

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

Today the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and variants Willescroft, Williscraft, Wolliscroft, Wooliscroft are distinct surnames. However, my research has demonstrated that stability in the spelling of the surname in England has only occurred over the past hundred and fifty years. Prior to this the different spellings of the surname were interchangeable. The common factor was that the different spellings of the surname sound the same especially with the Staffordshire accent.

Analysis from recent electoral registers, Birth, Death & Marriage records and census returns between 1841 and 1911 in the United Kingdom has demonstrated that the greatest concentration of the surname in the United Kingdom is in Staffordshire. However, the surname is now found worldwide.

The surnames appear to share a common origin from the hamlet marked on present day maps by 'Wooliscroft' located just outside Stone in Staffordshire, England. It has a long history and can be traced back to the 12C and perhaps Domesday and before. It was part of the Aston by Stone and Walton Manor. Today it is located in Hilderstone Parish. The spelling of the place name shows a similar development to that of the surname.

This does not mean that all the bearers of this surname have the same genetic roots but that their ancestors most likely came from the same place.

Earliest References to the surname

A study of records contained within the "Collections for the History of Staffordshire" by the [Stafforshire Record Society](#) has revealed some interesting references to both the surname and place-name prior to the 1600's. Some of the deviation in spelling may be due to transcription errors from the original documents pre1500. Reaney suggests that the name shown in documents may not be the name the person was known by. Different clerks may use different names to record information. It was not until the latter part of the 14C that recognisable surnames for ordinary people began to appear. (*The Origin of English Surnames: Reaney P. H., Routledge, 1967*).

In 1136 the place was called Willanes-croftum (Willianescroft) and this name continued until the late 1300's. In the 1300's it is referred to Wilardiscroft. Later the same century the place-name changed and was more commonly known as Wyllascroft, Willascroft or Wollascroft. I have found a similar pattern in the evolution of the surname. Between the 13C and 15C there were two other surnames which I considered might be variations or deviations of Williscroft & Woolliscroft, namely Werlawescroft and Whatecroft or Watecroft. However, I am now confident in stating that these are distinct surnames in their own right.

14th Century

During the 14C there are five possible references to the surname. The first is a feoffment dated 1311 when Henry the son of Walter of Wilardiscroft is referred to as a tenant of Gilbert, son of Geoffrey de Astone. Geoffrey was the Lord of the Manor of Aston by Stone in which the hamlet 'Wooliscroft' was situated. It is the first indication I have found that the place name was being used by clerks to identify individuals.

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

In 1367 a Richard de Wylascroft is mentioned in the Plea Rolls for Staffordshire. (*Staffordshire Record Society (SRS)*). Later in the Poll Tax Returns of 1377 John de Wyllardyscrofte at Fenton, Staffordshire and William Wyllardcroft at Walton, Staffordshire are mentioned. (*SRS, Fourth Series, Vol VI 1970*). About 1384 Thomas Wylascrofte was a sub-deacon at Stone Priory in Staffordshire. (*SRS, 1905 Vol VII ns*).

15th Century

My search of the 15C records has only revealed three references to the surname. In 1478 a Nicholas Wollescroft was a churchwarden at St Margarets's Church, Westminster, Middlesex. (*Notes & Queries: Church Warden Accounts, by William Blades, 22 Dec 1866, "Notes & Queries": s3-x, pp 496-497*).

In 1488 there are two references to William Wollascroft and land at Podmore and Brockton (*there are two places called Brockton in Staffordshire. The one referred to in these documents I believe is close to Podmore and located near Slindon in Staffordshire*). In my opinion William is most likely the forefather of present day Williscroft and Woolliscroft families. The land referred to in these documents remained in his "family" for 200 years.

16th Century

The references to the surname in Staffordshire are more numerous during the 16C and there is evidence that the surname is inherited. Family members are mentioned in manorial records, muster rolls of 1539, parish registers and Calendars of Wills at Lichfield Joint Record Office. I have not found references to the surname in other will indexes elsewhere in England for this time period. The documents show that the individuals are related but there is a lot deviation in how the surname is spelt and on which vowels are used.

Although, the greatest concentration of the surname remains in Staffordshire there are other references. The surname is found amongst the parish records of St Lawrence, Pountney, London. When a William Willi(e)scroft's children were christened and buried in the early 1540's.

