

# Origins of the Wareham Surname

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*Updated May 2013*

In this essay I briefly look into the various ancestral backgrounds of the Wareham families who are mainly based in southern England. I do not believe that all Warehams are related by blood and whilst most Warehams hold the name because of the name of the town in Dorset, I do not think that all Wareham families adopted the surname for the same reason at the same time. I do not think there is one common root to the family name. For example my line comes through a family who lived in Shroton in north Dorset in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and yet I cannot find any direct link to a neighbouring Wareham family in Child Okeford in a similar time period, even through sibling branches. I therefore conclude that there are many different Wareham families who have different backgrounds and reasons why the family name was used for their line and for most it is actually impossible to tell why the name was taken. For example I cannot prove for certain why my particular family adopted the Wareham family name and I can only trace my line back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

I would recommend conducting your own research into your own background, or getting it conducted by someone who knows what they are doing. Don't rely on vague name associations for family history but work back one generation at a time using all relevant and documented information available. If you are descended from a Wareham in your family ancestry why do you think your branch had the name? Have you found the reason for the adoption of the name or, like me, can you only go back so far till when written records started? My Wareham line were poor farm labourers, or 'peasants' as they were called before the agricultural revolution, and so records of their history do not go back much beyond the start of parish registers started in the 17<sup>th</sup> / 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are records of their baptisms, marriages and burials but not much more to give any clue about when or why they adopted the surname.

## **The Wareham surname**

### ***A brief history of surnames***

Surnames in England date back to Norman times and aristocratic families held them from early medieval times. Surnames became common to all families in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and during the reign of Henry VIII it became the law that with matrimonial baptisms, the child adopted the surname of the father. Those of lower social status often adopted a name according to their place of origin (e.g. Wareham, Gillingham or Blandford) or their trade or occupation (e.g. Carpenter or Smith).

The Wareham surname, when it was first recorded in medieval times, appears as 'de Warham' (see below). By the time of the Tudor subsidy and muster lists the name Wareham or Warham appears frequently across Dorset.

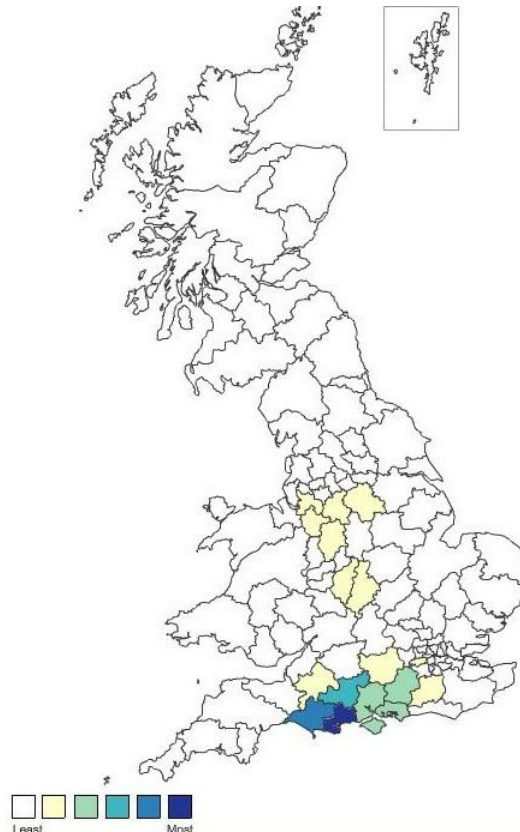
### ***Wareham in Dorset and Hampshire***

The surname Wareham is almost certainly normally derived from the Dorset town of Wareham. The town's name is probably Anglo-Saxon in origin and means a town or Hamlet, a 'ham' (forms part of the town name for many Anglo-Saxon towns in England, such as

Gillingham (Wessex), Nottingham and Cheltenham (Mercia) and Elmham (Anglia)) and 'Ware' from a weir in a river or original 'wear'.

