

History of the surname Fetherstonhaugh.

The surname Fetherstonhaugh has many forms you will find it recorded as Fetherston H in Ireland, it is also found in this form in Australia.

Adding an "a" will give you Featherstonhaugh found in England and Canada and also with the added "e" as Featherstonehaugh again mainly found in England and Canada.

The name originated in either the West Riding of Yorkshire from a town/village found in the Domesday Book as Fetherstan, there is also another in Staffordshire.

We think that the "haugh" was added when a William Fetherston married a daughter of the Tynedales from Cumbria, moved to Northumberland near Haltwhistle and built a Pele tower as a means of defence of his household. This tower still exists as part of what is now Featherstone Castle. We have records of an Elias Fetherstonhaugh giving grants to a priory early in the late 1080's.

So how did the "haugh" get added to the Fetherstan? The Pele tower was built near to the banks of the South Tyne River. Haugh means the side of a valley, and there are still examples of the haugh being used in place names in County Durham today. It also represents the placing of Featherstone Castle on the side of a valley on the South Tyne.

One of the unusual explanations of why, if the name, which originates in West Yorkshire and is to be found in greater numbers in County Durham in the 1881 census, could be that people who came from Featherstonhaugh stock actually dropped the "haugh". It is true that the name in its fullest form is the longest surname in Great Britain.

We also think Fetherstan or Fedderstan is a term extracted or changed over time from a feudal stone.

Many other ideas have surfaced over the years and can still be seen on some websites, this being the type of rock formation found in the Tyne Valley, this is not the case.

One of the biggest myths is that it is pronounced Fanshaw, not true at all, this name stands on its own as a surname in its own right, although many do still persist in pronouncing Featherstonhaugh as Fanshaw, especially in the south of England.

There is a story that during the war they used to challenge suspected spies by asking them to pronounce Feaerstonhaugh and if they said Fanshaw they were thought to be English.

The One Name Study into the Featherstonhaugh Surname began in east in 1997 when I took on the challenge of registering the name with the Guild of One Name Studies.

At the time we had no proof that this surname was linked with the other Featherstone surname which was also registered at the Guild.

It was started in response to the fact that I was given my Featherstone lineage back in to the mid 14th century by another founder member of the Featherstone Society, Beryl Featherstone. She had gathered some 20 odd 'trees' of Featherstone Families from the North and East Riding of Yorkshire. Gathered over many years working with the other founder members, Susan Nesfield and Iris Woodall, and the former holder of the Featherstone surname with the Guild, Gillian Gibson-Stephenson.

We thought it may be worthwhile publishing a book of the 'trees', but the problem was that new information kept arriving, and the book would be out of date by the time it was with the publishers.

So we contacted those people we knew who were researching Featherstone's and asked them if they would be interested in forming a Society, and getting a quarterly newsletter. This way we could up-date new findings as they came in. Over the years we have had contact with over 380 members, some have shared their research with us, which has allowed us to build up a fairly large database of linked families.

The Newsletter now past its 75th edition, and information is still being added to the database.

Things have moved rapidly since those early days, it took me 10 years to collect GRO references of Births, Marriages and Deaths, from 1837 to 1901, by pulling books from the shelves at St. Catherine's House, and later The Family Record Office. Now with so much information on-line, the collection process is a lot quicker than it used to be. Adding the extra 10 years to 1911 was a lot easier when the 1911 census was released, and we found further information.

Many people have assisted over the years, the acquisition of 20 editions of 'Featherston Findings' published by a long time member from the United States, Joyce F Hawkins, which documented the Featherston's of the South Eastern States of USA. She again had used many contacts over the years, which all added to her knowledge.

The recent work of E.E. Boston in updating Joyce's work, means we have managed to add some 5,000 individuals to our database, and more to come! They being the descendants of Charles from Henrico County in the colony of Virginia.

Special mention should be given to fellow Guild member Paul R. Featherstone, who for many years has been collecting together records of, initially, the county of Kent, and now expanding to all southern counties south of the Wash.

So the project is still growing, as we link Baptisms to GRO birth indexes and marriages to GRO records, and burials to the GRO index of deaths.

Census records play a large part in the reconstruction of families as do deposited Wills, again the work of an early member Diane Featherstone, who collected and transcribed many of them.

We basically get a fact and try to build a family from it. The further you go back in time the more difficult it becomes, since many early records are short on information.

Having collected all the Births, Marriages and Deaths from the GRO indexes up to around 1960, we can search to find if we already have something that matches, and thus individual records are merged together, when we find something that looks like a match. This can cause errors and I would urge those of you who think they have a match to prove it with certificates, since we could not in any way purchase every certificate we need to prove every event without a doubt.

We get lots of enquires asking for help, and we do our best to suggest best practices to prove the links beyond doubt. In most cases, we get more information back from those enquires, thus building a better database.

The work of the Guild 'Marriage Challenge' has proved to be a great help in getting marriages from Parish records far away from our local areas. Members take on a challenge to find GRO marriage indexes in their local record office which contain Church records for a registration district. We have many such records already entered, we also add other facts like military service records, and electoral roll information, as well as probate and administration records. We try to record occupations and also link the families found in census records together.

So, the basic facts of an individual born within the years of the GRO indexes would contain birth registration, a Baptism if we have found one, any form of Military service, before or after a marriage. The marriage registration, and if not, a registrar office or Church marriage, if we have found it. Then census information, if we have found it between 1841 and 1911. The death registration, burial record and probate or administration record, also if we have found it.

All the information is entered into The Master Genealogist, anything from south of the Wash is also recorded in our Southern England database.

We have also taken information from members GEDCOM'S and the Birth Brief submitted by members over the years. Each fact is given a source, so you should be able to tell where the information came from, at times, when we can see sources we take information from members trees on Ancestry, and sometimes use un-sourced material as clues to find our own sources.

You too can contribute;

If you have information that we don't have, then why not contact us and share. Without doubt there is a lot of information still to collect. The last few years have seen an explosion of records available on the Internet, and it can only be added one piece at a time. Linking to family groups takes the time, so if you have already made the links it makes the building of the database quicker. Just click the link at the bottom of any page to make contact.