An analysis of the personal names in an extract from a 14th-century fiscal document.

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Etymology and Classification of Surnames

Occupational Names:
Aleberster. MED A *Aleberster* meaning ' barmaid'.
le Bakere. DES *Baker* from OE *bæcere* meaning 'baker'.
Brasyer'. DES *Brasier* from a derivative of OE verb *brasian* 'to make of brass'. Here, brass-worker.
Brewer. DES *Brewer* from ME *brewere*, a derivative of OE verb *brēowan* 'to brew'. Here, brewer.
Clerc. DES *Clark* from OE *clerec* or *clerc*, or OFr *clerc* all meaning 'clerk'. The original sense was 'a man in a religious order' but later 'scholar' or 'secretary'.
le Couper. DES *Cooper* from ME *couper* meaning 'a maker or repairer of wooden casks, buckets and tubs'.
le Deigher. MED D *deier* for 'one who dies cloth'.
le Fourbour. DES *Furber* from OFr *forbeor*, meaning 'polisher of armour'.
Fourner. DES *Furner* from OFr *fornier* meaning 'baker'.
Grom. DES *Groom* from ME *grom(e)* meaning 'a manservant'.
Hostiller'. DES *Ostler* from OFr *ostelier* or ME *(h)ostiler*, 'one who received lodges or entertains guests, especially in a monastery'. Alternatively, 'keeper of a hostelry or inn' or rarely 'a stableman'.
Kynght. DES *Knight* from OE *cniht* usually meaning 'a servant' or 'a feudal tenant bound to serve as a soldier'.
Lardyner'. DES *Lardner* from AFr *lardiner*, meaning 'officer in charge of a larder' also 'the officer who superintended the pannage of hogs'.
le Lavendere. DES *Lavender* from OFr masculine *lavendier* or feminine *lavandiere* meaning 'washerman' or 'washerwoman'.
le Panyer'. DES *Panner*, a derivative of OE *panne* meaning 'pan'. Alternatively, from OFr *paniere* meaning 'a basket'. In both cases, the name may be metonymic standing for 'one who casts pans' or 'basket-maker'.
Parkere. DES *Parker* from OFr *parquier* meaning 'a park-keeper'.
Portour. DES *Porter* from OFr *portier* meaning 'door- or gate-keeper'. Alternatively, from OFr *porteour* meaning 'carrier of burdens'.
Prust. DES *Priest* from OE *prēost* meaning 'priest'. It may also be a nickname for someone of 'priestly' appearance or character, or given ironically for someone of an unpriestly character.
le Skynnere. DES *Skinner*, a derivative of ON *skinn* meaning 'skin'. Here, skinner.
Spynnestere. OED defines as 'a woman who spins, especially one who practises spinning as a regular occupation' as it did not acquire connotations of an old maid until the 17th century. Thuresson explains it is a feminine derivative of OE *spinnan* 'to spin'.

le Taillour. DES *Taylor* from OFr *tailleur* meaning 'tailor'.
le Tannere. DES *Tanner* from OE *tannere* or OFr *taneour*, *tanour*. OED defines as one whose occupation is to convert hides into leather.
Tenant. DES *Tennant* from OFr *tenant* meaning 'holder or possessor of a tenement'.
Warde. DES *Ward* from OE *weard* meaning 'watchman' or 'guard'.
le Waterman. DES *Waterman* identifies 'water-carrier', one who carts water for sale or from a spring for domestic purposes. Another meaning may be 'servant of Walter'.
le Webbe. DES *Webb* from OE masculine *webba* or feminine *webbe* meaning 'a weaver'.
Wheler. DES *Wheeler*, a derivative from OE *hweogol* meaning 'wheel'. Here, 'wheelwright'.
Wolleman. DES *Woolman* from OE *wull* + OE *mann*. Here, 'wool merchant'.

