

# Lenfestey-Lenveiset: A Case of Mistaken Identity

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IN P.H. REANEY'S *Dictionary of British Surnames*, the name *Lenfestey* is appended to a list of modern reflexes of the Anglo-Norman *Lenveiset*. At first glance, *Lenfestey* does indeed resemble the surnames which occur in the following combinations: Robertus *Invesiatas*, *Lascivius* (1086), Robert *Lenveiset* (1131), Thomas *Le Envaiset* (a. 1150), Jordan *Veiset*, *le Envaise* (12th cent.), William *le Enveise*, *Lenvesie* (1220), Adam *le Veyse* (1270), and Robert *le Voyse* (1327).<sup>1</sup> The differences between *Lenfestey* and the thirteenth century variant *Lenvesie* seem particularly insignificant. If one assumes that *-ey* and *-ie* represent the same sound, the names are separated only by the alternation of /f/ and /v/, which Reaney explains as a hypercorrection, and by the presence of the stem-final /t/, which he describes as "intrusive." Nevertheless, there are both internal and external reasons for not associating *Lenfestey* with *Lenveiset*.

Despite the phonetic similarity between *Lenfestey* and the older reflexes of *Lenveiset*, the former must be excluded from the *Vaisey* entry. A study of the evolution of labial-dental and dental consonants in French and English will reveal that Reaney's explanation of the /f/ and /t/ in *Lenfestey* is deceptively simple. There is reason to suspect that a /v/ supported by /n/ would not have become /f/ and that an intrusive /t/ would not have developed between /s/ and a following vowel. The particular sequence of phonemes in the name *Lenfestey* makes both devoicing and epenthesis improbable.

In the case of *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey*, the change from /v/ to /f/ was unlikely as long as both names were used in a French context. In French the voiced quality of the preceding nasal and of the following vowel would have protected the /v/. During the medieval period, the

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<sup>1</sup>Percy Hide Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 333. All subsequent references to Reaney's work also refer to the *Vaisey* entry.

only regular devoicing of /v/ occurred in a final position, where the consonant assimilated to silence: NAVEM > OF *nef*. Moreover, the accentual pattern of *Lenveiset* would have protected the /v/ from phonetic attrition. In an oxytonic form, pretonic consonants would have been resistant to change. Because the change /v/ > /f/ in *Lenveiset* was unlikely in Old French, the /f/ in *Lenfestey* should be explained in terms of a different etymon or in terms of a later phonetic development in English.

In English, as well as in French, the most frequent change in medial position was an assimilative one from /f/ to /v/. Modern pairs such as *wife*, *wives* and *life*, *lives* reveal voicing of the labial dental before the plural allomorph /-iz/. In Old English, voiced and voiceless labial-dental consonants were positional variants of the same phoneme. The sound was voiceless in initial position but voiced in medial position. Although the borrowing of French words with medial /f/ brought about phonemic contrast between /v/ and /f/ in English,<sup>2</sup> a French form with medial /v/ would have conformed to a sequential pattern of phonemes already permitted in English. The /v/ in *Lenveiset*, therefore, would not have become /f/ as a result of phonetic adaptation to its new language.

The matter of /f/ and /v/ is further complicated by dialectal variation within English itself. In Southern dialects, Germanic /f/ became /v/, a phenomenon which is illustrated by *vixen*, a Southern form which eventually replaced East Midland *fixen*.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these developments, there was considerable uncertainty in Middle English about initial /v/. Being aware of the encroachment of Southern forms with /v/, people with names of the *Vaisey* type could easily have replaced /f/ with /v/. Because of the unstable relationship between the labial-dental consonants, Reaney is probably correct in explaining the /f/ in *Faisey*, *Facey*, *Feazey* by hypercorrection. However, without evidence that the change /v/ > /f/ took place in medial position, one should not assume that the /f/ in *Lenfestey* is a result of hypercorrection. Perhaps forgetting that he had classified *Lenfestey* as a variant of *Lenveiset*, Reaney theorized that the loss of the initial syllable and loss of meaning preceded the change from /v/ to /f/.

