

## What does it all mean?

# If we all waited to publish our one-name study until we felt we had found the ultimate answer, we would probably not publish at all

*WHAT does it all mean? What's the point? Why am I doing this and how long will it take me? These are surely questions just about every one-namer has asked themselves at some stage of their researches, especially when feeling overwhelmed with the sheer weight of the results! In this special article, Guild Chairman PETER WALKER asks himself the same questions – and tries to give the answers.*

*In February the Guild is holding a seminar on Publishing Your One-Name Study and we hope Peter's article of extended length and detail about his own study will give other members some idea of at least one approach to the topic.*

**I** F I WERE AN academic, I would have called this article something like *On the origins, distribution and growth of the Hollier name (and variants) in England 1275-1900*, but I make no great pretence for the depth of scholarly insight in what follows.

No one-name study is ever complete and mine is no exception. I dream of the day when some new tranche of data will magically make sense of the jumble of information found so far and I'll be able to impress everyone with the depth of my research.

As an alternative, I offer these "Notes on



**By PETER  
WALKER**

work in progress", recognising that if we all waited to publish until we felt we had found the ultimate answer, we would probably not publish at all. If what follows is not particularly startling, I apologise in advance; but, on the other hand, perhaps it will encourage more of you to publish something about your studies.

### • How did I start?

While researching my Hollyer ancestry (my mother's maiden name), I found that a relation in Canada had accumulated a lot of research from several others who were researching the name in the 1950s and 1960s. They had collated their find-

ings and assembled some pedigrees, convinced that with a little more research they would prove that all the various Hollyer families were related. After all, given the fact that so many of the different families all seemed to have an artistic streak, surely there must be a connection?

Indeed, my Hollyers were signwriters, artists on glass and the more traditional artists on canvas. The other large group of Hollyers were engravers and photographers. It occurred to me that these researchers – all from the USA and Canada – had not done any basic collection of BMDs, since they were working on the other side of the Atlantic with no easy way to acquire the information stored away at that time in Somerset House.

Too much of their output was speculation, but the family stories and collected memorabilia was fascinating and stimulating. Not long after this, I discovered that a Harry Holyer was researching the names HOLYER, HOLLYER and HOLLIER through the Guild and he was able to tell me a good deal about my own Hollyer line and how it connected to his Holyer family from Woodchurch in Kent. It turned out we were 5th cousins, once removed. He was able to assist me with some of the other Hollyer lines and it quickly became clear it was highly unlikely that the various families were related.

In 1997, Harry Holyer died and I joined the Guild and took over the study of the three name variants. I found that a lot of the basic data had not been collected or was missing, so I had to embark on much work to get the study on a sound footing.

### • Where did the name originate from?

The evidence bequeathed to me included quotes from surname dictionaries and sundry speculative sources. It's worth looking at some of these sources, though some of the smaller books on surnames make no mention at all of the Hollier name or its variants. It can be helpful to do so in chronological order, for it must be the case that authors have surveyed earlier works when compiling their own.

The earliest surname dictionary mentioning the Hollier name is *Patronymica Britannica: a Dictionary of the family names of the United Kingdom*, published by Mark Anthony Lower in 1860. All he has to say is that Hollier is a mispronunciation of Hellyer, but at least he correctly identifies the latter name as a West Country name, meaning a thatcher or tiler. The mistake of believing that there is a connection

between Hollier and Hellier lives on to this day in sundry Internet sites selling "family coats of arms".

To be told that the heart of the Hollier name is in Devon is such obvious nonsense that their assumption of its connection with Hellier (which is a Devon name) is soon discovered. Such sites peddling phoney arms are not above providing phoney facts as well, as long as they make money.

Mind you, I note that John Titford, in his 2002 book *Searching for Surnames*, quotes the Hellier name as being Cornish, rather than from Devon, and despite the fact that the evidence points more towards Devon, it has always seemed to me to sound Cornish, perhaps thinking of places like Helston.

## Overlap

In the other direction, the Hellier name does overlap into Somerset and there's still an outside possibility that the Somerset Holliers that seem to

Now here's an item of trivia! The word Holyer is a word in the Cornish language, which apparently means "follower" or "partisan". There is a competition for works written in Cornish called *Holyer an Gof*, which is said to mean "Voice of the Smith", which leaves me no wiser as to what precisely *holyer* means.

emerge in the mid 18th century might be connected with a variation from Hellier.

