Variations in Middle English local surnames

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Abstract
Although there are many local surnames in Middle English that originate from places still on map and can easily be identified, many of the surnames indicate nothing more than the place of origin. The article will focus on the factors behind the distortion and variation of Middle English[1] local surnames, and surmises that they vary from place to place because of the way they are spelt, because of the phonetic change and, most importantly, because of the dialectal variation. Variations in local surnames also take place because of the distance a name travels from its origin, of addition of different suffixes, and of different peculiarities. Focusing on four Middle English local surnames with their variants, the article will talk about the etymology of the names, their variations, and the reasons behind their variations. In the case of *Oakes*, *Noakes*, and *Roake*, variations arise from grammatical misinterpretations or the knowledge of the function of prepositional elements. Initial *F-* in the South was pronounced *V* which we find in *Venn* and *Fenn*. *Aston* and *Easton* have the same etymology but they differ from each other on regional and phonological perspectives. Last but not least, *Staniforth* is a variant of *Stanford* where the variation arises because of the dialectal variations of suffix *–ford* and *–forth*.
Key Words: surnames, suffix, distortion, variation

Introduction

A local surname is a convenient term for all surnames derived from a particular locality or place, but these are of more than one type. There are many local surnames which derive from places still on the map and are easily recognisable but many of the surnames show or indicate nothing more than the place of origin. Besides the huge number of names derived from estates, towns and villages, there are many names from landscape features, such as Hill, Wood, and Field or from specific buildings or parts of buildings. The original words of many of the surnames are quite obsolete or they survive only in local dialect. Local surnames are one of the four types of surnames. They refer to place of origin and ownerships of lands. There are lots of variations in surnames and these variations take place because of different factors.

In my paper, I will talk about the distortion and variation of ME local surnames due to different reasons — the distance they travel from their birth-place, imitative tendency, and interesting and confusing endings — and shed light on different cases of suffix change. I will focus on four ME local surnames with their variants such as *Aston* and *Easton*; *Oakes*, *Noakes*, and *Roake*; *Stanford* and *Staniforth*; and *Venn* and *Fenn*. I will talk about the etymology of these names, their variations, and reasons behind their variations. Last but not least, I will show the distribution of the names in different counties in the UK based on the data from 1881, 1911, and 2004[2].

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[1]ME will be used as the abbreviation of Middle English throughout the article.

[2]1881 census data are taken from the website www.forebears.co.uk. 1911 census data are taken from www.uk1911census.com which fails to provide data for *Aston* and *Easton* in some counties. All the data of 2004 are taken from the book *An Atlas of English Surnames* where no information regarding the discussed names is found in some counties like Middlesex, Sussex,

Surnames: Origin, Types, Structure, and Variation

"In Old English times people usually had only one name, the Christian name but at the end of the Old English period, the need of a second name was felt and by-names were used to differentiate between people with same personal name" (Fransson,1935: 20). Surnames came in vogue in the late 11th century partly as a result of social changes following the Norman Conquest in 1066; in the 13th century, one could rarely find a person mentioned only by his Christian name. They were passed on from one generation to the next and were markers of relationships rather than descriptions of individuals. After the Norman Conquest, Old English[3] Christian names were totally changed and the Christian names of the Normans started to be used commonly although these names were limited. There were people with same Christian names in the same village and it was necessary to distinguish them by adding an extra name; later, other persons were also given a second name. When the Normans came to England, they brought second names with them and these names were added to those that already existed. Unlike Christian names, surnames could be changed. Before surnames became fixed as hereditary family names, a person could have two or more surnames at the same time and he could use different names in different times. Apart from some exceptions, surnames were considered as real names and used frequently for the sake of clarity (Fransson, 1935: 22-23).

ME surnames were divided into four classes: all surnames would fall into one or other of the four classes.

Local Surnames: This was by far the largest group of surnames held by landowning families, and referred to place of origin or to ownership of land. This is of two types:

➢   Locative Surnames: They derived from place-names or residence from where the person had come. For example, Tom *de Appelby* (Fransson, 1935: 26)

➢   Topographical Surnames: They were formed from topographical elements, and preceded by *ate*, *de la*, *uppe*, *binethe*. They denoted the residence of a person: Agnes *ate More* etc.

