



The
Ancient History
of the Distinguished Surname
**** WHITTEN ****

The dark rolling moors of the Scottish/English border are home to this notable surname Whitten. Its ancient history is closely woven into the rich and beautiful tapestry of the border chronicles.

In-depth research into some of the most ancient manuscripts such as the Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, the Inquisitio, the Ragman Rolls, the Domesday Book, baptismals, parish records, tax records and cartularies, gave researchers the first record of the name Whitten in Roxburghshire in the lands of Whitton where they were seated from very ancient times before 1100 A.D.

Your name, Whitten, appeared in many references, and from time to time, the surname was spelt Whitton, Whitten, Whytten, Whytton, Wyton, Wytten, Witten, Witton, Wyton, Wyten, and these changes in spelling frequently occurred within the family name. Scribes and church officials spelt the name as it sounded, and frequently the spelling changed even during the person's own lifetime.

The family name Whitten is believed to be descended originally from the Boernicians. This ancient founding race of the north were a mixture of Scottish Picts and Angles, a race dating from about the year 400 A.D. By 1000 A.D. this race had formed into discernible Clans and families, perhaps some of the first evidence of the family structure in Britain. From this area we get some of the most impressive names in history, surnames with unique nicknames such as the Sturdy Armstrongs, one of whom was, appropriately, the first to colonize the moon, the Gallant Grahams, the Saucy Scotts, the Angry Kerrs, the Bells, the Nixons, the Famous Dicksons, the Bold Rutherfords, the Pudding Somervilles, and most of the names ending in "son".

From these fighting clans of the border the surname Whitten was found in Roxburghshire from the year 1165 in the lands of Morebattle. The first on record was John Wyton, prior of St. Andrews in 1285 A.D. Michael and Adam Wyton both rendered homage to King Edward 1st of England in his brief conquest of Scotland in 1296. Michael was chief forester of the Forest of Selkirk. Richard Wytton, a dignitary of the Church also rendered homage. By the year 1400 the family had branched south to Northumberland and to Salop (Shropshire) in England. For this reason Thomas Whitton had protection for 2 years for going on the King of England's service in 1370. A later Thomas Witton was Sheriff of Salop. In Shropshire they built Whitton Court, which became the family seat of the middle ages. They also branched to Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, West Acklam in Yorkshire and Nethercote, Oxfordshire. Notable amongst the family name during the early history was Michael Whitton, Chief Forester of the Kings Forest of Selkirk in 1303.

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The clans or families to the north of the border became Scottish after about the year 1000 A.D., and to the south they became English. Nevertheless, despite the border, many would still be united clans, but strangely loyal to the defence of their respective countries.

Clan feuds became so intense that in 1246 A.D., 6 Chiefs from the Scottish side and 6 from the English side met at Carlisle and created a set of laws for all the border territory. These were unlike any laws prevailing in England or Scotland or, for that matter, anywhere else in the world. For refusal of assistance when called a person could be hanged on the instant, without a trial. While clans were on this "hot trot" to recover stolen property, (from which we get the modern expression "hot to trot"), they were protected from almost all eventualities.

In 1603, the crowns of Scotland and England unified under James VI of Scotland who found it expedient to disperse the "unruly border clans". The Border Clans were dispersed to England, northern Scotland and to Ireland. Some were banished directly to the Colonies.

In Ireland, they were granted lands previously held by the Catholic Irish. They signed an "Undertaking" to remain Protestant and faithful to the Crown. There is no evidence that the surname Whitton settled in Ireland as a clan, but this does not preclude individual settlements.

The New World beckoned and the many settlers in Ireland, known as the Scotch/Irish, became disenchanted. They sailed aboard the armada of sailing ships known as the "White Sails" which plied the stormy Atlantic. Some called them, less romantically, the "coffin ships". Amongst the first pioneers who could be considered kinsmen of the family name Whitten, of that same Clan or family, was Thomas Whitton who settled in Hingham, Mass. in 1635, with his wife Audry and his sons Jeremy and James. The Whittons settled at Hingham, Mass. and became one of the distinguished families of the U.S.A. Later John Whitton settled in Maryland in 1731, and another John settled in Philadelphia Pa. in 1862. Gregory Whitten settled in St. John's Newfoundland in 1708.

These pioneers became the nucleus of the first settlements from Maine to the Cumberland Gap. They provided much of the stock which produced the early presidents and governors of the United States. In Canada they settled Nova Scotia, the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa Valley.

The family name Whitten, provided many prominent contemporaries, Charlotte Whitton, ex Mayor of Ottawa; The Venerable Witton-Davies, Canon of Christchurch; Professor T. Witton Davies of Flintshire.

The most ancient grant of a Coat of Arms researched was:

Black with a silver water carrier, at the top three gold coins.

The Crest was:

An Owl.