A rather obscure early source is the 1864 work by Robert Ferguson entitled *The Teutonic name system of France, Germany and England*. Ferguson analyses the Anglo-Saxon word *hold*, meaning faithful or friendly, and draws links to the words *hulths* in Gothic, *holt* in Old High German and *holtr* in Old Norse. He suggests that this is the origin of the surnames Holder, Holter and Holler in English, Hollier in French and Holder in Modern German. Obscure it may be, but I suspect that this is the reason behind the Church of Latter Day Saint's decision to group Hollier along with Holder and Holler etc in their well-known FamilySearch website.

The Rev. Charles Wareing Bardsley was another of the early researchers into surname origins. In his 1873 work *English Surnames*, he discusses locative names and says that there are many cases where a place-word is suffixed by a word equally signifying residence, these being *er* and *man*. He then gives examples of people who might have lived by a particular tree, such as Beecher, Asher, Oker, Hollier or Holleyman. In the index, he does give one early reference to the name, a William Holyer as mentioned in Broomfield's *History of Norfolk*.

Bardsley's *A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames* was published posthumously in 1901. Bardsley was neither a linguist nor a philologist. While he was well intentioned, he was not perhaps as rigorous as later writers. He did not seek out the earliest references to the name and like others after

him, there is much inaccurate speculation in his work. But his dictionary goes slightly further than his earlier one by saying:

*Hollyer, Hollier (1) Baptised 'the son of Oliver', from the modified Ollier, q.v. Aspirates present no difficulty, as will be seen from a perusal of letter 'H'. (2) Local, 'the hollyer', one who dwelt by the holly-bushes; cf Bridger or Holmer. Of course, Hillier (q.v.) may be the parent.*

My research and that of others studying the name Ollier does not support the idea of a link between the surnames; the distribution is quite different and, curiously, Ollier only seems to appear in the 17th century, in Cheshire, so this might indicate French immigration. However, some Olliers did change their name to Hollier in the 19th century. I will return to the Ollier / Hollier link later.

While not strictly a dictionary, the work of H. B. Guppy called *The Homes of Family Names in Great Britain* is of interest. Published in 1890, it attempts to list where common family names were found in the 19th century, often using farmers as a group of people who are likely to have stayed near their roots. But all he comes up with is a reference from Nichol's work, *Leicestershire*, where he quotes that "James Hollier was a landowner in Hinckley at the commencement of this century". Indeed he was, but this rather ignores the many other Hollier (and variant) families living in Warwickshire, Somerset, Hampshire and Kent.

Ernest Weekly published his book *Surnames* in 1916. He says:

*First it must be noted that many surnames [ending] in -er, suggesting an occupation or habit, do not belong to this class at all. Some of them are Anglo-Saxon personals e.g. Asker, Asher, Asser from the Anglo-Saxon Æschere, Fricker from the AS Frithugar, Hollier, Hullyer from the AS Holdgar.*

He quotes as an example a William f. Holdeger in the Pipe Rolls.

The next work of note is William Dodgson Bowman's 1931 publication, *The Story of Surnames*. In discussing the Anglicisation of French names, in particular Huguenot ones, he quotes the names Olier and D'Olyer as being "now Hollyer". As is so often the case with surname books, he offers no evidence and I'm confident that there are no Hollyers who have any connection with the D'Olier family.

The D'Olier family originally used the name Olier when they were resident in France and added the "D" prefix when, like so many other Huguenots, they escaped to Holland, but wanted to emphasize their French origins. A descendant of this family, Isaac D'Olier, came over with William of Orange and fought in Ireland. He was part of the group encouraged to settle in Dublin to increase the Protestant community.

But many of the firms who sell instant family histories, especially those in Ireland, repeat the

supposed D'Olier-Hollyer connection as fact. The D'Olier family became quite prominent in Dublin and there is a street called D'Olier Street just south of the famous O'Connell Bridge in the centre of the city. The locals pronounce it as "Doll-ear" Street.

Gustav Fransson in his book *Middle English Surnames of Occupation 1100-1350, with an excursion on toponymical surnames* (1935) mentions that names ending in -ere or -iere denote someone who lives by a particular topographical feature, e.g. Bechere denotes someone who lives by a beech tree. He cites four examples of early names as follows:-

- Adam le Holyer, 1319, Subsidy Roll, Essex
- Adam Holier, 1332, Subsidy Roll, Essex
- Robert le Holare, 1275, Subsidy Roll, Worcs
- John Holere, 1295, Gaol Delivery Roll, Norfolk

and explains that these names mean "dweller by the hole, cavity or hollow place". I am grateful to Peter McClure for this information. He told me that names of this form are actually most frequent in Sussex and the adjoining counties. They are also found in Somerset and Worcestershire and occasionally in the East Midlands.