The Wareham surname was one of about 60 names that H B Guppy identified as being peculiar to the county in 1890. In the 1891 census the name is most common in Dorset and Hampshire with some Wareham's in Somerset, Warwickshire and Lancashire. Clusters of Wareham families appear particularly in north Dorset and in Hampshire around the New Forest (Ringwood / Fordingbridge) and Southampton.

Wareham surname distribution map 1881 –



From <http://gbnames.publicprofler.org/Surnames.aspx>

### ***Wareham, Warham, Wearham or Warram - why these spelling variations?***

In my research I have come across all three of these spellings attached to my ancestry and I think it is quite simply because it is a translation from the spoken word. It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that it appears that my Wareham line ancestors could read and write and this is evidenced by marriage records from Shroton even very late on being signed by the Wareham males with a cross for a signature. Therefore when recording the baptisms, marriages and burials the parish clerk would have been taking the name from the spoken word and would not have had it spelt for them. It is quite easy therefore to see why they may have dropped an 'e' (although you would have thought the clerk would get it right in Dorset given the town) and also Warram would come from the Dorset accent turned into a phonetic spelling.

**Article in 'Dorset Diary' Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2001**

“A Dorchester reader has shed some light on the surname Wareham. Patrick Tolfree writes to say that his ‘Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames, published in 1901’ records that in 1583 there was an Edward Warum (Waram) in the County of Dorset. This prompted me to see what it says. The entry, as you will note, is small and makes clear that the origin of the surname is the town name.

From dictionary -

**Wareham, Warham, Wearham;** Alexander de Warham P (Do); William de Warham 1332 SRDo; George Warum, Edward Warham 1641 PrSo.

In an early Anglo Saxon Chronicle dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Dorset town is spelled Wearham and in Domesday Warham, so did the de Wareham family mentioned take their name from the town or bring it over with William? I think this could weave a complicated web.”

### **Reasons for adopting the Wareham family name**

***Did my line get the name from a connection to a Blandford orphanage?***

**An article in the ‘Dorset Diary - The Wanderer’ section of the Dorset Echo  
Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

**“Dorset’s full of Warehams**

A recent e-mail has asked me to find the origins of the surname Wareham.

A friend was discussing this with a colleague whose surname it is. My friend went to school in Bournemouth with a lad of the same name and he asked if there was any relationship, which there wasn’t.

It appears that Wareham as a surname is peculiar to Dorset and back in the 1700’s there had been an orphanage at Blandford, where all the children were given the surname Wareham, hence the reason there are so many in this county. One must wonder why they weren’t called Blandford?

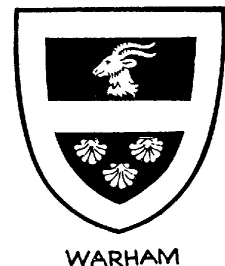
I have no idea how accurate the claim is, but it is an interesting story. Has anyone ever heard of this theory?

I contacted Dorset Echo in 2004/5 and they had no update on this article and no further information. Blandford museum and the local historian Ben Cox were also not aware of such an orphanage or much more about this rumour. But I have heard this rumour a couple of times now from different sources and it is possible that it was not invented. If this is the case then it may explain why there are so many Warehams in this part of Dorset scattered around villages but with no clear ancestral connections. It may also explain why, for example, I cannot find a baptism of my earliest recorded ancestor on this line, Jonathan Wareham, in about 1700 as there may not have been one under this name.

Clear evidence of my particular Wareham ancestry starts in Shroton in 1715 (see page 8) with the baptisms of children to Jonathan Wareham and his wife Anne. Jonathan may well have been connected to and descended from the Warehams of the neighbouring village of Fontmell Magna where the surname was more numerous in parish records in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. There are also clues connecting Jonathan of Iwerne Courtney to a Thomas Wareham of Fontmell from the previous generation (see Wareham spreadsheet online for information). However it is also possible that Jonathan is not connection to the Fontmell family and there are other options for associate families in that area, for example there was a will left by a John Wareham in Blandford in the 1690's, a Warram that was baptised in Shaftesbury in 1644 and a Wareham in Horton, near Cranborne Chase, in the 1641 Protestation Returns. Jonathan may also be connected to Warehams over the county border in Hampshire.