Surnames of Relationships or Familial Surnames: These names denoted a person's relationship and commonly contained the father's and rarely the mother's Christian name, and even his or her surname. Those from a father's name are known as 'patronymics' and those from a mother's name as 'matronymics'.

Surnames of Occupation or Office: The surnames of occupation were the most interesting names and could be divided into three possible groups. The first group contained dignitaries and officers, e.g. mayor, judge, sheriff, etc. The second group comprised occupations which belong to the country, such as agricultural and farming occupations, pastoral occupations and forestall occupations. The third and last group consisted of those who produced and sold different products.

Characteristic Surnames or Nicknames: These names were not taken by the bearer but were given to or imposed on them by other people; they even became hereditary. "Nicknames can be originated from different sources and are of different types, for example, physical and external peculiarities, mental and moral characteristics, from animals, fishes and birds, from oaths and phrase-names, and names of indecent and obscene association" (Reaney, 1978: 232).

Worcester and Yorkshire (East, North and West Riding). Mapping is done by using Google Fusion Tables (www.tables.googlelabs.com)
[3]OE will be used as the abbreviation of Old English throughout the article.

It should be mentioned that there is considerable overlapping within these groups. Local surnames may be occupational Surnames of office such as *Abbot*, *Bishop* and *King* are often nicknames whilst the last two may also be patronymics (Reaney, 1978: 20). "The use of surnames gradually spread down the social scale, with occupational surnames associated particularly with skilled craftsmen, and characteristic surnames with the lower classes" (Hough, 2012: 219). One chart concerning the variations and distributions of local surnames is provided bellow:

Place	Date	Total No. of Persons	Local %	Relationship %	Occupational %	Nicknames %
Winchester[4]	1066	243	8	9	13	13
	1115	274	13	6	21	9
	1148	855	13	2	26	10
Kings Lynn[5]	1166	186	14	6	14	16
Newark[6]	C 1175	365	7	5	23	9
	1225-31	299	29	7	8	6
Shrewsbury[7]	1209-19	982	8	4	18	7
	1384-1415	511	36	7	11	9
	1450-1459	268	37	16	12	12
London[8]	1292	805	42	8	26	15
	1319	1860	50	7	24	12
	1332	1631	51	8	18	13
Boldon[9]	1183	284	22	4	17	8
Subsidy Rolls, Sussex	1296	7210	43	9	9	7
	1327	7243	41	14	12	12
	1332	6973	40	14.5	11	12.5
Surrey	1332	5471	42	14	15	10
Kent	1334	11016	33	20	10	9
Cambs	1327	6385	23	25	14	12
Suffolk	1327	11720	26	19	15	14
Somerset	1327	11100	30	18	11	14
Worcester	1275	6235	14	14	14	12
	1327	4644	34	24	14	13
Warwickshire	1332	5457	33	23	15	10
Salop	1327	4897	31	11	17	9
Yorks	1297	3402	39	8	16	16
	1301	8699	37	5	18	8
	1327	3848	43	5	18	8
Lancashire	1332	2571	49	1	11	8

[4] Liber Winton
[5] Pipe Roll
[6] Surveys: the first for the town, and the second for the large county manor.
[7] Shrewsbury *Gild Merchant Rolls* (Trans. SaAs, 2nd ser., VIII (1896), 21-43; 3rd ser. V (1905), 35-54, 81-100).
[8] Subsidy Rolls
[9] Boldon Buke

Table 1: Variations and distributions of local surnames; Source: Reaney, 1978: 22

Variations in surnames took place because of variations in spelling, phonetic change, dialectal variations, and such. The modern form of many of our surnames is because of the spelling of some 16th or 17th century parson or clerk who had some education but who did not have any guidelines to the spelling of names. He used to write down the names phonetically, sometimes spelling the same name in different ways at different times; this variation in spelling often gives us the clue to the origin and meaning of the surnames. Alternative forms of a surname frequently provide proof of the development of different forms which are still found, e.g. *Busby*, *Busbe*, *Bushby* or *Bussheby* still survive as *Busby* or *Bussby* with a colloquial pronunciation *Bushby*. Some spelling changes do not affect the pronunciation; for example, both *F* and *Ph* represent the same sound and are interchangeable: *Fair*, *Phair*; *Fear*, *Phear* etc. Similarly, *C* often has the sound of *S* or of *K*: *Cely*, *Seeley*; *Carslake*, *Karslake*, and so on (Reaney, 1978: 27).

