On the next two pages after this table of contents, I've offered a rather lengthy "executive summary" of a methodology I've been developing for significantly improving on what the surname dictionaries tell us about the forms, the variants, the derivations, and the areas of origin for particular surnames. The "summary" is necessarily long, because my objectives are several, and because its rationale is multi-factorial—including the factoring of surnames into their respective surname patrilineages through Y-Chromosome DNA testing.

Table of Contents

An Executive Summary of this paper

In this paper I present and illustrate a methodology that may shed light on your British ancestor's surname, and his area of origin. I use the male pronoun here, because my focus is genealogical, and most of the records that genealogists rely on concern males, all involve surnames, and in most cultures surnames are passed down in the mal line. However, genealogists are typically almost as interested in their maternal surnames, or other ancestral surnames, and when they are, they naturally turn to surname dictionaries for further enlightenment as to the derivation and/or likely areas of origin for their surname. Genealogists also turn to surname dictionaries for authoritative advice on which forms of a surname are variants of a primary, standardized surname, and which stand on their own and have their own variants.

Unfortunately, even the best surname dictionaries, however erudite and insightful they may be, are ultimately just collections of theories that usually rest on a very narrow bed of evidence—or worse, are merely copied, without much editorial review, from more authoritative dictionaries. Experienced genealogists have learned to be wary of the kinds of assertions that rely for their validation on the sheer volume of their repetition.

My methodology, though equally theoretical, aims to at least broaden the evidential base for differentiating between principal surnames and their variants, and for identifying their areas of proliferation, which in Britain are also usually their areas of origin. To this end, I make use of certain modern comprehensive census indexes: primarily the ones for the 1881 UKCensus that covers England, Wales, and Scotland, and for the 1901 Irish Census that covers the whole of Ireland—Northern Ireland (Ulster) as well as the the Irish Free State.

And since the majority of those who are ever likely to read this paper, or encounter any of my own surname analyses reports, are going to be American, and more specifically US, genealogists, I've also drawn on certain comparable USCensuses, which need to be taken into consideration when applying the British data to the US context, where they often develop a somewhat different pattern of variants.

Besides their utility in defining what I call "surname complexes" (a principal surname and it's probable spelling variants) modern software has made it possible to create surname distribution maps based on these key British censuses that show graphically not just where in Britain particular surnames are prevalent, but also, thanks to the glacial pace of internal migration within Britain since the adoption of permanent hereditary surnames became general (in England from 1350-1500, and later in the outlying Celtic areas), the areas of prevalence as of the 1880-1900 period are also, for all but the some of the most common surnames (like Smith, where every village had it's village blacksmith), are also usually the areas of their origin, spreading out slightly from there over the centuries to certain surrounding areas.

These are all very generic considerations, and this type of analysis, complementary to surname dictionaries, is unlikely to have direct genealogical payoffs in linking an American ancestor who immigrated from Britain to his specific family in Britain or even to the specific locality they lived in. Precious few genealogists are ever able to convincingly make such links, unless the ancestor came after 1800 when ships passenger lists and US-based naturalization records began to be kept; or unless the arrival was a New Englander, where vital records have been kept and preserved by New England towns from their very beginnings, AND where comparable British parish records for the same family can also be found, despite the incompleteness of such British records, and the lack of a comprehensive index for them.

But this new methodology does provide some localizing context that's likely to be relevant in considering the ethnicity, the religion, the motives for emigration, and its likely American destination, and ultimately, genealogy, family history, or any sort of history or even human in inquiry is mostly about reconstructing the relevant contexts that alone confer meaning on a particular set of facts.

Of course, for genealogists, its not primarily the surname that they're interested in: what they're primarily interested in is their own particular surname bloodline, or genealogical patrilineage. And for any given surname there are likely to be many of these, for common surnames, even many score patrilineages, each unrelated to all of the others. This is where DNA testing comes in: specifically, the pioneering DNA-testing

company Family Tree DNA's 37-marker test of the male-only Y-Chromosome (yChromosome) that's passed down, along with the surname, from father to son to son....

