

Explaining English surnames:
linguistic ambiguity and the importance
of context

Part Two
Interpreting the modern data¹

Peter McClure
University of Hull

INTRODUCTION

In Part One of this paper (McClure 2013) I showed that interpretation of the medieval data has been seriously affected by problems of ambiguity; that the problems occur at every linguistic level, especially at the morphological, where homonymy is common; and that disregarding the contexts in which names were used and recorded has led to mistaken

¹ This article is Part Two of a revised and expanded version of the 2013 Cameron Lecture, which was given at the University of Nottingham at the invitation of the Institute for Name-Studies. Its content and methodological approach owe much to the research of George Redmonds, David Hey and Richard McKinley, and to my experience during the last five years as a member of the Family Names of the United Kingdom project (FaNUK), co-directed by Patrick Hanks and Richard Coates. I am grateful to the University of the West of England for permission to quote copyrighted material from the project's database in advance of its publication in the forthcoming *Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*. My thanks also go to the anonymous reviewer and to Professor Coates, Professor Hanks and Dr Harry Parkin of the FaNUK team, who kindly read and improved earlier drafts of this article, though they are in no way responsible for the imperfections that remain. Parts Three and Four, which I hope to publish at a future date, will discuss common patterns of phonetic and morphological change in Modern English surnames and the problems of disambiguating names of native English origin from those that were brought in by post-medieval immigrants from Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and elsewhere.

explanations in surname dictionaries and to unreliable inferences in published work in applied anthroponymics, such as lexicology, dialect phonology, historical demography and socio-onomastics. As a corrective I argued for a comparative, locally focused methodology that systematically takes into account all relevant contexts, in so far as they are available.

In Part Two I am extending the discussion to surnames in the modern period, roughly 1450 to 1900. In the medieval data, linguistic ambiguity interferes with our search for the original sense of a surname. For the modern data the problem is not ‘sense’ but ‘identity’, and it stems from the apparently random way in which surnames mutated after they became hereditary. This fresh input of linguistic ambiguity seriously interferes with our efforts to identify which medieval name a modern form descends from, and context is therefore just as important for interpreting the modern data as it is for interpreting the medieval. None of the current dictionaries of modern English surnames (as of 2014) recognize the extent of the problem, though that situation is about to change with the publication in 2015 of Redmonds’ *Dictionary of Yorkshire Surnames* and in 2016 or 2017 of Hanks’ and Coates’ *Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* (abbreviated hereafter to *FaNBI*).

1. THE GROWTH OF AMBIGUITY AND OBSCURITY IN MODERN SURNAMES

Whether extracting names from national records like census returns or hearth tax returns, or from more local records like wills and parish registers, what strikes any family (or family name) historian is not only the variety of spellings that can occur for a single name but also the tendency for many names to change shape and for names to be easily confused with each other. Another thing that strikes one in examining such records is the number of surnames whose interpretation is quite baffling, and the bafflement only increases when, as is often the case, there is no obvious link to a recorded medieval form. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, the problem lies partly in the growth of fixed, hereditary surnaming, a process largely completed by the mid-fifteenth century (McKinley 1990, 35–37). It is true that in a few parts of England, such as Lancashire, surnames were

still being invented in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially patronymics like *Williamson* (McKinley 1981, 326–27), but most English families by this time had a permanent family name, in many cases (especially in the south and midlands) going back one, two, or even three centuries. This may have given compilers of surname dictionaries the confidence to assume that the forms of most modern surnames correspond reasonably consistently with the medieval data on which they based their etymologies. Compilers of archival catalogues and indexes often make a similar assumption of a straightforward relation between medieval and modern forms.

The apparent stability in the early modern surname stock is misleading, however. Already by around 1450 the original sense of many inherited names had often become ignored, obscured or forgotten. This growing loss in transparency was exacerbated by a long period of linguistic variability and change, at all linguistic levels, which from the fifteenth century onwards led to the differences that now exist between Middle English and Modern English and also to the local currency in surnames and place-names of variable, informal pronunciations, unregulated by any need to make contextually relevant lexical sense. It is not surprising to find hereditary surnames recorded in many different, roughly phonetic spellings, reflecting a variety of colloquial pronunciations, some of which retained an intelligible relationship with the original name, while others did not. The latter were vulnerable to arbitrary re-interpretation. They could be misheard and miswritten in the records, and were often assimilated to more familiar names or re-shaped through hypercorrection and folk etymology to fit better known name-patterns or word-forms.

The post-medieval history of English surnames is therefore characterized not only by the fossilizing effects of a largely hereditary name-stock but also by a great deal of phonetic and morphological change, which has led to name-forms converging and diverging in ways that easily can mislead etymologists, cataloguers and indexers. Convergence has produced a massive increase in homonymy in the surname system and divergence has produced equally disruptive losses of original identity.

On top of that, from the mid-fifteenth until at least the early eighteenth century, English spelling (including that practised by local lawyers and parish clerks) was more inconsistent, erratic and ambiguous than it ever had been or ever would be, with a significant increase in the use of inverted spellings. The spoken forms are therefore often difficult to infer with certainty from the written forms unless we have alternative spellings that disambiguate them.

A further reason why current spellings of English surnames can be misleading is that for many families it was not until the advent of universal literacy in the twentieth century that one spelling rather than another became fixed for their name in their locality. The now universal practice of fixed surname spellings is a very recent phenomenon and can give the false impression that all surnames have long possessed historically stable identities as defined and differentiated by their current spellings. This impression is reinforced by the fact that literacy and fixed spellings have almost eliminated variation in surname pronunciation, except in the case of spelling pronunciations, where a name is known through its written rather than its local oral form and the spelling allows alternative pronunciations (as in the surname of the author, J. K. Rowling). Current spellings rightly provide the head forms in modern surname dictionaries, but we cannot expect to make good sense of them if we do not recognize that they are frequently the arbitrary outcome of a long period of oral and orthographic variability, in which onomastic ambiguity and obscurity has proliferated.

2. CORRECTING ERRORS IN SURNAME DICTIONARIES

It has been a matter of concern among family name historians that Reaney (1958), Cottle (1978) and Reaney and Wilson (1991) mostly disregarded the post-medieval history of the names they aimed to explain. As more family name research is done at a local level, ever larger numbers of dictionary explanations of modern English surnames are turning out to be incorrect, not principally because the supposed Middle English antecedents have been misinterpreted (though that is frequently the case) but because the modern names have been misidentified and attached to

irrelevant etymons. The seminal work is George Redmonds' *Surnames and Genealogy: a New Approach* (Redmonds 1997). Through his intimate knowledge of the history of Yorkshire family names he demonstrates that the linguistic development of surnames was frequently driven by local variation in pronunciation and by false associations between unrelated names. Using onomastic aliases as primary evidence he identifies numerous instances of surnames with deceptive appearances and shows how mistaken were Reaney's explanations of many Yorkshire surnames.

