpaine: a son Richard in April 1678, and a daughter Rebekah in 1679. That branch continued at Thorncombe for three further generations -- Richard's own marriage to Joan Fowler in 1701, their son William's marriage to Elizabeth Bonner in 1726, and William's own son Richard in turn -- and eventually as far as Wells and Croscombe in Somerset, forty-five miles to the north, the largest single geographic move documented anywhere in this collection. A William-and-Elizabeth daughter, baptized Elizabeth in 1727, may be traceable to a marriage of her own: an Elizabeth Ouseley married John Applen at Thorncombe in 1751, which would make her twenty-four — plausible, though unconfirmed.

Confidence: Medium-High that Richard, James's son, is the 1679 bridegroom -- a strong circumstantial case resting on rarity of name, geography, and timing, rather than a document naming the connection directly.

James Owsley's other children

Besides Richard, James's own will, made in November 1681, gives small remembrance tokens — a shilling, five shillings, a coat or cloak — to seven of the children named as minors in his father John's 1663 will: James, Mary (married to James Comming), Richard, John, Benjamin, Hester (married to a Smith), and Margret. The eighth of that 1663 group, Elizabeth, is conspicuously missing from this list — very likely because she had died in the eighteen years between the two wills, since no other reason would explain her omission from an otherwise complete set of six surviving siblings alongside Richard.

John, one of these seven, may be traceable further. Chapter Eight notes a 'John Oussely' who married Deborah Dollen at Thorncombe on 18 September 1682 — which, if this is the same man, would put his birth in the 1657–63 window shared by his portioned siblings, a plausible age for a first marriage. A second, independent candidate also exists: a John Owsely who married Elizabeth Orchard at Wootton Fitzpaine in 1709, proposed elsewhere in this study as the unidentified husband named in Elizabeth Owsley's own 1744 will. Both are unconfirmed, and are not mutually exclusive — if both are correct, this John married twice, first at Thorncombe and, after a presumed widowhood, again at Wootton Fitzpaine nearly three decades later.

A second, separate group in this same will receives something quite different: not a token, but the household goods and the whole residue of the estate, divided equally — daughters Elizabeth, Martha, Ann, and Mary. This is very likely a second, younger Elizabeth, sharing a name with her probably-deceased elder half-sister, and grouped here with three sisters still needing real ongoing provision rather than a token remembrance — the same pattern of a name reused after an earlier child's death that this family has shown more than once already. An earlier edition of this chapter treated the will's Elizabeth as the same woman named in 1663, moved from one family to the other; both readings have now been tested against the full text of James's own will, and two distinct Elizabeths fits the evidence better than one who changed groups. Several of the four can be followed a little further in the parish registers: Mary Owsly was buried in 1690 and again — a second Mary, presumably a different woman of the same name — in 1691; Martha Owsly was buried in 1693.

James also names an overseer, 'my brother Beniamine' — not his own son Benjamin, who is remembered separately in the same will, but a second man of that name whose exact relationship to James is not established: possibly an otherwise undocumented brother, possibly a brother-in-law through his wife.

The younger Elizabeth's own fate is the best documented of the four. A probate inventory survives for 'Elizabeth Owsley, widow, of Wootton Fitzpaine,' taken in January 1694/5, describing a modest and entirely personal estate — clothing, a bed and its furnishings, two coffers, a small desk, a chair — with no household or farm equipment, consistent with a widow living among family rather than keeping her own household. She had married and been widowed by the time of her death in December 1693; her first husband's name does not survive in anything found so far. One of her appraisers, Anthony Comming, was very likely kin to James Comming, her own sister Mary's husband — a family member serving, as was customary, as an appraiser of his own relative's goods.

