Historical Occupations and Family Names

In the past there were a number of occupations that no longer exist, or for which the names have changed. When looking at census records, or other historical records, a person may list an occupation that is no longer recognized. Here are some of the names of occupations that were common in time past.

These names may have other value, because when last name were being assigned in Europe, many of the people took the name assigned to their occupation. This information may help when searching for an ancestor.

A

Acater - ship’s chandler, one who supplies food provisions to a ship
Accipitrary - falconer
Accomptant - accountant
Accoucheur - one who assists women in childbirth, midwife
Ackerman, Acreman - ploughman, ox herder
Actuary - accountant
Affeeror - official in the manorial courts responsible for assessing the monetary penalty and collecting taxes and dues, assessor
Alchemist - medieval chemist who claimed to be able to turn metal into gold
Ale Conner - official who tested the quality and measure of ale served in public houses
Ale-draper, Ale Draper - a tapster, seller of ale
Ale-tunner, Ale Tunner - one who worked among and on “tuns,” great hogshead barrels used to store ale in medieval times
Ale-wife, Alewife - landlady of an ale house, or ale stand
All Spice - grocer
Almoner - one who distributes alms, provides for the needy; in Britain may also refer to a hospital social worker
Amanuensis - stenographer, one who takes dictation,
Amen Man - parish clerk
Ankle Beater - young person who helped drive cattle to market
Apiarian - beekeeper
Apiculteur - beekeeper (French)
Apparitor - official who summoned witnesses for the ecclesiastical courts
Apothecary - One that prepares and sells drugs and medicines, a pharmacist
Archiator - doctor, physician
Armiger - squire who carried the armor of a knight
Arpenteur - land surveyor (French)
Arrimeur - stevedore, one who is employed in the loading and unloading of ships (French)
Artificer - a skilled craftsman or artisan; an enlisted military man responsible for upkeep of weapons and small arms; or an inventor
Aubergiste - inn keeper (French)
Aurifaber - a goldsmith, or one who works with gold

B

Bailie - bailiff
Barker - tanner
Baxter - baker
Blacksmith - one who shoes horses
Bluestocking - female writer
Boniface - inn keeper
Brasiler - dyer
Brazier - one who works with brass
Brewster - beer or ale manufacturer
Brightsmith - metal worker
Brownsmith - copper or brass smith
Burgonmaster - mayor
Burnisher - metal polisher

Carnifex - butcher
Caulker - one who makes things watertight by packing seams in windows, ships, etc., with a waterproof material, such as oakum or pitch
Chaisemaker - carriage maker
Chandler - dealer or trader; one who makes or sells candles; grocer
Chiffonnier - wig maker
Clark - clerk
Clerk - clergyman; cleric
Cohen - priest
Collier - coal miner
Colporteur - book peddler
Cooper - maker or repairer of wooden barrels, casks, and tubs
Cordwainer - shoemaker (originally any leather worker using Cordovan leather, from Cordova, Spain)
Costermonger - peddler of fruits and vegetables
Crocker - potter
Crowner - coroner
Currier - tanner of leather; one who curries horses

Dareman - dairyman
Daunsel - gentleman in waiting; groom; squire
Dexter - dyer
Diviner - one who finds water under the ground using dowsing rods or witching stick
Docker - stevedor; dock worker who loads and unloads cargo
Dowser - one who finds water under the ground using dowsing rods or witching stick
Draper - dealer in cloth and dry goods
Drayman - driver of a dray, a long strong cart without fixed sides for carrying heavy loads
Dresser - surgeon's assistant in a hospital
Drover - driver of animals to market; dealer in cattle
Drummer - traveling salesman
Dubbere - cloth dubber, one who raises the nap of cloth
Duffer - peddler
Dyer - one who dyes cloth

Elymaker - oilmaker
Endholdernn - inn keeper
Enumerator - census taker
Executrix - female executor

F

Faber - smith
Falkner - keeper/trainer of falcons
Farmer - tax-collector or bailiff
Farrier - horse doctor, one in charge of horses
Fell Monger - one who removes hair or wool from hides in preparation for leather making
Felter - cleaner and thickener of cloth
Fence Viewer - one who inspects farmer's fences
Feroner - a dealer in hardware made of iron. Also known as an Ironmonger.
Faulner - confectioner
Flax Dresser - one who works with flax fibers
Fleshewer - butcher
Fletcher - maker of bows and arrows; arrowmaker
Forestarius - forester
Framar - farmer
Frereman - servant of the Friars
Fuller - fuller of cloth, one who shrunk and thickened woolen cloth by washing, heating and pressing
Furber / Furbour - furbisher of armour
Furner - baker

G

Gaoler - jailer
Garlekmonger - garlicmonger; dealer in garlic
Gatward - goatkeeper
Gelder - a castrator of animals, especially horses
Ginerr - joiner
Glassewryght - glasswright; maker and mender of glassware
Glazier - glazier; repairer of windows
Glover - dealer or maker of gloves
Gobar - jobber
Grecher - grocer
Guiderer - maker of gold or silver coins
Gynour - engineer