Reaney's derivation of the surname **Maud(e)** is a classic example.² Presented with an abundance of Middle English (ME) evidence for the Old French (OF) personal name *Ma(ha)ld* or *Maud* as both a given name and surname, Reaney drew the obvious etymological conclusion. But as Redmonds (1997, 34–35) points out, the modern surname has long been mainly associated with the West Riding of Yorkshire, where local records show that it originated in the twelfth century with a minor aristocratic family of Riddlesden, near Bingley, called *de Monte Alto* or *de Mohaut*. The reference is probably to the Norman castle at Mold in Flintshire (Anglo-Norman *Monthaut* 'high mound'), which members of the Riddlesden family held along with the lordship of neighbouring Hawarden. The post-medieval reduction of *Mohaut* to *Maud(e)* is proven by aliases such as *John Maude otherwise Montalt* (of Ilkley, 1549) and *Arthur Mawde alias Mawhaut* (of Riddlesden, 1585). Whether any present day families named *Maud(e)* descend from a medieval lady called Maud is unknown and should not be assumed without similar researches in other local records. A modern linguistic form, however close it is to a medieval one, is not by itself sufficient evidence for a safe etymological connection. As Redmonds shows, time and again, it must be attached to a chronological sequence of related forms, linked by place or by family history.

² Bold type has been used for the first mention of each surname that appears as a head form in one or more of the currently available dictionaries, including Redmonds' *Dictionary of Yorkshire Surnames* (2015), or in Hanks' and Coates' *Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* (FaNBI forthcoming).

Allowance must also be made for surname confusion. Reaney (1958) correctly derives **Asquith** and **Askwith** from Askwith (West Riding) and **Askew** and **Ayscough** from Aiskew (in Bedale, North Riding), but Redmonds (1997, 186) cites aliases in which a Thirsk man is named both *Ascough* and *Askwith* (1438–49) and a Halifax man is named both *Asquith* and *Askew* (1684–1739).

Divergent pronunciations have also given rise to misleading associations with local place-names and to the creation of illusory place-names, patronymics, occupational names and nicknames. Redmonds shows that **Wolfenden**, from Wolfenden in Lancashire, has developed to modern **Ovenden**, which is formally identical with a West Riding place-name, and also to **Wolfendale** (Redmonds 1997, 177–79). Ovenden, near Halifax, did in fact produce a surname, and its earliest example, from the 1277 Wakefield Court Rolls, is cited by Wilson to justify his derivation of the modern name from that place-name, but this surname seems to have died out. *Hovenden* and *Ovenden* appear in Halifax in the mid-sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries as aliases of *Woffendenne* and *Wolfenden* (Redmonds 2015). As for *Wolfendale*, correctly assigned to *Wolfenden* by Wilson, there is no such place.

The substitution of *-dale* for *-den* is one of many common re-modellings of surnames based on analogy with other familiar names. In one parish alone (Birstall) *Snowden* appears also as *Snowdell*, *Robinson* as *Robinshaw*, *Rushworth* as *Rushforth* and *Crosley* as *Crosland* (Redmonds 1997, 201–02). In other Yorkshire parishes, post-medieval aliases include *Burnett* and *Burnell*, *Goddard* and *Gothard*, *Hampshire* and *Ormshaw*, *Hawksworth* and *Hawkswell*, *Stockdale* and *Stockton*, *Townend*, *Towning* and *Townell*, *Whitwell* and *Whitfield* (Redmonds 1997, 205–07) and *Broxup*, *Broxome*, *Brockson*, *Broscombe*, *Briscombe* and *Briskham* (Redmonds 1997, 179–82). It is not always possible to be sure which of these is closer to the original form, and although none of these variants is actually as randomly or arbitrarily produced as it may seem, the freedom with which weakly stressed endings have mutated is almost shocking in its implications. Each one can be explained in terms of natural phonetic variation, making for easier articulation in informal speech, or in terms of

morphological re-formation, in which names have been altered by hypercorrection and folk etymology to accord with familiar, often local, onomastic and lexical patterns or models. Knowledge of recurrent types of phonetic and morphological change that surnames have undergone is an essential tool in surname research; it is a substantial topic and will be discussed in a separate article, forming Part Three of the present series of papers. The point I want to emphasize here is that unless you can see each variant in the context of other variants in the same surname community it can be very difficult to guess what its true identity might be. It is no wonder that Reaney and others, lacking the relevant contextual data, have in all innocence mistaken the origins of many names.

Reaney did in fact acknowledge a high degree of variability and confusability in post-medieval surname development, citing a substantial number of instances in the first three chapters of his *Origin of English Surnames* (Reaney 1967, 9–19, 24–32, 38–46). He was also aware of recurring patterns of linguistic change, especially among surnames derived from place-names. He remarks that ‘some common place-name elements are weakened when final and unstressed and were re-spelled in a way which often disguises their origin; these weakened forms were then often confused and incorrect forms substituted’. He lists examples of *-ham* developing to *-am*, *-om*, *-um*, and *-on*; of *-garth* to *-gate*; of *-house* to *-as*, *-is*, *-us*, and *-ers*; of *-thwaite* to *-waite*, *-white*, *-wick*, *-fit(t)*, *-ford*, and *-field*; of *-wick* to *-ick*, and *-wiche* to *-idge*, *-age*, and *-edge* (Reaney 1967, 44–45).

Such changes are common enough in colloquial forms of the place-names themselves and many of these variants are recorded in the volumes of the English Place-Name Society Survey. These in turn provided Klaus Forster with material for his study of phonetic variation in *Englische Familiennamen aus Ortsnamen* (Forster 1978). The added complication for the surname investigator is that the referents of surnames, unlike those of place-names, are biological. They are reproductive, have short life-spans and are highly mobile. Family regeneration and migration mean that the volume and variety of mutation in surnames is of a much greater order than in place-names and more difficult to track across time and space.

What is surprising is that, in spite of knowing how productive surnames can be of morphologically deceptive variants, Reaney, Wilson and Cottle are so trusting of appearances when offering explanations of names for which they have little or no post-medieval evidence on which to base their judgements. It is fair to allow that they were in no position in their own day to find the evidence they needed, but perhaps that should have warned them to be more cautious in offering explanations based only on medieval forms, especially when they often had little idea of whether the locations of the modern surnames bore any relationship to those of the medieval records on which explanations were based.

