

FAMILY HISTORY AND SURNAMES
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(augmented by personal online research)

Despite the mobility of recent years, every county in England still has a collection of surnames that relates to it specifically.

Throughout England there are interesting distinctive names but **Smith** is by far the most common surname accounting for 1.3% of the national population in the 1901 census. However even with such a common name, there are areas where the name is scarcely, if ever, found.

With a few exceptions, hereditary surnames, the last names passed down through the males of a family, didn't exist in Europe until about 1000 years ago - beginning in southern areas and gradually spreading northward. In many countries the use of hereditary surnames began with the nobility who often called themselves after their ancestral seats. Many of the gentry, however, did not adopt surnames until the 14th century, and it was not until about 1500 A.D. that most surnames became inherited and no longer transformed with a change in a person's appearance, job, or place of residence.

Surnames just weren't necessary before the first Millennium. In a world that was much less crowded than it is today -- a world where most folks never ventured more than a few miles from their place of birth and every man knew his neighbours -- first, or given names, were the only designations necessary. Even kings got by with a single name.

In Britain, hereditary surnames were adopted in the 13th and 14th centuries, initially by the aristocracy but eventually by everyone. By 1400, most English and Scottish people had acquired surnames, but many Scottish and Welsh people did not adopt surnames until the 17th century, or even later.

Henry VIII (1491–1547) ordered that marital births be recorded under the surname of the father.

During the middle ages, as families got bigger and villages got a bit more crowded, individual names became inadequate to distinguish friends and neighbours from one another.

One John might be called "John son of William" to distinguish him from his neighbour "John the smith" and his friend "John of the dale." These secondary names, weren't quite yet the surnames as we know them today, however, because they weren't passed down from father to son. "***John son of William***," for example, might have a son known as "***Robert the Fletcher*** (arrow maker)."

In Wales the 'patronymic' system of taking the father's forename as the child's surname, therefore a change at each generation, continued in some communities until the 17th century. **Evan Griffith** could be the son of **Griffith Rhys**, who was himself the son of **Rhys Howell** - this being written as **Evan ap Griffith ap Rhys ap Howell**. 'Ap' meaning 'son of,' just as with **Up-, O'-, Fitz-, Witz-** and **Sky-**.

Over time, names such as **Ap Rhys, Ap Howell** and **Ap Richard** could become liaised to become **Preece or Price, Powell** and **Pritchard**.

Most surnames of British origin fall into seven types:

1. **Occupations** e.g. Smith, Sawyer, Fuller, Brewer, Clark, Cooper, Cook, Carpenter, Bailey, Parker, Forrester, Head, Palmer, Archer, Hunt, Baker, Miller, Dyer, Walker, Woodman, Taylor, Turner, Knight, Slater, Mason, Weaver, Carter and Wright. **“Boler”** occurs in Derbyshire, the Peak District etc – in the Middle Ages, lead was smelted on escarpments which were called Bowl Hills. Thus the name Boler meant Lead Smelter. Cowherd – only 45 men women and children in 1881 were called Cowherd. Coward is a derivative of this name and much more common. An alternative name for the keeper of the cattle was “Neetherd” – this doesn’t survive as a surname. It was just a job description. The surname “Neete” is derived from this. Arkwright – wright is a common name and there are specialist tasks within this such as Wheelright, Wainwright etc. An Ark was a chest with a saddle back top to it – Arks were made throughout the country but seem to have given rise to just one surname: Sir Richard Arkwright being one well know bearer of it.
2. **Personal characteristics** e.g., Short, Brown, Black, Whitehead, Young, Long, White
3. **Geographical features** e.g., Bridge, Camp, Hill, Bush, Lake, Lee, Wood, Holmes, Forest, Underwood, Hall, Brooks, Fields, Stone, Morley, Moore, Perry
4. **Place names** e.g., Washington, Everingham, Burton, London, Leighton, Hamilton, Sutton, Flint, Laughton
Some surnames are taken from Counties – Wiltshire, Hampshire etc. There are many Hampshires in Sheffield though and these are derived from Hallumshire in the area. There is the Hallumshire Hospital in the Sheffield area. Therefore we have to be careful in not making quick guesses as to the derivation. The name “Derby” as well as having been found in Derbyshire is also found near Liverpool. The group above are derived from places - including obscure farmsteads and hamlets. These are termed “locative names” and are derived in a local context. “North”, “South”, “East” and “West” refers to the geographical area of a given parish – not across the country as a whole.

“Ley” always refers to a farm.

“by” is a Viking name ending – Derby, Whitby etc. Blanksby was a tiny deserted medieval village and has changed to the modern Blingsby (near Hardwick Hall). In the Domesday Book, it was indeed Blanksby showing that surnames don’t change that much over the centuries.

A shaw is a narrow strip of woodland (Bagshaw, Bradshaw etc)

Ashurst & Akehurst – meaning a small Ash wood and small Oak wood respectively. There are instances of the surname Ashurst in Kent, Surrey and Sussex but it originates in the South Lancashire Area where there is an Ashurst Hall near Wigan.

The origination of Akehurst is Akehurst farm in Sussex.