This form of yDNA testing is thus a natural, and I would say essential, component of any consideration of the roots of a British surname, and prima facie, the fact that there are usually many different patrilineages for a particular surname would seem to render any attempt to localize the area or areas of origin of a particular surname irrelevant to most of its yDNA-tested descendant bearers. But an important British-based study of the degree to which some 40 British surnames were clustered into yDNA-defined patrilineages found that for most surnames, a majority of its bearers belonged to just the two largest of it's patrilineages, with, on average, some 41% belonging to just its one most prevalent patrilineage—which naturally, in most cases, aligns nicely with the one or two, or at most three, principal clusters of the surname to be found on surname distribution maps made from the aforesaid British censuses.

These surname distribution maps, at least for the principal, standardized form of the surname complex (if not so much from it's variants, which tend to have frequencies too low to support theories of origin or spread) are likely to supply some useful context for most of the bearers of a particular surname, regardless of whether yDNA testing indicates that they belong to the single largest one, for two reasons: first, some of these biologically unrelated surname patrilineages are likely to be due to an NPE (Non-Paternity Event) having occurred as an offshoot of the main line; and second, because later surname adopters generally chose as their permanent hereditary surname one that was well-established, respected, and popular in the same local area.

Complementing, Extending, and Correcting the Surname Dictionaries

Surname dictionaries have traditionally been used as guides to the origins and derivations of surnames in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, but even for this purpose, I think they have been largely superceded by the surname distribution statistics now available online from census records, and graphically, from the maps that can now be made from these statistics.

The USCensus is widely available online, indexed. I myself generally access it from Ancestry.com by subscription, relying on the decent, though very imperfect, Ancestry.com index. From this census index one can successively derive counts of the numbers of people of each distinct surname and its spelling variants, but just using the relative numbers of different spellings to identify the original or "correct" (standardized) form of a particular surname, as well as its associated spelling variants, can be a perilous and error prone enterprise.

This is where surname dictionaries come in, but the general ones provide scant substantiation for their opinions, and the etymological ones, which catalog early usages, are overly focused on thin gentry lines extant before the general adoption of surnames in Britain, many of which have long since died or daughtered out.

On the other hand the actual prevalences and distribution of surnames and their variants, as shown in the UKCensuses, and the surname distribution maps that can now be made from the 1881 UKCensus, and the 1901 Irish Census, provide a much sounder, better evidenced, guide to the areas of Britain where individual surnames originated, and also to the classification of spelling (and usually close phonetic) variants into distinct surname complexes, each represented by a single standardized form that may or may not correspond to the principal entries in the dictionaries.

A bit of background may be enlightening here.

The Origins of British Surnames

The earliest comprehensive source of names in Britain is the Domesday Book, compiled in the years after the Norman Conquest of 1066, and therein, for the most part, only the feudal gentry have names that could be considered surnames in the modern sense, except that they weren't necessarily permanent or hereditary..

Since that time, or more broadly "since time immemorial" which in some interpretations goes back to the Roman manorial period of the first few centuries of the Christian era, most British peoples were tied to the land and to the local hamlet they were born in or near, initially either as slaves or at best factotums for gentry masters, and later as serfs. Since these tiny local areas barely rose to the level of communities, there was no need to differentiate people by hereditary surnames: personal names, perhaps qualified by an appropriate byname that expired with the person, were sufficient. Bynames might reflect personal characteristics, or a person's occupation, or either a particular named local place (locative names), or a generic natural feature that characterized his place of abode (topographical names, or the given names of fathers, perhaps altered to show that they were derivative (patronymics), (e.g. "John the Large", "Simon Baker", "Peter Pontefract" for a market town in Yorkshire, or "David Richard-son"—and, of course, all the Scottish and Irish "Mc"/"Mac"/"O'" surnames are patronymics.

Hereditary surnames emerged in England quite early, from 1350-1550 (starting, not coincidentally with the Black Death that killed a third of the population and set another third on the road to a more survivable place). But hereditary surnames were generally adopted later, and piecemeal in the mostly rural and outlying Celtic areas of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, usually incident to a particular individual's decision to migrate out into the larger world; and because many areas of Wales, and also Scotland, remained rural and remote until the 19th century, there were still surnameless people in these areas into the 1800s.

