

Origins of Austin Kilham's Family

By William B. Heys

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Over the years there seems to be a common misunderstanding as to the origins of the Killam/Kilham family. Some researchers have written that the family place of origin is in the parish of Kilham, Yorkshire, England. Others have written that the family's origin is in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England, and then they moved to Dennington, Suffolk, England.

The earliest reference to a place of origin of Austin Kilham's Family seems to be from Myron O. Allen who, in 1860, mentions the Parish of Kilham in **West Riding** of Yorkshire, England:

“The name of Austin Kilham occurs among the earliest settlers of Wenham. He is supposed to have come from the **West Riding** of Yorkshire, where the parish of Kilham still exists, situated near Beverly, the principal market town in that part of England. From this Austin Kilham, all who bear the name of Kilham, which has now become considerably diffused in our country, are supposed to be descended. The family have, at different periods, taken an active and prominent part in the affairs of the town.”¹

In fact, the Parish of Kilham is in **East Riding**, Yorkshire, England. Unfortunately, this error has been copied by subsequent researchers.

Samuel Drake in 1860 makes no mention of **West Riding** or **East Riding**:

“These people went to New England with William Goose, M^f of the Marey Anne of Yarmouth

....

May the 11th 1637 The examinacion of Augusten C.....

Alles his wife ageed 40 yeares.....

desirous to goe to Salam in New E.....

....”²

George Staley Brown in 1898 seems to have copied this mistake from Allen.

¹ “The History of Wenham, Civil and Ecclesiastical, From its Settlement in 1639 to 1860”, by Myron O. Allen, M.D., published in 1860. Pages 144-5.

² “The Founders of New England”, by Samuel Drake, published in 1860, page 49

“AUSTIN KILLAM is supposed to have come from **West Riding** of Yorkshire, where the parish of Kilham still exists, near Beverly, the principal market town of that part of England, and it is said that there the Kilham family has been seated since the time of William the Conqueror.”³

Henry Waters, in 1898, makes no mention of **West Riding** or **East Riding**:

I have no doubt that we have here the family of our Austin or Augustine Kilham who went to New England in the ship Mary Anne of Yarmouth, William Goose master, in the spring of 1637 (see Drake's Founders of New England, page 49), in company with sundry others from Norwich, Yarmouth and parts of Suffolk. I myself examined the list of passengers some years ago, and made out a trifle more than Mr. Drake seems to have done. It reads as follows (i.e. to my eyes):

May the 11th 1637. The examinacion of Ängsten Call
Alles his wife aged 40 yeares
desirous to goe to Salam in New Eng.....⁴

Walter K Watkins of Chelsea, Mass., in a letter to the editor, Yarmouth Herald, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, dated March 15, 1898, takes issue with **West Riding** and mentions Dennington for the first time:

Mr. Brown, in his introductory to the Killam family (Yarmouth Genealogies No. 50) states Austin Killam was supposed to have come from the West Riding of Yorkshire, where the parish of Kilham still exists. He was the son of Henry and Alice (Goodale) Killam of Dennington, Suffolk, England.

The writer visited this parish in the summer of 1897, and examined the parish register, which gave the baptisms of many of the children of Henry Killam, and also the baptism of Daniel, son of Austin Killam, in 1620. He sailed, as stated, from Yarmouth, England, which is about 40 miles from Dennington.⁵

William Stowell Mills, in 1902, makes no mention of **West Riding** or **East Riding**:

“To Mr. Henry F. Waters belongs the credit of discovering the English home of this family.* In this country, the name has various spellings as Callum, Killum, Killom, etc.”⁶

Sidney Perley, in 1913, repeats Allen’s and Brown’s error of **West Riding**, but goes on to suggest that Suffolk County rather than Yorkshire might be the place of origin of the Kilham family.

³ “Kilham Family Genealogy”, by George Staley Brown published in the Yarmouth Herald (Yarmouth Genealogies, No. 50. The Kilham Family, February 22, 1898), pages 278-296.

⁴ “Genealogical Gleanings in England”, by Henry F. Waters, published in the New England Historic and Genealogical Register, Vol. LII, 1898, pages 238-9.

⁵ “Yarmouth Nova Scotia Genealogies, Transcribed from the Yarmouth Herald”, George S. Brown, Copyright 1993, Genealogical Publishing Company, page 296

⁶ “The Early Kilhams”, by William Stowell Mills, LL.B., of Brooklyn, N.Y. , published in 1902 in the New England Historic and Genealogical Register, pages 344-346.

