

ORIGINS OF THE WHITEHOUSE SURNAME

The name probably has multiple origins, by referring to people living in white (lime-washed) houses in any number of places. Some authorities seem to think that Whitehouse is a corruption of Whitehals, meaning a man with a white neck, but this seems to me much less probable, because it requires the "l" consonant to become silent in pronunciation for the name to have deviated to Whitehouse and because there must be very few people with white necks. The earliest occurrences found must depend on which particular documents have survived. Parish registers, one of the longest survivors, did not begin until the 1550s and those in the "black country" area of Sedgley, Dudley and West Bromwich contain many Whitehouses in the early registers. Early forms of the name are often as "Whithouse", suggesting a short first vowel sound, but received wisdom in the black country is that the name is often pronounced with a long first vowel and a short second one as in "White-us". That pronunciation accounts for the spelling deviations of Whitehous and Whiteus, for example. For those that set store by the written word, the following is a summary of early occurrences.

1. Extracts from authoritative books

"A Dictionary of English Surnames" by P. H. Reaney, Litt. D., Ph D., F.S.A., 3rd edition with corrections by R. M. Wilson M.A., Routledge, London, 1991 ISBN 0-415-05737-X

Page 487, Whitehouse, Whithouse, Whitters

- (i) Stephen *atte Whitehous* 1327 - Subsidy Rolls, Somerset: "Dweller at the white (stone) house"; Whittas Park in Torpenhow (Cumberland) is Whitthouse in 1777 - Place Names of Buckinghamshire etc., English Place Name Society
- (ii) William Whitehals 1369; Robert Whithause 1551; Marmaducus Whithaus 1598; Antonius Whitus 1615; all from Register of the Freeman of the City of York: White neck cf. Whittles, Shorthose

"A Dictionary of Surnames" by Patricia Hanks, Flavia Hodges and David L. Gold, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, reprinted many times with corrections, this one: 2004 ISBN 0-19-211592-8

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English (widespread but especially common in the W. Midlands): topographic name for someone who lived in a white house, from Middle English Whit WHITE + hous HOUSE; or a habitation name from a place named with these elements, as for example Whittus in Cumberland
Variations: Whithous, Whitters

"A Dictionary of Surnames" by Mark Antony Lower, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., Ware, Herts, 3rd edition 1988 ISBN 1-85326-916-6 (first published as "A Dictionary of the Family Names of the United Kingdom" by John Russell Smith, London and G.P.Bacon, Lewes, 1960)

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A village in the parish of Tough, Co. Aberdeen, Scotland

[*Note: this is correct. There are also White House, Ipswich, Suffolk; White Houses, East Retford, Notts; Whitehouse, Kintyre, Scotland, Whitehouse Common, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands; Whitehouse Green, Burghfield, Berkshire*]

"Encyclopedia of Surnames" by John Ayto, A. & C. Black Publishers Ltd., London 2007 ISBN 978 0 7136 8144 4

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Person who lives in a white house

Mary Whitehouse (née Hutcheson) 1910-2001, British campaigner against permissiveness in the media; Paul Whitehouse 1959 - , British comic actor and writer

"The Guinness Book of Names" by Leslie Alan Dunkling, 6th edition, Guinness Publishing Ltd., Enfield, Middlesex, ISBN 0-85112-595-6

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(sometimes) A man with a white neck

2. Parish registers

The earliest record found by a search in "Ancestry" is of a Johes Witthaus in Yorkshire c. 1550

The earliest West Midlands entries are for an Elenor Whithouse 1555 Dudley, and the marriage of a Joan Whitehouse, 1559 Sedgley.

3. Other early records

The Muster Roll of 1539 has been described as the Tudor Home Guard. It is a list for the whole of the county, giving details of able-bodied men and the weapons with which they were armed. It also lists equipment to be provided and paid for by these men, according to their means. The only Staffordshire entry is for a Thurstan Whitehouse of Sedgley, who shall provide a bow.

Early Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Records have been transcribed and published. The earliest Whitehouse entry is for 1555-56 and shows two "complaints" by a Thurstan Whythouse, one related to the sale of a cottage and land in the village of Brierley for £40 and the other to land in Tipton, also for £40.

A 1571 entry shows a complaint by a Thrustane (sic) Whitehouse of Sedgley that his brother Richard failed to pay him for land at Garnall (sic: Gornall).