In 1569 Nicholas the son of Rici (Richard) and Christina Williscroft was christened at St Augustine's Church, Norwich. The couple are mentioned in the [Norwich Census of The Poor](#) taken in 1570, the surname being transcribed "Nulliscraft". The transcription reads "*Richard Nulliscraft of 36 yeris, baker in work, & Chrystian, his wyfe, of that age that spyn white warp, & 2 children, ye eldest 6 yere, sykly, & have dwelt her 14 yer. [hable]*" The couple were living in the St Peters of Manford Parish in a house owned by William Hemlyngs. Richard had moved to Norwich about 1566. The parish church is located in the centre of Norwich.

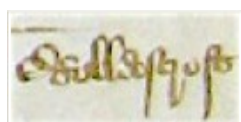


St Peter of Manford Church and Market Square, Norwich

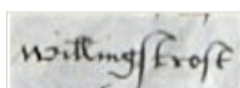
The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

An Ellen Wylliscroft, a servant, was buried at St Mary, Woolnoth in the City of London in 1593. A Dorothy Woolerscroft was buried at Wednesbury, Staffordshire in 1599. I have concluded that these references are isolated occurrences of the surname following an extensive search of the parish records where they first appear.

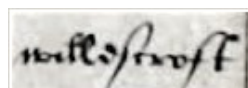
16C examples of the surname



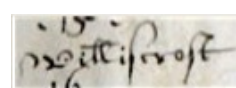
Wollascroft
1533



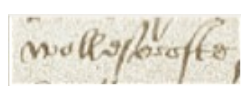
Willingscroft
1539



Willescroft
1540



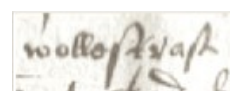
Williscroft
1545



Wollescrofte
1598



Willascroft
1586



Wolloscraft
1598

17th Century

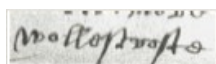
During the 17C the references to the surname are found various available parish registers in Staffordshire. At the turn of the century bearers of the surname were living mainly in the Stone area (*parish registers & manorial records*) and in the Alton area (*probate & manorial records*). There are also references to the surname in the records of St Mary's, Lichfield, Staffordshire. By the mid 1600's the surname can be found in the records for Cauldon and Milwich, Staffordshire. However, a Thomas Wyllicraft was buried un Norwich, Norfolk in 1601, Agneta Wilowscroft, a widow, was buried All Saints, Derby, Derbyshire in 1603, Richard Willescroft was buried at Lancaster in Lancashire in 1606 and a George Wolliscroft died from drowning in London in 1666.

The Hearth Tax returns taken at Michaelmas (29 September) 1665 give a good indication of households in Staffordshire at this time. There are seven references to the surname in Staffordshire: Anne Wollascroft of Aston & Walton (1 hearth), William Woolescroft of Farley (1 hearth), James Wollascroft of Coton, Milwich (1 hearth), Bonaventure Wolverscroft of Cauldon (1 hearth), William Wolverscroft of Cauldon (1 hearth), John Woolliscroft of Alton (not chargeable) and Ralph Willerscroft of Brockton (not chargeable). A similar variation in spelling occurs in the "Calendar of Wills" at Lichfield Joint Record Office.

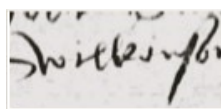
It is in the mid 1640's that 'Woolliscroft' first appears as a spelling of the surname in the will of Leonard Woolliscroft of Cauldon, Staffordshire. However, his wife's surname was spelt Wolverscroft in her will five years later.

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

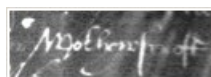
17C examples of the surname



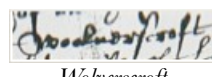
Wolloscrofte
1609



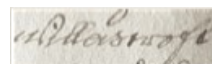
Wilescroft
1606



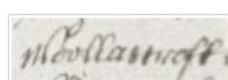
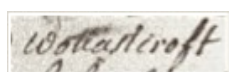
Wollenscroft
1633



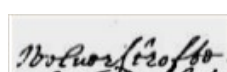
Wolverscroft
1647



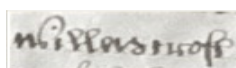
Willascroft
1652



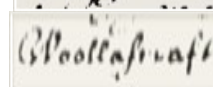
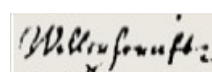
1683
Wollastcroft?
(Admon)Woollascroft
(Inventory)both entries
for the same person



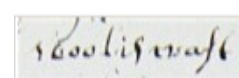
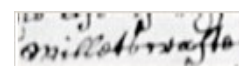
Wolverscrofte
1677



Willascroft
1684



Willascroft
Woollascroft
1658
from the same sentence
in the same document



Willestcrafte
Wooliscraft
1668
both examples refer to the
same person but are from
different documents

