

## RESEARCH NOTES

### WHAT'S IN A NAME? VICTORIAS IN CANADA AND GREAT BRITAIN IN 1881

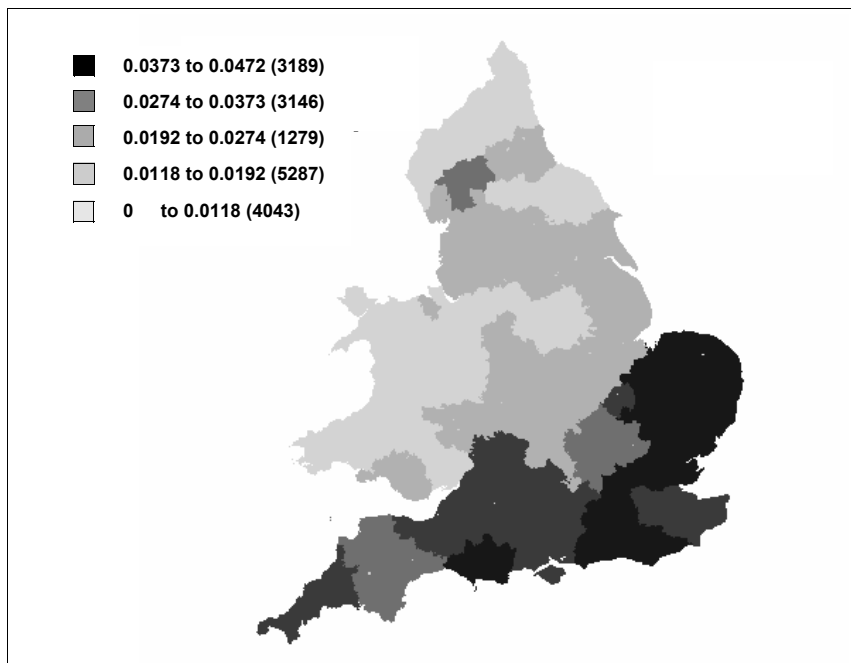
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In the previous issue of *LPS* Joan Schneider commented in a letter on the absence of girls named Victoria in the village of Tilsworth, Bedfordshire, in the second half of the nineteenth century, suggesting that one might expect to find more on the assumption that girls would be named in honour of the Queen.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years the propensity for parents to name their daughters Victoria has been decreasing quite rapidly. Of girls whose birth was registered in 2002, Victoria was the 77<sup>th</sup> most popular name, having dropped from being ranked 39<sup>th</sup> only three years earlier.<sup>2</sup> Yet, following the line of enquiry suggested by Joan Schneider, how did the name fare during the reign of Queen Victoria, undoubtedly the most famous bearer of the name? To what extent were Britannia's daughters named after their monarch during the epoch that took her name?

The subsequent Queen Victoria was born on 24 May 1819, the daughter of Edward, Duke of Kent, son of George III, and Victoria Maria Louisa, daughter of Francis Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld and former wife of Prince Emich of Leiningen. As it happens the young Princess, the heir to William IV, who had no legitimate children, was never intended to be called Victoria. Prior to her baptism her father intended that she be named Victorie Georgina Alexandrina Charlotte Augusta, and these names were submitted to the Prince Regent (the soon to be George IV, the Duke of Kent's elder brother), who was to be one of the godfathers, the other being Tsar Alexander I of Russia. However, the Prince Regent, who openly disliked his brother, refused to accept the names proposed, suggesting the name Georgiana should either be used as the child's first name, or not at all. At the christening in the Cupola Room at Kensington Palace on 24 June when prompted by the Archbishop of Canterbury what the name of the child should be, the Prince Regent simply answered 'Alexandrina'. The Duke of Kent then urged that another name be added, suggesting this time, Elizabeth. The Prince Regent apparently replied 'Give

Figure 1 Those named Victoria as a percentage of all females, by county 1881.



her the mother's name also then, but it cannot precede that of the Emperor'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, 'Alexandrina Victoria' was later entered into the baptismal register. As a young child the future Queen was called Drina, an abbreviation of her first name, and it was only after her ascension to the throne in 1837 that she adopted her second name as her 'primary' name. If it were not for this quirk of fate we might today refer to the second half of the nineteenth century as the 'Alexandrinan' age.

