

An Overview of Personal Naming Practices in Scotland, 1680-1840

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Abstract

It is often claimed that Scottish children were named in a fixed sequence after relatives (first son after paternal grandfather, first daughter after maternal grandmother, second son after maternal grandfather, second daughter after paternal grandmother, etc.), especially during the Early Modern period (e.g. Cory 1990, Durie 2009). This theory, based on limited qualitative evidence, has been seriously challenged by recent research, a quantitative study of the baptismal records of four Scottish parishes for the period 1700-1800, which has demonstrated that the sequence was not widely followed. The question which then arises is: if families in Early Modern Scotland were not following the 'traditional' naming pattern, what naming patterns, if any, were they following?

In this paper, I discuss the findings and implications of my recent project and show that the 'traditional' naming pattern was in fact not followed by the majority of Early Modern Scottish families, with an estimated 60% of familial groups not using it. Using material gathered from the baptismal records of eleven parishes, covering the period 1680-1840, I then outline the potential usage of other naming practices, including naming for deceased relatives, influential townsfolk, and godparents.

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Introduction

The field of Scottish personal naming practices has been largely unresearched, particularly for the Early Modern period. The few studies that exist have tended to employ a purely qualitative rather than quantitative approach, and we therefore have limited information on the general naming practices of this period. My ongoing research aims to rectify this situation; a recent Masters project focussed on the usage of what is known as the 'traditional Scottish naming pattern', and my current PhD project examines the other naming practices and influences on naming evident during the Early Modern period. In this paper, the results and implications of the Masters project will be discussed, and the naming practices so far observed in the course of my PhD research will be outlined.

A 'Traditional' Scottish Naming Pattern

It is widely claimed by the general public and by genealogical researchers (e.g. Cory 1990, Durie 2009) that Scottish families in the Early Modern period followed a specific pattern, known as the Scottish naming pattern, when naming their children. This pattern is stated to be as follows: the first son is named for the paternal grandfather, second son for the maternal grandfather, third son for the father, first daughter for the maternal grandmother, second daughter for the paternal grandmother, and the third daughter for the mother (Cory 1990: 68). Younger children would be named for other relatives, often aunts or uncles, or influential townsfolk. The description of the pattern might suggest that six children, three of each sex,

would be needed to fulfil all stages of naming for grandparents and parents. However, the pattern could be condensed if several relatives shared the same name. For example, the first three children of James Anderson and Margaret Millar fulfil all of the main steps of the naming pattern (see Figure 1): the eldest son, John, shares a name with his paternal grandfather; the second son, James, shares a name with his maternal grandfather, and also with his father; and the eldest daughter, Margaret, shares a name with her maternal grandmother, her paternal grandmother, and her mother.

