

## The Dagg People in St. Kew

*Jim Dagg, February 2015*

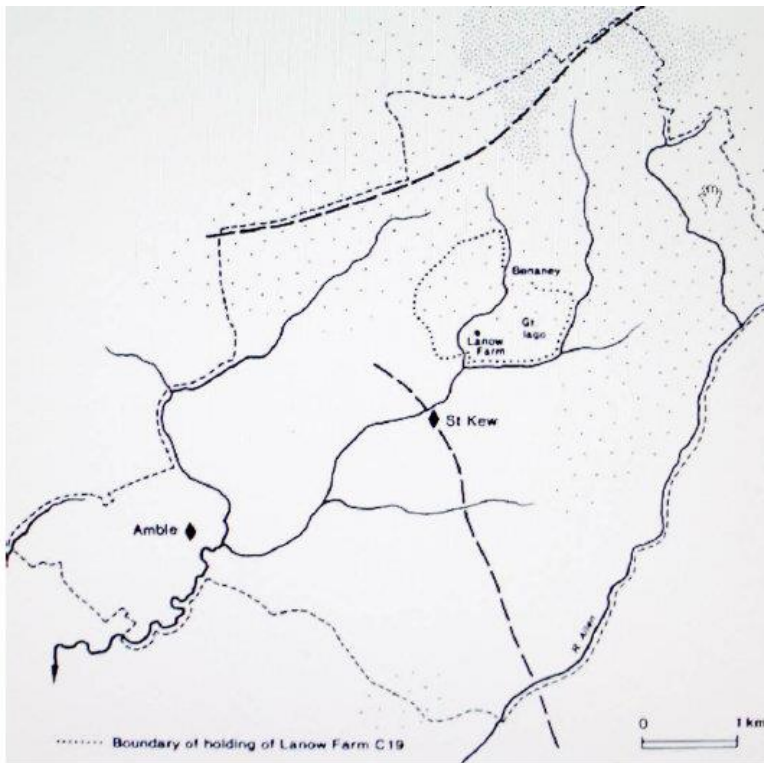
St Kew parish, one of over 220 in the Duchy of Cornwall, is north of the town of Wadebridge, north of the Camel Valley and inland from Port Isaac in North Cornwall. About 1100 people are permanent residents of the 6500-acre parish and live in hamlets and farms connected by hedge-lined lanes. The lanes are narrow and twisting. Drive with care. Forty miles an hour can lead to some scary encounters with wildlife, other drivers or walkers. Both cyclists and eight and half foot-wide tractors are on a stop-for-nothing mission.



Parishes - St Kew in red (Cornwall Records Office)

The ancient hamlets are called Chapel Amble, Trewethern, Trewethen, St Kew Highway, St Kew, Trelill, Trequite, Tregellist, and Pendoggett. The origins of St Kew parish, lurk in the mists of time. Ancient beginnings have emerged in the work of many historians, archaeologists and people researching family records that are constantly being discovered. Although I am not one of those lucky types, I have developed a spectator interest during many visits to Cornwall, starting back in the early 1970s. Today, the parish is all quiet farmland. There once was a railway, but the station at St Kew Highway closed in the 1960s. Now a main road runs north to south, the A39, optimistically named the Atlantic Highway, and the B3314 road clips the north-west corner through Pendoggett, but all roads by-pass the church town of St Kew.

The heart of St Kew parish is St Kew hamlet and the parish church, St James the Great. Historians note that a 6th century monastery dedicated to a Welsh monk, St Docco existed near a tributary of the River Amble. The settlement was called Lanndohow, later corrupted to Lanow, and is now Lanow Farm. Docco's sister or cousin named Cywa wandered the countryside helping people devise ways of protecting their crops and livestock from predators. She gained fame by taming a problem bear who became her companion. Eventually made a saint, Cywa became St Kew.



Lanow Farm



St Kew and Bear

The parish church was dedicated first to St Docco then to St Kew. However, in the late 1400s it was enlarged and re-dedicated to St James. St James the Great St Kew There were Dagg people in that part of Cornwall at least in the 1500s. My cousin Ainsley Dagg researched our branch of the Dagg family, and his best guess is they descended from William Dagg of Trewiggett farm near Pendoggett in North Cornwall some time before 1600. He also believed they were most likely Huguenot refugees from France who eventually arrived in the Duchy of Cornwall in the 1500s and 1600s. I have not found the Dagg name in any Huguenot records, but some lists note that being included or omitted neither confirms nor denies membership in that category.

