



## Family History

### Tracing a Family Tree: Getting Started

Tracing a family tree is far easier than it used to be only a few years ago. It is now possible to find ancestors as far back as the early years of the reign (1837–1901) of Queen Victoria by using the Internet in the comfort of our own homes. This can be done quickly and at relatively modest cost, compared with the time and expense of travelling to distant record offices. Gone are the days of laborious searching through microfilms of unindexed census returns and the lifting of heavy volumes of civil registration records off the shelves in crowded rooms in places that took long hours to reach. This revolution in the accessibility of records has come just in time to meet the unprecedented interest in family history that has risen to yet new heights with the BBC television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (2003). Tracing a family tree is now one of the nation's favourite pastimes.

But the success of these programmes and the rapid progress that is usually made in the early stages of research can make it all sound too easy. People may be lulled into thinking that tracing a family tree is something that can be done entirely on the Internet. In fact, family history web sites offer only a small fraction of the records that are available for study. Rapid progress comes to a sudden end in the early decades of the nineteenth century, before civil registration records of births, marriages, and deaths began in 1837 and census enumerators' books survive from 1841. The long, hard slog at record offices is still necessary to get back further and to flesh out the bare bones of the story that you have uncovered so far.

It is, of course, still possible to trace a family tree in the old way without using a computer. In getting started with the aid of one there is plenty to do offline before turning to the records of births, marriages, and deaths and the census returns (which, for reasons of privacy, are at the moment (2008) available only from 1841 to 1901). Make a start by writing down all that you already know, or think you know, about your family's past. Most of us know something of our family history, though it is common to have no knowledge of the time before our grandparents. Memories are selective, so talk to other members of your family—even if you are the eldest!—and do it in an organized way. Prepare some of the questions you want to ask and make everyone feel that they are part of the research process by providing information as well as asking for it. From the start, write everything down in a notebook (and perhaps transfer this information to a computer file), recording your source of information and the date that you received it. You will quickly learn that

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this is good practice when you start to visit record offices. It can be frustrating months or years later not to know where you found information that needs checking or which you only half-noted at the time because you did not then realize its significance.

When visiting other members of your family, or old friends and neighbours of your parents, take along some old \*photographs or other mementoes that you might have, for these act as a spur to memory and conversation and often prompt new lines of enquiry. Some of what you are told may well turn out to be untrue. Be sceptical about stories that you are descended 'on the wrong side of the blanket' from someone famous and that a great legacy awaits you if only you can prove the descent. Many families have romantic tales about some fictitious ancestor or unlikely explanations of their origins. The information that you receive may well be contradictory or muddled. Yet family stories are not always like that and they often suggest your first lines of enquiry. They can be very real explanations as to why an ancestor moved a long distance from his or her place of birth, how he or she acquired a particular job, how and where your grandparents met, and many other details that you will never find from official records. The best type of \*oral history can be very rewarding. Your relatives may also have photographs, birth, marriage, or death certificates, military medals, school reports, newspaper \*obituaries, or funeral cards, though it is common to find that some of the people in the photographs (which are rarely labelled with names and dates) cannot be identified. Not so long ago, old people were often reluctant to reveal any scandals in their family history, but attitudes have changed and such stories are now often told with relish. Women usually know far more about the history of their extended family than do men and it is common to find that one woman in particular is a fund of knowledge. As in all forms of enquiry, follow the most promising leads.

The pooled information from your family members often points you to the churchyards and public \*cemeteries where your ancestors are buried. Tombstones can be informative, though many have weathered badly and some have been removed. The information inscribed upon them, however, has to be treated as cautiously as any other source. For example, it was common to think of someone aged 84 as being in his 85th year and to note the age as 85. If the inscriptions for all members of the family are the work of the same mason, the earliest dates will have been recorded long after the events they commemorate and may therefore be faulty. It is important to realize from the beginning that all sources of information need to be looked at critically for they may contain errors. Nevertheless, tombstones often convey information, e.g. about a relationship or precise place of residence, that the researcher did not know. Remember also that many of our ancestors were illiterate before primary education became compulsory in the late 19th century, so names were often spelt in a variety of ways. There was no correct spelling for a surname. You may find tombstones side by side with different spellings of the same family name. You will also find that many †surnames changed over time.