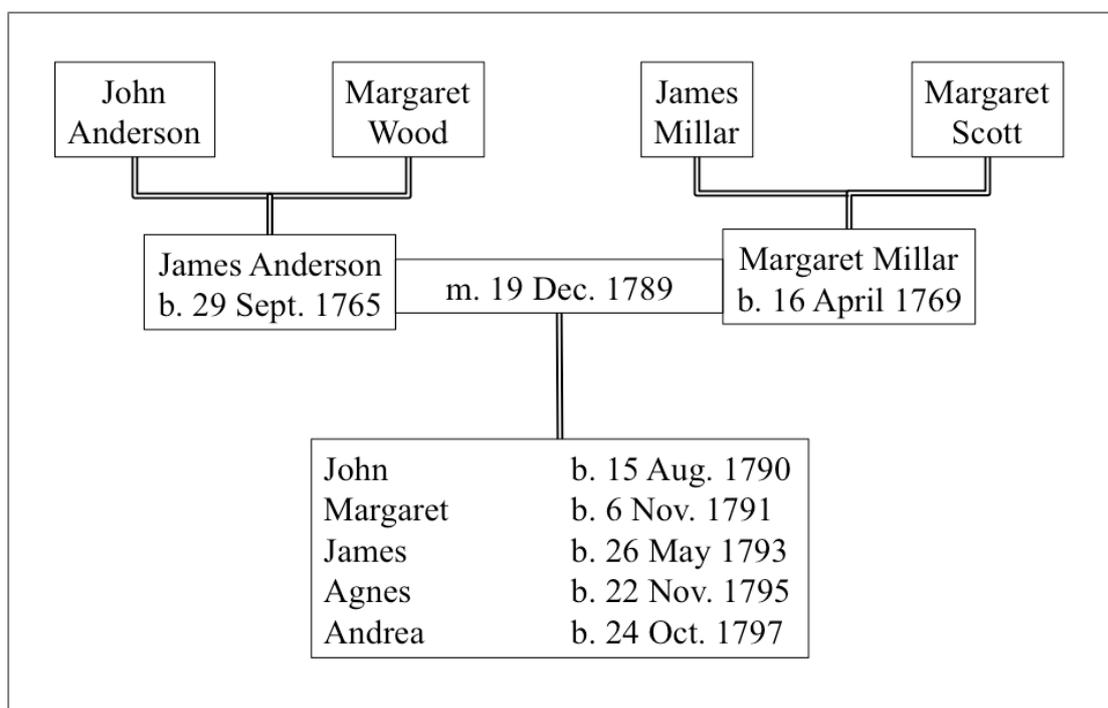


Fig. 1. Family of James Anderson and Margaret Millar

My Masters project was an investigation of this pattern, specifically focussing on the claim that its use was widespread in Early Modern Scotland. This claim had been largely unsubstantiated in the sources, with only qualitative evidence of the pattern itself rather than quantitative evidence of its usage. It was therefore prudent for quantitative research to be conducted into the usage of this pattern.

For this research, the baptismal records for 24,325 children were collected from the Old Parish Registers (hereafter OPRs). These records represented four parishes – Govan (Lanark), Beith (Ayrshire), Dingwall (Ross and Cromarty), and Earlston (Berwickshire) – for the period 1700-1800. Parishes were chosen to represent a range of geographic, social, and linguistic variables. The OPRs were kept by the Scottish Kirk, meaning that this research only represents the Presbyterian Scots, rather than including, for example, Catholics or non-Christians. Nevertheless, with the majority of Scottish people being Presbyterian, these records are an excellent source of personal names in Early Modern Scotland.

Once the selected baptismal records had been collected, they were organised into 7,734 familial units (groups consisting of father, mother, and children). It was not possible to determine whether all 7,734 groups did or did not include children sharing names with their

grandparents and parents, in the specified order. However, two methods were devised to establish the rate of pattern usage within a smaller number of groups. As stated above, the 7,734 familial units consisted of father, mother, and children. It was not possible to further reconstruct all groups (i.e. linking children with grandparents), but 50 groups were linked with grandparents. These 50 groups were then examined to determine whether they strictly followed the specified naming pattern. Of those groups, it was discovered that no group clearly followed the naming pattern and 62% did not follow the pattern. It could not be known definitively whether the remainder did or did not follow the pattern.

Due to time constraints, it was impractical to apply this method to a larger number of groups. Therefore, a second method was devised which could be applied to any number of groups, as long as each group contained three or more same-sex children. The pattern dictates that the third child of each sex should be named for the parents; therefore, the family could potentially be following the pattern if the parent's name appeared within the first three unique names of children of the relevant sex. It is necessary to specify the first three unique names for each sex, rather than the first three names for each sex, as if, for example, a second son named for the maternal grandfather had died, it is possible that the third son may also have been named for the maternal grandfather. It also need not be the third unique name in particular being shared with the parent; if the father had shared a name with either grandfather, for example, then the name would appear earlier in the birth-order but the family could still be classed as following the pattern. Overall however, if the pattern were being followed, the parent's name could not appear any later than the third unique name for a child of the relevant sex.

To demonstrate, it was reasoned that it was possible that the family in Figure 2 was following the naming pattern. There were three sons (named *James*, *John*, and *William*), and one of them shared a name with the father (John Rodger).

