

## Workshop Report

### 404PLUS: Back to the 404 Parishes and Beyond\*

#### Local Population Studies Society Spring Workshop 2022

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On 28 May 2022 the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS) held a Workshop on the theme of opportunities and prospects for the future of parish register demography. This Workshop replaced the usual Spring Conference, and is intended to be the first of several more ‘hands-on’ gatherings at which practical issues about the *doing* of historical demography will be considered.

The immediate rationale for this Workshop was the launching of a new section of the LPSS web site which will host the data from the 404 parishes used by E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield to write *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: a Reconstruction* (London, 1981). However, the Workshop also marked the formal launch of a new project by the Local Population Studies Society called 404PLUS, which is designed to augment the data from the 404 parishes in two ways: by adding aggregate data for more parishes in the same format as the data for the 404 parishes, and by including a new data set of transcriptions of parish registers which might be used by population historians for comparative work. Both of these data sets would in principle be Open Access, in that any interested member of the public might download them and use them, and advice on how to analyse them would also be made available on the web site.

The Workshop was divided into two halves, reflecting these different elements of the 404PLUS project. The first half dealt with the aggregate data and the second half with the transcripts. The Workshop as a whole was introduced by Kevin Schürer, who also provided a brief appreciation of the life and work of Sir Tony Wrigley, without whom the 404-parish database would not exist.

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\* <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps108.2022.8>.

### Aggregate data

**Andy Hinde** began by presenting an overview of the 404PLUS project. This built on the ideas outlined in a paper he wrote with Paul Tomblin and published in *Local Population Studies* 103.<sup>1</sup> The project will start by making publicly available the data from the 404 parishes together with an updated version of Roger Schofield's guide to the data.<sup>2</sup> The project aims then to add similar data for further parishes, having checked them for accuracy and completeness, keeping to the same format as was used by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure when preparing the data for the 404 parishes. This would be a continuous and ongoing process, gradually augmenting the database. The database would be stored on the LPSS web site.

The second part of the project would involve uploading to the web site transcriptions of parish registers 'including details of individuals' names, but ... presented ... in a standardised format, with a consistent set of columns'.<sup>3</sup> These would also be rigorously quality-checked before being uploaded. Initially the number of transcriptions available would be small, but the hope and aim of the project is that the number would gradually increase so that, in the course of time, a database with a sufficiently large number of parishes would be produced that could be used to answer many research questions such as those posed by Chris Galley in his recent summary of the state of knowledge of infant mortality in England.<sup>4</sup> Andy Hinde reiterated the comments made in the paper he wrote with Paul Tomblin that '[t]he vision is of a project quite different from the large-scale academic projects with defined objectives, a nominated research team, and a specific time-frame. It is of an open-ended project managed by LPSS, but without particular objectives save to create a repository for parish register data in the form of both counts of events, and full transcripts, presented in a common form[at] and with a guarantee that they have been rigorously checked for data quality.'<sup>5</sup>

Andy then went on to describe the existing data for the 404 parishes, which consist of Excel files, one for each parish, containing the data; and text files, again one for each parish, giving various characteristics of the parishes. The format of

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1 A. Hinde and P. Tomblin, 'Local population studies using parish registers: ideas for future research', *Local Population Studies* 103 (2019), pp. 55-63, <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps103.2019.55>.

2 The updated guide is already available as R.S. Schofield and A. Hinde, *Parish Register Aggregate Analyses*, 2nd edn (Alton, 2021).

3 Hinde and Tomblin, 'Local population studies using parish registers', p. 62.

4 See C. Galley, 'Infant mortality in England 1538-2000: the parish register period, 1538-1837', *Local Population Studies* 103 (2019), pp. 103-204, here at pp. 200-4, <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps103.2019.103>.

5 Hinde and Tomblin, 'Local population studies using parish registers', p. 62.

the Excel files, and the sources of data used in putting together the list of characteristics of each parish, are described in the *Parish Register Aggregate Analyses* booklet which is now available on the LPSS web site.

Following this, **Chris Galley** and **Sue Jones** both gave presentations that illustrated the kinds of questions that could be tackled using aggregate parish register data. Chris based much of his presentation on his work on the city of York, whereas Sue examined mainly rural parishes in non-metropolitan Surrey, based on the research she undertook for her recent DPhil thesis.<sup>6</sup> These included the analysis of the progress of epidemics and mortality in general and the analysis of the agricultural economy of rural areas using data on the seasonality of marriages. It was clear from both presentations that there was a great deal of interesting research to be done using only the aggregate monthly counts of baptisms, marriages, and/or burials.

## Transcriptions of parish register data

Following a short break, **Paul Tomblin** described the current situation with respect to transcriptions of parish register data. Many county and regional family history societies have substantial numbers of transcriptions of the registers for parishes in their regions. The quality of these is very good, and Paul illustrated this with reference to some checks he had carried out on registers transcribed by the Derbyshire Family History Society. A limitation of the transcriptions for academic work, however, is that they are in a whole variety of formats so comparative analysis of several parishes is complex and time-consuming. Of course, the transcripts were not made for the convenience of academic historians! But it does mean that there would be value in building up a collection of transcripts in a common machine-readable format which could be used for comparative analysis.

Paul then demonstrated some transcripts of parish registers from Rutland which he had put into a standard format in Excel (Figure 1 shows an example). The workshop then began a discussion about the common format of the transcripts and several suggestions were made to which Paul responded.

