Naming Patterns in the Cambridgeshire Parish of Castle Camps, 1563-1704

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Abstract

This paper challenges the theory that godparents had a greater degree of influence than parents in the naming of children in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The results of a diachronic empirical study of the parish records of Castle Camps (Cambridgeshire) instead suggest that the perpetuation of the parents' names was considered more important, at least in this particular parish. The study also shows that the practice of substitution (of naming a child for a previously-deceased same-sex sibling) was often used where possible; this is an important finding as, due to the precise criteria the records must fulfil in order to be suitable for analysis, evidence is lacking for this particular naming practice.

My study concludes that in Castle Camps in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, patrilineal and matrilineal naming became more commonly practised. The prevalence of parental naming indicates that godparents may not have had such a significant role in the naming process as has previously been suggested. In addition to this, the study highlights that although a small number of records do seem to indicate an element of godparental influence on naming, the number of relevant records is so small that godparents were not as influential in this area as might be expected from the results of studies such as Chitty's (1969). The practice of naming a child for a deceased elder sibling is, if not common, in use throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in this area.

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Introduction

Smith-Bannister argued that "names […] reflect personal choice, not some rigid code which limits choice, and therefore name choice tells us about the attitudes of those choosing names." (1997:2) Some research, including that by Smith-Bannister, has led to the conclusion that the parents' names were generally perpetuated, and took precedence, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. However, scholars such as Chitty (1969) and Niles (1982) have argued that godparents were very influential during this period, and thus it would be their 'personal choice' and 'attitudes' represented in the naming of a child. If this were true, it could be expected that an equal if not higher rate of godparental naming would be seen in a parish, as compared to patrilineal and matrilineal naming. To establish which method of naming was more prevalent in a particular area, a diachronic empirical study of the parish records of Castle Camps (Cambridgeshire) was conducted for the years 1563-1704. The research project also involved an investigation into the potential use of substitution (of naming a child for a previously-deceased same-sex elder sibling). This practice has been noted by scholars including Smith-Bannister (1997) and Stone (1990), but, as records must fulfil a number of strict criteria to be eligible for analysis, evidence of this practice is lacking.

Methodology

This study focussed on the small rural parish of Castle Camps, in Cambridgeshire, England, and its parish records for the period 1563-1704. This particular range of years was chosen as the baptismal records were complete for this time, the results could be easily compared to results from similar studies of the same period, and the range was sufficiently extensive for the observation of any trends. The marriage and burial records were also available for much of this period, which was valuable; marriage dates could indicate fairly accurately when a couple would start having children, which helped to highlight any potentially missing records, and burial dates were vital for the analysis of the substitution practice.

In conducting this project, I took these records, which were organised chronologically, and manually ordered them by surname, by parents' name, and also by year, so that they were ultimately organised into familial units.

After the records had been organised, I had usable records for 1362 baptisms between 1563 and 1704. The number of baptisms was in fact higher than this figure, but many entries from the beginning and end of this period had to be excluded. This exclusion was due to the fact that the parents may have been procreating before or after the period being studied, and to analyse the name of one child when its parents had perhaps many more children would result in misleading statistics. These 1362 records accounted for 642 females and 720 males, and represented 449 familial units (with an average of 3.03 children per family).

From this point, I was able to systematically analyse each familial unit for the aspects of naming to be studied.

Results

It was essential to firstly investigate the potential presence of patrilineal and matrilineal naming, as if this were a prominent feature, it would suggest that a lower rate of godparental naming could be expected.

It is important to emphasise that figures presented here for parent-child name-sharing are intended to represent potential patrilineal or matrilineal naming, rather than conclusive naming for a parent. Name-sharing between parent and child may also be due to such factors as a small name-stock. With further analysis of birth-order and the size of the name-stock, it may be possible to determine whether parent-child name-sharing is deliberate. However, at this stage, the data could be representative of deliberate or coincidental name-sharing.

