



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

Lucy Hayes

The symbol ^ means that other possible meanings will be discussed in the name summary. To avoid footnoting every explanation, I will refer to 'DES' throughout for *A Dictionary of English Surnames* and 'OED' for *Oxford English Dictionary*. Where DES is not cited, no information was available.

Occupational

Barbor: 'barber', from Anglo-French *barbour* (DES *Barber*).

Biker: 'beekeeper', from Old English *bēocere*, Middle English *biker* (DES *Bicker*).^

Botiller: could be from Old French *bouteiller*, 'servant in charge of the wine cellar' (DES *Butler*), or from Old French *bouteille*, 'bottle', a metonymic for bottle maker (DES *Botler*).

Bowyar: probably from Middle English *bowyere*, 'maker of bows' (DES *Bowyer*).

Brewer, Bruwer (x2): 'brewer', from Middle English *brewere*, 'to brew' (DES *Brewer*).^

Burgeys: could be from Old French *burgeis*, 'inhabitant of a borough', strictly speaking a freeman possessing municipal rights (DES *Burges*).

Capper: 'a maker of caps', from Old English *cæppe*, 'cap' (DES *Capper*).

Carpunter: presumably from Anglo-French *carpenter*, 'carpenter' (DES *Carpenter*).

atte Chaumbre: from Middle English *chaumbre*, 'room (in a house)', with **atte**. In this form it is likely to be a person in the employ of the exchequer, the 'cameram', overseen by the Chamberlain, 'camerarius' (DES *Chambers*).

Cordwaner (x2): 'shoemaker', from Anglo-French *cordewaner* (DES *Cordner*).

Coupere: 'maker or repairer of wooden casks, baskets or tubs', from Middle English *couper* (DES *Cooper*).

Fullar: similar to Fuller, from Old English *fullere*, 'a fuller of cloth' (DES *Fuller*).

Gardyner: similar to Gardener from Old Norman French *gardinier**, 'gardener' (DES *Gardener*).

Glovar: probably Glover, from Old English *glōf*, 'glove' with suffix, 'a maker of gloves' (DES *Glover*).

Gurdeler: 'girdle-maker', from Old English *girdle*, 'girdle' (DES *Girdler*).

Kembester: 'a comber of wool or flax', feminine form of *Kembere*, from Old English *cemban*, 'to comb' (DES *Kempster* and *Kember*).

Midwyf: 'Midwife': first date in OED is c. 1300 for *mid-wyues*, possible antedating as it seems likely the occupational term would have existed independently before it became a by- or surname.

Muleward: likely to be a variation of Millward, 'miller', often spelt with variations on the first vowel (DES *Millward*).

Ostlyer: 'one who receives, lodges or entertains guests, especially in a monastery', from Old French *ostelier/hostelier* (DES *Ostler*).

Prentic' (x2): 'apprentice', from Old French *aprentis*. However this could also be a nickname (DES *Prentice*).

Skourer: ‘scout’, from Middle English *skouerours* (OED *scourer*); antedating, as first example in OED is c.1400.

Spicer, Spysier: ‘a dealer in spices; an apothecary or druggist’, from Old French *espicier/especier* (DES *Spicer*).

Spynnester: ‘a spinner of wool, yarn’. Female version of Spinner, from Old English *spinnan*, ‘to spin’ (DES *Spinner*).

Strengar: from Old English *streng*, ‘string, cord’ with added suffix, meaning ‘a maker of strings for bows’ (DES *Stringer*). However it could also be from Middle English *strenger/strengre*, ‘stronger’ (OED *strenger*).

Tailour, Taylour: ‘tailor’, from Anglo-French *taillour* (DES *Taylor*).

Locative surnames - Topographic

de Bergh’: ‘dweller by the hill’, from Old English *beorg* ‘hill’, with **de** (DES *Bergh*).

Dane: ‘valley’, from Old English *denu*. Could also be toponymic, as there are places called Dane in Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Kent and Sussex (DES *Dane*).

atte Gleve: **atte** implies a locative name. **Gleve** is from Middle English *gleyve/gleve*, ‘lance’, which could a spearman, or the winner of a race in which a lance was set up as a winning post (DES *Gleave*). As a locative surname, it could be someone who lived at the place where such races were run.