The family's later continuation

Wootton Fitzpaine's Owsley records continue well into the eighteenth century, after Richard's own branch had settled at Thorncombe: a George Owsley married in 1743 and was buried in 1747; a Margaret Owsley was buried in 1750, the same year as a Martha Owsley who very plausibly is Richard and Rebecca's own great-granddaughter, baptized at Thorncombe in 1730 as a sister of William Oushy, and who appears to have remained in this parish rather than following her brother's branch onward; an Anstice Owsley had banns called in 1754; an Ann Owsley was buried in 1763; and a Richard Owsley was buried in 1764. This last entry shares a name with this family's own later Richard (baptized at Thorncombe in 1732), but cannot be the same man: that Richard married at Wells in 1763 and had a child baptized at Croscombe in 1766, so this 1764 burial belongs to a different, unidentified Richard — a useful reminder that a shared name and a plausible year are not, on their own, enough to confirm an identity.

A James Owsley, buried in 1760, has since gained a full identity through his own surviving will. Styled a yeoman, James made his will on 31 May 1758 and was proved that July, in the Bristol diocese peculiar court — a different jurisdiction from the Dorset archdeaconry that handled the parish's earlier wills. He names two daughters as his joint executrices and sole heirs, dividing his estate between them 'share and share alike': Mary, wife of Thomas Evens, and Elizabeth Ousley, unmarried at the time. A granddaughter, Mary Newton, receives a small legacy, most plausibly Mary Evens's own daughter from an earlier marriage, though the will does not say so. No sons are named, suggesting these two daughters were his only surviving children.

Elizabeth, unmarried when her father made his will, is very likely the same Elizabeth Owsley who married Henry Harbin at Wootton Fitzpaine in November 1761 — about a year after James's death, an entirely ordinary interval for a woman settling her father's estate before marrying. Whether James was himself related to George Owsley, married in this same parish in 1743, is not established by any document found so far.

Chapter Ten: Iminster, and a Note on the Croscombe–Wells Branch

Iminster's six surviving records center on Thomas Ously and his wife Jane, whose children — Jane (1796), John (1797), a second Jane (1802), and John and Elizabeth together (1805) — represent a family entirely separate from anything else in this study. An earlier, unconnected entry records a Margrett Owsley marrying Samuel Hawker in 1695.

The Croscombe and Wells St Cuthbert records, discussed in Chapter Nine, sit geographically apart from the rest of this collection — the Mendip Hills rather than the Somerset–Dorset border country that dominates everywhere else in this study. It bears repeating here that, were it not for the naming-convention and timeline argument connecting Richard Ousley of Wells back to Thorncombe, this branch would read as an entirely unrelated family sharing only a surname.

Chapter Eleven: The Minor Parishes

Several parishes in this study contribute only a handful of records each, most describing individuals who cannot be connected to any larger household.

Hinton St George

An Elizabeth Owsley buried in 1633 most likely matches Crewkerne's Elizabeth Owsley (born 1582); a second Elizabeth Owsley burial in 1635 is unmatched. A Samuel Owsley (1761) and William Owsley (1792) have no baptism match anywhere in this study.

Broadwindsor

Samuel Owsley married Deborah Tucker in 1674 — a different Deborah from Wells's Deborah Bull, a century earlier. Alfre Owsly married William Collet in 1697, and Lucy Owsley was baptized in 1800 to a mother recorded only as Mary.

North Petherton, Burstock, and Whitechurch Canonorum

North Petherton offers a single, isolated entry: Margaret Owsley, baptized 1610, daughter of a William Owsley. Burstock and Whitechurch Canonorum, by contrast, each hold exactly one record — Eliz Bonner's 1705 baptism, and Rebecca Locke's 1655 baptism, respectively — both of which prove to be exactly what this study's Research Coverage Register anticipated: supporting records for women who married into the Owsley family, discussed in Chapters Two and Four.

