'Nomina Villanorum et Burgensium': Oxfordshire Bynames before c. 1250

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SUMMARY

Recent research into the naming patterns of the middle ages has emphasised the importance of changes in the 12th century, when the Old English stock of personal names was supplanted by a new pattern of continental font-names, with a byname or surname. The pace of change varied in different parts of the country. Attention has been recently concentrated on some boroughs in the 12th century – Winchester, Kings Lynn, Canterbury and Battle. This paper examines the position in Oxfordshire and in two Oxfordshire boroughs (Banbury and Thame) at the end of the 12th century and beginning of the 13th. It examines changes in naming patterns and also how the names reflect on social change.

I n his discussion of the surnames of Oxfordshire, Richard McKinley considered those of villeins in a chapter about 'Bondmen's Surnames'. In general chapters, McKinley also discussed the surnames of burgesses and townspeople, particularly those of Oxford. For the names of villeins, he concentrated on the voluminous information in the *Rotuli Hundredorum* of 1279–80. 'In Oxfordshire, the late 13th-century Hundred Rolls list large numbers of both serfs and freemen, and so provide the material for comparing the names of the free and the unfree sections of the population at a time when stable, hereditary surnames were just starting to become common'. By 1279–80, 'the great majority of serfs, male and female', were assigned surnames or bynames. In Bampton hundred, studied in depth by McKinley as a sample area, there were about 750 unfree tenants in 1279–80, of whom only about twenty had only forenames. Analysis of these surnames in Bampton hundred revealed that freemen were likely to have a higher level of locative surnames (34%) or surnames derived from occupation or status (24%), whilst bond tenants had predominantly surnames derived from personal names (29%) or topographical surnames (15%).[1] With the benefit of these conclusions for the later 13th

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century, is it possible to move backwards to discover the nature of surnames before *c.* 1250?

There exist two main compilations of surnames or bynames in Oxfordshire before *c.* 1250. The Inquest of Templars, produced *c.* 1185, includes manors of the Templars at Church Cowley, Merton, Sibford, and Hensington. A survey of the estates of the Bishop of Lincoln, produced *c.* 1225 or a little later, includes the Bishop's manors in Oxfordshire at Banbury *cum membris*, Thame (with Weston), and Dorchester.[2] Both provide listings of villeins holding virgates or half-virgates and also of the smaller tenants such as cottars. In addition, the descriptions of Banbury and Thame include lists of burgage tenements and the names of burgesses. Both surveys may suffer from the common problem of rentals and surveys, in that they may omit sub-tenants, and they also provide only a static, not a dynamic, picture. For the latter reason, they do not illuminate whether names were becoming hereditary surnames or remained simply bynames of one generation.

In the Inquest of 1185, a very large number of tenants of all status were recorded simply by their baptismal or font-name. A qualifying byname did not seem necessary to the jurors who reported the information in the survey. Widows, moreover, were simply known as Y *vidua* (e.g. Rehenilda *vidua*). Where a surname or byname was employed, it was often a name showing relationship (patronymic, metronymic or a personal name). Few bynames were locative; exceptions were, for example, de Couele and de Feccam. These exceptions can be satisfactorily explained by the criteria established by McKinley.[3] The byname de Couele occurs at Sibford, so it is simply the locative name from one of the Templars' manors used at another. The byname de Feccam may be a sort of nickname derived from the lord's possessions overseas. Bynames of occupation did occur in the late 12th century amongst villeins: *pistor; pelliparius (tres);* seriant; *telarius,* Leueua Berecorn may have had a nickname or an occupational byname. Surprisingly, topographical surnames were virtually absent – only *ad Fontem* occurs.

