

Main Points

The lists of the surnames that occur most often in Scotland's registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths count the surnames of each child for births, of both parties (e.g. bride and groom) for marriages, and of the deceased for deaths. Different spellings are counted separately. Surnames which occurred fewer than ten times (in total) in a year do not appear in the list for that year. As explained elsewhere, the lists may not be representative of the surnames of the whole of the population of Scotland.

A summary table shows the 'Top Twenty' surnames, and the number of times that they occurred, in every fifth year from 1975 to 2015. In each of those years:

- the top three names were the same, and they appeared in exactly the same order in each of the years:
 - Smith was always first (it had 1,929 occurrences in 2015);
 - Brown was always second (1,438 in 2015); and
 - Wilson was always third (1,352 in 2015).
- the next five names were the same, but their order could vary from year to year (to illustrate this, their positions in 1975 and 2000 are also given below):
 - fourth in 2015: Stewart, with 1,186 occurrences in that year (it was sixth in 1975, and fourth in 2000);
 - fifth in 2015: Thomson, with 1,172 occurrences (it was seventh in both 1975 and 2000);
 - sixth in 2015: Robertson (1,158 occurrences; fourth in 1975; sixth in 2000);
 - seventh in 2015: Campbell (1,130 occurrences; fifth in both 1975 and 2000); and
 - eighth in 2015: Anderson (1,068 occurrences; eighth in both 1975 and 2000).

The table also shows that the names which were ninth and tenth sometimes changed. Usually, one or both of Scott and MacDonald were in the last two places in the Top Ten, but in some years Murray was there, and Reid and Taylor have both appeared once in the Top Ten.

The names which made up the rest of the Top Twenty were also generally much the same from one year to the next, albeit with some rises and falls in position; towards the foot, some names have moved into and/or dropped out of the Top Twenty. For example, MacDonald and Murray were both between ninth and thirteenth in each of the years shown; Clark was thirteenth or fourteenth in every year; Ross was always between fifteenth and nineteenth; and Young was always between fifteenth and twentieth. Walker and Watson were both in the Top Twenty in eight of the nine years which appear in the table, with both never being higher than sixteenth. Morrison was in the Top Twenty in seven of the nine years, with sixteenth as its highest position; Mitchell was there in six of the nine years, reaching fifteenth; Paterson in five of the nine years, and never higher than seventeenth. Fraser, Graham, Henderson and Miller all made the Top Twenty in only one of the nine years that are shown in the table.

While there have not been great changes in the ranking of the names at the top of the annual lists, there have been large falls in many of their numbers over the longer term, due to drops in the total numbers of births, marriages and deaths. For example, compared to 1975, there were over 12,800 fewer births in 2015, around 9,500 fewer marriages and over 5,500 fewer deaths. The biggest drop was for Smith, from 2,719 in 1975 to 1,929 in 2015: a fall of 790. There have also been falls of more than 500 since 1975 for Robertson (down by 638, from 1,796 in 1975 to 1,158 in 2015), Campbell (down by 619, from 1,749 to 1,130), Wilson (down by 534, from 1,886 to 1,352) and Brown (down by 532, from 1,970 to 1,438).

In general, the numbers for particular surnames have changed much less between 2000 and 2015, because there are much smaller differences between the numbers of events in those two years: compared to 2000, there were just over 2,000 more births in 2015; nearly 700 fewer marriages and about 200 fewer deaths. Again, the biggest drop was for Smith: down 275, from 2,204 in 2000 to 1,929 in 2015. The only other falls of more than 100 between 2000 and 2015 were for Mitchell (down by 157, from 723 in 2000 to 566 in 2015) and Campbell (down by 121, from 1,251 in 2000 to 1,130 in 2015).

The surnames for which there have been the largest rises reflect the greater ethnic diversity of Scotland: the only increases of 100 or more between 1975 and 2015 were for Ali (up by 116, from 39 to 155), Khan (up by 114, from 17 to 131) and Ahmed (up by 100, from 24 to 124). However, none of these surnames occurred often enough to be in the Top 100 in 2015. There were no increases of 100 or more between 2000 and 2015; the only names with rises of more than 50 or so were Chen (5 in 2000, 82 in 2015), Khan (up from 61 to 131), Ali (up from 95 to 155) and Lin (1 in 2000, 52 in 2015). Again, none of these surnames was in the Top 100 in 2015.