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What's in a surname?

What's in a surname - Part 2

A project that maps surnames to parts of the UK will now rank them in terms of social status.

Forget keeping up with the Joneses, it's the Cadburys and Goldsteins that social climbers should have a keen eye on.

The social status of nearly 26,000 surnames has been researched as part of a project to better understand what our surnames say about each of us.

Earlier this year, the Magazine reported on how academics at University College London had built a website that, at the click of a mouse, mapped a surname to the parts of Britain where it is most commonly found.

The latest update to the site means anyone can also see how their surname ranks in terms of social standing - in other words, how posh or common their name is. Each name has been assessed on income, house value, educational attainment and health. (See factbox for details and link.)

Among the top names are Cadbury, Goldstein and Pigden, with no other names ranked above them.

The site is the result of a year-long study aimed at understanding patterns of regional economic development, population movement and cultural identity, led by Professor Paul Longley and visiting Professor Richard Webber.

It firstly mapped the distribution of surnames from the 1998 electoral register and does the same against the 1881 census, making it possible to see how surnames moved around the country during the last century.

FACTBOX

[Surname_Profiler](#)

How the site works

1. Click on "Start a surname search"
2. Write in surname, check "1998" button and click "Find"
3. Click "geographical location" and look for the "social demographics" box

Global

The status of names has now been calculated by taking their postcodes from the electoral roll. These have been cross-referenced with educational attainment, employment levels, financial data and health statistics to calculate an average status for each name.

There are some surprises, with even the Windsors - the assumed name of the Royals - outranked by 34% of the population. The country's unofficial Royal Family, the Beckhams, are outranked by 73%.

"While some people might be surprised by the results and say it's not true of their family, the results do tend to be true in aggregate," says Prof Longley.

"People may have anecdotal evidence about their family doing well, but the family line can still have done badly."

Middlesbrough in north-east England was used as a case study to analyse how immigrants and long-term residents had fared over the years in socio-economic terms.

In 1881 the town had a lot of residents with Cornish names, as a large number of workers' families migrated en masse to mining communities in the North East when the tin industry collapsed in Cornwall in the 1850s. These families have hardly moved through the social ranks during the last century.

Residents in the region with Irish names were a little more upwardly mobile, as were those with traditional north-east names. But those who had fared the best were migrants with names from other regions of the UK - other than Cornwall.

Prof Longley says the next step for the site, which has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, is to take it global, so people all over the world see how well those that migrated have fared compare to those who stayed put at home.