Redmonds' 1997 monograph, with its revelations of pervasive surname mutation across a single county, has blown a large hole in the authoritativeness of Reaney and Wilson (1991) as the standard dictionary, and his *Dictionary of Yorkshire Surnames* will undermine it still further. A major question is therefore how to replace Reaney's and Wilson's work with something more reliable. John Titford's *Penguin Dictionary of British Surnames* (2009), which is a revision of Cottle (1978), makes good use of modern mapping of surnames to correct a number of errors, especially in the explanation of surnames from place-names. He also draws on some of Redmonds' discoveries (about *Ovenden* and *Woffindale*, for example) and on family history research by members of the Guild of One Name Studies. As a family historian himself, he has written a perceptive introductory essay to his dictionary on the nature of modern surname development and its research implications. However, the dictionary deals with only around 10,000 names, fewer than half of those in Reaney and Wilson, and some of his explanations repeat erroneous or inadequate explanations in Cottle and in Reaney and Wilson, including a number of those which, like *Maud*, *Moxon* and *Stringfellow*, were corrected in Redmonds (1997).

The reliability of any dictionary of English (or British) surnames is severely constrained by the small amount of published research based on local records. There is a pressing need for more studies like those by Redmonds on Yorkshire names but no other county has been investigated in a similar depth or with such a detailed grasp of local and family history. Edgar Tooth's four-volume series *The Distinctive Surnames of North*

Staffordshire (2000–10) is a partial and admirable exception. It is a comprehensive and often illuminating study but it does not focus on variants in the way that Redmonds' works do, and some of the etymologies (mostly derived from the dictionaries) are inaccurate. Helpful observations on variants with misleading appearances can nevertheless be found scattered within different volumes and chapters. A nice example is the north Staffordshire name **Bridget(t)**. Though spelled like the female personal name, it is a local pronunciation of *Bridgwood*, from a now lost place near Biddulph, Staffordshire (Tooth 2000–10, I, 48–49). Some examples correct erroneous explanations in Reaney and Wilson. Wilson derives the surname *Bettany* or *Bettoney* from the plant name *betony* (ME *betonike*, Old English *betonice*), unsupported by any medieval surname evidence. He cites post-medieval surnames from Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire, but the modern name is distinctively Staffordshire in distribution. Tooth notes that in the parish registers for Seighford (Staffs) the man buried as Joseph *Bettany* in 1806 is named as Joseph *Betteley* in 1762. The source is Betley (Staffs), recorded as *Betunlegh*, 1289 in Horovitz (2005, 117). Perhaps the Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire name is a variant of **Beatley**, from Beetley (Norfolk), with substitution of [n] for [l], but that remains to be proven.

Some of the county volumes of the (now defunct) English Surnames Series occasionally draw attention to deceptive or obscure variants, especially those dealing with Lancashire (McKinley 1981) and Sussex (McKinley 1988), but the number of surnames whose origins are individually explored in these volumes is relatively small. The published researches of members of the Guild of One-Name Studies have also increased our knowledge of surname variation (Rubery 2011 and Edgoose 2013 are good examples), as has the work of the Names Project at the University of Sheffield, led by David Hey (see Hey 1992). Useful as all these publications are, the bulk of English surnames remains seriously

under-researched, and there is no prospect of this being fully remedied in the foreseeable future.³

3. THE FANUK PROJECT AND ITS NEW DICTIONARY

In the light of the foregoing critique, the outlook for new and more reliable dictionaries of English (and other British and Irish) surnames might seem bleak but it is in fact remarkably promising. Surname research is currently being revolutionized by the digitization of documentary sources and increasing access to information through the internet. This is the foundation of a project called ‘Family Names of the United Kingdom’ (FaNUK for short) and an associated electronic database called ‘Family Names in Britain and Ireland’. The project was set up by Patrick Hanks in 2008 with the support of Oxford University Press, and subsequently (2010) transferred to the University of the West of England, where Professor Richard Coates (Principal Investigator) and Patrick Hanks (Lead Researcher and visiting Professor) successfully applied for two substantial grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It has a research team of two paid associate researchers (currently Paul Cullen and Harry Parkin, 2014–17), several language and names consultants (including the present writer as chief etymologist) and a number of other specialist assistants.⁴ The first phase of the project ran from 2010 to 2014. A second, dealing with previously un-researched English surnames with fewer than 100 bearers in 1881, began in January 2014 and will finish at the end of December 2017.

The main outcome of the first phase is *A Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland (FaNBI)* to be published by Oxford University Press in hard copy and online. At its core is an edited text of Reaney’s and Wilson’s material, reproduced by arrangement with the copyright holders.

³ For a historical survey of surname dictionaries see Hanks (2009, 124–37). For a review of current dictionaries see McClure (2016, 278–89).

⁴ For details of the project see the website: <www1.uwe.ac.uk/cahe/research/bristolcentreforlinguistics/fanuk.aspx>.

One of the principal aims of the project is to provide revisions of Reaney's and Wilson's entries, partly using newly accessible primary data from all periods and partly drawing on recently published research, including much of what is contained in Redmonds' *Dictionary of Yorkshire Surnames*, to which he generously gave *FaNBI* pre-publication access. The project's dictionary will exclude Wilson's ghost entries, the surnames for which he seems to have invented modern forms in order to justify the inclusion of a medieval name that interested him (Redmonds 2005; Tucker 2008, 27). In addition *FaNBI* attempts to explain another 20,000 or so names that are not in Reaney and Wilson. As a result the whole dictionary will cover around 46,000 names right across the spectrum of names in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, including Welsh, Scottish, Irish, and Manx, and common names among recent immigrants from abroad. This was an ambitious goal for the initial four-year project, for it faced the same difficulty that Titford (2009) encountered, that while Yorkshire and north Staffordshire surnames have been well researched, relatively little is known of the histories of thousands of surnames in other English counties. The same may be said to different degrees of Scottish and Irish names, though the research problems are sometimes of a different kind.

A major aspect of the *FaNBI* methodology is the deployment of sources that were not available to Reaney and his successors. Some of these are medieval, including (i) printed editions of records, such as lay subsidy rolls; (ii) national online records, including those available from British History Online,⁵ the Patent Rolls⁶ and, by arrangement with The National Archives (TNA), abstracts of Proceedings in Chancery, 1386–1558, and of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384–1858 (PROB 11); (iii) an edition of *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381* (Fenwick 1998–2005) in the form of an electronic database, provided to *FaNBI* by the author and with permission of the British Academy. Others

⁵ <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>>.

⁶ <<http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/patentrolls/>>.

are post-medieval, the most significant of which are (i) the online British censuses (1841–1911), (ii) Steve Archer's CD-ROM *The British 19th Century Surname Atlas* (2003), based on the digitized transcripts of the 1881 census returns,⁷ (iii) a digitized index of the Irish Fiants of the Tudor period (Nicholls 1994) and (iv) what used to be known as the International Genealogical Index (IGI). The latter comprised (among other material) indexes of data from transcriptions of church and other official registers, which were first published online by the Mormons or Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (LDS). The current IGI website no longer contains this data, but an abbreviated edition of it was made available to *FaNBI* through the generosity of the LDS. A fuller version of the data is still available online, however, in the Records listings in LDS's new FamilySearch website.⁸ Material from this source will be referred to in this paper with the abbreviation IGI/FSR.