## Respected

The best known and probably most respected surname dictionary is that produced in 1958 by P. H. Reaney and revised over many years, including by R. M. Wilson, up to 1997. He says:

*Hollier, Hollyer, Hullyer*

*Robert le Holyere 1309 Lay Subsidy Beds.*

*Adam Holiere 1327 Lay Subsidy Essex*

*Old French: holier, huler, a variant of horier, hurier*

*Middle English: holer, holyer, huller*

*'whoremonger, debauchee'.*

Penguin produced a *Dictionary of Surnames* in 1967, authored by Basil Cottle. He treads familiar ground by referencing the name as an occupational name meaning "whoremonger" from Old French or a locative name meaning "dweller in the hollies" from Old English.

1969 saw the publication of Henry Harrison's *Surnames of the United Kingdom*. He correctly identifies the three variants as being Hollier, Hollyer and Holyer and opts for the locative explanation "dweller by the Holly Tree(s)", quoting the Middle English *holie* and *holin* and the Old English *hole(g)n*.

Sir William Addison, in his 1978 book *Understanding English Surnames*, says "Few, for example, will know that Hollyer is said to be derived from the Old French word for whoremonger or fornicator" – more or less quoting from Reaney.

In 1989, another major dictionary was published by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, called *A Dic-*

*tionary of Surnames*. They opt for the occupational explanation meaning brothel-keeper:

*Middle English and Old French hol(l)ier (a dissimilated variant of horier, agent noun from hore, hure, a whore, of Germanic origin). It may also have been used as an abusive nickname. Variants: Hollyer, Hullyer, Hollister (originally a feminine form; cf Baxter).*

Moving forward to more recent times, the flow of books doesn't cease. *A History of British Surnames* by R.A. McKinley (1990) says: "Some occupational names, including some quite common ones, exist in pairs; examples are Baker and Baxter, Brewer and Brewster, Deemer and Dempster/Hollier and Hollister". He goes on to explain that the considered view is that the second names are feminine forms of the occupation terms.

So what are we to make of all this? We have to accept much of the evidence of the expert philologists and I've no doubt that Hollier may well have meant a person living close to either a holly tree or a hollow. It seems harder to accept when a surname became hereditary that anyone would be happy to carry on the byname or nickname of their father if it meant a brother-keeper! But then, I suppose you could say the same of names like Cruikshank (bent leg). Perhaps when names became hereditary, the individuals themselves didn't actually have a free choice.

Now both George Redmonds and David Hey caution against accepting the evidence from these surname dictionaries, however scholarly they may be. The more modern approach asks us to interpret the work of philologists alongside the genealogical evidence. The early names quoted by Reaney may perhaps be just bynames and not hereditary, but in any event, even if they were hereditary, they may have died out and not be the source of the surname in more recent times.

## • What of the evidence?

So how does the evidence stack up from the work I've done on the names? Firstly, the names Hollier, Hillier, Hellier and Hullier are quite distinct. Only with Hallier is there a question mark. Hillier is focussed on Wiltshire, Hellier in Devon (though the overlap in Somerset cannot be ignored) and Hullier is very strongly based in Cambridgeshire. Hullyer / Hullier is so focussed on northern Cambridgeshire that I am prepared to accept the explanation that it is a Dutch name brought over to England by the dyke builders of the 17th century, who did so much to drain the Fens. Hallier, when not a transcription error for Hollier, is almost entirely associated with Wickwar in Gloucestershire, at least when using the

