

Early Gregson History

Don Falkenburg: 3 FEB 2013

We can trace the ancestry¹ of Henry Knight Gregson back to John Gregson of Murton (d. 1607). The source for this Gregson pedigree is "*The History and Antiquities of North Durham...*" published by James Raine in 1852. [1] The only hint regarding the ancestry of John Gregson is the statement that he came from Barton in Lincolnshire. As far as I know we have no genealogical resources to definitively connect the Gregsons of Lowlynn beyond John Gregson of Murton. However, there is some evidence to connect the Gregsons to the de Normanton family who came to England at the time of Norman conquest in 1066.

Family de Normanton

The author of the *History of the Family of Gregson of Whalley, Lancashire* [2] claims that the family that was to become Gregson came to England at the time of the Norman conquest in 1066. The *de Normantons* identified themselves using a territorial surname designating the ownership of land. They lived in Normanton on the River Calder in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The first record of a person from this family was named John. He was born about 1090 and lived in the Manor of Normanton. John was likely a son of one of the knights who was a part of William of Normandy's invading force. In the eleventh century, Normanton (originally called Normantune) was surrounded by a moat. Such a settlement was likely chosen for its strategic view of the surrounding area. An area known as Haw (or How) Hill was a likely observation point.

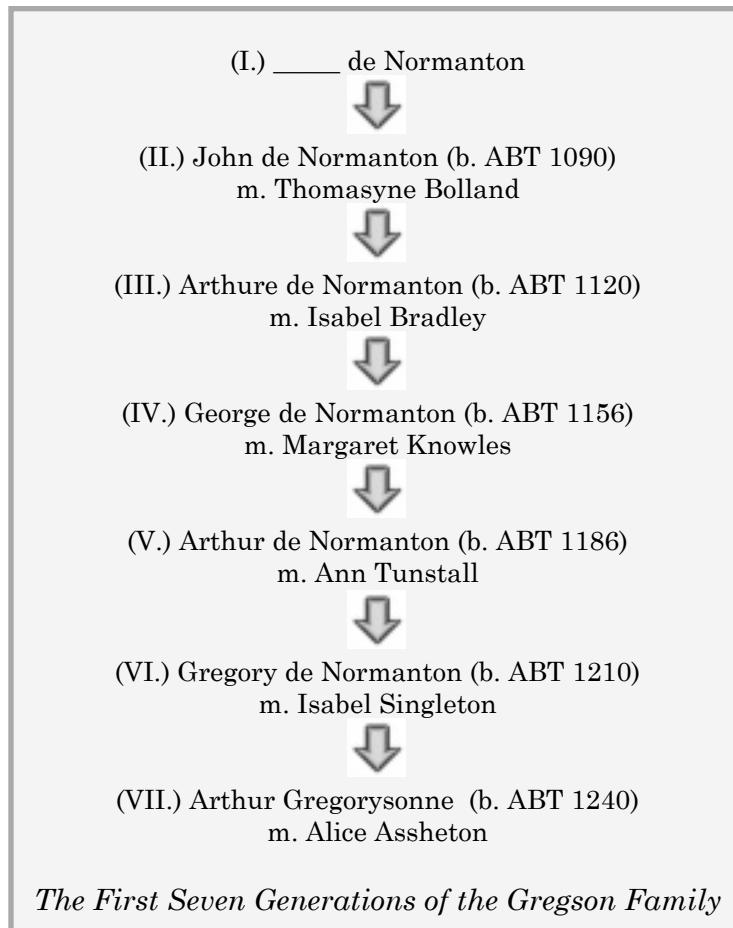
The author of the aforementioned history states: "*The position of the de Normantons was evidently one of much consequence, for alliances were freely made with the best families of Lancashire*". Thomasyne Bolland who married (II.) John was descended from the Earls of Delamere. Isabel Bradley who married (III.) Arthure was the daughter of Sir Frauncis Bradley, Knight, Lord of Bradley Demesne. Margaret Knowles who married (IV.) George was the daughter of Sir John Knowles, Knight and Feudal Lord of Chepin. (V.) Arthur married Ann the daughter of Sir James Tunstall, Knight of Tunstall and Thurland.

Generation (VI.) Gregory de Normanton is a particularly noteworthy member of this family.

"In 1189 Richard I (Coeur de Lion) came to the throne, and with that monarch came the age of the Crusades against Palestine. In order to raise funds he sold all the Crown Lands and offices of State he could, and for 10,000 marks he restored the Vassalage of Scotland. It was at that time an essential part of the education of the heir in every family of importance to be trained to fill a military career, and such would therefore

¹ See discussion in *The Knight Gregson Family > The Pedigree of Henry Knight Gregson*

*have been the education of Gregory de Normanton. He was born at a period of religious fervor which overspread the whole of Europe, and into which the principal families of England entered with such zeal that many of them utterly impoverished themselves to find funds to support the Crusades, or to found Abbeys. Gregory himself appears to have parted with the Manor of Normanton, for his son Arthur, who was born about 1240, abandoned the strictly territorial name 'de Normanton' and became known as *Arthurus filius Gregorii*".*



Although the author of this Gregson history refers to Richard the Lionheart and the Crusades, King Richard I. died in 1199, almost a decade before the birth of Gregory. If Gregory distinguished himself in the Crusades, it would have been in the Seventh Crusade (1248 - 1254) which was led by Louis IX of France, the brother-in-law of King Henry III, reigning monarch of England during Gregory's early life. Whether in the Crusades, or as a consequence of another campaign, we are reasonably sure that Gregory distinguished himself on the battlefield. His heraldic shield was enhanced with a canton²— an azure and gold chequy (chessboard) indicating valor on the battlefield. Gregory de Normanton would have