Locative names:
Benham. DES *Benham* identifies Benham, Berkshire or Sussex.
Bristowe. DES *Bristow* suggests Bristol, Gloucestershire or Burstow, Surrey.
Burgh'. DES *Burgh* from one of the many places named Burgh. Perhaps abbreviated from *Burgher* (DES *Burger*) 'citizen' or *Burghes* (DES *Burges)* 'a freeman of a borough'. If so, occupational.
Durham. DES *Durham* names Durham.
Mauncel. DES *Mansel*. Inhabitant of Maine or Le Mans, from OFr *Mancel*.
Roby. DES *Robey* from Robey, Derbyshire or Roby, Lancashire. Alternatively a Scottish diminutive of Robb, a pet form of Robert. If so, patronymic.
Shirwode. DES *Sherwood* identifies Sherwood, Nottinghamshire.
Stratford. DES *Stratford* from one of the Stratfords.
Swyneshull'. Formerly a place in Oxfordshire[1].
Tracy. DES *Tracey* identifies Tracy-Bocage or Tracy-sur-Mer, Normandy. From AN.

Nicknames:
Chast. OED identifies adjective 'chaste' spelled *chast* in 1386 so perhaps a nickname for someone of pure or virtuous behaviour. Alternatively, may have been given ironically for promiscuous person.
Crook'. DES *Crook* from ON *krókr* or ODa *krōk* meaning 'something crooked'. This may refer to physical characteristics such as someone with a crooked back or moral behaviour such as a sly person. Alternatively, may refer to someone who lived near a nook or bend, if so topographical.
Everard. DES *Everard* may be from OE *Eoforheard* but as many bearers of the name were from the Continent the surname is usually from OG cognate *Eburhard* meaning 'boar-hard', or 'as strong as a boar'.
Mody. DES *Moodey* from OE adjective *mōdig* meaning 'bold, impetuous, brave'.
Yong'. DES *Young* from OE *geong* meaning 'young' and often used to distinguish a young man from an older man of the same name.

Topographical:
Castell'. DES *Castle* from OFr *castel* meaning 'castle'. Here, one who lived near a castle. Alternatively, someone who owes rent or services to a castle, or someone who was employed at a castle. If so, occupational.
Shawe. DES *Shaw* from OE *sceaga* meaning 'dweller by the wood'.
atte Welle. DES *Attwell* from OE *wella* + *æt* 'dweller by the stream or spring'.

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[1] Boynton, G. (2003). *Calendar of Patent Rolls: Edward III Vol. 12, 1361-1364*.
http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/search.html [Accessed 01/03/10]

Wodekochall'. Not in DES. Perhaps woodcock (OED identifies an early spelling *wodekoke* in 1347) + OE *hall* meaning 'hall' or 'manor-house'. Bird-names were often combined with *hall* to form place-names. It is possible it is used ironically for inelegant or plain place.

Patronyms:
Benet. DES *Bennet* from given name OFr *Beneit* or *Beneoit*, Latin *Benedictus* meaning 'blessed'.
Brian. DES *Brian*, a Breton name introduced by the Normans. In the north, it is OIr *Brian* brought by Norsemen from Ireland.
Mayhew. DES *Mayhew* from OFr *Mahieu*, a common Norman form of Matthew.
Water. DES *Water* was common medieval pronunciation of OG *Walter*.

Mysterious names:
Chanfeld. Not in DES, OED or MED. Perhaps a place-name as ends in common OE element *feld* but not in DBP.
Kerias. Not in DES, OED or MED.
Ledecomb'. Not in DES, OED or MED. Perhaps from a place-name with common element OE *cumb* 'valley'. Letcombe Basset in Oxfordshire was spelled *Ledecumb* in the Domesday Book[2] so perhaps the name originates from there.
Stodle. Perhaps from a place-name with common element OE *lēah* 'woodland clearing' such as one of the many places called Studley or Stoodley. OED also gives *stodle* as a form of ON *stuðill* 'wooden post'; perhaps a nickname for a tall person or topographical name for a dweller near a post.
Wheton'. Not in DES, OED or MED. Perhaps from a place-name with common element OE *tūn* 'settlement'.

Analysis of Surnames
        The surnames have been separated into categories of occupational names 'denot[ing] a man's occupation'[3], locative names indicating the place where a man lives or comes from, topographical names 'derived from terms for features of the landscape'[4], nicknames from physical or moral characteristics, patronymic names derived from masculine personal names and mysterious names whose etymologies I cannot accurately identify. However, classifying the names is rarely this simple as within the groups 'there is considerable overlapping and a full and accurate classification is impossible'[5]. Surnames I have categorised as topographical such as Castell' may be occupational. Similarly, surnames of office such as Prust are often nicknames.
        Classification of the surnames has proved particularly difficult due to the absence of prepositions. Prepositions such as *de* are often a distinguishing feature of locative and topographical surnames and whilst the document includes 14 such names, only one preposition is used. This means it is difficult to establish when we are dealing with a surname derived from a place-name, especially when the place-name has changed considerably or the place no longer exists. Swyneshull' is such a case; in the absence of a preposition, it is unclear that it derives from a place-name and no modern place exists with the name or a similar name in England. However, *Swyneshull* was a suburb of Oxfordshire in the Middle Ages and therefore, it is clearly a locative surname.

