

HOW DO I...USE NAMING PATTERNS IN UNITED KINGDOM RESEARCH?

By Jerroleen H. Sorensen
BYU Library Family History Center



WHAT'S IN A NAME?



*Would a rose smell as sweet
if it was called a dandelion?*

Onomastics or onomatology is the study of proper names of all kinds and the origins of names.

Anthroponomastics is the study of personal names.

In many cultures patterns developed to both identify a person and to carry on names within families and clans.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

HOW CAN ONOMASTICS HELP IN FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH?

- Family names are often passed down and can give clues as to parenthood or ancestry.
- Maiden names of female family members can frequently be found as middle names.
- Place names used as surnames can point to a region of origin.
- Distribution of surnames can also lead to regions of interest in researching family lines.

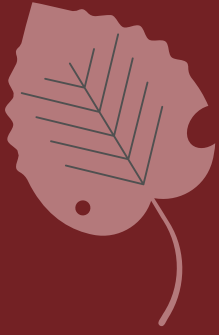
HOW DID PEOPLE
COME UP WITH ALL
THESE NAMES?



GIVEN NAMES (FORENAMES)



- Given names, usually bestowed at birth, have always been used to distinguish one person from another. They could (can) be fluid during a person's lifetime.
- Anciently, names had separate meanings in the language itself. Some cultures still use meaningful naming. They often denoted religious ideas, personal characteristics or qualities, or natural phenomena.
- English forenames have their etymology in Germanic (Anglo-Saxon) or Scandinavian languages, Middle English, Norman French, Celtic, Gaelic, Hebrew, Greek or Latin. In more modern times this may include Indian, African or Asian languages.
- Names change over time as language changes or as nicknames or bynames are derived. It is frequently important to know what the original name might have been to find a correct record or relationship.



SURNAMES (LAST OR FAMILY NAMES)

- Surnames in Europe were created starting in the 11th century. The practice was begun even later in England, beginning in the 12th century.
- Surnames became settled in the British Isles mainly between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries due to population growth and government bureaucracy.
- English surnames were derived from given names; locations, i.e., topography or place-name; occupation or status; nicknames; patronymic or matronymic names; personal descriptions; the vagaries of the human mind.
- The Welsh did not adopt completely adopt surnames until well into the 1700s. Individuals were identified by their relationships, chiefly the father.

ENGLISH NAMES



ENGLISH GIVEN NAMES



- Family connections: Surnames as first names; maiden name as middle name; middle name of parent as first name (mostly in 18th-20th c.); recently deceased family members.
- Biblical names-Mary, Martha, Judith, Jemima, John, Paul, Nathan, Obadiah and others. Especially popular among Non-Conformists (non-Anglicans).
- Virtues: Faith, Hope, Charity
- Classical names: Roxana, Alexander
- Royalty or nobility: Albert, Alberta, Duncan
- Flower names became popular for girls at the end of the 19th c.
- Before 1700, children were often named for their saint's day or for their godparent.

ENGLISH GIVEN NAMES, CONT.

- Fads: Scottish names in 1850s; Celtic revival late 19th-early 20th brought Welsh names Bronwyn, Cecilia, Alan, Cary; medieval craze from 1848 Pre-Raphaelites spawned names Bertram, Bayard; actors', movie stars', writers' names
- Friends of the family-Witnesses; godparents; neighbors
- British naming pattern was sometimes followed, but not so often after the 1700s. It's worth a shot, though, as some adherence is highly likely.
- Children in the same family may have the same name, but not often after the 1700s. Often, a child previously born had died, but not always. Particularly in the eastern counties, it was considered bad luck to name a child after a dead child.

ENGLISH GIVEN NAMES, CONT.

- There was a common superstition – of long standing – that a child, or at least the first child born to a couple, should not be named after a living parent.
- Middle names became common during the late 19th c.
- Sometimes an illegitimate child who adopted a stepfather's name would give his mother's maiden name (his birth name) to all his children as a middle/surname.
- Twins: Names that begin with the same letter or last syllable; twin names from mythology; anagram names; names with the same meaning in two different languages. Could even have the same name.
- Catholic children will often have the Latinate name written on the record. Sometimes High Church Anglican priests still did that, as well.