A golden rule in the pursuit of family history is to start with yourself and work backwards in time, proving each link as rigorously as you can. You may be tempted to assume that a record of a birth or a baptism is that of your ancestor because it occurs in about the right place at roughly the right time, but you need to check this information against all the other records that are available, e.g. by consulting death or burial records to see whether this person died as an infant or child, and going through other birth or baptism records to see whether anyone else with the same name was recorded. We must proceed as carefully as if we were trying to prove a case before a court of law. Sometimes, of course, we are defeated by the ambiguity of the evidence. This thorough

practice is particularly necessary when our information has come from somebody else's transcript, either in a printed document or on the Internet (which at the moment is particularly prone to errors). The craft of genealogy is to look at all the various records that are available before arriving at a decision. This involves visits to record offices in addition to looking at a computer screen. Success comes from looking in the proper place in the right way.

Deciding which line to pursue first is a matter of individual choice. Most people start by tracing the history of their father's line, because this is how they acquired their surname. It is more difficult to trace a direct female line because the surnames keep changing upon marriage. As family history is a hobby, it is natural to proceed in fits and starts, depending on the time available and the enthusiasm generated by success. Once an ancestor turns out to be frustratingly elusive, it makes sense to turn to another branch for a while. A worthy aim—which in practice is often difficult to achieve—is to trace all your sixteen great-great-grandparents, so that you get a rounded view of your immediate ancestors. Once you get further back, the personal links with the people who have contributed to your genetic make-up become thinner and thinner. Nevertheless, it is still a fascinating task to trace the history of your own surname, and others on your family tree, as far back as possible, especially if they are rare names that can be pinned down to particular localities in the Middle Ages. Knowing where your ancestors came from is part of the appeal of family history and a spur to turn to the local history of that place or district.

The information that you find will be so varied that you will need to work out which methods of recording suit you best. It is essential to work in a systematic manner, recording everything in notebooks or computer files. From the start, you will need to attempt to link your ancestors in \*family trees, however brief and questionable they might be in the early stages, for these sketches provide links and highlight problems. Some people find that wallpaper is useful for recording large families! A number of computer software programs are available: the popular *Family Tree Maker* (British edition), *Family Historian*, *Family Tree Maker*, and *Brother's Keeper* for PCs, and *Reunion* for Macs. The standard genealogical abbreviations that are used on family trees are: b. born; bapt. baptized; d. died; d.unm. died unmarried; d.s.p. (from the Latin *decessit sine prole*) died without children; dau. daughter; s. son; div. divorced; unm. unmarried; = married; l. left descendants.

Family history is a sociable activity and you can learn a lot from other people's experiences. Every part of the country now seems to have its local family history society, which arranges lectures, and perhaps beginners' sessions, publishes its own journal, and organizes activities such as the recording of \*monumental inscriptions in churchyards and cemeteries, or the transcription of \*parish registers, census returns, and other local records, which are then made available in print, on microfiche, or on a web site. The address of your local society can be found at your nearest library or online. The numerous family history fairs that are held in different parts of the country are well worth attending.

Armed with the information that they have gleaned from relatives and the documents and memorabilia in their own possession, many people now begin their searches on the Internet, where the amount of available genealogical material is growing rapidly. The essential book of guidance is Peter Christian, *The Genealogist's Internet* (3rd edn, 2005). For general information about family history and how to get started, turn to GENUKI, a non-commercial site run by volunteers. This has the most comprehensive collection of online information about family history for the British Isles. It provides answers to

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Frequently Asked Questions and devotes pages to topics such as military records. These are followed by county pages, which provide links to the web sites of county record offices, local family history societies, county surname interest links, etc., and information about national genealogical organizations and all relevant mailing lists. GENUKI also acts as the main newsletter for British family historians. For those whose family history interests extend beyond the British Isles, the most comprehensive site is Cyndi's List. See also the Appendix on record offices and their web sites at the end of this *Companion*.