It is especially the access to digitized versions of country-wide historical sources that has made a profound difference to the *FaNBI* team's ability to improve on Reaney's and Wilson's explanations, and to offer reasonable derivations for surnames not previously explained. The basic method is comparative and locally focused. Comparisons of (1) Archer's mapping of the 1881 surnames, (2) the geographically located surnames in IGI/FSR, and (3) the geographically located surnames in Fenwick's *Poll Taxes* and other medieval records have often provided a more rapid and more accurate pointer to English surname origins and development than was imaginable a couple of decades ago. It has allowed the *FaNBI* team to develop a streamlined version of the contextual methodology that is described here and in Part One, adapting it to the constraints of a time-limited research dictionary. The primary context for explaining the origins

⁷ Archer produced two significant upgrades in 2011 and 2015, improving accuracy, appearance and functions and also (in the 2015 version) excluding name data from ships in port, which had to some extent distorted the mapping. These upgrades do not affect the data cited in the present article, which refers to the 2003 version that was initially used by the *FaNBI* researchers.

⁸ <<https://familysearch.org/search/>>.

of any modern surname must be the place where the surname originated and the places where it later ramified. The material in these electronic databases has given us an opportunity to do exactly that in a very large number of instances, enabling the *FaNBI* team to compare the spellings of thousands of names, county by county, parish by parish, or vill by vill, over long periods of time, and to identify the processes of linguistic variation that can point us to a surname's origin.

I will illustrate what I mean with the surnames **Pepperday** and **Peberdy**, which Reaney (1958) derives from the OF oath *pape-dieu* '(by the) Pope-God', citing Stephen *Papedi*, 1166 (in Black 1946, s.n. Pepdie), Henry *Papedi*, 1180 (Yorkshire) and John *Pabdy*, 1381 (Yorkshire). However, this Scottish and north-east England surname seems to have died out after the sixteenth century. It is not in fact the most obvious source of *Pepperday* and *Peberdy*, which (unknown to Reaney) have a long history in the midlands, especially Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. When researching these names for *FaNBI* it seemed to me that they were linguistically closer to **Peabody**, from ME **pe(y)*, **pay* (OE **pēa*) + *bodi* 'peacock body', probably a nickname for a vain person and not, as Wilson curiously suggests, 'servant of *Pay*' (Reaney and Wilson 1991). Moreover, the medieval evidence for *Peabody* pointed to a Northamptonshire origin:

John *Paybody* of Crick, 1397 (Northamptonshire); William *Paybody* of Badby, 1437 (Northamptonshire).⁹

In researching the later history of any name, the first step is to look at the surname maps in Archer (2003), including the distributions that are plotted at the level of Poor Law Unions. In 1881 *Peabody* (256 bearers) has a significant cluster in and around London (85 bearers) but the rest are mostly spread across the midlands, especially Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire and Staffordshire. A

⁹ The medieval data was kindly supplied by Robert Peberdy from Cheshire and Northamptonshire Deeds, MS DDX1/6, Cheshire and Chester Archives, Chester, and from Strelley Documents, MS DD/E/73/1, Nottinghamshire Archives, Nottingham.

variant spelling, *Pebody* (76 bearers), is mainly concentrated in Northamptonshire and south Leicestershire. Of the names that we are concerned with, *Peberdy* (254 bearers) is mostly in south Leicestershire, while *Pepperday* (85) is mostly in Derbyshire, south Leicestershire and Rutland. The next stage is to scroll through the evidence in IGI/FSR. It shows that spellings of all these name-forms coincide in many of the same counties at various dates from the sixteenth century onwards, earliest in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire parishes:

Northamptonshire: William *Paybody*, 1558 (Blakesley); Margery *Pebody*, 1574 (Yelvertoft); Edward *Peybodie*, 1661, Mary *Pebody*, 1699, William *Pebody*, 1775 (Little Bowden); Elizabeth *Pepperdy*, 1728 (Thorpe Arch); John *Pepperday*, 1780 (Duddington). **Leicestershire:** John *Pabody*, 1579 (Lutterworth); Thomas *Peabody*, 1606 (Thedingworth); Nathaniell *Peebody*, 1618 (Melton Mowbray); Arthur *Pebardy*, 1755, Shusanna *Paberdy*, 1763, Sophia *Pebordy*, 1808, Samuel *Peberdy*, 1866 (Thurnby). **Staffordshire:** Elizabeth *Paybody*, 1700 (Bramshall); John *Peberday*, 1763, Ann *Pebody*, 1771, Thomas *Pebody*, 1825 (Gnosall). **Derbyshire:** Gervase *Pepperdy*, 1803 (Heanor).

The most telling correlations in IGI/FSR occur within the same parish or town:

Robert *Peabody*, 1699, William *Pepperdy*, 1715, William *Peberdy*, 1793, Hannah *Piberdy*, 1804, Robert *Pebordy*, 1808 (Saddington, Leicestershire); Nathanael *Peybody* 1738, Nath *Pebordy*, 1741 (Welford, Northamptonshire).

Here we have clear evidence, linked by chronology and location, pointing to modern *Peberdy* and *Pepperday* as variants of *Peabody*, and although such correlations do not carry the same force as aliases, they offer a high degree of probability that they are variants of the same family name.

The time it took to assemble the evidence and reach this new conclusion about the origin of the modern surname was a matter of an hour or more.

It was not necessary to wait for another Redmonds or Tooth to spend a lifetime researching the surnames of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire before Reaney's mistaken explanation of this particular surname was replaced with something more reliable. What it needed was a researcher, with a reasonable degree of linguistic and onomastic competence, to sit in front of a computer with access to searchable, electronic databases of relevant documentary sources. This is one reason why *FaNBI* can make a serious claim to offer something significantly better than Reaney and Wilson could have hoped to attempt.

The method is also effective in suggesting explanations for surnames not included in previous dictionaries. **Bilyard** and **Billiard** look like the word *billiard*, known in its plural form as the name of a French cue-and-ball game, but only played in England since the sixteenth century. More realistic etymologies might derive it from the Old English (OE) personal name *Bilheard*, as Weekley (1916, 38) supposed, or from the OF (female) personal name *Biliard* (Continental Germanic *Biligardis*), though this has not yet been found as a given name in medieval England. The problem with these theories is the lack of Middle English evidence, especially in the right location. It is the distribution of the modern names (chiefly Nottinghamshire in Archer 2003) that directs us to a more fruitful hypothesis, that they might be variants of the Nottinghamshire surname *Billyeald* (not included in any previous dictionary) with the not uncommon dissimilation of [l] to [r]. *Billyeald* is almost certainly from *Bilhold* or *Biliald*, OF forms of the Continental Germanic female personal name *Bilihildis*, which is known to have been used in Anglo-Norman families (Forssner 1916, s.n. Billeheud). The surname from this personal name has an extensive history in East Markham and nearby towns in the north of the county:

Henr' *Bilhold*, 1327, Henr' *Bilyald*, 1332, Thom' *Biliold*, 1327,
Thom' *Bilyald*, 1332, Joh' *Beliald* de Estm[ar]kham, Will'
Belyald de Estm[ar]kham, 1450 in Subsidy Rolls (East Markham,

Nottinghamshire); ¹⁰ Robert *Belyald* of East Markham, 1480 in *Inquisitiones post Mortem* (Nottinghamshire); Henricus *Billiald*, 1626 in IGI/FSR (West Markham, Nottinghamshire); William *Billiald*, 1644 in IGI/FSR (Worksop, Nottinghamshire); Thomas *Bilyald*, 1674 in IGI/FSR (East Markham, Nottinghamshire).