The availability of a computerised version of the complete 1881 census of England and Wales allows a study of the popularity of the name Victoria.<sup>4</sup> In England and Wales in 1881 Victoria was not a particularly popular name. Across both countries together there were only 3,123 Victorias recorded in the census.<sup>5</sup> This total accounted for only 0.021 per cent of all females in the country. To put it another way, only about 2 in every 10,000 women had been named Victoria.<sup>6</sup> Yet behind this national mean there lay a wider degree of regional variation. As the accompanying map shows, Victorias were mostly to be found in the 'southern' counties of England. In particular the name stands out as being a 'metropolitan' one, with some 22 per cent of all Victorias being enumerated in Middlesex. This county also recorded the highest proportion of females named Victoria, accounting for 0.047 per cent of all Middlesex women. Outside of Middlesex, Victoria was found in greatest numbers in East Anglia, where in the counties of Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Cambridge

**Table 1** Distribution of Victorias in 1881 in Canada

Province	n	%	Total female population	Victorias as % of all females
British Columbia	8	0.1	19,520	0.041
Manitoba	49	0.9	28,132	0.174
New Brunswick	203	3.7	157,029	0.129
Nova Scotia	236	4.3	219,855	0.107
Ontario	1,270	23.2	946,591	0.134
Prince Edward Island	39	0.7	54,147	0.072
Québec	3,648	66.8	680,273	0.536
Territories	12	0.2	4,817	0.249
Total	5,465	100	2,110,364	0.259

women named Victoria were around twice as common as the national average.<sup>7</sup> In the country as a whole, women named Victoria were rarely found north of a line running from the Bristol Channel to the Wash, a fact that possibly reflects an underlying cultural divide between the 'north' and 'south' of the country.

The map presented above (Figure 1) deliberately does not illustrate the proportion of females named Victoria in Scotland. The reason for this is quite simple. If Scotland were to be included much of the map for the northern kingdom would be blank. The 1881 census of Scotland recorded just 112 women called Victoria, representing just 0.0057 per cent of the entire female population of the country.<sup>8</sup> Of these, nearly 60 per cent (n=64) were found in either Edinburgh or the county of Lanarkshire. Across large tracts of Scotland there was not a single Victoria to be found.

If Victoria was a relatively uncommon name in late nineteenth-century Britain, and generally became increasingly rare as one moved northwards from the 'southern' counties of England, how did this picture compare to the use of the name in other parts of the Queen's empire colonised by emigrants from the mother country? Some clues in attempting to answer this question are given by an examination of contemporary census data for Canada. As in the case of Great Britain, the complete 1881 census of Canada has been transcribed as a computerised database.<sup>9</sup> This shows that on average Victoria was a much more common name in Canada than it was in England and Wales. Indeed, with the name accounting for 0.259 per cent of the entire female population, the 5,465 Victorias in Canada in 1881 were just over 10 times more numerous, *pro rata*, than their English and Welsh counterparts. Women in Canada were some 45 times more likely to be christened Victoria than their Scottish cousins.

