

**DESCENDANTS OF ROBERT SLIMMON & HELEN LINDSAY****Background****Searching for the Origins of the Slimmon Family Line**

Anyone who researches family history in the UK will soon learn that there are many challenges to finding records prior to the 1800s. At least for ‘common folk’, the only records that are likely to exist are those for births/baptisms and marriages/banns originally recorded at the local parish church. Such records have come to be referred to as the Old Parish Records (OPR). The OPR were handwritten entries in books that were stored in various ways. Unfortunately, some of those record books are in such poor condition as to be unusable and many have been lost completely. Even for areas and from times where the OPR have been well preserved, they are far from complete because of the church’s policy of not registering events which did not conform to church standards – children born out of wedlock being a prominent example. The imposition of fees or taxes for such registrations also caused many couples and families to simply not bother and the decline in the influence of the church as urbanization increased was yet another barrier to registration. A good explanation of the limitations of the OPR can be found on the ScotlandsPeople web site at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). Fortunately the UK government established a requirement that ALL births, marriages and deaths after 1854 had to be registered. Searches for records beyond that date tend to be much more successful. The implementation of 10 year censuses starting in 1841 has also drastically improved the amount of data available on residents born as far back as the late 1700’s.

Another challenge when searching for records prior to about 1900 involves the wide variety of ways in which family names were spelled. The problem appears to stem from two major developments in the English language. The first was “[The Great Vowel Shift](#)” that took place between about 1350 and 1700 and marked the transition from middle English to modern English. This change affected the way words, including family names, were both pronounced and spelled. In Slimmon family history, this manifests in the surname initially being spelled variously as “Sluman”, “Slowman”, “Slewman”, “Slomand” etc until about 1650. Then, over the next 100 years or so, there was a very distinct transition from that more guttural spelling to the more familiar variants of “Slimmon”, “Sliman”, “Slimon”, “Slemmon”, “Sleman” etc. In some cases, the transition can be seen within a single family. A good example, is the baptismal records for the children of Thomas ~Slimmon<sup>1</sup> and Isobell Henderson in the parish of Kelso (approximately 45 miles south of Edinburgh). Their first three children, born in 1663, 1666 and 1667 were all registered in the OPR as “Sluman”. The fourth child, born in 1670, was registered as

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1 *In this section the symbol ~ is used in front of the Slimmon name to indicate all possible variants in spelling the Slimmon name.*

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“Sliman”, while the last two children, born in 1673 and 1677 were registered as “Sleeman”.

The Middle English style of spelling the ~Slimmon name seldom appears in any of the OPR after the 1763 – 1767 births of the children of James ~Slimmon and Ann Anderson in Burntisland (north across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh.) Even though their marriage record uses the “Slimman” spelling, the births of all of their three children were recorded as “Slomand”.

The second major event that affects the search for Slimmon ancestors was the [English Language Spelling Reform](#). Historians generally attribute this development to the increased use of the printing press and the need for printing houses to be more consistent in how they spelled words for the benefit of the growing proportion of the population that could read their publications. A key figure in this process was [Samual Johnson](#) who, in 1755 published A Dictionary of the English Language. This move to standardization of spelling also took several years and, in the case of the OPR, would have depended upon the local clergy to learn and adopt the new standard. As a result, we see drastic variations of the spelling of the family name within a single family. Take for example the case of William ~Slimmon and Jannet Cullen in Lanarkshire. Their 1776 marriage registration appears as “Slimman” but the birth/baptismal records of their seven children appear variously as “Slimman”, “Sliman”, “Sliming”, “Slymond” and “Slymon”.