5. **Estate** For those descended from land-owners, the name of their holdings, manor or estate
6. **Patronymics, matronymics or ancestral**, often from a person's given name. e.g., from male name: Richardson, Jones (Welsh for John), Williams, Jackson, Wilson, Thompson, Johnson, Harris, Evans, Simpson, Willis, Fox, Davies, Reynolds, Adams, Dawson, Lewis, Rogers, Murphy, Nicholson, Robinson, Powell, Ferguson, Davis, Edwards, Hudson, Roberts, Harris, Watson, or female names Molson (from Moll for Mary), Madison (from Maud), Emmott (from Emma), Marriott (from Mary) or from a clan name (for those of Scottish origin, e.g., MacDonald, Forbes, Henderson, Armstrong, Grant, Cameron, Stewart, Douglas, Crawford, Campbell, Hunter) with "Mac" Scottish Gaelic for son.
7. **Patronal from patronage (Hickman meaning Hick's man, where Hick is a pet form of the name Richard) or strong ties of religion** Kilpatrick (follower of Patrick) or Kilbride (follower of Bridget). It might be worth noting that Kil may come from the Gaelic word 'Cill' which means Church. This would certainly support the claim that the surname is tied to the religion.

The original meaning of the name may no longer be obvious in modern English (e.g., a Cooper is one who makes barrels, and the name Tillotson is a matronymic from a diminutive for Matilda). A much smaller category of names relates to religion, though some of this category are also occupations. The names Bishop, Priest, or Abbot, for example, may indicate that an ancestor worked for a bishop, a priest, or an abbot, respectively, or possibly took such a role in a popular religious play.

“By Names” were not passed on to sons and did not become hereditary surnames. Many surnames disappeared at the time of the Black Death. There are less surnames now than there were prior to the Black Death.

One way of inheriting a name from your father was to add a name - “Jones” from “John”. Some added “son” as in “Johnson”.

Surname spelling has evolved over centuries and until the 20th century, the spelling of a surname was not fixed. Before then, it was not unusual to see the same person's surname spelled in different ways from record to record. In the 1800's and before, when many people were illiterate, names were written by clerks, officials, and priests as they heard the name pronounced. This led to different spellings for the same name. Spelling continued to evolve until this century. Names were also changed over the passage of time as people moved geographically.

Surnames that derived from nicknames include: Fox, Black, Brown, Grey, White etc. Round also emanates from the west Midlands – particularly Dudley.

“Daft” has been changed into “Dart” because of its connotations. In the Middle Ages, “Daft” meant “Meek” and is concentrated in Nottinghamshire particularly.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR SOURCES OF INFORMATION RE SURNAMES:

1377 – 1381:

The Poll Tax Returns

1660s – 1670s:

The Hearth Tax returns were the government's chief source of revenue in the 17th century and are worth investigating.

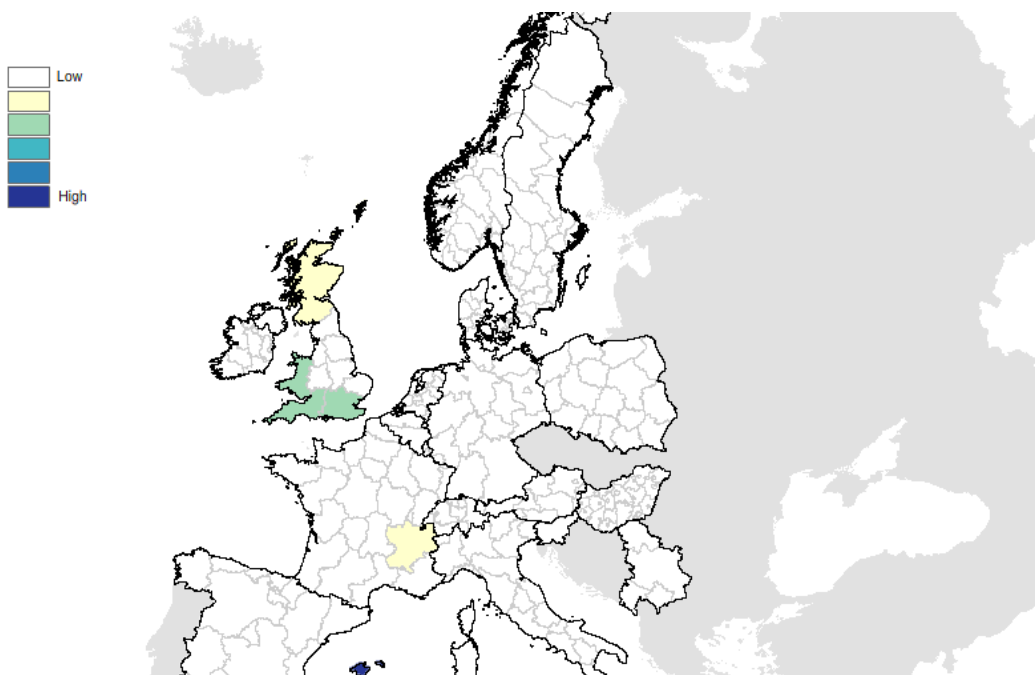
1834: The New Poor Law Registrations

1841: census (and others following).

1881 maps showing surname distribution

Stephen Archer in modern times has produced surname maps.

DNA studies can also reveal whether people with the same surname have a common ancestor and are an exciting new development.



This map shows the distribution of the surname “Champriss”