

WHAT'S IN A SURNAME?

Hawkwell Village U3A
Family History Group

THE RISE OF SURNAMES

Before the 11thC people were known by their first name

Surnames started to creep in around 1,000 years ago

Reasons include

- Tax collection became better organised
- Land ownership & contracts
- Officials & monasteries keeping various records etc
- Growth of populations

*It was ok to be 'John' in a village,
but not in a city!*



BY-NAMES

Initially many people used 'by-names' to distinguish themselves from one another.

These were non-hereditary surnames i.e. those which were not passed on to the next generation.



DEVELOPMENT OF SURNAMES

Surnames can be divided into four main groups:

- Local Surnames
- Surnames of Relationship
- Surnames of Occupation/Office
- Surnames from Nicknames



But sometimes it is not clear and there are some crossovers e.g. Attwood could be that was a 'dweller of the woods' or that he was a woodsman!

LOCAL SURNAMES

- Largest group
- Can derive from a place name:
 - Where he held land
 - Where came from
 - Where he actually lived
 - A geographical feature of the landscape e.g. Hill, Woodruff
 - Originally preceded with de, at, by, in etc
- Can derive from a residence e.g. near a wood, marsh, elms, ash etc such as Underdown, Byfield etc
- Can derive from a country or nationality e.g. Scott, English, Breton, Fleming, Cornish etc



SURNAMES OF RELATIONSHIP

- Known as
 - Patronymics (from father/male ancestor)
 - Metronymics (from Mother/female ancestor – much rarer)
- Examples
 - Addition of –son e.g. Richardson, Williamson, Thompson, Margisson etc
 - O'Brien (descendant/son of Brian); or Mac/Mc
 - Prees (Ap Rees – used in Welsh for son of Rees); Pritchard, Price, Pugh etc
- The final 's'
 - Shortened form of –son such as Richards, or Maggs; or
 - Possessive e.g. Richards - A servant of Richard?



SURNAMES OF OCCUPATION OR OFFICE

- Obvious occupational names such as cook, smith, fletcher, constable etc
- What about the 'celibate' offices such as Abbot, Pope, Prior, Nunn etc? Likely they were nicknames such as 'lordly as an Abbot', 'meek as a nun'
- Many occupational names relate to long-gone trades such as Arkwright, Harbisher, Chaucer etc.



Wheelwright
Goldsmith
Sergeant
Chancellor
Saddler
Chamberlain
Collier
Cartwright
Taylor
Steward
Brewer
Skinner
Gardner
Wright
Butcher
Fuller
Potter
Carter
Reeve



SURNAMES FROM NICKNAMES

Many modern surnames derive from nicknames

- Perhaps from
 - physical characteristics or peculiarities such as Beard, Longfellow, Dunn, Redd, Chaffin, Grelley etc
 - Or from habits such as Barefoot etc
 - Or from traits such as Swift, Hardy Fox (smart as a)
- Many were probably ironic e.g. Small when they were in fact big, or Littlejohn who may have been a giant etc.



Broadhead
Pauncefoot
Redhead
Gulliver
Beard
Moody
Whitehead
Pratt
Chaffin
Barefoot
Cruickshanks
Grelley
Longfellow
Swift
Goosey



SPELLINGS

Unless your surname is very common such as Richards or Woods, the spelling is likely to have corrupted over time (even Woods may be recorded as Wood or Wodes etc).

If you have an unusual surname it may be recorded in dozens of different ways before literacy was established and spelling settled down around the mid 19thC.



*"Confound it! — that moron Chaucer misspelled my name *again!*"*

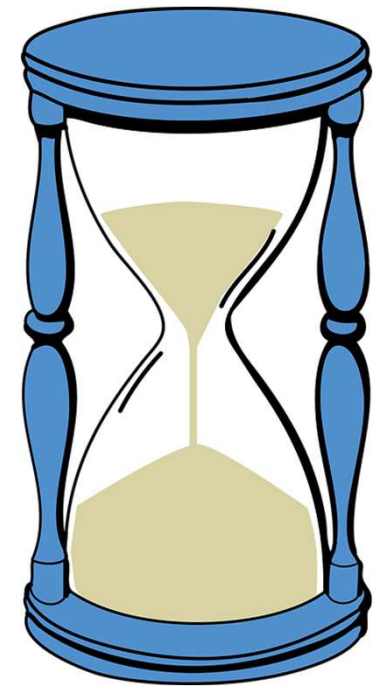
EXAMPLE OF SURNAME SPELLING CHANGE

My surname Neobard changed over time thus:

Nevard » Nebard/Nebbard » Neobard

...but has also been spelt:

Knopwood, Nabard, Nabarrd, Nabart, Nabbard, Nabbert, Nabbord, Nabbort, Nabert, Naobard, Neabard, Neabord, Nebart, Nebbeard, Nebberd, Nebbert, Nebbird, Nebird, Nebbit, Nebbitt, Nebboard, Nebbord, Nebburd, Nebeard, Nebert, Nebet, Nebhard, Nebird, Nebord, Nebort, Neburd, Neoband, Neobbard, Neoberd, Neoboard, Neobord, Neoobard, Neubert, Newbard, Nibard, Nibbard, Nibert, Nippard, Nobard, Nobard, Nobbard, Nobert, Noobord, Nubbard, Nubbert, Nyboard, Nevbard, Nesbard, Leobard, Nedbard, Nelbert, Knebbett, Thnebut, Knebut, Neolard, Nevett.....

