

Spelling ALDERSON

As a 'one name' society our focus is on the ALDERSON name, but if we want to understand the relevance of old records, we cannot be a 'one spelling' society. Table 1 gives 63 different name spelling that seem to relate to our ALDERSON ancestors. Where do these spellings come from?

Chaotic spellings are what people working on the history of place-names and personal names expect. Dialect, semi-literacy, and lack of spelling standardization, as well as sound changes varying in different dialects, are the main reasons. Writers set down the letters that they thought were equivalent to the sounds they heard. They did not do this consistently – we find examples of a name written using different letters in the same text by the same writer. At the same time those doing the writing may have had different accents from those speaking the name. We can only imagine the possibilities for variation with pronunciation in a strong northern Middle English dialect written down in Latin by French speakers, as is the case with the earliest records.

These examples give an idea of the variations.

- Rawff AWDARSON married Alic in 1582 in Ravenstonedale WES and buried her there as Alice ALDERSON in 1610.
- Margaret AUDERSON daughter of Bartholomew was baptised on 14th April 1590 in Hutton Rudby NRY and Margaret AULDERSON married there on 19th April 1609.
- Robert ANDERSON married on 16th April 1594 in Leake NRY, had sons John ANDERSON baptised on 17th Nov. 1605, Richard AWDERSON baptised on 13th June 1608, Thomas ALDERSON baptised on 23rd Sept. 1610, all at Leake.
- Christopher son of James ANDERSON was baptised at Great Fencote in 1601, and buried as the son of James AUTHERSON in 1602.
- James had son George AWDERSON baptised in 1608, daughter Elizabeth ADERSON baptised in 1610, daughter Barbara ADESON baptised in 1612, and daughter Alice ALDERSON baptised in 1615, all at Auckland St Andrew DUR.
- John ALDERSON married his wife Elizabeth in 1608 at Manchester Cathedral LAN and buried her there as Elizabeth ALDERSONNE in 1620.
- Mary AUDERSON baptised 1608 in Hutton Rudby, was married there as Mary OLUDERSON in 1634.
- Ninian son of Michael AUTHERSON was born 11th May 1611 in Aldbrough, WRY, and Ninian son of Michael ALDERSON was buried 15th May 1611 in Aldbrough. While Ingram ALDERSON married on 15th May 1654 in Long Marston, YKS, had a son William AUTHERSON baptised 25th July 1666.
- Adam son of William ALDERSON was baptised 12th Aug. 1635 in Colne, LAN, and Adam OLDERSON was married in 1688 in Colne.
- John AWDERSON who witnessed the reading of the Book of Articles of Religion in Sockburn Church by the Vicar on 13th July 1662 had two daughters baptised there: Ann AUDERSON on 17th May 1663 and Margery ADERSON on 17th April 1668.

- Alexander AUDERSON married 21st Nov 1671 in Eryholme NRY, had a son William ANDERSON born Oct. 1672 in Eryholme.
- Richard had daughter Richard AUTHERSONNE baptised in 1673, and buried as Richard AUTHERSON in 1675, and son Richard ALDERSON baptised in 1687, all at Great Fencote NRY.
- John had son Robert ADDESON baptised in 1751, daughter Elizabeth ADDERSON baptised in 1754, and Susan ALDERSON baptised in 1760, all at Sadberge.
- Hannah HOLDERSON was baptised on 26th May 1782 and buried as Hannah ALDERSON on 7th Sept. 1782 in Leeds.

Table 1 gives the spellings found in the AFHS database for the UK, with the first and last dates at which they occur, and the place in which they first occur. Whatever the spelling, we would expect something equivalent to *ald* then to *er* then to *son*. Table 1 shows the various spellings broken down in this pattern.

Table 1 – Variations of the spelling of ALDERSON

Spelling	Syllable	Earliest	Latest	Place of Earliest Record
Adarson	Ad-ar-son	1594	1681	Aycliffe, County DUR
Adderson	Add-er-son	1548	1796	Fiskerton Cum Rolleston, NTT
Addeson	Add-e-son	1559	1751	Hexham, NBL
Addison	Add-i-son	1791	1791	Auckland, DUR
Addysonn	Add-y-sonn	1579	1597	Cowthorpe, WRY
Aderson	Ad-er-son	1533	1749	London
Adeson	Ad-e-son	1612	1688	Auckland, DUR
Adesson	Ad-e-sson	1697	1697	Auckland, DUR
Ald	Ald--	1614	1614	Aycliffe, DUR
Alder	Ald-er-	1714	1737	Darlington, SUR
Alders	Ald-er-s	1759	1771	Llangurig, MGY
Aldersen	Ald-er-sen	1662	1776	Pulborough, SSX
Alderson	Ald-er-son	1170		Lancaster, LAN
Alderson	Ald-er-son	1450		Finchale Priory, Durham, DUR

