



# A Toga in the Family Tree?

## ABSTRACT

Recent analysis of my DNA test results suggests there is an “exotic” element in the results which is probably tied to the Roman occupation of Southwest Scotland. This report sets out the available evidence

By Ted Flack, PhD.,

## Background

When I was growing up, my father, Dr “Douglas” H.E.D. Flack, told me that he believed that our surname, “Flack”, “Flach” or “Flax”, was probably originally a Dutch name that came to East Anglia in England from the Lowlands in the Middle Ages with the linen industry and the growing of flax.

He was reinforced in his belief by the proliferation of families with the surname “Flack” in East Anglia, an area that suits the growing of flax, a crop which flourishes in cool, damp environments like the Netherlands and East Anglia.

When it was learned that in fact our oldest traceable ancestor, Captain William Flack was born in 1810 in Bailieborough, County Cavan, Ireland, this was readily explained by the suggestion that many East Anglian flax workers would have been encouraged to move to Ireland when the flax industry was established in that country. It was not until 2014 that I discovered this search would likely be fruitless because new evidence suggested this explanation of the origin of my surname is not true!

In 2014, I was contacted by a William Flack from Massachusetts, USA who said he was also searching for his Flack family ancestors. He explained that the immigration papers held for his William Flack’s family in the US indicated only that his family came from Ireland and that there was no information about where in Ireland. He said that if I was prepared to submit a Y-DNA test (male paternal line using a high level, 111 points of comparison test), and that we had a close match, then he would be able to determine that his Flack family also came from County Cavan.

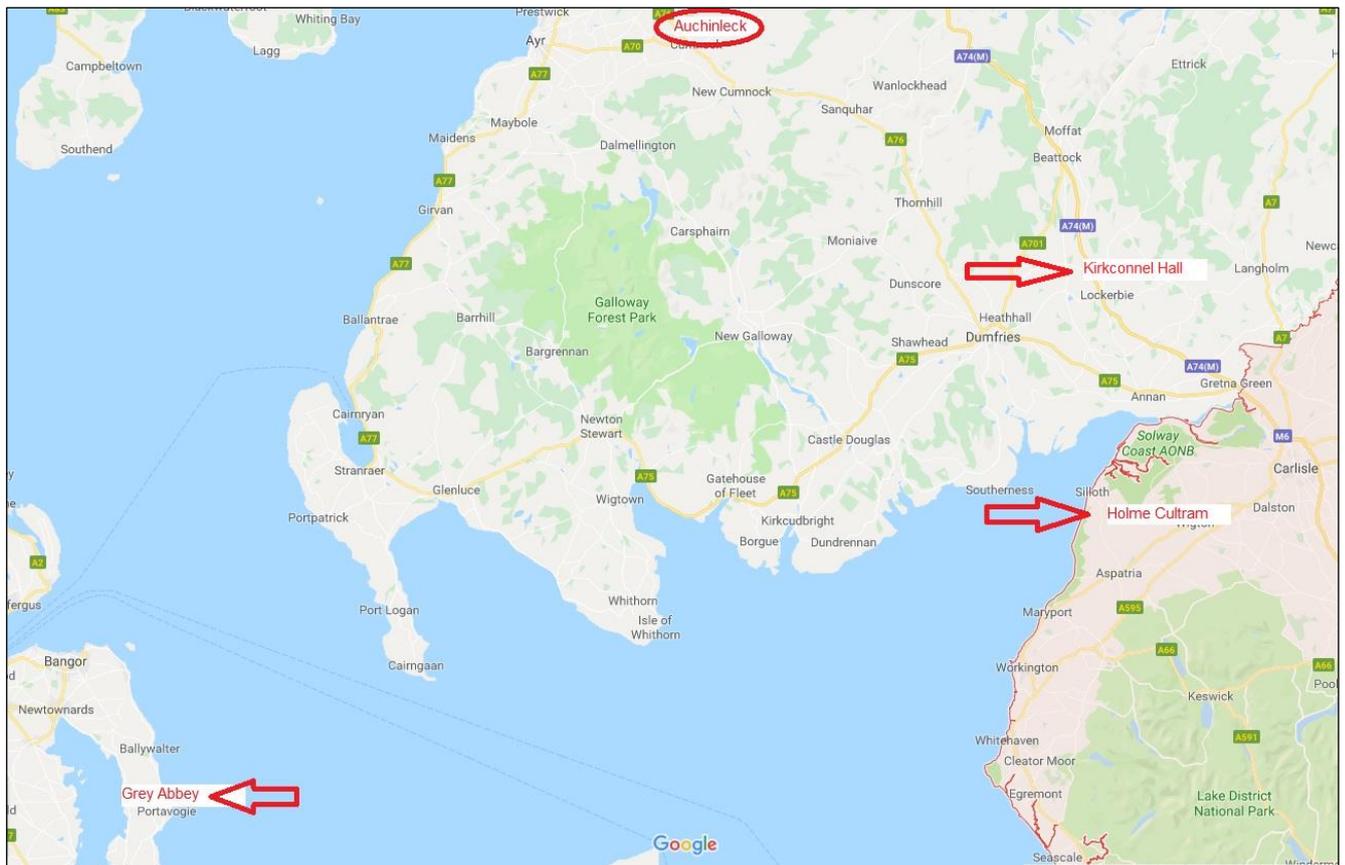
Having made inquiries to ensure that this unusual request was genuine, I consented and the FTDNA testing agency sent me the test which I completed and returned in the express envelope provided. About a month later, I received the startling news that I have a 80% chance of sharing a paternal ancestor within 250 years (10 genealogical generations) with the William Flack of Massachusetts! But even more startling -that we both have a strong and close genetic association within 500 years with people with the name Affleck, a surname historically associated with southwestern Scotland.