18th Century

During this period of time more consistency appeared in the spelling of the surname. Woolliscroft, Wooliscroft, Wolliscroft and Williscroft are more common spellings but interchangeable. The surname spelling varied between parishes and within documents. It is also when the first Williscroft (1703) family is mentioned in Ireland and Williscroft/Woolliscroft (1733) families appear in Colton, Staffordshire. The surname is also found amongst the records for London and Derbyshire in the early 1700. Later in the century the surname is recorded in North Wales, Cheshire and Lancashire but the greatest concentration remains in Staffordshire.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution individuals moved from the land to where work could be found. The Williscroft's and Woolliscroft's were no exception and migrated through the country in search of employment. Others left these shores to find their fortunes in the new territories. The surname was present in Canada, USA, Brazil, Jamaica, Central America, New Zealand and Australia.

With the coming of civil registration in 1837 the different variations in surname start to have their own identity. Yet it was not until the mid 1800's that consistency occurred in the spelling which enables one to identify families by the surname.

Today the surname can also be found in South Africa, Spain, Asia and Sweden.

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

Sources for the Origins of the Surname

Abbreviations :

SRS = [Collection for a History of Staffordshire](#)

LJRO = [Lichfield Joint Record Office](#)

WSL = [William Salt Library](#)

Surname	Date	Place	County	Document	Source
of Wilardiscroft	1311	Wilardiscroft	STS	Feoffment	William Salt Library S. MS. 459/3
de Wylascroft	1367	Stafford	STS	Plea Rolls	SRS XIV 1893
Wyllardcroft	1377	Walton	STS	Poll Tax	SRS, Fourth Series, Vol VI 1970
de Wyllarddyscrofte	1377	Fenton	STS	Poll Tax	SRS, Fourth Series, Vol VI 1970
de Wylascrofte	1384	Stone	STS	Ordination List	SRS,1905 Vol VII ns
Woolecroft	1478	Westminster	LND	C W Accounts	Notes & Queries: 22/12/1866
Wollascroft	1488	Podmore	STS	Feoffment	SRS XV 1894
Woolecroft	1488	Podmore	STS	Indentel	SRS, Vol 1921
Wylliscrofte	1532	Great Bridgeford	STS	Prayer List?	SRS Series 4, 1976
Wollascroft	1536	Bridgeford	STS	Marriage Settlement	Wm Salt Library M226/1
Wulloscroft	1537		STS	Star Chamber	SRS 1910
Willescroft	1539	London	STS	Burial	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Wyllascrofte	1539	Chebsey	STS	muster roll	SRS, Vol 5 ns 1902
Wyllascrafte	1539	Great Bricheford	STS	muster roll	SRS, Vol 5 ns 1902
Willascrafe	1539	Myllemese	STS	muster roll	SRS, Vol 5 ns 1902
Willescroft	1539	Aston by Stone	STS	muster roll	SRS, Vol 5 ns 1902
Willescroft	1542	London	MDX	Christening	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Willescroft	1543	London	MDX	Burial	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Williscroft	1540	London	MDX	Christening	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Willescroft	1542	London	MDX	Christening	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Willescroft	1543	London	MDX	Burial	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Wollascrofte	1544	Bridgeford	STS	Fee-farm rent	William Salt Library M226/2
Williscroft	1545	London	MDX	Burial	St Lawrence, Pountney, London
Wollonscrofte	1555	Checkley	STS	Admon	LJRO
Willascroft	1555	Seighford	STS	Probate	LJRO
Wolascraft	1556	Brychforde	STS	Probate	LJRO
Wolicrofte	1565	Ellastone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willescroft	1568	Stone	STS	Admon	LJRO
Williscroft	1569	Norwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wollescroft	1571	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willescroft	1583	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Williscrofte	1583	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willescroft	1583	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

Willascroft	1586	Podmore	STS	Jervis Papers	William Salt Library M226/3
Williscroft	1589	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wylliscroft	1593	London	MDX	Burial	Parish Records
Wolsoncroft	1593	Chesterfield	DBY	Christening	Parish Records
Williscroft	1597	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Wollascroft	1598	Alveton	STS	Probate	Will of Wm Beardmore – LJRO
Wollascroft	1598	Farley	STS	Probate	Will of Ralph Clerke -LJRO
Williscroft	1598	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Woolerscroft	1598	Wednesbury	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1598	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1599	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Williscroft	1600	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1600	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolsoncroft	1603	Castle Church	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Williscroft	1603	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wilowscroft	1603	Derby	DBY	Burial	Parish Records
Wollascroft	1603	Farley	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1940 p180
Williscroft	1605	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Williscroft	1605	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willescroft	1606	Lancaster	LAN	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1607	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wollescroft	1605	Alveton	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1940
Williscroft	1608	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wollescroft	1608	Farley	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1948/9, p288
Wollescroft	1608	Kingsley	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1948/9
Willescroft	1608	Alton	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1948/9, p57
Wolverscroft	1608	Denson	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1948/9
Willoscroft	1608	Stone	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1948/9,
Wollescroft	1608/9	Okemore	STS	Quarter Session Rolls	SRS, 1948/9, p282
Wollascrofte	1609	Alton	STS	Probate	Will of Ellen Beardmore– LJRO
Williscroft	1611	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolsoncroft	1611		STS	Probate	LJRO – not available
Williscroft	1614	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willescroft	1614	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1615	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1615	Stone	STS	Probate	LJRO – not available
Williscroft	1618	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Williscroft	1626	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1622	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

