

Musbury Heritage – What’s in a name?

There are not many newcomers to Musbury who haven’t been teased about not being proper villagers, as we’ve only been here 5 minutes, which is quite true in my case! Indeed, it sometimes seems even those who have been here for decades are jokingly referred to as interlopers.

So, who are the real Musbury families? Well, really there is no simple answer, as even centuries ago there was some mobility between the villages. Real mobility came in the middle of the 19th century with advent of railways. Prior to that people essentially stayed in their local area. Only the rich and educated moved around much. Gentry, clergy and professional people would come and go with much greater regularity.

The first named census was compiled in 1841, so that makes a good starting point for studying the surnames in our village. Here are the 15 most popular surnames from 1841 to 1911 and how the numbers changed over those years. This is a small extract from over 200 different surnames.

Surname	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Hoare	35	36	28	27	28	15	18	23
Collins	20	23	27	32	24	22	22	14
Larcombe	17	16	24	13	11	23	19	7
Rockett	15	16	11	12	17	18	16	19
Harvey	8	6	19	21	17	19	10	14
Partridge	4	12	14	12	18	13	19	11
Goldsworthy	7	18	12	17	13	17	10	4
Welch	0	4	5	6	13	23	25	20
Wakley / Wakely	18	14	7	11	8	9	5	6
Gear	0	0	5	15	21	17	9	9
Hellier / Hillier	0	6	8	12	16	11	11	9
Row	2	5	8	15	15	5	9	6
Loveridge	10	15	10	13	8	7	0	0
Halse	8	10	9	11	13	3	2	0
Mitchell	0	5	7	1	7	11	9	12

How many of these names still exist in Musbury today? Some of them will be recognisable and some will be known from the local area, but no longer present here. It may also be surprising that some other surnames are missing.

The Hoare family are most prolific and, of course, we know that they are still in the village. This doesn’t mean they are directly related to the Victorian families, but I would be surprised if they were not. Parish registers show births for Hoare, Hoar and Hore families in the 1600s and this means they were likely to have been in Musbury for a long time prior to then. They were predominately employed as agricultural labourers or trades people, such as shoe and boot makers. The Collins were in similar employment.

The Larcombes and Rocketts were involved in more variable trades. Larcombes were publicans, farmers, carpenters, tanners, etc. The Rocketts were mainly builders and carpenters, as can be evidenced by local buildings bearing their initials. They were also our first postmasters.

The popular name of Welch only appeared in Musbury during the middle of the 19th century, with first recorded birth in our parish registers being in 1848. Early research seems to show some coming from Axmouth and Membury.

Another name familiar to many of us is that of Gear. This was a local family from Combyne and Axmouth, some of whom settled in Musbury in the 1850s. Oscar Gear will be remembered for his large nursery that ran from Rose Cottage. No members of that family still live in the village, but there are descendants living in Devon who take a keen interest in our history.

Perhaps the exceptions in the above list are the Halse and Row families who often described themselves as Yeomen, being wealthy farmers of the Maidenhayne and Ashe farms. They were not landowners, but as farmers were probably less mobile than trades and professional people. Both families were in Musbury during the 18th century through to the early 20th century, but are they still in the local area?

Other familiar names a bit further down the list are, for example Whiller, Jefford, James, Burroughs / Burrows, Griffin, Salter, Moulding, Edwards, Loud, Sweetland, Rowell and many more. There were even Annings in Musbury until about 1860. I'll put the full list in the 'People' section of the website (www.musburyheritage.co.uk).

Missing from the list are many surnames associated with Musbury's recent history. Rather than being further down on the complete list, most of them do not appear at all, being later arrivals in the 20th century. Next time when someone calls you a foreigner you can always respond with "well we were all incomers to the village once!".

I am writing this article to stimulate some thought about our local names and would very like to hear from anyone who can provide stories or any information about Musbury families. If you know or believe you are related to a well-established Musbury family, then I would be very happy to help you with producing a rudimentary family tree to establish your link to the past residents. If you have pictures of past residents and wouldn't mind them being shown on the MH website, I would very much appreciate be allowed to scan and return them.

Please remember I'm also interested in buildings, trades, farming, etc. from Musbury's past, which includes anything up to the late 20th century. Don't be shy, I am always happy to chat about our history! I am also very capable of making mistakes, so please let me know if you find one.

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