<u>Surname</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Father's Name</u>	<u>Date of Baptism</u>	<u>Record Note</u>
Rodger	Isabell	Female	John	1701-08-24	Ridpeth
Rodger	James	Male	John	1704-02-06	shoemaker in Ridpeth
Rodger	John	Male	John	1706-08-18	shoemaker in Ridpeth
Rodger	William	Male	John	1709-10-16	shoemaker in Redpeth

Fig. 2. Children of John Rodger

However, it was concluded that the family in Figure 3 were not following the naming pattern. The father's name, *John*, did not appear until the fourth son, with earlier sons being *George*, *William*, and *Thomas*. Therefore, even if the parents had intended to follow the naming pattern, this usage had been disrupted.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Father's Name</u>	<u>Date of Baptism</u>	<u>Record Note</u>
Young	Agnes	Female	John	1765-12-01	wright in Earlstoun
Young	George	Male	John	1767-07-12	wright in Earlstoun
Young	William	Male	John	1769-06-26	wright in Earlstoun
Young	Thomas	Male	John	1771-06-16	wright in Earlstoun
Young	John	Male	John	1774-10-09	wright in Earlstoun
Young	James	Male	John	1776-11-03	wright in Earlstoun
Young	John	Male	John	1779-11-21	Fewer and wright in Earlstoun

Fig. 3. Children of John Young

This reasoning was applied to all families who had three or more same-sex children; results are given in Table 1. Where the parent's name does not appear within the first three unique names of each sex, it can be said that the family is not following the specified naming pattern. For fathers and male children, this figure is 27.04%, and for mothers and female children, the figure is 31.58%.

	Count	%		Count	%
Father's name appears	858	72.96	Mother's name appears	611	68.42
Father's name does not appear in first 3	318	27.04	Mother's name does not appear in first 3	282	31.58
	1176			893	

Table 1. Analysis of families with three or more same-sex children

Although these figures suggest that 27.04% and 31.58% of these families were not following the pattern, it cannot be assumed that the remaining 72.96% and 68.42% were. The parents may indeed have been consciously following the naming pattern, but equally they may have simply decided to name the son for the father or the mother for the daughter. Therefore, to further refine these figures, similar analysis was conducted on those families which had both three sons and three daughters, of which there were 371. For this analysis, the important families were those which exhibited some parent-child name-sharing, so the 40 groups which lacked information or displayed no name-sharing were then removed (see Table 2).

	Count	%
Father and mother's names appear	205	61.93
One parent's name appears	126	38.07
	331	

Table 2. Families with three or more children of each sex which exhibited parent-child name-sharing

If these families were following the naming pattern, the names of both parents should appear within the first three unique names for each sex. As can be seen in Table 2, 61.93% of these families had both parents' names appearing within the first three unique names. However, a substantial proportion – 38.07% – had only one parent's name appearing. Despite having a parent's name appearing, these families could not have been following the pattern; this had

implications for those groups in Table 1 listed as exhibiting father-son or mother-daughter name-sharing.

I therefore applied these figures to the previous table, excluding those families used to generate the Table 2 results to avoid double-analysis. This resulted in an estimate of 58.42% of families not following the naming pattern. This figure includes those families where the parents' names did not appear at all and an estimate of those who were likely to have been practising patrilineal or matrilineal naming but not following the pattern. Earlier, it was stated that, of the 50 groups where grandparents were known, 62% of groups did not follow the pattern. Significantly, the estimate of 58.42% is close to the figure of 62%, which would suggest the estimate is accurate. It should also be noted that these figures show the estimated minimum percentage that were not using the pattern, rather than the minimum percentage that were.

Other Naming Practices and Influences

My current research project aims to establish what, if any, naming practices or influences are evident in cases where the traditional naming pattern is not used. It also aims to reveal whether these other practices and influences are actually disrupting usage of the naming pattern, or whether the pattern is simply not always used. The final stage of the project will be to quantify the answers to these questions, and uncover what proportion of families we can expect to find following the pattern faithfully, what proportion are following it but have also been influenced by other factors, and what proportion choose not to follow it at all.

The project data have been taken from the baptismal registers of eleven parishes, selected to represent a range of linguistic, social, and geographic variables, for the period 1680 to 1840. These parishes are shown in Figure 4 and, from north to south, are: Holm (Orkney), Durness (Sutherland), Longside (Aberdeenshire), Kilmallie (Argyll), Tiree (Argyll), Auchtermuchty (Fife), Kilrenny (Fife), Saltoun (East Lothian), Govan (Lanark), Dundonald (Ayrshire), and Tongland (Kirkcudbrightshire). Baptismal records have been collected for 63,462 children.