As hereditary surnames did emerge, they often just froze and passed on their progenitor's byname, but many surnameless people deliberately chose a name they liked, perhaps one borne by a local worthy whom they admired; for reasons that can readily be understood, this was a choice that was largely confined to permanent out-migrators. In Scotland and Ireland where most people were landless tenants who leased from local gentry, many out-migrators chose the surname of their landlord, at least if they were on good terms with him; interestingly, the freed slaves of the South who migrated north and west after the Civil War, typically

took the surnames of their former masters—somewhat belying the Simon Legree myths retailed in the 19th century best seller *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that played a large role in promoting our devastating Civil War.[1].

The Surname Dictionaries

The better surname dictionaries attempt to sort the many surname spelling variants into individual surname complexes, usually represented by a single standardized modern spelling, and most also offer theories about the origins and derivations of these surnames. These theories are usually plausible, but most are also quite speculative, and need to be swallowed, if they are, with a few grains of salt. One type of dictionary, that seeks to offer an evidential basis for its theories is the etymological dictionary, which is based on an exhaustive canvass of all the ancient records extant during the period of surname adoption: these dictionaries compile specific, cited instances of the early use of specific surname forms in particular places (e.g. tax or land records for particular English counties).

An essential part of the theoretical structure proposed by surname dictionaries is to account for all of the plausible variants of each standardized surname, thus providing what amounts to a complete surname taxonomy. This is a non-trivial, and highly problematic, task in its own right, because before the early 1800s, when general language dictionaries came into use, based on the novel proposition that there was just one correct spelling for every word and everyone literate ought to learn it, even educated people, even professional clerks, recorders, or legal drafters, spelled all but the most common words phonetically, as they heard them, writing them down according to their whim and their own idiosyncratic conventions. There are cases of hand written wills in which the testator spelled his own name several different ways in the same document[2].

The Uses of Surname Statistics from Censuses and Surname Distribution Maps made from them

Dictionary etymologies, even those derived by expert philologists from an exhaustive canvass of ancient records, are very largely exercises in informed, perhaps even erudite, speculation. But today we have another tool that provides a better guide to the areas of origin, and sometimes to the derivation of British surnames: surname distribution maps based on the 1881 UKCensus for Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland), and comparable maps that are based on the 1901 Census for Ireland[3].

The uses of surname statistics and surname distribution maps are at least two:

> (1) they can be used to identify the British county of origin of the particular surname patrilineage of over half of those of us who have British roots;
>
> and
> (2) they can be used as a more evidence-based alternative to dictionaries to sort phonetic or spelling variants into distinct surname complexes—that qualify as principal surnames in surname dictionaries.

If you flip through a few more pages, you'll find examples of the sets of statistics and the kind of map I'm talking about, but to understand and appreciate the meanings and uses of this data, we, as Americans need to understand the very different locational programs that governed the lives of our British ancestors.

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[1] The author, New Englander Harriet Beecher Stowe, had virtually no acquaintance with the actual South and fabricated her very influential tale of the supposed horrors of slavery out of her imagination. Millions of Americans today live under worse conditions in the big city ghettos-"woke" liberalism's recreation of Stowe's fictional Southern plantations.

[2] You will find more on these surname-related topics, and also a bibliography of dictionaries and other books about surnames and forenames on my Surname page.

[3] My sources for these surname distribution maps are two: (1) I make the maps of Great Britain based on the 1881 UKCensus from The British 19th Century Surname Atlas, v1.2, by Archer Software; (2) The Irish maps come from a free online resource, Irish Surname Maps, created by Barry Griffin. Unfortunately, no direct same year comparison between the maps for Great Britain and Ireland is possible because all the 19th century Irish censuses were lost in 1922 during one of the Irish "risings".

Static Brits versus Peripatetic Americans

Most American genealogists would be inclined to dismiss, say, the 1880 USCensus, as a sound guide to the natal origins of their particular ancestors, let alone to the origins of the surnames they bear. But that's because Americans have always been restless and peripatetic, ever since the first of their line made his/her giant leap out from the familiar area and culture of their birth, across a vast ocean, to a place hardly better known to them than we know the surface of the moon.