TABLE 1:   INQUEST OF TEMPLARS 1185

	Type of tenant	No of tenants	Forename only
Cowley	cottars	20	10
Merton	virgaters	38	23
Hensington	virgaters	13	4
Sibford	1–2 virgates	24	15

Digressing to baptismal names, there is a strong survival of insular names into the late 12th century: Wiburga, Odbricht, Henepet, Sireth, Adelard, Leueua *(tres)* Cutheue, Kinch, Rehenild *(tres)*, Burewald, Sabricth, Sewale, Lowinus, Thurkil *(bis)*, Ketelburn, Thurbern, Hereward, Godwin *(bis)*, Herwi, Sewini, Alured, Ernehet, Siward *(bis)*, Podricus (Theodoric), Alditha, Wiberdus, Rauening. Although Norman continental font-names had gained some ground, the OE font-names survived in profusion in 1185. However, only one byname (Thomas Hedricus) seems to have been derived from an OE

[2] B.A. Lees (ed.), *Records of the Templars in England* (British Academy Records of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales, ix, 1935), 42–6, 55–6; The Queens College, Oxford, MS 366, ff. xix'–xxv' (for the date, *V.C.H. Oxon.* vii, 13n).

[3] McKinley op. cit. note 1, 203–4.

personal name. The persistence of OE personal names (single baptismal or font-names) concurs with what is known elsewhere. They were usually single names, originally simplex, but later compounded (combining name elements). Towards the end of the OE period, some bynames may have developed (as listed by Tengvik, for example). In Normandy, heritable surnames (particularly locative surnames) may have been developing, related, Holt has recently suggested, to hereditary tenure and fees and the patrimony. Gradually, after the Conquest, the wide stock of insular personal names was supplanted by a narrower stock of continental baptismal names. At the same time, Christian names *stricto sensu* (i.e. saints' names) also became popular, but again they comprised a narrow *corpus* of names. These changes were influential in the gradual adoption of bynames. Where, conversely, OE personal names persisted, the adoption of bynames may have been deferred.[4]

By the time of the survey of the Bishop's estate, some changes had occurred in the pattern of bynames, but some features still persisted. It was now more customary for both burgesses and rural tenants to have bynames. Although very many unfree tenants still did not have bynames, the proportion with such *cognomina* was much higher. Widows, however, continue universally to be known as Y *vidua*, without a byname. Seven widows occur amongst the 27 female burgesses of Banbury, and all are designated in this way. Two other female burgesses (one each at Thame and Banbury) have only a forename (Golda, Margeria). (There was only the one female burgess at Thame.) Three other burgesses were known only by their status as widows, in a different form: *Relicta* Hugonis de Sancto Dionisio, *Relicta* Cur' and *Relicta* Simonis de Hampton'. Women of dependent status were known by their late husband's name, whilst women of independent status had their own byname. The bynames of independent women are a mixture of locative (de Cottrap, de Wicham), occupational (*dispensaria, gardinaria, textrix*), personal (Gerard, Danile, Aswoy), topographical (Ing, ad Barram), status (dreng), and nickname (lauerke).[5]

TABLE II: BYNAMES ON THE ESTATE OF THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN *c.*1225

	Total	Loc.	Occ.	Nick.	Top.	Pat./Met./Pers.
BURGESSES						
Banbury	c190	52(28%)	41(22%)	15(8%)	<5%	25(14%)
Thame	c 63	24(38%)	25(40%)	<%5	<5%	6(10%)
FREE						
Banbury	6	1	2	2	0	1
Thame	7	1	1	0	0	5
VILLEINS						
Banbury	143	28(20%)	19(13%)	20(15%)	14(10%)	24(17%)
Thame	29	10(35%)	9(31%)	0	4(14%)	6(21%)
SMALL*						
Banbury	18	5(28%)	3(17%)	2(11%)	1(6%)	3(17%)
Thame	21	1(5%)	9(43%)	0	2(10%)	2(10%)

*Cottars and tofters

[4] Rumble op. cit. note 1, 1405–6; C. Clark, 'Battle *c.* 1110. An Anthroponymist looks at an Anglo-Norman New Town', in R.A. Brown (ed.), *Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ii (1979), 21–41.

[5] McKinley, op. cit. note 1, 181–197; C. Clark, 'Womens' Names in Post-Conquest England: Observations and Speculations', *Speculum*, liii (1978), 223–251.