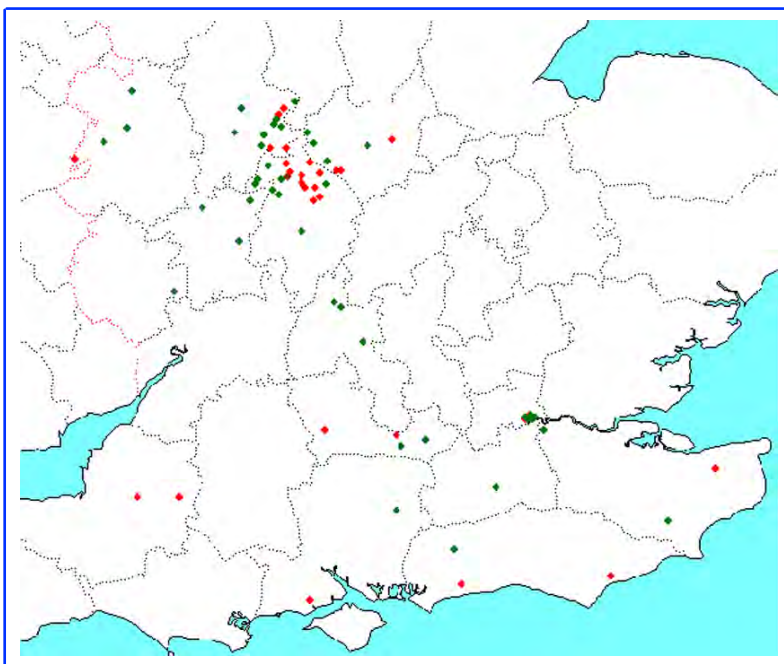
**Can my one-name surname really mean a whoremonger or a brothel keeper?**

IGI as a source. Given the lack of Holliers in Gloucestershire, it seemed these were separate names. But then I noticed that the name Hollister (said to be a feminine form of Hollier, you'll recall) is, from the IGI data, also strongly focussed in the Wickwar area of Gloucestershire. Even the 1881 Surname Atlas CD shows this fairly well. So far, I haven't been able to figure out whether this is a coincidence or if it may be significant to the origins of the name.

Both Reaney and Fransson quote a number of early records of what they consider might be ancestors of today's Hollier families. The problem is that all the distribution evidence suggests that Essex, Bedfordshire and Norfolk cannot be the source of the name as it developed from the late Middle Ages. The name is almost unknown in these counties. Yes, I have found some other early records from these counties, but both the Bedfordshire and Norfolk ones seem to be Hullyer, rather than Hollier, though spelling is hardly stable in these early times.

## Distribution

The true distribution of the name can be found from the early records in the IGI. I plotted these in Steve Archer's Genmap and, to remove the impact of any single transcription errors, only plotted parishes with two or more records before 1700. The plot is based on the 1992 version of the IGI, so does not include any Holliers in the Isle of Wight, but



**Figure 1 – distribution of Holliers from the IGI, plotted with Genmap**

equally does not feature the more recent influx of patron submissions. The result is shown in Figure 1.

What it shows is very interesting, though not as dramatically focussed as those which David Hey has published in his books to show how families tended to stay close to their origins. There are a number of features of the distribution that are of note:

- The name is almost unknown in Scotland,

Wales, the North of England and East Anglia.

- There is a focussed group that starts from a single point in North Warwickshire and expands out over time.

- Across much of Southern England, there is a spread of locations where the name is found, with no particular pattern or focus

The Warwickshire group seems to be a single family origin. An early reference is from 1325 and mentions an Adam de Holyer being witness to a land deed at Canley in Stoneleigh. The focus of the family seems to be Shustoke, where there is a record from 1373 of a John Holyer, bailiff of John de Clynton, knight, in his manor of Shustoke, Warwickshire. In 1433 there is a record of a Roger Holyer holding property in the nearby parish of Arley.

By the time parish registers started in 1538, there are frequent records of Hollyers at Shustoke and surrounding parishes in North Warwickshire. However, the name had also by that time spread out to the neighbouring counties of Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, and Oxfordshire. Families in Worcestershire may also be part of this expansion. The fact that this group almost certainly has a single family origin, does not mean that the name in this case is locative. As David Hey has shown, names with an occupational origin may become hereditary just once. However, landowners and bailiffs don't sound like candidates to have been brothel keepers!

In contrast, the pattern in the Southern counties may suggest several independent origins, consistent with the idea of the name being locative. That said, several of the locations are quite close to the coast, so migration by sea is a possibility. Early settlements include:

- Berkshire, mainly around Reading.
- Hampshire, in the New Forest area and the Isle of Wight.
- Sussex, at Hooe.
- Kent, in the Romney Marsh area

In the manuscripts of the Corporation of New Romney there is a reference from 1399 of a Robert Holier being paid to ride to Sandwich, London and along the coast "to obtain news as to the arrival of the present King" [Henry IV]. There was also a Holyer family owning land at Hooe in East Sussex with an earliest known reference from 1440. A record of 1444 suggests that the landowner at Hooe was "John Holyer of Canterbury", so suggesting a link back to Kent. The Hooe community thrived for a

long time, but disappeared in the 18th century. Equally, the Berkshire group dwindled in the 19th century and no modern families descend from these groups.

