

The Comerford Family

How Origins became confused

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TWO or three miles south of the ancient cathedral city of Lichfield in Staffordshire lies a small hamlet of less than a dozen houses known as Chesterfield. Here, as the Latin origin of the name attests, the commander of the nearby Roman Watling Street fortress of Letocetum, now the village of Wall, had his villa, and here many centuries later a Breton named Alan who had come as a follower of Roger de Toesni, Baron of Stafford, took up his residence soon after the Norman Conquest. Alan also had a seat six miles east at Comberford and both he and his successors for two or three generations later prided themselves in a form of double surname derived from both their seats, de Comberford and Chesterfield. Possibly, one is inclined to think, had they been involved more in the public life of Lichfield rather than Tamworth, which was nearer to Comberford, the family might have instead adopted Chesterfield as their surname. This indeed might have then avoided the confusion, both genealogical and heraldic, which arose through the identification of the Quemerfords of Co. Kilkenny with the Staffordshire Comberford, both families later adopting the elided form — Comerford.

Burke, founder of the now famous “Burke’s Peerage” and “Landed Gentry,” was himself descended from the Comerfords of Faddenbeg, in Co. Tipperary, and assumed they had come to Ireland with one Roger de Comerford, “Grand Master of the Game to King John in Ireland,” in 1210, as did his later successor in studies, Dr. Edward McLysaght, author of “More Irish Families.” However neither explained how Comberford was elided to Quemerford, the popular mediaeval rendering of the name, and later to Comerford. In fact the Quemerfords originated in a village of that same name in Wiltshire, and their early history is treated with in the transcribed documents published in Vol. 4 of Miscellaneous Manuscripts in 1907 by the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

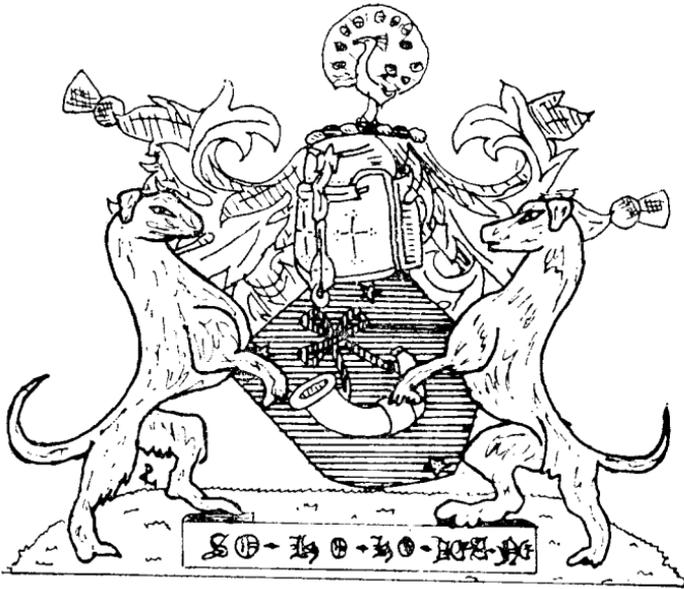
The assumption that this Kilkenny family were a branch of the Comberfords of Staffordshire, was based on a pedigree registered by one Captain Joseph Comerford on April 22, 1724 in Dublin Castle and certified by the then Ulster King at Arms.

This Captain Joseph Comerford would rank high as the most colourful, and possibly even paranoiac, member of the

family. Having fought under the Earl of Tyrone with the Jacobites against William III, he exiled himself to the Province of Douai in France, where he tended to call himself "Baron d'Enguemoire," an obvious derivation of the supposed "palatinate" title of "Baron of Danganmore" for which there is no proof of it ever having been created or previously used. This nebulous title was assumed on the basis that the Danganmore branch were the senior line of the Comerford family. In fact this branch was secondary to that seated at Ballybur Castle, near Cuffesgrange. The Captain, who could not have been descended from the Danganmores as they became extinct by 1671, and are now represented by the Langtons, also assumed the arms of the Comerfords, rejecting those of the Quemerfords which dated back to at least 1260, thus antedating the Comerford shield by at least a century. These arms were then erected in Callan churchyard over the tomb of his ancestor, Thomas Comerford, who died in 1629. The shield shows a Talbot quartering a cross charged with five roses, and a peacocks head is over this as crest. The roses were used by the Parles family of Shittlehange, Staffordshire who supported the Lancastrian "Red Rose" claim to the throne of England, and whose heiress married a Comerford. The motto "So Hou Hoo Den Ne" would seem to be a corruption of the Comerford "So No No Dea Ne" which in turn was possibly derived from the "Homo Homini Lupus" of the Wolseleys, another Staffordshire family who also used a talbot on their shield. In France Captain Comerford added two peacocks on either side as supporters.

