

C *lark, the name*

Meaning a Man of a Religious Order, and Later a Scholar

An Ancient Name Well Known of the Isles and Europe

Clerk/Clark or Clarke is the oldest true surname recorded anywhere in Europe. These names evolved largely from the Latin clericus, a term which had almost universal usage describing a person in holy orders, a scholar or a scribe. However, it is only after 1400 that we can be certain that it was being used as a surname rather than as a description of someone's occupation or status. In the modern idiom, the surname can be found as Clark, Clarke, Clerk and Clerke.

As Clark and Clarke are spelling variants of the same name and have the same meaning they probably only exist in both forms because when surnames were first assumed people were illiterate and it was not uncommon to find a person's name recorded in more than one spelling, sometimes in the same document, rather than some predetermined plan. As you can see from the histories of the name there are several different spellings recorded including Clark, Clarke, Clerc, Clerk, Clerke, le Clerec, which all are/were forms of the surname Clark/Clarke. I don't think anyone could say with certainty that any one form of the name came first.

From the custom of identifying a person by his first name and occupation the name proliferated, but only after 1400 did it become an inherited family name.

The word "clerc" denoted a member of a religious order, from Old English cler(e)c 'priest', reinforced by Old French clerc. Both are from Late Latin clericus, from Greek klerikos, a derivative of kleros 'inheritance', "legacy", with reference to the priestly tribe of Levites (see Levy) 'whose inheritance was the Lord'. In medieval Christian Europe, clergy in minor orders were permitted to marry and so found families; thus the surname could become established. In the Middle Ages it was virtually only members of religious orders who learned to read and write, so that the term clerk came to denote any literate man, particularly the professional secretary, "scribe" or scholar.

Clarks in Scotland

The earliest name on record in Scotland was Roger Clericus, who held land in Kelso in the year 1174. Clark was the 14th most frequent surname at the General Register Office in 1995. The name is common throughout the Lowlands and Highlands of Scotland. It is particularly prevalent in Caithness and there were important families of Clarks in places as far apart as Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Paisley and some have become landed families with baronetcies. Ulva was the original home of Clan MacQuarrie. In about 1850 Francis William Clark, an Argyll landowner, built an impressive modern seat on the island, near the abandoned house of the 16th Chief.

Clan Clerich, or Clark, was one of the old 17 tribes of Clan Chattan. The territory occupied by the Clan Chattan during its long history lies mainly in east Inverness-shire and stretches from Inverness in the north to Laggan in the south, and from Glenloy in the west to Glenshee and

Invercauld in the east. It embraced the upper stretches of four of Scotland's main rivers: the Nairn, Findhorn, Spey, and Dee.

Tartans, Shields, and Badges

The tartan used by the Clerks is a variation of one called "Blue Clergy" which was worn by ministers, though it dates from the re-invention of tartan after the visit (orchestrated by Sir Walter Scott) of King George IV to Scotland in 1822. The later Clark – a modern variant of the 'Clergy tartan', or, if links can be traced to Lochaber or Badenoch, such patterns as are associated with Clans Cameron and Chattan - or that of any other clan to which links can be traced.



From Professional Identity to Family Name



When translated into Gaelic it becomes Chleirich, resulting in Mac a'Chleirich - son of the clerk (surviving mainly in McCleary, or MacChlery, often anglicised to Clarkson). Families of Clarks/Clerks attached themselves to several clans, first no doubt, as men-of-business to the chiefs. The Clan Cameron in Lochaber, and the Clans Mackintosh and MacPherson in the Confederation of Clan Chattan in and around Badenoch all recognize them as septs. In the latter kindred the Clarks of Clan Chlerich are said to trace descent from Gillemichael vic Chleric, the personal servant of Malcolm, 10th Chief of Mackintosh during the 15th century. There was never a Highland clan of that name. However, it is frequently found among the Clan Chattan confederacy. Clarks appear to have been a sept (under the protection) of the MacPhersons (whose origins were also from the church, "Mac-a Phearsain" meaning in Gaelic "son of the parson" in the days when celibacy of the priesthood was not enforced).