If some groups died out, others suddenly expanded. Several instances can be found where expansion originates with a single "portal couple". Other early lines die out (at least the male ones

carrying the surname), while all later families descend from this single couple. There are a handful of records of the Holyer name in Kent, starting with the 1399 event mentioned above. But it was when John Holyer married Elizabeth Gregory in 1737 in Canterbury Cathedral and settled in Woodchurch, to the north of the Romney Marsh area, that the extensive Holyer and Hollyer families from Kent expanded to be the dominant group that persists to this day. My own line is from this family, as are all modern day Holyers, and they all descend from this one couple.

A similar situation occurs in Somerset. A tiny handful of early records have been found, though those at Nunney and Wells are likely to be transcription errors for Hellier, a name which is found principally in Devon, but crossing over into Somerset. But then Samuel Hollier married Grace Plumbly in Burrington in 1749 and the first two generations of their descendants produced plenty of males who produced big families and by the 19th century the Somerset Holliers, concentrated in a handful of villages in the Axbridge Registration District, had become the largest group of Holliers, even overtaking the Warwickshire and Leicestershire groups.

### Mutation?

Aside from a single record from 1722 in the neighbouring village of Wrington, there are no other reliable earlier Hollier records from that area that I have found so far. Almost all of that part of Somerset is not included in the IGI. Had the family moved from elsewhere? Or had there been a single name mutation from Hellier which gave rise to the Holliers in this part of the country?

Another example concerns the Holliers in Northamptonshire – not featuring in the IGI, but research in parish registers has shown a line starting around 1660 in Weedon (Edward Hollyard) that continues in that part of the country even today. But in the early generations virtually only one family in any generation existed. They seemed to produce too many girls for the name to expand and it hung on a thread. But then John Hollier and Sarah Leatherland, who married in 1786 in Lower Heyford, managed to produce enough boys for the line to start to expand. So again, we have a “portal couple” through which all modern day descendants have their ancestry.

Hampshire provides a similar interesting pattern. The earliest reference to the Hollier name in Hampshire is from 1493, when a John Hollier was recorded as owning land at Sway. Early parish register entries from the mid-16th century show Holliers at Boldre, Milford and Brockenhurst in the New Forest area. It seems likely that the Holliers in the Isle of Wight descend from this group, as the earliest references there are in Freshwater, to the west of the island.

However, by the 19th century all the mainland families except one seem to have disappeared. It is only from the town of Fordingbridge, where

Hollyer/Holliers were well established by the beginning of the surviving parish registers in 1642, that all the 19th century Hollyer and Hollier families in the Portsea district originate and all these from just one couple who married in 1776.

What’s so special about the concept of a “portal couple”? Within every family group there must be a single couple who were the progenitors of that line, the ancestors of all known modern members of that family. What is surprising to me is that of the four cases described above, in three (Kent, Somerset and Hampshire) the “portal couple” are also the earliest proven ancestors I have found in that line.

In *Family Names and Family History*, David Hey has analysed the distribution of many surnames and shown how many names, despite spreading far and wide, still tend to focus around their point of origin. To keep his research within reasonable bounds, he only collected and plotted deaths in the period 1842-1846, as this would represent individuals probably still living close to their roots. As one-namers we tend to have more complete data on vital records, but I thought it might be instructive to copy David’s approach to see whether the pattern matched the older distributions (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 – Hollier distribution based on 1842-1846 deaths

The results are mixed. Essentially, because the Hollier name and variants is fairly uncommon and not focussed on a single place, the number of deaths in any given registration district is usually only one or two. Only Birmingham and Axbridge manage five deaths in the period 1842-1846. The presence of stray entries in Durham, Lancashire and Wiltshire distract from the underlying picture, which does at least show the groupings in the West Midlands, Oxfordshire, Somerset and Kent. But on its own, the technique doesn’t deliver good results.

What this should mean is that academic researchers can gain benefit from drawing on the larger bodies of data collected by one-namers.

