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A STUDY OF THE CHILD-NAMING PRACTICES OF SCOTTISH QUAKERS BETWEEN 1700 AND 1825

(University of Glasgow, unpublished M.A. thesis, 2012)

Three questions form the bedrock of the study: *'Taking Scottish Quakers as a case study, is it possible to extrapolate naming patterns from historical data? ... What, if any, synchronic¹ differences were there in the names given to Quaker children in Scotland'*? and *'What, if any, diachronic² differences were there in names given to Quaker children in Scotland'*? (p. 10). To answer these questions, the author compiled a corpus³ of 627 births in Scotland between 1700 and 1825, and has also provided lists of the first names in use in her appendices (as well as a sample 'family tree' of the descendents of David Barclay, who was born in the mid-seventeenth century). Whilst there were difficulties in using the sources, she discovered that there appeared to be little geographical difference in naming. She also found that in a significant proportion of births where the family trees could be ascertained, children were named after grandparents at a time when this practice was falling out of favour in the general, non-Quaker population. The author suggests that this was a reflection of the insularity of the Quakers in the eighteenth century. Such faith-specific naming has been supported by the practice of English Friends naming after grandparents in the absence of godparents. Even so, the introduction of middle names from 1774, as well as more unusual first names, led the author to argue that the wider contemporary shift towards Quaker involvement in the world was reflected in naming practices.

Keywords: Scotland; Barclay; Jaffray; onomastics; naming practices; baby names; eighteenth century; family tree; family; gender, Quaker, Quietism, Quakerism

Useful for: anthroponomists; historians of names, naming, parenting, families and sentimental differences in the treatment of male and female children; genealogists, and especially people tracing the Barclay and Jaffray families; those interested in Scottish Quakers and those wishing to trace how eighteenth/nineteenth-century transitions in faith were manifested in culture

¹ Synchronic: a method of linguistic study concerned with the state of a language at a particular time

² Diachronic: a method of linguistic study concerned with the historical development of a language

³ Corpus: a body of written or spoken material upon which a linguistic analysis is based

Introduction

This section is comprised of a few paragraphs introducing the subject of the thesis – an analysis of the first names and patterns of Quaker naming in Scotland between 1700 and 1825 – and the organisation of the thesis. The author elaborates on her rationale, essentially proposing that Quaker naming held a distinctive faith-based character at a time when Friends set apart from the world themselves and their communities.

Literature review

The author surveyed the state of the field of naming studies. She concluded that little academic attention has been devoted to the historical study of naming in Scotland, or naming as part of religious practice. The few studies that there are suggest that the broad Scottish naming pattern in the eighteenth century was that children were ‘named after their grandparents, with the first born boy named for the paternal grandfather and the first girl for the maternal grandmother’; the second child of each gender was named after the remaining corresponding grandparent; the third child, after the father or mother, but more recent studies question this assumption. It has also been suggested that Quakers in England also named children after their grandparents, whereas members of other churches were more likely to name children after godparents.

Methodology

The author outlined her reliance on A. S. Maxwell’s *Scottish Society of Friends, Quakers: Register of Births, Proposal of Marriage, Marriages and Deaths 1647-1878* (Aberdeen, 1967), supplemented by online Mormon sources. She highlighted problems encountered (mainly in accessibility to and quality of manuscript records) in ‘collecting data ... to create a corpus from which the names ... could be analysed in terms of the breadth of the namestock and the number of times they occur as well as any underlying patterns by which they were given’ (p. 11). The author therefore transcribed child names and formed family trees.

Findings

The findings are presented in graphs and tables and then discussed. The author discovered that the bulk of names, especially amongst girls, were of unknown origin. This was explained as partly due to the ability to see directly the naming patterns for older children and, crucially, that sources often recorded the name of the father only. The writer found that middle names were not used prior to 1774 and thereafter their application rose sharply, especially for girls. This may be skewed, the author proposed, due to a corresponding increase in the number of births. For only a small proportion of the corpus of 627 (between 61 and 76 births), was it possible for the author to compile family trees from which to

consider naming patterns. For many of these, the origin of their first name was unknown. A small number were named after maternal and paternal uncles and aunts. As well as mentioning two children who appeared to have been distinctively named (both were girls), the author discovered that 'a large number of first born boys ... bore the same name as their paternal grandfather', with some having the same first name as both grandfathers (p. 21). Many first-born girls were named after their maternal grandmother.

Discussion

The author found 'little geographical variation' in naming. Where there was a suggestion of difference, the author has considered this as potentially caused by source survival and quality; however, she continued, perhaps this suggested that insular Quaker identity prevailed over external naming practices and was '[fossilised]'. The author has also noted that 'over the period of this study ... the names given to children were no longer tied to the namestock which had been in use for centuries' (p. 24). These became 'increasingly used in conjunction with middle names', for which, there is some suggestion, of the use of another family name or other 'prominent individual' (pp. 24-5). Moreover, three-quarters of the first children to receive middle names were female. The author suggests that this, the expansion of namestock and the rising birth rate reflect the wider contemporary shift in Quaker engagement in the world, as well as echoing modern parallels by which girls' names can be more flamboyant. Unlike English Friends, Scottish Quakers appear not to have employed grace names – naming children for virtues reflecting the parents' beliefs, such as Charity, Worthy or Temperance.

Conclusion

Whilst the results do not reflect the author's original suppositions, it is evident that names were not given randomly. However, 'Scottish Quakers appear to have retained a tradition which was in the process of falling out of use among the general population' (p. 28) – that is, naming after grandparents. Until a 'national corpus of data for this period' is produced, the findings cannot be contextualised.

Appendix 1

A list of the male and female first names in use between 1700 and 1825, with their frequency.

Appendix 2

A chronological list of individuals given middle names.

Descendents of: David Barclay

A family tree running from births in the mid-seventeenth to those in the mid-eighteenth century.

Summary prepared by Rebecca Wynter (2012)