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6 C. Galley, *The Demography of Early Modern Towns: York in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Liverpool, 1998); S.R Jones, 'Taking the measure: a demographic-based study of non-metropolitan Surrey, c. 1550-1750' (unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2020); see also S. Jones, '“Big data” and parish registers: a case study of mortality in early modern non-metropolitan Surrey', *Local Population Studies* 107 (2021), pp. 12-39, <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps107.2021.12>.

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**Figure 1** Screenshot of the draft transcript file for baptisms in Ashwell, Rutland

Ref	Date	Sex	Age	Abode	Occupation	Status	Forename(s) of Father	SURNAME of Father	Status of Mother	Forename(s) of Mother	SURNAME of Mother	Occupation of Mother	Register Comments	Parish Register	County
1289	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	Thomas	STANTON	Labourer	Elizabeth				Ashwell	Rutland
1290	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	MARSHALL	Shepherd	Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1291	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	Levi	BOTTOM	Labourer	Sarah			Credited by mistake	Ashwell	Rutland
1292	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	George	SIBLEY	Labourer	Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1293	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	George	WILLIAMSON	Railway Porter	Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1294	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	BROOK	Station Master	Mary Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1295	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	Levi	BOTTOM	Labourer	Sarah				Ashwell	Rutland
1296	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	James	BOTTOM	Labourer	Sarah				Ashwell	Rutland
1297	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	James	WIGGINGTON	Labourer	Frances				Ashwell	Rutland
1298	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	MARSHALL	Labourer	Mary Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1299	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	George	SALLY	Labourer	Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1300	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	WHITFIELD	Labourer	Frances				Ashwell	Rutland
1301	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	MARSHALL	Labourer	Jane				Ashwell	Rutland
1302	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	William	COULSON	Labourer	Edith			Wrong parents originally entered. Entry amended 01/02/2020. Witnessed Parents & Henry TIGG, churchwarden	Ashwell	Rutland
1303	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	Henry	TIDD	Grinder	Elizabeth				Ashwell	Rutland
1304	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	WATSON	Labourer	Martha				Ashwell	Rutland
1305	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	Thomas	SIBLEY	Labourer	Charlotte				Ashwell	Rutland
1306	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	William	WIGGINGTON	Labourer	Frances				Ashwell	Rutland
1307	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	BOTTOM	Labourer	Harriet				Ashwell	Rutland
1308	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	ASTON	Carter	Martha				Ashwell	Rutland
1309	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	James	WATSON	Labourer	Mary Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1310	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	David	SMITH	Labourer	Ellen				Ashwell	Rutland
1311	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	John	MARSHALL	Labourer	Jane				Ashwell	Rutland
1312	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	George	SIBLEY	Labourer	Ann				Ashwell	Rutland
1313	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	James	BOTTOM	Traveller	Letitia				Ashwell	Rutland
1314	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	BOTTOM	Labourer	Martha				Ashwell	Rutland
1315	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	William	WIGGINGTON	Labourer	Frances				Ashwell	Rutland
1316	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	Levi	BOTTOM	Labourer	Sarah				Ashwell	Rutland
1317	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	MARSHALL	Labourer	Jane				Ashwell	Rutland
1318	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	MARSHALL	Labourer	Jane				Ashwell	Rutland
1319	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	FRANK		Jane					Ashwell	Rutland
1320	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	THOMAS	KNOWLES	Cartwright	Frances				Ashwell	Rutland
1321	1855	F	4	Hinkley, Leics.	Hinkley, Leics.	Day of	Thomas	CLARE	Butcher	Hanna	Cartwright			Ashwell	Rutland
1322	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	George	CLARE	Labourer	Clara	Cartwright	Tuins		Ashwell	Rutland
1323	1855	F	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Day of	George	CLARE	Labourer	Betty	Cartwright	Tuins		Ashwell	Rutland
1324	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	WELLS	Yeoman	Clara Ann	Cartwright			Ashwell	Rutland
1325	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	Charles	SALLEY	Labourer	Frances	Cartwright			Ashwell	Rutland
1326	1855	M	4	Ashwell	Ashwell	Son of	John	ASTON	Carter	Martha	Cartwright			Ashwell	Rutland

**Note:** The screenshot shows baptisms from 1855 to 1863. The entire spreadsheet covers the period 1595-1921 and includes burials and marriages.

**Sources:** Parish register of Ashwell, Rutland.

An important point was then raised about copyright. Clearly, if LPSS members made their own transcripts of the original parish registers, these could be put into the agreed standard format and posted on the relevant section of the LPSS web site. However if transcriptions originally made by others are adapted to the standard format there may be a copyright issue. The question is not whether the parish register data themselves are protected by copyright; clearly this is not the case. But transcribers are probably entitled to copyright protection for the work they have put into reading the original registers and transcribing them into a format that is easier to use. Until the copyright position is clarified, it was felt better to focus attention on augmenting the aggregate database. Paul Tomblin made the

point that it was always possible to create aggregate data files from transcripts, and he and a friend had developed a programme to achieve this.

**Andy Hinde** then demonstrated the prototype web pages which have been developed for the 404PLUS project. The meeting expressed its gratitude to **Andy Burn** for his work in producing these. There are presently two such pages: <http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/parish-registers/>, which describes the 404PLUS project so far, and <http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/parish-registers/download/>, from where the parish register data can be downloaded. The discussion then moved on to consider the next steps for the 404PLUS project. For the immediate future the priorities are to integrate the prototype web pages into the LPSS web site, and to develop the database of aggregate counts of baptisms, marriages and burials.

Thanks are due to all those who participated in the workshop and contributed their ideas, and to Karen Rothery for organising the logistics and arranging the Zoom meeting.