

THE DAUGHTER OF THE FARRIER

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"Name, please."

"Harold Walter Ichthyologist."

"I beg your pardon - what was that again?"

Who wouldn't beg your pardon after hearing a name like that? And imagine having it and spelling it to every bank teller, school admissions clerk, secretary, credit manager and prospective employer. There are enough difficult names as it is without adding ones like Ichthyologist, Epidemiologist and Taxonomist to them. Yet some families might very well have been given these names if we were still assigning surnames, because a man's occupation was frequently used as the basis for his family's name. Thanks to the simplicity of earlier times, however, Mr. Ichthyologist has probably come down to us as Mr. Fisher.

After I started thinking about occupation names, I started setting down a few. The list soon grew quite long and also led to an insight - monolingual as I am, I could only record occupation names in English or what bits and tags of French and German that were obvious. I concluded that there must be a great many interesting occupational words hidden beneath Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Armenian and other ethnic names.

There are probably a number of names which originally referred to an occupation but which have been so distorted by anglicizing that they now mean nothing. I also reflected that some of these occupation names may have been given in jest as nicknames because someone acted like a pope or a king. Or, perhaps, he was related to a priest or abbot. Although sometimes the spelling has changed, there are many occupations we can recognize in their old clothes such as Gardner, Saylor, Taylor and Chandler.

The names I like best are those based on archaic or old-fashioned occupations that have all but disappeared from present-day experience. Some of these are Fletcher (arrow maker), Cooper (barrel maker), Palfreyman (groom for ladies' horses), Scribner (writer or scribe), Wainwright (a maker of wagons), Chapman (a peddler or merchant), Sutter (a sutler, or army provisioner), Faulkner (a keeper or trainer of falcons), Shriver (one who listens to confessions) and Farrier (a horseshoer). His daughter is celebrated in the old jingle

The daughter of the farrier
Could find no one to marry her

Because, 'tis said, she grew so fat
There was no man could carry her.

I'm sure there are a lot of fascinating occupation names that I have not ferreted out. I wanted to include a number of famous people's names which sound as if they are based on occupations, but couldn't find the substantiating evidence to justify it. Maybe you can trace their etymology and thereby add Cheever, Mather, Thurber and Tuchman to the list.

As difficult as some of our names are to pronounce and spell and transport from generation to generation, let's be grateful that we aren't still handing out last names. By and large, I think that the old names are usually simpler and more graceful. Imagine some poor little girl starting school this fall and giving her name to the teacher as Susan Elizabeth Systems-Analyst.

A LIST OF OCCUPATIONAL SURNAMES

Abbott	Cooper	Hosterman	Shepard
Arrowsmith	Dancer	Hostler	Shepherd
Baker	Doctor	Hunter	Schumacher
Beeman	Draper	Kaiser	Schumann
Boatwright	Driver	King	Shoemaker
Booker	Dyer	Knight	Schreiber
Bowman	Earl	Koenig	Shriver
Brenner	Farmer	Lancer	Singer
Brewer	Farrier	Loper	Skinner
Bucher	Falconer	Mailer	Smith
Buchman	Faulkner	Mason	Spinner
Butler	Finster	Masters	Steward
Canter	Fisher	Miner	Stover
Carpenter	Fleischmann	Painter	Streeter
Carter	Fletcher	Palfreyman	Sutter
Cartwright	Forester	Palmer	Taylor
Carver	Fraser	Parker	Teacher
Chamberlain	Gardner	Planter	Thatcher
Chandler	Garner	Plummer	Tinker
Chaplain	Glaser	Rector	Trader
Chapman	Glasser	Reever	Trapper
Clark	Glosser	Roper	Wainwright
Coachbuilder	Glover	Ryder	Wagonner
Coker	Grover	Sadler	Warner
Coleman	Harper	Salinger	Weaver
Collier	Herder	Saylor	Wheelwright
Cook	Hooker	Scribner	