

“Who is this common ancestor anyway and what does it all mean?”

Well, that’s the big question, and it could be a different ancestor depending on which Middlebrook(s) you are talking to.

Most Recent Common Ancestor (MRCA)

If you are talking within the USA based members of ‘Haplogroup R1b – Lineage I’ then the common ancestor is presumably Joseph Middlebrook (c1610), or perhaps the MRCA is one of his descendants if you’re looking at a narrower group of results.

If you bring our recent New Zealand friend John Norris Middlebrook into the picture, then your MRCA could be 2 or 3 generations earlier than Joseph. We might theorise that Michael Middlebrook of Batley and Edward Middlebrook of Dewsbury were brothers or cousins (they arrived in neighbouring parishes around the same time, in an area with no prior Middlebrooks). This would mean that Joseph was first or second cousin to the Middlebrook Sisters. In which case, your common ancestor would have been born in the early-mid 16th century (approx 12-13 generations ago).

Then, if you bring myself into the equation, you could be looking at a MRCA several generations prior to that – possibly as early as the late 14th – early 15th century (let’s say 15-20 generations ago).

As Bob says, the DNA results are valuable in confirming or refuting relationships indicated by genealogical paperwork. They are also useful in confirming or refuting the possibility of wider theories where genealogical records might not exist due to the time frame (esp. going back to the sixteenth century and beyond).

There is a valuable tool that I like to use for predicting the number of generations separating pairs of individuals from their MRCA according to their DNA matches (see results in Table 1 below). Obviously, with the random nature of DNA mutations, these figures will not be precise, but they are in the right ball park to indicate the possibility that my hypotheses above, regarding both John Norris Middlebrook and myself, could be correct.

I have also produced a timeline ‘descendant’ chart that illustrates the possible routes towards our MRCA and perhaps our original Middlebrook ancestor. So Node B represents your most recent ancestor in common with John Norris Middlebrook, and Node A represents your most recent ancestor in common with myself. This is only used to show some current participants in the DNA project and there will, eventually, be several more branches to fit on to the chart.

Original Middlebrook

When we get back as far as the late 14th – early 15th century we are potentially heading towards the ‘original’ Yorkshire Middlebrook – ie. one man from whom all other Middlebrooks from the Yorkshire area are descended. This is what particularly interests me. Not so much who was the ‘original’ Middlebrook (because we may never be able to identify him through contemporary records) but which branches have descended from the same man and are therefore genealogically and genetically related? In fact, the more we are able to answer the second question, the closer we might get to locating/identifying the originator.

To get to this point we need to have some understanding of the nature and timing of surname development. Whilst by-names started to become much more common across Britain after the Norman Conquest (1066), the fashion for hereditary surnames only began to spread in southern England from about the middle of the 13th century. This process started later in the north of England (eg. Yorkshire) and took a century longer to complete. Only by the early 15th century was it rare for an Englishman not to have a surname.

We can see examples of this process and the difficulties of establishing who has a hereditary surname, just by looking at some early examples of the Middlebrook name, using the three instances below:

Religious Houses of North Yorkshire

There are several examples of the Middlebrook (Middelburgh) name appearing in documents/charters of the religious houses of North Yorkshire (and beyond) during the 13th and 14th century. Many of these are mentioned by Louis F Middlebrook in his introductory notes for the Register of the Middlebrook Family.

Examples include Johanne de Midelburgh in the Whitby Chartulary, Thomas de Myddelburghe in the Appellation de Coldingham and several individuals in the Guisborough Chartulary, including William de Middelburgh who was Prior of Guisborough up to 1321. Unfortunately, these people were almost certainly not related to us in any way – nor perhaps even to each other.

The modern day town of Middlesbrough in North Yorkshire was, during the 13th-14th century, a very small village noted only for its Benedictine Monastery. Middlesbrough Priory belonged to Whitby Abbey and was maintained by 12 monks. So the names that we see in these religious documents are not those of an extended genealogical family, but are in fact the names of individuals from a celibate order of monks – identified by their home priory.

Freemen of the City of York

There are a few Middlebrooks (Middelburghs) listed in the Register of the Freemen of the City of York 1272-1558 (Surtees Society Publications, Vol. 96), as follows:

1397-98	Nich. de Middelburgh, mercer
1400-01	Ricardus de Middelburgh, mercer
1412-13	Walterus Middelburgh, fisticus
1426-27	Joh. Midilburgh, chaundler & salesman, fil. Nicholai Midilburgh
1441-42	Robertus Middilburgh, clericus

It seems most likely that the first two of these entries, Nicholas and Richard, were merchants from the Dutch port of Middelburg. This was an important city in the commercial trade between England and the Low Countries, as was York. These two merchants may have been related, or they may have simply arrived from the same city during a busy trading period.