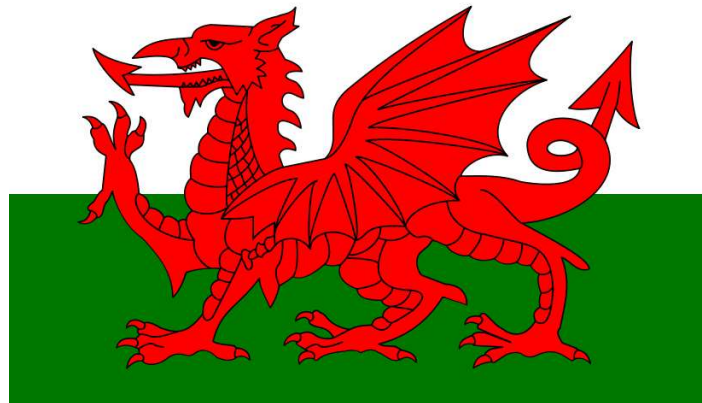


WELSH SURNAMES

Patronymics in use until even the beginning of the 19thC. For example:

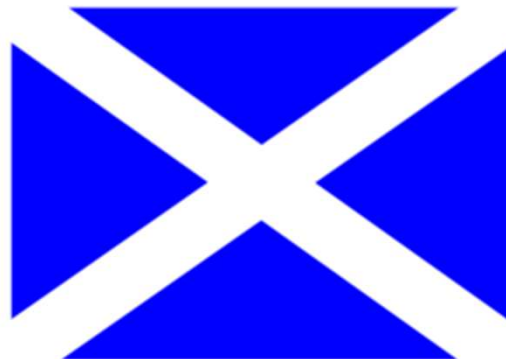
Evan Jones has two sons: Rhys and Morgan. They would be Rhys Evans and Morgan Evans.

- If Rhys Evans has a son Griffith he would be called Griffith Rhys
 - If Morgan Evans has a son William he would be William Morgan
-and so on, changing each generation



SCOTTISH SURNAMES

- Hereditary surnames took longer to establish in Scotland, especially in the Highlands & northern isles e.g. 18th or even 19thC!
- 'Mac' prefix means 'son' (and sometimes abbreviated to Nc, N, Mc, Mhic or M in old documents)
- Vc means grandson or granddaughter in old documents
- Families often adopted 'clan' names of the chief, so Macdonald's may not be related to clan chief



IRISH SURNAMES

- Ireland one of the first to adopt hereditary surnames
- Use of O' and Mac (grandson & son of)
- Also used clan names

Bane
White

Crone
Brown

Duff
Black/Dark

Healy
Ingenious

Kelly
White-Headed



Lawder
Strong

McGowan
Son of a smith

Murphy
Sea warrior

O'Connor
Lover of hounds

Ryan
Little king

HOW COMMON ARE YOU?

The surname 'Smith' accounts for 1.3% of British People

Smith. Number in Great Britain: 546,960. ...

Jones. Number in GB: 422,023. ...

Williams. Number in GB: 294,625. ...

Taylor. Number in GB: 250,780. ...

Davies. Number in GB: 215,074. ...

Brown. Number in GB: 195,410. ...

Followed by: Wilson (186k); Evans (171k); Thomas (159k); Johnson (151k); Roberts (145k); Walker (133k); Wright (130k); Robinson (128k); Thompson (127k); White (123k); Hughes (120k); Edwards (119k); Green (115k); Lewis (112k); Wood (111k); Harris (110k); Martin (109k); Jackson (109k); Clarke (108j)

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*How
Common
is your
Surname?*

SURNAME MISCELLANEA

The majority of the English population had acquired hereditary surnames by about 1400.

There are at least 45,000 different English surnames in use today.

Recent research has shown that most individuals do not move far from their ancestral family homes and so, 700 or more years later, most names can still be associated with particular localities.

Before the Black Death in 1348 there was a much greater variety of surnames than in use today – even though the population was only 10% of the present day.



SURNAME DICTIONARIES



Most surname dictionaries are compiled by etymologists.

Definition Etymology: *the study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history.*

The surnames contained within have not been individually researched.

These dictionaries ignore the genealogy of the name so by ignoring this the etymology is often wrong!

Without understanding how the particular surname developed and changed over time it is not usually possible to be sure of it's root.

On-line free surname dictionary: <http://www.surnamedb.com>

HOW CORRECT ARE SURNAME MEANINGS?

Examples:

“**Neobard**” has only appeared in one surname dictionary (Rev Henry Barber, 1903). It defined the name as Anglo-Saxon from the word “*Nithbeorht*” meaning “bright need”.