This project was designed to involve largely quantitative research, but some qualitative case studies are also being included. During data-collection, it was discovered that some records were explicit about whom the children were named for. This has allowed remarks to be made based on specific records, although the final project will focus mainly on overall trends.



Fig. 4. Map of parishes. (Map data ©2014 Google)

Naming for Deceased Relatives

One situation that seems to have affected naming is that of recently deceased relatives. To return to the family shown in Figure 1 (repeated below in Figure 5), James Anderson and Margaret Millar had five children, with the first three fulfilling the main steps of the pattern. The next child, Agnes, shares a name with a maternal aunt. The fifth child, however, represents the first occurrence of the name *Andrea* in Kilrenny. Usefully, the clerk tells us where her name has come from: ‘She was named after Andrew Anderson, Supposed to be [lost at sea]’ (Kilrenny OPR: 438/00 0020 0047). The clerk reports that Andrea’s father, James, is also missing, but there is already a child with this name. Andrew Anderson is one of Andrea’s uncles, a younger brother of James; while she could have been named after one of her four paternal aunts, she has instead been named after her recently deceased uncle.

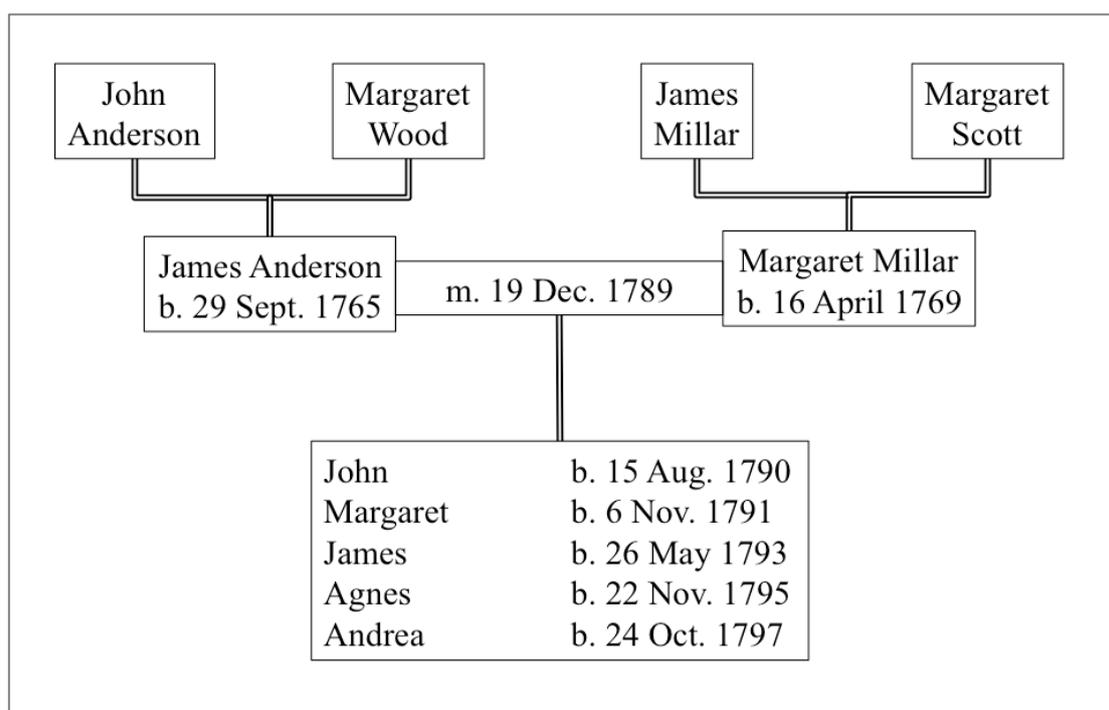


Fig. 5. Family of James Anderson and Margaret Millar

In Andrea’s case, the name *Andrew* was modified to make it a female name, applicable to a daughter. However, this does not seem to have always been the case. Figure 6 shows the two children of Thomas Watson and his wife Minnie, who lived in Saltoun, in East Lothian. The couple married in August 1799 before the arrival of their son George in 1801 and their daughter Thomas in 1803. The