In recent years getting started on tracing a family tree has been made far easier by the availability on the Internet of the two basic sets of records for the beginner, \*civil registration and \*census returns. The state requirement to register all births, marriages, and deaths began on 1 July 1837 and continues to the present day. The earliest surviving census enumerators' books for the whole of the country are those from the census of 6 June 1841; they are available for study at ten-yearly intervals until 1901. These records are transcribed, indexed, and digitized on pay-per-view or subscription sites; the volunteer FreeBMD project covering the civil registration records of England and Wales is not yet complete. Regrettably, web sites often contain numerous transcription and indexing errors, for many of the compilers do not have specialist skills in reading old documents. It is therefore important to check the information obtained online with the original records. The Internet provides help and guidance and acts as a short cut to the relevant records. For most of us it is cheaper and more convenient to use an online service than to travel to a record office, but the Internet is not a substitute for seeing the original records. At the moment, relatively few sources are available online, for transcribing and indexing records is a slow, laborious job that takes up an enormous amount of time. The Internet is a great help in getting started and in making rapid progress back to the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, and no doubt in the coming years many more records will be put online, but unless you are content with just the names and brief information about your immediate ancestors, visits to reference libraries and record offices remain essential.

All the English and Welsh counties and most of the metropolitan districts have their own record offices. They are listed in the Appendix, together with their addresses, telephone numbers, and web sites. Local material can also be found in a variety of other locations such as the \*Mormon Family History Centres, \*museums, heritage centres, and local history collections at county libraries. In most cases admission is free, but it is wise to book an appointment, indeed essential if you wish to use a microfilm reader or computer. You will need to obtain a reader's ticket at the reception desk, so bring along a driving licence or some other means of identification. Go with a notebook and a pencil (for pens are not allowed as they might damage documents). Professional archivists will advise you on which records to search, though they are often very busy. It helps if you have already made some progress and have a clear idea of the questions that you hope to answer. In most record offices documents can be produced only at regular, stated times, which you need to note for future reference. While you are waiting for documents to arrive, familiarize yourself with the practical arrangements, such as filling in request slips for documents or the facilities for purchasing photocopies of documents or printouts of microfiche or computer records, and look at some of the many catalogues, e.g. of parish registers or map collections. When you are using original sources, including those on a microfilm or microfiche reader, always make a note of all the document reference numbers from which you have obtained information or have searched to no avail (for you do not want to go through them all again).

Parish registers are the major genealogical source available at county record offices. These documents must usually be consulted on microfilm. Large numbers of parish registers have been published, but these are usually the early ones, from 1538 onwards. The same applies to the Mormon \*International Genealogical Index, which arranges information derived from large numbers of parish registers. The \*Church of England registers that you will need for the baptisms, marriages, and burials of your 19th-century ancestors are in a standard form from 1 January 1813, though before that they are very variable. If you cannot find an elusive ancestor in the civil registration records, a parish register might provide an alternative source of information. The registers are particularly useful for the generation before the introduction of civil registration in 1837, though you need to be aware that in the growing industrial towns new churches were founded within the ancient parishes and that many people preferred the services that were held in a variety of dissenting chapels (*see* NONCONFORMITY). The archivists in the record offices will explain the local situation and direct you to the relevant catalogues, if the records survive.

It is natural at the beginning to concentrate on these major sources, but you will become aware of the great range of other records that are available in print or as original documents. These help to fill out the picture once you have sketched a basic family tree and they can help to solve some intractable problems. You will discover how to link the information that you have gleaned from different sources. A baptism date in a church or chapel register will point to the year or quarter that you need to search in the civil registration registers to find a record of the actual date of birth. A trade and commercial \*directory on the shelves of a record office might give you the address and occupation of an ancestor in, say, 1872, which will narrow your enquiry when you search for him in the 1871 census returns. Finding an ancestor in the 1841 or 1851 census enumerators' books might lead you to a \*tithe award and map, which will identify the place where he lived and perhaps the land that he owned or rented. Family history, then, becomes much more than a search for names and dates. You have started on a journey of discovery about the lives of your ancestors and the local communities in which they lived and worked. This will take you far beyond your local archives to the record offices of those parts of the country where your ancestors lived, to The \*National Archives for England and Wales at Kew or its counterparts in Scotland and Ireland, and perhaps to the \*British Library, the National Library of \*Wales, the \*Bodleian Library, or the \*Borthwick Institute for Archives at York. Only a fraction of the nation's records are available on the Internet.