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[2] Ekwall, E. (1972). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*. London; Oxford University Press, p.296.
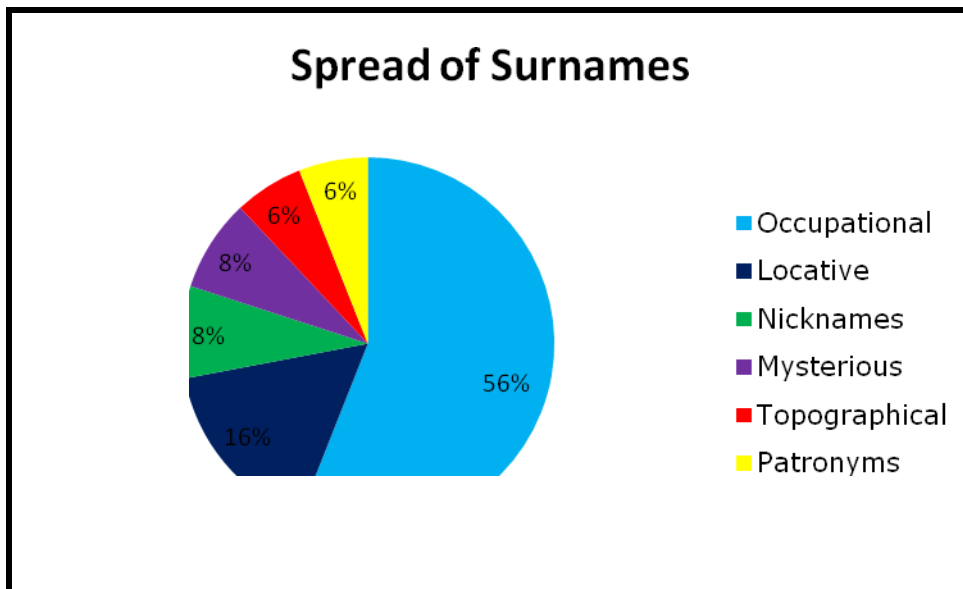[3] Reaney, P. (1967). *Origin of English Surnames*. England: Barnes and Noble, p.176.
[4] McKinley, R. (1990). *A History of British Surnames*. England: Longman, p.73.
[5] Reaney, P. (2005). *Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames [DES]*. London: Oxford University Press, p. xiv.