According to Reaney (1978), there is a common practice to prefix an inorganic *S* to words starting with a consonant as in *scrumple*, *snaisty* (nasty). *S* becomes *sh* in the beginning such as in *Shakesby* for *Saxby*; in the middle such as in *Pashley* for *Pasley*; and in the end such as in *Parish* for *Paris*. There is an interchange between initial *P* and *B*: *Bullinger*, *Pullinger*; *Blamphin*, *Plamphin* etc. The similar interchange of *T* and *D* is found in names like *Tyson*, *Dyson*; *Dunstall*, *Tunstall* etc. Loss of *r* is found in names like *Basham*, *Bassam* from *Barsham*, and *Funnell* from *Furnell.* The final *n* of names ending in *–son* sometimes becomes *m*: *Haysom* 'son of Hay' and *Ransom* 'son of Ran'. "In the treatment of the consonants *c*, *f* and *s* there was a huge difference between the North and the South. The Northern *cald* 'cold', calf preserved the sound of *k* in *Calf*, *Cawker* and such but Southern *ceald* still survives with *ch*. The Southern voicing of *s* is still preserved in some words. *F* in the beginning in the South was pronounced *V* which was also reflected in the spelling such as *Venn* for *Fenn*" (Reaney, 1978: 31).

Local Surnames: Structure and Distortion

As it is obvious, local surnames refer to the place from where a person has come, where he lives, or where he has his trade, service or occupation (Lofvenberg, 1942: xix). They were much more common than any other types of surnames and this was even the case in OE time. Many local surnames have survived up to the present days not only as surnames but also as place-names, which makes the matter more interesting. "A very large portion of local surnames are descriptive of the place where a man lived, near a forest, by a hill, in a valley, near a building, and the like. His place of residence could be described by any physical feature or by any object in the landscape which could easily be distinguished" (Reaney, 1978: 48). Originally, all these names began with a preposition (*de*, *at*, *by*, *in*, etc) and very often the definite article preceded the noun: Simon *ate Hegge*, Adam *Ithelane*, Richard *a Paules stret*, and so on. After the Norman Conquest, the usual preposition was *de*. In French names, which started with a vowel, this *de* often merged with names such as *Danvers*, *Disney*, *Doyley* and such, and sometimes with English names such as *Dash*, *Delafield* etc.

The method of indicating the place of origin was denoted by the use of descriptive adjectives, such as William *le Northerne*, 'William, the man from the North', Geoffrey *le Westerne*, 'Geoffrey, the man from the West' and so on. "Some of the toponymics have a French origin: *Surridge*, *Surrage*, (Geoffrey *le Surreys*); Estridge, (Peter *Estreis)*. Other toponymics denote nationality: *Wallis*, (Ricard *le Waleis)*; *Gales*, (Wulwurd *le Galeys)* (Reaney, 1978: 54). Sometimes the country of origin was specified and occasionally the town. The prepositional local surnames which were added to personal names were comparable to similar surnames attached to certain

place-names and in both cases the purpose was the same—to distinguish identical names.

Corruptions of local surnames may take place because of factors such as contractions and peculiarity, imitative tendency, the distance a name travels from its origin, and different disguised endings. Generally, the further a local surname travelled from its home, the more it became distorted or changed. Name with the highest number of form of this class is probably *Birkenshaw*, 'birch wood', also spelt *Berkenshaw*, *Burkenshaw*, *Burkinshear*, *Bircumshaw*. "With the common change of *t* for *k*, it becomes *Birtenshaw*, *Bertenshaw*, *Burtonshaw*, and even *Buttonshaw*. The replacement of –*shaw* by –*shire* is also seen in *Blackshire* and *Kirbyshire*, and the opposite change is found in *Wilshaw*. The change of –*shaw* to –*shall* in *Upshall*, *Ringshall* is a phonetic change which is opposite to the usual trends" (Weekley, 1974: 88). Some other examples of the corruption of county names are *Barraclough* which became *Barrowcliff* in Nottinghamshire, and reached London as *Berrycloth* and *Berecloth*. Sometimes, the distortions of local surnames took place because of imitative tendency, e.g. *Strawbridge*, *Strowbridge* for *Stourbridge* (in Worchester). Sometimes, a very slight change of spelling was rather confusing, for example, *Wincer* (Windsor), and occasionally alterations of the most violent kind took place, e.g. *Vickerstaff*, a Lancashire surname, apparently belonged to *Bickerstaffe*.

