

Wilson - a Y-DNA Case Study

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## Pinpointing the 'Wilson' Paternal Ancestral Genetic Homeland

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tyrone Bowes'.

**Dr Tyrone Bowes**

### INTRODUCTION

A simple painless commercial ancestral Y chromosome DNA test will potentially provide one with the names of many hundreds of individuals with whom one shares a common male ancestor. But what often perplexes people is how one can match many individuals with different surnames? The answer is quite simple. Roughly 1,000 years ago, one's direct medieval male ancestor, the first for example to call himself 'Wilson' was living near others with whom he was related, but who inherited other surnames like Gradwell, Hardman, Tranfield, Wallbank, Whipp and Wood. In the 1,000 years since paternally inherited surnames were first adopted, there will be many descendants of those individuals, some of whom will today undergo commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing. Hence the surnames of one's medieval ancestor's neighbours will be revealed in today's Y-DNA test results.

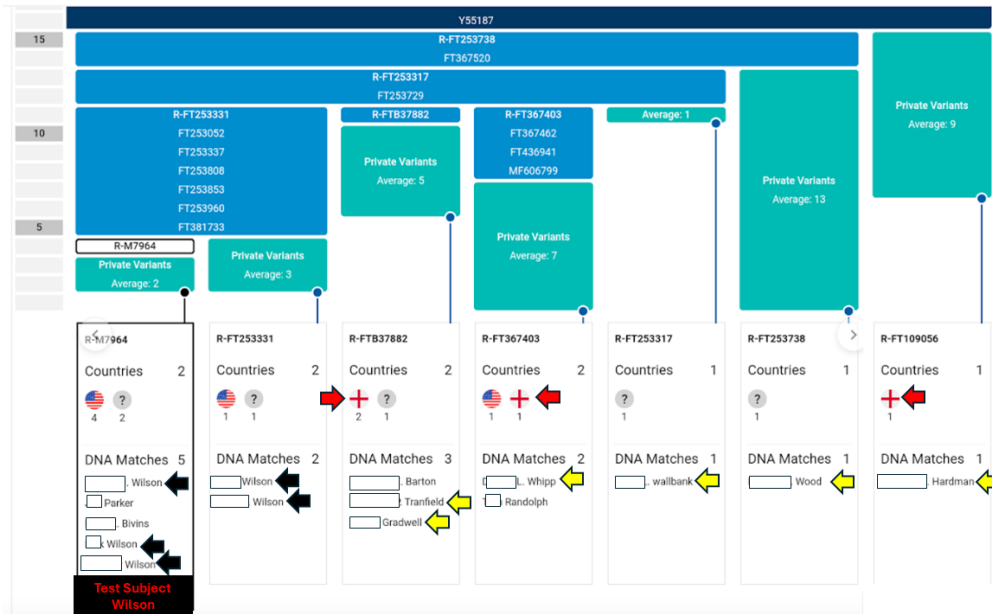
Surnames in England can still be found concentrated in the area where they first appeared, or in the area where one's ancestor first settled. One can therefore use census data to determine the origin of the English surnames that appear in one's Y-DNA results, identifying an area common to all, and reveal ones '**Paternal Ancestral Genetic Homeland.**' The paternal ancestral genetic homeland is the small area where one's paternal ancestors lived for hundreds if not thousands of years. It is the area where one's ancestor first inherited his surname surrounded by relatives who inherited others. It is the area where one's ancestors left their mark in its placenames, its history, and in the DNA of its current inhabitants. Since modern science can pinpoint a paternal ancestral genetic homeland, it can also be used to confirm it by DNA testing individuals from the pinpointed area.

