

Do you have a Cousin Jack in your family?

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Cousin Jack – Cornishmen, typically miners, who had left Cornwall to pursue work in countries like the United States, Australia, South Africa, and Latin America. Female equivalent: Cousin Jenny.

- The origin of the nickname may have come about from the idea that when a Cornishmen was asked if he knew anyone who needed work back in the home country, they would reply that they had a Cousin Jack who would be interested. This promoted the idea that the Cornish were ‘clannish’ – that they looked after their own when it came to job opportunities.

The **Great Emigration** of the Cornish between 1815 and about 1920 saw what has been termed the ‘wholesale scattering’ of the Cornish to the new mining frontiers of North and South America, Australia, and South Africa.

Cornish Emigration – Push and Pull Factors

PUSH	PULL
Poor wages	Higher wages
Lack of jobs	Job prospects
Family separation	Family reunification (chain migration)
Religious discrimination	Religious freedom
Food scarcity	Prospect of providing a better life for family
	Need for highly skilled miners

Key factors affecting emigration:

- 1815: Economic depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars.
- 1815-1830: Several countries in South America gained independence from Spain and Portugal which opened up job opportunities for the skilled Cornish miners. Many left for Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, Peru and Chili.
- 1845-46: Potatoes were a local staple in Cornwall, especially in the west. Crops were affected by the potato blight and food became harder to get, especially in 1847.
- 1848-1858: Gold is discovered in the United States, and Cornishmen around the world rush to try to make their fortune.

- 1859 - 1870: The Cornish mining industry begins to decline as new mining reserves are found overseas. In 1859, copper is discovered in South Australia and hundreds of Cornish families left for Australia.
- 1870: The price of tin collapses and mines begin to close.
- 1870-1920: By the end of the 1800s diamond and gold mines in South Africa attracted many Cornish miners.

Tips for Locating your Cousin Jack in the records

- If you're tracking your Cornish family on the England census and they are missing from the next census, they might have gone overseas. Look for passenger lists, or records in another country such as Australia, the United States, or South Africa.
- Use the FAN (Friends/Family, Associates, Neighbors) principle. Coined by Elizabeth Shown Mills, this research methodology refers to researching all those around your ancestor for clues. If you can't locate your ancestor, follow his cousins, siblings, neighbors, and church members. Families and friends often migrated to the same location, particularly in the Cornish mining community.
- Passenger lists will often show a place of last residence and may be one of the only records that show 'Cornwall' as the abode. Typically, on the U.S. census at least, you will mostly find that 'England' is given rather than the specific location. 'Cornish ancestry' is not something you will find on these censuses. If your Cousin Jack stayed permanently in the U.S. and was of the age to register for the World War Two draft, his place of birth (as Cornwall, England) may be found there. Naturalization documents will also show a more specific place of birth (if your ancestor naturalized).
- Use social, cultural, and historical context to learn more about your Cousin Jack.
- Contact historical and genealogical societies in the area your Cousin Jack mined. Don't forget mining associations/societies and local, state, and federal archives.

Sources to learn more about your Cousin Jack

General:

- Kresen Kernow (<https://kresenkernow.org/cr/>) (Cornwall's Archive Service)
- Cornwall Forever (<https://www.cornwallforever.co.uk>)
- Cornwall Heritage Trust (<https://www.cornwallheritagetrust.org/>)
- Cornwall Family History Society (<https://www.cornwallfhs.com/>)
- For societies in specific countries, search for 'Cornish Society' + 'Country name'
- Baines, Dudley. "European Emigration, 1815-1930: Looking at the Emigration Decision Again." *The Economic History Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, [Economic History Society, Wiley], 1994, pp. 525-44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2597592>.

- Kresen Kernow, *Cornish Overseas* (<https://kresenkernow.org/our-collections/collections-guides/cornish-overseas/> : accessed 20 January 2022). Collection guide to their archives.

Specific websites used in this presentation:

- Dr. Caitlin Green, *Dr. Caitlin R. Green* (<https://www.caitlingreen.org/2021/01/cousin-jack-origins.html> : accessed 20 January 2022), "Why Cousin Jack? The origins of the nickname of the Cornish overseas".
- Horace West, *The Miner's Guide: a ready handbook for the prospector and miner*, (Los Angeles: c.1921), digitized at Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/> : accessed 20 January 2022). Public domain.
- Bernard Deacon, *Cornish Studies Resources* (<https://bernarddeacon.com/demography/the-great-emigration/> : accessed 17 January 2022), "The Great Emigration".
- Kresen Kernow, *Cornish Overseas* (<https://kresenkernow.org/our-collections/collections-guides/cornish-overseas/> : accessed 20 January 2022). Collection guide to their archives.
- Philip Payton, *The Cornish Overseas*, (University of Exeter Press : 2005).