How far can you get back with a particular line? There is no straightforward answer to this question. It depends not only on perseverance but on a certain amount of luck. Some places may have a full set of parish registers, \*wills, and manorial court rolls that enable you to get back into the Middle Ages, but in other places these records may have been lost or destroyed. Many lines will be difficult, if not impossible, to prove beyond the late 18th or early 19th century because of gaps in the records. This is often the most difficult period of all, not just because of missing documents but because of inadequate registration at a time when the national †population was expanding quickly, people were moving about the country more than before, and many families were turning to Nonconformist chapels whose records may not have survived. If you can overcome this hurdle, you will usually find that your ancestors remained within the neighbourhood, or what they called their \*country, unless they were among the youngsters who were attracted to \*London or the leading provincial towns, such as Norwich or York. You may not find them all in the same parish register, but they can often be found in the registers

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of a group of neighbouring parishes. If a \*hearth tax return for the county that you are interested in is available in print, the index will enable you to identify the places where people with the same surname were living in the 1660s or 1670s. You will do well to get back to the 16th century, when parish registers began and wills became more common among ordinary people. Not many of us can get back into the Middle Ages by proving a direct line step by step, but it is often possible to show that a distinctive surname was coined in a particular locality in the 13th or 14th century and that it remained thereabouts until the 16th or 17th century, when you can begin to prove descent. Of course, many people claim direct descent from someone recorded in Domesday Book or even earlier, but they have never gone to the trouble of proving it. Every self-respecting family historian will recognize the need to be as certain as possible of the true facts.

Genealogy often used to be a snobbish pursuit, but nowadays family historians realize that, as the majority of British people were industrial workers in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and before that small farmers or labourers who worked on the land, most of us must be descended from ordinary people who led rather humdrum lives. It is, of course, exciting or amusing to find an exotic or scandalous ancestor, but usually we have to be content to discover where our family came from, how they have moved around or stayed close to their origins, what they did for a living, what their housing conditions were like, how many children they had, what they looked like in their posed photographs, what they did for amusement and relaxation, and what roles they played in their local communities. These personal discoveries take us down paths that no one has trodden before. They lead us into an understanding of British social history as a whole and inspire many to move on to the related subject of local history.

*See also* IRISH LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY; SCOTTISH LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY; FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINES; FEDERATION OF FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES; GENEALOGISTS, SOCIETY OF.

### SEE WEB LINKS

- GENUKI: family history records and societies.
- Cyndi's list of genealogy sites.
- Ancestry civil registration records (subscription).
- Find My Past civil registration records (subscription).
- FreeBMD civil registration records.

DAVID HEY

## **Surnames**

The fashion for families to have fixed, hereditary surnames began at the top level of medieval society and spread slowly down the social scale. The reasons for this fashion remain rather mysterious, though the practice was adopted widely throughout western Europe in the Middle Ages. Before the \*Norman Conquest, English people were known by their personal name and perhaps by a by-name which was not hereditary. The Norman barons commonly took the name of their estate (either in England or in Normandy) as a surname; a few had already done so before the invasion of England. This link with property gave rise to the earliest form of hereditary surnames, a fashion that was gradually followed by others.

It is sometimes said that the narrow range of personal names favoured by the Normans was the major factor in the need for surnames which distinguished one

person from another, but although this explains the use of by-names it does not explain why they became hereditary. The great increase in the use of written records during the 12th–14th centuries—especially manor \*court records from the mid-13th century onwards—has perhaps something to do with the formation of hereditary surnames, so that continuity in the ownership of property could be established and disputes minimized. It is possible that the large numbers of locative surnames which are derived from farmsteads can be explained in this way. However, medieval scribes were content to record a man as ‘John, the son of Robert’ (usually in the Latin form, ‘Johannes filius Robertus’), rather than by a surname, so this is not the entire explanation. It also leaves us with the problem of why some hereditary surnames were formed from nicknames (some of which were obscene and unlikely to have been coined by a scribe) or from occupations (many of which were not followed by the descendants of a man who first acquired a surname).