Chapter Twelve: Emerging Threads — Wider Dorset and Somerset

Every chapter before this one describes a family this study has taken the time to understand: baptisms weighed against burials, wills read against registers, identifications tested and, where the evidence allowed, settled. This chapter is different, and it is worth saying so plainly before it begins. Once the closer Somerset parishes had been worked as thoroughly as this study could manage, the natural next step was to look further afield. That turned out to mean two directions, not one: east and south into the wider county of Dorset, well beyond the Marshwood Vale cluster this family calls home, and also back north into Somerset, toward Taunton and the Levels around Langport, where a later pass through a large bulk parish-record extraction turned up a further scatter of Owsley entries. What follows is a first pass through sixteen parishes that turned up an Owsley or two, gathered from parish registers and a handful of probate records found along the way. None of it has been connected to this study's own confirmed lines. Some of it may never be. It is presented here not as settled family history, but as an honest record of where an Owsley surname has turned up beyond this study's core parishes, and what little is known about each one — material for a future chapter, or perhaps for nothing at all.

Lyme Regis

The single largest of these threads. A Judeth Owsley married Thomas Collin of Abbots Wootton here in 1653, 'of Whitchurch' — very likely, though not certainly, the same event as a separately noted 1654 entry for a 'Judith of Whitchurch,' the one-year gap consistent with Old Style dating. A full century later, a Roger Owsley — a prosperous tradesman, likely a maltster — left a will in 1745 naming three houses in the town by name (Butter Market, Church Street, and a dwelling with its own malt house on Coombe Street) and a modest fortune in silver plate to his wife Ann and sons William and John. Roger had married twice, first to Sarah Alford in 1712, then, after her 1743 burial, to Ann Carswell in 1744; his own death followed in 1752. A separate household — Thomas Owsley, married to Elizabeth Turner in 1702, with children Thomas, Robert, and Benjamin baptized across the following decade — shares the parish but no evident connection to Roger's family. Lyme Regis probates, notably, belonged to the Peculiar Court of the Dean of Salisbury rather than the Dorset Archdeaconry, which is why Roger's will survives in Wiltshire rather than Dorset.

Portland and Wyke Regis

A tantalizing cluster on the Isle of Portland. Two Owsley men — John and William — both died intestate within about a year of each other, in 1709 and 1710, each leaving a widow (Agnes and Joane respectively) who administered his modest estate. Both bonds were handled by the same notary, and the coincidence of timing makes brothers a reasonable guess, though nothing yet proves it. An earlier Richard Owsly was buried here around 1698–1700, a plausible father to both men, again unconfirmed. A generation later, the neighboring parish of Wyke Regis records three marriages of men styled 'Ousley Attwood' or 'Ousley Attwool' — a compound surname appearing nowhere else in this study — and Portland's own registers show the resulting family's baptisms into the 1760s. Whether this compound name preserves the memory of John and William's own household, by way of an unrecorded Owsly daughter marrying into an Attwood family, is an appealing guess this study cannot yet confirm.

Melcombe Regis

Part of the Weymouth conurbation, and the source of two isolated records: a Christopher Ously, baptized 1666, son of a Christopher Ousley; and, separately, a Jane Ousley, a widow whose modest probate inventory — clothing and silver plate making up the bulk of a household worth just under eleven pounds — was taken in December 1714. Chronology makes Jane a plausible widow of Christopher, but the inventory itself does not say so, and this study has not entered the connection without the actual grant of administration, which would very likely state the relationship directly if it survives.

Charmouth

Four marriages, spanning 1715 to 1748, with no evident connection to one another beyond the shared surname. One is worth flagging on its own merits: in 1715, an Elizabeth Oowsley married Richard Beall, explicitly noted as being herself 'of Wootton Fitzpaine' — one of this study's own core parishes. No individual in this collection has been matched to her, but the coincidence of parish is exactly the kind of detail worth remembering if a suitable Elizabeth ever turns up unaccounted for.

Seaborough and Chardstock

Two single-entry parishes. At Seaborough, a William Owsley married Elizabeth Wills in 1715; she is noted as being 'of Shepton Beacham' — Shepton Beauchamp, the Somerset parish where Rev. William Owsley of the Misterton family once held a benefice, and where a separate published source names a churchwarden 'William Housley.' Whether this is more than a coincidence of place is not established. At Chardstock, a Joan Owsley married John Deninge in 1683; Chardstock adjoins both Wootton Fitzpaine and Thorncombe, making a connection to the Wootton Fitzpaine family geographically plausible and, once again, entirely unproven.