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<sup>2</sup>Stuart Robertson and Frederic G. Cassidy, *The Development of Modern English*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, 1954), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup>Albert C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957), p. 231.

Intuitively, most observers would agree that hypercorrection is a plausible explanation of the alternation of /f/ and /v/ in the truncated reflexes of *Lenveiset*. Indeed, the early practice of glossing newer, shorter forms with older, longer ones (Jordan *Veiset*, *le Envaise*) indicates that the loss of the first syllable led to loss of meaning. One must note, however, that loss of the first syllable, rather than loss of meaning, made possible the substitution of /f/ for /v/. Being related to a shift in accent from the final syllable to the stem, the disappearance of the initial syllable made a major contribution to the anglicization of *Lenveiset*. The shift in accent and the loss of the first syllable were responsible for the creation of forms which, though meaningless, were structurally parallel to two-syllable names of native origin such as *Sealey* and *Woolsey*.

A glance at the data presented by Reaney substantiates the conclusion that /v/ became /f/ only after the loss of the first syllable. Shortened forms with initial /v/ are attested after 1296; however, shortened forms with initial /f/ did not occur until after 1327. It is especially important to notice that, aside from *Lenfestey*, there is no record of longer forms with medial /v/ after 1277. Because newer, two-syllable forms with initial /f/ and older three-syllable forms with medial /v/ are, with the exception of *Lenfestey*, mutually exclusive, one must conclude that the /f/ in *Lenfestey* did not develop from the /v/ in *Lenveiset*. In other words, the apparent alternation of the labial-dental consonants in *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* is unrelated to the alternation of /v/ and /f/ in short forms like *Vaisey* and *Faisey*.

One might also question Reaney's suggestions that the /t/ in *Lenfestey* is intrusive. Although /s/ and /t/ are both voiceless and dental, there is little evidence that /t/ develops with any degree of regularity after /s/. The epenthesis which frequently occurs after nasal consonants, as in *Thompson*, is perhaps less likely after a sibilant. It may be that the closure of the preceding nasal is prerequisite to the explosion of the voiceless stop.

Moreover, the failure of the stem vowel to diphthongize in *Lenfestey* may be an indication that the medial /t/ was etymological rather than intrusive. An etymological /t/ would have blocked the diphthongization of the stem vowel while an intrusive /t/ might have occurred too late to do so. If the /t/ had been intrusive, one might have expected to find some evidence of the diphthong that characterizes most reflexes of *Lenveiset*. The single vowel of *Lenvesie*, the reflex of *Lenveiset* which most closely resembles *Lenfestey*, may be the result of simplification, a phenomenon evident in some of the more recent reflexes. If the /t/

in *Lenfestey* is etymological rather than intrusive, the name cannot be considered a variant of *Lenveiset*.

In addition to these internal difficulties with Reaney's classification of *Lenfestey* as a variant of *Lenveiset*, there are several important external difficulties. When one observes the historical development of the variants of *Lenveiset*, he must be impressed by the steady progression during the thirteenth century from long forms to short forms. The variants *le Enveise* (1220), *Le Veyse* (1270), and *Vesy* (1296) illustrate the inexorability of the levelling process. It is inconceivable that any variant could have escaped the changes which accompanied the resurgence of English as the national language.

When one compares *Lenfestey* to *Vaizey*, *Voizey*, *Faizey*, *Feasy*, *Phasey*, and *Pheazey*, he must wonder how one modern variant can exhibit so many archaic features. If *Lenfestey* had been subjected to the same outside pressures, it would have resembled more closely the shorter variants of *Lenveiset*. Without any evidence of conservative forces which might have preserved the initial syllable, the centuries which separate these two names make any direct relationship between them improbable. Because *Lenfestey* is "fuller" than *Vaisey* and other modern variants, it should not be considered a variant of *Lenveiset*.

