

Names: how we came by them

A brief guide for residents of Flamstead

Introduction

All of us, young, old, or middling, are fascinated by our origins. One clue to these origins is our surname. Flamstead has a rich variety of names, some suggesting deep local roots, and others a wider heritage. Here we provide a simple guide to some of the names we come across in Flamstead.

We have based our guide on the names that would have been used in the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages is also called the medieval period, and spans one thousand years, from the end of the 5th century to the start of the Renaissance and the early modern period, in 1485.

Named after your birthplace or original home

After the Norman Conquest, in 1066, Flamstead was given by William the Conqueror to Ralph de Tony. It stayed in the de Tony family until it passed by marriage to the Earls of Warwick from 1309. Therefore, in the 12th Century, St Leonard's Church was built under the authority of the de Tony family. In the 14th Century, the Church had a medieval incumbent called John Oudeby. Oudeby, or now Oadby, was then a small town in Leicestershire, in a manor also belonging to the Earl of Warwick. You can read about the de Tony family in the story of Alice, Countess of Warwick. John Oudeby was the Rector of Flamstead from 1397 to 1414, and his memorial in the Church refers to his important other

roles. If you were poor, you could not move about; you were tied to your parish or your master. Therefore, names linked to distant places might suggest that you had wealth and power, once upon a time, anyway.

Named after your physical traits and appearance

Some people became known by a physical trait; if they were tall or short, they might be called Long or Short. Disease and physical deformity or injury was common, for example, a person with bent legs would be called Cruikshank. Black, Brown or Rudd (red) may have referred to hair colour. Green might have been the colour of clothing, which would in this case been distinct. Have you met anyone with Beige for a surname? Unlikely, because most poor people's clothes were that sort of colour, and names are used to distinguish people. From the 14th century there were "sumptuary laws": laws that controlled the type of clothes you wore. You were definitely not allowed to dress above your station in life!

Named to show your family identity

Surnames with the suffix 'son' were, and still are, much more common in the north of England and Scotland, than elsewhere in England. Peterson, Paterson, Harrison, Henderson, Hewson, Benson, Dawson,

Frederickson, Goodson, Ibbotson, Larson, Morrison, Neilson, Olson, Robertson, Samson, Tyson, Thompson, Williamson, and so on, all are Viking in origin. They denote that they are the son of someone named with the first part.

When welfare was limited to local people, and strangers might be suspect, family names helped to sort out who could be trusted, and who could be helped.

Identifying people through their fathers was normal practice in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian societies, which is where the Vikings invaded the British Isles from.

You may know that some countries today still routinely include a suffix like this: Russia, for example, in people's middle names.

Named after your trade

We can see how quickly your trade might become who you were: 'you know who I mean: not Jack the Mason, Jack the Baker! Jack Baker, not Jack Mason!' And the name stuck even when you changed your trade. 'Hello, I'm Mr Bun the Plumber". Confusing!

Here are some that you may come across in Flamstead:

- Baker, Barber, Brewer, Brazier (a worker in brass), Butcher
- Carpenter, Carter, Carver, Chandler (candle maker), Cooper (barrel maker), Coulter (plough share maker)
- Farmer, Fisher, Forrester
- Gardener or Gardiner
- Hayward (one who took care of the parish boundaries or hedges), Hewer (one who cut wood after it had been felled), Hillier, (a roofer)

- Joiner
- Mason, Miller
- Painter, Plumber (a maker of lead goods), Porter, Potter
- Roper
- Sadler, Sawyer (one who fashioned wood into planks), Slater
- Tiler or Tyler, Thatcher, Turner (one who fashioned items out of wood), Viner (one who grew vines or sold wine)
- Wheeler.

Can you find some more? See below for some examples.

Names of trades reflecting old social structures

- Baillie or Bayley (a Bailiff for a lord)
- Clarke or Clerk, Cook or Cooke, Cutler (a maker of swords)
- Forrester, Fowler
- Hunter
- Judd or Judge
- Page
- Reeve (one who upheld the local law as in a Shire Reeve or Sherriff)
- Scrivener (one who wrote documents).

Names associated with archery

- Archer
- Bowman, Bowyer
- Fletcher (maker of arrows)
- Stringer.

Names associated with the wool or fabric trade

- Drover, Dyer, Draper
- Fuller (one who cleans wool)
- Mercer (one who sells fabric)

- Shearer, Shepherd, Spinner,
- Tailor or Taylor, Tucker (one who prepared wool for spinning),
- Weaver, Webster (female weaver).

Names associated with the leather trade

- Curry or Currier (one who dressed leather before tanning)
- Dyer, Dresser
- Glover
- Sadler or Saddler, Skinner
- Tanner.

Names associated with guilds

- Arkwright (one who makes wooden chests)
- Mason, Monger.
- Wright, Cartwright, Plowright (one who makes ploughs), Shipwright, Wainwright (one who builds waggons)
- Smith, Smythe, Goldsmith, Silversmith.

Names associated with women's work

- Baxter (a lady baker), Brewster (a lady brewer)
- Cost(n)er (a lady fruit seller, from the Greek 'Costos', meaning apple)
- Foster (a lady that looked after another family's child)
- Spinn(st)er
- Webster (a lady weaver).

It is well documented that in the Middle Ages women did most of the jobs and trades that men did and they were not prevented from doing so. But, however

skilled they were, women were entirely barred from joining the guilds or lodges and, no surprise, were paid much less.

Odds and Ends

- A Chapman was an itinerant hawker or trader.
- A Waterman used the waterways to transport goods to and from trading places or brought fresh water to your home.
- A (Ho)Spittle(er) was someone who offered hospitality within the confines of a monastic building.
- While a cobbler mended your shoes, it was a Cordwainer or Shoemaker that made new shoes.
- A Gong Farmer removed the sewage from the houses and streets and a Groom of the Stool quite literally wiped the backside of the nobility!

Final observations

Please keep in mind that the spelling of names varied a lot in the Middle Ages, and afterwards.

William Shakespeare, who knew a thing or two about words, was not too bothered about spelling his surname, with six variations in the six signatures we know are his.

Another interesting thing about William Shakespeare's surname is that there is disagreement about the origins of his name. Do you know what the alternatives are?