The most confusing and varied part of local surnames is the suffix portion where it was often found that –*wood*, -*worth*, -*with*, and –*wade*, were frequently interchanging, not only with each other, but also with the –*ward* of Anglo-Saxon personal names and with the adverbial –*ward*. Simply speaking, –*wood* in surnames is to be handled with caution because *Stallwood* is simply a corruption of the nickname *Stalworth* or *Stalwart*; on the contrary, *Homeword* is an alteration of *Homewood*, or for *Holmwood*, from ME *holm* meaning 'holly'. The *Oak* took the first place among names compounded from trees. "In most of the villages there were oak trees and the word often becomes –*ack*, -*ick*, -*ock*, -*uck*" (Weekley, 1974: 94).

Names such as *Nash*, *Noakes*, *Nall* are well known to be aphetic forms of *atten ash*, *atten oaks*, *atten hall*. With these go *Niles*, *Nayland*, *Nyland* (Thomas *Attenylonde*), *Norchard*, and *Nendick*. We also get aphetic forms in which the initial *A-* alone disappears and the best examples of which are *Twells*, (at wells), *Tash* (at ash), Toe, Toes (Atto) etc (Weekley, 1974: 50). Besides the common *Bycroft*, *Byford*, *Bysouth*, *Bywater*, *By-* is also seen in *Bygrave*, *Bygreaves*, where the second element may mean 'grove' or 'quarry'. To these can be added *Bidlake* and *Bidmead*, *Bitmeat*, which contain the definite article. Names with *Under-* and *Up-* are fairly numerous and simple. "*Undrell* is for *Underhill* and *Upfill* for *Upfield* or *Upfold*. Sometimes in names like *Upward*, *Downward*, *Downhard*, *Forward*, *Southward*, –*ward* is substituted for –*Wood*, e.g. *Homeward* for 'holm wood' ('holly wood') (Weekley, 1974: 51-52)

Some Case Studies
Here, I will focus on four ME local surnames with their variants, and talk about the etymology of the names, their variations, and factors behind their variations.

Aston and *Easton*

Easton and *Astons* are very good examples of surnames sharing the same etymological root but having different regional and phonological variants. This name is of Anglo-Saxon origin and the general sources of the name are the Germanic elements –*ēast*, meaning 'east', + *tūn*, 'an enclosure or settlement'. The OE phrase *be easten tune* means 'place to the east of a settlement or a village'. Although the variant *Aston* was common in West-Midlands, *Easton* seemed to be distributed in different parts of England, e.g. Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Hampshire, Suffolk, Essex, Somerset, and Leicestershire. Old English *ēa* could have been realised

as /ea/ in the West-Midland dialect instead of /e:a/ and then was monophthongised to /a/ in ME at a time when the orthography for the place-names resembled the phonetic spelling (Viereck et al., 2007: 96).

In addition, there might be three more etymologies for *Easton*: Firstly, "In Essex, it derived from OE *ēg*, meaning 'island', + *stān* (as), meaning 'stone' and in Devon, from the personal names *Ælfrīc*, *Æᵈelrīc or Eādstān*" (Hanks & Hodges, 1988: 161). In Northampton shire, this name derived from the OE *Eādstānestūn*, where *eād* means 'prosperity', *stān* means 'a stone' and *tūne* means 'a settlement'. In this regard, Watts lists Great Easton and Little Easton in Essex, which were first mentioned in 1556 as Great Eyston and Little Eyston. He says, both the names stemmed from the OE personal name *Æega+ stān* (as), 'Æga's stone (s)' which was then assimilated to *Easton* or *Aston* (2004: 205). The first recorded spelling of this surname is that of John *de Eston* in 1299 in the 'Calendar of Court Rolls of Cambridge shire', Alan *de Eston in* 1273 in *Oxfordshire*, and Philipp ate Estone in 1327. Watts again states, "*Aston* might be the contraction form of *ate stone* 'dweller by the stone' or even a variant of OE æsc *āsh+tūn* as in the surname Ashton" (2004: 24). From the survey on ME dialects for the West-Midland counties, it is found that there is a few examples of OE *eāst* 'east' with the first element *East-* in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Gloucestershire but *Ast-* is prevalent in other counties. The West-Midland area, therefore, had developed a distinct orthographic variant.