Grene: from Old English *grēne*, ‘green’, usually meaning residence near the village green. Could sometimes be a nickname meaning young or immature, or one who wore green frequently (DES *Green*).

Hethhe: could be from Old English *hæþ*, Middle English *heth*, meaning heath (DES *Heath*).

Prestwode: ‘dweller by the priest’s wood’, from Old English *preōst* and *wōd*, or from Prestwood (Buckinghamshire, Sussex) (DES *Priestwood*).

Locative surnames – Toponymic

Brenchesley: could be from Brenchley, Kent.¹

Burford: from a place of that name in Devon, Oxfordshire, Shropshire or Surrey (DES *Burford*).

Caumbrugge: similar to Caumbrigge, from Cambridge (DES *Cambridge*).

de Clopton’: from Clopton (Suffolk, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire or Worcestershire) or Clapton (Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, Somerset, Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Middlesex or Avon) (DES *Clapton*).²

Cornewayle: from Cornwall (DES *Cornwall*).

Derby: from Derby (DES *Darby*).

Hidenev: there is a record of a Hidenev in East Sussex, in a document from 1513, though it seems the place-name has now been lost.³ The document references a road running from Willingdon, Sussex, through Leygate to Foulride to the north and Hidenev to the east. There is a Foulride Green to the north of Willingdon but no record of either Leygate or Hidenev, although there is a ‘Hide Hollow’.⁴

Imbryngale: end syllable could be Old English *halh* meaning ‘residence within a nook, recess or valley’ (DES *Hale*), implying a place-name. No evidence could be found of this place; perhaps from a lost settlement.

¹ National Trust Names [online resource], accessed at <http://www.nationaltrustnames.org.uk/> on 22 March 2010

² *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* [online resource] ed. A. D. Mills, accessed at www.oxfordreference.com on 18 March 2010

³ The Will of Agnes Thetcher of Southover, held in the East Sussex National Archives, accessed at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=179-amsx&cid=26-17#26-17> on 19 March 2010

⁴ ‘The Gazetteer of British Place Names’ [online resource], accessed at www.gazetteer.co.uk on 19 March 2010

Leverinton': from Leverington, Cambridgeshire.⁵

Malton': from Malton, Yorkshire (DES *Malton*).

Milford': from Milford (Derbyshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Yorkshire) or Long Melford (Suffolk) (DES *Milford*).

Newerk': from Newark, Nottinghamshire or Cambridgeshire.⁶

Okeley': from one of the many places of this name (DES *Oakley*).

Poliley': last syllable could be from Old English *lēah*, 'clearing' – a common element in place-names. Could not find any information for the full name; possibly from lost settlement.

Runham': from Runham, Norfolk.⁷

Swagham': perhaps from Swaffham in Norfolk or Cambridgeshire (DES *Swaffham*).

Turkesey': could be from Torksey, Lincolnshire.⁸

Whitwell': from Whitwell (Derbyshire, Dorset, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Rutland, Westmoreland, Isle of Wight) (DES *Whitwell*).

Wynteryngham': from Wintringham (Huntingdonshire, East Riding of Yorkshire) or Winteringham (Lincolnshire) (DES *Wintringham*).

Nicknames

Bridde': closest to Bride, from Old English *bridd*, 'bird' (DES *Bird*).[^]

Floure': similar to Flour, from Middle English *flur/flour*, 'flower' (DES *Flower*), as a nickname.[^]

Glenare': could be from Old French *glener*, 'to glean', meaning to gather the grain left behind by the reapers (DES *Glenant*).[^]

Hendman': 'handsome, courteous man', from Middle English *hende/hendy, mann* (DES *Hendyman*). Was also used as a given name, so this could be a patronymic.

Lyghtfote': from Old English *lēoht* 'light' and *fōt* 'foot', meaning 'one with a light, springy step, speedy runner' (DES *Lightfoot*).

Wigge': could be a nickname derived from Old English *wicga*, 'beetle' (DES *Wigg*).[^]

Patronyms

Davy': French popular form of 'David' (DES *Davey*).

