'An Analysis of the Personal Names in an Extract from the Poll Tax Returns of 1377'

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The analysis of the personal names of medieval England can offer us interesting insights into the Britons' lifestyles as well as revealing more about the pervasive influence of the French on British culture and language after the Norman conquest. I have divided the surnames into five categories according to their perceived etymology, then will discuss the analysis.

Surnames of Occupation or Office:

Henricus Baker': DES. Occupation. OE bæcere.

Cecilia Botman: DES *Boatman*. Occupation. OE *bāt* and *mann* 'boatman'.

Nicolaus Bowyer': DES. Occupation. ME *bowyere* 'maker of or trader in bows'.

Agn' Chaumberlayn: OED cites spelling *chaumberlain* under *chamberlain.* DES *Chamberlain*. Occupation. OFr. *Chamberlain* 'officer charged with the management of the private chambers of a sovereign or nobleman'.

Thomas Corduaner: DES *Cordner.* Occupation. OFr *cordoanier* 'cordwainer, shoemaker'.

Johannes Coupere: DES *Cooper*. Occupation. ME *couper*; 'maker or repairer of wooden casks, buckets or tubs'.

Willelmus Ferour : DES *Ferrer*. Occupation. OFr *ferreor, ferour* 'worker in iron, smith'.

Philippus Fuller': DES. Occupation. OE *fullere,* OFr *fouleor*, 'a fuller of cloth'. In general, *Fuller* in ME is southern and eastern.

Johannes Graunger: DES *Granger*. Occupation. AFr *graunger*, 'one in charge of a grange, a farm-bailiff'.

Matill' Hayward: DES. Occupation. A hayward's duties seem to have been to protect the fences around the Lammas lands when enclosed for hay.

Willelmus Lokyer: DES *Lockyer.* Occupation. Derivative of OE *loc* 'lock'; 'locksmith'.

Elias Pedder': DES *Peddar*. Occupation. Derivative of ME *pedde* 'a pannier', hence 'one who carries goods for sale', 'pedlar'.

Johannes Petynger: DES *Pottinger*. Occupation. OFr *potagier* ; 'a maker or seller of pottage'.

Agu' Plomer: DES *Plumer.* Occupation. OFr *plumier,* Latin *plumarius* 'a dealer in feathers or plumes'.

Johannes Sextayn: OED cites it as a ME form of 'sexton'. DES *Sexten*. Occupation. AFr *segerstaine*, 'sexton', originally 'the officer in charge of the sacred vessels and vestements'.

Simon Smyht': MED cites spelling of 'smiht' for 'smith'. DES *Smith*. Occupation. OE *smið* 'smith, farrier'.

Johanna Soler: DES *Soller*. Occupation. OE *solor* 'the upper part of a house'; probably for a servant whose duties lie there.

Willelmus Strenger': DES *Stringer*. Occupation. Derivative of OE *streng* 'string cord'; a maker of strings for bows. A common Yorkshire name.

Thomas Tanelmaker': Not in DES. Occupation? MED cites examples of *maker* as a suffix, and Anglo-Norman dicitonary defines *tanele;* 'coarse-cloth'.

Galfridus Taseler': DES *Tazelaar*. Occupation. Derivative of OE *tæsel* 'teasel', one who teasels cloth.

Willelmus Webbe: DES *Webb*. Occupation. OE *webbe*(f) or *webba*(m) 'weaver'.

Surnames of Relationship:

Ricardus Alayn: DES *Allain*. Patronymic. OFr *Alain* or OBret *Alan*, the name of a Welsh and Breton saint.

Thomas Alote: DES *Allott*. Metronymic. *Allot* (OFr *Aalot*), a hypocoristic of *Alis*.

Michaelis Aubree: DES *Aubray*. Metronymic. OFr *Aubree,* OG *Alb(e)rada* 'elf-counsel' (f).

Matill' Aylewyne: DES *Aylwin*. Patronymic. OE *Æðelwine* 'noble friend'.

Ricardus/Johannes Brand: DES. Patronymic. ON *Brandr*, ODa *Brand,* 'fire-brand, sword'.

Agn' Lowys: DES *Lewis*. Patronymic. *Lewis* an Anglo-French form of Old Frankish *Hlúdwig* 'loud battle'.

Johannes Morice: DES *Maurice*. Patronymic. *Morice* a common form of *Maurice*, a personal name from Latin *Mauritius* 'Moorish, dark, swarthy'; from *Maurus* 'a Moor'.

Johanna Payn: DES *Pain*. Patronymic. OFr *Paien* from Lat. *Paganus*, originally 'villager, rustic', later 'heathen'.

Johannes Sandr': DES *Sandars* - Reaney gives example *Sandre*. Patronymic. From *Sander*, pet-form of *Alexander*.