Back home in Britain, though, the pace of internal migration, at least until the 20th century, has always been glacial. Most Brits never journeyed more than 10 to 20 miles from where they were born, and families stayed rooted, tied in one way or another to the land that gave them subsistence, for century after century—land that they often didn't even own. Localism was for most an essential and comforting state of mind. Even with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s, only a few of the more adventurous young began to trickle towards the few large market or port towns in Britain that had the potential for greatly expanded industry or commerce with the rest of the world.

The story in America couldn't be more different. Although until after the American Revolution most Americans continued to live within 100 miles of the coast, that was only because there was plenty of affordable land still in that area to satisfy them, while the raw and dangerous frontier that lay beyond presented formidable obstacles to inexperienced and undercapitalized settlers. Yet despite this, by the 1730s the Scotch-Irish, who had already made the great leap from their ancestral homelands in Scotland to Ireland (where they were disadvantaged by law), began to flow into a welcoming Pennsylvania, and by the 1750s they were already, in large numbers, flowing hundreds of miles South into the great Valley of Virginia beyond the Blue Ridge mountains, and this feisty and intrepid people continued to push the western frontier as long as there was one.

After the American Revolution, which mixed Continental soldiers from all over, sent them traipsing all over the colonies, thus introducing them to the mostly empty western lands, a general westward migration was begun that didn't cease until the late 1800s. And although the pioneering era has long since come to an end, Americans even today think nothing of relocating hundreds or thousands of miles for their education, or in search of work or better career opportunities, or just because, as Americans, they're always ready for a change and looking for something better.

Thus America has always been a polyglot jumble of people of disparate cultures mixing and cross-fertilizing, heavily seeded with ambitious individualists bent on creating their own brave new world and making the most of their own individual lives—at least that has been the case until modern times, when the ersatz culture of "woke" ideology has sought to sort Americans into disparate tribes based on their inborn superficial personal characteristics.

The Principal Areas of Origin of Most British Surnames
are Reflected in Surname Distribution Maps

Thanks to the fact that Brits have continued to live in the same ancestral places since the general adoption of hereditary surnames hundreds of years ago, the greatest concentrations of a particular surname in certain counties of Britain, or small clusters of counties, usually provides us with a reliable guide to the county or counties of origin of that surname. Moreover, the way these concentrations bleed off somewhat from that county, though only in certain directions, lends further support to the thesis of British localism and stasis.

The surname dictionaries, especially the etymological ones, look, somewhat anachronistically, towards possible ultimate origins of modern surnames in the distant past, before surname adoption, and thus offer a less reliable guide to the areas where certain surnames ultimately took root and proliferated. Of course, the

process of proliferation has been somewhat arbitrary: some families are more fecund than others, or prosper more, while others who have taken up the same surname die or daughter out[4].

But as genealogists, it's mostly the families that have proliferated that we care about (both because we're more likely to have descended from them and because they are more prominent in the records), and not the amorphous history of their particular surnames. And a DNA-based study published in 2009 by English surname researchers Turi King and Mark Jobling, somewhat surprisingly found that for all but the most common British surnames, on average some 41% of those who bore a particular surname were patrilineage cousins—all descended from the same original surname adopter. Also, typically, the second most prevalent patrilineage for the surname accounted for another 10-20% of those sampled.

Thus, on average, a majority of Brits bearing a particular surname in the 21st century descend from just two genetically unrelated patrilineages, even though there might be dozens of different patrilineages for that surname in the general population. And the rarer the surname, the more concentrated its descendants into a single largest patrilineage, in some cases to virtually 100%[5].

One might suppose that all of those other patrilineages that arose independently for the same surname would impossibly fuzz and complicate a map that showed the distributions of a particular surname across Britain. But again, British localism has enhanced the clustering of that one, or two largest surname patrilineages by inspiring other local surnameless families to adopt as there hereditary surname one that was well established and locally respected.

Most surname maps do show dispersion that's not just confined to a single cluster of counties, and sometimes it becomes clearly evident that there are probably two or three or even more areas where a particular surname not only arose independently but also flourished there. However, one can never be sure that these other areas and pockets weren't seeded by the predominant surname patrilineage, and no doubt many of them were.