### ***Ecclesiastical connections?***

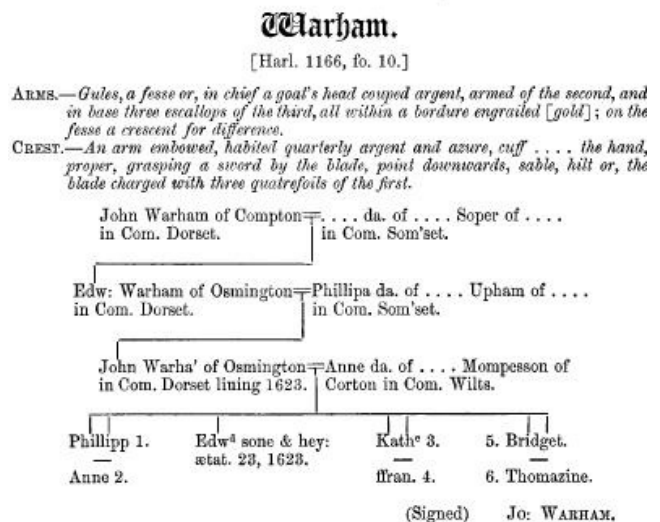
William Warham (sometimes referred to as Wareham) was an Archbishop of Canterbury from 1503 to 1532 during the reign of Henry VIII. His coat of arms were those shown on the right. He was born in 1450 and was from Hampshire, although may have been connected to the family at Osmington in Dorset (see below) and educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford. His coat of arms are at St Mary's Church in Oxford as I myself have witnessed when I studied there. Some Warham and Wareham families may come from this branch however there is no evidence that these Warhams (which may have changed to Wareham) are connected to other Dorset Warehams. The Wareham families from north Dorset are not historically much above the status of labourer and not wealthy or landed people. Therefore I am very doubtful that my own Wareham line is in any way connected to this Archbishop. There is an interesting webpage about him which includes photos of his tomb at Canterbury Cathedral - <http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/Bios/WilliamWarham.htm> .



### ***The Squire Warhams of Dorset***

In the 1623 Visitation of Dorset (royal heralds who visited the counties to confirm or deny the pedigree of various families who claimed coats of arms and gentry status) there is recorded the pedigree of Warham shown on the right.

There is also information about this family on the website about Osmington in Dorset -



<http://www.deraign.com/sardiniasun/osmington-history/historypage.html> -

“Towards the end of the 15th century (the date is uncertain) a Tudor house was built alongside the Church (parts remain today on the north side) as a seat of the Warham family who held the Manor under Henry VII.

and

“Edward Warham, the Squire ..., who died in 1601, seems to have his tomb prepared in his lifetime. In the inscription on which he recorded the liability of glass water clocks to sudden leakage ....

"Man is a glass is as water thats weakly walled  
about. Sinne brings in death. Death breaks the  
glass so runs the water out"

This branch clearly had claim to the same arms as those shown above and they must therefore have been connected to Archbishop Warham. They were a high status family being lords of the manor of Osmington which is north of Weymouth in Dorset.

Whether the Warham name comes from the Dorset town of Wareham originally or is a Norman family name that in fact gave its name to the town is unclear. However given that the town name of Wareham seems to derive from the Anglo-Saxon the latter is unlikely.

I also think it unlikely that my labouring family of Warehams from the north of Dorset connect to the gentrified Tudor Warhams of Osmington. I have no reason at the moment to believe that Jonathan born in about 1700 was of any higher social class than a farm labourer and so the gap in social status to bridge in that century from Lords of the Manor is significant, even allowing for a bit of ill fortunate for a junior branch.