#### Notes of caution!

1. Paternally inherited surnames were adopted in England after the arrival of the Normans in 1066AD. Surnames in England tend not to reflect a genealogical record of a surnames founding ancestor, but rather denote either a person's profession e.g., Taylor, Thatcher, Smith, a notable feature e.g., Short, Brown, Wise, or the place where they lived e.g., Townsend, Ellis, York. As a result, English surnames often have multiple points of origin, and hence potentially many unrelated founding Adams.
2. Science has demonstrated that only 50% of males with a unique surname will be related to that surname's founding ancestor (the 'surname Adam'), the other 50% of males will have an association that has arisen because of what are called 'non-paternal' events, usually a result of adoption or maternal transfer of the surname.
3. Often people are looking for their DNA results to trace back to a specific area. One must remember that the results reflect one's ancestor's neighbours from around 1,000 years ago. As a result, if one's English ancestors were descended from Viking raiders or conquering Normans, then ones Y-DNA results will often reflect earlier continental European or Scandinavian origin. For example, in Ireland, only 60% of males with Irish paternal ancestry are related to the pre-Christian Gaelic tribes. One must approach this process with an open mind!

### INTERPRETING THE Y-DNA TEST RESULTS

To pinpoint a paternal ancestral genetic homeland, one must first identify the surnames that appear as one's closest genetic matches upon commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing. Those surnames, particularly