In brief, here are the principles underlying the use of census statistics and the surname distribution maps that can be made from them to differentiate the mother surname complexes represented by surname dictionary entries (the primary surnames) from their variants, and to identify the counties of Britain in which they mostly originated and proliferated:

> **First, to be considered a primary surname, the subject of its own surname complex, a particular spelling of a British surname should either be instantiated in the 1881 UKCensus by 50 or more bearers, and/or in the more populous US by 85 or more[6].**

> **Second, surname distribution maps based on the 1881 UKCensus for Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland), and others that can be made from the 1901 Irish Census, reliably show, in their concentrations by county and their dispersion patterns, the counties where all but the most common British surnames originated and especially proliferated.**

> **Third, that the majority of British bearers of principal surnames fall into just one or two patrilineages, and as often as not if it takes two patrilineages to account for over 50%, these will probably have overlapping patterns of origin and proliferation.**

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[4] As it happens, this selective process favors the stable over the successful and contradicts Social Darwinism: modern sociological studies show that the largest families are farm families where land is plentiful and affordable (as it has been in America), because extra hands increase scale and so familial prosperity; meanwhile as individual families prosper and move up the socioeconomic scale they tend to drastically limit family size , and even edge into overall population decline.

[5] See my paper, "Patrilineage Clustering within Surname" for a fuller explication of this study, expanded by me with some American examples that show the pattern extending to our shores.

[6] By 1880 the population of the US was some 1.66x that of Great Britain.

An example: British Surname Distribution maps for ROBB

   Here's the 1881 UKCensus surname distribution map for my own surname, ROBB.
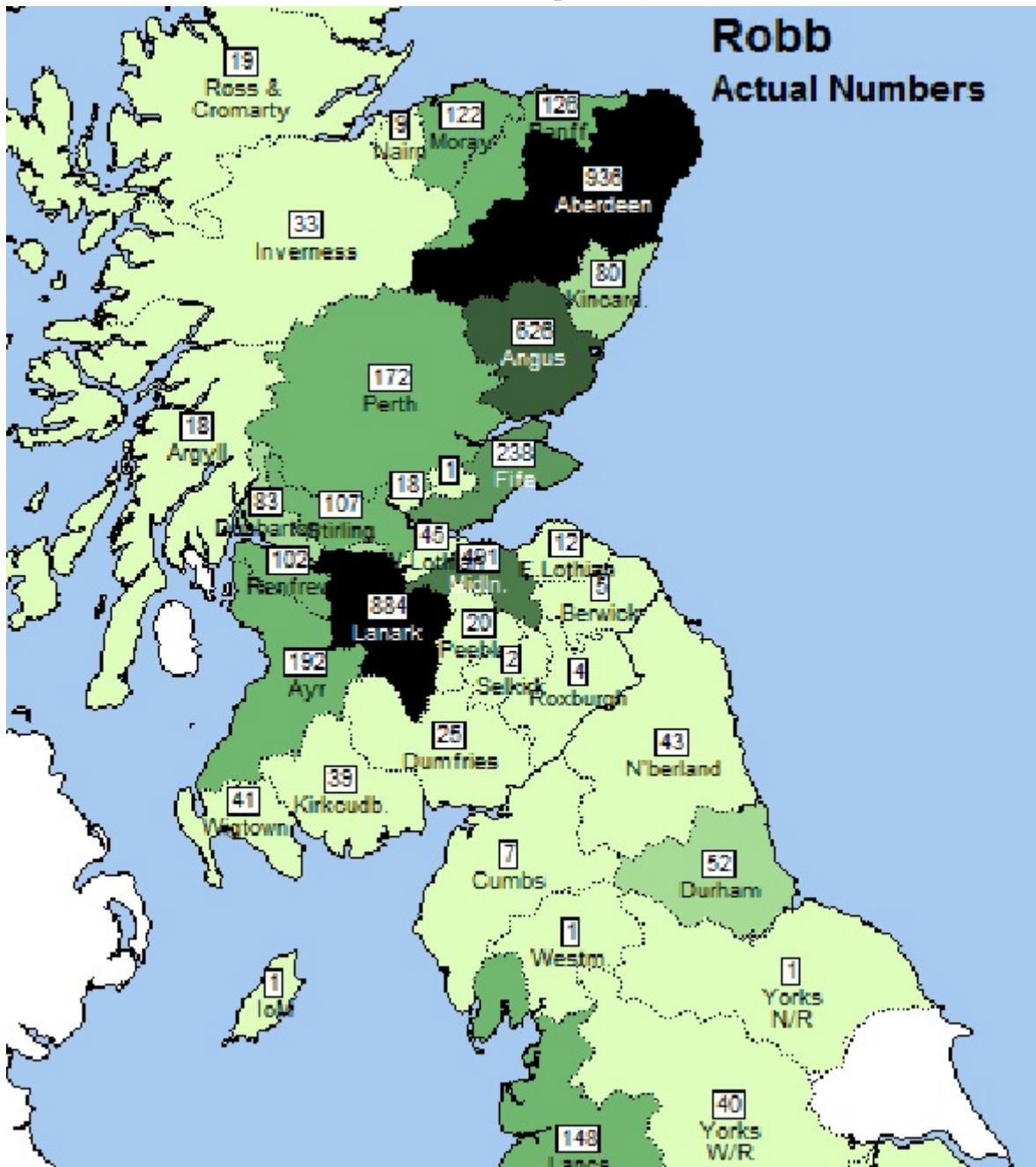