Many by-names in use during the 13th and 14th centuries never developed into hereditary surnames. Records from this period show that people were sometimes known by two or three by-names during their lifetime. The process by which surnames became fixed was prolonged and complicated. The fashion spread in southern England and East Anglia during the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th, but although equally early examples can be found in northern England and Lowland Scotland it took another century to become widespread there. By the 15th century most English people had acquired fixed, hereditary surnames, but Welsh names did not take an English form until the 16th century, and often long afterwards. Concise introductions are available in Richard McKinley, *A History of British Surnames* (1990), and David Hey, *Family Names and Family History* (2000).

Many of the surnames which were formed in the Middle Ages and which were recorded in the \*lay subsidies and \*poll tax returns of the 14th century have disappeared through the failure of the male line, especially those which had a single-family origin. The stock of surnames has been partly replenished by immigrants, and the variety of surnames has been increased by the corruption of original names into different forms, some of which now bear little resemblance to each other. Thus, Answer is derived from Edensor, Capstick from Copestake, and Shimwell from Shemeld. The use of phonetic spellings has added to the variety of forms that are now in use. Those people who insist that theirs is the correct spelling of a surname and that they have no connection with others who spell their name differently are mistaken.

British and Irish scholars lead the field in the study of the etymology of surnames; see P. H. Reaney, *The Origins of English Surnames* (1967), P. H. Reaney and R. M. Wilson, *A Dictionary of English Surnames* (3rd rev. edn, 1997), Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *The Oxford Dictionary of Surnames* (1988), Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland* (6th edn, 1989), Robert Bell, *The Book of Ulster Surnames* (1988), George F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland: Their Origin, Meaning and History* (rev. edn, 1999), T. J. and P. Morgan, *Welsh Surnames* (1985), and John and Sheila Rowlands, *The Surnames of Wales* (2nd edn, 2007). For the French origins of some British names, see Marie-Thérèse Morlet, *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de famille* (1991).

The explanations of the meaning of names that are offered by linguists with the necessary expertise in old languages are merely the starting points for family and local historians who are interested in the origins, spread, and sometimes the disappearance of surnames. Their suggestions do not always fit the evidence that is provided by the past and present distributions of surnames, nor do the medieval references from different parts of the country quoted by Reaney take account of the failure of male lines,

which leave a much narrower distribution of the name at the present time or sometimes its disappearance. Many of the surnames in Wilson's later editions of Reaney's dictionary were no longer in use by the time of the 1881 census, and probably long before; indeed, they had often been no more than by-names that had never become hereditary. People bearing the same surname today may often have a common ancestor, despite the evidence from the Middle Ages that the name was once more widespread, for other lines might have died out.

As long ago as 1890, H. B. Guppy, *Homes of Family Names in Great Britain*, stressed the importance of studying the geographical patterns of surnames in explaining their origins, but for a long time this approach was ignored (mainly because his samples of names were largely restricted to those of farmers named in \*directories). Then, from the 1970s, the English Surnames Survey at the Department (now Centre) for English Local History, \*Leicester University, published a number of county studies which were concerned not only with etymologies but with past and present distributions of surnames and with the ways in which some names have ramified over time. See George Redmonds, *Yorkshire: The West Riding*, English Surnames Series (1973), Richard McKinley's *Norfolk and Suffolk Surnames in the Middle Ages* (1975), *The Surnames of Oxfordshire* (1977), *The Surnames of Lancashire* (1981), and *The Surnames of Sussex* (1988), and David Postles's *The Surnames of Devon* (1995) and *The Surnames of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1998). It became clear that family and local historians have a great deal to contribute to the study of surnames. More recently, some of Reaney's conclusions about pet forms of names have been challenged on linguistic and historical grounds. See, in particular, Peter McClure, 'The Interpretation of Hypocoristic Forms of Middle English Baptismal Names', *Nomina*, 5 (1998), 'The Kinship of *Jack*. 1: Pet Forms of Middle English Personal Names with the Suffixes *-kin*, *-ke*, *-man* and *-cot*', *Nomina*, 26 (2003), and 'II: ...*-cok* and *-cus*', *Nomina*, 28 (2005).