Scribal conventions also make the identification of some surnames difficult. The scribe often abbreviates surnames, writing Burgh' and Crook', thus making it unclear how the original name ended. In some cases, the meaning of the surname would change drastically if the scribe was abbreviating '-er' rather than simply '-e'. For example, if Crook' is an abbreviation of *Crooke* it could be a nickname type for 'someone with a crooked back', but if it is an abbreviation of *Crooker* it may be a topographical surname meaning 'dweller at the nook or bend', alternatively if it is an abbreviation of *Crookes* it may be a locative surname from Crookes in Sheffield. However, due to the presence of many surnames with unabbreviated '-er' endings in the document and presuming the scribe would be consistent, I have concluded that he is probably only abbreviating '-e'.
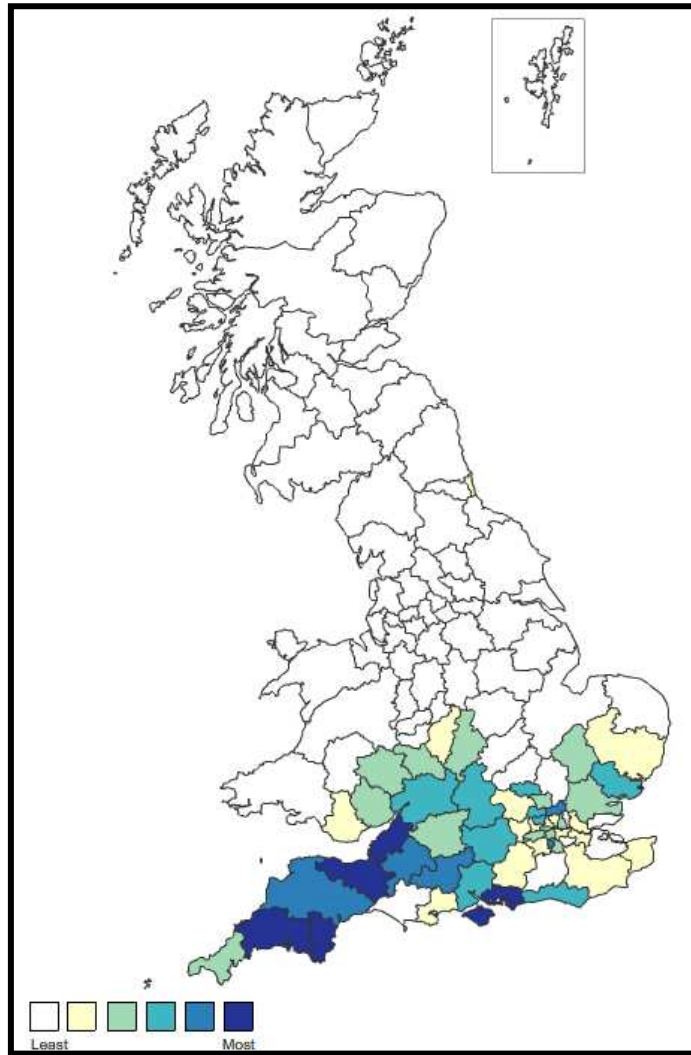
In spite of these difficulties, I have identified and organised all but five of the surnames in the document. The spread is illustrated below:

Of the sixty-three surnames in the document, thirty-five can be identified as occupational . This is extraordinary when locative names are usually the most common. The occupations also provide information about the type of area the document comes from. They mainly concern the manufacture of goods such as pots, baskets, food and especially textiles, which suggests that the area may be one of trading, near to a market or large city. Furthermore, there are no pastoral workers such as farmers implying that the area is urban rather than rural.

Such occupational terms also make it possible to locate the document more precisely due to their regional distribution. McKinley identifies the surname Deigher meaning 'dyer' as 'found mostly in the south and south west of England and parts of the west Midlands'[6] as Lister was used to mean 'dyer' in the North East, and Dexter in the South East. The map below illustrates the southern distribution of Dyer in 1881:

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[6] McKinley, R. (1990). *A History of British Surnames*, p.144.

Similarly, Webbe meaning 'weaver' occurs in my corpus and originated 'in the south of England, the south west, and the south midlands'[7] whilst Webster was used for weaving in the North and East. Tanner was also the common name for tanning in the south, whereas Barker occurs for the occupation instead in the North East. This evidence all suggests that we are dealing with a document from the south of England or the south midlands.

The dialect of some of the surnames also supports this assumption. Reaney comments that Prust from Old English *prēost* is a southern dialect form, preserving the 'South-Western and West Midlands'[8] Middle English rounded vowel '*u*'. Likewise, Shawe from Old English *sceaga* may have been spelled *Shay* if it were a Yorkshire dialect form or *Shave* if it were a Devonshire form.

