

Naming Patterns in the 16th/17th Century: Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire

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Introduction

My aim in this article is to examine the familial naming patterns of the Cambridgeshire parish of Castle Camps during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The main focus of investigation is how frequently one or more children were given the same name as a parent. The study is based on data from the parish records for 1563-1704, a period sufficiently extensive to provide robust statistics for the increase, decrease, or stagnancy in naming trends.

Methodology

The baptismal records were originally organised by year, so my first step was to re-organise them by familial unit in order to analyse patterns of naming. Once this had been accomplished, I had usable records for 1362 baptisms between 1563 and 1704. The number of baptisms was in fact higher than this figure, but I had to exclude many entries from the beginning and end of this period. This exclusion was due to the fact that the parents may have been procreating before or after the period being studied: to analyse the name of one child when its parents had perhaps many more children would result in misleading statistics. The original intention was to study the records for 1563-1699; however, I followed one or two families into the eighteenth century, as they had had a substantial number of children before the turn of the century. Therefore, my statistics are based on the 1362 baptisms which would lead to the most accurate results. These 1362 baptisms consist of the records for 642 females and 720 males, and are representative of 449 familial units (an average of 3.03 children per family).

One of the difficulties encountered during the course of the research was the lack of content in some of the records: a parent's name, both parents' names, or the child's name were occasionally omitted. These omissions made it impossible to ascertain whether or not the children were being given the same names as their parents. The high mortality rate

also led to problems, as frequently a new widow or widower would be remarried and procreating only a year or two after having children with their previous partner. I decided, in these cases, to class each marriage as a separate 'family', to take into account the influence of a new partner upon naming. However, this caused difficulties with individual cases, such as *William and Sarah Coote/William and Anna Coote*, in which the first marriage resulted in a son not sharing a name with the father, but the first son of the second marriage was named William. It is debatable whether it is better to class the son William as a first son of a marriage, or a second son of William Coote. Cases such as this were relatively common, and made the process of creating statistics more complicated than I had initially imagined.

It is also important to recognise that some of the data may be incomplete. It was not unknown for families to travel between parishes, and thus some of the baptisms relating to established Castle Camps families may have been conducted in a different parish. Also, the vicar and bishop updated their records independently and occasionally this resulted in discrepancies. In these cases, I have usually abided by the vicar's record, for purposes of consistency, or observed the bishop's version if it was later verified. For example, if the child in question later appears in marital or burial records, I have adhered to the version which agrees with the marital or burial entry.

The variations in spelling also gave rise to difficulty. The records were updated by what must have been a substantial number of different vicars and clerks, and consistency in spelling is somewhat lacking. I have grouped the various spellings together and analysed them under the name as it frequently appears in modern culture. Thus, although spellings such as *Elzbeeth*, *Ayls*, *Samewell* and *Awedrye* all appear in the original records, for purposes of analysis they are listed as *Elizabeth*, *Alice*, *Samuel*, and *Audrey* respectively.

Despite these problems, I gave consideration to each individual case as it arose and categorised it in the way I thought most appropriate. I believe that the resulting statistics are as accurate a representation of the naming patterns of the parish as possible.

Results

The statistics generated by this analysis are given, as percentages, in Tables 1 and 2. It must be remembered that these statistics refer only to the families who had a son, in the first table, or a daughter, in the second. Therefore all 449 families are not represented in each table. (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.)

When studying these tables, it is vital to remember that they portray only the percentage of families which contained a child named for the parent, and not the percentage of children specifically named for a parent. With the relatively small name stock of the time—sixty-one male names and sixty-two female names are used within the period being examined—it is certainly possible that some parents simply chose a popular name for their child rather than consciously deciding to name them after themselves. Similarly, the child may have been named for a godparent who coincidentally had the same name as one of the child's parents. As Niles argues, “we need not assume that Henry VI was Henry at the font because his father and grandfather were. He may have been Henry because one of his godfathers was Henry Beauford.”¹ Therefore it cannot be assumed that the tables presented necessarily represent the degree of deliberate, as opposed to coincidental, name-sharing between parent and child.

However, when these statistics are displayed as a graph, it is possible to see whether the results are representative of a trend. The existence of a trend would increase the likelihood of the name-sharing being deliberate, as it is highly improbable that a large proportion of the parish experienced coincidental name-sharing in the same decade. The statistics are displayed as a graph in Figures 1 and 2, and these graphs are combined in Figure 3 to allow easier comparison between male and female name-sharing.

¹ P. Niles, ‘Baptism and the naming of children in late medieval England’, *Medieval Prosopography* 3 (1982), 95–107 (p.100).

