



Christian Names in Wantage in 1861

by Margaret Prentice

The speculation in the media during August about the possible names for the daughter of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson, inspired me to look more closely at the Christian names in the 1861 Census for Wantage. The actual announcement of Beatrice, the name of Queen Victoria's fifth daughter and youngest child born in 1857, posed the question - Did the residents of Wantage choose so-called 'royal' names for their children?

I scrutinized the 1861 Census but found no 'Beatrice' and only one 'Victoria'. 'Elizabeth' and 'Mary', the other two names of the new princess, were very evident. In Wantage in 1861, 'Mary' was the most common name being recorded on 231 occasions. 'Elizabeth' was the second most popular with 156 entries, followed closely by 'Sarah' with 154. 'Ann(e)' was recorded 130 times as a first Christian name. But it was more popular than this suggests. When I was some way into the laborious task of recording the names, I realised that I should perhaps record Mary as 'Mary' or 'Mary Anne'. The four enumerators rarely recorded a second Christian name in full, with one main exception – 'Mary Anne', which was never written with a hyphen as would be the practice today. Also the enumerator might record a 'Mary Anne ----' and a 'Mary A----' on the same page. Was the second female also named Mary Anne but not so-called in general usage? The frequency of these popular names was increased by the practice of naming a daughter after her mother, for example:

Name	Relation	Age	Occupation	Where born
Henry Watts	Head	47	Bricklayer	Berks Chieveley
Mary A	Wife	47	Launderess	" Wantage
Ann	Daur	11	Scholar	" "
Mary J	Daur	9	"	" "
William	Son	7	"	" "
Lucy	Daur	6	"	" "
Mary A	Daur	3	"	" "

The next group of popular names were Jane(71), Eliza(68), Harriet(t)(55), Emma(54), Martha(50) and Maria(40). These names did not surprise me as they occur frequently in C19th literature, as do the next group - Emily and Ellen(33), Louisa and Fanny(27), Hannah(25), Caroline(24), Charlotte and Sophia(21), Rebecca(16) and Matilda(15).

The above mentioned names were the 20 most popular in Wantage in 1861. But the census actually recorded 103 female Christian names. Of these 40 were recorded on at least 2 and up to 14 occasions, These were Est(h)er, Rach(a)el, Annie, Helen, Jemima, Rhoda, Am(e)y, Catherine, Edith, Alice, Rosa, Ele(a)nnor, Frances, Margaret, Susan, Dorothy, Julia, Bertha, Ada, Belinda, Adelaide, Susanna(h), Laura, Lucy, Selina, Marian(ne), Kate, Constance, Agnes, Hester, Clara, Grace, Leah, Lydia, Amelia, Georgin(n)a, Mira, Rosanna, Penelope and Priscilla.

This left 43 names which appeared only once in the returns. This I found most surprising! These names were Kezia, Arabella, Prudence, Bridget, Lelina, Cordelia, Celia, Rosena, Florence, Sabina, Lelilia, Bishiah, Phoebe, Thirza, Frederica, Dora, Flora, Ama, Emmaline, Bethia, Clarissa, Victoria, Rose, Niomi, Sally, Janetta, Tenabia, Magdalene, Winifred, Henrietta, Anna, Letitia, Olive, Floretta, Annette, Virtue, Alma, Miriam, Meranda, Elydea, Dinah, Pamela and Barbara. The enumerators all wrote in very clear hands, but they seemed to have used guesswork in spelling some of the more unusual names.