Aldersone	Ald-er-sonne	1567	1674	Stainton in Cleveland, NRY
Aldersonn	Ald-er-sonn	1580	1657	Stainton in Cleveland, NRY
Aldersonne	Ald-er-sonne	1593	1649	Salisbury, WIL
Aldersons	Ald-er-sons	1615	1615	Bowes, NRY
Alderston	Ald-er-ston	1538	1685	Muker, NRY
Alderstone	Ald-er-stone	1581	1595	Dover, KNT
Aldessone	Ald-e-ssone	1300	1300	Stutton, Tadcaster, WRY
Aldeson	Ald-e-son	1641	1703	Winston, DUR
Aldison	Ald-i-son	1722	1755	Kirkoswald, AYR
Aldorson	Ald-or-son	1777	1798	Sturton cum Fenton, NTT
Aldouesson	Ald-oue-sson	1200	1251	Stinton [Stutton, Tadcaster, WRY]
Aldrson	Ald-r-son	1702	1702	Brough, WES
Aldson	Ald--son	1674	1674	Appleton Roebuck, YKS
Allderson	Alld-er-son	1586	1797	Hutton Rudby, NRY
Anderson	And-er-son	1544	1668	South Cave, ERY
Annderson	Annd-er-son	1565	1595	Kirk Ella, WRY
Anndersone	Annd-er-sonne	1585	1585	York, YKS
Arderson	Ard-er-son	1760	1760	Stranton, DUR
Arleson	Arl-e-son	1691	1691	Kirklevington, NRY
Atherson	Ath-er-son	1658	1728	Weasenham All Saints, NFK
Atterson	Att-er-son	1576	1591	Norwich, NFK
Audason	Aud-a-son	1645	1645	Colchester, ESS
Auddison	Audd-i-son	1702	1702	Bishopton, DUR
Auderson	Aud-er-son	1557	1751	Barwick upon Tees, NRY

Audersonn	Aud-er-sonn	1601	1601	Ravenstonedale, WES
Audersonne	Au-der-sonne	1583	1583	Eryholme, NRY
Audrson	Aud-r-son	1570	1572	Aycliffe, DUR
Aulderson	Auld-er-son	1587	1777	Hutton Rudby, NRY
Auldersonn	Auld-er-sonn	1561	1561	Muker, NRY
Autherson	Auth-er-son	1582		Kirkby Fleetham, NRY
Authersonne	Auth-er-sonne	1603	1684	Kirkby Fleetham, NRY
Awdarson	Awd-ar-son	1561	1608	Ravenstonedale, WES
Awderson	Awd-er-son	1489	1775	Cowthorpe, WRY
Awdersone	Awd-er-sonne	1614	1614	York, YKS
Awdersons	Awd-er-sons	1662	1662	Whitby, NRY
Awdeson	Awd-e-son	1580	1580	East Halsham, YKS
Awedeson	Awed-e-son	1693	1693	Bishopton, DUR
Awenson	Aw-en-son	1655	1659	Egglescliffe, DUR
Awlderson	Awld-er-son	1538	1538	Muker, NRY
Awtherson	Awth-er-son	1584	1690	Cottingham, ERY
Elderson	Eld-er-son	1690	1690	Great Yarmouth, NFK
Halderson	Hald-er-son	1730	1751	Barningham, NRY
Holderson	Hold-er-son	1713	1799	London
Houlderson	Hould-er-son	1799	1799	Cheadle, CHS
Oderson	Od-er-son	1723	1749	Finghall, NRY
Olderson	Old-er-son	1668	1789	Colne, LAN
Oluderson	Olud-er-son	1613	1634	Hutton Rudby, NRY

Orderson	Ord-er-son	1788	1788	Leeds, WRY

If we look at each spelling in this way, the second syllable would be what vowel linguists call the schwa. According to the Wikipedia: “The schwa is the vowel sound in many lightly pronounced unaccented syllables in English words of more than one syllable. It is most easily described as sounding like the British English *er* or the American English *uh*. It is the most common vowel sound in the English language. Its sound depends on the adjacent consonants and it is a very short neutral vowel sound. It is a characteristic of English that unaccented neutral vowel sounds, especially before *r* or *l*, tend to become a schwa. A schwa sound can therefore be represented in English by any vowel.” The *r* was pronounced in earlier times, and still is in central Lancashire, Scotland and the South West.

Mistranscription of the common scribe’s contraction of AWDERSON to AWD^RSON probably explains a second syllable consisting only of *r*. The form *oue* may be a French spelling of the sound.