Not all of the spelling differences we find in on-line sources can be attributed to the original records. Some stem from the difficulty or carelessness of those who transcribed the information from the handwritten script in the original sources. For example, it was only by chance that the 1851 census record of Robert Slimmon (1790) was discovered because one popular family history source had incorrectly transcribed the name as “Shimmon” even though it is clear that the spelling in the original document was “Slimmon”. In another case, a search in one source was unsuccessful because the name had been incorrectly transcribed as “Stimmon” but the search succeeded in a completely independent source where the name had been transcribed correctly. This reinforced the need to use a variety of sources when conducting searches of the OPR.

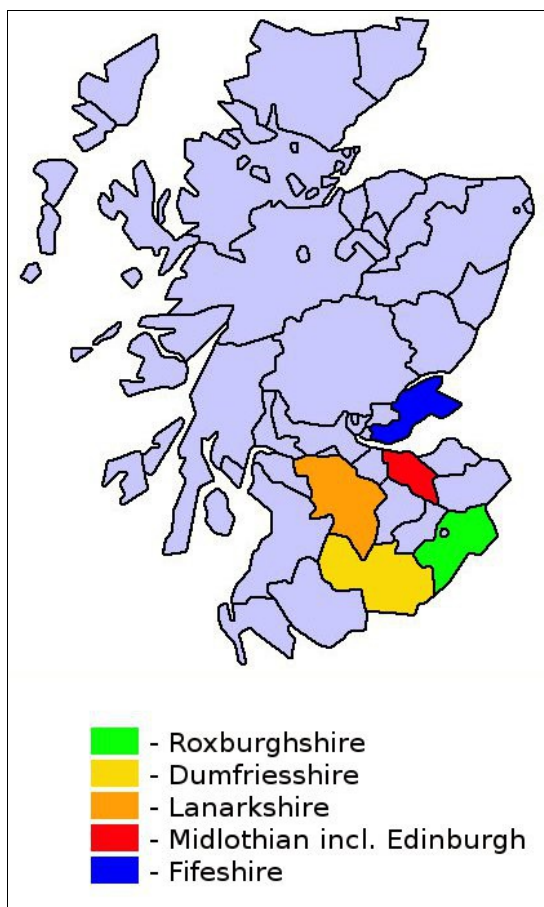
In spite of the forgoing issues and limitations, it has been possible to gain at least some inferences about the earlier origins of our Slimmon family tree.

The earliest OPR found so far for the ~Slimmon name in Scotland are the 1598 marriages of Meggie and Jonat “Sluman” in Kelso parish, Roxburghshire; about 45 miles south of Edinburgh and about six miles from the English border (coloured green in the county map on next page.) Since 1598 is also the first year for which there are any OPR birth records for that county, it seems likely there were ~Slimmons in the area prior to that

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year. By comparison, there were 8,748 births registered in the OPR in Edinburgh between 1560 and 1606 but none of them were ~Slimmons.

Until the 1641 marriage of George Slowman and Margaret Caldwell in Newbattle, Midlothian — the rural county which included the city of Edinburgh — nearly all of the OPR birth and marriage records for ~Slimmons in Scotland are from [Roxburgh County](#) and Edinburgh City. Two exceptions were the marriages of Agnes Slumen (1621) and Nicolas Sluman (1640) in the parish of Dumfries near the south-west coast of Scotland about 74 miles west of Kelso. Although there are OPR births extending back to 1600 in Dumfriesshire, none were ~Slimmons until after 1650.



County Map of Scotland

There are also OPR birth and marriage records for the county of Lanarkshire extending as far back as 1600. However, the ~Slimmon name does not appear until the 1647 and 1649 births of Jonet and Robert Slimman/Slimmane to Mathew and his unknown wife in Lanark parish.

The evidence from Dumfriesshire and Lanarkshire suggests that there may have been a westerly migration of ~Slimmons from Roxburghshire and Edinburgh between 1600 - 1649. Then, from 1650 to 1824, ~Slimmon births represented an average of 2.2% of the OPR births in Lanarkshire, a proportion that remained more or less constant over the period. By comparison, the proportion of ~Slimmon births in Dumfriesshire peaked at 28.4% between 1700 and 1724 and averaged 4.8% of the OPR births between 1650 and 1824.