Wilescrafte	1622	Lichfield	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wiloscrafte	1623	Lichfield	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woloscrofte	1626	Lichfield	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Williscroft	1626	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willascroft	1628	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Willascraft	1629	Lichfield	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolhowscroft	1633	Lichfield	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolsencrofte	1634	Baswich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolsencrofte	1635	Baswich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Williscroft	1635	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Williscroft	1635	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woollscrofte	1637	Baswich	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Williscroft	1638	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Williscroft	1638	Stone	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Woolscroft	1639	Eccleshall	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Woolliscroft	1640	Alton	STS	Probate	Lichfield 1640 – not available
Willoscroft	1640	Walton & Aston	STS	muster roll	SRS 1894 Vol XV
Willowscroft	1640	Milwich	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Willowscrofte	1642	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolliscroft	1643	Cauldon	STS	Probate	IJRO & PCC
Wolscroft	1643	Baswich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willowscrofte	1644	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolsoncroft	1644	Baswich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willowscrofte	1646	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolvercroft	1646	Cauldon	STS	Probate	IJRO
Wolverscroft	1647	Alton	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willowscroft	1648	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolverscroft	1648	Cauldon	STS	Probate	Will of Wm Laughtenhouse – IJRO
Willowscroft	1650	Milwich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willowscroft	1652	Milwich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willowscroft	1653	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willowscroft	1654	Milwich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willowscroft	1655	Milwich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Woloscroft	1655	Sandon	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Woolescraft	1656	Leek	STS	marriage	Parish Records
Williscroft	1659	Aston by Stone	STS	Probate	PCC
Willascroft	1659	Podmore	STS	fee farm rent	WSL M232B/4
Wollonscroft	1664	Baswich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wolliscroft	1666	Islington	MDX	Court Sessions	LMA: MJ/SPC/W/1666
Wollascroft	1666	Walton & Aston	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1921
Woolescroft	1666	Farley	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1925
Wollascroft	1666	Coton, Milwich	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1921
Wolvercroft	1666	Cauldon	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1925
Wolverscroft	1666	Cauldon	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1925
Woolliscroft	1666	Alton	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1925

The Origins and Evolution of the surnames Williscroft, Woolliscroft and Variant's

Willerscroft	1666	Brockton	STS	Hearth Tax	SRS 1927
Willercraft	1669	Farley	STS	Probate	LJRO
Wolverscroft	1669	Cauldon	STS	Admon	LJRO
Wolverscroft	1675	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wulloscroft	1676	Milwich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wooliscroft	1677	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolvercroft	1677	Cauldon	STS	Probate	LJRO
Wolverscroft	1678	Alton	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wolverscroft	1678	Alton	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wolvercroft	1679	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolascroft	1679	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Wolverscroft	1679	Cauldon	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wolverscroft	1681	Cauldon	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Woolascroft	1681	Milwich	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolliscroft	1682	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolverscroft	1682	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willacroft	1682	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willacroft	1683	Stone	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Willascroft	1683	Stone	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolascroft	1683	Stone	STS	Admon	LJRO
Willascroft	1684	Podmore	STS	fee farm rent	WSL M232B/4
Woolliscroft	1684	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolliscroft	1685	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willascroft	1687	Uttoxeter	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Woolliscroft	1690	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Woolliscroft	1690	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willascroft	1690	Podmore	STS	Land Deeds	WSL M22/3
Wooliscroft	1692	Cauldon	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Woolsencroft	1694	Baswich	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Woolliscraft	1695	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willascroft	1698	Uttoxeter	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wooliscroft	1698	Cauldon	STS	Christening	Parish Records
Willascroft	1699	Uttoxeter	STS	Burial	Parish Records
Wooliscroft	1699	Alton	STS	Burial	Parish Records