“It has been said that this (Kilham) family originated in the **West Riding** of Yorkshire, England, where the parish of Kilham exists; and the present writer suggest that the county of Suffolk may be the place.”⁷

⁷ “Genealogy of the Killam Family of Essex County, Mass.”, by Sidney Perley, 29p. (Reproduced from the Essex Institute Historical Collection), page 1

Horace Wilson Killam, in 1930, using wording similar to William Stowell Mills, references the research of Henry F. Waters. He also makes no mention of **West Riding** or **East Riding**. He writes:

“To Mr. Henry F. Waters belongs the credit of first discovering the home of the Kilham Family, the same being published in the New England Historic and Genealogical Register in April 1898, and in his Genealogical Gleanings in England in 1901 and confirmed by Mr. Walter Kendall Watkins of Malden, a well-known genealogist who visited the Parish (in Dennington, Suffolk, Eng) in 1897. In 1856, Joseph Whitney Killam, then of Wilton, NH and father of the writer traces his ancestry and that of a few others of the family from the arrival of Austin Kilham in Salem, Mass. in 1637 up to 1857, 220 years.”⁸

Rick Kilham, was the first researcher I am aware of to note that the Parish of Kilham is actually in **East Riding**, Yorkshire, England rather than West Riding. He writes:

“...in a book entitled “*The History of Wenham*”, by Myron O. Allen, M. D., Boston, Printed by Bazin & Chandler, 1860, located on pages 144 - 14, the original source and wording for the West Riding”⁹

Rick Kilham describes some of the challenges with connecting the Kilham Family of Dennington, Suffolk, England with the Parish of Kilham in East Riding, Yorkshire, England:

“There are several good reasons why the origin of the Kilham name remains an unanswered and/or undocumented question. However, when trying to solve a mystery the best place to start is with the information you do know. The earliest recorded individual in direct lineage to Austin Kilham is his grandfather, William Kilham; both parish records, and William’s will indicate that he resided in St. James Parish, Bury St. Edmonds, Suffolk, England. Extensive searches by numerous genealogists into all available records of the surrounding areas in Suffolk County have not revealed any information on his [Austin’s] birth; his parents” names, any other related individual Kilham names aside from his brother or that William was from the Bury St. Edmonds area originally. Does this mean William was not originally from the Yorkshire area? Not at all, what it does show is that we cannot prove his date or place of birth nor the names and locations of his parents and their place of birth.”

A town named Kilham in East Riding, Yorkshire, England, exists, but there is no evidence to support any tie with William or the Kilham name to this town other than the name itself. A friend of mine, Dixie Donald Kilham of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, who died recently, spent a great deal of time and money having the family name researched in the Parish of Kilham with no positive results.¹⁰

⁸ “Genealogy of the Killam/Kilham Family”, by Horace Wilson Killam, about 1930, not published.

⁹ Austin Kilham, Progenitor of the American Family named Kilham or Killam, L.F. “Rick” Kilham, 2000, Meriden, CT, page 14

¹⁰ Austin Kilham, Progenitor of the American Family named Kilham or Killam, L.F. “Rick” Kilham, 2000, Meriden, CT, page 14-15

Rick Kilham continues:

It wasn't until 1538 that Parish registers, by decree, were required to be kept on a regular basis. In that year a law was passed ordering the clergy to record baptisms, marriages and burials, and that they should be written down in a book after the service on Sundays, and in the presence of Churchwardens. Before this date there were no mandated records, except for a few created by monks who recorded the events for prominent families. Many churches, however, did not begin keeping records until further notice was sent out in 1558, and even then, many did not comply. In 1597, Queen Elizabeth I decreed that all existing records should be copied into "fair parchment books, at least from the beginning of this reign." There was considerable opposition."¹¹

Baptisms recorded at St. James Parish, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England:¹²

1558 10 Aug. Henry son of Wylliam Killam

1560 12 Sept. Elizabeth daughter of Wylliam Killam

1584/85 7 Feb Robert son of Robert Killam

1586 18 Dec Nicholas son of Robert Killam

1635 5 Apr. Bridget daughter of John Kilham

Baptisms recorded at Tannington, Suffolk, England:¹³

1588 16 Jun Alice daughter of Henry Kelham and wife Mary

¹¹ Austin Kilham, Progenitor of the American Family named Kilham or Killam, L.F. "Rick" Kilham, 2000, Meriden, CT, page 15.