One of the findings of the English Surnames Survey was that the decline in the number of different surnames in the late Middle Ages as a result of the Black Death and other disasters was followed during the period of population growth in the 16th and early 17th centuries by the spread of family names within a restricted neighbourhood, so that a surname that was once borne by a single family ramified to include several households by the time of the \*hearth tax returns of the 1660s–1670s, a useful midway point between the period of surname formation and the present day. These names did not migrate far, on the whole (though one always has to allow for the minority of individuals who moved well away from their home district), so that in the early modern period certain surnames became characteristic of a restricted area (*see* COUNTRY). Despite the mobility of the 19th and 20th centuries, every part of Britain still retains its characteristic names. Surnames are therefore a useful tool in the study of population movement and the stability of groups of core \*families.

Surnames are classified into the following major groups: locative, topographical, personal names or patronymics, nicknames, and occupational, though it is sometimes difficult to decide in which category to place a puzzling name. In some parts of England locative surnames are very common; for example, on the foothills of the Pennines in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, where medieval settlements were scattered, the proportion rises to about half. By contrast, in Scotland and Ireland the proportion is very low, and in Wales it is insignificant, but in the other Celtic region—Cornwall—locative or topographical names beginning with *Bos*, *Car*, *Lan*, *Pol*, *Pen*, *Ros*, and *Tre* are prolific. See G. Pawley White, *A Handbook of Cornish Surnames* (1981), and O. J. Padel, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names* (1988).

Locative names are those derived from particular places. Some of these names arose from towns or villages, but numerous others were derived from the names of farmsteads. In areas where hamlets and isolated farmsteads were the usual forms of settlement, such names are very common, but in regions characterized by nucleated villages they are rare. Locative names of this sort are still normally concentrated close to their point of origin, though some are now clustered near where an ancestor moved in the unsettled years after the Black Death, and a minority, such as Pickering and Wakefield, are found far and wide. Identifying the place where a surname arose is sometimes made difficult by the duplication of †place-names. Although it is obvious that there are several places called Aston or Sutton that gave rise to surnames, no one can be expected to know all the alternative sources of names across the country. For example, the Ripons of East Anglia came from the small settlement of Rippon (Norfolk), not from the Yorkshire market town.

Topographical names cannot usually be identified with the same precision, though they arose in the same way. They include such names as Bridge, Green, Hill, Townend, and Wood, which clearly have multiple origins. However, Armitage is derived from a single hermitage near Huddersfield, and the Brooks, Castles, etc. of any one district may be descended from a single family which derived its name from a feature in that locality in the Middle Ages. In such cases, the division between locative and topographical names becomes blurred and it is perhaps best to combine these two classes under the heading 'toponymic'. Names that are prefixed by a preposition, such as Atwood, Bywater, or Underhill, are topographical names, and so are many names that end in -er, such as Downer. Sussex is particularly rich in topographical names.

Patronymics include those derived directly from the name of the father, e.g. John or Richard, but a much more common practice was to add -s or -son. The -s suffix was preferred in southern and midland England, and as it was popular in the border counties it was the type that was widely imitated by Welsh surnames when they were formed in the English style from the 16th century onwards. In northern England and Lowland Scotland the -son ending was preferred. As the practice of adopting hereditary surnames became common first in southern England, -son names were formed about a century later than those ending in -s, when the poorer members of society were adopting surnames. Most \*Old English and Scandinavian personal names declined rapidly in use after the Norman Conquest, but some, e.g. Gummer and Oddy, nevertheless survived long enough to become surnames; distribution patterns suggest that these were often of single-family origin. The range of personal names favoured by the Normans was very restricted, so pet forms became common, often with the addition of suffixes such as -cock, -kin, -et, -ot, -mot, -on, or -in. Thus, families descended from a man whose father was called Richard acquired surnames as different as Richard, Richards, Richardson, Dickson, Dickens, Dickinson, Hitchcock, Higgins, Ritson, etc. Surnames derived from mothers, e.g. Marriott, are relatively rare. They do not necessarily denote illegitimacy (*see* WOMEN'S NAMES).