The Dagg family origins are obscure, and so is the origin of the name. Historians note that surnames were introduced to the British Isles by the Normans after 1066. The practice spread and by around 1400 applied to most family groups. Henry VIII (1491-1547) imposed new rules that marriages, births and deaths placed in church records required the surnames of the people involved to be recorded.

Some surnames related to the occupation of the individual, so the Dagg name may have referred to someone who made daggers or weapons. But it has other meanings. A dagg was a type of gun, a long pistol in flintlock days. Being “dagg’d” meant being drunk according to Ben Franklin’s 1737 dictionary. A dag in Cornish was a miner’s axe.

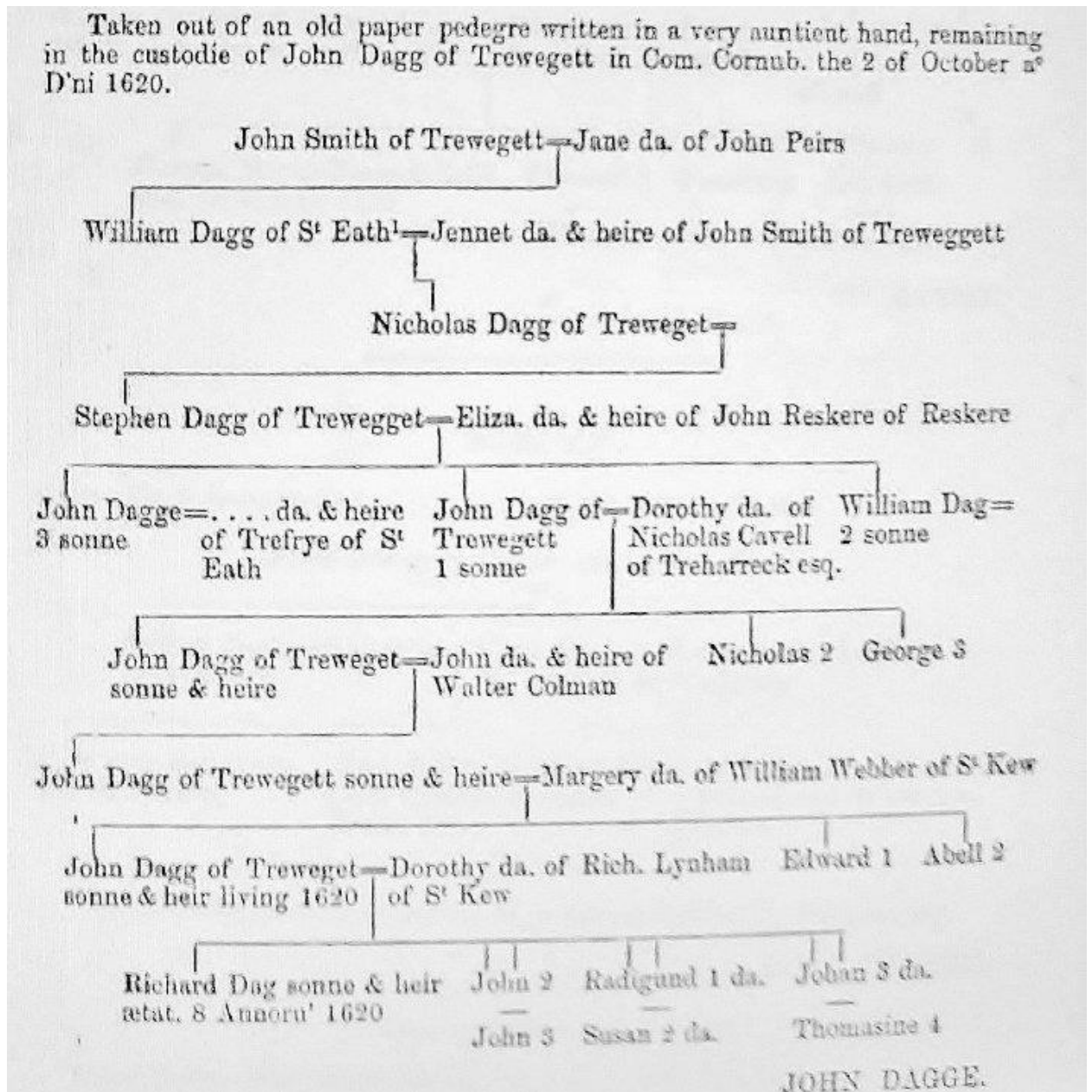
I got very interested in imagining the experiences of people migrating to Cornwall. What do people do if they are entering a foreign country on speculation, or running for their lives? If they have no job, no place to live, don’t know the language, and maybe have to depend on the charity of local people, how do they survive?

