

BIRDWELL

Birdwell – is a surname of English origin adopted from the locational name given to ‘Dweller at or near a spring or well frequented by birds.’ When surnames were becoming established in the 11th and 12th centuries, locational names were to be one of the main sources used for surname. A man would be known by the name of the place he lived in, or near and would adopt this as a surname. Not only town and village names appear in modern surname records but many ‘local’ places names are also found.

In Old English we find ‘bridd’ as a word used to denote a bird catcher, in Middle English the work ‘bridd’ has become ‘bird’, so the surnames Birdwell, Bridwell and Bridewell have the same source of origin, these being the names of several places in England. The surname was also adopted in the forms Berdwell and Berdewell. Some instances of the surname have also been adopted from the name given to ‘Dweller near the Celtic saint. A church in Fleet Street, London is dedicated to St. Bride and has a sacred well under her invocation. A palace was built on the site and this later became a prison and Bridewell has become the name in England used to describe minor prisons.

The place of Birdwell lies south of Barnsley in county Yorkshire, and early families of the name had flourished in this region. We find the name also recorded in Thelvetam in county Suffolk and Gasthorpe in county Norfolk.

The surname in the form Birdwell was never to become widely adopted in early England and is a rare entry in our early records of settlers arriving in America.

Description of Arms	
Arms	Gules (red) a goat salient argent (silver) armed or (gold) between three fountains proper
Crest	A heron proper
Motto	‘Ardua Petit Ardea’ – translated – ‘The Heron seeks high places’

The surname Birdwell is rare in all our early passenger lists of early settlers arriving in America, but we find an entry for Mary Birdwell in our New England records of settlers there before 1692. Mary Birdwell married John Dix who had settled in Hartford, Connecticut. Many passenger lists are still in archives waiting to be catalogued and printed and this surname may be among those. Abraham Birdwell is recorded as settling in Virginia by 1716 and George Birdwell is recorded in the same State in 1760.

By the time of the American Civil War 1861-65 the surname was becoming well established in America, we find eight entries for bearers of the name in the soldier records of this war all joining the Union Army and are as follows:

Name	State Served	Enlist Rank	Enlist Date
George W. Birdwell	New York	Private	12 th Jan. 1864
John A. Birdwell	Kentucky	Bugler	10 th Oct. 1861
John H. Birdwell	Illinois	Private	26 th Sept. 1862
John H. Birdwell	Illinois	Private	20 th Aug. 1862
Moses F. Birdwell	Illinois	Private	26 th Sept. 1862
Samuel C. Birdwell	Indiana	Private	1 st Oct. 1864
Thomas M. Birdwell	Illinois	Musician	24 th May 1861
William Birdwell	Illinois	Sergeant	6 th Aug. 1861

In more modern census records we find the surname well established in state of Texas and in the lists of World War I. Civilian Draft registers entries are recorded for bearers of the name from Texas and Idaho.

Coat of Arms

The Arms show on the shield a goat between three fountains. Early fountains in heraldry are always depicted as a roundel made up of six bars wavy silver and blue. The fountain (or well) is used to symbolize the source of origin of the surname and in heraldry this charge also symbolizes philanthropy (love of mankind).

The goat in heraldry symbolizes past sacrifices in the service of country and ruler.

Your surname is an English surname, the custom of using surnames began in England after the French Norman conquest. This significant change was not brought about solely by the invasion, for it was a movement that was already underway and spreading through the more populous countries of Europe. The rise of large towns and the growing population in country districts made it increasingly difficult to identify an individual who bore only one name, and that usually a nickname, or just a Christian name. When as often happened this would lead to an individual bearing a common name like 'John' or 'Thomas', and with so many 'Johns' and 'Thomas's' confusion arose, and it then was found to be more convenient to confer nicknames.

This then led to such names as 'John at the Hill' or 'John of the Mill', and therefore the introduction of surnames led to a much more satisfactory situation. In order to understand how we got our name it is necessary to consider the conditions prevailing in England after the Norman Conquest. In the centuries following that event hordes of Priests, Traders, and Adventurers flocked to this country from France and the Low countries. Also English speech was represented in many dialects, and in addition to the French and English dialects, the native 'Manx' 'Gaelic' 'Cornish' and 'Welsh' dialects spoken in the far outlying parts of the Kingdom, added to the confusion.

Surnames generally come in five classes – Baptismal or Personal names – Local surnames – Official surnames – Occupational surnames – Place names and nicknames. It sometimes is difficult to distinguish between occupational and official surnames. Unimpeachable early records ‘Domesday Book’ 1086, and The Hundred Rolls of 1273. In addition Pipe Rolls, Charter Rolls.

Surnames are generally acknowledged as having become the custom throughout Europe from around the 11th Century. In almost 90 per cent the origins of surnames were obtained from the following areas – Local surnames – Official surnames – Occupational surnames – Baptismal or Personal surnames – and Nicknames.

Other surnames derived from sources connected with ‘Hero Worship’ or ‘Teutonic Mythology’, and even from Mental and Moral qualities. As the baptismal name was conferred by fond parents, and the surname by the impartial world, so there is more truth in the latter than in the former. Although the general principals for surnames as outlined above apply to most countries, each country still had its own philological personality and history, therefore many names developed differently. It is also especially true that surnames developed or were derived from the Fathers name in many countries throughout the world. For example, we can give the undermentioned to explain the Patronymical form;

Nationality	Patronymic	Example	Meaning
English	-son	Richardson	son of Richard
Czechoslovakian	-icz, or ov.	Pavlov	son of Paul
French	-de, or ‘D’	De Pierre	of Pierre
German	-sohn	Heinsohn	son of hein
Irish	-O’	O’Kelly	grandson of Kelly
Scandinavian	-sen	Janssen	son of Jan
Scottish	-Mac	Maclver	son of Iver
Spanish	-az, or ez	Gonzalez	son Gonzal
Welsh	-ap, or ab	Bevan	son of Evan
Polish	-ski, wicz	Zeilinski	son Zeilin

The greatest variety of surnames throughout the world must be found in the United States and Canada, every country having contributed to its family surnames. A bewildering mass of names.