   This map covers only (most of) Scotland and the northern English border counties, because the ROBB surname clearly originated in Scotland—with the largest patrilineage rooted in Aberdeenshire. And of the 5169 ROBBs in Great Britain (Scotland, England, and Wales), some 90% were in Scotland, mostly in Aberdeenshire or in counties spreading out from there, while off-map to the south, apart from the 117 in London, there were only 266 ROBBs in the rest of England, and 8 in the whole of Wales.

   In comparison, there were 5031 ROBBs in the USCensus of 1880, and as many as 865 in Ireland in 1901, but most of these Irish ROBBs were Presbyterian (the signature Scottish denomination) or Anglicans, with only 7% Catholic, and virtually all resided in Ulster (Northern Ireland) which was the jumping off place for the great Scotch-Irish migration to the North American colonies from 1720-1775.

Although it appears that the ROBB surname had two principal areas of origin, counties Aberdeen and Lanark, that's only because Lanarkshire is the locus for the great port of Glasgow, which harbors disproportionate numbers of people of most surnames. For purposes of determining counties of origin, we need to adjust for county population, and when we do that we get:
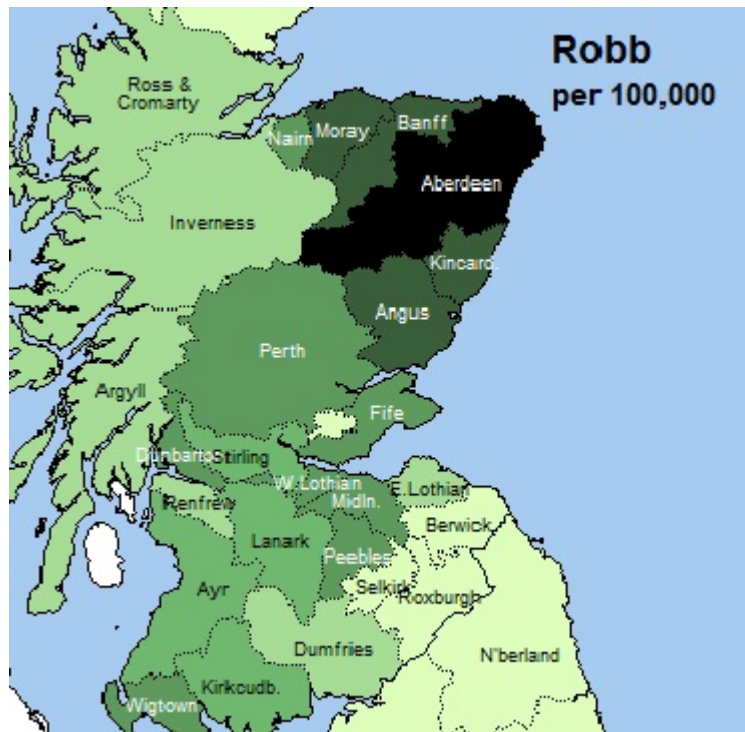
quite leaving the field to Aberdeen and it's surrounding counties.