The alternatives for third syllable are generally explained by 16th century spelling conventions. *sonne*, *sonn* and *sonne* arise with the development of printing. To justify the text, the compositor would add a final *e* to almost any word ending in a single consonant or would double a final consonant. At the same time, the convention of using a final (silent) *e* to indicate a long vowel sound developed (indicating, for example, the different sounds of *can* and *cane*). Adding a random extra *e* could create confusion about the sound, so doubling the final consonant before the *e* was introduced as a convention to indicate that the vowel should be short (requiring *can* to be spelled as *canne*). Eventually where this silent *e* had no effect on a vowel it began to be omitted, as did final doubled consonants. We also find doubling of other consonants such as *s* and *d*. The vowel in ‘son’ is also the schwa, giving rise to a variety of pronunciations. Simple replacement of *o* by *e* gives the common Scandinavian form *sen*. There is no great difference between the production of sounds for *s* and *t*. The tongue takes a similar position for each, although the airflow differs. *s* can be converted to *st* by varying and extending the airflow during the tongue movement giving *ston* and hence *stone*.

The variation of the first syllable is far more complex, depending a great deal on dialects greatly influenced by geography and history. The Northumbrian-Mercian line, which runs from the Lune south of Bowland and then across to the Wharfe, divides the northern Danelaw dialects from the southern Anglo-Saxon dialects. The east-west distinction is roughly defined by the Pennines, with a Geordie type found north of the Tees in the east, which may spread across the Tyne gap.

The major variation in the first syllable comes from the inclusion, or not, of *l*. In the Middle Ages, *l* was lost before other consonants (e.g. *talk*, *palm*). This occurs as l-vocalisation – turning the *l* into a vowel sound - in the west up into Scotland (e.g. *cowd* for *cold*), but loss of *l* without vocalisation in the East (e.g. *cad* for *cold*). Spellings with *au*, *aw* represent the sound after the *l* had been dropped. Spellings with *ad* or *add* may represent a variant where the *l* was lost without lengthening of the vowel. I heard my grandfather, who was from Jarrow, County Durham, say his name as *Adderson*.

The other main variation comes from *d* and *th* which have transmuted in many words – *murther* to *murder*, *burthen* to *burden*, but also *bruder* to *brother*, *fad(d)er* rather than *father*, and so on. In the north *th* (originally from Scandinavian) replaced the original *d*.

Intermixing of these two variations and the doubling of consonants gives most of the spelling variation. *awed* and *olud* could arise by dragging out the pronunciation while spelling – *a-w-ed* or *o-l-ud*, with the extra *e* or *u* representing the resulting schwa vowel.

In old scripts the distinction between the shapes of *u* and *n* is very slight. The same script can easily be read as *AUDERSON* or *ANDERSON*. Generally the only way to determine which was intended is by context. Where we find the name *ANDERSON* in isolation amongst many *AUDERSON*s we may find that the text was mistranslated. Similarly we find *AUUDERSON* read as *ANNDERSON*. *uu* was as an

alternative way of writing *w*. [This is not suggesting that Alderson and Anderson are the same name, only that they may be confused when reading old texts.]

The forms beginning with *h* are probably examples hypercorrection – adding an *h* where one isn't missing - in speakers in h-dropping parts of England. h-dropping has been around for at least 500 years! The forms beginning with *o* are phonetically close to our current pronunciation of ALDERSON, which begins with the sound *o* as in *cot*. Here, the diphthong in *aw* is smoothed into a single vowel sound. The forms beginning with *e* may indicate a change of sound. However, it could just be that the scribe thought the speaker had said *elder*.

The analysis shows that linguistically ATTERSON cannot represent ALDERSON, and must represent a different name. It also indicates that our current pronunciation including the *l* may be a pronunciation of the standard spelling, rather than a continuation of the ancestral pronunciation without the *l*.

Reviewing the various spellings we see their basis in regional dialects and the changing pronunciation of English. Spelling standardisation of our surname only took a firm hold after 1800 when it settled into a small number of variants in the UK. We can also get an indication of a possible root of the name. Nearly all of the various spellings of the initial syllable can indicate *old*. We find the normal English forms *older* and *elder* together with the variations on *alder*. The OUP Dictionary of Surnames gives: ALDERSON as *son of Alder*, where *Alder* is from one or the other of two Old English personal names, *Ealdhere* "old army" or *AEthelhere* "noble army". There was another personal name in Middle English, ALDOUS (variously spelt) from various male or female personal names beginning *Eald-* in Old English. So conceivably ALDERSON could mean *Aldous' son*. This is very suggestive of ALDOUESSON and strengthens Plantagenate Harrison's theory that the Aldersons were descended from ALDOUE.

[This article has been written with the extensive help and considerable expertise of the linguists at Lancaster University.]