ones that *recur* throughout one's closest Y-DNA results, will typically reflect the surnames of a medieval ancestor's paternal relatives/neighbours. Mr Wilson's closest genetic surname matches as revealed by commercial ancestral Y-DNA SNP testing are detailed in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1:** Block Display of Mr Wilson's closest Y-DNA SNP revealed genetic surname matches. The more Y-DNA SNP mutations that two males share, the more recent their shared paternal ancestor once lived. The test subject's closest Y-DNA SNP genetic surname matches are **NOT RANDOM**; he matches others named Wilson (**black arrow**) together with others with English surnames like Gradwell, Hardman, Tranfield, Wallbank, Whipp and Wood (**yellow arrows**) some of whom record paternal ancestral links with England (**red arrows**). Note: Randolph is not an English surname while Barton can be of Scottish origin.

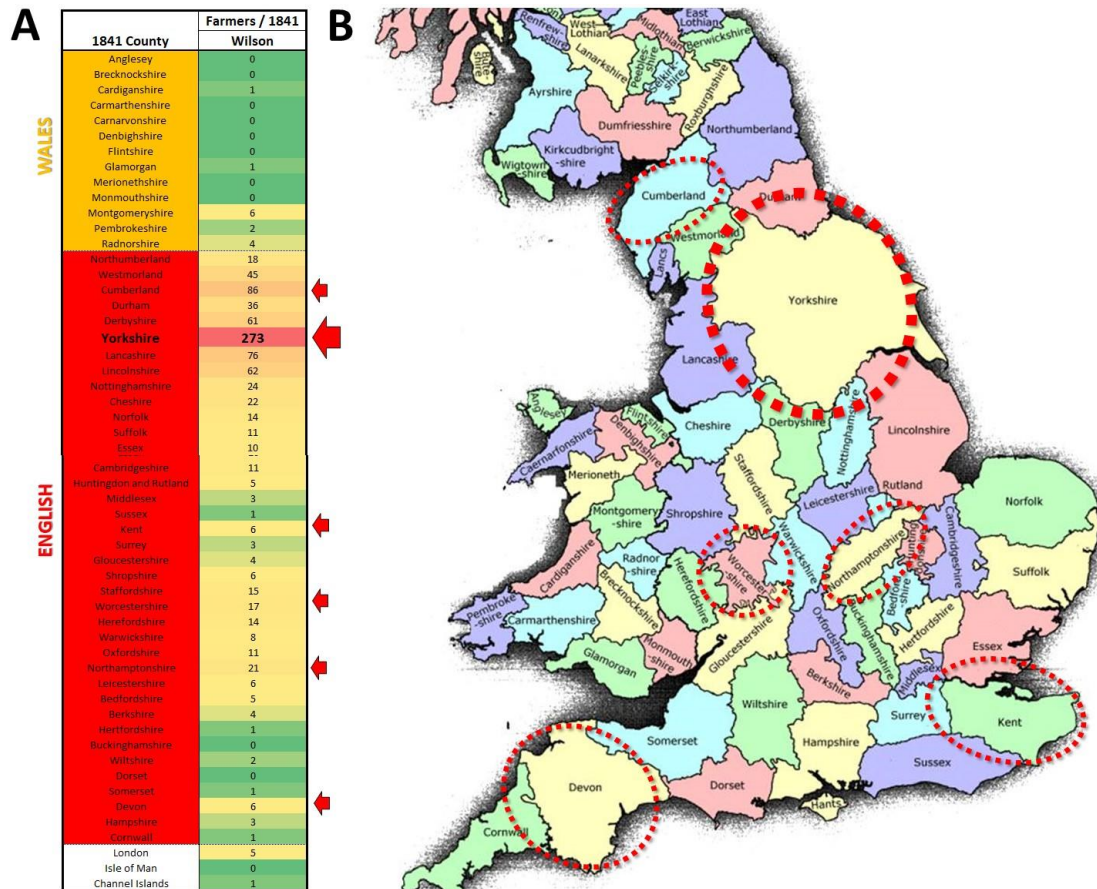
Upon commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing the test subject was a close match to others named 'Wilson' who tested independently, see **Figure 1**. This indicates that the test subject is directly descended from a Wilson-Adam, literally the first male to take that surname who lived approximately 1,000 years ago when surnames first appeared. The test subject's closest Y-DNA SNP matches are dominated by English surnames, some of whom record ancestral links within England. The dominance of English surnames and ancestral locations indicates that his paternal ancestor was living somewhere within England when surnames first appeared approximately 1,000 years ago, see **Figure 1**.