Given the frequency and variety of the short reflexes of *Lenveiset*, one must also question the limited distribution of *Lenfestey*. As Reaney observes, the name is "rare." It occurs only in relatively recent documents and only in a few widely scattered places. It is found here and there in telephone directories, but it is not discussed in earlier studies of English surnames. There is no mention of it in well-known works by Weekly, Bardsley, and Ewen. Because the name is not regularly attested in any particular area and because it cannot be traced back more than a few years, its relationship to *Lenveiset* is doubtful.

Aside from a superficial resemblance, there is no evidence of continuity between ancient *Lenveiset* and modern *Lenfestey*. There are no intermediate forms and no regular sound changes which might be useful in the construction of hypothetical forms. Because hypercorrection and epenthesis are sporadic changes, they do not satisfactorily explain how *Lenveiset* might have produced *Lenfestey*. Without even theoretical evidence of continuity between the two names, the proposed relationship between them cannot be trusted.

In short, internal evidence for rejecting Reaney's classification of *Lenfestey* as a variant of *Lenveiset* can be seen: 1) in the presence of /f/ where one might expect /v/; 2) in the failure of the stem vowel to diphthongize; and 3) in the occurrence of stem-final /t/. External

evidence for questioning Reaney's classification of *Lenfestey* includes: 1) the survival of just one reflex in an apparently archaic form; 2) the late appearance of the name; 3) its limited distribution; and 4) the difficulty of projecting intermediate forms.

Although it is difficult to understand why Reaney failed to perceive the linguistic problems discussed in the first part of this paper, it is even more difficult to comprehend his failure to make use of an etymological dictionary before including *Lenfestey* as a variant of *Lenveiset*. If he had consulted either Godefroy's *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* or Huguet's *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, he would have found that *Lenfestey* does not derive from OF *l'enveiset* > *l'envoisé* "the playful one" but from OF *l'enfesté* "the festive one." Although these names are similar in derivation, they come from separate sources. Each name has its own etymon and its own history. Whereas *Lenveiset* ultimately derives from VITIUM > OF *veisie* > *voisie* > *vice*.<sup>4</sup> *Lenfestey* goes back to FESTA > OF *feste* > *fête*.<sup>5</sup> Both nouns were assimilated to the first conjugation by simultaneous prefixation and suffixation. Both received the prefix EN- (> OF *en-*) and the infinitive ending -ARE (> OF *-er*). This derivational process was extremely productive in Old French, generating in addition to *enveiser* and *enfester* verbs such as *encombrer*, *endommager*, and *enraciner*. The past participles *enveisé* and *enfesté* were used adjectivally and were soon nominalized by the agglutination of the definite article.

Although *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* are of French origin, an important aspect of their phonetic development is the English environment into which they were introduced. The forms presented by Reaney reveal the anglicization of *Lenveiset* began early. The loss of the article and the verbal prefix is recorded as early as the twelfth century in the name *Jordan Veiset*. By the fourteenth century, there was a profusion of short variants; *Fecy* (1327), *a Vesy* (1332), *Vaysi* (1386), *Feysy* (1395). As bilingualism receded, the longer forms were shortened to make them structurally more English. Although the loss of the first syllable of *Lenveiset* is the most obvious result of anglicization, the most decisive factor in this process is the shift in accent in the past participle ending back to the stem where it had been in the noun form *veisie*.<sup>6</sup> As

<sup>4</sup>W. Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1968), p. 785.

<sup>5</sup>W. Meyer-Lübke, p. 283.