### • The Huguenot problem

I have already noted that some sources quote the Hollier name as being derived from the Huguenot Isaac D'Olier, who came over with William of Orange and settled in Dublin, being admitted as a burgess of the city in 1697. Clearly, he would not be the source of families recorded in Warwickshire from 1325. Yet the idea of a Huguenot link persists. It is probably due to the rather similar name Ollier, which is principally found in a very focussed area in Cheshire and North Staffordshire. Indeed, not only is it focussed even in relatively recent times, but there seem to be no records prior to the mid 17th century.

Stella Walker (no relation) who has researched the line, suggests that "it is probably French or Huguenot and it seems possible two or three brothers came to Cheshire in the 17th century and probably most of the Olliers in England are descended from them". Lawrence Ollier has also researched this name and concludes that perhaps their origin was slightly earlier in the 16th century but probably not before this. Supporting the idea of French immigrants, he finds the frequent early use of spellings like Oleheyer. Say that phonetically and its French origin is clear. Of interest is a will of 1705 of William Oleheyer who signs as William Ollier.

### Surgeon

John Blandy, a respected retired urologist, wrote a paper about Thomas Hollier, Samuel Pepys's surgeon, and postulated the idea that Hollier was successful as a lithotomist because he used a secret operation to remove bladder stones known only to the Huguenots. And, he said, Thomas Hollier was a Huguenot. When I challenged this, knowing Thomas Hollier, the surgeon, came from a lowly family of cobblers in Coventry, he said he was told this by the Huguenot Society. So it seems the Huguenot Society believes that Hollier and Ollier are the same name but, based on my studies, I would refute this.

And yet there are some intriguing coincidences. Some of the 18th century Hollyers in Coventry were in the silk ribbon making business for which Coventry was then renowned, an industry created by the immigrant Huguenots. Could some Huguenots have changed their name to that of Hollier / Hollyer, a name already in wide use in Warwickshire? Well, further analysis shows these silkmen to have been descended from wine merchants and although I cannot positively trace this line back before a marriage in 1687, there is a quite credible possible ancestry that can be found without invoking any Huguenot factors.

But let us return to the Ollier / Hollier issue. We know some people with the separate Cheshire / North Staffordshire name of Ollier became Holliers in the 19th century. But was there any other connec-

tion between the names? There is much stronger evidence that Ollier may be a Huguenot name and as noted above, it seems that the Huguenot Society have opined that Ollier and Hollier are the same name. In his 2004 book *The Distinctive Surnames of North Staffordshire*, Edgar Tooth states:

*Hollier is usually construed as a nickname for a lecher, whereas Ollier is a maker or seller of oil. Yet these two surnames occur side by side during the 1500s in the Penkridge parish registers; Thomas Hollyer buried on June 5th 1573, and Margaret Ollier baptised on April 5th 1579. The loss or addition of the initial "H" is almost universal in local dialects, so there is no problem here on that score, so the likelihood remains that the two names are simply variants of each other and are toponymics for a dweller by a holly bush.*

I choose to disagree. To reach such a firm conclusion based on just one baptism and one burial is poor analysis. The fact that neither Ollier nor Hollyer seem to feature again in Penkridge is ignored. The facts seem to suggest both these people are either strays from the more common territories of their respective surnames, or one is simply a transcription error by the parish clerk. Only if there was continuous co-existence of the name variants over several generations would it be safe to assume that the spellings were interchangeable, as is the case for Hollyer and Hollier in Warwickshire. It is sad to see such poor research in such an important book.

### • Origins elsewhere

As our studies are worldwide, I need to say something about the origins of the name elsewhere. Occurrences of the the name as found in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India have all been traced back to emigrants from England. Several US families also originate from England, but the notable exception is the Hollier name in Louisiana and nearby southern states of the USA. There the name is known to descend from three brothers who came from Nantes, France. in the early 18th century. Even today, the Holliers in southern USA pronounce their name the French way (Ol-yeah, but sometimes now pronouncing the H as well).

The US censuses also record families from Germany and indeed the IGI and Vital Records Index do show a few, but on the whole it is France where the name is found in large numbers. Of interest is that the name Hollier has a distinctively different distribution in France from the name Ollier. The other factor influencing the name in the USA is the impact of Anglicisation of names as immigrants came through Ellis Island. So a Swedish Holger family became Holyer and a Ukrainian Holiat (meaning Goliath) became Hollyer.