The results of the y-DNA test are reproduced on the next page.

Dumfries and Galloway and East Ayrshire are the area in which the surname Affleck in most commonly found today. To the south-west it borders Cumbria and to the south-east Northumberland, both in England.

The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland lists Affleck and explains that the name is an anglicized version of a Gaelic place names meaning “field”, such as “Auchinleck”. Other sources associate the name with “of the field of stones” and the old English word for stones such as “flag” and “flagging”.





So these were the results of the inquiries to date in mid-2018 when my wife, Joan and I visited Holm Cultram Abbey, Kirkconnel Hall and Auchinleck in August that year. ( See my report entitled “Family History Tourism Episode 1” [here](#)

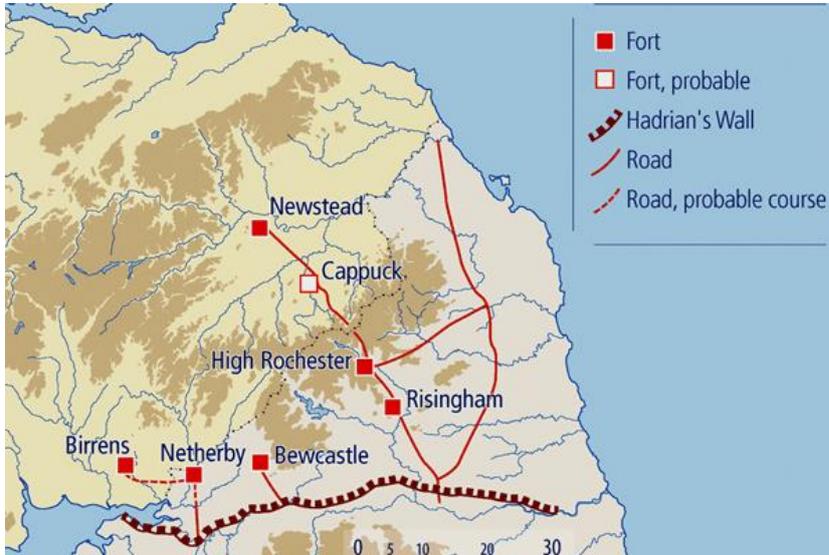
### **New Evidence**

In October 2021 inquiries with a DNA specialist intended to try to locate Billy Flack’s family in Ireland, resulted, as a by-product of his findings, a finding that my Y-DNA contained an “exotic” haplogroup J-M172 which, although occasionally found in SW Scotland, is thought to have Roman origins! Dr Tyrone Bowes, an expert in Scots – Irish DNA studies, states “*In fact, almost 4% of Scottish Origenes Y-DNA Case Studies have exotic Roman/Mediterranean-associated Haplogroups which lead back to either Dumfriesshire or Central Scotland (close to Hadrians wall and the Antonine wall).*”

This was a great surprise and immediately caused me to go searching for more information.