Location Surnames:

1. Locative

Johannes Bokenham: Not in DES. Locative? Closest example in Ekwall: *Bockingham Hall*, Essex.

Thomas Borham: DES *Boreham*. Locative, origin unclear. From i) Boreham, Essex, ii) Boreham Wood, Hertfordshire, iii) Boreham Street, Sussex iv) Boreham, Wiltshire.

Margareta Bulbeck: DES *Bulbeck*. Locative. Bolbec in Seine-Infériure.

Johannes Londene: DES *London*. Locative.

Ricardus/ Robertus/ Johannes Colne: Not in DES. Locative. Ekwall: i) River Colne, Essex ii) River Colne, Hertfordshire, Middlesex and Buckinghamshire iii) Colne in Huntingdonshire iv) Colne in Lancashire.

Johannes Fysshlake: DES *Fishlock*. Unclear whether locative or topographical. i) 'From Fishlake, Yorkshire'. ii) 'Dweller by the fish-stream'.

Johannes Horncastel: DES *Horncastle*. Locative. Horncastle, Lincolnshire.

Johannes Kent: DES. Locative.

Johannes Pebmerssh': Not in DES. Ekwall: Pebmarsh, Essex. *Mersshe* cited in OED under *marsh*.

Johannes Totham: DES. Locative. Great, Little Totham, Essex.

Ricardus Wymbyssh': DES *Wimbush*. Locative. Wimbish, Essex.

2. Topographical

Walterus Cros: DES *Cross*. Manmade topographical. 'Dweller by the cross'.

Willelmus atte Lowe: DES *Low*. Topographical with *atte*. OE *hlaw* 'hill', 'burial mound'.

Sarra atte Melne: Not in DES. Manmade topographical with *atte*. MED *milne* 'water mill'.

Willelmus atte Watere: DES *Water*. Topographical with *atte*. 'Dweller by the water or stream'.

Surnames from Nicknames:

1. Appearance:

Johannes Bal: DES *Ball*. Nickname. i) ME *bal, ball(e)* 'the rotund one' ii) adj. *ball* in the sense 'bald' from *ball* 'a white streak, a bald place'.

Johannes Bron': DES *Brown*. Nickname. OE *brūn* or OFr *brun* 'brown of hair or complexion'. Possibly from personal name OE *Brūn*, but uncommon after 1066.

Katerina Homan: DES. Nickname. DES suggests 'tall man', ON *há*, OE *mann*.

Margareta Note: Unclear, probably DES *Nott*: Reaney gives examples of *Notte* and *Not*. Nickname. OE *hnott* 'bald-headed'.

2. Personality/Qualities

Willelmus Baron': DES *Baron*. Possibly a title, but can be a Nickname when applied to a peasant, indicating haughtiness. OFr *barun*.

Johannes Dore: DES *Dore* Unclear. i) Nickname from OE *dora* 'humble bee', ii) Locative: a) Dore, Derbyshire, b) Abbey Dore, Herefordshire c) manmade topographical 'dweller at the gate' from OE *dor*. Example i) most likely, because no locative *atte* or *de*.

Ricardus Drory: Not in DES. Nickname? MED *dreri*, *drori* 'sorrowful' from OE *dreorig*.

Johannes Lache: Not in DES. Nickname? OED 'to neglect', OFr *lascher*. MED i) 'weary, slow, dull', ii) 'negligent'.

Johannes Prat: DES *Pratt*. Nickname. DES suggests derived from OE *prætt* 'a trick', from unrecorded adj. OE *prætt* 'cunning, astute'.

Johannes Sage: DES. Nickname. OFr *sage* 'wise'. Possibly ironic.

Ricardus Sparwe: DES *Sparrow*. Nickname? OE *spearwa* 'sparrow', literally 'flutterer'.

Johannes Sherewynd: DES *Sherwen*. Nickname. 'Cut wind' from OE *sceran* 'to cut' and *wind*; used of a swift runner.

Uncertain

Johannes Badel: Not in DES. Possibly Locative? Closest in Ekwall: *Baddeley*, Staffordshire.

Johanna Benale: Not in DES. Unclear. Possibly Locative? Closest in Ekwall: *Benhall*, Suffolk.

Johannes Braundene: Not in DES. Unclear. i) Surname of relationship? –ene possibly a suffix with *Braund* as patronymic? DES *Brand*. ON *Brandr* 'fire-brand, sword'. ii) Or locative? Closest in Eckwell: *Braunton*, Devonshire.

Johannes Kervyll': Not in DES, OED etc. If accounting for change from medieval 'k' to modern 'ch', perhaps 'chervill', a herb? Possibly occupational, a seller of herbs?