### • Name variants

As one-namers, we are familiar with the concept

of name variants. Derek Palgrave coined the term “deviants” to distinguish between true variant names, those people themselves used, and spellings that parish clerks, census enumerators and other record takers used. We don’t often get to see what names our forebears actually used. Evidence may come from signatures or MIs, but many folk left little written evidence. We know that John Holyer, the “portal individual” of the Kent Holyers, signed his name as Holyer on his marriage bond of 1737 and on his will of 1772. But the Canterbury Cathedral registers recorded his marriage as Hollier.

The sheer variation in deviant spellings within a single parish register can sometimes be surprising. Here is the sequence of baptism records from St Martin-in-the-Fields for the family of John and Elizabeth Hollier:

- 1630 John Hollier
- 1632 Thomas Holliard (later buried as Hollyer)
- 1633 Matthew Hollier
- 1636 Samuel Hollier
- 1638 Elizabeth Hallier
- 1639 Susanna Hollyard
- 1642 Maria Hollyer
- 1644 Symon Hollier (who is thought to have emigrated to Virginia and started a dynasty of six generations called Simon Hollier)
- 1646 Edward Holliard

The addition of the final “d” is found elsewhere in London in the 17th century. Samuel Pepys’s surgeon, Thomas Hollier, was often referred to in the great man’s diary as Hollyard and his children’s baptisms were variously recorded as Hollier, Hollyer, Hollyar, Holliar and Hollyard. The extra “d” doesn’t sound like something a modern London accent might append, so it’s hard to know exactly how the name might then have been pronounced. The final “d” is not found in the North Warwickshire heartland of the Hollier name, but has been recorded in Shropshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Sussex. However, the extra “d” is almost unknown after the 17th century.

One interesting document is the PCC will of John Hollier of 1697, who was a Mercer from Shrewsbury. He was admitted as a burgess of the city in 1664 and was Mayor in 1692. We can assume he was literate, but when his will was drawn up it was in the name of John Hollyer, but at the end of the document he is referred to as John Hollier. Even in legal documents, the variation of spelling seems to have been considered of no importance. All the evidence I have collected suggests the only genuine variants are Hollier, Hollyer and Holyer. However, one can draw up a chart to show all the permutations of deviant spellings that have been found (Figure 3).

Further deviant spellings are found in the census and in their modern indexes. Nineteenth century handwriting can be hard to read and if the indexer is not native to the UK, this can add further problems. The following have been found: Hollyee, Holler, Hollger, Holger, Hallier, Holier, Holllier,

Holliger, Hollin, Hollow, Holles, Hollien, Hollies, Hollyar, Holyar, Hoblyn, Halyer, Helier, Hellier, Helliar, Oliver, Ollier and Olliar.

The reverse problem also occurs. The separate surnames Hallier, Hullier, Hillier, Hellier and Ollier can end up transcribed as Hollier. I have spent many an hour pitting my wits with census indexes to find “missing” members of the families. Although we all

H	O	L	L	I	E	R	-
	A	L	Y	A			D
				O			

Figure 3 – chart of deviant spelling permutations

dislike the poor quality of some census indexes, there’s a certain intellectual satisfaction in tracking down mis-indexed persons – and an equal frustration when you fail!

Of the three main variants, since the 19th century, it fair to say that Hollier dominates and is five times the frequency of Hollyer, while Holyer is almost entirely confined to the Kent family that stemmed from Woodchurch. Most of the West Midlands families used the Hollier spelling. The Somerset and Oxfordshire families also used Hollier alone. However, the further one goes back, more cases can be found where both Hollyer and Hollier are found together, in places such as Berkshire, Sussex and Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight). The main changes during the 19th century were the gradual adoption of the Hollyer spelling by some of the Kent Holyers (but both co-exist today) and a few of the Cheshire Olliers that adopted the Hollier name.

### • Prominent people

The joy of a one-name study is that you often come across some notable people with interesting lives and connections. The Hollyer painters in my own family are interesting, if not household names, and I am pleased to have three examples of their original work as well as prints and many other images on my website. My own 2x gt-grandfather, George Hollyer, is said to have done the etched glass work for the famous Angel pub in Islington – which, in a curious reversal of present day trends, was closed and converted to a bank!