I knew that the Romans occupied NW England and SW Scotland from about 80 AD to 410 AD settling on Hadrian’s Wall which was built between AD 122, but I knew little about the Roman occupation of Ayrshire and Cumbria where our Flack (Affleck) is said to come from.

Despite this well-known boundary between Roman Britain and Scotland, modern archaeology indicates that there were numerous Roman camps in southwest Scotland beyond Hadrian's wall in the "boarders", designed to suppress the many raids and uprisings by the Caledonians in that area.



Despite this unrest, Hadrian's Wall also functioned as a customs post, raising funds from the many cross-border local traders in the area.



Research into the literature on the Roman occupation of the Scottish boarder also found that the Roman Army and Navy had significant bases in what is now Carlisle on the Solway Firth as well as the famous "Vindolanda" fort half-way between Carlisle and Newcastle .

Dr Mike Ibeji wrote for the BBC: "Vindolanda was garrisoned at different times by several auxiliary units, made up of non-citizen recruits who served for a period of up to 25 years in return for Roman citizenship. None of them were Britons. This is because of a policy prompted by the revolt of these very units in A.D. 69. In the wake of the infamous Year of the Four Emperors, the Dutch Batavian auxiliaries had mutinied against the emperor Vespasian, joined by their neighbours the Tungrians on the River Meuse. It had taken five Roman legions to subdue them, commanded by the veteran general Q. Petilius Cerialis. He had taken the subdued auxiliaries with him on his next tour of duty, to Britain, where they stayed. From then on, Rome followed a policy of not allowing native troops to serve within their province of origin. The units were commanded by their own tribal chieftains, but were gradually diluted by recruits from other areas.

The names on the Vindolanda tablets suggest that the racial origins of the Legions posted on the Wall were from Gaul, Germany, Pannonia, Dacia<sup>1</sup>, Illyria<sup>2</sup> and Greece (probably Greek slaves) as well as the upper Rhine homelands of the original units<sup>3</sup>.

The Roman fort at Birrens north of modern Carlisle (see map on previous page) was constructed by the Twentieth Legion which had strong ties with Illyricum, the Roman Province on the western shore of the Adriatic Sea.

Recent archaeology now makes it clear that the Roman legions had both trading and social contact with the local Britains in and around Carlisle. “Now archaeologists working on “The Roman Gask Project” have found a settlement outside the fort – including the pub or wine bar. The Roman hostelry had a large square room – the equivalent of a public bar – and fronted on to a paved area, akin to a modern beer garden. The archaeologists also found the spout of a wine jug. Dr Birgitta Hoffmann, co-director of the project, said: “Roman forts south of the Border have civilian settlements that provided everything they needed, from male and female companionship to shops, pubs and bath houses.

“It was a very handy service, but it was always taught that you didn’t have to look for settlements at forts in Scotland because it was too dangerous – civilians didn’t want to live too close. “But we found a structure we think could be identifiable as the Roman equivalent of a pub. It has a large square room which seems to be fronting on to an unpaved path, with a rectangular area of paving nearby. We found a piece of high-quality, black, shiny pottery imported from the Rhineland, which was once the pouring part of a wine jug. It means someone there had a lot of money. They probably came from the Rhineland or somewhere around Gaul.” We hadn’t expected to find a pub. It shows the Romans and the local population got on better than we thought. People would have known that if you stole Roman cattle, the punishment would be severe, but if they stuck to their rules then people could become rich working with the Romans.”

