



The Ancient History of the Distinguished Surname Rich

The name Rich arrived in England after the Norman Conquest of 1066. The Rich family lived in Hampshire. Their name, however, is a reference to Riche, in Lorraine, France, the family's place of residence prior to the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. Another equally valid derivation of the name suggests that it is patronymic, which means it was adapted from the first name of the original bearer's father. According to this version it comes from the Norman personal name Richard. Rich is a classic example of an English polygenetic surname, which is a surname that was developed in a number of different locations and adopted by various families independently. The chronicles of England, though sometimes shrouded by the mists of time, reveal from early records that the surname Rich was of Norman origin. The history of this name is interwoven into the colourful fabric of the history of Britain.

Careful research by professional analysts using such ancient manuscripts as the Domesday Book (compiled in 1086 by William the Conqueror), the Ragman Rolls, the Wace poem, the Honour Roll of the Battel Abbey, The Curia Regis, Pipe Rolls, the Falaise Roll, tax records, baptismals, family genealogies, and local parish and church records, determined that the name Rich was first found in Hampshire where they were seated from very early times and were granted lands by Duke William of Normandy, their liege Lord, for their distinguished assistance at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 A.D. One of the first on record is Edmund Rich, Saint Edmund (1175-1240) English churchman, who became Archbishop of Canterbury.

Many alternate spellings of the name were found. They were typically linked to a common root, usually one of the Norman nobles at the Battle of Hastings. Your name, Rich, occurred in many references, and from time to time, the surname included the spellings of Rich, Riche, and many more. Scribes recorded and spelled the name as it sounded. It was not unlikely that a person would be born with one spelling, married with another, and buried with a headstone which showed another. Sometimes preferences for different spelling variations were due to a division of the family, or, had religious or patriotic reasons.

The ancestors of the family name Rich are believed to be descended originally from the Norman race. The Normans were commonly believed to be of French origin but, more accurately, they were of Viking origin. The Vikings, under their Jarl, Thorfinn Rollo, invaded France in about 911 A.D. After Rollo laid siege to Paris, the French King, Charles the Simple, finally conceded defeat, granting northern France to Rollo. Rollo became the first Duke of Normandy, and Duke William, who invaded and defeated England in 1066, was in fact descended from Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy.

Duke William took a census of most of England in 1086, and recorded it in the Domesday Book. A family name capable of being traced back to this document, or to Hastings, was a mark of honour for most families during the Middle Ages, and even to this day.

The surname Rich emerged as a notable English family name in Hampshire where they were recorded as a family of great antiquity seated as Lords of the manor and estates in that shire. They were originally La Riche and were from Riche in the Lorraine. From about the 12th century they had also established estates in Sussex, and also became seated at Mulbarton in Norfolk. Sir George Rich was Chamberlain to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and the senior line of the family was elevated to the peerage as the Earls of Warwick and Holland. In 1547 Lord Rich became Lord Chancellor of England. They also branched to Somerset, Essex of Kent. They flourished on their many estates for several centuries. Of note amongst the family at this time was Richard Rich (circa 1496-1567), 1st Baron Rich, Lord Chancellor of England during the reign of King Edward VI; and Barnabe Rich (1540-1620), English author and soldier.

The surname Rich contributed much to local politics and in the affairs of England or Scotland. During the 12th century many of these Norman families moved north to Scotland, following Earl David of Huntingdon who would become King of Scotland. Later, in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, England and Scotland were ravaged by religious and political conflict. The Monarchy, the Church and Parliament fought for supremacy. The unrest caused many to think of distant lands.

Settlers in Ireland became known as the "Adventurers for land in Ireland." They "undertook" to keep the Protestant faith, and were granted lands previously owned by the Irish. In Ireland they settled in Ulster and Stephen Rich was Captain in the "man o war" "Rebecca".

The news and rumours of opportunities in the New World spread like wildfire. Many sailed aboard the fleet of sailing ships known as the "White Sails."

In North America, immigrants who shared the family name Rich, or one of its spelling variations included Edward and Elizabeth Rich, who arrived in Virginia in 1663; Miles, Joseph, and Abraham Rich who also came to Virginia in 1663; as well as Robert Rich, who settled in the Barbados in 1680 with his wife, children, and servants. From the port of arrival many settlers joined the wagon trains westward. During the American War of Independence some declared their loyalty to the Crown, moved northward into Canada and became known as the United Empire Loyalists.

In recent history, notable bearers of the Rich surname include: Alfred William Rich (1856-1921), British artist & author; Adrienne Rich (b.1929), American poet; Charlie Rich (1932-1995), American country musician; and Buddy Rich (1917-1987), American drummer.

In the process of researching this distinguished family name we also traced the most ancient grant of Coat of Arms from the branches which developed their own Arms.

The most ancient grant of a Coat of Arms found was:

A red shield with a gold chevron between three gold crosses bottonée.

The Crest was:

A silver wyvern rising on a green mound.

The ancient family Motto for this distinguished name was:

Garde la foy.

Motto translation:

Keep the faith.