Taken together, these sixteen parishes describe a real, if scattered, Owsley presence across Dorset and Somerset beyond this study's core cluster — prosperous tradesmen in Lyme Regis, humble cottagers on Portland, a run of single-entry marriages scattered from Taunton to the Somerset Levels, isolated entries at Seaborough and Chardstock that may or may not belong to anyone else in this book. Whether any of it joins up with the confirmed lines traced in the chapters before it is a question for whoever picks this research up next, this study's own compiler very much included.

Symondsburry

A single marriage: Robert Ouslye to Sussan Eliote, 20 September 1589 — one of the earliest entries found anywhere in this collection outside Cricket St Thomas and Winsham themselves.

Symondsburry adjoins both Whitchurch Canonichum and Wootton Fitzpaine, making this couple geographically the closest of all the unconnected threads in this chapter to this study's core families — and, at 1589, early enough that a connection to the founding Cricket St Thomas generation is chronologically possible. No baptism, burial, or further record for either Robert or Sussan has been found to test the idea.

Taunton, Orchard Portman, and Crowcombe

Three parishes clustered around Taunton, each contributing a single marriage. At Taunton St Mary Magdalene, an Isbell Owsley married William Stibbs on 27 April 1564 — the earliest record in this entire study apart from Cricket St Thomas and Winsham. More than a century later, on 16 April 1677, a James Owsley married Anne Stone at Orchard Portman; both are noted as 'of Taunton Magdalen,' tying this couple back to the same parish as Isbell, generations apart. This James is explicitly a different man from Wootton Fitzpaine's own James Owsley, who was still very much alive in Dorset in 1677. At Crowcombe, a Mrs Mary Owsley married Mr John Roke of Bagboro on 27 May 1680; the courtesy title 'Mrs' suggests some social standing, though nothing further about her is known.

Long Sutton, Curry Rivel, and Kingsbury Episcopi

Three neighboring parishes on the Somerset Levels around Langport. Long Sutton alone supplies three marriages: Xpain Owsley to Robert Jeanes, 10 February 1613 ('Xpain' being a period abbreviation for Christian or Christiana, from the Greek chi-rho); Julian Owsley to John Bull, 10 November 1619 — the Bull surname recurring, coincidentally or not, in Deborah Bull, who married into the Wootton Fitzpaine–Thorncombe family five generations later at Wells (Chapter Nine); and Paule Owsley to Ann Cogan, 19 May 1626. At Curry Rivel, an Elizabeth Owsley married Henry Dwelly on 3 November 1664. At Kingsbury Episcopi, a Mary Owsley — noted as 'of Muchelney' — married Thom. Pittard of Drayton on 2 March 1699. None of these five entries shows any sign of connecting to another, or to any family traced elsewhere in this study.

Bradford and Otterford

Two parishes in the hill country south of Wellington. At Bradford, William Owseley married Sara West, 'of Trull,' on 8 January 1660; Trull is where Rev. William Owsley's brother, William 'the younger' of the Misterton family, had proved his own will back in 1593 — a coincidence of place only, with no evidence the two households were related. At Otterford, a Rebec Ously married a William Ouslie on 20 September 1662, both parties described as 'of Buckland St Mary' rather than Otterford itself. An Owsley marrying an Owsley makes them very likely cousins of some degree, though no specific relationship survives to say how closely.

Part 3: Notes on Method

Spelling and naming variants

The surname in this study appears as Owsley, Ousley, Ously, Owseley, Owsly, Owesly, Owesely, Ouseley, Owslee, Housley, and Howsley, among others; all were treated as a single underlying name for the purpose of linking records. First names required the same treatment, particularly Latin baptismal forms common in earlier registers — Roberti and Robertus for Robert, Johannis for John, Gulielmi and Willielmus for William, Richardus for Richard, and so on. Recognizing these forms as equivalent, rather than as distinct names, was responsible for several of the strongest family reconstructions in this study, most notably at South Petherton.