On the other hand, *Aston* is an English medieval surname and has three possible origins. Firstly, locational from the various place called Aston from the 7th century words *eāst* and *tūn* or the settlement in the east of a village, or in some cases the settlement by the ash tree. Secondly, the surname may stem from some Anglo-Saxon personal name, such as *Aethelstan*, comprised of *aethel*, meaning 'noble' and *stan*, meaning 'a stone'. *Asthone de Sancto Luca* is mentioned in documents relating to the Danelaw in Lincolnshire in 1140. Thirdly, the name might be topographical for a person who lived by a stone that was easily noticeable. Here, *stān*, 'stone', is preceded by preposition *at* and form the name *Aston* (at+stān). The first recorded spelling of the name is that of *Richard de Aston* in 1206 in the 'Curia Regis Rolls' of Gloucestershire.

Apart from having the origin of *Easton* in Essex, Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk, a majority of occurrences between the 16th and 19th centuries are situated in areas such as West Lothian, Lanarkshire, Roxburghshire, Midlothian, Lincolnshire, Sussex and Northumberland. Interestingly, there are rarely any events for *Easton* in the West Midland area for the period of four centuries. *Aston* is circulated and concentrated in the West Midlands counties like Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, and Herefordshire from the 16th century onwards. According to the UK census data of 1881, the two names share almost the same number of occurrences: *Aston* 4978 and *Easton* 4551. *Easton* still prevalent in Scotland, clustered in the North and the South-East of England and Devon, but is almost absent in West Midlands counties. On the other hand, five West Midlands counties: Staffordshire (1366 occurrences), Warwickshire (779), Worcestershire (547), Shropshire (232), and Herefordshire (232) share 59.6% of the total occurrences for *Aston*. Again in 2004, these counties contributed to the 40.5% of the 7956 entries in the whole UK.

Map 1:   Distribution of *Aston* and *Easton*

Place (UK)	*Aston*			*Easton*		
	1881	1911	2004	1881	1911	2004
Staffordshire	1366	1796	705	14	18	58
Warwickshire	779	1029	321	9	32	71
Worcestershire	547	630	NI	7	8	NI
Middlesex	363	132	NI	383	202	NI
Lancashire	313	552	217	136	182	98
Gloucestershire	306	338	259	21	12	104
Shropshire	232	258	262	4	4	33
Yorkshire	188	443	NI	410	540	NI
Cheshire	161	261	214	20	20	68
Surrey	119	83	118	343	231	74
Lanarkshire	20	NI	9	425	NI	418
Midlothian	3	NI	16	213	NI	278
Devon	23	3	140	206	29	329
Northumberland	9	23	37	169	299	169
Kent	34	63	110	164	230	330
Sussex	16	16	NI	158	223	NI
Norfolk	16	8	57	143	149	160
Stirlingshire	0	NI	4	137	NI	338
West Lothian	0	NI	6	127	NI	258
Durham	39	66	75	118	296	76
Renfrewshire	5	0	0	103	0	65

Table 2: Distribution of *Aston* and *Easton*
NI: No Information is collected.

The presence of *Aston* is stronger mainly in the West Midland counties with a small presence of *Easton*. On the other hand, *Easton* is dominant in the Southern part of

Scotland and Northern border region. Both *Aston* and *Easton* show their high presence in Wales and the South-East of England, with *Easton* is the more frequent variant.