Stephanus Lalforde: Not in DES. Unclear. Possibly Locative due to suffix 'forde'.

Galfridus Rakebolt: Not in DES, OED etc. Possibly a compound name? OED *Rake (v)* i) to direct, guide ii) to proceed, especially with speed; to go at a rapid pace. OED *Bolt* i) an arrow.

Perhaps 'to go as fast as an arrow'? If so, nickname.

Agn' Rikelon: Not in DES. –*lon* possibly a suffix with *Rik* as Patronymic? Dunkling cites *Rike* as diminutive of *Richard*.

Johannes Stritt: Not in DES, OED etc.

Petrus Swyft: DES *Swift*. Nickname or Patronymic. OE *swift* 'swift, fleet', also a personal name.

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I divided my names into the four surname categories suggested by Reaney[1]: surnames of relationship, occupation or office, location and those derived from nicknames, then added a category of those surnames which I had difficulty defining clearly. I subdivided location surnames as McKinley does[2]; into locative and topographical surnames. Locative surnames are those originating from 'the names of specific places'[3] such as *Kent*, whereas topographical surnames derive from geographic features, which can be natural (*atte Watere*) or manmade (*Cros*). My sample has a relatively high number of locative surnames that had

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[1] P.H. Reaney & R.M. Wilson, A Dictionary of English Surnames (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. xiv
[2] Richard McKinley, A History of British Surnames (London and New York, 1990) p. 51
[3] Ibid.

originated from the south-east of Britain, around Essex, Middlesex and Hertfordshire, indicating that the document probably came from one of these counties.

However, locative surnames can be misleading if trying to place exactly where the person with that surname lives. This is demonstrated by the modern distribution of *Horncastle*[4], the highest density of the surname being in the counties Yorkshire and Hull, though the town of Horncastle is in Lincolnshire. The name therefore indicated perhaps where a migrant was originally from, rather than where he settled and his descendants lived.

Surnames derived from nicknames can be divided into those commenting on someone's appearance (*Ball*) and those commenting on personal habits or character, such as *Sage*. McKinley discusses surnames derived from animals or birds, which could either be occupational (*Herring* as 'a dealer of fish'[5]), or nicknames, in which the characteristic of the animal is associated with the original owner of the nickname. My sample gives me an interesting example of this: *Sparwe*, which can be included under Reaney's head form *Sparrow*. He suggests that it is a nickname that takes the meaning 'flutterer' from the sparrow's characteristics. If the owner of the name is a 'flutterer', this could mean that they were a worrier, or perhaps their physical movements were quick and bird-like.

McKinley states that many nicknames would have been bestowed ironically, much as many nicknames are today[6]. My sample contains two names which could be examples of this: *Sage* and *Prætt,* if for the latter we employ what Reaney gives as the original Old English meaning - 'cunning, astute'.

The largest category from the sample is that of surnames originating from occupation. Using occupations as by-names would probably have been the easiest way to distinguish one John from another, so this is unsurprising. Reaney[7] in his discussion of occupational surnames looks also at surnames from an office or title, but there were not any included in my sample. This, along with the fact that the majority of the occupational surnames are derived from manual jobs (*Smyht, Lokyer, Bowyer*) suggests that the people registered in the document were lower class. For this reason it seems more likely that the name *Baron* in the sample was a nickname given to a peasant rather than a titular surname.

All except two of the surnames of relationship are patronymic rather than metronymic and it is uncertain why sometimes the mother's name was inherited rather than the father's[8]. Interestingly, none of the patronymic surnames have a suffix or prefix, such as –son, mac- or fitz-, to indicate that they are surnames of relationship. This may be due to the customs of naming in the area from which the sample is taken. If using the National Trust Names Map to look at the modern distribution of names ending in –son, the highest concentration is in the north of England or in Scotland, even after hundreds of years of migration. This adds to the evidence that the extract being studied is from the south of England.

There were several surnames that were not in Reaney, nor could a clear match with a place-name be found in Ekwall. The OED and the MED were then referenced in an attempt to define either the whole name or its components. In some cases this was successful, such as with the surname *Lache*, which had a clear adjectival definition in the OED, making it suitable for a surname originating from a nickname. In other cases, an educated guess had to be made, such as proposing that *Lalforde* is a locative surname because 'forde' could indicate a place-name derived from its location near a ford. Then there were those names that did not appear to have any plausible match, for example *Stritt*, which was not close enough in structure to any modern or medieval word to make a reasonable suggestion for a definition.