¹² Kellam - Bury St Edmonds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), pages 2-3

¹³ Kellam - Bury St Edmonds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), page 3

Baptisms recorded in the transcripts of the church register, St. Mary's Parish, Dennington, Suffolk, England.¹⁴

- 1583 18 Aug. Mary daughter of Henry & Alice KYLLAM
(note- Some have Aug 13 which is wrong according to transcript, I do not have the original -wbh)
- 1590 24 Jun. Robert son of Henry & Alice KYLLAM
(note – Some have May 24 which is wrong according to transcript, original clearly states “June” - wbh)
- 1593 8 Jan. Elizabeth daughter of Henry & Alice KELLAM
- (Note – there is no entry in transcript for 1594 6 Dec Elizabeth Killam, daughter of William wbh)
- 1619 2 Feb. Margaret daughter of Robert KILLAM
- 1620 15 Mar. Daniel son of Augustine KILHAM
- 1620 8 Nov. Timothie son of Robert KILLAM
(note – Some have Nov. 18 which is wrong according to transcript, original shows “8” – wbh)
- 1626 13 Aug. Mary daughter of Robert KELHAM

Marriages recorded in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England.¹⁵

- 1566 22 Aug. Clementine (Clement) Kylham (Kilham) married James Wright (St. Mary's Parish)
- 1581 Joan Killam (Kilham) married George Gatt (Gat) (St. Mary's Parish)
- 1608 16 Oct. Nicholas Kilham married Joan Keye (St. James Parish)
- 1611 1 Sept. Barbary Kellam (Kilham) married Nicholas Clark (Clarke) (St. James Parish)
- 1635 5 Apr. Bridget Kilham married John Kilham 5 April 1635 (St. James Parish)

¹⁴ Transcripts of the Register for St. Mary's Church in Dennington, Suffolk, England

¹⁵ Kellam - Bury St Edmonds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), page 3

Marriages recorded in the transcripts of the church register, St. Mary's Parish, Dennington, Suffolk, England:¹⁶

1582 12 Aug. Henry KYLLAM married Alice GOODALE

1609 25 Apr. William TOMPSON married Mary KELLAM

(note - there is no entry in transcript for 1584 7 Jul Ann Killam married Roger ???? – wbh)

1612 9 Sep Robert Kyllam married Margaret GODBOLDE

(note – SSS has Margaret as sister to Austin' wife Alice)

Marriages recorded in Wrentham, Suffolk, England:¹⁷

1619 8 Sep. Austen or Augustine Kilham (Kellam) married Alice Gorbolde (Gorball)

(note- SSS has Alice as sister to Robert's wife Margaret)

Marriages recorded in Brundish, Suffolk, England:¹⁸

1635 16 Apr Alice Kellam married William Thompson

Burials recorded in the transcripts of the church register, St. Mary's Parish, Dennington, Suffolk, England:¹⁹

1617/18 11 Feb. Elizabeth daughter of Henry KILLAM

1621 24 Mar. Timothy son of Robert KILLAM

1624 3 Jan. Elizabeth daughter of Robert KILLAM

1624 1 Mar. wife of Robert KILLAM

1624 14 Jul Alice wife of Henry KELLAM

1628/29 31 Jan. Joseph son of Robert KILLHAM

1631 21 May Henry KILLAM

1659 4 Apr Thomas son of Robert KILLAM

1669 1 May Robert KELLHAM of Kelshall

¹⁶ Transcripts of the Register for St. Mary's Church in Dennington, Suffolk, England

¹⁷ Kellam - Bury St Edmonds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), page 3

¹⁸ Kellam - Bury St Edmonds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), page 3

¹⁹ Transcripts of the Register for St. Mary's Church in Dennington, Suffolk, England

Court Rolls of the Manor of Dennington

From the research of Sheila Spencer Stover (Firehair):

"To establish the birthplace of Austin's father, Henry, Court Rolls of the manor of Dennington from 1596 were searched for references hoping to find some clue to his parish of origin. There was an indirect reference to Henry. 30 March 1630 there was a mention "a certain way leading from the house of Henry Kelham, now in the occupation of John Manwood, towards Tannington." Henry Kelham is listed in the rentals of the manor 1622, 1629, and 1630 as paying rent of 10d, but the land referred to is not specified. "²⁰

Finally, Rick Kilham suggests that it may be reasonable to conclude that the Kilham family had origins in Yorkshire, England:

So where did the Kilham/Killam name originate? Currently no one can cite with hard documented proof an exact geographical place of origin for the family name. On the other hand, I do feel there is enough circumstantial evidence to support a hypothesis as to a probable place of origin. I believe we all can agree that the surname is English in its roots even if place-name research supports a Viking influence in the etymology of the name. This same research clearly indicates a high probability that the majority of name derivations have their formulation based on a specific geographical area and a description of an area's unique geography. The Parish of Kilham, East Riding, Yorkshire, England, meets the above criteria, and there is no reason why this Parish's name could not have been used when bynames came into fashion. We can grant that the spelling probably did change over the years but that same Kilham spelling is now the standard variant for the same named Parish in East Riding, Yorkshire, England, and for some of the Kilham family. The numerous variants from this name base have evolved in North America, with the Killam spelling being one of the most common from the line of Austin Kilham. It is also reasonable to hypothesize that the economic prosperity in the southern English counties, such as Suffolk, were a major drawing force for people wishing to migrate from an area of turmoil. This could account for the trail of Kilham names leading from Yorkshire to Lincolnshire and finally for our purposes, Suffolk.²¹

Based upon the research done by many researchers over the years, it may never be possible to establish a firm connection for Austin Kilham's family between Suffolk and Yorkshire. It would appear the earliest known source is from the birth recorded in St. James Parish, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England of Austin's father Henry, son of Wylliam Killam on August 10, 1558. There have been documented attempts to link this family as far back as the time of William the Conqueror in 1066. Unfortunately, it would seem these attempts are myth or wishful thinking.

²⁰ Kellam - Bury St Edmunds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), page 5

²¹ Austin Kilham, Progenitor of the American Family named Kilham or Killam, L.F. "Rick" Kilham, 2000, Meriden, CT, page 16.

The absence of documented contemporaneous sources (such as Church Registers noting the baptisms, marriages, and burials), suggests that many researchers have often documented educated guesses as actual facts. While supposition and hypotheses may provide useful insights, they should be documented as such.

For example, how do we know when and where Austin Kilham was born. Most researchers indicate he was born in Dennington, England. But how do we know this for a fact. Austin's place of birth is likely an educated guess and should be documented as such.

How do we know when and where Austin's son John was born. Many record John's birth as 1627 in Dennington, Suffolk, England. However, there is no record of John's birth in the Church Register of St. Mary's Church in Dennington.

In 1898, George S. Brown documents the children of Austin Kilham, but omits a birth date and place for John.²² In 1902, William Stowell Mills, seems to be the first to list a birth date for John ("b. about 1627"), but omits a birth place.²³ In 1913, Sidney Perley documents John's birth date as "about 1627" but also omits a birth place.²⁴ In 1930, Horace Wilson Killam also documents John's birth date as "about 1627" and omits a birth place. In 1970, Austin D. Kilham documents John's birth date as "about 1627" and omits a birth place.²⁵ More recent research documents John's birth as "born Bet. 1624 - 1627 in Dennington, Suffolk Co., Eng."²⁶ This is also likely to be an educated guess and should be documented as such. Unfortunately, none of the various research documents an authentic source for John's date and place of birth.

Misinformation often gets copied from one family tree to another, especially in this age of the Internet. I am not opposed to including speculation or hypotheses in family trees. I would, however, like to easily discern between, fact, educated guesses, and fiction. In my own research, I have often merged information into my family tree from the Ancestry.Com website. Family Tree Maker makes this easy to do. Some of this information comes from authentic original sources (census records, military records, Social Security records, etc.). Where possible I include the image of the original source. Often this information comes from other family trees that have been uploaded to Ancestry.Com. These should not be confused as authentic sources. Most of these family trees do not have original source notations. Information in my family tree that comes from other family trees, where there is no additional original source noted, should be treated the same as facts with no source – interesting, useful, but not necessarily true.

²² "Kilham Family Genealogy", by George Staley Brown published in the Yarmouth Herald (Yarmouth Genealogies, No. 50. The Kilham Family, February 22, 1898), page 279.

²³ "The Early Kilhams", by William Stowell Mills, LL.B., of Brooklyn, N.Y. , published in 1902 in the New England Historic and Genealogical Register, page 345

²⁴ "Genealogy of the Killam Family of Essex County, Mass.", by Sidney Perley, 29p. (Reproduced from the Essex Institute Historical Collection), pages 5,6.

²⁵ "Notes on the Descendants of Austin and Alice Kilham and Related Families", Austin D. Kilham, March 1, 1970, Library of Congress Card Number 75-112738, page K-3

²⁶ Kellam - Bury St Edmonds Kellam et al (copyright Stover, Sheila Firehair), page 11.

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