JEWISH NAMES



JEWES IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

- The first written record of Jewish settlement in England dates from 1070. The Jewish settlement continued until King Edward I's Edict of Expulsion in 1290.
- After the expulsion, there was no overt Jewish community (as opposed to individuals practicing Judaism secretly) until the rule of Oliver Cromwell. A small colony of Sephardic Jews living in London was identified in 1656 and allowed to remain.
- Historians commonly date Jewish emancipation to either 1829 or 1858, while Benjamin Disraeli, born a Sephardic Jew but converted to Anglicanism, was elected twice as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1868 and in 1874.
- The history of the Jews in Scotland goes back to at least the 17th century. Most Scottish Jews today are of Ashkenazi background who mainly settled in Edinburgh, then in Glasgow in the mid-19th century.

JEWISH NAMING PATTERNS

Naming and Jewish Priest-Kings

When Bernard of Clairvaux integrated the Celtic church into the Cistercian order and Scotland got its first Templar king, David I (1124–1153), a peculiar tradition became fixed in the royal genealogies: the eldest son was invariably named after his grandfather. The pattern can also be seen in the house of William the Conqueror, where Robert and William alternate in the lineage of the dukes of Normandy. By alternating Malcolms and Davids, David of Scotland clearly wanted to put the stamp of a dynasty on his house.

David's first-born, Malcolm, was murdered, and his second son, Henry, died before he could assume the throne. Thus Henry's son Malcolm (known as "the Maiden") became king at the age of eleven. That preserved the rules of primogeniture and also ensured the succession of a prince with the right name.

With the Stewarts we see a careful preservation of this tradition, all the way down to King James I of England, who named his heir-apparent, Henry, after his father, Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, husband of Mary Queen of Scots (the name Frederick came from Henry's other grandfather, Frederick II of Denmark):

Family Tree of James VI King of Scotland (James I King of England)

1. James I d. 1437
 - . 2. James II d. 1460
 - 3. James III d. 1488
 - 4. James IV d. 1513
 - 5. James V d. 1542
 - 6. Mary Queen of Scots d. 1587
 - +Henry Stewart Lord Darnley
 - 7. James VI (James I of England) d. 1625
 - 8. Henry Frederick Prince of Wales
- Note: Died of typhoid 1612

This pattern had been established before the Stewarts had come to Scotland, when they were known as Stewards (Lat. *Dapifer*, Flemish *Flaald*) of Dol in Brittany. For centuries we can trace the alternation of Walters and Alans, Fitz-Walters and Fitz-Alans, until King Robert II Stewart, 7th High Steward of Scotland, grandson of Robert I Bruce, founded the royal House of Stewart with his coronation in Scone Abbey in 1371.

The practice of alternating names goes back to the ancient Jewish custom of the high-priestly family of Zadok in Jerusalem, whose members were named alternately Onias and Simon from 332 to 165 b.c.e. This signature of spiritual sovereignty was imitated by the Hasmonaean rulers that followed them, as well as by the heirs of Herod (37–4 b.c.e.). Later, it was used by the Hillelites, with the names Gamaliel and Judah succeeding each other (with an occasional occurrence of Simon and Hillel [Jacobs 1906–1911]). About this time, the practice of double names for the same person began to be adopted, another Jewish trait revived by the Stewarts (e.g. "James Edward Stuart").

Thus the "stewards" of an obscure fiefdom in Brittany began to see themselves as stewards of the kingdom of heaven on earth. By virtue of their Templar heritage, moreover, "the Scots royal line comprised not only Priest Kings but Knight Priest Kings" (Gardiner 2001, p. 226).

Elizabeth Cladwell Hirschman. *When Scotland Was Jewish*. Public Domain Mark1.0, 2007.

JEWISH NAMING PATTERNS, CONT.

- Three rules were applied in naming Jewish children throughout the medieval period and up to the present time: the Talmud, *kinnui* (secular) versus *shem ha kadosh* (sacred) names, and the role of the female in Jewish ritual practice.
- The basic progression of a Jewish name:
 1. Joseph ben (son of) Simon
 2. Joseph ben Simon ben Moshe
 3. Joseph ben Simon ben Moshe of London
 4. Joseph ben Simon ben Moshe the Kohane (priestly family) of London
- "In some cases, a male is listed with his mother's rather than his father's name; e.g. Moyses fil Sarae (Moses ben Sarah). The most likely explanation is that the mother was simply better known." p.220

Elizabeth Cladwell Hirschman. *When Scotland Was Jewish*. Public Domain Mark1.0, 2007.