Reconnecting scattered identities

A recurring feature of the underlying records was that a single real individual often held two separate identities: one from their own baptism or burial, and another as an unlinked placeholder parent named on a child's entry, never connected back to their own record. Identifying where these placeholders and named individuals were the same person — using consistent naming, plausible age, and matching parish — allowed many otherwise-isolated baptisms and burials to be joined into coherent households.

Guarding against over-merging

The same name recurring across a broad span of years does not always mean the same person. Where children attributed to one father spanned more than about thirty years, this study treated the cluster with caution, and in at least one case — two different John Ousleys marrying in consecutive years, 1765 and 1766, to a Sarah Hockey and an Elinor Sheppard respectively — an initial merge based on shared name and overlapping decade was later corrected once the wives' names revealed two distinct households.

The value of collateral evidence

Marriage records, naming patterns, wills, probate inventories, and even legal formalities incidental to burial proved as valuable as baptisms and burials themselves. The Burying in Woollen Act oaths at Thorncombe, sworn by relatives at the time of interment, allowed a specific and otherwise ambiguous identification to be confirmed. The consistent period practice of naming a first son for his paternal grandfather supported the identification of Richard Ousley's parentage at Wells. And the appearance of a single baptism in an otherwise Owsley-free parish — Burstock, Whitechurch Canonorum — was, in both cases found in this study, the signature of a woman who had married into the family and whose birthplace had been preserved for exactly that reason.

Part 4: Where This Study Leaves Off

Several questions remain open, and are listed here in roughly the order this study would prioritize them.

Origins before 1560

Roger Owseley and the untraced Cricket St Thomas father appear to belong to roughly the same generation, born approximately 1530–1540 (Chapters One and Two). A found and verified will has since resolved part of this puzzle directly: William Owseley of Chillington, dated 1558, names a brother Roger — very likely this same Roger — and a sister Joane. A separate, slightly later generation sits at Crewkerne: an untraced elder William, documented only through his children, and his probable son, the younger William who married Florence Hutchins in 1580 (Chapter Three) — a family this study once, incorrectly, tried to connect to Chillington through a misread will, a connection since withdrawn. Whether the Chillington family, the Crewkerne Williams, and Cricket St Thomas's own untraced John are themselves related remains unproven. Probate records, manorial court rolls, or a hearth tax return for this area from the 1550s–1570s remain the most promising route to closing what is left.

A further, considerably better-documented figure sits in this same picture: John Owsle Sr. of Misterton, buried 1592 (Chapter Four), whose will-dated children put his own birth at roughly 1515–1525 — a full generation above Roger and the others, and old enough to be their father. His son Rev. William served as vicar of Crewkerne itself. Whether the Chillington and Misterton Owsleys — four miles apart, both documented by will in the sixteenth century — were themselves the same family remains open; no document found so far connects them directly.

DNA Testing

The Owsley Family Historical Society has organized the Owsley Surname DNA Project to pursue the family's ancestry through Y-Chromosome (Y-DNA) testing. Of particular relevance to this study, three men of Owsley lineage have completed Big Y-500 tests, the most detailed Y-DNA test currently available. Two are documented descendants of the Misterton line (Chapter Four); the third descends from the Wootton Fitzpaine line (Chapter Nine). Based on these results, the project reasons that these three testers' common paternal Owsley ancestor most likely lived in England in the 1400s or early 1500s.

The testing gives real confidence that all three men's lineages sit within the Owsley family, and that a common ancestor exists for them. Tracing that ancestor by name, however, is difficult -- perhaps impossible -- given how few records survive from so early a period.

The Chard contradiction

The apparent two-generation William-and-Ann Owsley household at Chard (Chapter Five) rests on an unresolved contradiction — the presumed father appears to have died in 1797, four years before the second family's first child was baptized. A burial register capable of confirming which William died in 1797 would settle this.

Appendix: Confidence Key

High — the relationship is stated directly on a surviving record (a baptism naming a father, a burial naming a spouse, and so on).