### The 'Wilson' Surname in England

The 1841 census of Great Britain revealed over 80,306 individuals named 'Wilson.' Since surnames arose in an agrarian society, farmers with each surname could still be found farming the lands where their ancestor lived when he first took the Wilson surname or in the area where one's ancestors first settled. The 1841 census revealed almost 906 English and Welsh farmers named Wilson, and an examination of the

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distribution of those individuals reveals that they are not scattered uniformly but are associated with at least 6 geographically distinct locations within England, see **Figure 2**. Since the test subject is directly descended from an English Wilson-Adam; his paternal ancestry is linked with one of six geographically distinct areas of England. It is the test subject's closest Y-DNA genetic matches, as a snapshot of his ancestral relatives/neighbours which will reveal where his English paternal ancestors lived.



**Figure 2:** The Wilson farming community in England and Wales in 1841. The 1841 census of Mainland Britain revealed 80,306 individuals named Wilson, 906 of whom were recorded as farmers resident in England and Wales. An examination of the distribution of those farmers throughout the 1841 Counties of England and Wales reveals 6 geographically distinct groups within England (**red arrows, panel A / red circles, panel B**). The test subject's paternal ancestry is connected to one of six English regions.

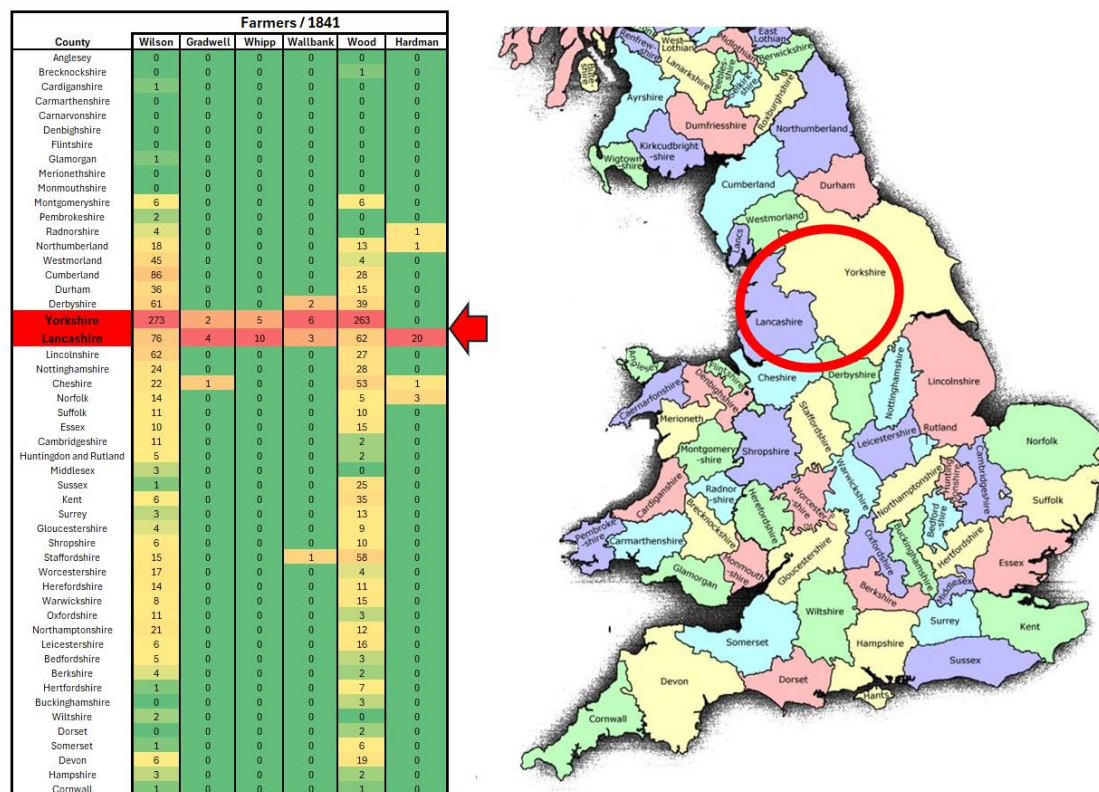
### Y-DNA, SURNAMES, AND LAND

Paternally inherited surnames first appeared about 1,000 years ago at a time when most people were involved in agriculture, hence surnames appeared among farming communities whose descendants in early census data could still be found farming the lands where their ancestor lived when he first inherited his surname. This means, for example, that a male named 'Wilson' from Devon will be a Y-DNA match to males with surnames like Berryman, Goldsworthy, Pascoe, surnames associated with the far southwest of England. In contrast, a Scottish male named 'Wilson' from Perthshire will be a Y-DNA match to males named Buchannan, Stewart, and Drummond, surnames associated with the Highlands of Scotland.

Commercial ancestral Y-DNA SNP testing reveals that at the dawn of the appearance of paternally inherited surnames an estimated 1,000 years ago, the test subject's

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founding Wilson-Adam lived somewhere in England, and among males who took English surnames like Gradwell, Hardman, Tranfield, Wallbank, Whipp and Wood, see **Figure 1**. Distribution mapping of English farmers named Wilson, Gradwell, Hardman, Tranfield, Wallbank, Whipp and Wood reveals that they only occur together within the borderlands of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the north of England, see **Figure 3**.