In the post-medieval period some branches of the family stayed put, while others, it seems, moved into the West Riding of Yorkshire, north Lincolnshire and Staffordshire. In each county IGI/FSR evidence shows co-occurrence of the variant *Billiard* or *Bilyard* in the same parish or town:

Thomas *Billiard*, also *Billiald*, 1619 (Swinderby, Lincolnshire); Joyes *Billiard* (baptised 1607 in Saint Peter, Sheffield, West Riding), daughter of Robert *Billiard*, probably identical with Robert *Billiald*, 1599 (married in Saint Peter, Sheffield); Richard *Billiald*, 1692, William Sweetapple *Bilyard*, 1754 (Fledborough, Nottinghamshire); Sarah *Bilyard*, 1792, Ann *Bilyeld*, 1802 (Cannock, Staffordshire); Edmond *Biliald*, 1663, Robard *Billiard*, 1792 (West Markham, Nottinghamshire).

The comparative methodology illustrated here can be highly effective, but I am not suggesting for a moment that it obviates the need for fuller, more detailed researches by family and local historians. In its cutting of corners, the method has limitations. (i) Great numbers of relevant documents are currently difficult to access, especially those that are not in printed editions. (ii) The transcriptions of names in printed editions and in online databases like IGI/FSR can be unreliable. Ideally they should be checked against the original documents, but this has usually been impossible within the scope of the FaNUK project. Partly for this reason, *FaNBI* never relies on single IGI/FSR forms for etymological interpretation. They make up part of a body of evidence, which, when analysed as a whole, suggests that the data that has been cited is reasonably

¹⁰ TNA, E179/159/84.

reliable. (iii) Errors in the census transcriptions (and there are many) can produce ghost names and misleading distributions in Archer's surname maps, although this is likely to be a problem only for uncommon names. Where doubt exists, the census data (especially the spellings and the places of birth and of registration) have been checked against the online images of the census returns. (iv) There are substantial gaps in the geographical and chronological coverage in the data provided by IGI/FSR and other pre-Census databases. David Hey (2000, 175) notes that Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Somerset are 'badly under-represented' in IGI/FSR, while parish registers for some counties, especially Northumberland and Co. Durham, are rare until well into the seventeenth century. (v) There is commonly an absence of genealogical information to confirm or disprove inferences that members of the *FaNBI* team have drawn from the correlation of different name spellings in the same county, parish or town. The family context is the one component in *FaNBI* that cannot usually be supplied except by linguistic and geographical inference, so the method carries a risk of circular argument. It means that some inferences using this method are going to be mistaken, particularly since many surnames have multiple origins, which surname mapping and searches of IGI/FSR and other records cannot always disentangle. (vi) Finally there is the question of research time. The generous four-year AHRC funding of the first phase of FaNUK has been vital in creating the new dictionary and trialling the methodology. But although the methodology is relatively speedy, it still takes time to search databases, establish plausible correlations and think through their etymological implications. It has not been possible within that time frame to give every one of the English surnames in *FaNBI* all the research attention that it deserves, and many need further work to establish more secure explanations. This is something for the future, as funding and availability of expertise allows, and as more work of local family name researchers becomes available and integrated into the body of knowledge.

4. MODERN SURNAMES AND THEIR LOCATION

The ability to map modern surnames, using electronic databases, is one of the most important advances in recent English surname research, leading

to vastly improved accuracy in explaining names and identifying name variants. It has confirmed beyond doubt that the majority of English surnames have moved relatively short distances over the centuries, in some cases staying remarkably close to their places of origin (Lasker and Mascie-Taylor 1990; McKinley 1990, 189–93; Hey 1992; Rogers 1995, 31–44; Hey 2000, 106–07, 115–17, 143–60). The reason for this lies in the complex but coherent social networks of local life that endured down the generations, ensuring family stability and influencing the range and frequency of migration. In *Family Names and Family History* David Hey writes of ‘surname neighbourhoods’, within which the most distinctive local family names moved around over many generations; they were ‘usually no more than ten or twenty miles in radius and were bounded by the nearest market towns’ (Hey 2000, 107). As he and his colleagues later observed:

The ‘core’ families that stayed put for generation after generation and who had well-established connections with similar families within the neighbourhood were the ones that shaped the character of the place: its speech, customs, attitudes, forms of religion, styles of vernacular architecture, working practices, and all other matters that cemented a local society (Redmonds, King and Hey 2011, 217).

If we move up to the next geographical level, of socio-economic regions formed by clusters of market towns, it enables us to account for most longer distance migrations as a consequence of successive short distance migrations over several generations within the same region. (The chief exception is migration to London, whose pull on migrants from all over Britain and Ireland was uniquely powerful.) Edward Martin argues, for example, that Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex form a ‘Greater East Anglia’, within which there are two contrasting sub-regions separated by the valley of the River Gipping in Suffolk (Martin 2012). These are Norfolk and north Suffolk, which (informally but not in print) he calls ‘Greater Norfolk’, and south Suffolk and north Essex (informally ‘Greater Essex’), where, although each sub-region shows some topographic and geological differences, they show more marked differences in their human activities,

such as field system and farming preferences, aspects of the construction and layout of buildings, dialect and so on. It is no surprise if surnames in socio-economic regions show similarly distinctive patterns of internal migration. Movement southwards from Norfolk into Suffolk and south-east Essex can be seen in the history of **Fosdyke** (and its variants) and **Gooch** (and variants), while there are names like **Cramphorn** (and variants) that originated in east Hertfordshire, spread into west Essex, and then migrated eastwards as far as the Suffolk border, if not beyond.¹¹

A delineation of all of England's socio-economic regions and sub-regions, including regional overlaps, would be immensely helpful for surname research, and a better knowledge of surname distributions over the centuries would reciprocally contribute useful information for the definition of the regions. Hey (2000, 109–11), for instance, has shown how surnames of north Staffordshire in the Hearth Tax Returns of the 1660s and 1670s reveal a significant influx of families from Cheshire and Lancashire, more so than migration from neighbouring counties to the east and south of the county. These patterns of movement, predominantly local in nature, seem to have been only marginally affected by the Industrial Revolution (Hey 2000, 115–16). The shifting distributions for *Peberdy* and *Billyeald* and their variants (see section 3), as plotted from IGI/FSR, probably reflect similar systems of regional migration.