The percentages of those families which contained a child sharing a name with a parent are given in Figures 1 and 2. In the few instances where 0.1% is unaccounted for, this is due to the fact that all percentages were rounded to the first decimal place.

Families containing a son who shared a name with his father						
	First-born sharing name	Second-born sharing name	Later son sharing name		Total sharing name	None sharing name
1563-9	43.6	12.5	6.3		62.4	37.5
1570-9	36.8	0	0		36.8	63.2
1580-9	48.1	22.2	0		70.3	29.6
1590-9	20	8	8		36	64
1600-9	33.3	16.7	0		50	50
1610-9	37.5	12.5	12.5		62.5	37.5
1620-9	43.5	8.7	4.3		56.5	43.5
1630-9	43.5	13	8.7		65.2	34.8
1640-9	46.4	3.6	7.1		57.1	42.9
1650-9	52.4	4.8	0		57.2	42.8
1660-9	56	12	0		68	32
1670-9	68	0	4		72	28
1680-9	67.9	17.9	0		85.8	14.3
1690-9	69.6	4.3	0		73.9	26.1

Figure 1

Families containing a daughter who shared a name with her mother						
	First-born sharing name	Second-born sharing name	Later daughter sharing name		Total sharing name	None sharing name
1563-9	Mothers not recorded in baptismal records in 1560s.					
1570-9	16.7	16.7	0		33.4	66.6
1580-9	0	14.3	0		14.3	85.7
1590-9	14.3	0	0		14.3	85.7
1600-9	20	4	16		40	60
1610-9	31.3	3.1	9.4		43.8	56.2
1620-9	32.1	0	14.3		46.4	53.6
1630-9	31.9	13.6	0		45.5	54.5
1640-9	25	15	5		45	55
1650-9	50	4.2	0		54.2	45.8
1660-9	54.5	13.6	4.5		72.6	27.3
1670-9	43.5	13	0		56.5	43.5
1680-9	51.9	14.8	0		66.7	33.3
1690-9	63.6	4.5	0		68.1	31.8

Figure 2

The overall majority of families contain a son who shared a name with his father: an average of 61% over the period studied, and as high as 85.8% in a single decade. Significantly, an average of 47.1% of all families with a male child had a first-born son sharing a name with his father. This would indicate a deliberate decision to name for the father, rather than coincidence due to the relatively few names in the name-stock. Also, it is a sustained practice, prevalent in every decade studied, and always with the inclination towards the first son sharing his father's name.

The table of potential matrilineal naming shows similar patterns, although the overall percentage of mother-daughter name-sharing was smaller at 46.2%, with a peak of 72.6% in the 1660s. Again, there is a clear preference towards the eldest daughter sharing the name of the mother, rather than a later child.

These results have been put into the form of a graph (see Figure 3) to aid a comparison of potential patrilineal and matrilineal naming. As can be seen, the overall rate of matrilineal naming was generally lower than patrilineal naming throughout the period studied, with only one decade where an exception to this can be observed.