Oakes, *Noakes* and *Roake*

Surname variants can also develop from grammatical misinterpretation or lost knowledge of the function of prepositional elements. "Surnames with an initial vowel were likely to be subject to a wrong separation of article and noun, e.g. <n> of ME *atten* because the ending *–ten* was no longer recognised as the dative singular of the article and was added to the noun as in *Oak>Noak*" (Forster, 1978: 194). This name with variant spelling *Oak, Oake, Oaks, Oke, Noak, Noake, Noakes, Nock, Noaks, Noke and Nokes* derives from the OE pre-7th century *ac*, ME *Oke* meaning an Oak tree and was initially given to a person whose dwelling was located by a well-known Oak tree. *Aten Oke* and *Atten Oak* (at the oak) were the original forms and when the preposition began to drop from this kind of surname, the final *-n* was attached to the designation of the tree and we obtained the form *Noake* with the vulgar plural form *Noakes.* Apart from *Noake*, we have *Rock* (Worcester), and *Rook* (Devon) from *atter oak* or *ater oak*, meaning 'by the oak'. The first recorded spellings of the name are Thomas *del Oke* (1275), Adam *at the Ock* (1273), Thomas *atten Oke* (1296), John *ate Noke* (1327), and Robert *ate Nokes* (1332).

 The surname *Roake* has several possible origins. Firstly, it can be residential for somebody living near a notable crag and this forms the 7th century word 'rocc'. Secondly, it can be residential also but for somebody living near a large oak tree. This derives from the ME phrase *atter oke*, meaning 'at the oak tree'. Thirdly, it can originate either from the village of Rocks in Northumberland, which is on a rock, or from Rock in Worcestershire, which is the combined form of *atter oke*. The first recorded spelling of the family name is that of Robert *del Roc* dated in 1182 for the county of Worcestershire. Although generally, the name was given to someone who lived near an oak tree or in an oak wood, in some cases, it can be given to someone who is strong like an oak.

By the 18th century, *Oakes* has concentrated in the area of Cheshire and Staffordshire and by the 19th century, areas like Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire, West Riding Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, and Shropshire contributed to the 77% of the total events for *Oakes*. "The few early records of *Noakes* in the 17th and 18th century are concentrated in the South-Eastern tip of England with Kent and Sussex becoming the only notable cluster by the 19th century and between 1500 and 1900 about 81% of the total events for *Noakes* were recorded in these two counties" (Viereck et al., 2007: 150). There is a clear pattern of distribution with both the variants; *Oakes* occur exclusively in the North and *Noakes* in the South-East. Although it seems that *Oakes* concentrate in the place of origin, it is also mentionable that *Noakes* concentrate in Kent and in Sussex.

Map 2: Distribution of *Oakes*, *Noakes*, and *Roake*

Place (UK)	Oakes			Noakes			Roake		
	1881	1911	2004	1881	1911	2004	1881	1911	2004
Lancashire	961	1577	367	40	52	32	8	4	2
Cheshire	662	879	865	7	15	27	0	1	0
Staffordshire	488	651	373	125	190	75	1	0	0
Yorkshire	446	572	NI	29	51	NI	1	1	NI
Middlesex	238	124	NI	424	141	NI	41	40	NI
Worcestershire	226	291	233	28	20	14	0	0	1
Warwickshire	161	159	123	43	56	36	7	2	1
Norfolk	149	187	174	2	4	39	0	3	0
Suffolk	144	154	111	3	3	59	0	0	6
Surrey	140	131	135	165	167	175	139	81	78
Sussex	45	60	55	578	531	511	1	4	7
Kent	58	103	192	286	407	303	4	26	38
Essex	18	97	236	154	370	327	9	6	31

Table 3: Distribution of *Oakes*, *Noakes*, and *Roake*
NI: No information is collected.

Regarding the distribution of *Roake*, there is the confusion of genders about the articles *atten*, *atter*, and *atte* which seemed to be an exclusive feature of South-Eastern region. The surname *Roake* concentrated in the South, especially in Surrey, Middlesex, and Berkshire between 1500 and 1900. Viereck et al. pointed out, "The

surname variants originating from the grammatically correct gender *atter* have been recorded less frequently than the variants emerged out of the application of wrong gender, e.g. *atten*" (2007: 150). *Roake* is more concentrated in the region comprising Surrey, Greater London, Kent, and Essex and it can be said that mainly in the south-east of England *Oakes* became *Noakes* or *Roake*.