If some of the Dagg people arrived by boat, it would be difficult to be land on some of the coast of Cornwall even on a calm day. If they made port in Fowey or Falmouth, for instance, and were lucky, they could get a job in the old Inn at Pelynt or tend bar at the Chain Locker in Falmouth. Jubilee Inn, Pelynt pub in Falmouth Further inland, the big houses, the manor houses could afford a living for people who had the skills required to work the large areas of farmland and woodland that supported the house, for example, mansions like Cothele or Trecice. Not saying they did, but nice thought.

Dagg people had to be adaptable. The record of Huguenots in other parts of England and other countries shows they were skilled as farmers, or perhaps crafts people, weavers, makers of jewellery, potters, weapon and tool makers. With those skills, they eventually assimilated into local populations in towns and villages in Cornwall.

Dagg men were gradually being domesticated. The website made available by the Cornwall Online Parish Clerks (OPC), lists hundreds of people named Dagg marrying, being born and dying in St Kew and other parishes. For example, Johannes Dagg and Margeria Webber in 1573. William Dagg and Johanna Weals in 1589. Johannes Dagg and Dorothea Lynam in St Kew parish in 1605 and in neighbouring St Teath parish, Petrus Dagg and Isobella Nichols in 1603, Wilyam Dagg and Elizabeth Blake in 1650. Of course, Dagg people also died. A sampling of the OPC Bodmin burial registry lists Antoney in 1641, Ann and Able in 1663, Benjamin in 1688. St Teath burials were Johannes in 1584, John in 1683. On a personal note, Cousin Ainsley noted that Dagg men were known to marry the heiresses to Trewiggett farm in St Kew Parish.

Here is a copy of a likely Dagg connection to Trewiggett farm taken from The Visitation of the County of Cornwall 1620:



Dagg people in Cornwall in the mid to late 1500s had to endure interesting times. Henry VIII, the first monarch to take a whole kingdom away from the Church in Rome, died in 1547. He was succeeded by Edward VI, age nine, and a council of advisors ran the country. The council was headed by a Lord protector, first Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset who was later overthrown by John

Dudley, who made himself Duke of Northumberland. Bishop Cranmer's new book of common prayer in English was rejected by the Cornish. Dagg people, if they were still non-Catholic, but living among people who were Catholic, probably had to pick sides. I have found no record of their decision.

Under Edward VI, in 1549, when the new prayer book in English was crammed down the throats of the Cornish, they refused to abandon their worship service in Latin. Bishop Cranmer's man, William Body set out to destroy any vestige of the old form of worship that Henry VIII's break with Rome had not removed. Violent resistance ensued in the west country. The Cornish unfortunately did not succeed, and lack of numbers and firepower let them down. At least four thousand died at the hands of an English government that also used mercenaries from Germany and France.

Before Edward VI died in 1553, he altered the will of his father Henry VIII, and willed the throne to Jane Grey his cousin. But forces in London and in various big and powerful towns in the country plotted against Jane Grey as queen. Henry VIII's daughter Mary, originally Henry's willed successor, was made queen. She immediately began to force England back to the Roman Church. The methods were typical of the age. Reformers were hung or hacked up if they didn't convert. Cranmer was burned at the stake along with three hundred other victims. Apparently the Dags were not wiped out. Lucky for them, and the country, that Mary's reign was a short five years. She died in 1558. Although Elizabeth I allowed England to advance to a state of compromise between Catholics and Protestants, I notice that even into modern times most Anglican churches are rather convertible, just in case of a swing one way or the other.