The clergy in the Scottish Highlands belonged to a militant order. It was recorded that a clergyman in Skye in the 18th century attended church with his two-handed sword, and that his servant walked behind with his bow and a case of arrows. When Presbyterianism became Scotland's national church, there was opposition and many times the service could not be held or was postponed, when a certain person came to the door. It is said that Colin Campbell, minister of Ardchatten, was denied admittance by the MacDonalds. Campbell, however, was ready for the cause. He was dressed in his kilt, and armed with a sword in one hand and a cocked pistol in the other, and defied the masses to remove him.

Clarks in England, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, and Finland

The name is also common in England where it is often spelled "Clarke". One Richerius Clericus, Hampshire, appears in the Domesday Book of 1086. The first recorded spelling of the family name is shown to be that of Willelm le Clerec, which was dated 1100, in "The Old English Byname Register of Somerset", during the reign of King Henry 1, known as "The Lion of Justice", 1100 - 1135. In the early Middle Ages any literate person could style himself clericus, a word which was appended to signatures in countless documents of that time. Other early recordings include: Reginald Clerc, noted in the Curia Regis Rolls of Rutland (1205), and John le Clerk, registered in the "Transcripts of Charters relating to the Gilbertine Houses", Lincolnshire (1272). Edwin Clarke, of Yorkshire, was listed in the Yorkshire Poll Tax of 1379. John Clerc possessed a territory in Edinburgh in the year of 1446. John Clerk of Leith (Shipmaster) was granted a safe conduct to travel from Scotland into England in the year 1446. Robert Clarke and Margaret Mayson were married at St. Dionis Backchurch, London in the year 1557. Richard, son of Rumboll Clarke was baptised at St. James's, Clerkenwell, London in the year 1583.

In Ireland, O'Cleirigh meant "grandson of the scribe" in Irish Gaelic. The surname Cleary came from Cleireach of Connacht, who was born around 829 A.D. The Irish branch, of this family group, settled in Derry and Donegal, Ireland; where they became famous poets. In Cavan, Ireland, the name was anglicized as Clarke.

In Scotland, at the end of the 12th century, a Roger clericus held land in Kelso and in 1249 Alan clericus was a witness to a charter in Aberdeen. There were nine people from Scotland with that name who signed the "Ragman Roll" when King Edward I of England demanded in 1296 that all landowners had to swear allegiance to him. These probably did not become surnames. Later the surname Le Clerc surfaced. Clerk meant secretary, scribe, scholar, or clerk. In Gaelic it was Cleiriach, which became Cleary and MacCleary in Ireland. Clerk/Clarks found in the Ragman Rolls of 1296 were:

1. Clerk of Colgnynton, Adam of the County of Edinburgh
2. Clerk de Eyeton, William of the County Berwickshire
3. Clerk de Louweder, William le fiz Alain of the County of Berwickshire.
4. Clerk de Rokesburgh/Roxburgh, Walter County of Roxburgh
5. Clerk, Guy burger of Jeddeworth
6. Clerk, Pieres, County of Edinburgh.
7. Clerk, Richard, citizen of Jeddeworth

Johannes Clark was prior of Scone in 1524. At Durness in Sutherland a family named Clarke can be traced to the 17th century.

In Sweden and Finland, Richard Clark, a native of Montrose in Angus, became vice-admiral of Sweden in 1623, and a Hans Clerck (of a different family) rose to be an admiral in the same service. The name still exists in Sweden and Finland in the form Klerck.

Clarks in America

In 1783, the exploration and settlement of the lands northwest of Ohio in the new country of the United States was carried out by George Rogers Clark (1752-1818). He held possession of the Southwest territory in Ohio, and was of Scottish descent.

Richard Clarke was noted as a passenger on the "Mayflower" bound for the New World in 1620. The American explorer George Rogers Clark (1752-1818) was of Scottish descent. Lawrence Clark, together with his wife, Margaret, and son, Thomas, were famine emigrants who sailed from Liverpool aboard the "Shenandoah", bound for New York in March 1846.