H

Hacker - hoe maker
Hansard - weapon maker or seller
Harper - musician
Hatcheler - one who combed out flax
Hawker - peddler
Haymonger - dealer in hay
Hayward - keeper of fences
Headborough - constable
Hedger - one who trims and tends hedgerows
Hetheleder - provider of heather for fuel
Higler - itinerant peddler
Hillard / Hillier - tiler one who covers houses with slate
Hind - farm laborer
Hooker - reaper
Hooper - maker of hoops for casks, barrels, tubs etc.
Horsler - stableman or groom; horse servant at an inn
Hosteler - innkeeper
Huckster - seller of small articles/wares
Husbandman - a farmer; animal husbandry; tenant farmer

Indentured servant - one who was committed to working for someone for a fixed number of years (usually 4 to 7), in exchange for passage to a new country or some other financial consideration.
Ironmonger - a dealer in hardware made of iron. Also known as a Feroner.
Intelligencer - a spy

Jagger - A peddler or hawker of fish
Journeyman - craftsman who had served his apprentice, a master craftsman
Joyner / Joiner - joiner; skilled carpenter
Jouster - A female hawker of fish; a fish monger

Kedger - a fisherman
Keeler - bargeman
Keller - salt keeper
Kellogg - slaughter man
Kempster - wool comber
Kepegest - innkeeper
Kneller / Knuller - a chimney sweep who solicited jobs door-to-door

Lagger - a sailor
Lapidary - one who cuts, polishes, or engraves precious stones; a jeweler
Lattener - one skilled in working with latten, a mixed metal resembling brass
Lavender - washer woman; from French laver, meaning "to wash."
Lederer - leather maker
Leech / Leach - doctor, physician
Limeburner - maker of lime
Limner - draughtsman or artist
Loblolly boy - 1) an errand boy; 2) surgeon's assistant on board ship
Lokeer - locksmith
Longshoreman - stevedor
Lorimer - bridlemaker

Malender - farmer
Malster - brewer of malted beverages (beer)
Manciple - steward
Marescallus - marshall
Marshall - horse servant, or groom
Mason - stone carver  
Mayer - physician  
Medicus - doctor, physician  
Mercator - merchant  
Milver - miller  
Millwright - one who designs or builds mills  
Mintmaster - an issuer of local currency  
Monger - seller of goods  
Muleskinner - teamster

N

Neatherder - cow herd  
Nedder - needle-maker  
Nettir - knitter

O

Ordinary - an innkeeper; keeper of a fixed price inn  
Osler - bird-catcher  
Osnard - herder of oxen  
Outrider - mounted attendant riding before or behind a carriage

P

Packman - a peddler; a person who traveled around carrying goods for sale in his pack  
Palmer - a pilgrim; one who had been, or pretended to have been, to the Holy Land  
Paneler - saddler  
Pannarius - clothier and draper  
Pardonner - a seller of indulgences  
Parochus - rector, pastor  
Peever - a pepper seller  
Pelterer - skinner; one who worked with animal skins  
Peregrinator - itinerant wanderer  
Peruker - wig maker  
Pettifogger - a shyster lawyer  
Pictor - painter  
Pigman - crockery dealer  
Pilcher - maker of pilches  
Pinder - keeper of the pound or pinfold  
Piscarius - fishmonger  
Pistor - miller or baker  
Pitman - a coal miner  
Plowman - a farmer  
Ploughwright - one who makes or repairs plows  
Plumber - one who worked with lead; eventually came to apply to a tradesman who installed or repaired (lead) pipes and drains  
Porcher - pig-keeper  
Porter - gate-keeper or door-keeper  
Poulterer - dealer in poultry  
Puddler - wrought iron worker  
Pynner - pin-maker
Quarrier - quarry worker
Quarryman - stonecutter
Quiller - one who used a machine to wind yarn onto spools
Quister - a person who bleached things

Raffia man - maker of straw or grass goods
Rag cutter - worker in a textile (cloth) or paper factory
Raker - street cleaner; one employed to rake street rubbish into piles
Revenuer - an official who enforced tax laws on liquor, working against illegal manufacturing of whisky
Rigger - hoist tackler worker, working on a ship's rigging
Ripper - fish monger; seller of fish
Rodman - a surveyor's assistant
Roper - a maker of rope or nets
Rotarius - wheelwright