The male Christian names followed a similar pattern. There were seven very popular names – ‘William’ was recorded on 208 occasions, followed in popularity by ‘John’(174), ‘George’(135), ‘Thomas’(120), ‘Henry’(115), ‘James’(111) and ‘Charles’(93). Were they in common usage because with the exception of ‘Thomas’ they were all names of English kings? Did parents in the reign of William IV name one of their sons ‘William’ and he in turn name one of his sons ‘William’? A typical entry in the census is the following:

William Martin	Head	33	Blacksmith	Berks	Wantage
Mary A	"	32		"	Charlton
William	"	12	Scholar	"	Wantage
Harriet	"	9	"	"	"
Ann	"	6	"	"	"
Elizabeth	"	3	"	"	"
John	"	9mo	"	"	"

The next most popular names were Joseph(60), Richard(57), Robert(39), Edward(36) and Frederick(32). These were followed by Walter(25), Jonathan(20) and Francis(18). Then came David(13), Stephen(12), Daniel(11) and Albert, Arthur and Benjamin were all listed on 10 occasions. Most of the ‘Albert’s were youngsters -perhaps named after the Prince Consort?

I have now listed the 20 most common male names in 1861. Like the female names, there was then a group of 26 names which occurred, in this instance, at least twice and up to 9 times. These were Amos, Mark, Edwin, Matthew, Sidney, Joroyal, Edmund, Jesse(y), Issac, Frank, E(a)rnest, Ebenezer, Samuel, Peter, Jacob, Bernard, Reuben, Lawrence, Noah, Silas, Christopher, Luke, Josiah, Aaron, Timothy and Shadrach. The two references to ‘Joroyal’ were in the same family -

Joroyal Green	Head	47	Carpenter	Berks	Wantage
Elizabeth	"	42	Wife	"	"
Eliza	"	19		"	"
Joroyal	"	18	Carpenter	"	"
Thomas	"	16	Carpenter	"	"
Walter	"	14	Scholar	"	"
Emily	"	11	"	"	"
Lelina	"	9	"	"	"
Elizabeth	"	7	"	"	"
Cordelia	"	5	"	"	"
Belinda	"	2	"	"	"

Again there were a surprising number of names which were recorded only once. These were Joshua, Giles, Eros, Edom, Andrew, Theobald, Cornelius, Kuter?, Ezra, Carew,

Moses, Philip, Isaiah, Marcus, Herbert, Fitzwilliam, Enoch, Jerimiah, Maurice, Morris, Ambrose, Jervis, Osmond, Abraham, Augustin, Abednego, Douglas, Hugh, Louis, Ezekiel, Michael, Percy, Lenoard, Alleyne, Llewellyn, Ralph, Alexander, Adam, Asher, Gabriel, Caleb, Johnson, Norman, Oliver, Valentine, Shemanah, Ferdinand, Elias and Rice. This last name one might think was a form of 'Richard', but both Rice Bennett's father and brother were called Richard!

Readers will probably have already associated 'Llewellyn' with Mr Llewellyn Jotcham the Wantage solicitor. Some of the more unusual names belonged to men who were born outside the locality, for example Osmond C Huntley, deacon and curate, who was a British subject born in France. But this was not always the case, for Asher Ball was of a local family and born in East Challow. The other members of his family had very ordinary names - George, Mary Ann, William, Ann and Eliza.

Does the plethora of familiar and unfamiliar Biblical names indicate the religious revival which the Rev. William Butler instigated in Wantage? The vicar's own entry in the census return is interesting.

Wm J	Butler	Head	43	Vicar	Middlesex	London
Emma	"	Wife	48			
Arthur J	"	Son	16	Scholar	Surrey	Putney
Grace H	"	Daur	13	"	Berks	Wantage
Wm G	"	Son	12	"	"	"
Edith C	"	Daur	10	"	"	"
Mary A	"	Daur	6			
Elizabeth	Barnett	Visitor	50		Middlesex	London
Martha	Dove	Serv	46	Nurse	"	Stepney
Emma	Kirkman	Serv	27	Cook	"	London
Olive	Collins	Serv	19	Housemaid	Hants	Otterbourne

The enumerators often used the common abbreviations shown above, but in some cases I had to guess at their meanings for example I took 'Jas' to mean 'James' and 'Jno' to mean 'Jonathan'. Not all Christian names were included in my survey as none were listed for the Workhouse or St Mary's Home. I have not checked my results thoroughly as it would be very time consuming and make little difference to the overall impression of the popularity of names in Wantage in 1861.

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