<sup>6</sup>The diphthongization of the stem vowel in *Lenveiset* shows that the name derived from Fr. *Veisie* rather than directly from VITIUM. If a corresponding past participle had existed in Vulgar Latin the stem vowel would not have diphthongized, stress having been on the ending.

we have seen, the stress pattern of the resulting two-syllable reflexes matched that of the many two-syllable names of native origin. A later, more conservative anglicization of *Lenfestey* also included a shift in accent from the ending to the stem. Subsequently, in America, an additional shift in accent to the initial syllable led to apocope. Thus *Lenfestey*, like *Lenveiset*, produced a variant which was fully adapted to the Germanic stress pattern. In fact, the resultant *Lenfest* is frequently confused with the Scandinavian *Lindquist*. Unlike *Lenveiset*, which did not survive as a surname in Normandy, *Lenfestey* continued to be used in a French context. As a result, it has French versions as well as English. Variants such as *Lenfette* (1513) and *Lāfette* (1517) indicate that phonetic development proceeded normally in French, that the name is pronounced as the common adjective, *enfesté* probably would have been pronounced if it had not disappeared from the language.<sup>7</sup> Compared to *Lenfette* and *Lāfette*, English versions of the name reveal archaic features. In English, the vowel of the prefix has been denasalized, and the /s/ has been preserved, or reintroduced through spelling pronunciation. In the modern reflexes of *Lenveiset* and in *Lenfestey*, the final *-ey* represents diphthongization of the stressed ending of the Old French past participle. When the stress was shifted to the stem, the pronunciation of *-ey* was reduced to /i/. Regional French versions of *Lenfette*, however, maintain the diphthong in two gradations, an ancient /ei/ and a more modern /oi/, which may still be heard in some varieties of Canadian French.

Just as there are parallels in the formation of *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* from Old French nouns so there are similarities in their grammatical function. Both are epithets which were used to describe a particular aspect of an individual's personality. Like Smart, Meek, and Moody, *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* could be included in Bardsley's category of names which reveal "mental and moral peculiarities."<sup>8</sup> Like nicknames, they were probably bestowed rather than chosen. In the words of C.M. Matthews, they "give us a chance to listen to the small-talk of the Middle Ages, the jokes, the pet names, the descriptions of six or seven hundred years ago crystallized into permanent forms."<sup>9</sup> More humorous than serious, *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* provide some insight

<sup>7</sup> *Lenfette*, *Lāfette* and other variants are recorded in notarial documents in the Parish of St. Peter-in-the-Woods, Guernsey.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Wareing Bardsley, *A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames with Special American Instances* (London: Henry Frowde, 1901), p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Constance Mary Matthews, *English Surnames* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 15.

into medieval times. They suggest an air of light-heartedness and gaiety, a *joie de vivre* which sometimes shows through in the *Canterbury Tales*, in the *fabliaux*, or in the *Libro de buen amor*.

Although *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* may have been appropriately descriptive when they were first used as surnames, they had to be less fitting for members of succeeding generations. When the names were handed down, their function became more denotative than connotative. When used in a strictly English context, they were meaningless.

Today, one must use an etymological dictionary to catch a glimpse of the good humor which underlies their creation. It is necessary to study the contexts in which the underlying adjectives were used in order to discover what meaning was intended. Despite Reaney's translation of *enveisé* as "playful," there is some doubt in his mind that latinized variants have the same positive connotation. He equates *INVESTIATUS* to "possessed by a demon" and *LASCIVUS* to "wanton." Although *enveisé* had meanings ranging from "wanton" and "arrogant" to "playful" and "exuberant," most contexts in which the word is used suggest a positive interpretation. By the time these words were used as surnames, amelioration must have taken place. In fact, Godefroy's definition of *LASCIVUS* as "*joli*" seems to indicate that amelioration had already begun in Vulgar Latin. For *enveisé*, Godefroy also offers positive equivalents. He proposes: "*gaillard, gai, de bonne humeur,*" and "*l'air ouvert.*" Moreover, the lines from the "*lai d'Equitan,*" with which he illustrates the use of *enveisé*, suggest a pleasant attitude:

Mut la trova curteise et sage,  
Bele de cors et de visage;  
De bel semblant e *enveisie*.<sup>10</sup>

In other texts, the connotations of *enveisé* appear to be equally positive. Although the definition "übermütig" and "üppig," which are given in the *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, may have negative connotations, contextual evidence again suggests that positive connotations predominate. The most frequent meanings are "exuberant" and "high spirited."<sup>11</sup>

Turning to *enfesté*, we find that connotations have been favorable

<sup>10</sup>Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1937), III, 321.