record for the baptism reads ‘Meney Mutter Relict [‘widow’] of Thomas Watson in Samuelston Mains lately deceased had a Daughter named Thomas’ (Saltoun OPR: 719/00 0020 0177); it would be logical to assume that the daughter was named after her dead father. Unfortunately, the grandparents could not be determined, and it therefore cannot be known whether Thomas and Minnie had been following the naming pattern with their eldest child, and subsequently whether pattern usage was interrupted by the father’s death.

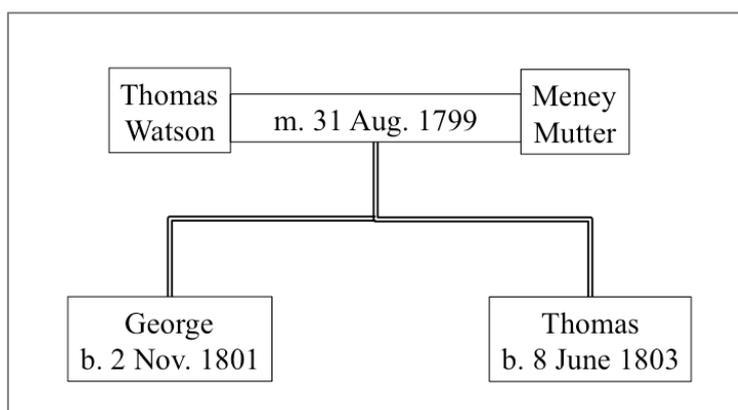


Fig. 6. Children of Thomas Watson and Minnie Mutter

Substitution

It was mentioned in the section on the traditional naming pattern that, when looking at the usage of the parents' names within the first three children of each sex, it was necessary to specify the first three unique names rather than the first three names. This was because, if, for example, a first daughter named for the maternal grandmother had died, it is highly possible that the second daughter may have been given the same name. This practice of giving children the same name as deceased siblings is known as 'substitution' and seems to have been fairly common in Scotland.

For example, Philip Anderson and Elspith Fowler, from Kilrenny (Fife), had nine children (Figure 7). The eldest three all survived childhood, but the twins, Philip and Janet, were both buried a few days after their baptism. The next daughter was named *Janet*, substituting for the deceased elder sister. The parents seemed especially keen to give a child the name *Philip*, either due to following the naming pattern or to a desire to perpetuate the father's name; however, despite having a total of three sons named *Philip*, none survived. The couple had no more children, the father dying a year after the youngest was born.

