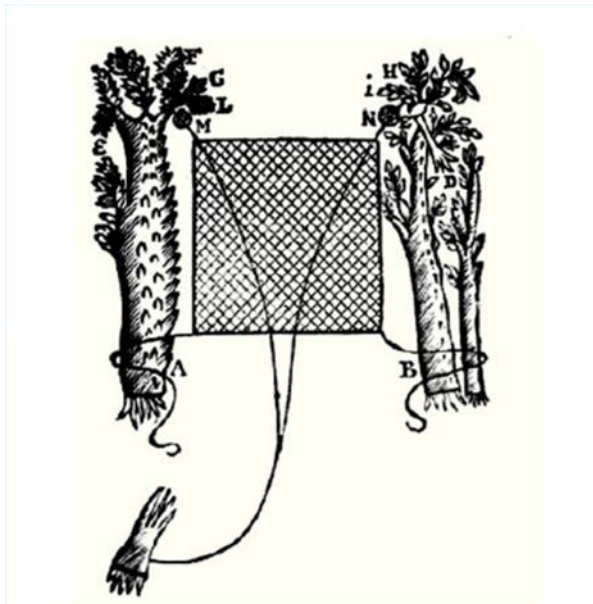




A flat net across a cock road. Illustration from Richard Blome 1686 'The Gentlemans Recreation'

The Origin of the surname “Cockshutt”

A place name or an occupation name?

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Surname variations and incidence in Lancashire and Yorkshire

In the research reports setting out the results of my research into our Cockshutt family history, I have frequently made reference to the difficulties created by the multiple variations in the spelling and origins of the surname "Cockshutt".

In this report I set out what we know.

The earliest incidence of the name "Cockshutt" or similar in Lancashire is noted by Lancashire eminent historian R.A. McKinley¹, in his book *The surnames of Lancashire* in which he states that "de Cocksuteheued" was a place name in the Widnes area of Lancashire as early as 1200. The author notes that the word is said to mean 'a glade through which woodcocks shoot' or a place where nets are set to catch woodcocks.

"Recorded in a number of spelling forms this is an English surname. It is locational and originates from any of several places such as Cockshoot Farm in the county of Worcestershire, Cockshot in Kent, or Cockshut in Lancashire. The derivation for the place name, and hence the later surname, is the Olde English pre 7th Century word "coccscyte," which translates literally as "a place where nets were stretched to catch woodcock", a common bird at the time. As such the surname was originally given either to a person who lived near or operated such a trap, or alternatively someone who had left the village, and moved elsewhere, the easiest way to identify a stranger being to call him or sometimes her, by the name of the place from whence they came. In this case early examples of the surname recording include those of: John Cokschote, in the court rolls of the borough of Colchester, Essex, in 1312, and Alice atte Cocshete, in the Subsidy Rolls of Sussex in the year 1327. Other examples are those of Cocke Shoute, in the Catalogue of Ancient Deeds for Berkshire in 1562, whilst a century later in 1662, Edmund Cockshott was recorded in the roll of the Guilds of Preston, in Lancashire". The first recorded spelling of the family name is shown to be that of Syman de Cokshute. This was dated 1296, in the Subsidy Rolls of Sussex, during the reign of King Edward 1st of England, 1272 - 1307. Throughout the centuries, surnames in every country have continued to "develop" often leading to astonishing variants of the original spelling."

The Victoria County History mentions a 'Cockshotsfield' in Simonstone in 1516² suggesting that that this land belonged to the Cockshutt family at that time. There is also a reference to a location near Simonstone known as "Cockshoot" in 1329.

¹ McKinley, R. A. & Marc Fitch Fund (Cirencester, England). (1981) in the publication *The surnames of Lancashire*. London Leopard's Head Press p.201-2. London Leopard's Head Press p.201-2

² 'Townships: Simonstone | British History Online'. n.d. Accessed 15 October 2018. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lancs/vol6/pp496-503>.

In his "History of British Field Names" (published 1993 by Taylor and Francis), John Field records the use of the field name "cockshoot" occurring in several counties across England which he states "probably refers to a natural glade, oak cover preferred, where occur the territorial flights of woodcock"... "a darting flight of these birds or its location". Elsewhere, in Shakespeare's Richard III the use of the term "cockshoot time" is explained as the time of day around twilight when the woodcock travel in the glades to find water.

McKinley states that the earliest recorded use of Cockshutt (or its variations) as a surname occurs in Lancashire in the vicinity of Ightenhill, a small village just 4 miles west of Simonstone in the 14th century. The generally accepted view of historians is that by about 1400, surnames were in general use in England, although some more remote parts of Britain did not adopt the practice until Henry VIII (ruled 1509–1547) ordered that marital births be recorded under the surname of the father³.