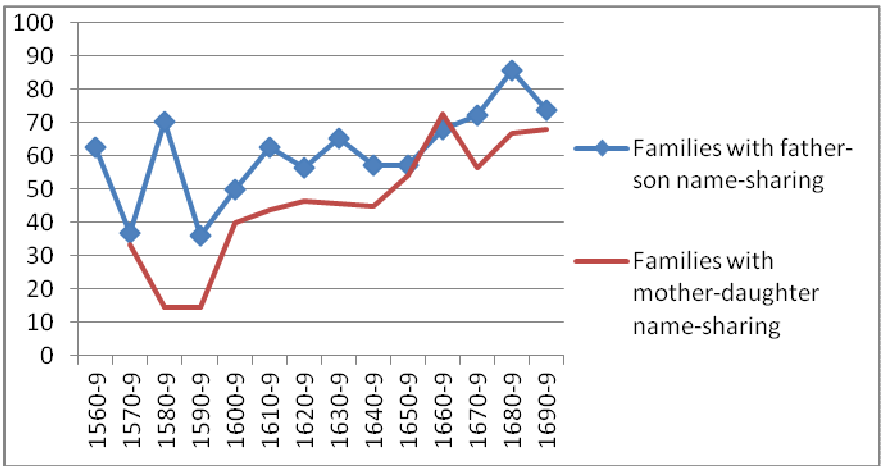

Figure 3

The results were then mapped against data compiled by Smith-Bannister, who conducted similar studies of other parishes in England around the same time. This mapping resulted in the graphs below, Figures 4 and 5. The difference in percentages is accounted for by the fact that Smith-Bannister analysed the total number of children sharing a name with a parent, while I believed it would be more accurate to analyse the number of families which contained a child sharing a name with a parent. With the latter approach, the statistics are not affected by the problem of large families who understandably would not have the majority of their children named for their parents.

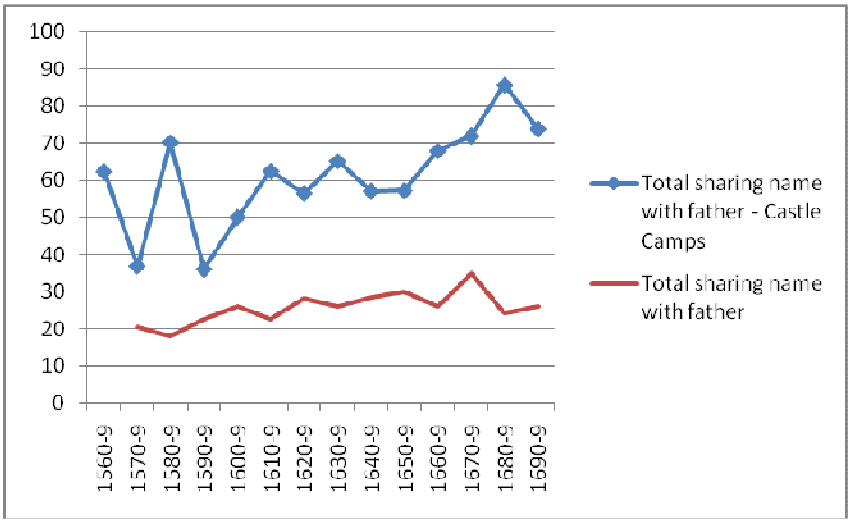

Figure 4. *Castle Camps records plotted against the data compiled by Smith-Bannister (1997: 42)*

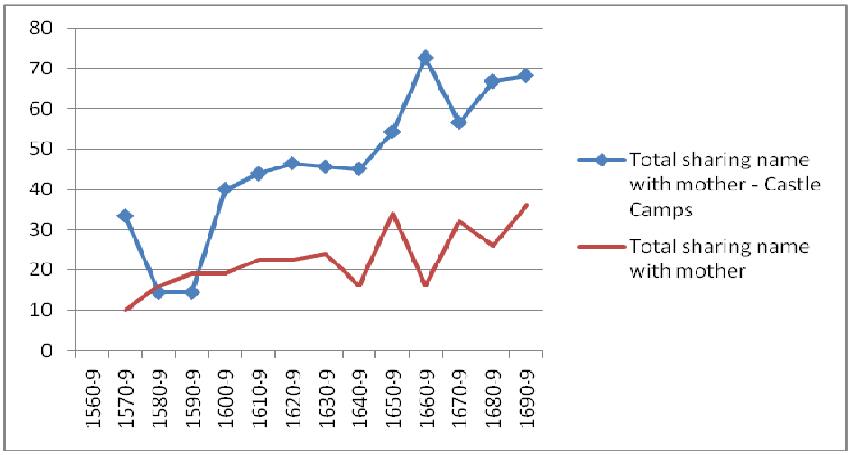

Figure 5. *Castle Camps records plotted against the data compiled by Smith-Bannister (1997: 43)*

There are fairly similar rises and falls in each set of data. For example, the peak in potential patrilineal naming observed in the 1670s by Smith-Bannister seems to occur in the Cambridgeshire parish in the following decade. Therefore, it appears that the data obtained from Castle Camps supports the theories already presented by Smith-Bannister regarding the use of parental naming.