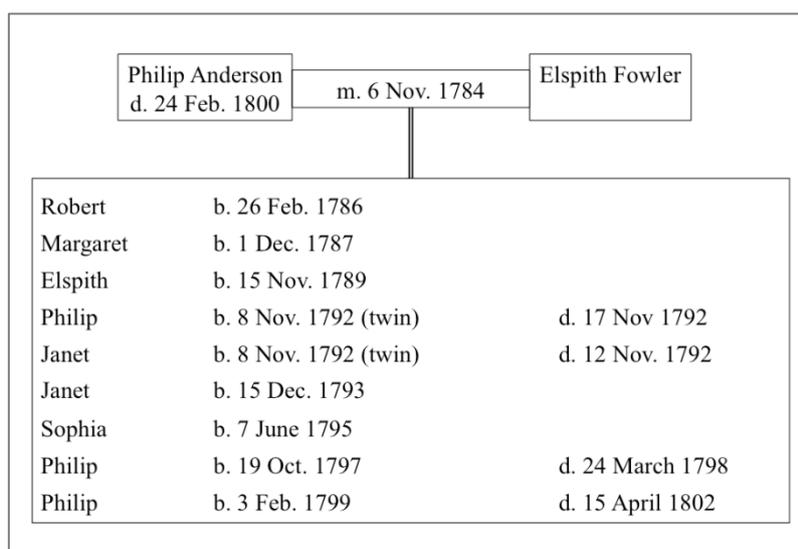


Fig. 7. Children of Philip Anderson and Elspeth Fowler

With this couple, the names of all deceased children were used again. However, this was not always the case. For example, David Cairns and Marjory Bell had eight children, two of whom died (Figure 8). The name *Helen* was repeated with a later child; however, *Mary* was not, despite there being multiple female children born after her death. The eldest daughter was named *Marjory*, either after the mother or the maternal grandmother; if the latter, it would indicate the family may have been following the naming pattern. Unfortunately, it was not possible to trace David's parents; however, if his mother's name were *Helen*, it may be that Helen's name was used again as it followed the naming pattern. Mary's name, on the other hand, would not need to be used again – the mother's name had already been given, so name-choice would be less pre-determined.

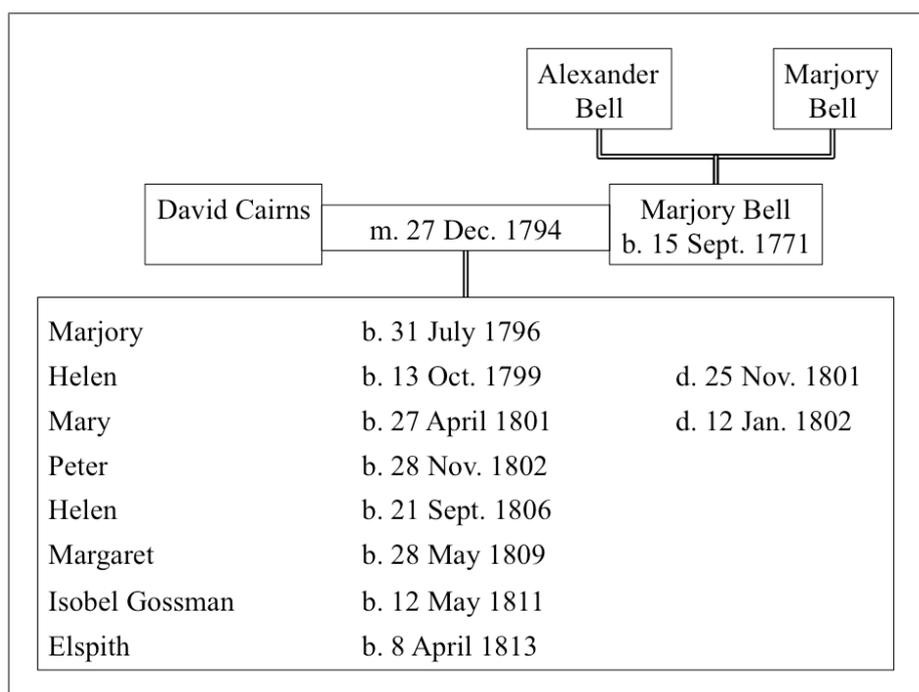


Fig. 8. Family of David Cairns and Marjory Bell

Naming for Influential Townsfolk

It seems most common for children to be named for relatives, but some were named for other townsfolk, including the clergy. The fourth and final child of Thomas Smith and Christian Cuninghame was named *James Brown* (Figure 9), with the clerk noting in the baptism entry that the child was ‘named James Brown, in honour of our new Minister’ (Kilrenny OPR: 438/00 0020 0105).¹