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

Table 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

Table 2

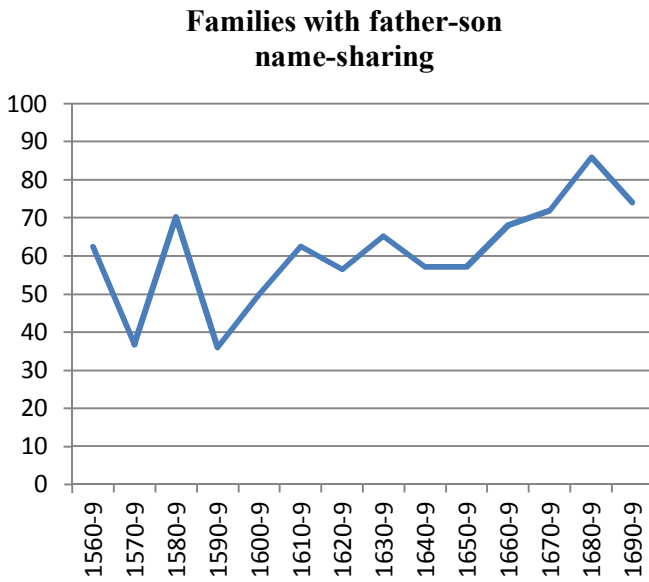
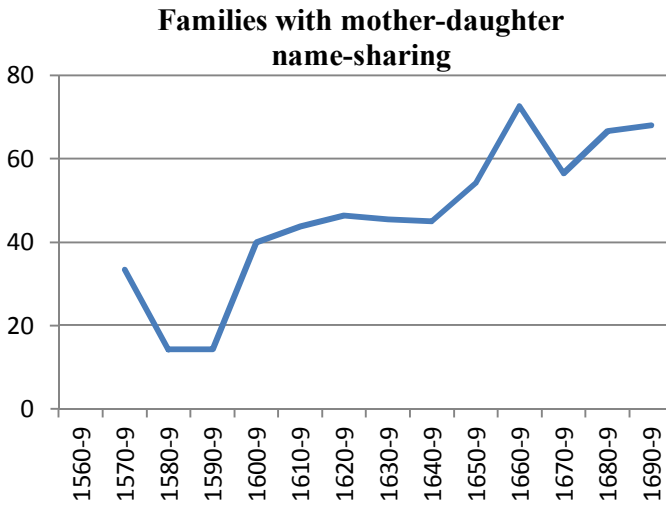
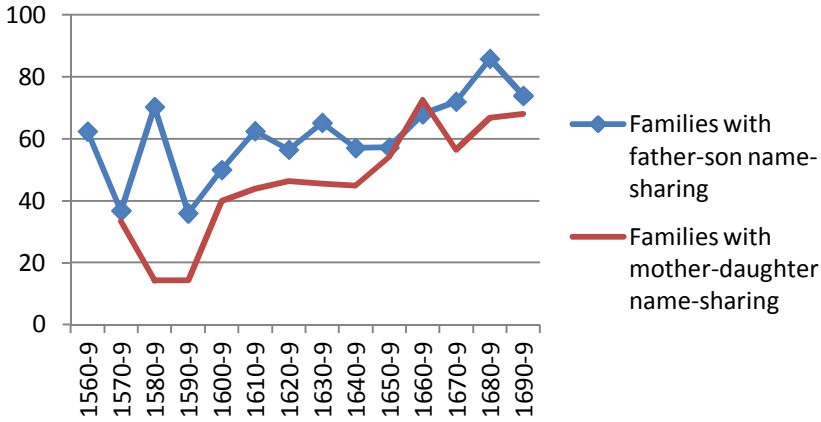
Figure 1**Figure 2**

Figure 3

From these graphs, it is clear that there is a definite upward trend for both naming a son for a father and for naming a daughter for a mother. Neither growth is steady, as there are decades for each which do not appear to fit the developing pattern. For example, the rapid growth and decline in the late sixteenth century of the pattern of sons being named for fathers is unexpected. However, the general pattern is one of definite growth, with one or two marked increases. The trend for mother-daughter name-sharing leaps noticeably at the very end of the sixteenth century and also after 1640. The trend for father-son name-sharing changes most substantially between 1650 and 1680, if the unexpected change in the 1570s is put aside. The overall growth can also be shown through taking the average percentages over five decades at the beginning and end of the period in question (Table 3).