However, it fails to take into account that the name used to be **Nevard** which is a mile away from Nithbeorht!

Likewise “**Acott**” is probably said to come from the French surname “*Court*” or “*A’Court*” for someone who lived or worked at a manorial court. Alternative explanations are from the Old English “ate cott” for residence “at the cottage”.

But this definition fails to take account that genealogical research has shown our branch of this surname to come from “**Alcock**” – which has an entirely different definition. Consisting of a personal name of Alan, Albert etc with the medieval suffix of ‘cock’ used as a nickname from the bird – perhaps a young man who strutted around in a pert and aggressive manner.



SURNAME PROFILERS

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/learn/facts/>

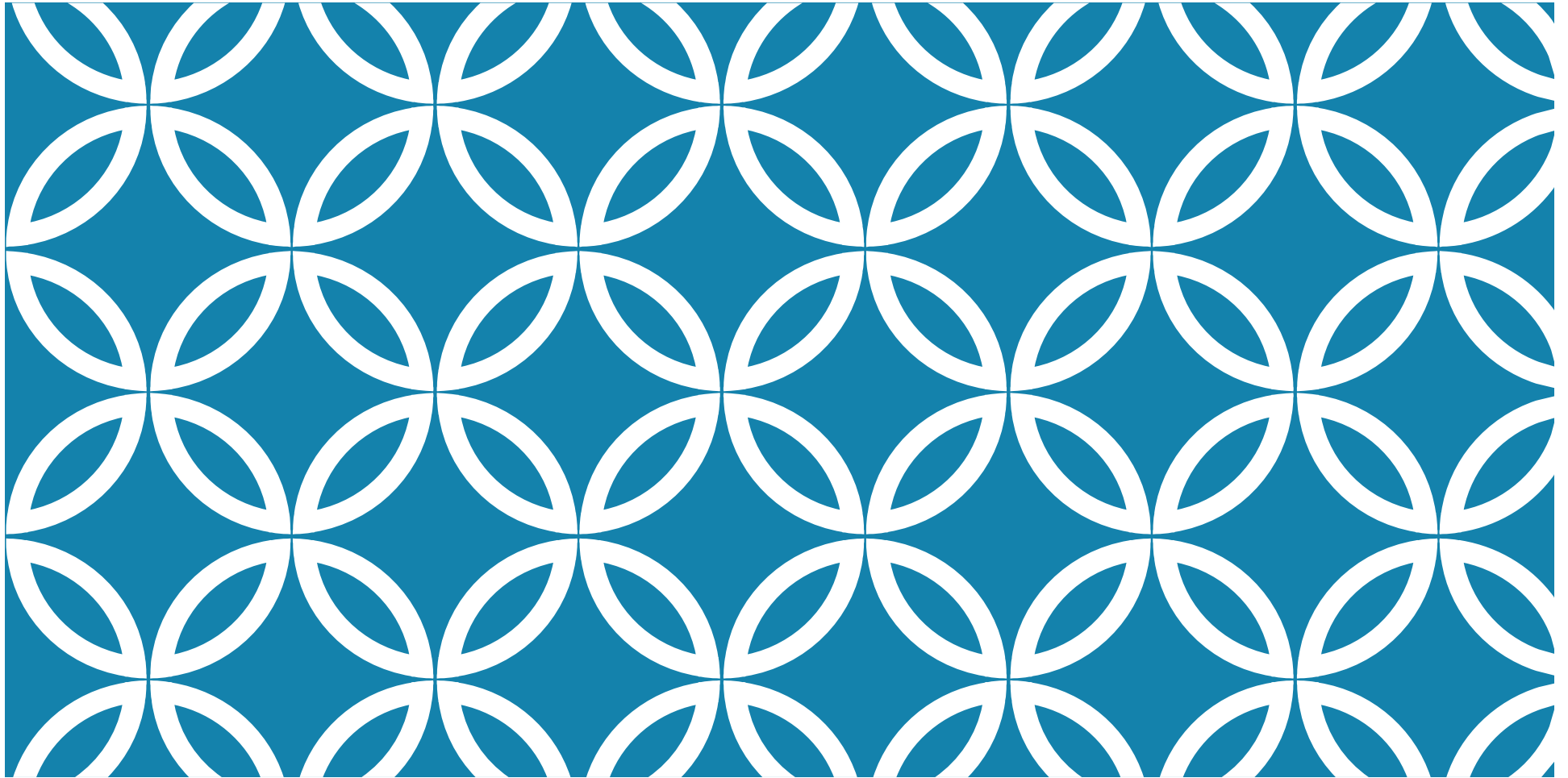
<http://named.publicprofiler.org/>

Where is the Neobard family from – data from 1891 Census



The Neobard family name was found in the UK in 1891. In 1891 there were 7 Neobard families living in Suffolk. This was about 39% of all the recorded Neobard's in the UK. Suffolk had the highest population of Neobard families in 1891.





THE END