

THE PRIME MINISTERS, MORE OR LESS

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The names of the American presidents have been transposed in various ways in at least three *Word Ways* articles, but to my knowledge no such attention has heretofore been accorded the names of their British counterparts, the prime ministers. To address this oversight, offered below is a table of metatransposals (i.e., transdeletions and transadditions) of British prime ministerial surnames similar to the one for the surnames of U.S. presidents offered in my August 1998 article, "The Presidents, More or Less."

If one begins the count with Robert Walpole—generally considered to have been the first true prime minister—51 individuals have now held that post. Subtracting one of the two *Grenvilles* in the list leaves a total of 50 different "surnames" for the table. (There is only one *Pitt* in it, as the elder Pitt is listed as the Earl of *Chatham*.) A complication with this group is that prior to the twentieth century, most prime ministers bore titles of nobility (often as a conferred honor) by which they were more often better known during their prime ministerships than by their personal names. In deciding which names, titular or personal, to use in the table, I have followed the listing of prime ministers given in Kenneth O. Morgan's *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*.

Here are my vocabulary rules: To be eligible for the table, a word or phrase must be a boldface entry in a major dictionary, or a reasonable inflection of such an entry. Not acceptable are words that are the plurals, inflections, or derivatives of an untransposed base name (*thatchers*, *northern*, *vice-chamberlain*, *majority*, *lawyer*, etc.). Also excluded, mainly for esthetic reasons, are proper nouns, transdeletions that delete more than a third of the letters in the base name, and transadditions that add more letters than there are letters in the base name.

In the following, all less-than-optimal metatransposals—those that add or subtract more than one letter—are shown in italics, with the number of letters added or subtracted indicated in parentheses. W3 = Webster's Third; W2 = Webster's Second.

Prime Minister	Transdeletion	Transaddition
Walpole	wallop	walloper W3
Wilmington	<i>twirling</i> (2) W2	<i>world-animating</i> (4) W2
Pelham	maple	<i>helpmate</i> (2) W3
Newcastle	cleanest	<i>sweet archangel</i> (4) W3
Devonshire	overshine W3	<i>devil's-grandmother</i> (7) W3
Bute	tub	tuber
Grenville	reveling	revellings
Rockingham	<i>charming</i> (2)	<i>knight commander</i> (5) W3
Chatham	<i>match</i> (2)	hatchman W3
Grafton	forgat W3	frontage
North	horn	thorny
Shelburne	busheler W3	<i>double-strength</i> (5) W3
Portland	<i>portal</i> (2)	<i>postprandial</i> (4)

Pitt	tip	petit W3
Addington	<i>atoning</i> (2)	<i>nodding catchfly</i> (6) W3
Perceval	cleaver	<i>perceivable</i> (3) W3
Liverpool	<i>overlie</i> (2) W3	<i>overpotential</i> (4) W3
Canning	caning	<i>enhancing</i> (2)
Goderich	<i>chider</i> (2)	<i>chowdering</i> (2) W3
Wellington	toweling W3	<i>town-dwelling</i> (2) OED
Grey	erg	gyres
Melbourne	<i>bemourn</i> (2) W2	<i>double mordent</i> (4) W3
Peel	lee	sleep
Russell	<i>rules</i> (2)	sulliers
Derby	bred	breedy W3
Aberdeen	breaden W3	<i>aberdevine</i> (2) W3
Palmerston	temporals W3	trampolines
Disraeli	sideral W3	side rails W3
Gladstone	<i>longest</i> (2)	<i>garden violets</i> (4) W3
Salisbury	<i>burials</i> (2)	<i>bushy-tailed rats</i> (6) W3
Rosebery	soberer	<i>gooseberry</i> (2) W3
Balfour	<i>flour</i> (2)	four-ball W3
Campbell-Bannerman		
Asquith	<i>quash</i> (2)	<i>squattish</i> (2) W3
George	gorge	engorge
Law	al W3	wall
Baldwin	<i>bland</i> (2)	windable W2
MacDonald	<i>calando</i> (2) W3	<i>collared monad</i> (4) W3
Chamberlain	<i>camel hair</i> (2) W3	<i>climbing hydrangea</i> (5) W3
Churchill	<i>church</i> (3)	<i>chlorsulphonic</i> (5) W2
Attlee	elate	<i>talented</i> (2)
Eden	end	needs
Macmillan	<i>laminal</i> (2) W3	<i>animalculum</i> (2) W3
Douglas-Home	<i>doghouse</i> (3)	<i>manganous chloride</i> (6) W3
Wilson	lions	lowings
Heath	hath	health
Callaghan	<i>gallach</i> (2) W3	<i>pantographically</i> (7) W3
Thatcher	ratchet	hatcher
Major	roam	jorram W3
Blair	bail	tribal

As can be seen, only the compound surname of Edwardian prime minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman presently stands in the way of the table's completion. With its 17 letters, *Campbell-Bannerman* requires, under my rules, a transdeletion that is at least 12 letters long and a transaddition of no more than 34 letters, neither of which I was able to find. My search was by no means an exhaustive one, however, and the existence of the 11-letter transdeletion *balance beam* suggests that a legal transdeletion, at least, for *Campbell-Bannerman* might eventually be found.