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

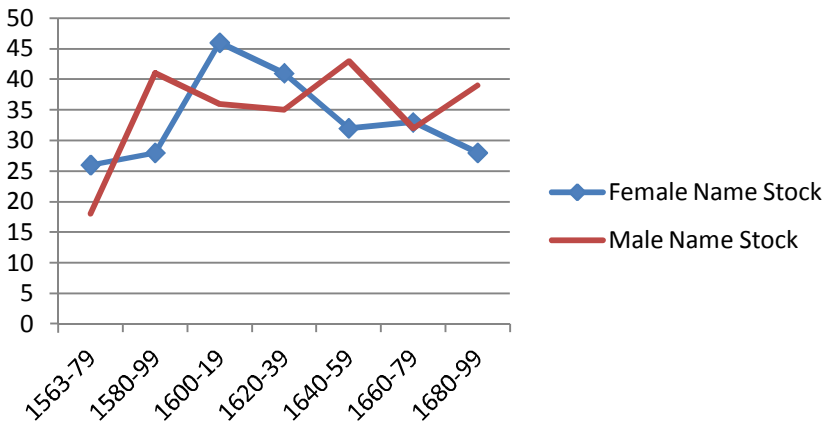
Table 3

These averages give us an average rise of 28.3% for males and 38.1% for females. Therefore, it seems that, although the percentage of sons having

a parental name is consistently higher than the percentage for daughters, the rate of change is far more substantial for the mother-daughter trend. This provides strong support for Smith-Bannister's claim about the rising trend: "despite the proportionally larger rise in mother-daughter name-sharing a substantially larger proportion of boys were named after their father than daughters after their mother."² Therefore, it seems that the trends visible in the records of Castle Camps were in fact observable in the English parishes in general, and the statistics so far presented provide further evidence of this universal trend.

It seems that, to explain this gradual move towards naming after the parent, there are two main possibilities. The first option is that there is a conscious or subconscious decision to name the child after the parent, possibly because the role of the godparent is becoming less important. The second possibility is that the name stock is decreasing and the number of available names is thus being reduced. Smith-Bannister acknowledges that, in the parishes he examined, "there was a reduction in the size of the stock of names."³ The name stock in Castle Camps between 1563 and 1699 is displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4



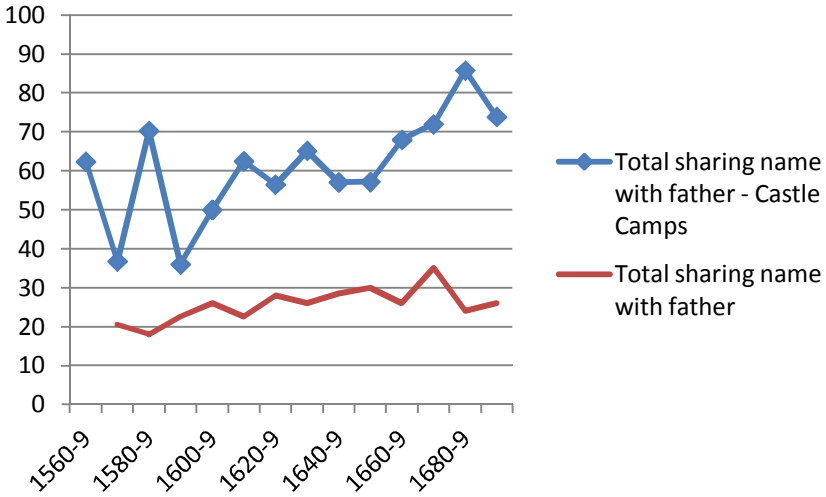
² S. Smith-Bannister, *Names and Naming Patterns in England 1538–1700* (Oxford, 1997), p.58.

³ *Ibid*, p.51.

This graph is largely inconclusive. Both female and male name stocks appear to be relatively low in the 1560s and 1570s, but fewer baptisms were recorded during those years and thus the opportunity for a larger number of names to be portrayed was lost. Overall, excluding the first two decades, the pool of male names has been fairly consistent in size. The pool of female names, on the other hand, drops rather rapidly. This initially appears to be damaging to the argument that the habit of naming for a parent became more common throughout the seventeenth century. However, the decrease in the female name stock is insignificant. In the 1580s and the 1690s, fifteen female names were in use, and only eight of these were used more than once. In the 1610s and 1630s, twenty-three female names were used. However, of these, only twelve (in the 1610s) and ten (in the 1630s) were used more than once. Of the twelve in the 1610s, only nine were used more than twice. Therefore, although the number of names in use has fallen, the number of names being frequently used, and thus having a serious impact on the naming of the times, has remained fairly constant. Thus, although the pool of female names has decreased in size over the seventeenth century, this is insignificant for the purposes of the argument.