I was also looking for any overall growth or decline in the tendency to have children sharing a parent's name. The graphs do indicate a slight growth, especially in the data concerning a matrilineal pattern, but I found it more effective to find the average of groups of decades and put them into a table (Figure 6).

	Father-son name-sharing	Mother-daughter name-sharing
Average of first five decades	43.1	25.5
Average of first five decades	71.4	63.6

Figure 6

Overall, there is a very definite increase in the percentage of families naming their children for the parents, a rise of 28.3 percentage points for the males and 38.1 for the females. Therefore, although the rate of father-son name-sharing is consistently higher, the mother-daughter name-sharing saw a greater degree of growth. As the name-stock did not greatly decrease over the period studied, these figures seem to suggest that the move towards name-sharing was more deliberate than coincidental, although this may have been a subconscious decision.

As might be expected by the trend towards patrilineal and matrilineal naming, naming after godparents does not seem to have been particularly significant. In fact, of the 1362 records studied, only two mentioned the godparents at all. This directly contrasts to studies such as Chitty's (1969), where it was the parents who went unmentioned.

However, it does seem that godparents may have had some influence, at least in these two records. Both children shared a name with their godfather. The first example was a third son, and his eldest brother shared their father's name; this supports the data already presented that patrilineal naming was a key trend of the period in this area, although it is significant that the child in this record did then share a name with his godfather. However, the second example is a first (and only) son, and shares his name with his godfather rather than his father; therefore, this record indicates godparents may occasionally have had priority over parental naming.

I also analysed a set of 18 records from the neighbouring parish of Shudy Camps from the 1560s, which contained the names of godparents. These results are shown in the table below (Figure 7). Unfortunately, in these records, the names of parents were not listed. Therefore it cannot be asserted that these examples did not also share a name with a parent, only that a majority, 72.2%, share a name with a godparent.

	%
Children sharing a name with one godparent	50
Children sharing a name with two godparent	22.2
Children sharing a name with neither godparent	22.2
Indeterminate (only one godparent listed)	5.6

Figure 7

This is not an uncommon issue. In Chitty's (1969) study of an Oxfordshire parish of the same period, 86% of children were found to share a name with a godparent, but the parental influence could not be assessed due to the lack of mention of parents' names.

It is difficult to properly gauge the extent of influence of godparents in the area, due to the omission of vital information. As the examples from the neighbouring parish are only eighteen in number, and there are only two in Castle Camps itself, it would suggest that the parents' names generally took precedence in the area, especially as, upon further study, it appeared there was a definite preference to naming the first child after the parent. However, this of course cannot be truly understood until a greater number of records are found which contain both the parents' and the godparents' names.

The other important aspect of naming examined in the project was the potential use of the practice of substitution. A low number of examples of this can be expected: to be eligible for analysis, a family must have seen both the death of a child and the birth of a subsequent, same-sex child whose baptism fell after the death of its sibling. In Castle Camps, there were 109 of these later siblings, which is not a particularly large number (although they do

represent almost ten percent of the total records studied). I have not put these results into a graph as the relatively few examples and consequent stark leaps in percentages would make for a misleading image. Instead, the results have been put into a table (Figure 8). The first column of data in this table refers to those children who were given the same name as an elder, deceased sibling. The second column refers to those children who could potentially have been given the same name, but were not.