Mannyng': from Old English *Manning*, a male name (DES *Manning*).

Samuell': from Hebrew meaning 'name of God' (DES *Samuel*).

Toby': vernacular form of Tobiah, Hebrew name meaning 'Jehovah is good' (DES *Tobey*).

Unsure

Pentrer': various Welsh place names begin *Pentre'r*, such as *Pentre'r Felin* (Denbighshire) and *Pentre'r Beirdd* (Montgomeryshire).⁹ However, this addition of the Welsh definite article does not seem close enough to *Pentrer'*; no closer suggestion was found.

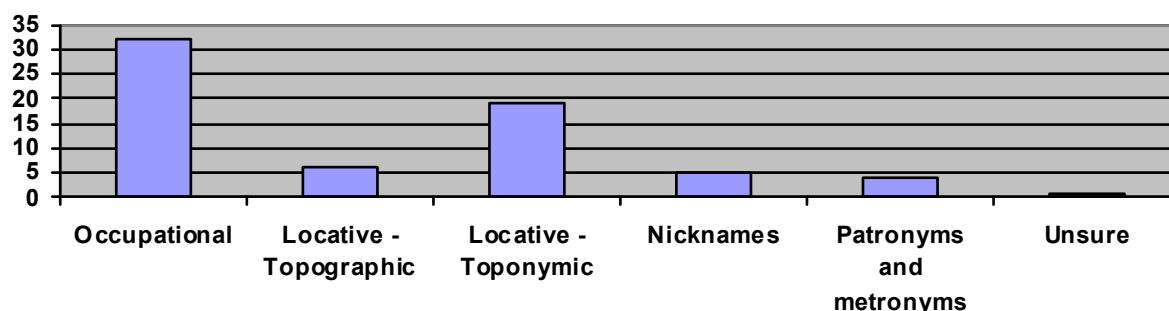
⁵ *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* [online resource]

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ 'The Gazetteer of British Place Names' [online resource]

Summary analysis of surnames**Fig. 1: Distribution of surnames by category**

Occupational is noticeably the largest category with 31 names. Occupational surnames were already common in 14th-century England. The surnames shown here uphold McKinley's observation that their trades "were very widely practised... yet were not exercised by a large number of people in any one place", for example *Carpunter* and *Couperre*; a village would be unlikely to have more than one or two.¹⁰ It is interesting that duplication of names only occurs in the occupational category; there are two each of *Brewer*, *Cordwaner*, *Prentic*, *Spicer* and *Tailour*, with minor variations in spelling. This emphasises the frequency of occupational surnames, or perhaps that those with such surnames have families with more tax-payers.

Brewer/Bruwer also held toponymic possibilities: *Bruyère*, *Calvados* or *Bruera*, Cheshire, from the topographic Old French *bruyère*, 'heath'.¹¹ *Biker* also could be from *Bicker*, Lincolnshire.¹² However from the Middle English *brewere* and *biker*, the spellings of both surnames implied the occupational meaning.

Nicknames were less likely to be hereditary; most early examples "were personal and died with the man".¹³ Nicknames are often harder to understand than occupational or locative names; within this category there were a few less certain names. *Floure*, for example, was also common as a woman's name, implying that it could be a metronymic. There was also the possibility that it is an occupational surname, meaning a maker of flour; either a metonymic or a hypocoristic version of a name such as *fflourmakere*.¹⁴

Concerning *Bridde*, 'bird', Reaney notes the curious frequency of such a "vague, indeterminate, generic term" as a surname, but comments that during this period it was metonymic with 'sweetheart' and other such terms, which may have contributed to its frequency.¹⁵ It is also suggested that the 'Bird' variants could be metonymics for bird-catcher.¹⁶

The least certain of the nicknames was *Wigge*. It could also have been a metonymic of *Wigger*, from Middle English *wygge*, 'wedge, wedge-shaped cakes', meaning a baker. Another option was that it is a truncated patronymic from *Wigor*, a common peasant's name in 13th century Suffolk.¹⁷

¹⁰ McKinley, Richard *A History of British Surnames* (London and New York: Longman 1990), p.133

¹¹ *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, eds. Reaney, P. H. and Wilson, R. M. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958 repr. 2005), p.63

¹² *Ibid.*, p.42

¹³ Reaney, P. H. *The Origin of English Surnames* (London: Routledge 1967), p.218

¹⁴ *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, p.172

¹⁵ Reaney, *The Origin of English Surnames*, p.227

¹⁶ *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, p.45

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.491

Glenare, from ‘gleaner’, could theoretically have been an occupational name. However gleaning is a very limited occupation, only possible during one season of the year; also, occupational names concerning farming are scarce, due to their inadequacy as a distinctive marker in fourteenth-century Britain.¹⁸ Thus it seemed more likely as a nickname, perhaps for someone particularly parsimonious.

Interestingly, the feminine surnames are all the names of women; Margereta Kembester, Agneta Midewyf, and Matill’ (presumably Matilda) Spynvester. This could imply that at this stage the surnames were in fact by-names, indicating the women’s professions. However, this is clearly not the case with the other names, as many of the men with occupational names have different occupations listed as their professions. In the south of England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, feminine occupational names were still mainly the surnames or by-names of women, although they had begun to be used as the names of men by about 1200.¹⁹

All of the patronymics are derived from first names without any suffix or prefix added, except possibly *Samuell*. This could indicate that these names have been hereditary for some time, as the great majority of surnames that simply replicated first names occurred before 1200.²⁰ These names also give an indication of the location; this form of patronymic was infrequent in northern counties, where use of the suffix ‘son’ was more common.²¹

There are 25 locative names, making them the second largest surname group. Whilst I have separated them in the graph, topographic and toponymic names occasionally overlap, as many place-names are based around topographic features. For example, Newark comes from Old English *nāwe*, new, and *weorc*, ‘fortification’.²² However I placed it in the toponymic category due to its frequency as a place-name. Locative surnames are among the oldest hereditary names, and were very common by the twelfth century. They are sometimes hard to identify, as place-names are liable to have changed; as surnames, this is particularly likely if the bearer migrated to another part of the country.²³ Reaney comments that locative surnames often indicate the place of birth or origin; “a convenient means of identifying a newcomer”.²⁴ This implies that the place-names in the document are unlikely to be from areas close by. Conversely, McKinley writes, “the history of most locative names shows a tendency to remain in an area around the place of origin”. He comments that locative surnames that have become dispersed are “exceptional”.²⁵ The surnames here seem to show a tendency towards the southeast, with some (*Derby, Malton, Runham, Turkesey*) close to the east midlands. *Cornewayle* and *Burford* (if Devon rather than Surrey) indicate the southwest, though overall there is a stronger southeast tendency.

Other surnames can also serve to indicate the origin of the document. *Fullar* is particularly distinctive of the south and east; in the north and the west midlands, the occupation was known as ‘walking’ (*Walker*), and in the southwest tucking (*Tucker*).²⁶ *Tailour* and *Taylour* also indicate a southern document, as northern dialects often spelled the word *taliour* or *tayliour*.²⁷ *Muleward*, as a variation of *Millward*, indicates the south and south-west of England, as in the east midlands, East Anglia and the north *Milner* was far more common.²⁸ *Brewer* is the more common form in the southwest, whilst *Brewster* prevails

¹⁸ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p.133

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.140

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.97

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.105, 112

²² *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* [online resource]

²³ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p.54

²⁴ Reaney, *The Origin of English Surnames*, p.36

²⁵ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p.69

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.143

²⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online resource], accessed at www.oed.com on 20 March 2010

²⁸ Fransson quoted in *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, p.310

in the northeast and east coast.²⁹ A consultation of the 1881 census reveals some anomalies (*Capper*, *Cordner* and *Lightfoot* are mostly northern, and *Samuel* is Welsh) but there is an overall trend towards the south-east.³⁰ The evidence indicates this is definitely a southern document, likely to be south-east. This supports McKinley's statement that toponymic surnames tend to stay close to their origin. It is likely that some were used, as Reaney states, to identify newcomers, for example *Cornewayle*, as there is no indication of Cornish influence in the document, and the south-eastern toponymics probably marked out newcomers from nearby settlements. Considering McClure's research on medieval migration, showing the tendency for most migratory movements to be within a small area, it seems likely that this is a south-eastern document, and the toponymics mark out newcomers mostly from within the same geographical region.³¹

Survey of first names

The first names are recorded in Latin, as was customary in fourteenth century official documents, although their English equivalents are clear.³² The English versions of many of the names are still in use today. In Fig. 2, first names are separated into seven categories; Germanic-origin names brought to England by the Norman invasion, biblical names derived from Greek, Latin-origin names brought by the Normans, non-biblical popular saints' names, Greek then Spanish names brought by Normans, and finally names deriving from Old English. The saints names are from various linguistic origins but classed together due to assertions by Hanks and Hodges that their popularity in the Middle Ages was due to that particular saint.³³ In the interests of simplicity I have taken Greek as the language of the Bible, so this category includes names such as John, of Hebrew origin, and Thomas, of Aramaic origin.³⁴ As we can see, the Norman invasion had a huge influence on the English name-stock. Even biblical names had been rare in England prior to 1066, but were already in use in France at that period.³⁵ Names derived from Old English are conspicuous by the fact that only two, *Edmundus* and *Godlef*, remain.

There are fewer women than men mentioned in this document, and the majority of female names listed are not with surnames but "ux' eius" or "s' eiusdem". As this is a fiscal document that is likely to deal with taxation, mainly the heads of household have their full names listed, accounting for the lack of females with surnames. It is interesting to note that naming after non-biblical saints is predominantly feminine, except for *Dyonys*', classed as 'uncertain', as it could be either *Dyonysus* or *Dyonysia*. This Latin form of the modern 'Dennis' or 'Denise' comes from the Greek *Dionisius*, a name borne by several early Christian saints (Hanks and Hodges hold this as the more likely reason for naming in the Middle Ages, rather than the legendary Greek demi-God).³⁶ The practise of naming after saints was similarly spread to England by the Norman invasion.³⁷

²⁹ National Trust Names [online resource]

³⁰ National Trust Names [online resource]

³¹ McClure, Peter 'Patterns of Migration in the late Middle Ages: The Evidence of English Place-Name Surnames', in *The Economic History Review*, vol. 32 (1979) 167-181, p.176

³² Redmonds, *George Names and History; People, Places and Things* (London: Hambledon, 2004), p.111

³³ All information from *A Dictionary of First Names*, Hanks, Patrick and Hodges, Flavia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

³⁴ Redmonds, *Names and History; People, Places and Things*, p.105

³⁵ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p.92

³⁶ *A Dictionary of First Names* [electronic resource], eds. Hanks, Patrick, Hardcastle, Kate and Hodges, Flavia, 2nd edn. accessed at <http://www.oxfordreference.com>

³⁷ Nevins, Albert *A Saint for your Name* 2nd edn.(Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), p.9

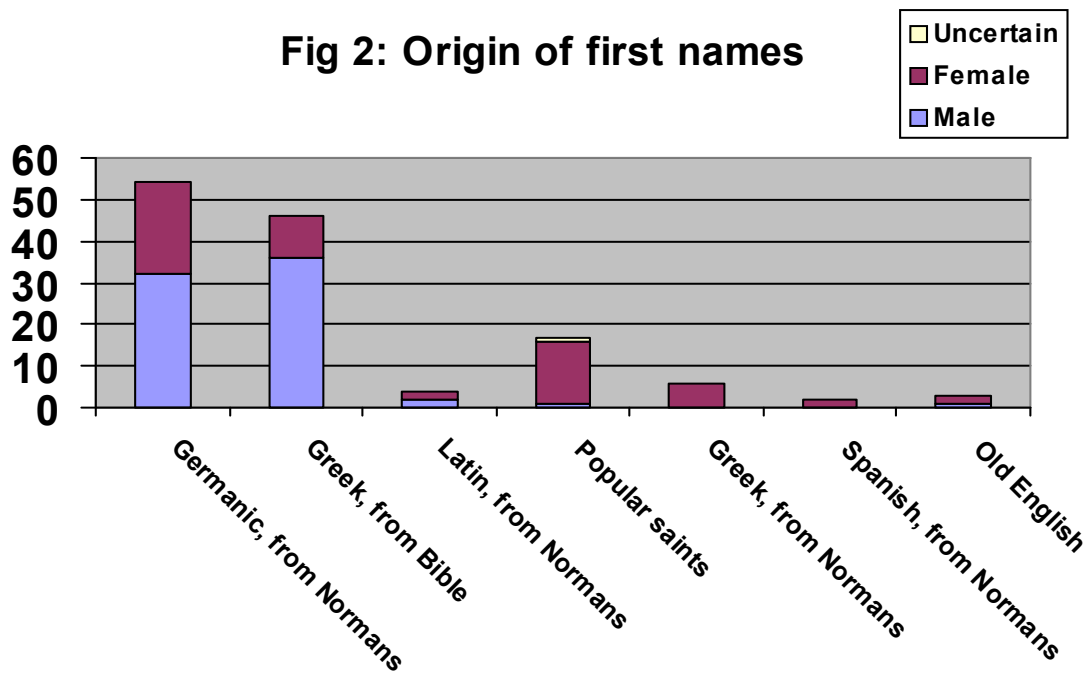


Fig. 3: Frequency of male first names

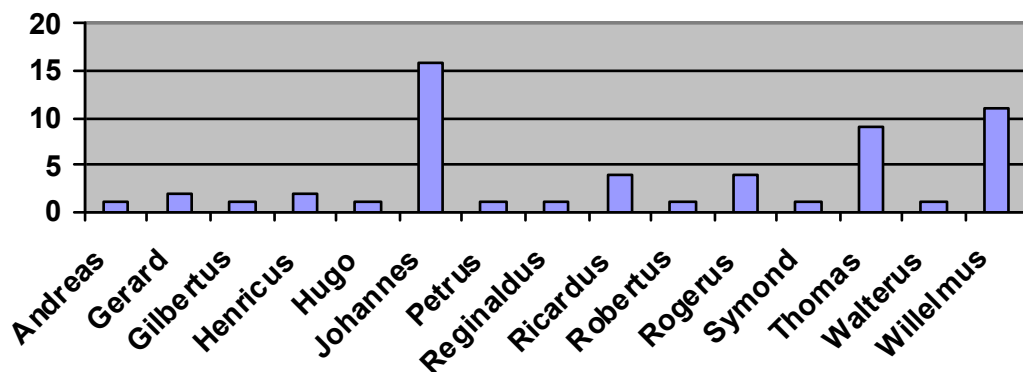


Fig. 3 shows that while there were 71 men named, only 20 names were used (I have classed Gerard and the pet form, Gerkyne, as one name).

McKinley comments that by around 1250 “it became very usual to have several men in one village with the same personal name, for this favoured the increasing use of by-names”.³⁸ Hanks and Hodges’ assertions that John is “the most perennially popular of all Christian names”, and William “the most successful of all the Germanic names introduced to England by the Normans” are definitely supported by this data.³⁹ This limited variation, and frequency of certain names, could be partially due to the general practice of naming children after one of their godparents, which would gradually narrow the naming spectrum, especially as a single person may be godparent to numerous children.⁴⁰

³⁸ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p.94

³⁹ *A Dictionary of First Names*, Hanks, Patrick and Hodges, Flavia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.180, 339

⁴⁰ Redmonds, *Names and History; People, Places and Things*, pp.107, 110

McKinley comments that patronyms “depend on the body of personal names currently in use in that community”.⁴¹ Interestingly, the patronyms (*Manning, Tobey, Davy* and *Samuell*) are not evident as first names. However this is a small cross-section of the community, and it is likely that others would still have been called these names; except for Manning, they are still in use today.

I could not find any information for the name *Arage*, and while *Milsenta* could be a feminine form of ‘Miles’, from Norman, I was not certain enough on this point to include the name. These two names have been left out of my summaries.

⁴¹ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p. 90

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Will of Agnes Thetcher of Southover, widow **AMS6326/17 1513**, in the National Archives, accessed at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=179-amsx&cid=26-17#26-17