

Paper by William S. Bolles
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OUR NAMES

Possibly every person has at least a mild interest in names, but seldom is that interest objective. As one would expect, it starts with intimate relationships, and, in most cases never goes beyond that. In the brief time allotted me this evening it is necessary to confine the scope of this paper to a particular branch of the subject, and, consequently I am giving my attention to the origin and development of surnames or family names. Not everyone who writes on the subject is able to verify all of his theories and statements, but an attempt has been made to seek reliable sources.

I am inclined to believe that an interest in names begins earlier than we usually concede. For instance, you and I have had little children, encountering us for the first time, ask the question, "What is your name?" A rather interesting thing happened in our Sunday School on last Easter morning. A child asked one of the teachers, "What is God's full name?" My earliest recollection of interest in names came when I was a lad and accompanied my father on some of his business trips through rural Middle Tennessee and read the names on mail boxes. Many of these farmers came from Swiss, German, and Italian background and the names were strange to me. One of the names that stands out in my memory was that of BACHEGALLIPO. By what process did names like that come into being? By what series of circumstances did any name find its place? This is what I want to consider briefly.

1. THE BEGINNING OF SURNAMES.

It is impossible to say when the first hereditary surname or family name originated, but certainly this practice did not begin with Adam. Not everyone adopted surnames at one time and the surname period covers several centuries. Camden in his "Remaines of a Greater Worke Concerning Britaine", published in 1605, said, "About the yeare of our Lord 1000 (that we may not MINUTE out the time) surnames beganne to be taken up in France, and in England about the time of the Conquest, or else a very little before, under King Edward the Confessor, who was all Frenchified."

The first to use surnames were the nobility who took as surnames the names of their estates, which descended to their sons along with the estate. The absence of surnames in early records is not conclusive proof that they did not exist, since custom favored the

font, or baptismal name, and there was the tendency to omit the surname. It wasn't until the latter part of the 12th Century that hereditary surnames became the rule rather than the exception, and not until the 17th Century that hereditary family names were on a sound basis. The earliest known list of English surnames came from the PIPE ROLL of 1159 - 1160. The first Irish names are recorded in documents nearly three centuries earlier than the Pipe Roll.

The scarcity of personal names in general after the Conquest, stimulated the use of surnames.

The use of surnames by the peasantry of Britain followed by some years the practice by the nobility, and to understand the origin and development of English surnames, one must know something about medieval manor life of England and the tribal or clan systems of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. The division of property and the functional responsibilities of members of these systems furnish some clue to the development of surnames. There was the CARTER, the AKERMAN (or plowman), and the CARPENTER. The HAYWARD was in charge of the sowing and gathering of crops. The WOODWARD safeguarded the lord's woods. The FORRESTER watched over the lord's deer and his rights of chase. The PARKER had charge of the lord's parks. The WEAVERS and other craftsmen had their places in the scheme. Not to be left out of this interesting picture was the less than 10% who lived in towns and cities, and the growth of merchant guilds and craft guilds. Some of the most important of the craft guilds were the GOLDSMITHS, DYERS, GLOVERS, GIRDLERS, SKINNERS, FLETCHERS (or arrow Makers), the BAKERS, SMITHS, and MASONS. By the middle of the 14th Century there were about forty different craft guilds in London. For sometime after the Conquest, each peasant, man or woman, was known by his or her given name. In time it became necessary for occurrences or transactions in the lives of individuals to be recorded and each individual had to be clearly identified. If a man was a WEAVER, the clerk so designated him and listed him as Richard the WEAVER. If the man's father was living, especially if the father had become well known, the clerk might refer to Richard as John's son, or if he happened to be the son of a prominent widow, he might be referred to as Emma's son. The location of one's house or some physical peculiarity was often used to identify a person. Each time it became necessary to give a man a surname to differentiate him from others, a descriptive word was added to his Christian name. As the need arose for naming him, more and more often the same word was used, and he came generally to be known by that surname. When

the same word was used as a matter of course, it became a hereditary family name.