<sup>11</sup>Erhard Lommatzsch and Adolf Tobler, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1954), III, 731.

from the beginning. Suggesting that the word means “*qui aime les fêtes*,” Godefroy illustrates its use with the following lines from the pen of Eustache Deschamps, a fourteenth-century courtier and poet:

Mais soit tousjours pres de ma coste  
 Si non pour aler au moustier,  
 Quant aux jours qu’il sera mestier,  
 Et qui ne soit pas *enfestee*,  
 Ni de saillir a la volee.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly defining *enfesté* as “qui est en fête,” Huguet cites several lines from Pierre de Brach’s sixteenth-century translation of Tasso’s “*A-minta*”:

M’entremesler je veux aux pastoureaus,  
 Oui, couronnez de fleurs et de rameaus,  
 Tous *enfestez* et sautelants de joie,  
 Ja se suivants du lieu prennent la voie  
 Ou par coustume ils vont de tous costez  
 Pour s’esjouir aux jours qui sont festez.<sup>13</sup>

Both selections indicate that *enfesté* meant “festive, light hearted, or frolicsome.”

Like many other words, *enveisé* and *enfesté* have disappeared from general use. They have not been preserved in either French or English except as surnames. *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey* are relics which today amuse a much smaller audience.

Turning now to the external history of *Lenfestey*, we find that there is a ready explanation of why this name appears so archaic and why it turned up so suddenly to bedevil P.H. Reaney. Rather than being from England proper, the name is from Guernsey in the Channel Islands, where, until recently, natives have all spoken a local variety of Norman French, a dialect still used by some older inhabitants. Like other isolated dialects, Guernsiais is conservative. Cut off from the main stream of linguistic development, it preserves many archaic features. In the dialect, there are numerous words and combinations of sounds which are no longer used in standard French. Like other island and mountain dialects, Guernsiais reflects an earlier stage in the development than the metropolitan language. Protected by the archaism of the

<sup>12</sup>Godefroy, p. 147.

<sup>13</sup>Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1946), III, 429.



local dialect, *Lenfestey* did not undergo the radical anglicization which had previously altered *Lenveiset* so drastically.

Once *Lenfestey* was removed from the protective environment of the Channel Islands, it underwent changes similar to those which had affected *Lenveiset*. As we have seen, there was an additional shift in accent from the stem to the initial syllable and a reduction in length. However, the shortening was accomplished in a very different way. Unlike *Lenveiset*, which in medieval times lost a recognizable article and prefix (*Len-*), *Lenfestey* lost its final vowel by apocope. Taken to America in 1752, *Lenfestey* was immediately anglicized to *Lenfest*.<sup>14</sup> Although one can only speculate about the reasons for such a sudden phonetic alteration of the name, it is certain that the anglicized version would have found more general acceptance than the French version in British North America. In fact, the pronunciation of the name by friends and neighbors probably determined the phonetic shape of the shortened form. In addition to the subtle pressures toward linguistic conformity exerted by the speakers of the dominant language, there were compelling extra-linguistic reasons for the alteration of *Lenfestey*. In the 1760s, the French and Indian Wars still threatened English colonists, and in Maine, where the name was used by the 1780s, there was fierce competition for lumbering rights between English settlers from Massachusetts and French settlers from Quebec. In an atmosphere of general hostility toward the French, it is not surprising that the name was more radically anglicized than it had been in Guernsey.

