

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society



Chorley Branch Education Group Talk Handout

An Introduction Surnames

When?

- Surnames came into use during the 12th and 13th centuries in the south of England and later in the north
- The new, Norman lords of the manor used clerks and stewards, who could read and write, to run their estates
- These people needed to know who they were dealing with when they were transacting business

Surnames

- Why do we have surnames?
- What do they do?
- The answer to both these questions is to allow us to distinguish one Tom, Dick and Harry from another Tom, Dick and Harry

- There was a limited choice of first names and there could be several people named John or Alice in one village
- The lord of the manor and his steward needed to know which of these people owed him rent or a heriot or a days service

John who?

- The steward tells the bailiff that John owes 2d rent
- The bailiff collects 2d rent from four different Johns – the miller, the shoemaker, the one who lives at the village well and the one with white hair but ...
- ... the steward only wants one rent – how will he explain to the bailiff which one he wants?

Who?

- The steward will have used a 'title' for each of the Johns
- John the Miller
- John the Cordwainer
- John at the well
- John the white head

Changes

- These would have gradually changed, partly through laziness, partly through clerical necessity, by dropping the definite article to give us.....
- John Miller
- John Cordwainer / Cordiner
- John Attwell
- John Whitehead

Dictionaries

- You need to be careful when using a surname dictionary as most compilers used etymology, or the meaning of words to define a surname
- George Redmonds has now stated that you need to look at a family's history to see where the name came from
- Eg - Fleetwood – where does this surname come from?
- Preston – which Preston?

Surnames from Parents - Patronymic

- In England these are easy to find – they usually end in 'son' – eg Johnson, Jackson

- These are surnames which developed mainly in the north and are based on father's names
- There are, however, some surnames that derive from women's names – Dyson (Dionysia's son) Margerison (Margery's son)
- They can also just be the father's name

Fitz

- The old Norman French word for son was Fitz, so there are still some families with surnames such as Fitzsimmons, Fitzmaurice
- The Prince Regent's brother, the Duke of Clarence, had a large family of illegitimate children, who were surnamed Fitzclarence
- If you look in the Preston telephone directory you will find quite a lot of people with a surname beginning with Fitz

Scottish and Irish

- The Scots and Irish use Mac and Mc to denote 'son of' – MacDonald, McKay
- The Irish also use O' – O'Gorman – this means 'grandson of'

The Welsh

- The Welsh had an oral naming tradition down to the mid 18th century, when they starting using surnames as we know them
- They used the word 'ap' to denote a son - Ioreth ap Rhys – Ioreth the son of Rhys
- The 'p' from 'ap' eventually stuck onto the name Rhys and you got Ioreth Price
- The patronymic surnames like these only became set in the mid 18th century, so looking further back you need Welsh at your fingertips or find a translator

The North of England

- Until very recently, the oral naming patterns used for centuries were still abundant in parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire
- Surnames were not used, but parents names and places were used
- John o' Peg's o' Nell's o' Jim's o' Kippax
- The older people still living in these areas probably still use this way of naming their neighbours

The Vikings

- In Iceland today you can have two children from one family, same parents but they have a different surname

- The son – Magnusson
- The daughter – Magnusdottir
- This does not appear to have caught on in this country after the Vikings landed

Names from Overlords

- If you were a servant or bondsman, your surname could have developed from your lord and master
- These surnames are usually written as a surname or occupation with an 's' on the end
- Parsons, Johns
- Don't forget, though, the final 's' may have disappeared and reappeared several times during the last few centuries

Names from Occupations

- These are very common!
- Can you think of five each?