	Child sharing name with dead sibling	Child not sharing name with dead sibling		Child sharing name with dead sibling (%)	Child not sharing name with dead sibling (%)
1560s	2	0		100	0
1570s	0	1		0	100
1580s	4	0		100	0
1590s	3	2		60	40
1600s	2	4		33.3	66.7
1610s	4	6		40	60
1620s	1	6		14.3	85.7
1630s	4	9		30.7	69.3
1640s	2	11		15.4	84.6
1650s	3	2		60	40
1660s	2	5		28.6	71.4
1670s	2	7		22.2	77.8
1680s	6	10		37.5	62.5
1690s	6	5		54.5	45.5
Total	41	68		37.6	62.4

Figure 8

As can be seen in the table, although the majority of suitable children were not named for an elder sibling, a substantial proportion, almost 40%, were. The ratio is also fairly sustained throughout the period studied; it is significant that there is no decade in the seventeenth century where substitution does not occur. It cannot be argued that substitution is widely practised throughout England in this period; these are the results of one parish and the records used in analysis were few, but in this parish at least, substitution was clearly regularly practised.

Stone stated that substitution was popular in the seventeenth century, before going into decline and dying out by the end of the eighteenth century (1990:257). These results obviously support the first part of that statement. However, it is important to note that they also extend the theory – the Castle Camps records indicate substitution as far back as the 1560s, when this study began.

One of the questions which arise when studying substitution is whether two living siblings could be identically named. Chitty and Stone have both acknowledged this practice, but it does seem to be particularly rare. Chitty has argued that it could happen due to children being named for similarly-named godparents (1969:47), and Stone theorised it could be due to the birth of sickly children (1990:257).

In Castle Camps, there were some instances of identically named, living siblings. The data for this has not been studied in detail, as it cannot be assumed that the elder child is still living simply as there is no burial record. Many burial records for this parish were damaged, missing or partial, and families did occasionally register their deaths in neighbouring parishes. However, one obvious example of identically-named children was apparent: in 1600, twin daughters were born and buried, and their names were Joan and Joan. The fact that both children died soon after birth is a strong indicator of both being sickly, and leads to

the suggestion that the decision in naming may have been made in order to perpetuate the name in the instance of the death of one of the twins. It is also possible that they had different godmothers who both happened to be named Joan, but in the circumstances this seems unlikely: as previously mentioned, it seems that the absence of records of godparents may indicate that they did not play a particularly prominent role.

It was stated above that 109 children, rather than 109 families, were suitable for analysis of presence of substitution. This is an important distinction: a small number of families saw the death of more than one child and the births of subsequent same-sex children, and therefore represent more than one of the examples in Figure 8. Edward and Anne Newborne, for instance, preserved the name of their eldest daughter but not their eldest son. The daughter did share a name with the mother, and the son did not share a name with the father, so it is possible that the daughter's name was given to a later sibling to perpetuate the mother's name, but the son's name was considered of lesser importance. However, as only one example of this was found in Castle Camps, I would not like to speculate further on this at this stage.

To conclude, the parish records of Castle Camps can be used to study a multitude of types of naming pattern and potential influences on naming in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth century. Of course, it must be remembered that this discussion concerns primarily one parish, and thus naming patterns may differ in other areas of England at the same time. Indeed Smith-Bannister has provided evidence that the northern parishes of England experienced a lesser degree of patrilineal naming than the southern parishes, among which Castle Camps would be included (1997: 42). However, I believe that, despite these results being created from one set of parish records, they still provide strong evidence for patrilineal and matrilineal naming, and an increase in this practice over the period studied. I have also suggested that godparents may have had some influence over naming, as argued by scholars such as Chitty and Stone, but it is difficult to believe that they had priority in naming when the patrilineal and matrilineal naming patterns seem to be so clear. Also, the lack of entries actually pertaining to godparents cannot be ignored. The data relating to substitution, although consisting of a small set of records, seems significant, and provides proof of a sustained and reasonably popular practice. The parish overall is extremely rich in evidence for various patterns of naming, and it is hoped that further studies can be conducted to establish whether these patterns are typical, or whether godparental influence can be more clearly seen in other parishes.

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