For mapping purposes IGI/FSR data do not generally provide a sufficiently representative sample of surname frequencies and locations in the early modern period to be statistically reliable, but it is to be hoped that one day it will be possible to map all the names in the Hearth Tax Returns of the late seventeenth century, incomplete though these are for some counties. Returns for a good number of counties are already in print and online, and are of great value when researching the names of individual counties, but mapping will probably have to wait until the completion of the University of Roehampton's Hearth Tax Project, in which digital

¹¹ See the entries for these names in *FaNBI*.

editions of all the Hearth Tax Returns are being published online.¹² The electronic version of Fenwick's fourteenth-century *Poll Taxes*, in spite of their incomplete coverage and orthographical complexities, seems to offer the possibility of similar maps of late medieval surnames. For the nineteenth century we already have Archer's mapping of the 1881 Census names, and for the twentieth century individual surname maps based on the 1997 electoral rolls are available from the Experian International Ltd public profiler website.¹³ Comparative studies of surname distribution across much of England over the last six centuries could soon be within reach, with huge benefits for the understanding of family and surname history.

5. LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITY, LOCATION AND PHONETIC VARIATION

The first rule of thumb, therefore, in researching a modern English surname origin is to look for earlier evidence in the same geographical area, whether that happens to be a neighbourhood, a county or, as is often the case, a combination of parts of adjacent counties within a socio-economic region or sub-region. The second is to remember that one can easily be led to the wrong conclusion if no account is taken of the phonetic variation that names can undergo. Reaney and Wilson neatly allocate **Wensley** to Wensley (in the North Riding of Yorkshire or possibly the one in Derbyshire) and **Winsley** to Winsley (in Wiltshire or Herefordshire), but in the 1881 census there are over 200 bearers of *Wensley* in south-west England (especially Somerset and Devon) and fewer than 150 in northern England, mainly in Blackburn and Burnley (Lancashire), and in Bradford (West Riding of Yorkshire). Those in the south-west are surely not migrants from north-east England but exhibit a variant pronunciation of *Winsley*, which is attested once as *Wenesley* in the Wiltshire place-name (1341 in Gover *et al.* 1939, 124) and is probably the source of the following names in IGI/FSR:

¹² <www.roehampton.ac.uk/Research-Centres/Centre-for-Hearth-Tax-Research/>.

¹³ <<http://gbnames.publicprofiler.org/default.aspx/>>.

Richardi *Wensley*, 1637 (English Bicknor, Gloucestershire); William *Wensley*, 1648 (Ditcheat, Somerset); Francis *Wendsly*, 1708 (Chipstable, Somerset).

In the 1881 census there are a few people named *Winsley* who live in the north Yorkshire Dales. These are not migrants from south-west England. IGI/FSR shows *Wensley* alias *Winsley* appearing in Swaledale, the next dale north of Wensleydale: Jeffrey *Wensley*, 1648, Ralph *Winsley*, 1732 (Grinton, North Riding of Yorkshire).

Problems in identifying the source of a locative surname are not uncommon where the surname and the originating place-name have different modern spellings that disguise their historical relationship. Two instances are *Widdall* and *Belk*. **Widdall** is not, as is suggested in *FaNBI*, from Wydale, near Hawes in the parish of Brompton (North Riding of Yorkshire). There seems to be no evidence for it in the local records, and the 1881 distribution is concentrated in south-east Lancashire, with 151 of the 185 name-bearers in Archer's map located in the district of Oldham. That is where we should first look for its source, and I am sure that it is the misleadingly spelled Woodhill, in the neighbouring parish of Bury. This is recorded as *Wyddell* in 1563, *Woddill* in 1564 and *Widdell* in 1598, and is probably a compound of OE *wīd* and *halh* 'wide piece of low-lying land in a river bend' (Ekwall 1922, 62). Woodhill lies in a bend on the R. Irwell. The origin is confirmed by the surname of Ricardus *de Widale*, assessed in Barton upon Irwell in the parish of Eccles (Lancashire) in the 1381 *Poll Taxes*, and which antedates Ekwall's earliest place-name form. The surname had a long history in Eccles and Oldham, as illustrated in data from IGI/FSR: Margret *Widdall*, 1570, Elizabeth *Widdall*, 1630 (Eccles); Joseph *Widdall*, 1657, Mary *Widdal*, 1714, James *Widdall*, 1837 (Oldham).¹⁴ The odd thing, which initially deceived the *FaNBI* team (including myself), is that, for once, it is the surname that has retained a

¹⁴ The explanation of this name will be corrected in a second edition of *FaNBI*, along with a good number of other entries, where new information and fresh insights in the second phase of the project have altered editorial judgements.

close linguistic resemblance to the original form of the place-name, while it is the place-name that has undergone the type of transformative phonetic and morphological changes that we usually associate with surnames, both the specific and the generic having mutated into the more recognizably toponymic elements, *wood* and *hill*.¹⁵

In Part One (McClure 2013, 6–7) I drew attention to Reaney’s doubtful explanation of **Belk** as a topographical name from a side-form of OE *balca* ‘bank, ridge’. His alternative derivation, from OE *bælc*, ME **belk* ‘stomach, pride, arrogance’, similarly assumes that the *-k* is original and etymological, but the following evidence proves that it is not. Archer (2003) shows that its 1881 Poor Law Union location was mainly in Sheffield and neighbouring Ecclesall Bierlow. Earlier IGI/FSR data places the surname in north Nottinghamshire, Sheffield and Whitwell:

Richard *Belck*, 1638 (Clarborough, Nottinghamshire); Sara *Belk*, 1651 (Sheffield, West Riding of Yorkshire); John *Belk*, 1677 (Worksop, Nottinghamshire); William *Belk*, 1685 (Whitwell, Derbyshire).

There is a single medieval attestation of this surname in Nigel(lus) *de Belk*, the name of a juror in an inquisition of 1277 relating to rights in Bolsover wood, not far from Whitwell; a fellow juror was from Hurst, a minor locality in Belph, in Whitwell parish (Darlington 1945, II, 327).¹⁶ Redmonds, King and Hey (2011, 13–14) rightly infer from evidence in *The Place-Names of Derbyshire* (Cameron 1959, 327) that *Belk* is in fact a lost alternative pronunciation of *Belph*. Cameron derives the place-name from OE *belg* ‘bag’, used topographically of the valley in which Belph stands, subsequently developing in Middle English to *Belgh*, pronounced /bɛlɣ/

¹⁵ Redmonds (2015) suggests that in Yorkshire the name is probably a variant of the Scottish locative surname **Weddall**, which is certainly possible, although on formal grounds some of the names that he cites, John *Widhall* of York (1476) and Henry *Widill* of Bolton Percy (1543), look more like the Lancashire one.

