

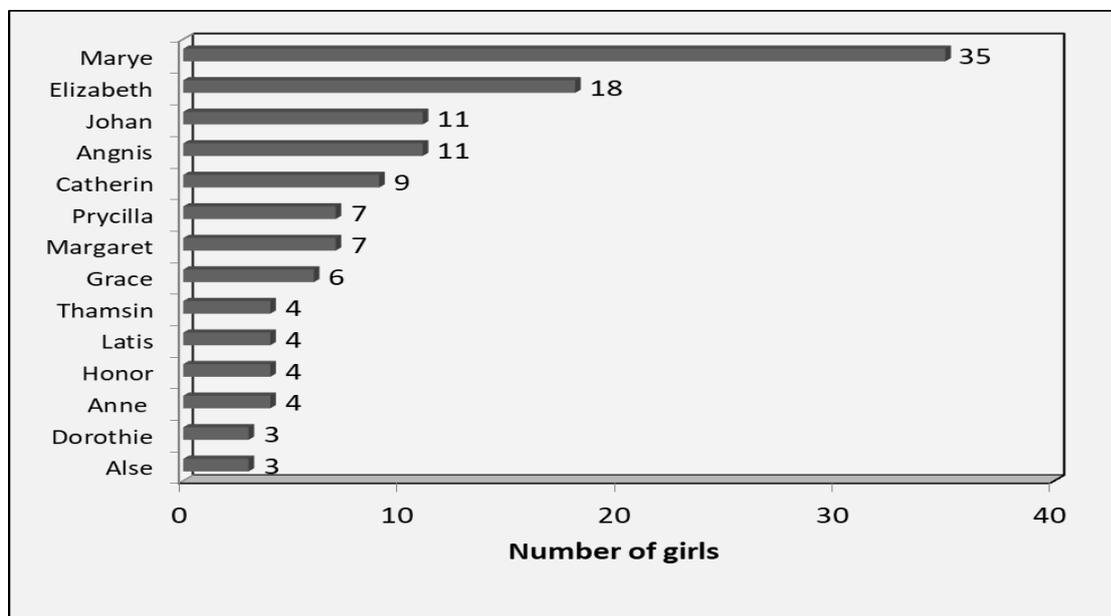
## Online local history: some Lancashire exercises

Many investigations into aspects of local history can be undertaken online. The following examples, drawing on Lancashire sources, are intended to provide guidance for teachers and parents in preparing local history investigations that primary and secondary children can undertake. They encourage children to interpret local historical evidence in order to describe and explain changes that have occurred over time.

### Example 1: children's forenames

- Use is made of parish register baptism data, so the exercise can go back to Tudor times in some localities. Baptism records for churches throughout Lancashire can be found online at the Lancashire Parish Clerks' Project at <https://www.lan-opc.org.uk/>
- Probably collecting 40 or 50 names for each gender will be enough to give a good idea of which were the most popular forenames, though more can be collected, of course.
- A frequency distribution of children's forenames for a locality can be compiled and displayed as a spreadsheet graph.
- A key objective is to help children to examine and explain change over time, in this case beyond living memory.
- Context can arise through comparison between parishes at a point in time.

The bar chart shown below provides an example of the results that can be obtained and how they can be presented. It shows the frequency distribution of girls' names at Barnstaple in Devon between 1790 and 1793. Names that occur fewer than three times have been excluded. From the 1730s, names in Church of England registers are generally written in



English rather than Latin. Children might be interested in translating the Latin forms. It should be noted that references to children born outside marriage arises with some frequency. Norfolk Record Office, for example, offer useful guidance at

<https://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/en/Help-with-your-research/Family-history/Parishes-and-churches/Parish-registers/Reading-and-interpreting-registers>

In the Barnstaple investigation, Mary was by far the most popular name for a girl, with Elizabeth the second most popular. For boys, John was the most popular name, occurring 46 times, with William, occurring 13 times, the next most popular.

Various exercises can follow that enable children to extend and deepen their investigations, in part to place their findings in context.

- Considering why were some names were very popular, bearing in mind the influence of revered religious and secular figures, including Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ; John, one of his twelve apostles; and John the Baptist, the preacher who baptised him.
- The absolute figures can be computed as percentages. Those for the Barnstaple sample are shown below. As can be seen, the three most popular names for boys reached half the total, whilst the two most popular formed over a third and the most popular exceeded a quarter. The distribution was similar for girls' names, with slightly lower percentage returns in each category.

Girls' names	Percentage	Boys' names	Percentage
Most common (Mary)	22	Most common (John)	29
Two most common (Mary & Elizabeth)	33	Two most common (John & William)	37
Three most common (Mary, Elizabeth & Agnes/Joan)	48	Three most common (John, William & George)	50

- Comparisons can be made with forename popularity in other parishes at the time to see if more general patterns emerge or if there was any marked variation. Similarity and difference can be explored, therefore.
- The most common forenames today can be compared with those in the past and consideration given to why changes occurred, especially the decline in the predominance of just a few names, a feature of the post-World War II era. Discussion can include the movement of people in and out the country and the rise of a global media.
- Particularly helpful in this respect is the *Baby Names in England and Wales* website, provided by the Office of National Statistics. It provides up-to-date details of forename popularity, as well as historical data about forenames, showing the changes that have occurred over time. It can be viewed at

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/babynamesenglandandwales/previousReleases>>

Open the data for a particular year to gain access to the range of information provided on the website.

