

Famous people called Stanley (or Stan) – or organisations linked to the same name

What are the chances of there having been lots of famous Stanleys in the world throughout history?

Looking quickly down lists of famous people it is quite hard to spot anyone called Stanley. There appear to have been no Pope Stanley, no King Stanley in the UK, no Stanley as president of USA, no French or Italian ruler called Stanley, no Russian Tsar or other leader called Stanley, no Holy Roman Emperor called Stanley. In the UK there was only one Prime Minister with the first name Stanley. This was Stanley Baldwin (although he did be prime minister three separate times). Similarly, going down the list of individual world sporting champions the Stanleys of this world are noticeably almost totally absent.

When asked to name some well-known person called Stanley our (admittedly rather idiosyncratic) sample of people tended to come up with names from popular culture. This may be a feature of a celebrity-obsessed society or it may be that people called Stanley tended not to be born into the elites that became rulers of one kind or another. Maybe Stanleys tend more to be creative/artistic types not given to world domination. Again, it may be a time thing: Stanley maybe was not a name that was around throughout much of the recorded history of the rich and famous – only becoming popular in the era of mass cultures. Any list of famous Stanleys is likely to be mainly a Western European thing if Stanley is not a name that has been transposed across many nations over time, and there are likely to be differences between the list produced by our UK respondents and a similar list that would be the result of asking the same question in the USA (with the latter containing names of hockey/baseball stars rather than soccer stars).

In Britain the most common names given as famous Stanleys were:

(in no specific order)

Stanley Holloway - Stanley Augustus Holloway OBE (1890-1982) was a stage and film performer, a comedian, a poet and singer, but probably best known for his comic monologues eg Albert Ramsbottom. He played Dr Doolittle in the 1964 film version of My Fair Lady and was in the film Brief Encounter. He made films for the Ealing studio including The Lavender Hill Mob and The Titfield Thunderbolt.

Stanley Matthews – Sir Stanley;1915-2000; English footballer. He was regarded as one of the greatest wingers of all time. His nickname was ‘the Wizard of Dribble’. He played for England in 54 international games. He was one of the oldest players at the end of his career. He spent long periods of time playing for Stoke and then for Blackpool (including a famous Cup Final).

Stanley Baldwin – (1867-1947); He was First Earl Baldwin of Bewdley and was Conservative prime minister three times (1923-24; 1924-29; 1935-37). He dominated British politics between the two world wars.

Stanley Kubrick – 1928-1999; American movie director and producer. His films include 'Dr Strangelove', 'Clockwork Orange', '2001: A Space Odyssey', and 'The Shining'.

Stan Laurel –(1890-1965) He was born Arthur Stanley Jefferson, in Ulverston Lancashire England. He was a stage performer, an understudy to Charlie Chaplin. He became part of the Laurel and Hardy pair of actors and film stars.

Stanley Baxter – Scottish comedian and impressionist, born 1926 in Glasgow. He developed his acting skills as part of his National Service in the army.

Stanley Spencer – Sir Stanley; 1891-1959; English painter. Best known for his series of religious paintings.

Stanley Milgram – His psychological research was in areas such as Obedience, social attitudes etc

..... most people don't get this far, running out after only 3 or 4 names.

They might have added:

Stan Getz (jazz musician)

Stan Boardman (stand-up comedian)

Stanley W Hayter (surrealist/abstract painter).

Stanley Tookie Williams (founder of the Los Angeles Crips gang)

Stan Mortensen (footballer)

Stanley Gibbons (producer of stamp/philately reference books)

The list doesn't seem to be very many given the number of people who have existed in the world. Maybe Stanley has been a rarity as a name or a very recent adoption as a name?

The origins of the name indicate that it is Old English. Stan (=stone) + lea (=clearing/meadow); so having its origins as a place-related name ('the person living at the stony meadow'). From the place name it became handed down as a surname (as was the case with so many names).

The peak of its usage as a first name was around 1916 but even then it was the name of only 0.6% of boys, giving it a ranking of 34th most popular name. Since that peak the use of the name has steadily declined (with a smaller peak around the 1950s) until today when it

scarcely records on the chart. One explanation for the lack of famous Stanleys may simply be that there were not, proportionally at least, many Stanleys at all.

Stanley may not be one of the commonest names but it is still up there on the list (and certainly was relatively popular around the 1900 – 1950 period). It has broad UK geographical coverage ie is not a very local-specific name. It has also been around for a long time. There should have been a reasonable chance of there having been a few more Stanleys making it into the reference books. Still, they did not shine through. That being so it feels that each example is somehow special enough to be worth finding out more about.

When the criteria are loosened away from simply real people's first names more options spring to people's mind:

Stanley – the explorer who 'found' Livingstone ie Henry Morton Stanley

Stanley Kowalski (character in 'A Streetcar Named Desire', played by Marlon Brando in the film)

Norman Stanley Fletcher – character in TV comedy series 'Porridge'

Stanley – the character in the book 'Holes'

Flat Stanley – a paper cut-out shape that travels to places

Erle Stanley Gardner – a writer

New Stanley Hotel – a famous meeting place in Nairobi

Stanley tools – especially the Stanley Knife (a box/carpet knife)

Stanley – a part of Hong Kong

Accrington Stanley – a football club

The Stanley Cup – Canadian/North American Ice Hockey trophy

Lord Stanley – Earl of Derby; several of these each famous for different things

Stanley Park – a recreational area in the seaside resort of Blackpool

Stanley Park – a recreational area in Vancouver

Port Stanley – capital of the Falkland Islands

Stanley Falls – in Africa

Paul Stanley (stage name of Stanley Harvey Eisen, rock guitarist – in group 'Kiss')

They could also have added Morgan Stanley (bank)

Various places called Stanley in Derbyshire, Durham and Gloucester

As a surname it is one of the oldest and noblest of English surnames via the Stanley family, Earls of Derby, who can be traced back to a companion of William the Conqueror. The family's fortune was established as early as 1400. It is from the branches of this family that some of the references in the lists above arose as they took up positions of power and influence around the colonies.

There are undoubtedly others, with varying degrees of 'fame' The most exciting link I have come across is that the spy Kim Philby had the cryptoname of 'Stanley'.