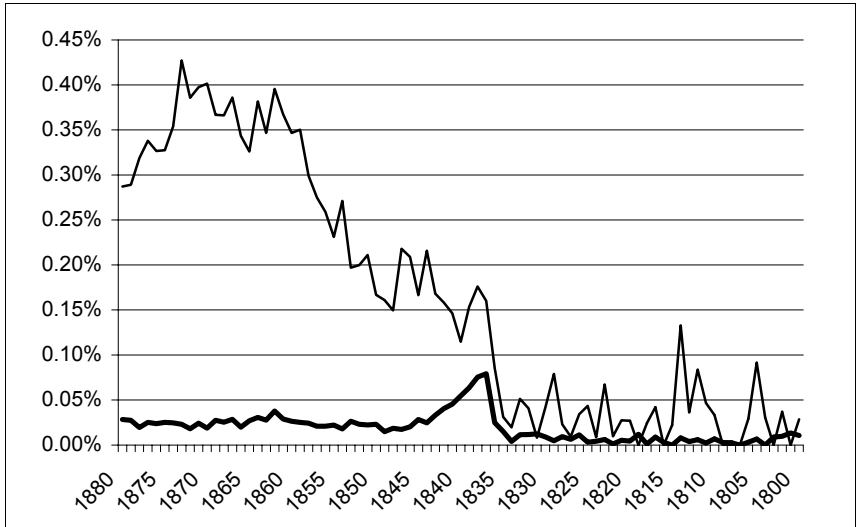
However, analysing the distribution of Victorias in Canada by province of enumeration indicates that the use of the name was not as one might have predicted. Table 1 shows that Victoria was more popular, and by a large margin, in the predominately French-speaking province of Québec rather than the Canadian 'heartlands' of British emigration.

Two-thirds of all Victorias in Canada in 1881 were to be found in Québec, where they accounted for a little over 1 in every 200 women. Moreover, of the 3,635 Victorias in Québec, 90 per cent were recorded in the census as being French in terms of ethnic origin. Thus the name Victoria was much more common among French-Canadians than others. Was the naming of daughters in Québec a means of demonstrating loyalty with the anglo-Canadian elite, or was it just a name that appealed to French speakers? It is perhaps interesting to note that the name Victoria was also relatively common in the Channel Islands in 1881, the islands being not only much closer to France than England in terms of distance, but also having a significant French-speaking population.<sup>10</sup> However, despite the unexpected situation in Québec, it should be noted that with the exception of British Columbia, which shows similar rates to Middlesex, *all* of the provinces of Canada recorded, *pro rata*, at least twice or nearly twice as many Victorias within the female population as the county in England and Wales where the name was at its most popular.<sup>11</sup> Can this naming practice be taken as a means of demonstrating a bond to the mother country, perhaps in an attempt to win favour with domestic elites?

The collective census data also allows the ages of Victorias in Canada and England and Wales in 1881 to be examined and compared. Obviously knowing the name and age of an individual at a given date enables the year when the child was christened with the given name to be calculated, plus or minus a margin of six months. Figure 2 graphs the distribution of Victorias enumerated in Canada and England and Wales in 1881 by year of birth. This displays some interesting features. The difference in the popularity of naming girls Victoria in the two countries can clearly be seen. In England and Wales, the use of the name was most common, unsurprisingly, in 1837, the year of the Victoria's ascension to the throne, and 1838, the year of the coronation. Prior to that Victoria was very rarely used as a girl's name, and thereafter the name's popularity dropped away quite quickly. Of those born in 1837-1838 (and still alive in 1881) some 0.075 per cent of girls were named after their monarch. By 1845 the proportion had dropped to around 0.025 per cent, and generally remained at between 0.025 and 0.03 per cent up until the time of the 1881 census. A slight increase in popularity was shown in 1862, presumably as a result of Prince Albert's death on 14 December 1861. No such rise was witnessed in 1877 when Victoria was pronounced Empress (of India). It would be interesting to discover if the Silver and Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1887 and 1897 witnessed a rise in the popularity of Victoria as a name.

For Canadians 1837 also witnessed a surge in the popularity of Victoria as a name. However, unlike the trend noted for England and Wales, the name continued, with some short-term fluctuations, to rise in popularity, reaching a

**Figure 2** Percentage of females named Victoria as a proportion of all females, by year of birth: Canada and England and Wales, 1881.



