

The Origin, Distribution, and Evolution of English Surnames:

The presentation will examine the regional nature of English surnames. This characteristic can be traced to factors which led to the initial formation of a surname, as well as the relative geographic immobility of individuals prior to the 20th century.

In this context the adoption of surnames in England following the Norman Conquest will be discussed. The influence of Saxon Danish and Celtic place names will be examined thru the medium of distribution maps which demonstrate the non random nature of place names. Specific surnames derived from place name elements will be then be discussed and their distributions illustrated. In addition to location based surnames, the distribution of occupational surnames will also be examined.

The English Surname Survey has suggested a number of generalizations concerning the origin of English surnames. Central to their methodology is the use of maps (in conjunction with the study of local history), to determine a surnames place of origin. By mapping data in a time series beginning in the 19th century and working progressively back to the late 16th century, surname historians can now focus their research in specific geographic areas. The presentation will outline and illustrate this procedure with the presenters own research.

Surname evolution and change can frequently result in seemingly impenetrable brick walls. The presentation will conclude with an examination of factors which can often confound and confuse the surname researcher and genealogist. George Redmonds has demonstrated that surname variants are created with surprisingly regularity. Structural changes involving vowel and consonant change, aspiration, metanalysis, and suffix confusion contribute to these changes .These changes can be subtle or dramatic. Finally the alias and name change will be considered.

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