¹⁶ There is no connection that I can find between this man and Henry *del Belk* (correctly *del Bekk*) of Wiverton, Nottinghamshire, mentioned in Part One (McClure 2013, 6–7).

(see Jordan 1968, §187). In late Middle English and early Modern English [χ] generally developed to [f], which is usually spelled <gh> in standard English vocabulary and sometimes as <f> or <ph> in names, as seen in *Belph*. It also occasionally altered to [θ] (see McClure 2013, 10–11) and to [k], but only in non-standard pronunciations, the main evidence for which is from surnames and place-names. Cameron records *Belph* as *Belgh* in 1179, and as *Belth(e)*, *Belgthe* and *Belph(e)* in the sixteenth century. His one example of *Belk* is the 1277 surname (incorrectly printed as 1273). Evidence elsewhere for the change to [k] is rare. Dobson (1968) has no orthoepic evidence for it, but Jordan (1968, §§196, 197) notes its sporadic appearance in ME after [r] or [l], a pattern repeated in some Sussex and West Riding of Yorkshire place-names (Mawer and Stenton 1929, xxix; Smith 1961–63, VII, 90, §43).

It is noticeable that the *-k* spelling seems restricted to the surname, whereas the *-gh* and *-th* place-name spellings occur only rarely for the surname. John *Belgh'* and William *de Belgh* are listed in the 1379 *Poll Taxes* for Harthill, six miles north-west of *Belph*, and provide evidence that the surname was by then probably hereditary. It is satisfying to find that IGI/FSR records all three main forms of the surname in the seventeenth century in a single Derbyshire parish: Robert *Belgh* (presumably a spelling of /bɛlf/) 1641, Anne *Belth*, 1645, and Anne *Belck*, 1672 in Longstone, about twenty miles west of Whitwell. *Belph*, the modern spelling of the place-name, seems not to have survived for the surname.

This interconnection of place and pronunciation provides an answer to many surname puzzles, especially in the identification of surname variants. Linking Archer's 1881 distribution maps (often best used at the level of Poor Law Union) to the variant surname spellings in IGI/FSR has given the *FaNBI* team innumerable pointers to surname origins. On the other hand, not all surnames ramified only, or even predominantly, in their home territory. Some families migrated surprisingly long distances, even in the medieval period, whether through family connections (especially at the higher end of the social scale), through trade (by sea as well as by road), or through the search for work. Although this runs counter to the general

pattern of short distance migration and constitutes only a small percentage of family movements, it is a significant factor in explaining some surname origins. *Tattersall*, for example (from Tattershall, Lincolnshire), appears in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire in the 1379 *Poll Taxes* (Johanne *Tatirsall*', Pendleton Chase, Lancashire; Robertus *Tatirsall*', Snydale, West Riding of Yorkshire), and it is in those counties where the modern surname mainly occurs in 1881, though not without some misleading phonetic and morphological developments, as these IGI/FSR examples illustrate:

Samuel *Tattersall*, 1627, Betty *Tattersfield*, 1744, Joseph *Tattersley*, 1747 (Dewsbury, West Riding of Yorkshire); Henricus *Tattersall*, 1653, Johannes *Tatterson*, 1675 (Kildwick, West Riding of Yorkshire); Mary *Tattersall*, 1678, John *Tattersdale*, 1688, Willm. *Tatersley*, 1713 (Wakefield, West Riding of Yorkshire); James *Tattersall*, 1690, Ann *Tatterstall*, 1717 (Rochdale, Lancashire); William *Tattershall*, 1718, William *Tattershaw*, 1755 (Ashbourne, Derbyshire); Mary *Tatterton*, 1712 (Spondon, Derbyshire); Saml. *Tattershall*, 1759, William *Tortoiseshell*, 1832 (Uttoxeter, Staffordshire).¹⁷

All the variants in this list survive as modern surnames and they seem to bear out Hey's observation (2000, 148) that the number of variations increase with the distance from the source.

Cherryman or **Cherriman** is a Sussex name with an equally misleading appearance. Reaney and Wilson take it at face value and explain it as 'a grower or seller of cherries' but McKinley (1988, 177) questions this, given that it appears in Sussex records no earlier than 1577

¹⁷ According to Redmonds (2015) the movement of *Tattersall* north into Lancashire and Yorkshire is similar to that of *Ingham* (from one of the places called Ingham in Lincolnshire, Norfolk or Suffolk) and may be linked to the possession of lands in all these counties by the Duchy of Lancaster. He suggests that the Duchy's holdings lie behind the migratory patterns shown in many surnames within the Lancashire-Yorkshire region, such as *Blackburn*, *Brearley*, *Burnley*, *Rothwell* and *Sherburn*.

and was earlier spelled *Cherian*, *Chiryam* and *Chyriam*. Redmonds may have solved the problem by suggesting that it is an altered form, by folk etymology, of **Cherryholme**, a Barnsley (West Riding of Yorkshire) surname in 1881, which probably derives from a lost place-name in Drax (West Riding of Yorkshire), where John *Chyrholme* and William *de Teriholme* (*sic*) were taxed in the 1379 *Poll Taxes* (Redmonds, King and Hey 2011, 137–38). Post-medieval spellings cited by Redmonds from the Drax area include *Cheriholme*, *Cheriam*, *Cheriom* and *Cherion*. The migration of this name to Sussex is at first sight surprising but McKinley points out that distinctive surnames belonging to retainers in the employment or tenancy of noble families can be found in widely distant places that reflect the spread of their estates among different counties (McKinley 1988, 5). He notes that the Percys, for example, held extensive lands in Yorkshire and Northumberland, as well as the Honour of Petworth in Sussex. It may be this kind of affiliative network that explains why **Wilberforce** (from Wilberfoss, East Riding of Yorkshire and very much an East Riding surname in 1881) appears in Sussex in the early modern period (and is still there in small numbers in 1881): Richard *Wilberforce*, 1590 in IGI/FSR (Birdham); Elizabeth *Wilberforce*, 1620 in IGI/FSR (Herstmonceux).

The social connections of the upper gentry enabled an exceptional degree of geographical mobility on their part, with the consequence that their family names and those of their relatives, followers and tenants may have ramified most successfully in places quite far from where the surname originated. The Lincolnshire Tattersalls, for example, who ramified so numerously in Lancashire and Yorkshire, were a high-ranking family in the medieval period, holding the Lordship of Tattershall of the Honour of Richmond since shortly after the Norman Conquest, as well as manors and lands in the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Keats-Rohan 1999, 195, s.n. Eudo Filius Spireuic; Redmonds 2015, s.n. Tattersall). The modern distributions of names like this may be of little use on their own in establishing their place of origin, and may actually mislead us if the name or its variants are homonymous

with names of more local origin.¹⁸ Genealogy and family history become indispensable, as the following example shows.