Saddler - maker and repairer of saddles and bridles
Salter - one who makes or deals in salt
Savant - servant
Sawbones - physician
Sawyer - sawer of wood; carpenter
Scabblers - person who uses a scabbler (pick) to trim the sides of a tunnel
Schmacker - shoemaker or cobbler
Scribler / Scribbler - minor or worthless author
Scrivener - scribe or clerk; professional or public copyist or writer; notary public
Scrutiner - election judge
Seinter - girdle maker
Sewer rat - a bricklayer who specialized in making and repairing sewers and tunnels
Shearmen - one who raised the surface of woolen cloth and then sheared it to a smooth surface; cutter of woolen cloth
Shrieve / Shriever - sheriff
Sickleman - a reaper
Slater / Slatter - roofer; tiler
Slopseller - seller of ready-made clothes in a slop shop
Snobscat / Snob - shoe repairer; cobbler
Soper - soapmaker
Sorter - tailor
Spicer - a grocer or dealer in spices
Spinner - unmarried woman; spinner (female)
Spittleman - hospital attendant
Spurre / Spurrier - maker of spurs
Squire - country gentleman; farm owner; justice of peace
Stevedore - a dock worker or laborer who loads and unloads ship's cargos.
Stuff Gown / Stuff Gownsman - junior barrister
**T**

Tanner - one who tans (cures) animal hide into leather
Taper - candlewick maker or seller
Tapley - one who puts the tap in an ale cask
Tapster - a barman; a person employed to serve beer
Tasker - reaper
Tawer - one who taws (makes hide into leather without the use of tanning)
Teamster - one who drives a team (horses or oxen) for hauling
Textor - weaver
Thatcher - roofer; specifically thatch roofs
Tide waiter - customs inspector
Tinker - an itinerant mender and seller of kettles, tin pots and pans
Tipstaff - policeman
Travers - toll bridge collector
Tucker - cleaner of cloth goods
Turner - one who turns wood on a lathe into spindles

**U**

Ulnager - a person appointed to examine woolen goods for quality
Upholder - 1) upholsterer; 2) an auctioneer’s assistant
Upright worker - chimney sweep

**V**

Vagnarius - maker of sheaths and scabbards
Vassal - a servant of the lowest order
Venator / Venur - huntsman
Victualer - a seller of food and drink; tavern keeper
Vintner - wine merchant
Vulcan - a blacksmith; iron worker

**W**

Wabster - weaver
Wadding maker - maker of wadding (usually made of old rags or cotton) for stuffing upholstered furniture
Wafer maker - maker of church communion wafers
Wagoner / Waggoner - teamster not for hire
Wailer - Mine worker who removed impure rocks in a coal mine
Wain house proprietor - owner of a building where wagons could be parked for a fee
Wainius - ploughman
Wainwright - wagon maker
Waiter - customs officer or tide waiter; one who waited on the tide to collect duty on goods brought in
Waitman - Night watchman who guarded the gates of a city, usually marking the hours with the ringing of a small bell
Waker - A person whose job was to wake workers in time for early morning work
Walker / Waulkaner - fuller; cloth trampler or cleaner
Waller - 1) Specialist in building walls; 2) salt maker
Wardcorn - Watchman armed with a horn for sounding the alarm on the event of intruders or trouble. Common during medieval times.
**Warker** - Specialist at building walls, embattlements, and embankments
**Warper / Warp Beamer** - a textile worker who arranged the individual yarns which created the "warp" of the fabric upon a large cylinder called a beam.
**Water bailiff** - 1) A custom's officer who searched ships as they came into port; 2) one employed to protect fisheries from poachers
**Water carter / Water carrier** - Someone who sold fresh water from a traveling cart
**Waterguard** - customs officer
**Webber / Webster** - weaver; operator of looms
**Wetnurse** - A women who feeds the children of others with her own breast milk (usually for a fee)
**Wharfinger** - a person who owned or was in charge of a wharf
**Wheelwright** - builder and repairer of wagon wheels, carriages etc.
**Whey cutter** - a worker in the cheese industry
**Whiffler** - an officer who went before an army or procession to clear the way by blowing a horn or trumpet
**Whipcorder** - a maker of whips
**Whisket weaver** - basket maker
**White cooper** - one who makes barrels from tin or other light metals
**White limer** - one who painted walls and fences with white lime
**Whitesmith** - tinsmith; worker of tin who finishes or polishes the work
**Whitster** - bleacher of cloth
**Wing coverer** - a worker who covered airplane wings with linen fabric
**Wonkey scooper** - person who operated a scoop-type contraption from a horse
**Wright** - a skilled worker in various trades

X

**Xylographer** - a person who made wooden printing blocks
**Xylopola** - wood merchant

Y

**Yagger** - peddler
**Yardman** - 1) a rail worker; 2) a farmer
**Yatman** - doorkeeper or gatekeeper
**Year man** - one who hired himself out for a year's work at a time, usually agricultural
**Yeoman** - 1) a farmer who owned his own land; 2) a ship's storeman
**Yowler** - assistant to a thatcher who held the yowles of straw

Z

**Zigarius** - Gypsy
**Zincographer** - One who used zinc plates, known as 'zincos,' for engraving or printing
**Zitherist** - one who plays a zither, one of a class of simple stringed instruments
**Zoographer** - one who classifies species of animals
**Zythepsarist** – brewer