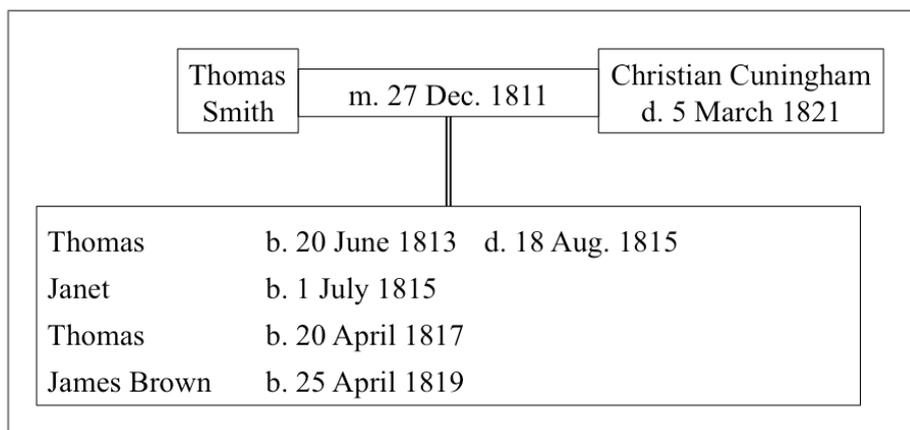


Fig. 9. Children of Thomas Smith and Christian Cuninghame

Genealogists such as Steel (1962: 39) and Hamilton-Edwards (1983: 73) have noted that it was traditional for the first child baptised by a minister in a Scottish parish to be named after him, and this record would support this idea. Records have also been found which suggest that children were sometimes named for the minister even if they were not the first to be baptised by him. However, it is possible that this tradition did not extend to all parts of Scotland: during the course of the Masters research, it was discovered that, despite Laurence Johnston being minister in Earlston (Berwickshire) for approximately two decades, no children were baptised with his name. It is therefore possible that this tradition is affected by other variables, perhaps geographic in nature.

When considering well-known townsfolk other than ministers, there are again explicit cases of children being named after them. In Tiree (Argyll), the daughter of Alexander McPherson was named *Jane Maxwell*, and the clerk noted that the child had been named after the Duchess of Gordon (Figure 10).

¹ In Scotland, ‘minister’ is a term used to refer to the leader of the local church.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Father's Name</u>	<u>Date of Baptism</u>	<u>Record Note</u>	<u>Record Reference</u>	<u>Options</u>
McPherson	Jane	Maxwell	Female	Alex	29-01-1810	Excise Officer [...] Kirkapoll [...] This Child was named after the Duches of Gordon	551/1 FR237	<input type="button" value="Edit"/> <input type="button" value="Delete"/>

Fig. 10. Baptismal record for Jane Maxwell McPherson

This is an explicit case of naming for a prominent townsman, but several likely instances of children being named for powerful families were also found. From the Masters data, four children in the parish of Beith (Ayrshire) were named *Ralston*, which was the surname of the local laird. Similarly, in Govan (Lanark), four children were named *Maxwell*, which again was a surname of a powerful landowner. It is possible that this was either due to affection and respect for the family, as has been noted by Redmonds (2004: 126), or that there was a sponsorship arrangement, as discussed by Steel (1962: 39).

Naming for Godparents

Finally, there are indications of some children being named after godparents. Of the 24,325 records examined for the Masters research, only 441 referred to a godparent. 174 of these were suitable for analysis, and, of those, 46 contained an example of godparent-child name-sharing: 26.45%. It is possible that these instances of name-sharing may be coincidental due to the godparent sharing a name with another relative. However, as the proportion of name-sharing is reasonably high, it is likely that some children were deliberately named for their godparent. This is being tested in the current project by looking at godparents with uncommon first names. For example, the sponsor of Zacharias, son of Matthew Smith and Isabel Rankin, was Zacharias Steill (Govan OPR: 646/1 FR113). In this parish, the name *Zacharias* was uncommon, being given to only eight children. It did not feature in the names of the child's known relatives, and was not the name of a minister or landowner. It is therefore likely that this child was named for his godfather.

This child was the third son of his parents, and one of his elder brothers was named *Matthew*, thus sharing a name with the father. This means that the family may have faithfully followed the naming pattern, completing the specified stages with the brother Matthew being named after the father, and thus had the freedom to name Zacharias after someone who was not a relative. Therefore, this example does not provide evidence of naming pattern usage being disrupted by godparental naming, but it does indicate that it was thought important to name children for godparents. It is therefore possible that future examples will be found where godparental naming does disrupt usage of the naming pattern.

Conclusion

In this paper, the results of research into the ‘traditional’ Scottish naming pattern have been discussed, and it has been highlighted that fewer families in Early Modern Scotland followed this particular naming pattern than has been previously suggested. Drawing on the findings of ongoing research, evidence for some alternative naming practices has been presented; these practices include naming for deceased relatives and for influential townsfolk. The future stages of this research project include quantifying these practices, based on a database containing over 60,000 baptisms, and examining the potential effects of geographic and social variables.

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