Fenn and Venn

"The unusual surnames *Fenn* and *Venn* are of medieval English origin and one of the first recorded which developed from OE *fenn* meaning 'a marsh' and described someone who lived in a low lying marshy area" (Hanks & Hodges, 1988: 179). Both *Fenn* and *Venn* are both topographic surnames for someone who lived in a low-lying marshy area, or regional and locational for a former resident of the Fen county of East Anglia in particular. They originated in the Fens "a flat low-lying tract of land with rivers, streams, and manmade channels that drain into *The Wash* which comprises a large region of east and south Lincolnshire, north and east Cambridgeshire, and northwest Norfolk" (Room, 1988: 136).

Early examples of the surname *Fenn* are mainly restricted to the district around the Broads in East Norfolk with a smaller number in the West. "The early samples of the surname are that of Godwin *de la Fenna* in 1176 in Devon, Ralph *de Fenne* in 1190 in Lincolnshire, Isabella *ate Fenne* in 1273 in Oxforshire, Robert *de la Fenne* in Somerset, and John *ate Venne* in 1327" (Reaney, 1997: 166). The interesting thing is the Southern variants of *Fenn* where /f/ became /v/. The unvoiced fricative developed variedly from regions to regions and was voiced in the South of England, especially when preceding a vowel. *Venn* is a Devonshire place-name and was mainly distributed in Devon and Somerset.

Whereas *Fenn* is distributed in Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Hertfordshire and Kent, *Venn* is rarely present there and totally absent in Lincolnshire. *Venn* is really strong in Gloucestershire and its distribution pattern runs from the north of the West Midlands to the South and to the Eastern shore. The analysis of census data reveals that *Fenn* has concentrated in the counties of the Mid East, Surrey and Kent, and according to 1881 census, *Venn* comprises approximately half as many entries as *Fenn*. According to the 1881 census, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Surrey, Staffordshire, and Kent have shared 64.2% of all events for *Fenn*. On the other hand, the distribution of *Venn* is limited to Somerset, Devon, and Gloucestershire with 45.6% of all events, and Middlesex, Surrey, Sussex, and Kent occupy 30.7% of the total events for *Venn.*

Map 3: Distribution of *Venn* and *Fenn*

Place (UK)	*Venn*			*Fenn*		
	1881	1911	2004	1881	1911	2004
Somerset	289	31	133	0	2	30
Devon	216	21	113	18	4	102
Middlesex	157	84	NI	596	249	NI
Surrey	128	83	106	246	196	149
Gloucestershire	118	214	235	72	61	49
Sussex	82	111	101	53	77	83
Kent	52	55	94	213	160	202
Lancashire	45	37	24	87	205	115
Hampshire	34	41	167	37	46	75
Suffolk	11	28	16	356	372	277
Norfolk	8	7	14	272	306	357
Essex	7	32	42	272	506	443
Staffordshire	8	8	16	143	159	64
Cambridgeshire	4	2	20	103	163	146
Yorkshire	3	18	NI	93	219	NI
Warwickshire	24	41	31	57	87	43

Table 4: Distribution of *Venn* and *Fenn*.
NI: No Information is collected.

Venn is still distributed exclusively in the Southern counties. The South is divided among the two variants into West and East with both variants taking supremacy in one of the directions. *Fenn* dominates the South East where both variants are mostly concentrated in the entire Midlands apart from Gloucestershire, Hereford, and Worcester. Gloucestershire and Hampshire are the eastern boundaries of the area where voiced initial /v/ dominates over the unvoiced variant.

Stanford* and *Staniforth

"The place-name element *–ford* is one of the most common ones being cognate with Old Frisian *forda*, Old Norse *ford*, Old High German *furt* and Old Saxon *vord*; its variant element *–forth* is heavily concentrated in the Northern counties like Lancashire, North, East and West Riding Yorkshire" (Viereck et al., 2007: 104). This long established surname is of Anglo-Saxon origin, and is a locational one from any of the South England places, such as Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, and Essex. "It derives from OE *stān* 'stone' + *ford* 'ford'; hence 'stony ford' or ' a ford made of stone'" (Hanks & Hodges, 1988: 508). The above places were recorded as *stanford* and *stanforda* in the Domesday Book. Early examples of the surname include William de *Stanford* (1191), Adam *de Stanford* in Oxfordshire (1273), and Symon *de Stanford* in Hutingdonshire (1275).