Medium-High — the relationship is not stated directly, but rests on a strong, mutually reinforcing combination of age, geography, and naming pattern, with no plausible competing candidate found anywhere in this study.

Medium — a reasonable case can be made, but with a weaker fit on one dimension (a wider age gap, a greater distance, or the existence of an alternative, less likely candidate).

Low, or Low-Medium — the reasoning is suggestive rather than compelling, typically because it depends on more than one uncertain link joined together, or because a key supporting fact (such as a first wife's death, or a disambiguating burial) has not been found.

Where a finding is described in this study as speculative rather than confidence-rated, it falls outside even the Low tier — an informed guess offered for its narrative and investigative value, not as a proposed fact.

Appendix: Sources and Records

This study rests on 296 parish register entries extracted from seventeen parishes across Somerset and Dorset, supplemented by fourteen individually significant documents -- twelve of them wills or probate inventories, verified against their own images -- and five external published or genetic sources. The full record set, with every entry's identification number, linkage, and notes, is maintained in the companion research workbook (OMPD Master Workbook); this appendix summarizes what the book rests on.

The parish registers

Parish	County	Years	Bap	Mar	Bur
Thorncombe	Dorset*	1615-1812	40	21	35
Winsham	Somerset	1562-1743	16	11	15
Cricket St Thomas	Somerset	1565-1638	19	8	8
Crewkerne	Somerset	1567-1730	5	6	11
Misterton	Somerset	1564-1633	11	5	5
Chard	Somerset	1764-1808	11	0	8
Wootton Fitzpaine	Dorset	1679-1764	0	5	13
South Petherton	Somerset	1600-1723	11	0	4
Ilminster	Somerset	1695-1805	5	1	0
Martock	Somerset	1608-1718	2	2	2
Croscombe	Somerset	1766-1809	1	0	3
Hinton St George	Somerset	1633-1792	0	0	4
Broadwindsor	Dorset	1674-1800	1	2	0
Wells, St Cuthbert	Somerset	1734-1763	1	1	0
Burstock	Dorset	1705	1	0	0
North Petherton	Somerset	1610	1	0	0
Whitechurch Canonorum	Dorset	1655	1	0	0

**Thorncombe was anciently part of Devon, transferring to Dorset in 1844; it is given here under its modern county. Marriage counts include banns. Burstock and Whitechurch Canonorum each contribute a single record — in both cases the baptism of a woman who married into the family, which is precisely why those registers were searched.*

Individually significant documents

A handful of records carried weight beyond an ordinary register entry, and are listed here with their locations where known:

The will of William Owseley of Chillington, dated 8 October 1558, proved 14 January 1558/9 -- TNA PROB 11/42A/192, register Welles, quire 22, folio 170 -- the oldest Owsley document found in this study, naming brothers Roger and Walter and a sister Joane Marshall (Chapters One and Three).

The will of Katheryne Owsley of Crewkerne, made January 1575/6 -- TNA PROB 11/57/653, folio 402 -- identifying her as the sister, not the daughter, of a William Owsley of Crewkerne, and pointing to an untraced earlier generation of that family (Chapter Three).

The will of Robert Marshall of Iminster, tanner, dated 7/8 August 1576, proved 9 October 1576 -- TNA PROB 11/58/373, register Carew, folio 212 -- witnessed by Roger and William Owsley; corrects a misattribution present in print since 1890 (Chapters Three and Four).

The will of William Owsley, gentleman, of Crewkerne, dated 24 April 1620 -- TNA PROB 11/135/670 -- confirming his household and connecting it to Thorncombe (Chapter Three).

The will of Erne (Ema) Owsley of Misterton, written 9 September 1592, proved 25 September 1592 — surviving in abstract as Document DD/X/SR 5, Somerset Record Office, Taunton; the founding document for the Misterton family's structure (Chapter Four).

The will of Rev. William Owsley, vicar of Crewkerne, written 10 August 1627, proved 25 June 1630, Prerogative Court of Canterbury (Chapter Four).

