

Searching for family with DNA tests

David Pike

Many of my ancestors left the UK well before census and civil registration records began to be kept, so for me it has been a challenge to try to make connections with distant descendants from my ancestors' kin that remained in the UK. Census and civil registration are wonderful genealogical tools, but it has been nearly impossible for me to tell from them who are, and who not, my relatives. To overcome this obstacle I have turned to the aid of genealogical DNA tests.

My surname is Pike, and my Pike ancestors probably resided in Poole, Dorset, in the late 1600s or early 1700s, just prior to their settlement in Newfoundland. There is speculation that Poole may have only been home to my Pike ancestors for a few generations, meaning that my Pike line might have originated somewhere else.

But where? Pike is a common surname in the West Country; in Dorset alone there are clusters of Pikes in Stour Provost, Wareham and Church Knowle, Worth Matravers, Pimperne and Shapwick. Moreover, there are many additional groups of Pikes in counties such as Wiltshire, Somerset, and Devon to name just three. Which of these families, if any, am I related to? I could easily waste both a fortune and a lifetime trying to research potential connections with traditional records, and still not obtain any answers.

So I am delighted by the advent of genealogical DNA tests that can tell whether two family lines are related or not, and all with the ease of mail-order. DNA tests take just a few weeks to process.

My task now is to find other people with Pike ancestry, and in particular those who have inherited a Y-chromosome (a small portion of DNA that is passed only from father to son)

from a Pike ancestor, so that we can compare our genetic signatures with one another.

Within the Pike family there is an active effort at building a genetic census, to be used hand-in-hand with traditional census records and other genealogical tools at our disposal. Although the Pike project has discovered a number of genetic matches that have subsequently helped to unravel enigmatic genealogical connections, I personally have not so far found any genetic matches anywhere in the UK. But, far from being discouraged, I can thus stop wasting time and money trying to find elusive connections to families with which I am a known genetic non-match. I now know that I can focus my efforts elsewhere, and if/when I do find a genetic match, I can further concentrate my attention on finding connections between my Pike ancestors and those of my new-found cousins.

One of the goals of this article is to provide a glimpse into the utility of genealogical DNA tests, which I hasten to point out are quite different from the DNA tests used by government and law enforcement agencies; these focus on those parts of a person's DNA that are unique to only one individual, whereas genealogical DNA tests aim to reveal genetic signatures shared by extended families along either paternal or maternal lines.

An excellent book with more details is *Family history in the genes: trace your DNA and grow your family tree* by Chris Pomery. People wanting to learn more about genealogical DNA tests might also find the resources "for newbies" at <www.isogg.org> helpful. FamilyTreeDNA is one of several companies providing genealogical tests; it has links to websites for

over 4,000 family DNA projects, just one of which is the Pike project.

The Pike project website is at <www.math.mun.ca/~dapike/family_history/pike/DNA>. It can also be easily found by doing a Google search for "Pike DNA".

There is a map on the project's results page that shows where in the UK we have found members of several different Pike families who are involved in the project, including one family from Cork in Ireland, but which is believed to have originated in Berkshire.

The editor would be delighted to hear from members who have tried genealogical DNA testing, with or without success.

Heathens, felons and Granny's memories

***Godfrey Collyer (4604)
seeks to rehabilitate
the notorious
Wokingham Blacks***

While researching my Collyer ancestors from Wokingham I found references to a group of local felons known as the Wokingham Blacks. Some quick research revealed them to be men who blackened their faces and got up to no good in Windsor Forest in the 1720s. They were referred to variously as an infamous band of robbers, footpads and ruffians. Their crimes would appear to have been robbery, blackmail, burglary, extortion, mugging and murder, and their leader William Shorter was accused of commanding most of the crime in east Berkshire. It was also claimed that locals were afraid to speak out against them.

Surely my ancestors could not have belonged to such a band of criminals, for they were gamekeepers, small farmers, husband-men, blacksmiths and agricultural workers – hardworking, respectable people, God-fearing and church-going!

Recently a distant cousin wrote explaining that her grandmother had discouraged her from researching her family's history, declaring that they were criminals buried on the wrong side of the church wall, and that they never married or baptised their children, so no church records existed. My cousin went on to describe a family crest in her possession, consisting of a blackened face and an oak leaf. Could this be a reference to the Wokingham Blacks?

I value the recollections of elderly relatives, but I have learned to look for evidence to substantiate them. I have evidence to show that my ancestors did marry, and that their children were baptised. They are found in large numbers in all of the parishes of Windsor Forest and the Bagshot Heath area, which was the stamping ground of the infamous Wokingham Blacks. Did the supposed family crest suggest criminal association with the notorious Wokingham Blacks?

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I read E P Thompson's *Whigs and hunters*, which contains much about the Wokingham Blacks. I located an article by Pat Rogers called *The Waltham Blacks and the Black Act*, which also discusses the activities of the Wokingham Blacks, and another by John Broad called *Whigs, deer stealers and the origins of the Black Act*. After many hours' reading I concluded that history has been less than fair to the Wokingham Blacks, who were in the main men of substance, including: