

# English Origins and Sources II

By George Redmonds

Dr David Hey is probably best known for the books he has produced on different aspects of English local and family history, most recently his excellent guides and reference works<sup>1</sup>. Less well known, but deserving of wider publicity, is the work he has done with The Names Project Group, now under his direction at Sheffield University. The group had its origins in a class provided by the Division of Adult Continuing Education tutored by Dr Hey and Professor Widdowson. The number of active participants in this informal research group has varied over the years, ranging between ten and twenty, but since its foundation they have been responsible for several publications that are important sources for genealogists and family historians, particularly for those with ancestors in South Yorkshire.

For genealogists with a general interest in surname studies the group has produced a booklet that examines the origins and history of many of the most characteristic names in and around Sheffield. It includes, for example, articles on Shirtcliffe, Revell, Stacy, Newbold, Dungworth and Scholey, all family names significant in the seventeenth-century settlement of New England and Pennsylvania<sup>2</sup>. Also included are several important surnames that have not been dealt with in any of the major English reference publications.

Another rich seventeenth-century source is the group's database on the masters and apprentices in the manufacture of cutlery, an industry for which Sheffield was once internationally famous. When a boy was apprenticed to a member of the Company of Cutlers his name was entered in the records, together with the name, place of residence, and occupation of both his father and his master. There were also details of the length of time he was expected to serve and the date when he finally became a freeman of the company. These records were originally printed in 1906, with the data arranged in alphabetical order of apprentices names, but because so much valuable information was "buried in the text" it was decided to computerize all the records, a task that has been completed. The lists published in the group's booklet provide the masters' names in alphabetical order for the period 1624-99, and an appendix names over two hundred cutlers for the years 1614-15<sup>3</sup>. The fact that almost 4,000 apprentices' names are listed gives some idea of the scope of the records. Again there are many names in the lists, in addition to those already quoted, that important to American genealogists, including, for example, Backhouse, Bingham, Hancock and Fretwell. These two publications can now be studied in comparison with the Hearth Tax Returns for South Yorkshire, published by the group in 1991<sup>4</sup>.

More recently the group produced a valuable and interesting source for the townships in the Wapentake or 'Hundred' of Staincross, a district that covers the upper valleys of the rivers Don and Dearne and includes the important towns of Barnsley and Penistone<sup>5</sup>. The new publication provides a complete transcript of the militia lists of 1806 and has a valuable introduction, which discusses the accuracy of the lists and the problems associated with their use. It also has a note on similar publications and provides details of useful guides to militia lists in general.

These Staincross lists are a prime source of information about more than 3,000 men a generation or so before the first census returns, and they have been prepared for publication with family historians very much in mind. They demonstrate how individuals can be identified, for details of each man's age and occupation are provided and, in the case of married men, the number of children is also given. There were, for example, nine John Taylors in Staincross in 1806, two of whom had three-child families. *However*, John Taylor of Thurlstone was a cloth dresser, thirty years old and blind in one eye, whereas John Taylor of Cawthorne was a cordwainer, thirty- two years old and 'poor. ' The group has carefully analyzed this data, which again has been computerized, in conjunction with other sources. This approach allowed the editors to make perceptive comments about the movement of families and individuals in an area much greater than the Wapentake itself. The published returns are presented in tabular form, first by township then in alphabetical order of surnames.

David Hey's most recent work on names has not been confined to organizing research on the Names Project, and two additional articles that may not have come to the attention of North American researchers should be mentioned. The first appears as the third part of a recent town history. It concerns Mahlon Stacy, a well-documented Sheffield Quaker

who left Handsworth in 1678 and settled on the banks of the Delaware. The article comments on the use of the unusual given name Mahlon, tracing it to the kith and kin of the Stacys over a 200-year period, and also examines the close-knit Quaker community in Handsworth, as well as the status of numerous families from that area who transported “themselves to an island in America called west Jarsay” in the 1670s!<sup>6</sup>

Finally mention must be made of a groundbreaking article on the surnames of Staffordshire, a county which has so far not been written about in the English surnames series<sup>7</sup>. David Hey first of all draws our attention to several important sources, both published and unpublished, including the work of Michael Paffard<sup>8</sup> and Edgar Tooth<sup>9</sup> and a “truly remarkable and unique source” that lists over 51,000 names in the Archdeaconry of Stafford<sup>10</sup>. In looking at the origins and distribution of such distinctive surnames as Salt, Wedgewood, Tellwright, Eardley, and Wooliscroft, the author displays an exemplary technique, one that all genealogists interested in surname studies would be well advised to follow. The maps and statistics that accompany the article add substance to David Hey’s comment that “one has only to dip into the hearth tax returns for different parts of England to realise just how strong were the regional patterns of surname distribution three centuries ago.”

## Footnotes

1. D. Hey, *The Oxford Guide to Family History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); D. Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
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3. D. Hey, ed., *The Origins of One Hundred Sheffield Surnames* (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1992)
4. D. Hey and J. Unwin, eds., *The Cutlers of Hallamshire, 1624-1699* (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1992).
5. D. Hey, ed., *The Hearth Tax Returns for South Yorkshire, Ladyday 1672* (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1991).
6. D. Hey, *The Militia Men of the Barnsley District, 1806* (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1998).
7. D. Hey, “Mahlon Stacy: An Early Sheffield Emigrant,” *Aspects of Sheffield*, ed. M. Jones (Sheffield: Wharnccliffe Publishing, 1997).
8. D. Hey, *The Distinctive Surnames of Staffordshire, The Nineteenth Earl Lecture*, Staffordshire Studies 10 (1998).
9. M. Paffard, “North Staffordshire Names,” *Staffordshire Studies*, II (Keele: Keele University, 1989-90).
10. E. Tooth, work in preparation.
11. A. J. Kettle, ed., “A list of Families in the Archdeaconry of Stafford, 1532-33,” in *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (Staffordshire Record Society, 1976).