The lists of the burgesses of Banbury and Thame allow an insight into bynames in smaller towns which had been developing in the 12th century. Banbury, it has been suggested, may have been one of the 'primary towns' of England. The market existed by 1138–9; the main development of burgages may have been promoted by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln (1123–48). By *c.* 1225, there were at least 220½ burgage tenements held by some 190 burgesses. Thame at this time had 63 burgesses; the market had been established by the late 12th century.[6] The lists of burgesses reflect the development of the boroughs in the late 12th century. In Banbury, 52 (28%) burgesses had locative bynames, 41 (22%) bynames derived from occupation or status, 15 (8%) nicknames, 25 (14%) patronymic or metronymic bynames, and less than 5% topographical bynames. At Thame, the pattern was predominantly the same: 24 (38%) locative; 25 (40%) occupational or status; 6 (10%) patronymic, metronymic or personal; few had nicknames or topographical names. The lack of topographical names is surprising; it might have been expected that more burgesses would have been known by where they lived in the urban environment. An urban form would presumably have been developing. However, the lack of topographical bynames in the urban context is comparable at Battle, King's Lynn and Winchester, where there were only a few such names. There are a few examples in Banbury: Gunnilda ad Barram and Godfrey infra Barram. The most distinctive categories of urban bynames were locative and occupational.
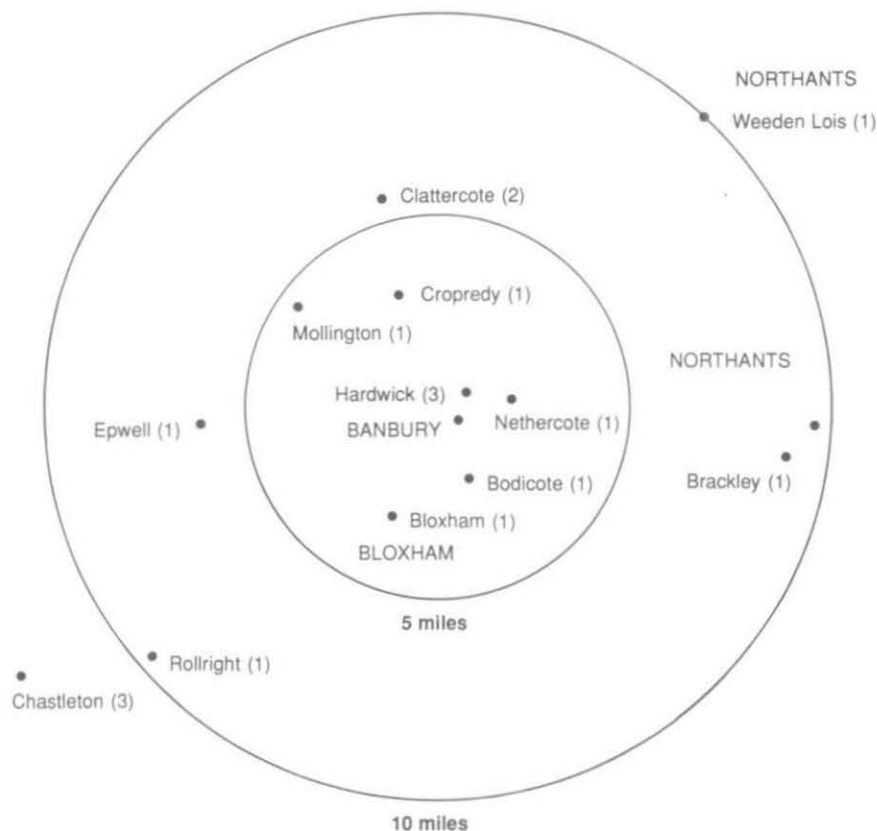
Locative bynames may reflect immigration into the 12th-century borough. The map shows the possible places of origin of some burgesses of Banbury with locative bynames. The vast majority came from within a radius of ten miles of Banbury. Some names, however, suggest a further distance of origin: Satwell (Rotherfield Greys, S. Oxon, *bis*); Evesham (Worcs.); Coventry (Warws., *tres*); London; Waverley (Surrey); Reading (Berks.); Dunwich (?Suffolk, *bis*); Scottus (*bis*). Most of the immigration reflected in these bynames was rural—urban. Most movement was from vills around Banbury or in North Oxfordshire. Some of the migration over longer distances was urban—urban: de London; de Couentre; Reding; de Brackel'; de Oxon'; de Euesham (or from other nascent boroughs). The locative bynames for Thame reveal a smaller number of urban places of origin: de Walingford; de Eillesbire (Aylesbury); de Adderbur' (Adderbury, a nascent borough of the Bishop of Winchester). The major migration to Thame was rural and local.