In the 1881 Census **Wyndham** alias **Windham** has 77 bearers in Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey and Kent. It looks very likely to be from Wyndham (Sussex), for which there are earlier bearers of the surname in Wyndham itself in the 1332 *Sussex Subsidy Rolls* (Adam and Ralph Wyndeham) and the 1379 *Sussex Poll Taxes* (Ricardus Wyndehame), as well as other men similarly named in nearby Edburton in the same documents. There is quite a gap in time, however, before the earliest name bearers appear in IGI/FSR in Sussex and neighbouring counties:

Elizabeth *Wyndham*, 1672 (Eastwell, Kent); Caroli *Windham*, 1673 (Hursley, Hampshire); John *Windham*, 1680 (Charlwood, Surrey); Julia *Wyndham*, 1793 (Bignor, Sussex); William *Wyndham*, 1833 (Kirdford, Sussex).

I wonder if these names could alternatively be variant pronunciations of **Winham** with an intrusive [d]. *Winham* is probably a variant pronunciation of **Wenham** (from Wenham, in Rogate parish, Sussex), as seems to be implied in these IGI/FSR correlations:

Hugh *Wenham*, 1563, Elizabeth *Winham*, 1815 (Saint Lawrence in Thanet, Kent); Georg (*sic*) *Wenham*, 1616, Thomas *Winham*, 1648 (Herstmonceux, Sussex); Harbart *Winham*, 1619, Richard *Wenham*, 1623 (Hellingly, Sussex); George *Winham*, 1817, Mary *Wenham*, 1818 (Clapham, Surrey).

But although it is tempting here to follow the usual rule of thumb and settle for one or both of these locative origins that are close to where the modern

¹⁸ *Tattersall* might theoretically derive from *Tateshale*, the pre-Conquest name of Pontefract (West Riding of Yorkshire; see Smith 1961–63, II, 75), but Redmonds (2015) finds nothing to suggest that this might actually be an alternative source of the surname.

surname is recorded, there is a third possibility which fits a distribution pattern involving long distance migration.

The manor of Petworth in Sussex, formerly a possession of the Percy family, was inherited in the late seventeenth century by the Wyndham family of Orchard Wyndham in Somerset. Their surname is not from a Sussex place-name but from Wymondham in Norfolk, commonly pronounced /windəm/ (Forster 1981). By marriages into the upper gentry and nobility from the sixteenth century onwards, the Wyndhams of Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk acquired not only Orchard in the parish of Watchet (Somerset) but also Upsall (North Riding of Yorkshire) and a number of estates associated with the earldom of Egremont in Cumberland (Wyndham 1939; Wyndham 1950). When one looks at Archer's maps for 1881, one sees that the epicentres of *Wyndham* and *Windham* were not Norfolk or Sussex but Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire and Middlesex, with some outliers along the south coast and in northern England (Lancashire, Co. Durham and Northumberland). This is a good match with the counties where members of the Wyndham family had properties, and it is supported by the evidence of IGI/FSR. It is striking that, although *de Wymondham* is attested in various spellings in the *Poll Taxes* for Norfolk and although *Wyndham* appears in various spellings in IGI/FSR entries for Norfolk parishes well into the nineteenth century, by the time we get to the 1881 Census both *Wyndham* and *Windham* have disappeared from the county.¹⁹ Unlike most surnames, their distribution in Archer (2003) gives us little or no clue as to their principal origin.

¹⁹ Reaney and Wilson suggest Wymondham (Leicestershire) as another source for *Wyndham* and *Windham*. There are men named *de Wymund(h)am* in the *Poll Taxes* for Leicestershire but as there is no evidence that the place-name was ever pronounced as *Windham* (see Cox 1998–2014, II, 286), and as IGI/FSR has only a single, late instance of the surname in that county (Jonathan *Wyndham*, 1676, Rothley, Leicestershire), it is on present evidence a difficult hypothesis to prove.

6. MODERN SURNAMES AND HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

The histories of names like *Maude*, *Ovenden*, *Bridgett*, *Bettany*, *Peberdy*, *Billiard*, *Wensley*, *Belk*, *Cherryman* and *Wyndham* abundantly prove the point that variability in colloquial speech lies at the heart of modern surname mutability. The potential benefits of surname evidence for research in historical linguistics have yet to be fully realized. English surnames, like place-names, offer valuable data for the description of colloquial and regional speech variation over many centuries. Standard discussions of English historical linguistics, such as Wyld (1921), Jordan (1968, a revision of the 1934 edition), and Dobson (1968) occasionally cite name forms, but their publications were researched and published too early to make use of the wealth of onomastic data to be found in Redmonds (1997) and in the more recent county volumes of the Survey of English Place-Names. These county volumes are an excellent source of information because in most cases the location and the linguistic identity of the name are fairly certain, and the editorial notes on phonology and dialect are sometimes very detailed. Some EPNS editors also provide phonetic transcriptions of modern, local pronunciations, which can be of great value to surname researchers. As for the surname material, it is considerably more abundant than place-name evidence but it is far less well studied. Its usefulness for historical phonology depends on establishing the formal identity of each name, a task of far greater magnitude and complexity than that for place-names. This is one of several reasons to hope that the FaNUK project will continue to receive future funding, so that all the names in the *FaNBI* database can eventually be adequately researched from the growing list of documentary sources available.

The vagaries of phonetic variation can be challenging for the surname researcher, and some kind of classification of the changes that are characteristic of surname development would be a great help. In a recent paper Oliver Padel points out that ‘place-name scholars do not appear to have systematically listed the changes which place-names typically undergo’ (Padel 2014, 4). This is no less true for surnames. Compiling a comprehensive ‘grammar’ of surname development and variation would

be a lengthy and complicated task, and is currently an unachievable goal, given the relatively poor knowledge that we have of thousands of individual surname origins. An attempt by Forster (1978) to classify and illustrate the sound changes that have led to the modern forms of toponymic surnames (i.e. those from place-names) is a useful beginning, but it is not entirely reliable, since it contains a good deal of guesswork about surname derivations for which he has no evidence.²⁰ Redmonds (1997) includes valuable appendices dealing with typical phonetic changes and suffix confusion in Yorkshire surnames of all categories. Thanks largely to the use of IGI/FSR data in *FaNBI*, one can begin to extend these analyses in a modest way across the rest of England. This topic will form Part Three of ‘Explaining English surnames’.

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²⁰ For example, Forster (1978, 148) supposes that **Gulliver** is a pronunciation of **Guildford** (from Guildford in Surrey), but there is no evidence in IGI/FSR or in the *Place-Names of Surrey* (Mawer and Stenton 1934, 9) to support this. *Gulliver* and its variant *Gulliford* are convincingly explained by Reaney as a nickname from Old French *goulafre* ‘glutton’.

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