**Key:** — % of all females, Canada  
 — % of all females, England and Wales

peak of 0.425 per cent of all females born in 1872 being named Victoria. Maybe the continued popularity of the name Victoria in Canada resulted, in part, from the 'Victoria Day' public holiday, held on 20 June, the anniversary of her accession, initiated in Canada in 1845 and still celebrated today.<sup>12</sup> For those born between 1859 and 1872, with the exception of just a couple of years, over 0.35 per cent of all females living in Canada in 1881 were named Victoria, some five times the level seen in post-coronation England and Wales. Could this delayed popularity of the name in Canada perhaps be related to the development of the colony as a self-governing Dominion, such status being granted in 1867?

The Canadian situation also displays another aspect to the use of the name Victoria. Whereas the name, as noted previously, was hardly known in England and Wales prior to 1837, the same was not true of Canada. In the Canadian case minor peaks were recorded in both 1805 and 1815. Both of these years, of course, saw major British victories over the French on both the sea, at Trafalgar, and on land, at Waterloo. In a colony with such a high proportion of French-speakers this pattern appears rather striking and may, indeed, say much about the national consciousness within the colony.

To return to the question initially posed by Joan Schneider: 'Are Victorias lacking throughout the country?', the answer would seem to be yes, and

especially lacking in the north of England, Wales and Scotland. However, the name was used to a much greater extent in at least one of the colonies, namely Canada. But was the Canadian situation reflected in other parts of the Empire? And what about Alberts?

#### NOTES

1. 'Naming of children', letter submitted to *Local Population Studies*, 69 (2002) p.100.
2. [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/specials/babiesnames\\_girls.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/specials/babiesnames_girls.asp). 2 March, 2003.
3. The proceedings at the christening were recorded in the correspondence of the Duchess of Kent. See C. Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria. Her life and times. Vol. I 1819–1861* (London, 1972), 34–5. The 'Emperor' referred to by the Prince Regent was Tsar Alexander of Russia, the other godfather. Alexander was not present at the christening himself, but was represented by the Duke of York. The godmothers were the Queen of Württemberg (the eldest daughter of George III and the Duke of Kent's sister) and the Dowager Duchess of Coburg (the Duchess of Kent's mother). Neither were present.
4. K. Schürer and M. Woollard, *1881 Census for England and Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (Enriched Version)* [computer file] (2000). Genealogical Society of Utah, Federation of Family History Societies [original data producers]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor]. SN:4177..
5. This includes a small number of variants such as Victorie, Victora and Victorine.
6. In line with this finding the name Victoria does not appear at all in any of the seven parishes surveyed by Tom Arkell using the 1851 census enumerators' books. See, T. Arkell, 'Forename frequency in 1851', *Local Population Studies*, 47 (1991) 65–76. Out of 3,194 females studied, one was recorded with the name Victorie.
7. Respectively accounting for 0.041, 0.041, 0.039 and 0.039 per cent of the female population.
8. K. Schürer and M. Woollard, *1881 Census for Scotland (Enriched Version)* [computer file] (2000). Genealogical Society of Utah, Federation of Family History Societies [original data producers]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor]. SN:4178.
9. L. Dillon, *1881 Census of Canada* [computer file] (2003). Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [original data producers]. Montreal, Dépt. de Démographie, Université de Montréal [distributor].
10. In Guernsey in 1881 Victorias accounted for 0.171 per cent of the female population, while in Jersey the figure reached 0.359 per cent.
11. It is perhaps also interesting to note that the name Victoria was recorded, by Canadian standards, in quite low numbers in the province of Prince Edward Island. This island, previously called the Isle St Jean, was renamed in 1798 in honour of Edward, the Duke of Kent (Victoria's father), who was in Canada commanding the British forces in North America at the time.
12. We are indebted to Matthew Woollard for drawing attention to the Victoria Day public holiday. He also provided useful comments on an initial draft of this text.