The city of Carlisle was known in Roman times as Luguvalium. When the civilian settlement in this area was enclosed by a stone wall is unknown, but it is generally assumed to have followed the line of the later medieval wall. The town probably became the civitas capital of the Carvetii tribe sometime in the 2nd century and Cair Ligualid was listed among the 28 cities of Britain in Nennius<sup>4</sup>. A single large stone building has been located which may have been for administrative use. Industry included copper working and tanning, while merchants are also in evidence. Inscriptions show there was a

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<sup>1</sup> Dacia an ancient country in southeastern Europe in what is now northwestern Romania. It was annexed by Trajan in ad 106 as a province of the Roman Empire.

<sup>2</sup> From about mid 1st century BC the term **Illyricum** was used by the Romans for the [province](#) of the [Empire](#) that stretched along the eastern Adriatic coast north of the [Drin river](#), and later to a broader region stretching between the Adriatic Sea and the Danube,

<sup>3</sup> Dr Mike Ibeji, BBC, November 16, 2012

<sup>4</sup> Nennius, (flourished c. 800), Welsh antiquary who between 796 and about 830 compiled or revised the *Historia Brittonum*, a miscellaneous collection of historical and topographical information including a description of the inhabitants and invaders of Britain and providing the earliest-known reference to the British king Arthur.

Mithraeum (Temple of Mithras) in the town and possibly a temple to Mars, who was identified with the local deity Belatucadros.

In the past there has been considerable differences of opinion as to whether Roman soldiers were permitted to marry under Roman law. Recent academic studies seem to agree that rank and file soldiers in the legions, auxiliary brigades, and elite cohorts were denied an official Roman marriage during their term of service, but that situation changed about A.D. 197 when this right was granted to legionaries at least, by Septimius Severus. Other studies suggest that the ban continued<sup>5</sup>.

In 2017 the fort baths of the Hadrian's Wall fort of Stanwix, north of the River Eden, were discovered by the river in the cricket ground. Archaeological artefacts discovered in 2021 suggests the Roman emperor Septimius Severus and his consort Julia Domna may have spent time in Luguvalium around AD 208-211 since engraved stone fragment dedicated to the empress as well as the emperor's personal workshop-stamped tiles (Severus was campaigning in Scotland at the time)

An examination of what is known of the Legions that served at the western end of Hadrian's Wall has failed to find any references to Roman legions from Illyricum in the early conquest to the area, however it is generally recognised that later in the Roman occupation period (250-400 AD) officers and men from legions recruited in Illyricum were often posted to the borders of the empire to respond to disturbances.