<https://archive.org/details/when-scotland-was-jewish/page/219/mode/2up>

This book contains a list of Jewish/English names and words related to Jewish names

"Jewish Naming Convention in Angevin England," Society for Creative Anachronism, <<http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/names/jewish.html>>

SCOTTISH NAMES



SCOTTISH NAMES

- The Scots used patronymics, that is, the children took on their father's name as a byname.
- In Scotland, the prefix Mac or Mc, meaning son of, is the most common. Fitz- from the Norman French was also used.
- Scottish Highlanders often have both a clan name and a byname, and sometimes a *sept* name (a smaller grouping within a clan), as MacLeod of MacLeod, the Chisholm.
- These names became settled surnames in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- There are many Danish, Norwegian, and Norman names in Scotland.
- Starting in the early 17th c., English names were adopted. Lowlander names are often English in origin.
- Clan names can also be place names.
- Many Irish moved to Scotland in the 1840's, bringing their names with them.
- The female prefix was *inghean*, daughter of. Her name in Gaelic would not refer to the clan she belonged to.

SCOTTISH NAMES, CONT.

- Some surnames were based on animals.
- Many names are based in church terms, particularly names with (Mac)gil.
- Many Scottish surnames are based on clan names.
- Bynames were prevalent in the northeastern part of Scotland, the Borders, and the West Highlands.
- Scottish given names often have Gaelic origins.
- Scottish and Irish names are very similar. They are essentially the same people, the Gaels, originally from Ireland.
- Women's names in the 19th c. were sometimes feminized male names. They may be male relatives' names.
- Catholic confirmation names may not be in records, but were often used as middle names.



IRISH NAMES



IRISH NAMES

- The Irish used patronymics, that is, the children took on their father's name as a byname. These names became settled surnames in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- In Ireland, the prefixes of O', meaning grandson or descendant of, and Mac or Mc, meaning son of, were common. Fitz was also in use. It is NOT true that Mac is Scottish and O' is Irish.
- Roman Catholics often dropped Mac and O' or adapted the name. Mucklebreed=Mac Giolla Bhrighde.
- Surname stability was not as common in Ireland as in England. Prefixes were often dropped, making many different spellings, even within a family.
- English law, at one point, forbade the use of O' and Mac' in Irish surnames. Not all members of Irish families chose to conform, so several forms of a surname often emerged within a single family.
- A woman's surname replaces Ó with Ní (reduction of Iníon Uí "descendant's daughter") and Mac with Nic (reduction of Iníon Mhic "son's daughter").

IRISH NAMES

- Mór ("big") and Óg ("young") are used to distinguish father and son. The word Beag/Beg, meaning "little", can be used in place of Óg.
- Adjectives denoting hair colour may also be used as a byname: Pádraig Rua ("red-haired Patrick"), Máire Bhán ("fair-haired Mary").
- Traditional (Gaeltacht) names are still in informal use in some areas. These are composed of the first name, followed by the father's name, followed by the name of the paternal grandfather.
- Irish given names are also Gaelic. Many have been Anglicized and adopted in England.
- Some names are both male and female.
- Nicknames may not resemble the original name. It is important to find out the original name.
- Catholic records may have the Latin form of the name.



WELSH NAMES



WELSH NAMES

- The Welsh used patronymics, that is, the children took on their father's name as a byname. These names became settled surnames in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- In Wales, the prefixes of Mag, Map, Mab, ap or ab, meaning son of, were common. These morphed into names starting with Bof P attached to given names.
- Women retained their maiden names and did not take their husband's name (he didn't have one).
- Male ancestors' names could be added in a string up to 6-7 generations back. They were both name and pedigree.
- Women's names were also patronymic: Verch or ferch, shortened to vch or vz. It also appears as ach and ych. Occasionally attached as ch.
- Less common patronymic names are often very localized and may sometimes be traced back from the modern bearers to a single person or family group.