Meanwhile, back in Roxburgh county, ~Slimmon births peaked at 48.5% of OPR births between 1600 and 1624 but steadily declined to zero after 1749. Similarly, the proportion in Midlothian—including Edinburgh city—peaked at 4.0%

between 1600 and 1625 and declined to zero by 1675 with only a slight resurgence to 1.6% between 1800 and 1825.

The clearest evidence of Slimmon migration was into the county of Fifeshire, north of Edinburgh on the north shore of the Firth of Forth. There were no registered ~Slimmon

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births in that county until James “Slimman” married Ann Anderson in Fyfe in 1761 and had three “Slomand” children between 1763 and 1767 in Burntisland, Fifeshire. Between 1775 and 1824, ~Slimmon births averaged 2.3% of all OPR births in that county. No doubt migration to Fifeshire from the south and/or west would have been facilitated by the 1750 introduction of the first ‘roll-on, roll-off’ rail ferry service by the Edinburgh and Northern Railway company. This revolutionary new service connected the north and south shores of the Firth of Forth bringing Burntisland much ‘closer’ to the rest of southern Scotland.

There is nothing in any of the early records that suggests the ~Slimmon name could have originated north of the line between Edinburgh and Glasgow. In fact, as noted previously, the records that do exist seem to suggest that ~Slimmons first appeared in the late 1500s in the south-east corner of Scotland near the English border.

A search of the OPR in England provides additional clues to the origins of the ~Slimmon line. Between 1600 and 1649, there were only two ~Slimmon OPR births in either of the two English counties immediately south of the border with Scotland. Both of those births were in the County of Northumberland in the extreme north-eastern corner of England. However, during that same time period, a significant number of ~Slimmon births appear in the OPR for the English counties of Devon (107), Kent (71), Cornwall (69), Sussex (35), Middlesex (10) and London (10); all counties in the extreme south of England. (See map on next page.) There were also no noticeable differences in the various ways the ~Slimmon name was spelled in England as compared to those recorded in Scotland during the same period. This leads to the reasonable conclusion that the ~Slimmon line in Scotland may actually have originated in the south of England.

So what event or events may have lead to such a distant relocation? One plausible scenario stems from the state of relations between Scotland and England during the 1500s. King Henry VIII ascended the throne in 1509 and soon became embroiled in hostilities with France. King James IV of Scotland, who was an ally of France, agreed to invade England from the north in an attempt to draw forces away from the south of England, thereby diminishing the threat to France.

In early 1503, King James and an army of about 30,000 men moved across the English border. In keeping with the rules of chivalry, he had sent notice to the English of his intentions a month earlier and invited the English to battle. As expected, the English responded by raising an army to expel the invaders. A single decisive clash between the assembled armies of the two countries occurred on September 9, 1513 near the town of Coldstream in the county of Northumberland, England. In the [Battle of Flodden](#)—also known as the Battle of Braxton Hill—King James personally lead as many as 40,000

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Proportion of ~Slimmon Births in England – 1600 to 1649

Scots against the English. The English army, estimated to have been about 26,000 strong and lead by the Earl of Surrey, successfully vanquished James' army in a battle that started at 4:00 pm and lasted only hours. It has been estimated that somewhere between 6,500 and 17,000 men died in the battle. King James was himself one of the casualties.

It may not be coincidence that ~Slimmons first appear in the OPR of Scotland in the town of Kelso - just 13 miles from the site of that historic battle. It also seems entirely plausible that ~Slimmon men from the south of England were recruited into military service and moved to

Northumberland to help defend the border and possibly even fight in the Battle of Flodden. Some may then have remained in the area to marry and raise their families. With the 1603 unification of England and Scotland under King James I of England (King James VI of Scotland), subsequent migration from the north of England into Scotland would certainly have been facilitated.