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[4] http://www.nationaltrustnames.org.uk/Surnames.aspx.
[5] McKinley, p. 160
[6] McKinley, p. 162
[7] Reaney, xiv
[8] McKinley, p. 128-129

--740—

The given names in the sample can be divided into those originating either from Greek, Hebrew, Latin or 'Common West Germanic'[9]. There is no evidence in the sample of Old English names lasting as late as 1377, and it is generally acknowledged that almost all Old English given names died out in Britain circa mid-13th century[10]. However, the girl's name *Cristina* (Christina) is cited by Withycombe as being from the OE *christen,* 'christian', though the first recorded usage is not until after the conquest, in 1086[11].

The French with the invasion brought a new name stock to Britain, some of which were Germanic in origin and had the same type of construction as the Old English given names, in that they were mostly dithematic. Examples of these in the sample are *Ricardus* (Richard), *Willelmus* (William), *Galfridicus* (Geoffrey), *Rogerus* (Roger), *Robertus* (Robert), *Walterus* (Walter), *Henricus* (Henry) and the female *Alicia, Matillda* and *Avelina.* As with the Old English and Old Norse given names, the themes of these Germanic names tended to be heroic. For example, the most popular in the sample of these names is *Willelmus*, from *Wilhelm*, made up of the elements *wil* 'will, desire' and *helm* 'helmet', and *Matillda* is derived from the Germanic elements *mahti* 'strength' and *hildi* 'battle'. Withycombe suggests the possibility of *Richard* not only being imported from the continent by the French but also being derived from an Old English *Richeard,* from *ric* 'ruler' and *heard* 'hard'. *Avicia* (Avice) is a name Withycombe is uncertain about, proposing it may be from the Old German *Aveza.*

Withycombe suggests that when the French invaded, several of the names they brought with them 'reinforced' similar English names. For example *Roger* and *Robert* (both Old German modified by French) took over from the Old English *Hrothgar* and *Hreodbeorht* respectively.

With the conquest the new name stock also included a growing number of Christian names of 'biblical personages or post-biblical popular saints'[12], several of which were Hebrew in origin. *Johannes* (John), *Michaelis, Simon, Elias, Johanna, Anna* (Hannah) and *Sarra* (Sarah) are examples, and all are names found in the Bible. Their meanings would often have a direct religious significance, such as *Michaelis* (Michael), which means 'who is like the lord?' and *Elias,* a derivative of the name *Elijah*, defined as 'Jehovah is God'.

There are also Christian names in the sample that are derived from Greek, such as *Nicholas, Stephenus, Phillipus, Petrus (*Peter*), Margareta, Dionisia* (Denise), *Katerina* and *Stacia.* The name *Agn'* appears in the sample, presumably an abbreviation for *Agnes,* from the Greek 'pure, chaste'. Several of these were saints' names, for example Saint Margaret, invoked as the patron saint of women in labour. Withycombe states that *Nicholas* and *Stephen* were in fact used in England before the Norman Conquest, but only for monks, spreading to the common populace after 1066.

Denise is one instance in the sample of a girl's name which is derived from a masculine name, although none of the men's names were originally female. Other examples are *Johanna* (from *Johannes), Juliana* (from *Julian), Sabina* (from *Sabine*) and *Caecilia* (from *Caecilius*).

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[9] Richard Coates, 'Names' in A History of the English Language ed. by R. Hogg & D. Denison (Cambridge, 2006) p. 319
[10] Ibid, p. 320
[11] E.G. Withycombe, The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names(2nd ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), pp. 61-62. [All given name definitions are from Withycombe, unless otherwise stated].
[12] Coates, p. 320

Withycombe states that Peter was one of the most common Christian names in Britain[13], but in the sample there is only one example of a *Petrus*, whereas there are several *Johannes* and the most common woman's name is the female equivalent, *Johanna*.

Interestingly, all the given names derived from Latin in the sample are female; *Beatrix, Juliana, Lora, Caecilia, Sabina* and *Laetitia*. Sabine is interesting, as it is derived from the name of a nation of people, 'a race of ancient Italy who inhabited the central region of the Apennines' (OED), setting it apart from the other given names, which tend to take their meanings from phrases or adjectives, such as *Mabilia,* the English form of Latin *Amabel,* which is from *amabilis,* 'loveable'.

There were a couple of unusual given names that did not fit with the rest of the groupings. Withycombe suggests that *Idonia* (Idonea) is 'related to the Old Norse *Idhuna*, a goddess of spring, derived from the Old Norse *idh* 'work''. Also, in the sample there was the given name *Agu'*, but it is unclear what its full form would be, and there was no equivalent in Withycombe.

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Studying the sample of names from the 1377 poll tax demonstrates how varied the range of surnames was by the fourteenth century, and it is interesting to compare both surnames and given names that are still in common usage today with those that have, for one reason or another, fallen out of favour.

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[13] Withycombe p. 232

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