Occupations were used as by-names long before hereditary surnames were fixed. The most common occupational surnames—Smith, Wright, Taylor, Turner, etc.—became hereditary early in the process of surname formation. Most villages are likely to have had one craftsman pursuing each of such trades but are unlikely to have had more, so the occupational surname was readily distinguishable. Some occupational surnames are derived from obscure trades which are no longer practised. Such names have as marked a geographical distribution pattern as the locative names; for example, Palliser or Pallister (the man in charge of a medieval deer park) is a name that is largely

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confined to north-eastern England, particularly North Yorkshire and County Durham. The use of dialect words for the same trade also produced distinct regional patterns of surnames. For instance, the eastern England surname Fuller has the same derivation as the south-western Tucker, the northern Walker, and the south-east Lancashire Bowker; each of these names refers to a man who fulled cloth at a mill after a piece had been woven at the loom.

This group of surnames includes those which were derived from offices, such as Chamberlain or Steward. However, those which apparently denote a rank, such as Earl or Knight, are more likely to be nicknames. This class of surname is derived from 'an eke name', meaning an alternative. Nicknames are the most difficult group of surnames to explain. The reasons for bestowing them were often ephemeral and whimsical and the expressions used were frequently colloquial or slang. Even those which sound straightforward, such as Short or Long, Savage, or Wise, may have been bestowed ironically for the opposite characteristic. Pope, King, Squire, etc. were probably nicknames that were applied facetiously, or for servants of such high-ranking people. Some words that were used as nicknames have changed their meaning over time; thus, Daft meant meek and Nice meant simple. Occasionally, names which sound like nicknames, e.g. Broadhead, are in fact from the names of places, and it is difficult to judge whether a name like Bacon is a nickname or occupational in origin. Even more puzzling is how such names became hereditary in preference to other forms of surnames.

The use of obscene language for some medieval nicknames (nearly all of which have long since been abandoned) suggests that they were bestowed by neighbours rather than the scribes who first recorded them. Past and present distribution patterns of surnames suggest that some nicknames had a single-family origin. Mouse and Bunyan are predominantly Bedfordshire names, Speight (a woodpecker) and Verity come from the West Riding of Yorkshire. Some nicknames of multiple origin are characteristic of certain regions. Armstrong is associated with the counties on both sides of the Scottish border, whereas Yapp (meaning clever or crafty) is concentrated in the west midlands and the Welsh Borders.

From the earliest years following their formation, many surnames have evolved into different forms. Some of these changes are easy to spot, for they were merely slight changes of pronunciation or spelling, but others are now very different from the original or are contractions, such as Penny from Wimpenny. Changes were particularly common when an individual or a family migrated to another district where the local inhabitants did not understand the accent. George Redmonds, *Surnames and Genealogy: A New Approach* (2nd edn, 2002)—the most important recent book on surnames—has shown that this was not a minor phenomenon but was of considerable importance in adding to the stock of English surnames in the post-medieval period. Some names changed fundamentally in two or three generations. Examples from Sheffield parish registers include Broxon changing to Brocksupp, Gascoigne to Caskin, and Brailsford to Brelsworth. Dr Redmonds shows that names sometimes became 'identical with other surnames and, more confusingly, with place-names and personal names with which they had no real connection'. Each family name must therefore be treated as a unique case and genealogical methods used to establish its original form before an opinion can be offered about its etymology and place of origin. He concludes that 'without some sort of genealogical evidence it can be unwise to link modern surnames with those found in medieval sources'.

George Redmonds has long advocated the idea that many surnames have a single-family origin. The locative names are the easiest to spot. Pennine farmsteads, for