The patronyms in the document are also remarkable as they are all unmarked forms with no affixes. McKinley explains such patronyms are rare in the north of England[9] where patronyms often end with the suffix *–son*. Equally, *-son* types are rare in the south and absent in this document altogether, reinforcing the notion that the document is from the south of England.
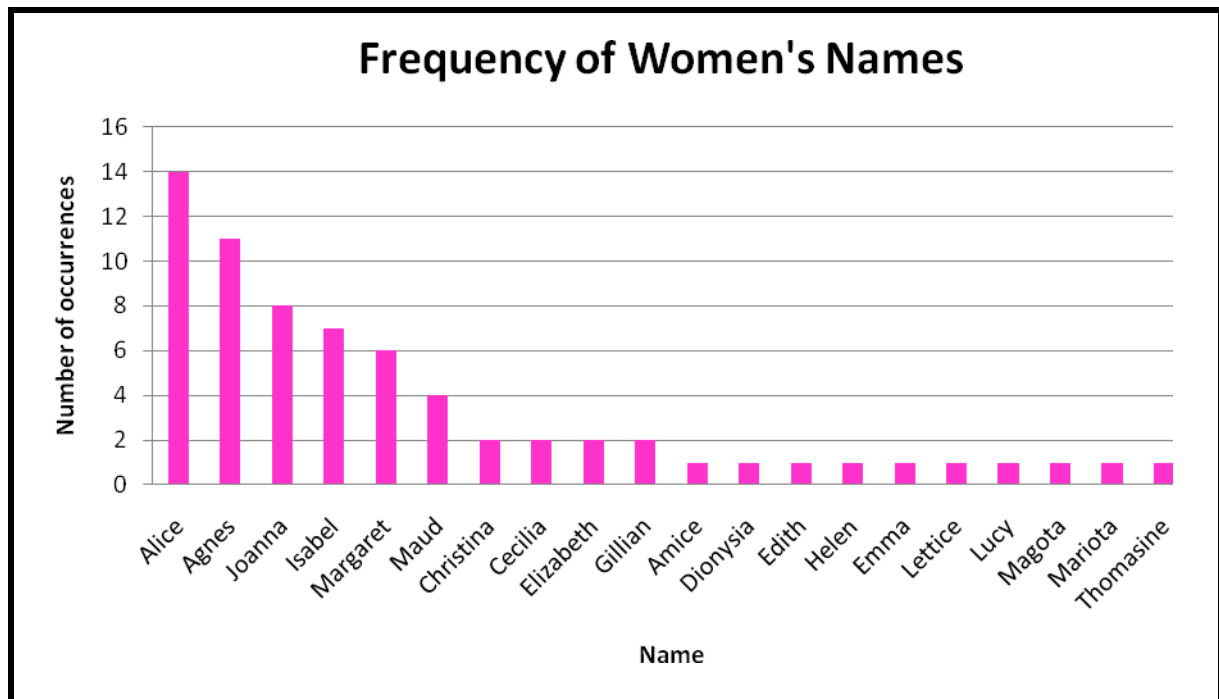
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[7] Ibid.

[8] Reaney, P. (2005). *Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames [DES]*, p.262.

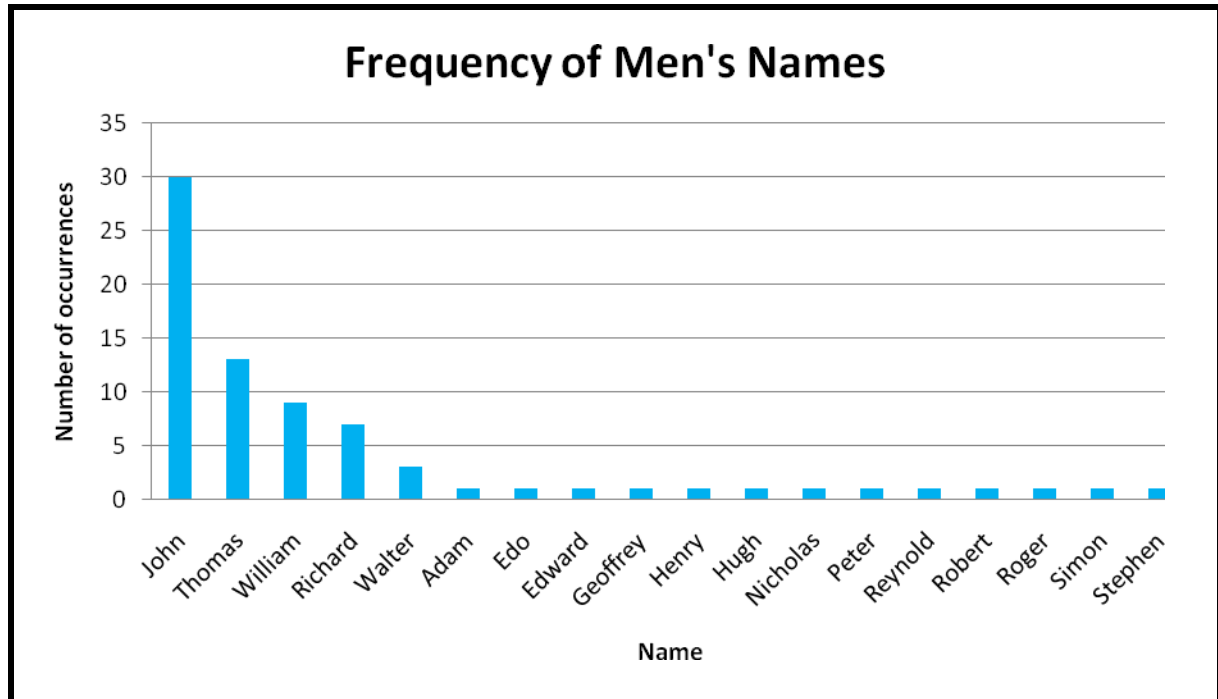[9] McKinley, R. (1990). *A History of British Surnames*, p.105.