Many Scottish ROBBs emigrated to the US, primarily to Pennsylvania, during the main flow of Scots or Scotch-Irish to the New World, from 1720-1775, and my exhaustive research has shown that five ROBB families were seated in Pennsylvania by the time of the Revolution, during and after which such immigration slowed to a trickle. Male descendants of all five of these families have had their Y-Chromosomes tested and as it happens, the first four families belonged to the same single largest ROBB patrilineage in the US, while the fifth family was the progenitor of perhaps the second or third most prevalent American ROBB patrilineage.

There is documentary evidence that this fifth family sailed from Belfast Ireland, and was headed by one James Robb who had been a merchant adventurer over there, with ventures plying between Glasgow and Belfast from whence his family sailed (he evidently emigrated because he had gotten into financial difficulty). Thus, it's highly likely that James's ancestral roots lie in the Lanark area—perhaps just north of Glasgow across the Firth of Clyde in Dunbartonshire to which one Scottish ROBB I know of has traced his roots.

Meanwhile, a grandson, or possibly a great-grandson of one Joseph Robb, the head of the fourth ROBB family to emigrate to Pennsylvania (and my own ggggGrandfather) contributed a note to an obscure Ohio church history published in 1900 that his immigrant ancestor, Joseph, had come with other members of his natal family from Aberdeen, Scotland. Other details of this origin note are shaky and none of it can be substantiated with actual evidence. But since probably 95% or more of these 18th century Scottish-origined immigrants came directly either from Ireland or from the Scottish SW and the lowland counties bordering England, the sheer improbability of Aberdeen as the proximate source for this family gives this particular claim a credibility that it wouldn't otherwise have. And if Joseph was a patrilineage cousin of the other three ROBB heads of family who preceded him to Pennsylvania (two Williams and a John), then all their ancestries presumably trace back to Aberdeen.

The essential problem with tracing one's line back to Britain before 1800, when censuses and preserved ships passenger and naturalization records began to come into play, is to find parallels with names, places, times, and behaviors on both sides of the pond. To that end, Britain's New England colonies kept vital records that go back to the very beginnings of settlement, and these can be meshed with the less complete parish records of England, and the rather spotty surviving records of Scotland and Ireland, but there is no comprehensive index for the British records, and British surname distribution maps can tell us which ones to search.

ROBB is a simple surname with virtually no spelling variations, so it's not a good example for illustrating my other main theses here: that surname distribution maps can be useful alternatives to dictionaries in sorting soundalike names into particular surname complexes that qualify for a principal surname definition in the dictionaries. But this ROBB map nicely illustrates the way surnames sorted into genealogical patrilineages, whether by genealogical research or by testing the male-only Y-Chromosome of male descendants bearing the surname, can be mapped onto their British areas of origin, and thereby establish their own distinct surname patrilineage identities regardless of speculative dictionary theorizing.

Using Surname Distribution Maps to Organize Spelling Variants
into Distinct Surname Complexes

British surname distribution maps, and the counts that the censuses underlying them provide for the numbers and mappings of particular surname variants, either by themselves or combined with yDNA testing, can provide better guidance than surname dictionaries as to which spelling (and speaking) variants belong together under the same surname complex (or principal dictionary entry), and which might constitute an independent surname with its own area of origin and history.

The vast majority of American surnames originated in Britain, centuries before the formal standardization of spelling, so on both sides of the Atlantic many spelling variants arose for all but the simplest and most common surnames, e.g. KING, WHITE, and even ROBB (not common, but simple). But as standardization occurred, first gradually, then suddenly (with the rapid populatization of Dictionaries as best sellers in the late 1700s and early 1800s), many surnames underwent "corrections" to the new standard forms. And the British were in the forefront of this because clerks and official recorders, the modern species who derived from highly educated "clerics", lawyers, and businessmen, were early professionalized in Britain, while those who undertook these functions in the colonies were often markedly less so.

As a result, in the New World, variant spellings could take hold and proliferate and even in time overtake in frequency the original, increasingly standardized British forms. Still, the later pull of standardization in the US during the early decades of the 19th century, resulted in many family heads "correcting" the spellings of their surnames, to which they had previously been indifferent, while others deliberately embraced whatever forms that the more literate recording clerks had chosen and familiarized them with.