We can only guess at what the Dagg people went through during their migrant travels. Being of the reformist protestant persuasion, they probably were not too well received. Although they could marry into the right family and become gentry, they had to struggle to achieve any kind of status. Eventually, some would be classed as yeomen, as was Digory Dagg in 1606 noted in the National Archives in a legal dispute. He may have also done some good deeds for the town, and there is a plaque in St Petroc's church in Bodmin in Digory's name. We did not get into St Petroc's church during our visit, but in Bodmin's museum the list of mayors in the 1600s were several men named Dage.

During Elizabeth I's rule (1558-1603), during wars with France and then Ireland, men named Dagg may have served in Elizabeth's army in those wars, and eventually stayed to live there, if they survived. The 1600s in England and in Cornwall became more and more dangerous and interesting. King Charles I married Catholic Henrietta and preferred an almost Catholic form of structure and ceremony in the Anglican church. King Charles fought with Parliament, dissolved it and ruled by decree. Ultimately his struggle for power resulted in a civil war. I

do not know if the Dagg people sided with the Cornish and the Royalists. Unfortunately for some and fortunate for others, Cromwell's army won the day.

After the English civil war, some of Cromwell's army was sent to subjugate Ireland. My cousin Ainsley's research is a little quiet on that account. He picks up the later Dagg family emigrating to Canada from Ireland in the 1800s. He noted men named Dagg were British army officers who attended the University of Dublin and married into influential Irish families. That will be saved for another tale.

Getting back to the way people lived in the 1500s and 1600s, maybe the way of life in Cornwall was not too different compared to France. Assuming the Dagg people were domesticated and living indoors, I looked at some of the types of farm buildings and houses people built in Cornwall and in Brittany. Looking on internet sites and also estate agents' advertisements for houses in both locations today, I found good examples.

The Dagg name in the population of Cornwall seems to have decreased to almost none in present day. Speaking of dying out, the average life expectancy around the time Dagg people were migrating to Great Britain is often said to be 35 years. But the average includes that 30 percent of people born who never lived beyond fifteen years. If they survived disease and accident, they likely went to their sixties or seventies or longer. Typical killers were diseases, accident and war. Also, people accepted dangers in making a living. Mining, fishing, crewing warships, smuggling and poaching, and even farming, presented many ways to get killed. Urban areas, with poor sanitation, overcrowding and polluted water, were also unhealthy and dangerous. Well, if a few Dagg people stayed wild, kept away from towns and remained people of the land, they may have had a better chance of staying alive. Disease was the worst killer. Neither cause nor cure was understood. Smallpox, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, malaria, TB, syphilis, and in very unlucky years, plague killed thousands.

The Dagg name occurs all over the British Isles, and the question is, are all people named Dagg related? Their family tree may prove it. But if people with the same surname say they are not related, perhaps a DNA test could prove they are related if their genes are similar enough. However, in centuries past, identity was a family affair. Well, fairly distant cousins did marry, possibly with no unfortunate results.

Because people did not travel too far from their village or tribal lands, they intermarried with people with similar physical traits. Their close relationship became obvious. It could be seen in their faces. For example, when the genome mapping was being done, one of the researchers tracing the Y-chromosome took photos of people in some of the "stan" countries such as Kazakhstan, or Uzbekistan, and showed them to native American people in New Mexico. Instantly



they commented on the resemblance of people in the pictures to known local relatives. So much mystery in all this family tree business. Coincidentally, our landlady and her partner live near Lanow Farm at Lanow Mill on the tributary of the River Amble mentioned earlier. No relation, but her family name was Smith, but no connection to the Dagg-Smith union from Trewiggett.

Some people have created great family trees. I admire that work. Although searching for my genetic family origins is not a priority, I think J.C. Cullen's *History of the Dagg Family* as mentioned in the Toronto Cornish Association's book *Cornish Emigrants to Ontario, volume II* could be a good start, if I ever have time to get more serious. I probably won't go to the same ends commissioned by the late Richard Bolitho, much respected member of the Toronto Cornish Association and cousin of the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall. Mr Bolitho told me he had his DNA tested, hoping to be related to the indigenous Cornish. Not to be. It turned out his DNA was related to an ancient tribe in Spain.

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