The locative surnames also provide important evidence about the document's origin. There are 10 locative surnames and of these, one is from a place-name in Berkshire, one from Gloucestershire and two from Oxfordshire. Although there are surnames from place-names elsewhere such as Nottinghamshire, this concentration around the south Midlands and Oxfordshire in particular, suggests the document may originate from that area.

Analysis of Given Names

There are one hundred and forty-four people recorded in my document but only thirty-eight different given names. As such, many people have the same given names. Of the sixty-eight women, fourteen are named Alice (Latinized as *Alicia*), eleven Agnes, eight Joanna, seven Isabel (*Isabella*), six Margaret (*Margareta*) and four Maud (Latinized as *Matill'*). Next follow Christina, Cecilia, Elizabeth (*Elizabetha*) and Gillian (*Juliana*), which each occur twice. Only occurring once are Dionysia (*Dionisia*), Edith (*Editha*), Helen (*Elena*), Emma, Lettice (*Leticia*), Lucy (*Lucia*), Magota, Mariota and Thomasine (*Thomasina*). The following bar chart illustrates the frequency of the women's names:

The spread of the men's names is even more interesting. Of the seventy-five men, thirty are named John (Latinized as *Johanne*) which is forty percent. Whilst Thomas (*Thoma*) is the second most common name, it only occurs thirteen times. Nine men are called William (*Willelmo*), seven Richard (*Ricardo*) and three Walter (*Waltero*). Adam (*Ada*), Edo, Edward (*Edwardo*), Geoffrey (*Galfrido*), Henry (*Henrico*), Hugh (*Hugone*), Nicholas (*Nicholao*), Peter (*Petro*), Reynold (*Reginaldo*), Robert (*Roberto*), Roger (*Rogero*), Simon (*Simone*) and Stephen (*Stephano*) each occur only once. The bar chart below illustrates the frequency of the men's names:

Frequency of Men's Names

[Bar chart titled "Frequency of Men's Names". Y-axis: "Number of occurrences" ranging 0 to 35. X-axis: "Name". Bars: John = 30, Thomas = 13, William = 9, Richard = 7, Walter = 3, Adam = 1, Edo = 1, Edward = 1, Geoffrey = 1, Henry = 1, Hugh = 1, Nicholas = 1, Peter = 1, Reynold = 1, Robert = 1, Roger = 1, Simon = 1, Stephen = 1]

The graphs show that the women's names are much more evenly distributed with ten occurring more than once, whereas the spread of the men's names is concentrated around just five. Furthermore, there were twenty different names used for sixty-eight women but only eighteen for seventy-five men, which suggests that there were more women's names in circulation during the period. Such findings are supported by Richard McKinley who claims that during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries 'new male personal names had virtually ceased to be created'[10] while female ones had not. Leslie Dunkling's work illustrates that even four hundred years later fifteen of the eighteen men's names in my document were still in the top fifty names but only nine out of the twenty women's names were, as new female names came into existence[11].

There are few given names of native English origin, just Edith, Edward and Edo. Edo is probably either a hypocorism or a scribal abbreviation of a longer heroic dithematic name such as Edward, Edmund or Edwin. Either way, the first element is Old English *ēad* meaning 'prosperity' as is the case in both Edith and Edward.

