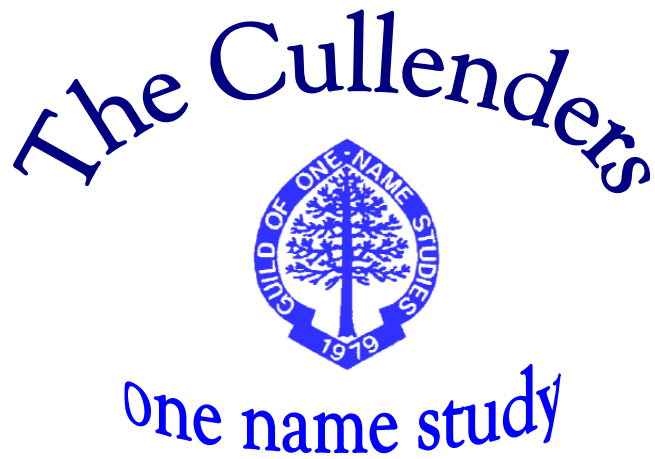


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Why Cullenders?

First of all, my apologies for intruding on your Christmas unannounced in this way. I am writing to everyone with the surname Cullender, Collender or similar, or who I know to have ancestors of those names, for whom I have been able to trace an address. I have also sent this out by email, so some of you might receive more than one copy, for which I apologise

In the course of researching my family history, I became fascinated by the rarity of my grandmother's maiden name, Cullender (she is the tall one at the back of the photo). I was aware that the family had been contacted by an American cousin back in the 60s when, as I was a teenager at the time, the story of Rose Cullender made quite an impression.



Elizabeth Cullender and Charles Lambert, Jan 1st 1903
Adults L to R: John Francis, Beatrice, John Francis,
Hannah, Amy Florence (Bolton), Mabel, Elizabeth (Lisle)
Front: Daisy and Florence

My internet searches also made me aware that Sue Tyler in the USA was, until very recently, still intensively researching the name, and had come to the conclusion that all Cullenders are related. I'm not quite convinced, but as yet I have not been able to contact Sue. If anyone can put me in touch with, or give me news of her, I would be very grateful.

Anyway, my fascination has led to me registering with the Guild of One Name Studies, and agreeing to collect together information about Cullenders worldwide. I have included alternate spellings such as Collender and Cullinder, because I have documentary evidence of the names being interchangeable right up to the 19th century.

Where do we come from?

So far I have managed to collect birth, marriage or death records of 1001 Cullender/Collenders between 1500 and 2002. 720 of these are from England, and most of those were in either Devon or East Anglia. Most of our Devonshire ancestors spelled their name with an 'o', and most of the East Anglians with a 'u', but unfortunately it is not that simple, because I have found the alternate spellings in both regions.

Cullenders disappeared from East Anglia in the 18th Century – the last birth in Suffolk was in 1721, and in Norfolk in 1771- and the last Devonshire Collender was born in 1867.

I have come across a theory that the name originated in Ireland, but the earliest record seems to be about 1700, so I think it is more likely to be the other way round. It is possible that we came from continental Europe – I have come across the names Collinder and Kullender originating in Sweden and Germany – but for now it's all just speculation. If you have another theory I'd love to hear it.

By 1881 most of the Cullenders and Collenders lived in London. The earliest records show them as mariners in docklands, and later there was a succession of chimney sweeps in one branch, but apart from these I have found no evidence of a 'family trade'.

Scandal and Infamy

If you don't have any scandal in your family you're not going to find anything recorded beyond the standard births, marriages and deaths. I have several leads waiting to be followed up, but I'm not sure that there will be anything to rival the next two stories.

Murdered for Gin

Mary Defour, illegitimate daughter of Judith Defour, a 'throwster' (a person who twists silk filaments into a yarn) and John Cullender, a weaver from Spitalfields, was born about 1742, baptised in Bethnal Green, London. Judith put the child in the workhouse, but one day in 1744, she fraudulently obtained permission to take her out for a few hours. Just a week previously, the workhouse superintendent had given Mary new clothes; Judith stripped the child, strangled her with a rag and left her in a ditch. She then sold the clothes for 'a shilling and a groat' (one and four pence, or 7p in today's money) and spent the money on gin. Judith was tried at the Old Bailey and sentenced to death. She 'pleaded her belly', meaning that pregnant women could usually have their death sentences commuted, but a 'jury of matrons' declared that she was not pregnant.

This seems to be the first recorded instance of a Cullender coming into close contact with the worst effects of alcohol. A century later the Barnet branch of the family were staunch teetotallers and all belonged to the Salvation Army, citing the evil they had seen in London slums as their motivation. It is not inconceivable that it was this sad story that was at the heart of that conviction. This story (but not the Cullender connection) is often quoted in accounts of the conditions that led to England attempting prohibition, and eventually raising taxes on gin. It also happened at the time Thomas Coram was setting up his foundling hospital in London, motivated by similar stories. The Coram Family museum will be opening in 2004, thanks to the hard work of Rhiann Harris, who also has Cullender connections

Witchcraft in Suffolk

John was not the first Cullender to be associated with a woman who was to end her life on the gallows. I have yet to trace a link between the Cullenders of London's East End and those of East Anglia, but the one group seemed to appear at about the same time as the other died out. The evidence of Rose Cullender's witchcraft is far less compelling to the 21st century reader than is that of Mary Defour's iniquity, but this poor widow was accused of casting spells on her neighbours, and her fate was sealed by the discovery of a third nipple (probably a mole). She was hanged on 17th March 1662 in Bury St Edmunds.

Double Tragedy

The first Cullenders to settle in Barnet were Samuel and Eleanor. They had suffered as many tragic bereavements as most parents of their time, but one particular week must have been especially unbearable. On 26th July 1849 their 3-year-old daughter, Harriott, died at home in 29 William Street, Poplar, from whooping cough and hydrocephalus. Just three days later, on 29th July, Eleanor was visiting Samuel's brother and sister-in-law, James and Sarah at their home in 26 London Street Ratcliff, where her niece Harriet, aged 2, died from malignant cholera.

Life is full of irony, isn't it? So far, I have only purchased five death certificates from the register office, and Eleanor features in four of these. The last records her own death, of which one of the causes (remember the family were teetotal) was cirrhosis of the liver. Was this the final straw that drove John Francis to sobriety, or just a cruel coincidence?

During the next year, I hope to complete the transcription of the birth, marriage and death indexes in the UK, and start to build a web page. I already have a few 'leads' that might develop into stories, and I also hope to be inundated with letters and emails from many of you, with dates, names, stories and pictures that I can incorporate in this history of our name.

A happy Christmas and prosperous New Year to you all

Ann Joss