Note that the preposition 'de' is dropped for the last 3 entries. The entry for 1427 is very important, because it is the earliest indication I have found for any variant of the Middlebrook name being hereditary. So John Midilburgh was admitted to the Freedom of York through the patronage of his father, the merchant Nicholas Middelburgh.

There are no further admittances for this family (or families), so what happened to them? Perhaps they died out or returned to the continent. Perhaps, having succeeded in trade, they bought land and settled in the Yorkshire countryside. This starts to give us a theory for where our name came from and who was the 'original' Yorkshire Middlebrook.

Slaidburn parish

Henry de Holden of Slaidburn, in his will dated 1429, left a small legacy (sixpence) to **William de Middlebroke, clerk**. This provides the earliest example of our surname that I have found in the Craven district of Yorkshire and is especially interesting as it occurs in a parish where a Middlebrook family was known to live during the following century.

Unfortunately, even at this relatively late stage, we cannot be entirely certain that this man's surname had yet become stable and hereditary. Because, in a couple of subsequent Slaidburn wills (including the widow of Henry de Holden) dated 1440 and 1442, there is mention of a William Clerke and William 'the clerk' which might still be the same man. So it is quite possible that his original byname had been dropped.

However, the name re-appears in Slaidburn in 1543, when **Robert Mydylbroke** is listed in a lay subsidy of 1543. Could this just be a coincidence, or perhaps the surname did stick after all? Is this where the name originated, was William related to the merchants at York, or perhaps this is a completely separate branch of Middlebrooks?

Time to Most Recent Common Ancestor (Generations)																		
ID	m	8	9	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	9	1	1	3	1	1	1	1
	o	5	7	6	5	3	1	2	5	1	5	3	1	1	5	1	3	0
	d	8	2	1	5	1	1	2	3	3	9	0	2	3	9	7	0	9
	a	6	7	6	1	9	6	1	4	9	2	9	7	6	5	8	9	7
	l	6	6	2	1	0	6	9	7	5	2	7	5	1	2	7	7	3
				0	1	8	1	3	7	6		2	7	0	7	8	0	7
modal	67	1	2	2	2	4	4	5	7	7	7	10	11	12	15	37	42	42
85866 Isaac 1753NC	1	67	2	2	2	4	4	5	7	7	7	10	11	12	15	37	42	42
97276 Sims 1762NC	2	2	37	2	2	4	4	7	2	7	7	10	15	12	18	38	42	42
161620 Nathaniel 1764VA	2	2	2	37	2	4	4	7	2	7	7	10	15	12	18	38	42	42
255111 Joseph Middlebrook 1635	2	2	2	2	37	4	4	7	2	7	7	10	15	12	18	38	42	42
131908 Isaac 1753NC	4	4	4	4	4	37	2	4	4	10	10	7	12	12	15	42	46	42
211661 Not Provided	4	4	4	4	4	2	37	4	4	10	10	7	12	12	15	42	46	42
122193 Middlebrooks 1763 NC	5	5	7	7	7	4	4	67	11	7	7	10	9	12	15	40	42	42
153477 Rufus 1848GA	7	7	2	2	2	4	4	11	67	7	7	10	17	17	21	45	42	42
213956 Not Provided	7	7	7	7	7	10	10	7	7	37	2	15	18	15	24	35	35	38
95922 Thomas 1763NC	7	7	7	7	7	10	10	7	7	2	37	15	18	15	24	35	35	38
130972 Nathaniel 1764 VA	10	10	10	10	10	7	7	10	10	15	15	37	18	18	15	46	50	46
112757 Joe 1610 Eng	11	11	15	15	15	12	12	9	17	18	18	18	67	17	21	48	59	55
313610 Batley Yorks ENG (NZ)	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	17	15	15	18	17	54	22	44	50	46
159527 William 1811 ENG	15	15	18	18	18	15	15	15	21	24	24	15	21	22	67	40	46	42
117878 Robert 1766 NC	37	37	38	38	38	42	42	40	45	35	35	46	48	44	40	67	10	7
130970 Robert 1766 NC	42	42	42	42	42	46	46	42	42	35	35	50	59	50	46	10	37	12
109737 Robert 1766 NC	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	38	38	46	55	46	42	7	12	37

Table 1: A prediction of the time (in generations) to the 'most recent common ancestor' between Middlebrooks of Haplogroup R1b using 37 or more markers. Produced at http://www.mymcgee.com/tools/yutility.html?mode=ftdna_mode using FTDNA mutation rates. Note – the green number along the diagonal is the number of markers used.

An Illustrative Timeline for Yorkshire Middlebrooks (proposed)

1300

1400

1500

1600

1700

1800

1900

