

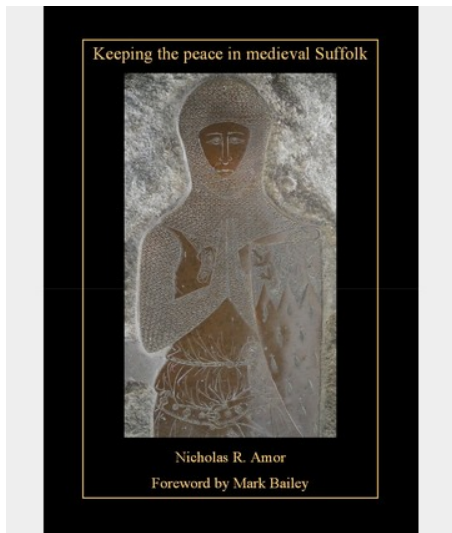
The nicknames of some medieval felons

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Keeping the peace in medieval Suffolk, by Nicholas Amor



Suffolk poll tax 1381, occupational surnames

- **name=occupation:** Nicholaus Fuller *fuller*, Willelmus Tayllour *tailleur*, Johannes Wetherherde *bercarius*, Robertus Daye *daye*, Ricardus Redere *redere*, ...
- **name≠occupation:** Johannes Coupere *carpenter*, Amya Schepherde *spynnere*, Ricardus Saltere *textor*, Johannes Lestere *skalder* (OED 1536) ...

The Poll Taxes 1377, 1379, and 1381 part 2, ed. C. Fenwick pp.504ff.

Alan le Utlagh 1231 (Ilketshall)

- *Emma que fuit ux[or] Alan le Utlagh*
- 'the outlaw'

The National Archives (TNA) CP25/1/213 no.20 (Feet of Fines).

le Gannoker

- Frequent in Suffolk in the 14th century.
- ‘one who brews or bakes against the assize, or forestalls, or regrates’.
- From a verb **gannoken*, attested only in latinized form.
- *Ade de Botisdale p’ gannok’ pan’* “Adam of Botesdale for gannoking bread” (Redgrave court roll 1315).
- Not at first ‘inn-keeper’ (the dictionaries are wrong!), but it became that later.

Keith Briggs, Middle English **gannoken* ‘to grate’, *Notes & Queries*, 63 (2016), 531–2; Gannock in King’s Lynn, *JEPNS* 48 (2016) 28–39.

Matild' Wrangle 1294/5 (Exning)

- Possibly for *Wrangler* ('one who wrangles or quarrels; an angry or noisy disputer or arguer', OED ?1518).
- OED **wrangle**, *v.* 'to dispute angrily; to argue noisily or vehemently; to altercate, contend; to bicker' from 1377.
- OED **wrangle**, *n.* 'an angry dispute or noisy quarrel; an altercation or bitter disputation' a1555.

TNA JUST3/63/2 m3r.

Galfr' Pylekrok 1298 (Babergh Hundred)

- 'steal crock'
- OED **pill**, *v.*¹ II 7a 'to rob, extort, pillage' a1350.
- Variant **peel**, *v.*¹ I 1a 'to rob or strip (a person) of possessions; to pillage or plunder (a place)' a1250.
- cf. *Pillere* below.

TNA JUST3/63/3 1r.

Dulcia le Pillere 1310 (Ipswich)

- ‘plunderer, robber, thief’
- OED †**pillier**, *n.* c1385 (Chaucer)
- A word probably representing a merger of a derivative of the ME verb *pill* ‘to rob, extort’, and the unrelated French *pillier* (>pillage).
- cf. *Pylekrok* above.

TNA JUST3/63/4 7r.

John le Startere 1308 (Cavendish)

- 'deserter, vagrant; . . . shirker, quitter'.
- OED **starter**, *n.* in this sense from 1519.
- Not in MED.

TNA JUST3/63/4 3r.

Joh'es Deth 1309 (Blaxhall)

- 'death'
- *Joh'es Deth* was the leader of a gang accused of murder.
- ODFNBI: "nickname from Middle English *deeth*, *deth*, Old English *dēap* 'death', perhaps for someone who played the part of Death in a local pageant. Compare the figure of Death in the Chester mystery cycle. The traditional pronunciation of this surname is Deeth, which would be the normal development of Old English *dēap*."

TNA JUST3/63/4 1v.

The modern surname Death



Bucklesham, Suffolk.

Alexander Trech 1308/9 (Lavenham)

- Accused of stealing capons from the parson of Norton.
- OED **treche** | **trich**, *v.* 'to deceive, cheat, betray, play false with'.
- No ordinary noun recorded in OED, but cf. OFr *triche* 'deceit, treachery, cheating'.
- Cf. also OED †**treacher**, *n.* 'a deceiver, a cheat; one who deceives by trickery;' from c1290 > surname Treacher.

TNA JUST3/63/4 6r.

Robert Coggere 1314 (Blything Hundred)

- OED †**cogger**, *n.*² ‘a sharper, cheat, deceiver, beguiler’ 1580.
- Or perhaps ‘master of a cog (ship)’?

TNA JUST3/63/4 13v.

Thomas Ronneaway 1370/1 (Herringswell)

- OED **runaway**, *n.* 'a person who runs away; a fugitive, deserter, or escapee' 1534.

East Anglian Notes & Queries 11 (1906), 270.

Robert le Cove 1311 (Risbridge Hundred)

- OED †**cof**, *adj.*
- 'quick, nimble, prompt; eager, keen, bold; fierce, pugnacious'.
- Perhaps the origin of OED **cove**, *n.*² (slang) 'fellow, chap' 1567?

TNA JUST3/63/4 9r.

Robert Sprunt 1309 (Marlesford)

- OED †**sprunt**, *adj.* ‘brisk, active; smart, spruce’ 1631
- Related to “sprint” or *sprent*?
- Survives as a modern surname; recorded in ODFNBI from 1237.

TNA JUST3/63/4 1v.

Literature

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- Jan Jönsjö (1979). *Studies on Middle English nicknames: 1. compounds*. Vol. 55. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup
- Ingrid Hjertstedt (1987). *Middle English nicknames in the Lay Subsidy rolls for Warwickshire*. Vol. 63. Uppsala: Uppsala University
- David Postles (1999). “‘Oneself as another’ and Middle English nickname bynames”. *Nomina* 22, 117–132
- Cecily Clark (1978). “Thoughts on the French connections of Middle-English nicknames”. *Nomina* 2, 38–44

Abstract

Nicknames describing a characteristic activity of the bearer were common in the Middle Ages. There are very many examples of the “Shakespeare” type such as Brekepot, Clynkebelle, Fillecup, and Lickedish, and other important categories are formed with the article *le* followed by an adjective or agent noun. Such names not only provide an insight into the thought-processes of the medieval mind, but contain valuable evidence of the Middle English colloquial vocabulary. This talk will explore possible examples of a very small category: nicknames of felons, criminals, and outlaws, using evidence from fourteenth-century Suffolk documents.