We are inclined to think that the name John was given to a SMITH to distinguish him from the other SMITHS, but the reverse is true. He was given the name SMITH to distinguish him from the other Johns.

The first Anglo-Saxon names were given in honor of plants and animals, and these were followed in the middle ages by personal description names, some unflattering, and many of which survive, such as, SHORT, HARDY, and LONGFELLOW. In Domesday Book, England's first census in 1086, we find the first listing of the early English names. Many survive in their original form, many have changed, and others have vanished.

Place names were popular in early England and many are in use today: CRAIG, 'from crag', BRADLEY, 'from the broad lea', HALFORD, 'from the hall by the ford'.

Still in active service are the 'pageantry' names handed down from France and England, such as POPE, PAGE, ABBOTT, and SQUIRE.

Color names have come down to us from many lands, but England supplied most of them, such as RUSSET, 'the ruddy', and WYNNE, 'the white or fair'.

Jewel names, such as RUBY and GARNETT came from many lands.

The flower names, as a rule, began in Greece, but were most loved in flower-loving Scotland.

S. Baring-Gould, in his book on family names, says that "a LEACH is unquestionably a physician, and the horrible creature that was formerly supplied to suck one's blood was so named because it served as a useful doctor in cases of inflammation."

English surnames cannot be deduced from the nomenclature of any single people, for the English of today are an amalgam of many races that have been fused into one. There are British, Saxon, Flemish, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, German, and Jewish names.

Charles W. Bardsley divides surnames into five classes. (1) Baptismal or personal names. (2) Local names. (3) Official Names. (4) Occupational names. (5) Nicknames. He says that in reality there are only four classes because it is often difficult to distinguish between occupation and office.

It seems that all of the countries of Western Europe adopted the same means of identification or their neighbors did for them. Wales is the exception to this. Here there is scarcely a trade name, only a few nicknames, no official surnames, hardly any local

names, and about 95% baptismal names. This has made identification extremely difficult. One of the greatest difficulties in solving the origin of surnames comes under the law of imitation. In some instances long after parentage had been forgotten people pronounced their names in such a way as seemed to convey a meaning; and when registration was made, the names were written accordingly. A few examples of this are: CREDY for GREDHAY, BACCHUS for BAKEHOUSE, PITCHFORK for PITCHFORTH, and GARLEWT for GARMOND.

Many names are modifications, and in some instances mutilations.

Many old English personal names, completely forgotten, survive in our surnames.

One English authority says that "the statement that surnames from female names never existed, is absurd; and the idea such names denote illegitimacy, is as utterly ridiculous." If anyone will take the trouble to study the Yorkshire Poll Tax of 1379, he will be astonished to find how many children were styled after the mother's personal name while the father was still living; probably because she was a stronger personality than he in the eyes of her neighbors, or because she had a dowry."

2. SURNAMES IN AMERICA.

Our American names have come down to us from sometimes confused and often unrecognizable sources. Ancient names that served European countries for hundreds of years met with curious changes in the newer United States. As a rule they have dropped syllables and letters and gained in euphony and ease of pronunciation in keeping with the world less leisurely than the old of its original source.

While in primitive Europe our names were being given form and meaning, in North America Indian tribes were also developing family names under the symbols of the totem, by natural phenomena, or physical characteristics.

The number of surnames in the United States has been reduced, it seems, because there has been a tendency to abandon unusual forms and spellings for the familiar ones.

Many Americans of Scottish and Irish ancestry have dropped prefixes. In some instances substitutes or contractions have come into use for hard names. One classic example of this is the use of MACK for MC GILLICUDY in the case of CONNIE MACK of baseball fame.

The Dutch were the first non-British immigrants to come to the Atlantic seaboard in large numbers. Many of these did retain their native names, but many others gave way to

the pressure of English speechways. In like manner a few English settlers assumed Dutch names.