The majority of the women's names are from Biblical languages, such as Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew. The Biblical names include Thomasine from Aramaic, Agnes, Dionysia and Helen from Greek, and Elizabeth, Isabel, Joanna and Margaret from Hebrew. Mariota is likely to be a hypocorism of Mary, making it also a Biblical name of Hebrew origin. Of the women's Biblical names, three are phrasal with Joanna originating from *Johanan* meaning 'God is gracious' and Elizabeth and Isabel from *Elisheva* meaning 'God is my oath'.
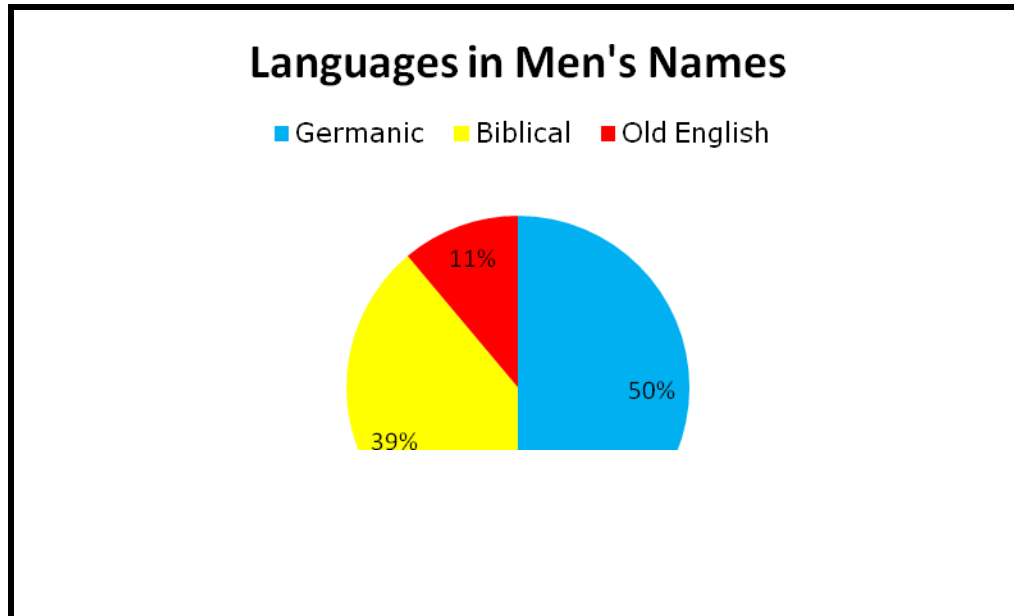
On the contrary, Biblical names do not constitute the majority of the men's names. Only seven of the men's names are from Biblical languages: Thomas is from Aramaic, Nicholas, Stephen and Peter are from Greek, and John and Simon are from Hebrew. Of the men's Biblical names, only John is phrasal and is from the same root as Joanna. Instead, most of men's names are of Germanic origin brought to England by the Normans. Such names include Henry, Hugh, Geoffrey, Reynold, Richard, Robert, Roger, Walter and William. In fact, these male Germanic names introduced after the Conquest were so popular that they sometimes replaced Old English native forms, as is the case with Walter which replaced

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[10] McKinley, R. (1990). *A History of British Surnames*. England: Longman, p.94.
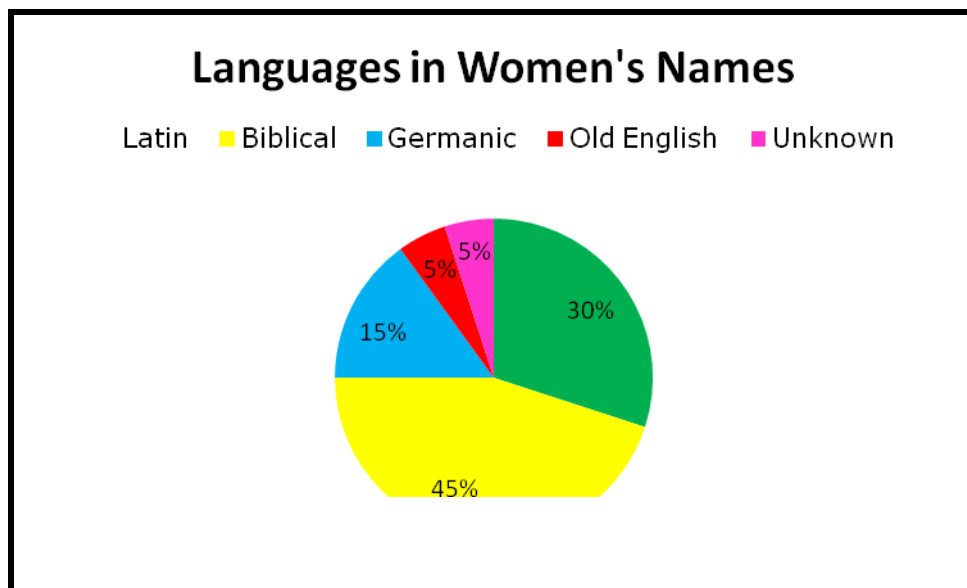[11] Dunkling, L. (1986). *The Guinness Book of Names*. England: Facts on File, pp.40-4.