Sometime later the captain bought a large estate in Champagne and rose in status from Baron to Marquis — Marquis d'Anglure. His right to this rank would seem as dubious as that to Baron d'Enguemoire. Before he died in 1729 he had registered a pedigree in Dublin Castle and a plaque in the Comerford Chapel of Tamworth Church, both proclaiming that the Kilkenny family were a branch of the Staffordshire family.

The pedigree registered in Dublin Castle, proves on close examination to be one of the most inexpert genealogical fabrications on record. This pedigree narrates a descent from the non-existent Roger de Comerford, Grand Master of the Game to King John, through nine generations of "Barons of Dangenmore," the last dying in 1504 leaving a daughter and heiress Mary who then marries Richard Comerford of Comerford. This Richard was a brother of Humphrey Comerford who married a cousin of Henry VIII, and of Henry Comerford, Precentor of Lichfield Cathedral. Richard was born ca. 1495 and married and died in England leaving issue. However the registered pedigree dismisses this (bigamy?) and gives six more generations between him and one Edward Comerford who died in 1620, thus giving an impossible average of 17 to 18 years



Quemerford of Wiltshire alias Comerford of Kilkenny



Comberford of Staffordshire alias Comerford of Wexford

per generation, and contradicting a family tree certified by the Archbishop of Cashel and other ecclesiastics to Don José Comerfort y O'Neill of Barcelona, collateral ancestor to the Duke of Los Torres, the Marquis of Acapulco, the Marquis of Valdeosera, and other Spanish noblemen. The captain's pedigree also denies the Comerforts their origin from Quemerford in Wiltshire, which as a result has been overlooked by most Irish family historians since 1724. Another result of the pedigree has been the use of the wrong coat-of-arms by many Irish Comerforts. The general tendency has been to use the Comerfort talbot quartering the Quemerford hunting-horn, whereas the latter should be used alone. These arms, illustrated above, are based on the seal of Henry Fitz Bartholemew de Quemerford. The two Irish wolf-hounds on either side supporting the shield are of little authority, having been registered as those of the fabricated "Barons of Danganmore."

Despite all this there have been some connections between County Kilkenny and the Staffordshire Comberforts. Thomas Comberford, head of the family, was a Jacobite, and came to Ireland with James II, later settling in Bunclody, County Wexford. His father was a Quaker, having been converted by Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill, both of whom had helped establish a community of Friends in Kilkenny, whilst an ancestor, William Comberford, M.P., J.P., along with other Staffordshire gentry, received a grant of lands in Leicestershire and Derbyshire from James, son and heir of James, Earl of Ormonde, on October 3, 1448. The Comberforts later shared a common descent with the Butlers from the Stafford family, and also from Henry III. And it is through their shared kinsmanship with the Butlers that both Quemerforts and Comberforts, both now Comerforts, show a distant but yet still close blood relationship.

Woulfe in his *Irish Surnames* gives Comartun as the Gaelic form of Comerford, but it seems too ludicrous how one would even attempt to "translate" a surname of Anglo-Saxon etymology such as Quemerford or Comberford, into another language. Would Woulfe attempt to render say Birmingham or Istanbul in Gaelic? His origin for this monstrosity lies in the registered pedigree of 1724, and so has no authority; the only Comerforts who have in fact a reliable rendering of their name in Irish are those of the Dundalk area, Celtic in origin, and a branch of the Mac Cumiskey's. The Quemerforts and Comberforts remain Comerford.