There are lots of variants of *Stanford*: *Standford* through the addition of a consonant after /n/; *Stamford* due to the regressive assimilation; *Staniford* as the result of a transitional vowel between two consonants; *Stanforth* and *Staniforth* due to the suffix *–forth* since *–ford* often rendered *–forth* in northern dialects. *Stanford* and *Staniforth* are the two strongest variants. According to 1881 census, *Stanford* has strong hold in Middlesex (323 occurrence), Surrey (317), Sussex (310), Kent (301) and Staffordshire (218). Among other variants with suffix *–ford*, e.g. *Staniford*, *Standford* and *Stamford*, *Stamford* is the strongest with 106 entries in Sheffield, 92 in Middlesex, 60 in Surrey, and 57 in Cambridgeshire. *Staniford* has its highest number of occurrence in Berkshire (32), and *Standford* has in Kent with only 29 occurrences. Among the variants with suffix *–forth*, *Staniforth* is much stronger than *Stanforth* with a maximum occurrence of 691 in Yorkshire; *Stanforth* also has its highest occurrence in Yorkshire although with only 63 occurrences.

Map 4: Distribution of *Stanford* and *Staniforth*

Place (UK)	*Stanford*			*Staniforth*		
	1881	1911	2004	1881	1911	2004

Middlesex	323	124	NI	24	17	NI
Surrey	317	232	233	10	1	42
Sussex	310	371	330	1	3	21
Kent	301	233	304	3	11	22
Staffordshire	218	287	96	0	10	7
Cambridgeshire	97	141	98	0	1	9
Norfolk	82	89	72	0	3	12
Lancashire	79	137	86	77	149	43
Essex	79	208	240	0	1	24
Warwickshire	67	183	82	14	20	19
Worcestershire	67	127	119	1	9	17
Bedfordshire	53	104	52	1	3	19
Suffolk	44	58	73	0	4	16
Yorkshire	43	99	NI	691	803	NI
Derbyshire	4	45	34	125	124	157
Leicestershire	27	46	55	65	93	76
Nottinghamshire	7	22	33	54	103	107

Table 5: Distribution of *Stanford* and *Staniforth*
NI: No Information is collected.

The first occurrences for *Stanford* in the 16th century are recorded in Sussex, Worcestershire, Hampshire and Lincolnshire. There is hardly any event in the Northern part in the 16th and 17th century. In the 18th and 19th century, there is a significant cluster in the Southeast of Sussex with a rare presence in the Northern part. In the case of *Staniforth*, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and West Riding Yorkshire hold almost 65.2% of all the events between 1500 and 1900; however, only a few events are found in the Southeast of England during the same time span. *Stanford* is still stronger variant than *Staniforth*. The element *–forth* is really strong in Yorkshire as it has always been, and is almost absent in the South of England comparing to variants with *–ford*.

Conclusion
We have seen how ME surnames vary from place to place because of the way they are spelt, because of the phonetic change and, most importantly, because of the dialectal variation. Variations in local surnames also take place because of the distance a name travels from its origin, of addition of different suffixes, and of different peculiarities. *Aston* and *Easton* have the same etymology but differ from each other on regional and phonological perspectives. In the case of *Oakes*, *Noakes*, and *Roake*, variations arise from grammatical misinterpretations or the knowledge of the function of prepositional elements. When preposition started to drop from names like *Atten Oke* and *Atter Oak*, the final *-n* and *-r* was attached with the name of the tree and we find the variant *Noake* and *Roake*. Initial *F-* in the South was pronounced *V*, which we find in *Venn* and *Fenn*. *Staniforth* is a variant of *Stanford* and here the variation arises because of the dialectal variations of suffix *–ford* and *–forth*. In Northern dialect *–ford* is often rendered *–forth*. At present *Aston* is stronger in the West Midlands counties whereas *Easton* is more dominant in the Northern border region and the Southern part of Scotland. *Fenn* dominates over *Venn* in the Southeast areas apart from Gloucestershire and Worcester; on the other hand, *Venn* is stronger than *Fenn* in Gloucestershire and Hampshire. *Stanford* is stronger than *Staniforth* in the South of England but the element *–forth* has its strongest base in Yorkshire. *Oakes* concentrates in its place of origin, and in the Southeast of England it becomes *Noakes* and *Roake*.

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