Names from Nicknames

- These could be rude nicknames given to ancestors that were dropped when the family became 'respectable'
- There were also nicknames that were tongue in cheek, such as Gotobed – either the person to first have this as a nickname/ surname was very industrious or very lazy

Nicknames from dress, attitudes, etc

- The surname 'Mantle' could come from a peculiarity in the way the original owner of the surname dressed
- 'Proud' probably came from a person who was proud above their status
- Here are some early examples of nicknames, some of which will have stayed with the family, some of which have disappeared

Early Nicknames

- 1379 – Isabel Leuanbrede, Otley
- 1393 – Adam Levanbrede alias Otley
- 1277 – William de Linley called Tyrewiggel
- 1314 – Thomas son of Christiana Skot, which Thomas is called Cockehakel
- 1252 – John Spotothebrowe, Scarborough
- 1301 – Alan Potfulofale, Pickering

- 1379 – John Oilthegate, Letwell
- 1379 – Robert Touchepryk, Howden

Alias

- Clerks often put aliases into Manor Rolls to help them identify one of two or more people with the same surname
- 1552 – John Lanche alias Potter, brasener, York
- 1591 – Thomas Warren alias Capper, feltmaker, Shipley
- 1767 – Margaret Backhouse otherwise Bacas otherwise Bacchus
- Another form of alias or nickname was used when people took part in the 'Miracle Plays' of the Middle Ages
- Families would take the same role year after year and became known by the character they portrayed
- Prince, Abbott, Pope, Priest, King, Everyman, Death
- All but the last two surnames could also have been attached to people who were servants to a prince, abbot, etc

Surnames from Localities

- These could be from hamlets and individual farmsteads or from bigger towns
- However, if John of Dyneley moved to Holme in Cliviger he would be called John Dyneley.
- When he moved on to Burnley he would be called John Holme
- When he moved from Burnley to Manchester he would be called John Burnley
- When he moved to Birmingham he would be known as John Manchester

Immigrants

- England has always had an immigrant population that has adopted English ways and names
- Many of their 'foreign sounding' surnames have changed over the years and have also been deliberately Anglicized
- Schmidt – Smith, Marx – Marks, Beharrell – Barrel, Belle – Bew

Beware!

- Some surnames have a foreign sound to them, but are truly English
- Gaukroger
- This name derives from a small rocky, locality in Sowerby, near Halifax
- Dracup
- A Catholic family that probably used this as an alias, that eventually stuck

Surname Websites

- www.publicprofiler.org/worldnames/Main.aspx
 - You will find Worsnops most prolific in New Zealand
- www.ancestry.co.uk/learn/facts
 - Spencer - English: occupational name for someone employed in the pantry of a great house or monastery, from Middle English *spense* 'larder' + the agent suffix *-er*.
- www.bounty.com/baby-names/names-beginning-with/a?page=2
 - Use this site for fore names and you will find Keith is of Celtic origin meaning 'forest or windy place'.
- www.behindthename.com
 - Again for forenames - Marjorie - Medieval variant of [MARGERIE](#), influenced by the name of the herb *marjoram*. After the Middle Ages this name was rare, but it was revived at the end of the 19th century.
- www.surnamesearchutility.com/
 - This is a site with links to many others – Mainly American - Jefferson Reaves married Jennie V Franklin 12 Feb 1902 In Jackson County in Florida
- <http://surnames.behindthename.com/>
 - Gives a simple meaning of a name
- <https://www.surnamedb.com/>
 - Gives an excellent description of the meaning of a surname with examples of early occurrences
- <http://www.britishsurnames.co.uk/>
 - Mainly useful as a surname profiler

The Surname Atlas

- By using the Surname Atlas we can discover where our surnames predominated in the 1881 Census, which can help in locating where the family originated before the massive migration into towns
- Some researchers use telephone directories to pinpoint surname birthplaces

Good luck.
Get searching.

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society
Chorley Research Centre at Astley Hall Farmhouse

Opening times

First & Third Saturdays Noon—4:00pm
Monday, Wednesday & Friday 10:00am—4:00pm

Last appointment 3:00pm

Booking advisable—Tel. 01257 231 600 (When centre is open), Tel 01257 262 028 (When centre is closed)

or

Book on line at - Chorley Family History Research Centre Website – www.cfhrc.com

Research Enquires - chorleyresearch@lfhhs.org.uk

Chorley Branch Website - www.lfhhschorleybranch.com

LFHHS

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