The locative bynames may reflect the hinterland of the two boroughs – their economic regions. The bynames of burgesses at Banbury derive mainly from North Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, but a wider range of origin perhaps also reflects the role of Banbury as a 'primary town'. The bynames of Thame were local and rural, with a tendency towards central Oxfordshire (Weston, Cop Court), but also Buckinghamshire and Berkshire (e.g. Cheddington, Ilmer). In both cases, there was immigration across county boundaries. Immigration across county boundaries may be a feature of rural—urban migration, whilst rural—rural migration may have tended not to traverse boundaries. Migration across county boundaries to Thame and Banbury may also have been attractive because a wider network of market towns and trading had not yet developed, although the 12th century is increasingly regarded as the period of the real proliferation and confirmation of significant markets.[7] Since small market towns may

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[6] *V.C.H. Oxon* x, 18–22, 27–8; vii, 179—180, 187–90; A. Everitt, 'The Primary Towns of England', repr. in *Landscape and Community in England* (1985), 93–107.

[7] R.H. Britnell, 'The Proliferation of Markets in England', *Econ. H.R.* 2nd ser. xxxiv (1981), 209–21.

Locative Surnames: Burgesses of Banbury: Places of Origin.

NORTHANTS

Weeden Lois (1)

Clattercote (2)

Cropredy (1)

Mollington (1)

NORTHANTS

Hardwick (3)

BANBURY   Nethercote (1)

Epwell (1)

Bodicote (1)   Brackley (1)

Bloxham (1)

BLOXHAM

5 miles

Rollright (1)

Chastleton (3)

10 miles

I In Banbury
Calthorpe (1)
Wykham Farm (1)

II Outside 20 miles
Satwell in Rotherfield Greys (South Oxon) (2)
Reading (1)
London (1)
Waverley in Surrey (1)
Evesham in Worcestershire (1)
Coventry in Warwickshire (3)
Walter Scottus

Hampton Gay (3)

Stanton St. John (1)

Hensington (1)

Oxford (1)

Figures in brackets indicate the number of Burgesses
with this locative surname.

not yet have developed in these areas, Banbury and Thame may have exercised an influence across county boundaries.

A feature which distinguished small towns from rural vills was the concentration of craft trades and services.[8] Bynames in Banbury derived from some distinctly urban trades: *uinitarius*; le Tanur; draper (*tres*); le lorimer (*bis*); mercer; *textor/textrix* (*tres*); *tinctor*; le Tailour. However, burgesses also held some names of rural status or which could have been either of urban or rural derivation: *molendinarius*; *faber*; *piscator*; *gardinaria*; spademan; *carectarius*; *bercarius*; *carucarius*. Some names could have been either: *pistor*; cupere; le potter; coruaiser. Bynames deriving from status included *justiciarius*, *marescallus* (possibly occupational), and dreng – the latter a byname surviving in several places in N. Oxfordshire.[9] The list of occupational bynames of burgesses at Thame is similar, but with a higher level of bynames which could be either urban or rural: *molendinarius* (*tres*); *clericus* (4); *sutor*; *pistor* (*bis*); *marescallus* (*bis*); *faber* (*tres*); le tailour (*bis*); *gardinarius*; *carpentarius* (*bis*); le mazon; *fullo*; *tinctor*. Perhaps the distinctive feature in both towns is the bynames derived from cloth and clothing and victualling.

