English naming traditions

First of all, wherever you are in the world, I hope that you, your family and friends are well.

All that thinking about Irish, and possibly Scottish, naming traditions in my last post made we wonder if a similar tradition existed in England.  It turned out it did.  In fact it was exactly the same.

MALES:

* 1st son named after paternal grandfather (patGF)
* 2nd son named after maternal grandfather (matGF)
* 3rd son named after father (F)
* 4th son named after father’s eldest brother (patB)
* 5th son named after mother’s eldest brother (matB)

FEMALE:

* 1st daughter named after maternal grandmother (matGM)
* 2nd daughter named after paternal grandmother (patGM)
* 3rd daughter named after mother (M)
* 4th daughter named after mother’s eldest sister (matS)
* 5th daughter named after father’s eldest sister (patS)

However, there were other traditions too, that might have varied the above rules:

* Babies may have been named after powerful people, e.g. royalty, and these names were likely to have become fashionable, perhaps particularly in London and other fine towns and cities. Naming a child after a local wealthy landowner was also common.  Perhaps this was more likely in rural areas.
* In addition to the grandparents, parents, and their eldest siblings, babies might have been named after another significant family member. In my last post there’s the example of Annabella, named for her great grandmother who had recently died.
* In those days of high infant mortality, babies were often named after earlier siblings who had died in infancy. This often comes as a shock to beginner genealogists. Again, in my Irish family (see last post) there’s an example of this.  As late as 1888, Patrick’s second son John was named not only for his paternal grandfather but also to honour the memory of the first-born son.  Below, William and Jane lost seven of their children in infancy, among them three Thomases and two Edwins.
* Biblical names were popular amongst Nonconformists, particularly for people belonging to a dissenting protestant church or meeting house. In my own dissenting lines I have Nathaniel, Benjamin, Isaac and Abraham, but in wider research I’ve come across Jonah, Zedekiah and Zillah.

German Naming Conventions

A good understanding of the conventions used by German families for naming children is essential to German genealogy research. This knowledge helps identify family relationships and explains multiple children with similar or, in some cases, the same name.

Both Catholic and Protestant religions adopted this method of naming children. Customarily at baptism a child was given two names. The first was a religious name and the second their call (Rufnahme) name. Unlike today, people were known by their second or middle name.

Johann Ludwig Steck was called Ludwig or Louis. However, he can be located in various records as Johann, John, Ludwig, and Louis. Families often used the same saint’s name for most or all their children’s first names. Mary or Maria were popular for girls and St. John and St.

George were popular for boys. Consequently, 12 Georges in the same family! Male and female children were named in a pattern that held true for generations. This naming scheme is defined below:

MALES

* 1st son after the father’s father
* 2nd son after the mother’s father
* 3rd son after the father
* 4th son after the father’s father’s father
* 5th son after the mother’s father’s father
* 6th son after the father’s mother’s father
* 7th son after the mother’s mother’s father

FEMALES

* 1st daughter after the mother’s mother
* 2nd daughter after the father’s mother
* 3rd daughter after the mother
* 4th daughter after the father’s father’s mother
* 5th daughter after the mother’s father’s mother
* 6th daughter after the father’s mother’s mother
* 7th daughter after the mother’s mother’s mother

Where a duplicate name occurred, the next in the pecking order was used. Often children were named after a deceased sibling. To complicate this trend of same name designation, when there is a second marriage, the method is often repeated from the beginning. It isn’t unusual for half-brothers or half-sisters to have the same name. Unfortunately, you cannot make an assumption that this method was followed faithfully by all families. At best, it was used as a starting point for most parents.