Wealdhere, Robert which replaced *Hreodbeorht* and Roger which replaced *Hrōðgār*. McKinley believes such popularity may have owed to the prestige attached to the names of the invaders[12]. Nevertheless, only Alice, Emma and Maud of the women's names are of Germanic origin and none superseded existing Old English names.

This concludes the languages in the men's names and the following pie chart maps the spread more clearly.

Languages in Men's Names

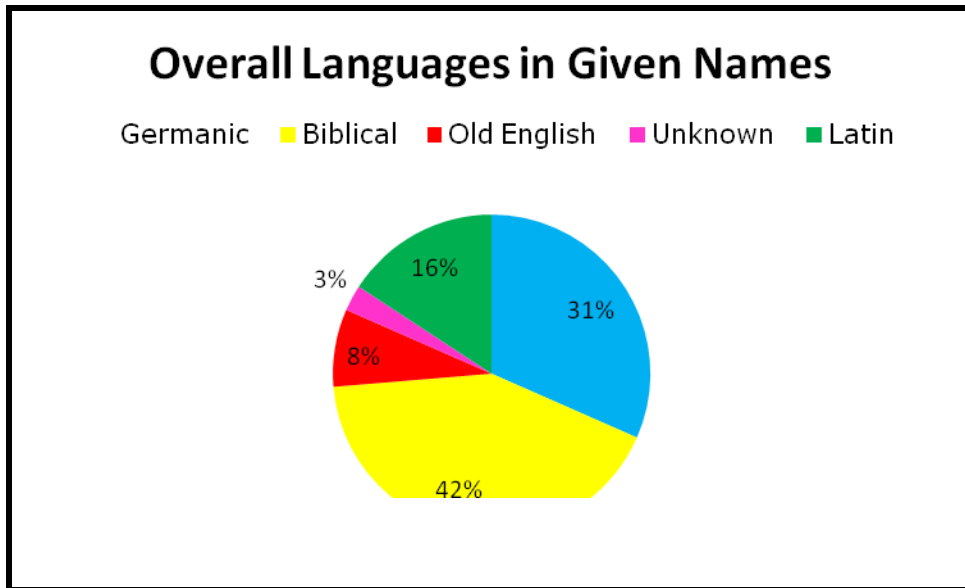■ Germanic   ■ Biblical   ■ Old English

- 11%
- 50%
- 39%

However, Latin also occurs in the women's names as Christina, Cecilia, Gillian, Amice, Lettice and Lucy are all of Latin origin. The pie chart below illustrates the spread of languages in the women's names. I have categorised Magota as of unknown origin as I have been unable to be certain of its etymology. I suspect, however, it may be a hypocorism of Margery or Margaret.

Languages in Women's Names

Latin   ■ Biblical   ■ Germanic   ■ Old English   ■ Unknown

- 5%
- 5%
- 5%
- 30%
- 15%
- 45%

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[12] McKinley, R. (1990). A History of British Surnames, p.94.

The final pie chart below shows the proportions of languages in both male and female names combined. There are no names of Scandinavian origin, which supports my earlier notion that the document originates from the South West of England where the Vikings had the smallest presence and influence.

Overall Languages in Given Names

Germanic ■ Biblical ■ Old English ■ Unknown ■ Latin

3%   16%

31%

8%

42%

There are four surnames derived from given names in my document: Benet, Brian, Mayhew and Water. They are all patronyms and all from different languages. Benet is from Latin *Benedictus* meaning 'blessed' and Brian is from the Celtic Breton language meaning 'high' or 'noble'. Mayhew is from Matthew, Hebrew *Mattathia*, a phrasal name meaning 'gift of God' and Water was the common medieval pronunciation of Germanic Walter. McKinley explains that patronyms will reflect the given names in use in the community[13] but interestingly, my document does not contain anyone with the given names Benedict, Brian or Matthew, although Walter is recorded three times. This suggests that the names may have already become hereditary with the original bearers of the name having either died or moved away.

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[13] Ibid, p.92.

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