### ***Gypsy Roots?***

According to the book '*Gypsies of the New Forest by HEJG, 1909*' –

“The ordinary surnames amongst the Gipsy tribes in the Forest are [amongst others] ... Wareham...”.

I certainly think this may explain the roots of some of the Wareham families of Hampshire where there are a large number of families, particularly around Ringwood and Fordingbridge. It may be the case that my Warehams from Dorset may also have Romany roots, however many were settled in Shroton from about 1650/1700 with no suggestion in the names or description in parish registers of gypsy blood. So if they were gypsies then that connection was further back in time.

### ***Someone from Wareham?***

Another Wareham researcher told me that they think that their family used the name because their family did not have a surname at the time but lived in Wareham and when they left the town searching for work, or for some other reason, the town name was adopted as surname. I have no firm evidence, but it may explain why the surname Wareham (looking at census information from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the town's war memorial) does not seem to be that common in Wareham itself. I think that this is almost certainly the most likely reason for my surname and was adopted for similar reasons but if that is the case I doubt if it will ever be established for certain because the start of its use, particularly for a family of lower social class, would be unlikely to have been recorded. The name would just have been used for the new 'of Wareham' family when records of births, marriages and burials were then attributed to

a family that just adopted the name. This would almost certainly have been well before parish registers became common, which was after the reign of King Henry VIII.

### ***Town Fires or the Civil War?***

Another possible origin for the Wareham name could be where the name was given to displaced children made orphans as the result of a large or even smaller fire in the town. Due to the construction of buildings and streets in Dorset and other areas, house fires which then spread to engulf a town, were far from uncommon up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wareham suffered from a 'great fire' in 1762 and Blandford in 1731. It may be for this reason that names like Wareham, Blandford and Gillingham are fairly common in the County.

As I can trace my line back to at least 1700 in Shroton (and possibly 1650 in Fontmell), which is well before the before 1762 great fire of Wareham, I don't think this explains the origin of my name. Unless there were other previous major fires in the town of Wareham that I have not found recorded yet.

Another possibility is displaced persons due to the English Civil War and it is the case that the town changed hands three times during the war and people were killed in the struggle. This could be a cause for the origin of my ancestry but again would not explain the Fontmell Warehams who go back to at least 1641 and prior to the war as there are three recorded there in the 1641 Protestation Returns – the only ones in the north Dorset area that I have found other than the one at nearby Horton.

### ***'de Warham'***

In the 1327 Lay Subsidy Rolls (presumably an early tax record) there are a number of 'de Warhams' in Dorset. I assume that the 'de' comes from the Latin or French meaning 'of' and 'Warham' refers to the Dorset town and therefore all the following are probably 'of Wareham' in a pre-surname society and these families may have adopted the surname Wareham in later generations.

Stratton – Willelmo de  
Warham  
Bere Regis - Henrice,  
Matille de Warham  
Milbourne St Andrew –  
Waltero de Warham  
Ibberton – Willelmo de  
Warham  
Waddon in Portisham –  
Johanne de Warham

It is fairly certain that some of these 'de Warham' families connect to the gentry Warhams of Osmington in Tudor times referred to previously and are probably not connected to other Wareham families of Dorset. However it is interesting that one 'Willelmo de Warham' is in Ibberton in north Dorset as he may be a progenitor of the Warehams of the area, or connected to the family line that were.

### ***Warham in Herefordshire and Norfolk***

Some people from these Counties could have adopted the names Warham which could then have changed to Wareham. There are indeed some Warham families still in existence today but they are far less common than those with the Wareham name and people attached to these Counties would almost certainly have remained as Warham as there would have been little reason to change it to connect to the Dorset town and add an 'e'.

### ***Further research***

I do update this essay as new information comes to light and if you have any information or opinion that you would like to add to it please do let me know.

My own Wareham family lines, from my grandfather Sidney Ernest Wareham, is on the next page.