WELSH NAMES

- The Welsh have a long-standing love of nicknames and bynames, for example, Evan Stretchem, the byname of an undertaker.
- There are relatively few given names and surnames that are from the Welsh language.
- Few Welsh people received middle names. If a person left Wales, he might adopt a middle name (father's name or mother's surname) but probably did not use that middle name in Wales.
- Alias may imply either maiden name, husband's name or previous husband's name.
- Later in the 19th century, men might take an extra name or adopt their mother's surname hyphenated (Evans-Davies). This name was not usually passed on to subsequent generations.
- Modern Welchification means newer surname changes may create a different spelling, i.e., Hughes=Huws.

MANX NAMES



MANX NAMES

- Manx is a Goidelic Celtic language and is one of several insular Celtic languages spoken in the British Isles.
- There are relatively few given names and surnames that are from the Manx language. Indigenous Manx names tend to be predominately Gaelic in origin.
- Patronymic names used the Gaelic Mac prefix until the 17th c. The unstressed Ma dropped out and became C, K, or Q as part of the surname based on a given name.
- Many Manx names begin with these letters.

CORNISH NAMES



CORNISH NAMES

- Many personal names are derived from place names.
- Given names are generally English, but may have Cornish forms.
- Surnames are of patronymic origin.
- Prefixes used are Tre-, Pol-, Pen-, Bos-, Bod-, Car-, Chy-, Hal-, Lan-, Men-, Nan-, and Ros-
- Patronymic names used the Gaelic Mac prefix until the 17th c. The unstressed Ma dropped out and became C, K, or Q as part of the surname based on a given name.
- Many Manx names begin with these letters.

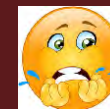
BRITISH NAMING PATTERN

The same pattern applies to most British and Irish cultural groups starting with the earliest records (1500s-1900). The later, the less likely the pattern will occur as outlined.



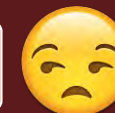
The smaller the name pool (i.e., rural areas and patronymic cultures), the less benefit from the pattern because there are so few same names being passed on.

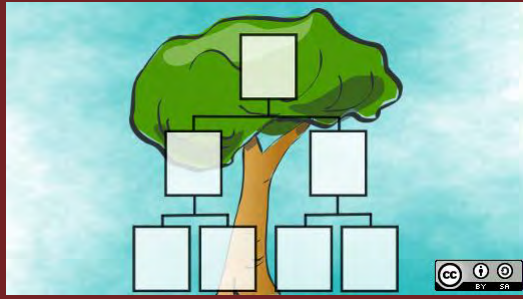
Anticipate anomalies. It is rarely followed strictly.



Don't jump to conclusions based solely on the names or the pattern of names. Research and evidence are the key. The pattern is only one tool.

Be very careful not to confuse people with the same name on your public tree. It will make you and other people crazy.





- The first son was named after the paternal grandfather (PGF)
- The second son was named after the maternal grandfather (MGF)
- The third son was named after the father (F)
- The fourth son was named after the oldest paternal uncle (1PU)
- The fifth was named after the second oldest paternal uncle (2PB) or the oldest maternal uncle (1MB)

- The first daughter was named after the maternal grandmother (MGM)
- The second daughter was named after the paternal grandmother (PGM)
- The third daughter was named after the mother (M)
- The fourth daughter was named after the oldest maternal aunt (1MS)
- The fifth was named after the second oldest maternal aunt (2MS) or the oldest paternal aunt (1PS)

THIS IS THE GENERAL PATTERN

- If there was duplication (for example, the paternal grandfather and the father had the same name), then the family moved to the next position on the list.
- The Ancestral Scottish pattern would have a 3rd-6th son or daughter named after a great-grandparent. Subsequent children would be named after their parents' great-grandparents.
- Children might be named after a friend, godparent, other family member--particularly a recently deceased relative--or a brother or sister who had previously died, without regard to the pattern.
- Don't rely on naming patterns after the third child of either sex. They may not be strictly followed.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Joseph and Ann, married 1775