Although having a large borough as nucleus, both Banbury and Thame had large rural estates appended. The estate at Banbury was a 'multiple estate' which included Coton (Cotes), Cropredy, Wardington, Calthorpe, and Great Barton. The rural estate at Thame included Weston. Analysis of the bynames of freemen, villeins holding more than half a virgate, and small tenants (cottars and tofters) is provided in Table II. A superficially surprising feature is the high level of locative bynames. However, such names on the Banbury estate almost all derive from hamlets and vills appurtenant to the estate: de Burthon'; de Cotes; de Midelthorp'; de Wardington; de Croperia; de Herdwic; de Wicham (Wykham Farm). The few exceptions are: de Kancia; de Killesby (Kilsby, Northants.); Epwell (Oxon.) and de Mollington (Oxon.) (all villeins); Ingeleis, de Mollington and de Couentre (cottars). Locative bynames of villeins at Thame, however, include: de Icford (Ickford, Berks.); de Chelendon (Cheddington, Bucks—*tres*); le Ireis; de Merton and de Eya (Sonning Eye) (both Oxfordshire). Topographical bynames were higher amongst villeins than the burgesses. Nicknames were popular amongst the villeins at Banbury (especially prude or le prude, king, blund), but not those of Thame. Occupational bynames were higher (as a proportion) at Thame than Banbury, although the actual numbers were small. In the complex of the estate at Banbury, however, a greater number of occupational bynames occurred at Great Barton and Calthorpe, perhaps indicating that here was the centre for the manorial famuli of the whole estate. As amongst the burgesses, the byname of Dreng, derived from an old status, was evident (Hugh, Ralph, Robert, Richard and John). A fair proportion of the villeins at both estates received patronymic or metronymic bynames or bynames derived from personal names.

Even in *c.* 1225, however, numbers of villeins and cottars were still known only by a font-name. Widows of this status were also simply known by their forename and the suffix *vidua* (12 of the 18 female tenants at Banbury, 9 of 10 at Thame). The same situation prevailed at the Bishop's estate at Dorchester, where four of six unfree female tenants were listed by their Christian name and *vidua*, a fifth being Avice daughter of Nicholas. Amongst the unfree tenants of Banbury, a sprinkling of insular personal

[8] R.H. Hilton, 'Medieval Market Towns', *Past and Present*, cix (1985). 2–23.

[9] McKinley op. cit. note 1, 143. This surname is more usually associated with northern England. For occupational surnames in general, G. Fransson, *Middle English Surnames of Occupation 1100–1350* (Lund Studies in English, iii, 1935).

names persisted: Ailward, Alwyn(n), Gamel, Turchil (several) and others; but not at the same high level as on the Templars' estates in 1185.

From this small and imperfect body of data, some tentative conclusions may be evinced about bynames in Oxfordshire before *c.* 1250. In the late 12th century, surnames or bynames were not usual amongst the unfree peasantry. By *c.* 1225, they were much more customary, although some tenants were still identified by a font-name only. OE personal names persisted strongly into the late 12th and even early 13th centuries. In the early 13th century, unfree tenants on the Bishop of Lincoln's estate at Banbury had a high proportion of locative bynames, but these names were derived from places which were constituents of the discrete estate. Other bynames of villeins were derived equally from topography, patronyms, personal names and occupations. The burgesses of Banbury and Thame, however, had a higher proportion of locative or occupational bynames.

A note of some insular personal names

OE = Old English; OG = Old German; ON = Old Norse; OD = Old Danish.
Most of the names are dithematic compounded names.
Adelard from Æelheard. OE. æðel = noble; heard = hard.
Leueua. From Leofgifu. OE. leof = dear, love; gifu = giver.
Cutheue. OE. cut = famous, known; heue = hyge? = mind, courage.
Thurkil. OD.
Ketelburn. ON, OD.
Thurbern. OD.
Hereward. OE. here = army, weard = keeper, protector.
Godwin. OE. god = good, wine = friend.
Herwi. OE ? here
Sewini. OE, sae = sea; wine = man.
Alured. OE. Ælfred.
Ernehet. OE. earn = eagle, geat from folkname Geatas.
Siward. OE. sige = victory, weard = keeper, protector.
Podricus. OG. Theodoric.
Wiberdus. OE. wig = war, beorht = bright.
Rauening. ON Hrafn, OD Rawn, OE -ing (diminutive)
Golda. OE. gold.
Odbricth. OE, OG. æðel = noble (OG, OD), bricth = bright.