The Germans were the first immigrants to undergo name-changing on a large scale. The first whole shipload to arrive landed in 1683. The Quakers and Scotch Irish had preceded this large influx of Germans and when their names were enrolled as the laws of the times required, the enrolling officials, because of the speech barrier and illiteracy on the part of many of the immigrants found the task next to impossible. At first it was probable that the names were pronounced correctly, but in time they acquired spelling pronunciations, which were considerably different from the originals. Where the early Germans encountered forerunners who were not British, they often changed their names to accommodate the speechways of these earlier settlers. Of all of the immigrant peoples of the United States, it seems that the Jews are most willing to change their names. This willingness did not originate in the new land, they brought it with them. In many cases these changes have been for protective purposes, but one fact has probably contributed to this willingness more than anything else. In some parts of the world Jews were not compelled to assume surnames until fairly recently, and thus family pride has not developed to the extent found with other peoples.

The Chinese in the United States have only about sixty different family names, of which CHAN, WONG, and LEE (or LI) are the most frequently found. The number to be found in China has been estimated anywhere from 150 to 400. The Chinese seldom change their surnames, but representing them in English presents such a problem phonetically that this results in many variants. Chinese usually adopt American given-names, but often change the order of their names, like the Hungarians, because at home the surname is first.

It is in pronunciation, rather than in spelling, that surnames suffer their greatest mutation.

Pronunciation of surnames sometimes differs so from place to place that authorities do not always agree.

Surnames of the American people have been greatly stabilized by the wholesale regimentation introduced in World War I. Many of those drafted had vague ideas of the spelling of their names, but by the time they were discharged, every man had a name that was firmly fixed in the official records. The general spread of life insurance has also been a stabiliz

ing force. Automobile registration has gone a long way in stopping changes in family names. Social Security has also contributed to this.

The order of prominent names varies with location in the United States. In some states it is a political asset to bear certain names. One of the best illustrations of this is to be found in an issue of the Buffalo Evening News of August 25, 1936, in the "Believe It Or Not Ripley" feature. In Minnesota some years ago one of the Johnson clan became a formidable candidate for office by simply announcing his name. He offered no platform and made no campaign, yet he polled 44,049 votes out of 151,686 cast.

3. ATHENAEUM NAMES.

SMITH

This is an occupational name but the number of smiths cannot account altogether for the predominance. It may be partially explained in the fact that when first used the term signified any craftsman employing hammer. At one time the name was probably more common than today. A great many German and Jewish SCHMIDTS must be concealed among the SMITHS.

It is the leading surname in England, Scotland, and Wales, as well as in the United States. In World War II there were 21,476 SMITHS in the Navy, and 54,180 in the Army. On Roll of the Veterans Administration in 1946, there were 13,000 John SMITHS, and 8,000 had no middle name.

This immense family has been the subject of many anecdotes. A wag on a certain occasion, coming late to the theatre and wishing to get a seat, shouted at the top of his voice, "Mr. Smith's house is on fire!" The theatre was emptied sufficiently enough for the man to get a choice seat.

WHITE

WHITE comes from HWITA, an ancient English Baptismal name of Saxon origin. HWITA originally indicated a person of light, fair complexion. WHITE is sometimes shortened form of the old English patronymic for WHITING, 'decendent of White.' WHITE is also Anglicised from the German WEISS, or from the French BLANCH and BLANCHARD. The equivalent of the name WHITE is found in many countries. On my recent trip to Cuba I visited in the home of Senor BLANCO.

SOYARS - Some clue to this name may be found in the name SEARS.

FINK

There are variations of this name - FINSH, FINCK, etc.

It is a bird name from the old English, finc, the name applied to any small, seed-eating bird as the bullfinch or canary. In German and Swedish a finch is a fink. The English surname, also written FYNCH, may originate from the picture of a finch displayed on a tavern shop or sign.

Maurice S. White in his list of surnames lists the nationality of FINK as German.

KOFFMAN

I am assuming that this name is a variation of the name KAUFMAN or KAUFMANN, which may be altogether erroneous. If my assumption is correct, it is an occupational name of German origin, often German-Jewish, from kaufmann (the word is not capitalized), which means 'a merchant, a tradesman.' The German term kaufmann implied that the merchandise was purchased by the tradesman; in other words, the kaufmann was the buyer.

