

The History and Development of English Surnames

by David Flint

Part 3 -- Surnames of Relationship

History

Jutes, Angles and Saxons invaded Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Norman Conquest 1066 by William, Duke of Normandy.

Development of hereditary surnames in England complete by about 1450.

Middle Ages (500-1500)

Middle English (1100-1500)

Categories of Surnames

- local place-names
- **relationships**
- occupation or office
- nicknames

Patronymics: names formed by combining one's given name with the name of the father.

Matronymics names formed from women's names, including the name of a mother or other female ancestor.

Names in -son (Saxon)

Williamson, Johnson, Richardson are forms of the **-son** extension of a personal name for William, John, and Richard. In OE, patronymics were formed by adding **-ing** to the stem or **-sunu** to the possessive form of the personal name as in *Dudding* 'son of Dudda'; *Eadricessuna*, 'son of Eadric'. This **-son** extension originates from the OE **-sunu** and gives us the common ending in that style of surnames today.

Norman 'fitz'

Names like Fitzalan and Fitzwilliam are considered aristocratic, but are not necessarily an indication of noble birth; also used by others of lower status. Early examples were generally Latinized as in 'Robertus *filius Radulfi*', generally translated as Robert *fitz* Ralph. It is an Anglo-Norman formation that developed in England and has no parallel in France.

Examples in the reign of Henry II took forms such as *filz*, *fiz*, *fitz* and occasionally *fuiz*, from Old French *filz*, and Anglo-Norman *fis*, pronounced **fits** meaning 'son'. Some examples: Gervasius *fil Radulfi*; Willelmus *le Fiz Simon* (Fitzsimon); Rauf *le fuiz William* 1299 (Fitzwilliam); Robert *filz Payn* 1305 (Fitzpayn); Robert *le fuitz Wautier* 1329, Johan *fitz Waulter* 1350 (Fitzwater, Fitzwalter). King Charles II used *Fitzroy*, meaning 'the king's son', as a surname for his illegitimate sons.

Welsh 'ap'

The Welsh didn't adopt fixed surnames until about 300 years after the English. Their custom was to have whole genealogies in their surnames, rather than just single surnames. They would honor their ancestors, calling themselves '**ap**-' for 'son of'; however, a Welshman in England would soon adopt the custom there and use just the name of his father. The Welsh Henry Tudor became King of England in 1485 (Henry VII, father of King Henry VIII). His name was the typical Welsh patronymic '*ap*-Tudor' for 'son of Theodore'.

Over time the '**ap**-' was dropped. Names beginning with 'R' or 'H' retained 'p' from ap, as in Probert, Pritchard and Price. If the name began with a vowel, the 'p' in ap would become a 'B', giving us Bevan, Bowen and

Bedward. In other names, such as 'ap-William' the *ap-* disappeared entirely, and an 'S' was added at the end giving us Williams.

Written vs. Spoken name

In the 11th century there was a difference between the written and spoken form of one's name. 'Johannes *filii* Willelmi' (John, son of William) was the form of name never used in everyday life. It is the form written in Latin by a clerk and not the form that would be used in conversation. It may have been a translation of the Norman 'Fitzwilliam'.

The 'son of Dudda' would be written 'filii Dudde' and may have been simply a translation of the OE 'Duddesunu'. These Latin forms were strictly written forms of the name as commonly used by clerks in the 12th and 13th centuries. Walter Dudde was known as the son of Dudda and written in Latin as '*filii Dudde*', but in everyday conversation he was called Walter Dudde. By the 14th century clerks began using the spoken form of the name in the records; what had been written before as '*filii Roberti*' became 'son of Robert' and was the more common written form.

Diminutives

A diminutive is a shortened form of a name, used to show familiarity and affection toward someone (or something); sometimes called a pet-name. Diminutives today typically end in *-let* or *-y*, as in piglet, droplet, booklet, doggy, kitty, Billy, Teddy.

Common diminutive suffixes: *-et*, *-ot*, *-un*, *-in*, and *-el*; used for both masculine and feminine. Examples: Abbott from 'Abel-ot'; Rawlin from OF Raoul, OG Radulf; Dodgin from Dodge (Roger); Hewell from Hugh.

Examples of surnames from the popular Norman names **Robert** and **Richard**, and their diminutives: 'Robyn' (Robin) from Robert > Roberts, Robarts, Robertson, Robins, Robinson, Robison, Robson; from diminutive 'Dob' > Dobbs, Dobson, Dobbins, Dobinson, Dobison; from 'Hob' > Hobbs, Hobson, Hobbins, Hopkins, Hopkinson. Richard > Richards and Richardson, Ricks and Rix, Rickson and Rixon or Ritson, Rickards, Ricketts; from diminutive 'Dick' or 'Diccon' > Dicks or Dix, Dickson or Dixon, Dickens or Diccons, and Dickenson or Dicconson.

Married women taking husband's name dates to medieval times. In the early period a married woman could be known by her maiden name or by her husband's surname with 'wyf' added, as in '*Mary Walker, wife of Henry Field, or Mary Fieldwyf*' (England Surname Origins-International Institute). In legal documents women retained maiden name with 'formerly' as in 'Elizabeth Lynch formerly Curthopp' (1550). In Elizabethan England a widow retained first husband's name if remarried.

FamilySearch Wiki reference articles

England Surname Origins:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/England_Surname_Origins_-_International_Institute

England Naming Customs: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/England_Naming_Customs

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For Dropbox Cloud link to English Surnames by Bardsley, use:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/unry3xvk1k6nlbx7upfhz/Bardsley-English-Surnames-ebook-Project-Gutenberg.txt?rlkey=tpn978vlg4bhbimljg2mo897&st=sdo2jai5&dl=0> for the **.txt** file format and <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/dtri5hm4z9xc7xe02hgz/Bardsley-English-Surnames-ebook-Project-Gutenberg.pdf?rlkey=s3dz4ljcv3ed2bad3lyw9okyt&st=gcwqvw39&dl=0> for the **PDF** version.

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