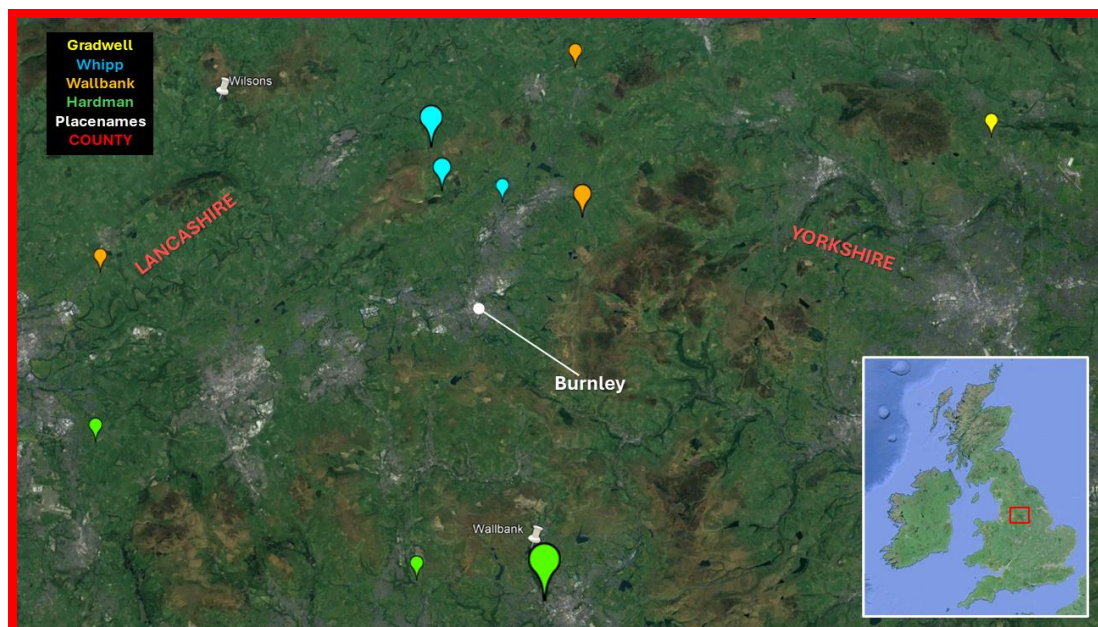
**Figure 3:** Distribution mapping of Y-DNA revealed surname matches reveals a paternal ancestral link within the borderlands of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Farmers with each surname still concentrate in the area where their surname first appeared or in the area where one's ancestors first settled. Distribution mapping reveals that the test subject's closest Y-DNA revealed surname matches are all associated with bordering Lancashire and Yorkshire (red arrow left panel, red circle right panel). Note: no farmers named Tranfield were recorded in 1841.

### Mr Wilson's English Paternal Ancestral Genetic Homeland

A close examination of the distribution of farmers named Gradwell, Hardman, Wallbank, and Whipp reveals that they concentrate together in the farmland that surrounds the town of Burnley in Lancashire, and it is there that the test subject's English Paternal Ancestral Genetic Homeland is to be found, see **Figure 4**. It was in that area that his paternal ancestor lived when surnames first appeared in England after the arrival of the Normans in 1066AD. The longer a surname is associated with an area, the greater the chances of finding historical monuments of placenames associated with it. An examination of the surrounding area reveals Wilsons farmstead near the village of Cow Ark in Lancashire, see **Figures 4 and 5**. The test subject's paternal ancestors will also have left evidence of their ancestral links with this area in the history of this location, but also in the DNA of males named 'Wilson' who may still live there.



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**Figure 4:** Mr Wilson's English Paternal Ancestral Genetic Homeland. The Wilson surname is very common within Yorkshire and Lancashire, but by plotting the location of farmers named Gradwell, Hardman, Wallbank, and Whipp it reveals that they concentrate in the farmland that surrounds the town of Burnley which lies close to the border of Lancashire and Yorkshire. It is in the farmland that surrounds Burnley that the test subject's English Paternal Ancestral Genetic Homeland is to be found. It is there that his founding Wilson paternal ancestor lived when surnames first appeared in England an estimated 1,000 years ago, and where he first acquired the 'Wilson' surname. In the surrounding area one finds reference to his paternal ancestors in 'Wilson's' farmstead. The test subject's paternal ancestors will have left evidence of their long ancestral links with this area in the history of this location, and in the DNA of this area's current inhabitants.



**Figure 5:** Wilsons Farmstead near the village of Cow Ark.

### Indo European Celts

The modern English are a diverse bunch descended from pre-historic inhabitants Neolithic first farmers, Indo European Celts (Ancient Britons), Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and Normans. However, clues to the ethnic origin of the test subject's paternal ancestors can be found in his R-L23/R-L151 Haplogroup which indicates that he is descended from the Indo-Europeans who first arrived in Britain almost 4,500

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years ago and whose descendants gave rise to the Celtic Ancient Britons whose Y-DNA signature dominates Wales, Western England and the Lowlands of Scotland.

### **Confirming the Paternal Genetic Homeland**

One must keep in mind that this is a scientific 'DNA' approach to pinpointing an origin. The DNA does not lie, and commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing of males named 'Wilson' who live and farm in the area surrounding Burnley in Lancashire would confirm the ancestral link with that area.

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