

CHAPTER ONE

Origins

IN Anglo-Saxon times, Dunstan (meaning “brown rock” or “hill stone”) was used as a personal name, given to a boy at birth or baptism. The most famous bearer of the name was Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury from 961 until his death in 988. Dunstan was a scholar and craftsman, and he devised the coronation service, a form of which is still in use today. Observance of his day, 19 May, was ordered by King Canute.

In later times, Dunstan was used also as a surname, and instances of both appear in the Hundred Rolls of 1273, where Thomas Dunstan and Dunstan de Berstede (both of Kent) are mentioned.

Alternative spellings are found, especially Dunston and Dunstone, and all three were used interchangeably in the Middle Ages by careless (or semi-literate) parish clerks. The derivation of Dunston is probably different, meaning “a settlement established by Dun”. There are parishes of that name in the dioceses of Lincoln, Oxford, Southwell, Norwich and Durham. Examples from the 13th century include Hugh de Dunston (Lincoln) and William de Dunston (Notts.).

Today, the surname is relatively rare. In 1993, *The Burke's Peerage Book of Dunstons* put the number of families worldwide at 3,246. The use of Dunstan as a personal name is even more rare, and confined mainly to Roman Catholic families.

In Great Britain, the majority of Dunstons are to be found in Cornwall. Their ancestors were mostly miners of tin and copper, an occupation which reached its peak in Cornwall in the early 19th century. After about 1850 the industry slumped when production was overtaken by mines in America and South Australia. This prompted emigration from Cornwall on a large scale, and explains why over half the Dunstan families in the world today are to be found in Australia.

Although difficult to be absolutely certain, it is most likely that my own ancestors led simple lives as tin miners or tenant farmers in Cornwall for hundreds of years after the Norman conquest. My branch of the family can be traced back with confidence to the late 16th century. The subsistence lifestyle ended 200 years later, when my great great great grandfather William Dunstan left Falmouth for Lancashire.