When the name was reintroduced into America after the conclusion of hostilities between France and England, the simple substitution of English phonemes for French sufficed. Even in Maine, where the anglicization of French names continues, the longer version of the name has survived. Appearing on the Maine coast before the War of 1812,<sup>15</sup> the name has been preserved in the less radically anglicized form which was originally brought from Guernsey. On the Gaspé Peninsula, where Guernsey fishermen lived and worked in close proximity to French Canadian fishermen, the longer version of the name has persisted, the French Canadians using the version *Lenfêté* while the Guernseymen hold to *Lenfestey*.<sup>16</sup>

In the United States, the anglicized versions of *Lenfestey* and *Lenfest*

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<sup>14</sup>Copies of the *Lenfestey-Lenfest Genealogy* have been deposited in the Library of Congress by Dr. Bertram Lenfest.

<sup>15</sup>The French and Indian Wars ended in 1763, eleven years after the first *Lenfestey* arrived in America.

<sup>16</sup>Telephone interview in Montreal, November 15, 1977.

may be found in roughly equal numbers in the telephone directories of several large cities. Although not common names, they are found throughout the United States, many descendants of the original settlers having participated in the westward migration of the 1800s.<sup>17</sup>

Although there has been a close association between the Channel Islands and England since the days of the Conquest,<sup>18</sup> early migration was to the New World. In more recent times, a substantial number of Guernseymen have gone to England for schooling, only to marry and settle there. Early in World War II, most children were sent from Guernsey to England to be spared the dangers of the impending German invasion.<sup>19</sup> They stayed in England until the Channel Islands were liberated toward the end of the war. Undoubtedly, this relatively recent migration to England has made possible the inclusion of *Lenfestey* in Reaney's *Dictionary of British Surnames*.

Although the Norman fondness for descriptive names produced both *Lenveiset* and *Lenfestey*, their evolution has been very different. Having entered England as a result of the Conquest, *Lenveiset* retained its meaning and its structural integrity as long as French was spoken by the ruling class. However, as English gradually regained ascendancy, the accentual pattern was altered and the name was shortened so that it more closely resembled names of Anglo-Saxon origin. By the time the initial /v/ of the shortened forms had become confused with /f/, there was little left to recall the original three-syllable name. Its meaning and much of its substance had disappeared. On the other hand, *Lenfestey* continued to develop as a French name on Guernsey, where it was protected from the radical anglicization which had transformed *Lenveiset*. Centuries later, when *Lenfestey* was carried to England, the rhythm of change had slowed considerably. Having escaped the more radical anglicization of the Middle Ages, it underwent a rather mild adaptation, the regular substitution of English phonemes for French. Only in the monolingual society of colonial America did *Lenfestey* receive the harsh treatment accorded *Lenveiset*. Compared to the recognizably French surnames of the Channel Islands, *Lenfestey* seems quite normal; it has much in common with Guernsey names such as *Mouliplied*, *Coffinot*, *Anguetil*, *le Pataurel*, and *le Messurier*.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Lenfest Genealogy*.

<sup>18</sup> The Channel Islands were a part of the Duchy of Normandy when William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Coysh, *Swastika Over Guernsey* St. Peter's Port: Guernsey Press, 1955), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Lenfestey Genealogy*.

In conclusion, Reaney's erroneous identification of *Lenfestey* as a variant of *Lenveiset* demonstrates that coincidental similarities between surnames may deceive even experienced investigators. To avoid confusion, scholars must keep in mind the principles of historical linguistics. They must be aware of the "drift" of languages and question the origin of forms which do not follow general trends. Whenever possible, they should explain sound changes in terms of established sound laws. They should, therefore, have a thorough grounding in the mechanics of conditioned and sporadic sound change. In their efforts to classify names, they should not forget the importance of relative chronology and phonetic environment. Above all, they must make use of appropriate etymological dictionaries. Since a great many names derive from common nouns or adjectives, these monumental works may provide essential information about origins and early stages of development. Whenever historical data are available, they should be used to substantiate theories.

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