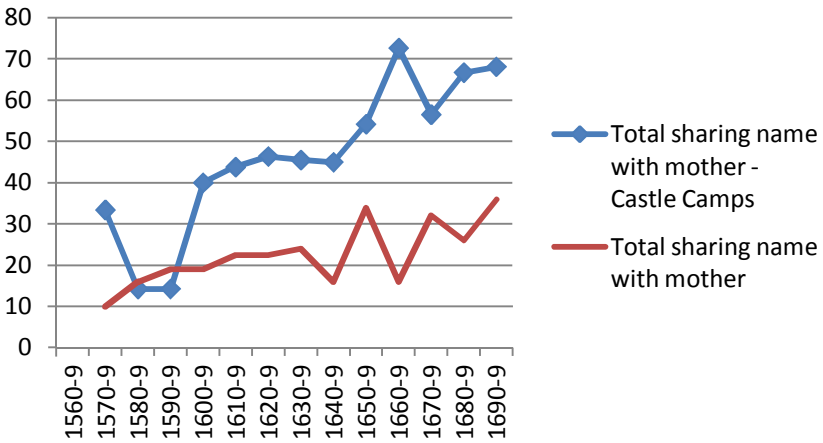
Therefore, if the possibility that a reduction in the name stock caused the trend is now negated, it seems that the other option must be true: there is a conscious or subconscious decision to name the child after the parent. To confirm this, it is necessary to study the research of other scholars, to compare the Castle Camps results to their own. Smith-Bannister studied a large number of English parishes during the same period, and is a natural choice for comparison. However, Smith-Bannister chose to base his statistics on the number of children who shared a name with a parent, while I have opted to take note of the number of families who had a child sharing a name with a parent. With the latter approach, the statistics are more accurate: they are not affected by the problem of large families who understandably would not have the majority of their children named for their parents. However, I have plotted my research results against Smith-Bannister's in the hope that a trend will still be visible (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5



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

Figure 6



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

Significantly, both sets of data show a similar pattern of rises and falls. For example, the peak of Smith-Bannister's data in the male name-sharing graph occurs in the 1670s, and the peak of the Castle Camps data occurs only a decade later. Smith-Bannister argues that "we can discern and date the start of a positive shift towards [parental name-sharing]"⁴ and states that these dates are 1590 for males and 1610 for females. This certainly seems to also be the case for the Castle Camps records, if we disregard the irregular statistic for the males in the 1580s.

Another feature which would support the theory that parent-child name-sharing was deliberate rather than coincidental is that of birth-order. If the parent-child name-sharing statistics were coincidentally high, due to the low number of names in the name stock, it would be more likely that the later children would share their name with a parent.⁵ The statistics from Tables 1 and 2 have been condensed to show the average from the period being studied (Table 4).

	Male	Female
First-born	47.6	33.4
Second-born	9.7	9
Later child	3.6	3.8

Table 4

It is immediately apparent that, should a family have a child named for a parent, it is far more likely that the first-born child would have the parent's name. Therefore, applying this discovery to the remarks made by Smith-Bannister, it seems clear that the parent-child name-sharing cannot have been largely, if at all, coincidental. The conclusion to be made here is that, as Smith-Bannister himself says, "the [...] upward course of the rise in the proportion of eldest children named after a parent undoubtedly indicates that this movement was a thoroughly deliberate one, a clear choice on the part of many parents."⁶

⁴ *Ibid*, p.58

⁵ *Ibid*, p.63

⁶ *Ibid*, p.65

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to analyse the names and naming patterns of the parish of Castle Camps during a period of roughly 140 years. In general, they are consistent with Smith-Bannister's findings on parent-child name-sharing. Any slight discrepancies may be explained by the fact that "there was a much greater swing towards naming sons after their fathers in the southern than in the northern parishes."⁷ Cambridgeshire, as a southern parish, would most likely have seen a more rapid growth for the practice of naming a child for a parent. As Smith-Bannister was analysing both northern and southern parishes simultaneously, he doubtlessly created a lower average than he would have seen had he focused only on the southern parishes. The Castle Camps records are therefore likely to have proportionally more children named for parents than Smith-Bannister saw in his results.

The significance of the statistics of first-born children named for a parent must not be ignored. The patterns seen during this particular stage of analysis suggest that the parent-child name-sharing was, for the most part, a deliberate decision rather than coincidental. Coupled with the trends noted for name-sharing, this indicates that a high proportion of the residents of Castle Camps in the period examined thought that patrilineal and matrilineal naming was important, and this trend grew over the seventeenth century.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.42