The will of William Owsley 'the younger' of Axminster, written 3 September 1593, proved 5 November 1593, Prerogative Court of Canterbury — the document connecting Misterton to the Trull and Glooston lines (Chapter Four).

The survey of the Manor of Crewkerne, 1597 — Document DD/PT S 1515, Box 1, Somerset Record Office — which records John Owsley aged fifty, fixing his birth at 1547 (Chapter Four).

The Glooston parish ransom entry, 28 July 1679, preserved in Nichols' History of County Leicester — recording payment 'to redeem Thomas Owsley... taken by the Algerines' (Chapter Four).

The will of John Owsley, yeoman, of Wootton Fitzpaine, dated 2 March 1662/3, proved November 1663 -- TNA PROB 11/312/297 -- establishing the family across three generations (Chapter Nine).

The will of James Owsley of Wootton Fitzpaine, dated 7 November 1681, proved at Bridport 14 December 1682 -- original will, Dorset History Centre, Archdeacons' collection -- naming sons including the Richard this study identifies as the father of the Richard who carries this family forward above 1678 (Chapter Nine).

The probate inventory of Elizabeth Owsley, widow, of Wootton Fitzpaine, taken 1 January 1694/5 -- image supplied by the researcher -- confirming a further daughter of James Owsley's household (Chapter Nine).

The probate inventory of Anthonie Lock, late of Wootton Fitzpaine, taken 26 September 1693 -- image supplied by the researcher -- confirming Rebecca Locke's father as himself a resident of this parish; the accompanying administration bond, dated the day before, names a previously undocumented son, Matthew Locke, as administrator (Chapter Two).

The will of James Owsley, yeoman, of Wootton Fitzpaine, dated 31 May 1758, proved 16 July 1760 in the Bristol diocese peculiar court -- original will and probate act, image supplied by the researcher -- giving a full identity to this collection's own WOO-015 burial record (Chapter Nine).

The Burying in Woollen Act oaths at Thorncombe, 1703 — sworn affidavits accompanying burials, which distinguished Richard Owsly's wife from the several other Joan Fowlers of that parish (Chapter Three).

Somerset Parish Register Society, Marriages at Crewkerne, 1559 to 1812 — a published transcription naming William Owsley as churchwarden of Crewkerne circa 1598 (Chapter Three).

The marriage record of Richard Owsley and Deborah Bull, Wells St Cuthbert, 1763 — a key document in tracing the Wootton Fitzpaine–Thorncombe family forward into the eighteenth century (Chapter Nine).

Published and external sources

Harry Bryan Owsley, *The Owsley Family in England and America* (Chicago, 1890; reprinted by Richard Poyntz Owsley, 1971) — the founding genealogy; used here for the Glooston household, the Algerine ransom, and historiographical context, with its errors noted where later research superseded it.

Ronny O. Bodine, *The Owsleys of Somersetshire, England* (2nd edition, 2010), compiling twenty years of Owsley Family Historical Society research — the source that resolved the Misterton family and documented the line from Misterton through Axminster, Trull, and Glooston to Virginia.

The Owsley Surname DNA Project (Owsley Family Historical Society, established 2003), as reported in the OFHS Newsletter of December 2018 — the Y-DNA evidence connecting living descendants, including the compiler of this study's own line, to the Misterton family.

Dictionary of National Biography, entry on Matthew Slade (1569-1628?) — a published scholarly source confirming Joan Owsley's 1567 marriage and revealing her previously unknown fifth child (Chapter Four).

findmypast.co.uk — the source of fifteen additional register entries located in 2026, including the records that filled Cricket St Thomas's 1588-1612 register gap (Chapters One and Three) and the 1656/7 marriage of James Owsley to Ann Bazley at Lyme Regis (Chapter Nine), drawn from the Phillimore Marriage Registers, 1531-1913.

All parish register extractions were compiled by the family researcher from the original registers and transcriptions; the complete, record-by-record dataset with identification numbers, family linkages, confidence assessments, and change history is maintained in the companion OMPD Master Workbook.