### Example 2: family life in the 1950s

- Lists are made of several items that would not have featured in family life during the 1950s and others that might have done, keeping a reasonable balance between them.
- Children ask people who were children in the 1950s whether or not the items were available to them. Elderly relatives are obvious candidates.
- Children use their findings to compare aspects of their childhood with those of the older generation. So, they can consider the nature of changes that have occurred over time, as well as the causes and impact of the changes.

With regard to entertainment, for instance, the influence of technological innovation can be considered, noting the new types of products that have become available and the greater range of choice they offer.

#### 1. Home entertainment in the 1950s

Which did you have in your home in the 1950s?	Yes or no
colour television set	.....
black and white television set	.....
radio	.....
computer games	.....
tape recorder	.....
record player	.....
comics	.....
compact disc player	.....
board games	.....
piano	.....
card games	.....
dominos	.....

Please make any other comments

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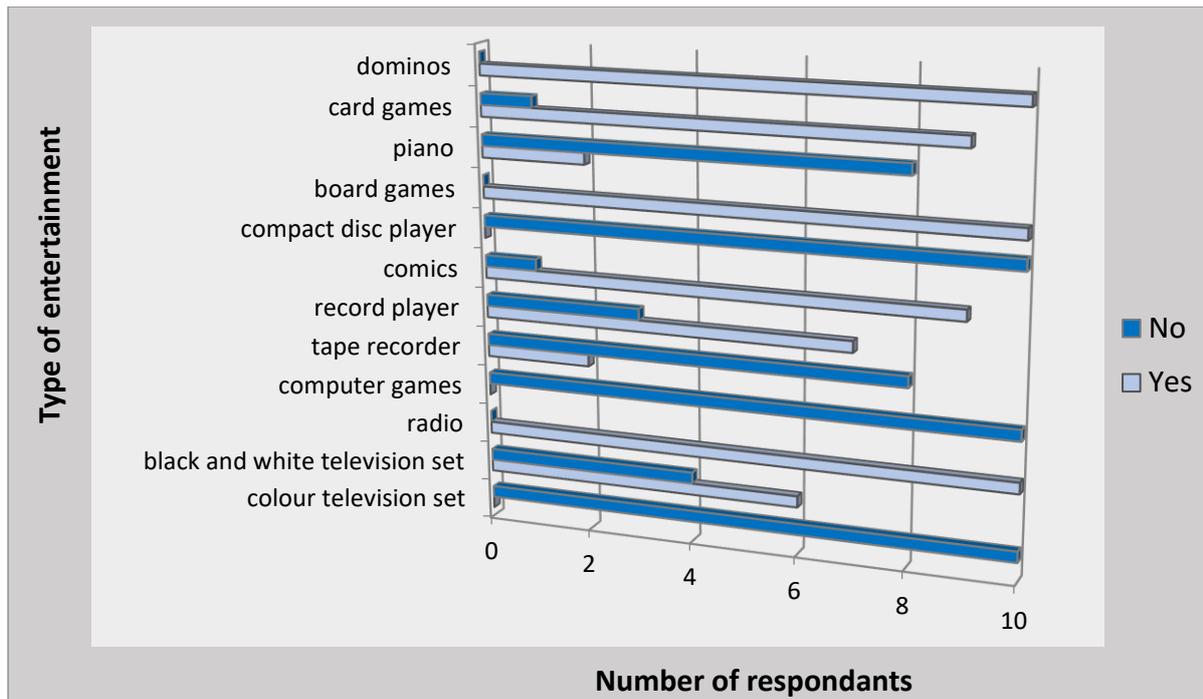
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Only a small number of responses are required, a task that children might share. Space is provided at the bottom of the sheet for respondents to make additional remarks.

Children can graph their results and comment on them. An example based on ten responses is given below.



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### Other local history exercises

These can be found on the website of the British Association for Local History. One concerns the revolutionary increase in the speed of travel that railways brought about. It compares the time taken by a stagecoach in journeying between Preston and Colne in the 1820s with that taken by a train in the 1860s. Another uses 1851 census data from Tockholes, near Blackburn, to consider early Victorian children as scholars as well workers. They can be viewed at

<https://www.balh.org.uk/education-classroom-exercises-in-local-history>

Others deal with the theme of road travel in the stagecoach era, including the elephant at the tollgate story, making use of source material that is freely available on line. They can be found at

<https://www.balh.org.uk/resources/docs/additions-to-local-history-book-themes.pdf>

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