² a corner decoration

been created Knight Banneret. Clark in his *Concise History of Knighthood* describes the ceremony for conferring Knight Banneret:

“The King, or his General, at the head of his army, drawn up in order of battle after a victory, under the royal standard displayed, attended by all the officers and nobility present, receives the Knight, led between two Knights, carrying his pennon [pennant] of arms in hand, the Heralds walking before him, who proclaim his valiant achievement, for which he has deserved to be made a Knight Banneret, and to display his banner in the field... The words the Herald says to the King are these: ... this Gentleman hath shewed himself valiant in the field, and for so doing deserveth to advance to the degree of Knight Banneret, as worthy henceforth to bear a banner in the war.” [3]

Arthur Gregorysonne

In about 1240 Sir Gregory de Normanton married Isabel, daughter of Sir William Singleton, Knight. Gregory’s heir was son Arthur. Likely because of the fame of his father and the fact that the Gregory had sold the estate at Normanton, Gregory assumed a patronymic designation for the family—in Latin this was written as *Arthurus fil Gregorii* or from the family’s Norman heritage, Gregorysonne. In subsequent generations the surname would be shortened to Gregsonne, and finally, Gregson.

The family now lived in Whalley in Lancashire, about a 42 miles from Normanton. Whalley was the site of a Cistercian Abbey whose construction was begun in 1270. It is believed that Gregory and his descendants contributed to the construction of Whalley Abby.

“Whalley must be taken as the true centre or nodal point of the Gregson family. Benedictus de Normanton was one of its earliest Abbots; the family arms were in the Abbey and are now in Whalley Church.” [4]

Whalley Abbey was closed in 1537 as part of the dissolution of the monasteries ordered by Henry VIII when he broke with Rome. Abbot Paslew, who was in charge of Whalley at the time, was executed for high treason for his involvement in protests over the break with Rome. The Abbey became the private estate of the Asshetons; Richard Assheton was the father of Alice who married Arthur Gregorysonne. Today, Whalley Abbey is a ruin with one intact building used as a conference center for the Church of England.


While there are variations of the Gregson coat of arms for different branches of the family, the description for Knight Gregson of Lowlynn, Beal (28 JUL 1842) granted to Henry Knight Gregson by the College of Arms is described as:

Argent, a saltire gules, recerellee, engrailed azure, a canton chequy erminois and of the last. Mantling gules and argent. Crest — On a wreath of the colours, a cubit arm couped argent, charged with a bendlet wavy azure between two others gules, tied round the wrist with a riband of the same colours and holding in the hand proper a battleaxe or, the staff sable, entwined with a wreath of oak fructed also proper.

The language of symbols [5] used in describing coats of arms and crests provides a textual description.



Henry Knight Gregson
Coat of Arms

The *Saltire* is St. Andrew's Cross  denoting resoluteness; *gules* is the color red befitting a warrior; and *engrailed* refers to the wavy outline of the cross. The background of the shield is argent which designates either silver or white.

According to *The History of the Family of Gregson of Whalley, Lancashire*, the arms of the de Normantons were “*argent and saltire gules.*” That is a simple St. Andrew's Cross. With the bestowing of knighthood on Gregory de Normanton the shield was augmented with a canton displaying an azure and gold chequy. The author of the history goes on to describe the de Normanton crest which is the decoration above the shield:

“an arm couped at the elbow, vested charged with two bendlets wavy, argent and sable, holding the hand arg. two spurs sable; and the motto was “Gannire e Usire meaning Win and Wear in

Norman-French. The author continues “This Crest and motto remained unchanged in the family until about 1533, after which a battle-axe or an handle sable was substituted for the spurs.”

The coat of arms awarded to Henry Knight Gregson in 1842 is very similar to that of Gregory de Normanton. The reference to *chequy erminois* denotes a resemblance to ermine: black markings on a gold background, and the couped arm holds a battleaxe.

While the *History of the Family of Gregson of Whalley* describes many who were descendants of Arthur Gregorysonne, the genealogy is not complete and it is difficult to trace the exact connection between Arthur and John of Murton. However, the evidence provided in the armorial description of the family de Normanton and the that of Henry Knight Gregson provide what appears to be strong evidence of the connection.

- [1] Raine, James, *“The History and Antiquities of North Durham as subdivided into the shires of Norham, Islandshire and Bedlington, which, from the Saxon period until 1844, constituted parcels in the County Palatine of Durham but are now united to the County of Northumberland.”* John Bowyer Nichols and Son (London, 1852) pp.206-207
- [2] Reid, Robert M. *History of the family of Gregson of Whalley, Lancashire: “Gregson pedigree.”* (Shoshone, Calif.: unknown, 1968). This is the normal citation of the work, but the author states “Reference is hereby made to “History of the family of Gregson of Whalley”, a document of thirty-two pages , purchased by me from The College of Arms, ...London...” Interesting that this document is also of the same name and length.

I suspect that in large measure this is copied from the referenced document. Repository: [Ancestry.com](#) or [Don Falkenburg's family web](#).

- [3] Hugh Clark, *A Concise History of Knighthood*, v. 1 (London: printed for W. Strahan, et al. , 1784) 74-75, online: [books.google.com](#)
- [4] *The History of the Family of Gregson* p. 15.
- [5] Boutell , Charles, *Handbook to English Heraldry*,A.C. Fox-Davies (London, 1914) < <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23186/23186-h/23186-h.htm> >