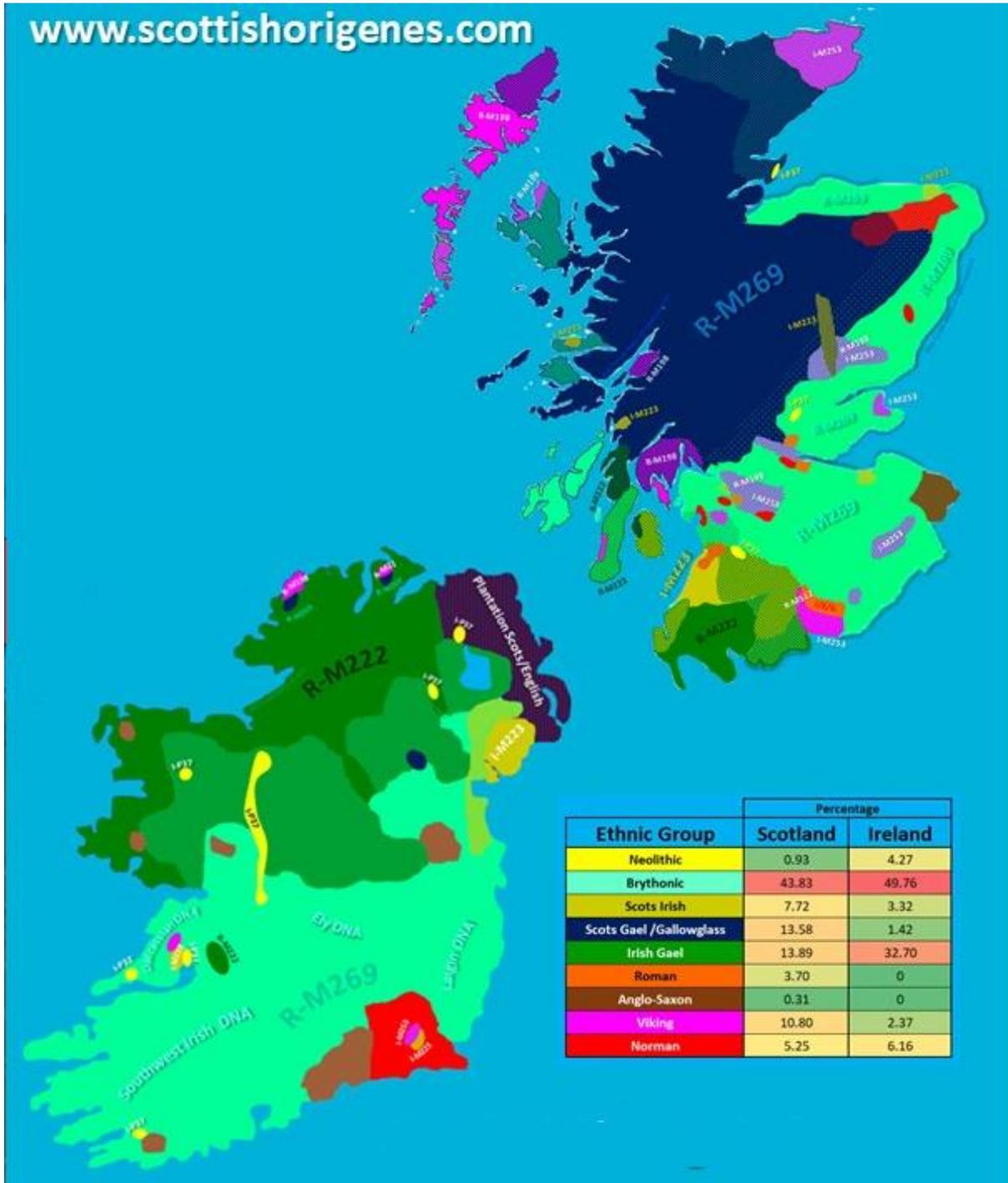
Since the semiautonomous clansmen of the Illyrian highlands were hardy warriors, it was inevitable that the emperors should recruit them to serve with the Roman legions and even the Praetorian Guard. When in the 3rd century BCE the empire began to be threatened by the barbarian peoples of eastern and central Europe, Illyricum became a principal military bulwark of Rome and its culture in the ancient world. Several of the most-outstanding emperors of the late Roman Empire were of Illyrian origin, including Claudius II Gothicus, Aurelian, Diocletian, and Constantine the Great, most of whom were chosen by their own troops on the battlefield and later acclaimed by the Senate.

In summary then, it is highly likely that the haplogroup J-M172 found its way into my Y-DNA from a Roman soldier from the Roman Province of Illyricum who probably served as an Auxiliary Legionnaire on the western end of Hadrian's Wall or nearby forts near Carlisle.

The following map shows that traces of roman DNA have been found in the current population of SW Scotland.

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<sup>5</sup> Septimius Severus and the Marriage of Soldiers. Peter Garnsey. California Studies of Classical Antiquity (1970) pp45-53



### Where was Roman Illyricum?

The Roman province of Illyricum stretched from the Drilon River (the Drin, in modern Albania) in the south to Istria (modern Slovenia and Croatia) in the north and to the Savus (Sava) River in the east; its administrative centre was Salonae (near present-day Split) in Dalmatia. With the extension of the Roman Empire along the Danube River valley, Illyricum was divided between the provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia.

Under the empire, Illyria enjoyed a high degree of prosperity. It was traversed by a Roman road, and Illyria's ports served as important trade and transit links between Rome and eastern Europe. Copper, asphalt, and silver were mined in parts of the region, and Illyrian wine, oil, cheese, and fish were exported to Italy.



■ - Prefecture of Illyricum, 318-379 AD

### Conclusion

It seems possible that my Scottish Flack (Affleck) ancestors were descendants of a Roman soldier who served on the boarder of Scotland and England and was from Dalmatia or somewhere in the northwest of the Balkan peninsula. His descendants lived and worked, possibly as stone masons, in the area north of Carlisle.