Thus, while there has been more confusing divergence and proliferation of variants in the US, this is all the more reason when attempting to map out surname complexes in the US to look back to Britain where standardization occurred earlier and variants from the original surname complexes were more rigorously scrubbed and discouraged. And by original surname complexes, I mean, not primarily the thin, gentry-weighted etymological histories whose references mostly predate general surname adoption in Britain, but the actual concentrations of the predominant, standardized forms that were adopted to represent each British surname complex.

Another British-American Surname Example: RATHBONE

The progenitor of the majority of American RATHBONEs, was the John Rathbone (in that spelling) who was one of the first settlers of Block Island, RI, in the late 1660s. He had a number of sons and they had sons and his line has proliferated significantly over the subsequent centuries. But most of his descendants weren't particularly literate, and as they spread out into neighboring areas of New England and away from their roots,

while most carried the "Rathbone" spelling with them (with minor variants), one or two of the lines that had remained in RI began spelling it as they probably pronounced it: "Rathbun". And over a couple of centuries, this American variant, which is unknown in Britain, vied with the standard British spelling, and despite the continued pull back to "Rathbone" that has presumably occurred here as as spelling standardization took hold in the 1800s, the "Rathbun"s have won out, advancing their own American standard.

As it happens, I have a RATHBONE 6th cousin, Rob Rathbun, who, like me is descended from Wait Rathbone Jr of Tinmouth, a township in RuthlandCoVT that abuts the county seat: Rutland town, where Wait is buried. Wait's surname is mostly spelled "Rathbone" in the local records, and that's the form in which it was inherited in my family, through a daughter of Wait's second wife. However, Rob is descended from Wait's first wife, and somewhere during the 1800s, while the "Rathbun" spelling was overtaking the original (and British standard) "Rathbone" spelling, his surname got changed to Rathbun.

Following are some statistics on the actual numbers of people bearing the surname RATHBONE in the US and various areas of Britain, that cover both the standard spellings, and the recognizable spelling variants:

	USCensus------------------------		UKCensus (Eng,Wales,Sco)	Ireland
	1790 (minus VA)	1880	1881	1901
Rathbun	27 mostly in RI	1842	—	-
Rathbone	24	1216	1660	2
Rathburn*	3	1000	16	2
Rathborn*	5	147	38	1
Rathbourn*	—	9	11	etc.
Rathbern*	—	48	–	
Rathbon	5 4 in NY, 1 in CT	99	2	
Rathban	—	33	4	
Rathboan	—		6	
Rothbone	—	6	1	
Rothburn*	1	35	1	
Ro[a]thburn	5 all in NewLondonCT	—	-	

The trailing "*" is to bring in "---e" ending forms, like "Rathborne".

When comparing the actual numbers between countries or areas, their relative populations at the time should also be taken into account.

Population in millions of:	1880/1	1900/1
United States	50.2	76.2
England+Wales	26	32.5
Scotland	3.7	4.5
Ireland	5.2	4.5

Or in other words, as of 1901 (and the ratios for 1881 aren't much different) the population of England, including Wales, was 7x that of Scotland, and 7x that of Ireland, while by 1900, the population of the US was 1.8x that of the whole of Britain, and the sum of the three principal forms of RATHBONE in the US (Rathbun, Rathbone, and Rathburn) was 2.4x the number in Britain.]

The US variants of RATHBONE include one very prominent one: "Rathburn" (with its own spelling variants). This Rathburn form varies quite a bit from the RATHBONE phonetic pattern, so how do we know that it doesn't constitute a distinct surname complex?

First, because the surname distribution statistics for the 1881 UKCensus (and the corresponding empty maps that could be made from them) show that "Rathburn" has negligible frequency in Britain. Second, because there are known instances in the US, where "Rathburn" and its variants have considerable currency, where people who spell their name thus are descended from the immigrant John Rathbone of Block Island, and this has been confirmed by yDNA testing. Finally, third (last and this time least), because "Rathburn" is also not recognized as a distinct surname complex by the best British-oriented surname dictionaries.

Again, although Lancashire has the most "Rathbone"s, it also features the great port of Liverpool, so it's the second, population adjusted, map below that more credibly highlights Cheshire as the area of origin.