PETRIE

In George Fraser Black's "Surnames of Scotland" Petrie is the diminutive of PETER and PATRICK.

A Charles PATRE in Balwelow, is recorded in 1513. An Andrew PETRE was vicar of Caithness in 1530. A David PETRYE was charger witness in Tannydyce. There is a record indicating that James PETRIE was retoured heir of his father in 1688.

HENDERSON

Like many other names, HENDERSON is a patronymic, and means the son of HENDRICK or HENRY. The 'd' is intrusive. HENDRY is still a common provincialism for HENRY. In Wales this was the ordinary form.

It is a distinctive Scotch surname and clan name. The HENDERSONS of the Scottish highlands were affiliated with the clans of GUNN and MacDONALD of Glencoe. There are English HENDERSONS, also.

HAYNES

The name HAYNES falls under more than one classification. As a Baptismal name it signifies the 'son of HAINE.'

Charles Bardley says that the origin is unmistakably fontal, but he suggests that the derivation might have some connection with 'the farmstead of Hain, the proprietor.'

In the Local class it means 'of HAYNES', a parish in the Diocese of Ely.

Maurice White lists the nationality as English, but there are indications that it could have other connections.

TRIMBLE

According to Charles Bardsley this is a variant of the bordername of TURNBULL, found in County Cumberland.

This is a name frequently found in Scotland and Northern England. TURNBULL is one of the few surnames to which an anecdotal derivation seems to be reasonably applicable. Supposedly it originated as a nickname conferred for some act of personal daring. There are several traditions that have wide circulation.

DUNCAN

DUNCAN is Gaelic, meaning a powerful chieftain. From DUN, 'a fortress', and CEANN, 'head or chief.'

William Arthur says that DUNCEAN or DUNCAN means strong-headed, and Maurice White gives the meaning as 'brown chief.'

HENARD

In a discussion of Cornish and Welsh elements of Local Surnames, I found out that the prefix HEN means 'old' as found in a name like HENWOOD.

A. W. Dellquest in a chapter on name elements says that it is possible to determine the signification of any number of surnames; and in the Welsh-Cornish name elements lists HEN as meaning 'old or ancient', and ARD as meaning 'high and lofty.' As to what these two put together mean, your guess is as good as mine.

YOST

HIGGINS

HIGGINS belongs to the Nickname Class. It is derived from RICHARD in the following way: HICKS, at first the favorite gave us HICKS, HICKSON, and the lazified HIGG, HIGGS, HIGSON (a patronymic), then the diminutive HIGGIN and HIGGINS.

S. Baring-Gould says that the name HIGGINS could have had its beginning in the name ISAAC.

DIXON

The name Dixon comes under the Nickname Class as the above. It too is derived from RICHARD and in the following way: from DICK we get DICKS, DICKSON, and DIXON.

It may come from the Dutch DYCK, 'a bank or dike', a bulwark thrown up in the Low Countries against the sea or rivers to prevent inundation.

RONEY

In none of the etymologies of surnames I was able to consult was this spelling of the name to be found. It is extremely hazardous for one to guess about name origins, even where a considerable knowledge of name forms and elements is known. The only place where I encountered the name in my reading was in Burke's Landed Gentry. A certain Lieutenant-Colonel Richard RONEY, born June 1, 1821, was married to Rose Anne DOUGAL. He assumed by Royal License 1871, the name and arms of DOUGAL, and died April 10, 1880, leaving issue.

TALBERT

TALBERT is a personal name. It was not local, for it is never found in conjunction with 'de'. Many surnames may be seen in Domesday, and TALBOT would simply be RICHARD's patronymic. This explains to a certain extent the early use of Talbot as a dog's name. Personal names were freely used in this manner.

A quotation from Chaucer -
 "Ran Colie our dogge, and
 Talbot, and Gerlond."

