

## Books in English on Personal Names

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**I**N THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, the first book published on personal names was by William Patten. It was printed in London, and the title page carried the date, 1575. The garrulous title, typical of the times, was: *The Calendar of Scripture, Wherein the Hebru, Callidian, Arabian, Phenician, Syrian, Persian, Greek and Latin names, of Nations, Cuntreys, Men, Weemen, Idols, Cities, Hils, Riuiers, & of oother places in the holly Byble mentioned, by order of letters ar set, and turned into oour English toong.*

This work consisting of 193 numbered sheets, although they are printed on both sides, listed the names in alphabetical order with derivations in English. Meanings were given first in Latin, then in English black letter. Some Biblical citations were noted, together with references to earlier writers, mostly Cardinal Francisco Ximenez de Cisneros and John Arquerius.

The first Queen Elizabeth was then on the throne, and when the compiler came to that name he lapsed into Latin and filled thirty-seven pages, including a seven page poem, in praise of his queen. Jesus rated nine lines, and Moses was disposed of in eleven.

Following Patten, William Warren published in London, in 1581, a collection of poems on women's names. He also indulged in a long flowery title, which could be shortened to *The Nurcerie of Names*. Little is known of either William Patten or William Warren.

The first important study on personal names done by an English writer are two chapters entitled "Christian Names" and "Surnames" which together total almost half of the first edition of *Remaines of a Greater Worke* by that most eminent and learned scholar, William Camden. It was published in 1605, although the dedicatory epistle is dated June 12, 1603.

Considered by Camden to be merely the material left over from

his greater work, his *Britannia*, it went through seven editions during the seventeenth century, and, although only reprinted twice in the nineteenth century, is today regarded as Camden's more important work.

In the same year as Camden's book was published in London, Richard Rowlands, under the name of Richard Verstegan, the original Dutch name of his family, published in Antwerp his *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, which contained a chapter on "The Etymologies of the Ancient Saxon Proper Names of men and women," and another on English surnames. While not nearly so significant as Camden's chapters, Verstegan's work is an important early research on personal names. It ran through five editions before the end of the century.

In 1626 appeared *Onomatophylacium or The Christian Names of Men and Women* by John Penkethman, merely a catalogue of personal names with a table of interpretations covering thirty-two unnumbered pages. This was followed in 1655 by a similar, but much longer work, compiled by Edward Lyford, entitled *The True Interpretation and Etymologie of Christian Names*. Both of these works are extremely rare and have scarcely been noted by later writers.

Of early dictionaries the first to give a separate section to names was the anonymous *Gazophylacium Anglicanum* which was dated 1689. Some later ones included proper names in the main alphabet. However, none of them is notable for the information given about personal names.

Except for a long-winded theological controversy over the names of God, indulged in by various writers during the middle 1700's, and an unimportant inquiry into ancient Scottish surnames in 1723 by William Buchanan, the eighteenth century, with all its great writers, produced almost nothing on the subject of personal names. Buchanan's work was, however, enlarged and reprinted twice before the end of the century and reprinted twice in the next century. A few brief essays appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* during the eighteenth century.

The nineteenth century is marked by the work of two scholars who spent much of their time in research on the subject of English surnames. Mark Antony Lower was a genial antiquary with a great fund of miscellaneous information, but without a knowledge of

the modern science of philology. He first published a small book of sixty-eight pages, now quite rare, entitled *The Book of English Surnames*. Based on this first effort, Mr. Lower brought out his *English Surnames, Essays on Family Nomenclature* in 1842, three years later, which lasted through four editions, the last being in 1875. Commencing with the third edition in 1846, it was enlarged to two volumes. Then in 1860 Mr. Lower published his *Patronymica Britannica*, a dictionary of family names.

Along with his duties as a churchman, Charles Wareing Bardsley made a life-long study of English names and his *Our English Surnames* was issued in 1873, only five years after leaving Oxford. Revised in a second edition (1875), it continued through seven editions plus the eighth and ninth "impressions," the latter of which was dated 1915. No material alterations were made after the second edition. Canon Bardsley also wrote *The Romance of the London Directory* and *Puritan Nomenclature*. His principal contribution to the subject, however, was *A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames*, revised for the press by his widow and issued in 1901.

Robert Ferguson followed, in 1858, with his *English Surnames*. Canon Bardsley's book, commencing with the second edition, dropped the "Our" and became *English Surnames*. Thus from 1842 to 1915 three English authors issued seventeen editions, impressions and reprints of "*English Surnames*." In his fourth edition Lower complained of their failure to choose distinctive titles for their works but little good it did him.

Ferguson, a cotton-spinner who eventually became a member of Parliament, wrote two other books, *The Teutonic Name System*, in 1864, and *Surnames as a Science*, in 1883, which passed into a slightly enlarged second edition the next year. However, the quality of Ferguson's work is inferior to that of Lower and Bardsley.

The first dictionary of surnames in the English language was by the American writer, William Arthur, father of President Chester A. Arthur. The binder's title of his etymological dictionary of family and Christian names was *Derivation of Family Names*, published in New York in 1857. Mr. Arthur had compiled various magazine articles on the subject as early as 1845. Nathaniel I. Bowditch, the Boston Recorder of Deeds, collected odd surnames in groups and published them as *Suffolk Surnames*. The third edition, running to 757 pages, was issued in 1861. Apparently every copy of

the first and second editions was autographed to some prominent person; however no copy of the third edition is autographed since Bowditch died just before it came from the printer's hands. Thomas G. Gentry published his *Family Names* in Philadelphia in 1892.

Another English minister, the Reverend Henry Barber, compiled a dictionary, *British Family Names* in 1894, which was, eight years later, enlarged into a second edition. Its reliability may be tested by noting that the only derivation the author gives for his own surname is that it is from St. Barbe, a local name in Normandy.

The best dictionary of British surnames is that by Henry Harrison, *Surnames of the United Kingdom*, in two volumes. It was first published in parts, and then bound, the first volume being issued in 1912, and the second in 1918. Although the best reference work on surnames in the British Isles, it is fast disappearing from our libraries because it was printed upon such poor paper that it commenced to crumble away only a few years later.

The venerable Professor Ernest Weekley, formerly of University College, Nottingham, has contributed much to the study of personal names. His first important work, *The Romance of Names*, in 1914 (fourth edition in 1928), dealt generally with both English Christian names and surnames. This was followed, in 1916, by his *Surnames*, an able discussion of the subject, which reached a revised third edition in 1937. In 1933, he discussed the names that have become a part of our English speech, in *Words and Names*. Last from his pen is a very readable essay on our Christian names which he entitled *Jack and Jill*, in 1939; a second edition was published in 1948.

A professional writer and publisher, with a definite flair for research, C. L'Estrange Ewen, authored, in 1931, his comprehensive *A History of Surnames of the British Isles*. He followed this, in 1938, with an extensive outline entitled, *A Guide to the Origin of British Surnames*, which was based on his earlier work.

Later writers seemed to take a perverse delight in adversely criticising earlier studies of English names, taking little account of the fact that these earlier students were forced to do pioneer work. The prolific English author, Sabine Baring-Gould, in his *Family Names and Their Story* (1910, new edition, 1913), pointed out deficiencies in Lower, Ferguson and Bardsley. Henry Harrison said that a list of the errors in Bardsley's Dictionary was a task too heavy to be

continued. Ernest Weekley severely criticised Lower and Ferguson—and Bardsley to a lesser extent.

Ewen was savage in his criticism of Weekley. Naming many of the others, he observed, in that superior manner he affected, that "they educate and amuse, but they do not satisfy." He screamed to high heaven when philologists and reviewers criticised his efforts, and even published, at his own expense, a pamphlet which was mostly devoted to castigating his critics.

A comprehensive general history of names was that written in French by Eusebius Salverte and translated into English, in two volumes, by the Rev. L. H. Mordacque, and published in London in 1862-64. The Scotchman, Harry Alfred Long, wrote two general books on personal names, *The Names We Bear* in 1870, and *Personal and Family Names* thirteen years later.

A most useful book is *Homes of Family Names in Great Britain* (1890), compiled by Henry B. Guppy, which identifies the surnames common in each county. And William G. Searle's *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* (Cambridge, 1897) is most useful to early English scholars. A general work on personal names is this author's *The Story of Our Names*, 1950.

The first two important works on Christian names in modern times were both published in London in 1863. Sophy Moody wrote a popular account entitled *What Is Your Name?*, and Charlotte M. Yonge compiled a comprehensive two volume study, *History of Christian Names*, which was condensed to a one volume, new revised edition in 1884. This work by Miss Yonge has ever since been regarded as the standard work on the subject, and has been studied by every writer since.

In recent years several dictionaries of Christian names, with their derivations and meanings, have been issued. There is the *Dictionary of Given Names* by Mrs. D. A. Gutterez (Flora Haines Loughead) in 1934, which contains the most names with the least claim to scholarship. The next year *What Shall We Name the Baby?* by Winthrop Ames, assisted by Florence A. Doody, came out. Both of these books are by Americans.

Following this, the next year, was *Name This Child* by the English lexicographer, Eric Partridge, which was revised and enlarged in the third edition in 1951. Partridge's *Name Into Word*, in 1950, cannot be ignored by those who desire information concerning names that have become parts of our language.

Elsdon C. Smith's *Naming Your Baby* was published in 1943. *A Treasury of Names*, by Evelyn Wells, was printed in 1946, followed, in 1951, by *Your Baby's Name*, compiled by Maxwell Nurnberg and Morris Rosenblum.

Then in England in 1945, with a bit more research and a reputation for scholarship engendered by the quite respectable title of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, Elizabeth G. Withycombe's book was hailed as an authority by critics on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is the Swedes, however, who are producing the most scholarly and valuable studies of English personal names. In 1935 Gustav Fransson's doctoral dissertation on *Middle English Surnames of Occupation 1100-1350* was published. Olof von Feilitzen wrote *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book*, in 1937. Gösta Tengvik produced *Old English Bynames* in 1938. Then the next year Hilmer Ström published *Old English Personal Names in Bede's History*. Bertil Thuresson wrote *Middle English Occupational Terms*, issued in 1950. These Swedish studies, published in Uppsala and Lund, were directly influenced by Professor Eilert Ekwall, the distinguished philologist whose *Studies on English Place- and Personal Names* (1931), *Variation in Surnames in Medieval London* (1945) and *Early London Personal Names* (1947) were all published in Lund.

A brief survey of this kind could not include specialized works, such as George F. Black's *The Surnames of Scotland* and Joseph G. Fucilla's *Our Italian Surnames*, published in 1946 and 1949 respectively, even though they are excellent in their field. It was also necessary to exclude works of a general nature, such as those of H. L. Mencken and Louis Adamic. A detailed list of literature on personal names in English is available in the author's *Personal Names, a Bibliography*, New York, 1952.