	Expected		Actual	Notes
1 st Son	patGF	Nathaniel	Leonard	Expected order of matGF and patGF reversed
2 nd Son	matGF	Leonard	Nathaniel	
3 rd Son	F	Joseph	James	Expected order of F and patB reversed
4 th Son	patB	James	Joseph	
5 th Son			Joseph	
6 th Son	matB	William	Benjamin	A paternal brother who died
7 th Son			Benjamin	
1 st Daughter	matGM	Mary	Mary	
2 nd Daughter	patGM	Sarah	Hannah	patS
3 rd Daughter	M	Ann	Ann	
4 th Daughter	matS	Mary	Dinah	Mary already used.
5 th Daughter			Sarah	patGM

William and Sarah, married 1790

	Expected		Actual	Notes
1 st Son	patGF	Joseph	Samuel	
2 nd Son	matGF	John	John	
3 rd Son	F	William	William	
1 st Daughter	matGM	Mary	Betty	
2 nd Daughter			Betty	
3 rd Daughter	patGM	Hannah	Sarah (mother)	
4 th Daughter	M	Sarah	Mary	
5 th Daughter	patS	Martha	Martha	

John and Betty, married 1821

	Expected		Actual	Notes
1 st Son	patGF	William	William	
2 nd Son	matGF	George	George	
3 rd Son	F	John	Samuel	Expected order of these two is reversed
4 th Son	patB	Samuel	John (father)	
5 th Son	matB	Abraham	Isaac	Named after father's uncle
6 th Son			Richard	
1 st Daughter	matGM	Hannah	Harriet	
2 nd Daughter	patGM	Sarah	Elizabeth	Expected order of these two is reversed
3 rd Daughter	M	Elizabeth	Sarah	
4 th Daughter	matS	N/A	Jane	

1. Make a names table similar to this one for the family of each suspected individual, starting with the oldest known generation and going forward in time to about 1900. Printed or handwritten pedigree charts are very helpful here for comparing names in families.
2. Compare all families with known names. Finding names may take some time. Keep notes.
3. Choose the most likely ancestor(s) and do your best research on all members of that individual's family.
4. Keep GOOD records of your research. I use a spreadsheet for each family with different pages for each person as a research log.
5. Analyze names, dates and locations in comparison to other suspected individuals. Do more research on others as needed.
6. Draw a conclusion based on the evidence you compiled.
7. Share your findings in your family tree. Give reasons for your thinking in notes and comments/discussion sections.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Coghlan, Ronan, et al. *Book of Irish Names*. New York: Sterling Pub Co., 1989. On Internet Archive ([internetarchive.org](https://www.internetarchive.org))

"Gaelic Name Adjectives," <https://scottishsig.org.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2023/01/Gaelic-Name-tool.pdf>

Heppenstall, Janice. *English Ancestors*. <https://englishancestors.blog/>.

Hirschman, Elizabeth Caldwell. *When Scotland Was Jewish*. Public Domain Mark 1.0, 2007

"Onomastics Handout2 Santa Cruz." <https://scgensoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Onomastics-Handout-Santa-Cruz.pdf>

Robb, John. "The Scottish Onomastic Child-naming Pattern." <https://johnbrobb.com/Content/TheScottishOnomasticPattern.pdf>

Rowlands, John. *The Surnames of Wales: for family historians and others*. Birmingham: Federation of Family History Societies, 1996. On Internet Archive ([internetarchive.org](https://www.internetarchive.org))

Scotland's People, "Forenames." <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/guides/research-guides/forenames>

Shiva.com. "Naming a Child." <https://www.shiva.com/learning-center/commemorate/naming-a-child>

Smith-Bannister, Scott. *Names and Naming Patterns in England, 1538-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Stewart, George Rippey. *American Given Names*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. On Internet Archive ([internetarchive.org](https://www.internetarchive.org))

Titford, John. *Searching for Surnames*. Newbury, Berkshire: Countryside Books, 2002. On Internet Archive ([internetarchive.org](https://www.internetarchive.org))

Tracing Irish Ancestors, Roberts Wholesale Books: n.p., 2000.

Whyte, Donald. *Scottish Forenames*. Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 1996. On Internet Archive ([internetarchive.org](https://www.internetarchive.org))

See the FamilySearch.org Research Wiki article on Naming Customs for each region or country in the British Isles for basic information about names and patterns. Follow the links for deeper study.

For more detailed information, get the handout from the Byu library Family History Center website.

<https://fh.lib.byu.edu/classes-and-webinars/sunday-classes/>

THANK YOU



“It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to.”
— W.C. Fields