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22 December 1994

Mr. Lorel Morrison,
4812 71st Avenue,
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U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Morrison,

I do not think the surname Giscombe/Giscomb is other than of English origin. The place-name element Combe (Comb or Coombe) is found in very many English place-names and in Old English is Cumb, meaning a valley. Almost every county has one or more names containing ~~this~~ element. For example, Swanscombe in Kent, Ilfracombe in Devon, Castle Combe in Wiltshire, and so on. The element also stands alone as Coombe in Hampshire and Combe in Gloucestershire, and it is from these places that the surnames containing the Combe element will have been derived.

However, having said that I have searched very many gazetteers and directories without finding that there is, or every has been, a place called Giscombe or Guscombe in the British Isles.

I have searched the Great Card Index at the Society of Genealogists' library in London, which contains many millions of cards, the results of the work of scores or genealogists over the past century, and there was not one mention of the surname Giscombe or a reasonable variant.

A similar complete blank was drawn as the result of a search of the first five years of civil registration indexes at the General Register Office in London from 1837 to 1842.

Cont/....

Director of Research :
Colin J. Parry A.G.R.A.

Mr. Lorel Morrison. 22 December 1994

I have a volume of the collected monumental inscriptions in Jamaica and this contains no mention of the name which suggests the brothers were only passing through that island in the nineteenth century.

The latest edition of the International Genealogical Index gives very good coverage of many English counties with regard to birth/baptismal and marriage entries taken from parish registers from the sixteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. This source has been examined for London, Cornwall, Devon and Kent, but not a single instance of a name like Giscombe/Guscombe has been found. This is extremely unusual since in London one generally finds mention of every conceivable surname.

I have an index to wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury from 1800 to 1850 and this, like many other sources consulted such as school registers, telephone directories, name books and heraldic sources, failed to provide a single entry which might help.

I think we must now consider that the name is a variation of some similar sounding name, brought about by the lack of literacy in early times and the absence of any standardised spelling - particularly so in the case of surnames - and considering this there only seems to be one name which is known to have a great numbeer of spelling variations with which it may have been confused and that is Gascoigne. Professor Reaney in his Dictionary of British Surnames lists a great number of variations of this name but does not include Giscombe, but he cannot have been expected to note all. The ones he does quote are:

Gascoign, Gascoinge, Gascoin, Gascoine. Gascoigne, Gasquoine, Gaskain, Gasken, Gaskin, Gaskins and Gasking.

A mis-hearing of one of these could possibly have resulted in Giscombe or Guscombe.

Although I feel certain the name is English in origin, I have looked in various European sources but there is nothing like it in any of these, and the Christian names of the two explorers are typically English.

Cont/....

Mr. Lorel Morrison. 22 December 1994

I wonder if you have any further information, however, trivial it may seem, which might help. I assume there is no clue on John's gravestone on Vancouver Island, or on Peter's, which gives some clue to where they were born. If this were so a systemmatic search of the different sections of the I.G.I. could reveal their baptismal entries.

However, I think at this point I should make a progress report, but will keep trying to find something. I cannot ever remember previously failing to find a single reference to a surname. It is very intriguing.

Yours sincerely,

Colin J. Parry,
Director.