Cockshut

Pronounced /ˈkɒkʃʌt/ 

Cockshut time is the twilight of evening. The word has a longish history, with this being the first use on record:

*Thomas the Earl of Surrey and himself,
Much about cock-shut time, from troop to troop
Went through the army, cheering up the soldiers.*

Richard III, by William Shakespeare, 1597.

There are two explanations about where it comes from. One surname historian suggests that it refers to the time of day when fowls are shut up in their coops for the night, though why it should be *cock* rather than *chicken* or some other word isn't explained. A link with *cockcrow* for dawn has been suggested, though the two terms aren't parallel and the connection feels stretched.

Other writers point to the variant form *cock-shoot* and to terms like *cockshoot net*. These are fowl hunting terms that are said to refer to the woodcock, a wading bird with short legs. It's nocturnal, hiding during the day in dense cover but coming out at dusk, when it often flies low



The British woodcock

³ Doll, Cynthia Blevins (1992). "Harmonizing Filial and Parental Rights in Names: Progress, Pitfalls, and Constitutional Problems". Howard Law Journal. 35. Howard University School of Law. p. 227

along paths and other openings in woodland. At one time, people used to trade on this habit to catch them in nets. This is the origin of several British place names, such as Cockshoot in Herefordshire, Cockshut Hill in Birmingham and Cockshoot Broad in Norfolk, as well as the family name.

However, in his *English Dialect Dictionary* a century ago, Joseph Wright included the hunting and twilight senses separately, hinting there may once have been two distinct words that became confused because they are linked to the same time of day. But it seems more likely that the woodcock origin is the true one.

In the search for the ancestors of Edmund Cockshutt of Ball Grove, the following spellings of the surname were noted in the church and secular records

COCKSHUTT , COCKSHUT, COCKSHUTE, COCKSHOOT, COCKSHOOTE, COCKSHOOTTE, COCKSHOT, COCKSHOTT, COCKSHOUT, COKSHOT. COCKSHORT, COKESHOTT.

A database search of records collected by Ancestry.com, FindMyPast.com and FamilySearch.org using the search terms "Cockshutt or similar" in the period 1401-1500 revealed approximately 140 different records, the earliest of which is the 1465 marriage of Thomas Cockshoot and Jane Higson at Chorley, St Lawrence, Lancashire, just south of Preston and about 22 miles south west of Simonstone. There are significant numbers of duplicate records included in these figures.

The earliest records in the Lancashire On-Line Parish Clerk records are as follows:

Marriage: 29 Apr 1562 St Mary and All Saints, Whalley, Lancashire, England
Gilbtus Towneley -

Elizabethe Cokeshott -

Register: Marriages 1539 - 1601, Page 87, Entry 203

Source: LDS Film 1471099

Marriage: 25 Oct 1573 St Leonard, Padiham, Lancashire, England

Johes Cockshoote -

Leticia Spenser -

Register: Marriages 1573 - 1653, Page 2

Source: Original Parish Register

Burial: 5 Mar 1574/5 St Leonard, Padiham, Lancashire, England

Edmundus Cockshoott -

Register: Burials 1573 - 1653, Page 5

Source: Original Parish Register

A similar search in the FamilySearch.org database in the period 1401-1500 revealed 116 baptism, marriage or burial records with Cockshutt or similar

surnames of which 21 were recorded as resident in Lancashire, 2 in Yorkshire. There are some apparent duplication included in these figures.

In the period 1501-1600 the number of Cockshutt records (including duplications) increased to 818 with 429 events recorded as taking place in Lancashire and 167 recorded in Yorkshire.

Analysis of the records available on-line for the period 1400 to 1600 from all sources revealed that there appear to be three locations where, during that period, clusters of Cockshutt baptisms, marriage and burials are recorded. The clusters were the Whalley-Padiham-Simonstone area, the Great Harwood area and around Kildwick in Yorkshire.

Some caution is needed in drawing conclusions from these findings since it is not clear to what extent the patterns of preservation of original parish records may have influenced these patterns.

There is a tradition in my Cockshutt family that one of our distant ancestors was in charge of the "Cockshutt" for the lord of the manor on which he lived and that therefore Cockshutt might also have been an occupational name and adopted by other unrelated keepers of these bird traps.

It does seem reasonable to conclude that the historical incidence of the name "Cockshutt" (and its variations) was high in a relatively small geographic area in North-Eastern Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. To what extent these families were related does not now appear possible to unravel, however there may be some evidence to suggest that there were family connections between some of them. In the following sections these "hints" will be explored and discussed.

It will be noted that, for the family historian, the issues that arise in extending our Cockshutt family history beyond 1700 include the variations in the spelling of the surname "Cockshutt", the extensive use of Latin in the baptism, marriage and burial records of the period and the multiple and complex changes in the Diocesan and Parish boundaries in this North East corner of Lancashire close to the Yorkshire border. All of these factors make any search for family history records in the period, difficult for all but the gentry.