Amongst the many interesting individuals found during research are:

#### Thomas Hollier 1609–1690

Already referred to, Thomas was born in Coventry in 1609 and from 1629 trained in London as a surgeon, or chirurgeon as it was often then called. He worked at both Barts and St Thomas’s Hospitals, the latter for 53 years. He is famous for operating on Samuel Pepys for the removal of a large bladder stone in 1658. This was in the days when such surgery without anaesthetics or antiseptics often led



to death. In 1662 Thomas did 30 consecutive stone operations without losing a single patient. He became a close friend of Samuel Pepys and Robert Boyle. His portrait (left) hangs at the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

#### Frederick Hollyer 1837–1933

Frederick came from a family of engravers. In 1869 he produced a couple of mezzo-tint engravings of Landseer paintings, but in the 1870s became a renowned photographer. He excelled in the technique of high quality platinum prints. After photographing the works of Frederic Leighton, he was introduced to the Pre-Raphaelite painters and did work for Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and G. F. Watts, thereby bringing these artists and their work to a wider audience. He was friendly with many of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, including the designer William Morris. He was also in demand for his studio portraits and his sitters encompassed the aristocracy and leading figures in politics, the arts and sciences.



#### Richard Hollyer 1728–1778

Richard was the “father” of what I call the ‘City Hollyers’. He was born in Coventry, the son of Joseph Hollyer (1691–1734). At 14, in 1742, he went to London and was apprenticed to a Mr J. Blakey, a blacksmith trading as a glazier in the City. Blakey died and Richard was transferred to Matthew Jarman to complete his apprenticeship. Matthew Jarman was very prominent in the trade being Master of the Glazier’s Company in 1746. On completing his apprenticeship, he became a Freeman of the City of London in 1750. Later the same year he married Matthew’s daughter Sarah. He was admitted to livery in the



Glazier’s Company on September 7 1753 and eventually followed in his father-in-law’s steps by becoming Master in 1775. During his year as Master, he admitted his son Matthew to the Company. Towards the end of his life, with Matthew, he carried out essential repairs to St Paul’s Cathedral.

#### Henry Hollier c1755–1830

Henry was born in India, but his ancestors were from the extensive Hollier family of Barton under Needwood in Staffs. He became a civil servant in India, but ill-health forced his move to England in 1784. Soon after, he married and moved to Cardiff, where his two children, Fanny and Henry, were born. Henry had been appointed as Steward to the 1st Marquess of Bute (Lord Cardiff), who was not-

able for restoring Cardiff Castle from ruins. Henry went on to hold a string of public posts in Cardiff in addition to looking after the Marquess’s affairs. He was admitted a Burgess in 1783, became the Town Clerk of Cardiff (1786–1789), Bailiff (1786–1814), Clerk of the Peace (1795–1797), Clerk of the General Meeting (1802), Collector of Customs (1797), and Alderman of Cardiff.

#### Henry Hollier 1792–1856

Son of Henry Hollier of Cardiff, above, Henry junior, became Receiver General [of Taxes] of the County in 1813 and followed his father by being admitted a Burgess in 1815. However, Henry appears to have embezzled the taxes and in 1818 his extensive estates were seized by the Crown and sold off to repay his debts. The famous bankers Coutts & Co have surviving correspondence with Henry and his father and it appears he was always giving excuses for being in debt. In 1823, Henry married Mary Ann Babbage, the sister of Charles Babbage, the mathematician famous for his work on early mechanical computing. Henry and Mary Ann had six children and all the Holliers today in the Llanelly area descend from Henry.

#### William Perring Hollyer 1834–1922

A noted 19th century painter of animals, especially Scottish scenes. This was a popular genre of painting, probably made so by Queen Victoria’s love of everything Scottish. Five of William’s children also became artists. Despite his love of Scottish scenes, there is no evidence he actually went there.



But he did move around the country, bringing up some of his family in London and some in Liverpool. At the time of the 1881 census, he was at Bettws-y-Coed in North Wales. After returning to London, he moved to Huntingdonshire and finally retired to Faringdon in Oxfordshire. Three of William’s brothers,

including my own great-great grandfather George Hollyer, followed in their father’s trade of Herald Painting. But by the mid-1850s, this had developed into the trade of “Artist on Glass”, using acid to etch glass, widely used in public houses for windows and screens.

As I said at the beginning of this article, no one-name study is ever complete, so in that sense, there can be no conclusion. Research continues to try to link more family groups together, especially those in the Isle of Wight. Some progress is being made in reconstructing and linking the families in Oxfordshire, but any link to the families in Warwickshire to the north remains undiscovered. I try to document as much as I can on my website at [www.hollyer.name](http://www.hollyer.name) and record interesting snippets on the associated Blog.

*I would encourage all members to write up what they know about their “name” – because there may not ever be a better time than now. ○*