CORNETTE

In the above form I am inclined to think this is a variant. CORNET is a surname of Scotland.

A MILONE CORNET appears in records about the close of the 12th Century, and during the first quarter of the 13th Century he is designated as prior of St. Germain's in East Lothian. As DOMINUS Milo CORNEHT, he was witness to the marches of Stobo about 1180.

OWEN

Owen is Welsh from Irish and is one of the most frequently found in the Welsh surnames.

It is derived from the ancient Celtic AIN, the equivalent of John. The early form of OWEN is OWEIN, regarded as a cognate with the English EWEN, Welsh EVAN, and Irish EOGAN, although the precise derivation and meaning of these names is by no means certain. Maurice S. White says that it means 'well born', and I pass it on to you for what it is worth.

KEITH

KEITH is a local Scottish name of the Local Class, meaning 'of KEITH', an estate in the parish of Humble County, Haddington. A. Mr. Lower adds that several parishes and places in Scotland bear the name. There is a tradition that King Malcolm II bestowed a barony in East Lothian, named KEITH, who adopted the family name after the name of the estate. The name is from the Gaelic CAETH, which means 'inclosed place' or 'deep hollow'. The KEITHS of the Scottish Highlands were affiliated with the Clans MACPHERSON and SUTHERLAND.

BELL

The name BELL has three distinct origins.

In the Personal classification or Baptismal Class, BELL was the 'son of BELL', versus BELSON; that is, the son of ISABEL.

In the Nickname Class it found its meaning through the French word 'bel', which means 'beautiful, handsome, or fine'.

In the Local Class it was a name taken from the sign of an inn or shop. The sign of the bell was frequently used. 'John at the Bell' became JOHN BELL.

In nationality it is both French and English.

HANRATTY

HUDSON

HUDSON comes under two classifications, the Baptismal or Personal Class and the Nickname Class. It means the 'son of HARD or HUD', a strange North English nickname of RICHARD, taken from the syllable. In Gower's Latin Verses on Watt Tyler's insurrection, all of the nickname forms of the day are introduced, and the name RICHARD is included as being about the fourth name in frequency. In place of DICK, HUD is recorded. That the form was familiar, certain entries found in the north prove.

Maurice S. White explains the origin of HUDSON as being a patronymic of HOOD, meaning 'which see.'

YANCEY

DEATHERAGE

It is my opinion that DEATHERAGE is a form of the name DEATH.

S. Baring-Gould has something to say about the name DEATH. He says that this name does not describe him as one who conveys man to his long home. It is really De Ath.

Charles W. Bardsley in his book, "English and Welsh Surnames" says that the family of DEATH, or D'Aeth, of Knowlton, are asserted to have come from 'Aeth, a place in Flanders.

McGAUGHEY

BOLLES

BOLLES is an English name of Scandinavian origin. It is derived from BOLE, 'a tree trunk', or possibly from BOL, denoting 'a hill or elevation'. The word bole, in a general sense, signified a knob or swelling. BOLLE was an established surname in England as early as the Norman invasion. The Tax Rolls of Huntingdonshire, dated 1327, contain the name William BOLLE. The form BOLLIS denoted 'son of BOLLE'.

RICHARDSON

RICHARDSON is a patronymic of RICHARD. RICHARD for many centuries has been a favorite baptismal name and is also frequent as a surname, especially in the patronymic forms RICHARDS and RICHARDSON. The familiar nickname for RICHARD, DICK has in itself been responsible for a number of surnames. Richard, interpreted as 'powerful', has cognates in many languages. The widespread popularity of RICHARD is largely accounted for by its long use as a name for kings.

SAUNDERS

SAUNDERS is a Scottish representative of English SANDERSON, a popular abbreviation of ALEXANDER. It seems that ALEXANDER is derived from the Greek, and in the original meant, 'defender of man'. One authority points out that nowhere is the name ALEXANDER so thoroughly national as in Scotland, into which country it was introduced by Queen Margaret, wife of King Malcolm Ceanmoor, from the Hungarian court, where she was brought up.

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