



Beckworth is a name whose history on English soil dates back to the wave of migration that followed the Norman Conquest of England of 1066. The Beckworth family lived at Beckwith in the Yorkshire parish of Pannal, and it is from this location that the name Beckworth is derived. The distinguished name Beckworth is derived from the Old English word *bece*, which means beech, and the Old Norse word *vior*, which means wood. Thus the surname Beckworth indicates the proximity of the town to a grove of beech trees. The name of Beckwith is said to have been changed from Malbie in the 12th century. After studying the ancient manuscripts, historians discovered the Beckworth surname to be of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Documents such as the Domesday Book, compiled in 1086 for William I of England (William the Conqueror), have revealed the first recorded instances of the Beckworth surname. Evidence suggests that the name Beckworth was first found in Yorkshire, where they held a family seat from early times, some say long before the Norman Conquest in 1066.

Throughout the records the Beckworth surname was found with various spellings, such as Beckwith, Beckworth, Beckworthe and these changes in spelling even occurred in references to the same person. Even such literate people as Shakespeare would sign their name with different spellings. Some variations resulted from the influence of court languages such as Latin and French on the spelling of a name. In general, however, people paid more attention to how a name was pronounced, not to how people thought it should be spelled.

The Beckworth family descended from a culture which shaped England more than any other. Coming to England in the 5th century, the Angles and Saxons dominated the countryside by force and pushed the native Britons into Wales. Angles and Saxons were independent tribes, but their common Germanic heritage meant that their language and customs were similar. Early Germanic society was made up of groups of families uniting around a chieftain or king. This social unit tended to remain small unless bands grouped together to accomplish a certain task, such as a war with another group. These groups would then break up after the task was complete. Anglo-Saxon Britain was divided into a bewildering number of kingdoms, some only short lived, until unification under Egbert in the 9th century. Even with the merging of Angle and Saxon kingdoms, true cohesion was not achieved until after the Norman conquest.

After the successful Norman invasion of 1066 Anglo-Saxon rule came to an end. Despite this, the culture of the common man was largely an Anglo-Saxon culture. However, politics and high society was to be dominated by the Norman French. William the Conqueror abolished the great earldoms which had existed under the Anglo-Saxon rulers, thus removing a major source of domestic turmoil. English society ceased to resemble the old tribal structure consisting of bands of families grouped around different leaders. England was slowly developing into a nation.

The Beckworth family was also facing a period of development, and was found in the county of Yorkshire, where it is said that they changed their name in the 12th century from Malbie. They were seated at Beckwith in the parish of Pannal. They also acquired within the next three centuries estates at Aldborough, Thurcroft, and Trendon. They flourished on their estates for many centuries, intermarrying with other distinguished families of the area. Notable members of the family include Sir Marmaduke Beckwith.

The Beckworth family survived the Middle Ages, despite famine, plagues, and the trials of daily life. However, in the 17th century political and religious upheaval forced many families to leave England. During this period the middle class was gaining in power and importance, and for the first time was ready to assert itself in Parliament. The power-struggle which resulted divided the country into two very powerful factions. This century also saw renewed tensions between the Protestants and the Catholics. Together these conflicts were enough to drive families from their homeland.

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In Ireland Protestant settlers and the followers of Cromwell were granted lands taken from the native Irish. Other families came to Ireland simply to escape their war-torn home. The name Beckworth may well have arrived in Ireland with the "Cromwellian Adventurers for Land," in the 17th century. At that time, 1,000 acres of land was available to settlers in Ulster for £200, in Connaught for £300, and in Leinster for £600.

Turmoil at home made the New World appear attractive to many families in England. They immigrated to Canada, the United States, Australia, and some moved to continental Europe. Members of the Beckworth family risked the hazardous voyage to start a new life in new lands. This decision to emigrate was never made casually, for while there were hardships at home, the journey across the sea was so perilous that up to forty percent of a ship's passengers would not reach their destination.

Immigrants to the New World bearing the Beckworth surname, or a spelling variation of this name include: Sir Marmaduke Beckwith of Aldborough who settled in Richmond County, Virginia in 1748; but he had been preceded by Matthew Beckwith who settled in Connecticut in 1635; Thomas Beckworth settled in Maryland in 1633.

Canada was one of the destinations selected by immigrants. Canada was at first a French colony, but, it was inevitable that the French empire be challenged. At the end of the Seven Years War, in 1763, Canada was ceded to the British. Soon after this the first large group of English speaking migrants arrived in Canada. United Empire Loyalists arrived in the decades during and following the American Revolution. Most of the Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia and the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes region. It was not until nearly a century after this that Canada began to develop into the great nation it is today. By the mid 19th century, land opportunities and the building of the railroads allowed immigrants to settle the west.

The Beckworth family has always contributed to the society to which it has belonged. More recent notables of the surname Beckworth, include John Beckwith, Keeper of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The Motto for the Coat of Arms translates as: *To enjoy innocent*

