Local Population Studies

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Local Population Studies

LOCAL POPULATION STUDIES

Local Population Studies (*LPS*) is the official journal of the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS), which is devoted to the promotion of the study of historical demography, and associated topics in economic and social history, in local and regional contexts. The focus of the journal is upon issues that will appeal to a diverse audience of historians of the family, society and economy, sociologists, demographers, geographers and economists. It is the world's only journal dedicated to population history and related issues in local and regional settings. Its primary focus is upon the British Isles, but it occasionally carries articles relating to other countries. It has been published bi-annually since 1968.

LPS carries substantive articles (5,000 – 7,000 words), research notes (typically 2,000 – 3,000 words), miscellanea and other short notes (from as few as 500 words), an annual review of periodical literature, articles on sources and methods, debates in population history, information on electronic resources, book reviews and correspondence. All articles and research notes are peer-reviewed. The journal is particularly interested in publishing shorter pieces on specific communities and localities. For shorter submissions, we aim for a turnaround period of about six weeks between first submission and electronic publication.

From 2023, *Local Population Studies* is being hosted on the Local Population Studies Society's web site http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/. Contributions will be published electronically on this web site as soon as they are ready. They will be collated into issues twice per year for printing and binding.

Articles and contributions from back issues are also available electronically on the Local Population Studies Society's web site. Material published in the last two years is available only to subscribers to *Local Population Studies*. Material published more than two years ago is available free of charge to members of the public. Hard copies of individual back issues which remain in stock are available on request to both subscribers and non-subscribers, at £10 per issue (including postage and packing). Contact editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk.

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All enquiries about advertising in *Local Population Studies* should be sent to the Editor, Dr Andrew Hinde, 8 Anstey Mill Lane, Alton, Hampshire GU34 2QP, United Kingdom. Email: PRAHinde@aol.com OR editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk.

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Contents

BOOK REVIEWS

Editorial*

This issue of *Local Population Studies*

It is only around three months since the last issue of *Local Population Studies* was published. We are trying to catch up after delays caused by the pandemic, the need to update the Local Population Studies Society web site and the retirement of successive printers. I am hopeful that the next issue, issue 113, will be published in November or December of 2024 and that this will complete the catching up process.

This issue contains two articles and an important Sources and Methods piece. The first article is by Romola Davenport and Max Satchell of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. Davenport and Satchell use parish register data to examine the veracity of Daniel Defoe's comments about the frequency of remarriage among the farmers of the Essex marshlands. It is well known that malaria was endemic in these marshes. Defoe argued that the local farmers were resistant to malaria but that they had the habit of taking brides from the uplands to the north and bringing their brides into the marshes to live. Lacking resistance to malaria, these brides soon perished so that their husbands had frequently to remarry. The eventual consequence, Defoe observed, was a process by which women were imported from the Essex uplands to the marshes to die, the marshes acting as a population sink for women of reproductive age from the rest of the county of Essex, much as the London in the seventeenth century acted as a population sink for the whole country. It turns out that this is an interesting story but the parish register evidence strongly suggests that it is just a story. Davenport and Satchell find no evidence of remarriage by marshland farmers to anything like the extent that Defoe suggested. None of Defoe's observations on this topic withstand confrontation with the empirical evidence from parish registers.

The second paper is by Peter Jolly and takes further his work on charwomen in Berkshire which was the subject of his earlier paper in *Local Population Studies*.[1] In this paper Jolly examines the size and structure of the households in which the charwomen lived. He finds that many charwomen were widows and many lived alone. Children leaving the family home and the death of their husbands precipitated this. Of course, the fact that a woman was left alone without means of support was often the reason that she took up work as a charwoman. Married women were less common among charwomen than in the population as a whole,

* https://doi.org/10.35488/lps112.2024.1.

1 P. Jolly, 'Strategies for survival: charwomen in rural Berkshire', *Local Population Studies* 108 (2022), pp. 58–67.

which suggests that women with alternative means of support were disinclined to take up charring. On the other hand, young widows, especially those with dependent children, were quite prominent as a group within the population of charwomen.

This issue of the journal devotes a substantial number of pages to Philip Thornborow's Sources and Methods contribution on Methodist Registers. We feel that this is justified, as many population historians are much less familiar with these registers than they are with the Church of England registers, even though Methodists formed a substantial minority of the population in several parts of England and Wales in the nineteenth century. Thornborow takes us systematically through the different branches of Methodism that emerged from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. He describes the survival of Methodist registers and how population historians might gain access to them, and their content. Many are in The National Archives, as they were surrendered to the Registrar General when civil registration began in 1837. We hope that Thornborow's contribution will encourage more population historians to use these registers to write the history of localities where Methodism was common.

Local Population Studies Society web site

Readers are encouraged to visit the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS) web site and to make any comments or suggestions for items to be posted there to the Editor of *Local Population Studies* (editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk OR PRAHinde@aol.com). Requests for changes to the structure of the web site or for additional features (such as interactive maps) should be directed to Dr Andrew Burn, LPSS's webmaster (web@localpopulationstudies.org.uk).

Access to *Local Population Studies*

Readers are reminded that electronic access to all issues of the journal is available as follows. First, go to the web page http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/. By moving your cursor on to 'The Journal' you will reveal a drop-down menu. Clicking on any of the items in the drop-down menu will give access to the relevant current and past issues of the journal. 'First view articles' are those that have not yet been consolidated into an issue. These are only available to members of LPSS and/or subscribers to this journal. The same is true for issues 108-111 of *Local Population Studies*. However, issues 1-107 are Open Access and available to anyone. Note that clicking on 'Past issues' will take you to a legacy web page containing issues 1-87 of the journal.

Local Population Studies Prize

It is with great pleasure that I can announce the winner of the *Local Population Studies* Prize for articles published in 2022 (issues 108 and 109). The winner is Dr Sadie McMullon for her article entitled 'Marriage horizons in Fletton: the hidden narrative behind the parish marriage registers', *Local Population Studies* 108, pp. 13-34. Congratulations to Sadie for an excellent contribution to the journal!

Readers are reminded that the *Local Population Studies* Prize will be awarded again in 2024 and 2025, provided suitable entries are available. If you are either a student (at any stage), a young academic (within five years of completing a PhD) or not based in a university, you stand a chance of winning three years' membership of the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS), to include the registration fees for all conferences organised by LPSS during those three years. The prize is being offered in 2024 for the best article by an eligible author published in *Local Population Studies* issues 112 and 113, and in 2025 for the best article by an eligible author published in *Local Population Studies* issues 114 and 115. Papers written by more than one author are eligible, but all authors must meet the criteria, and only one prize will be offered for each paper. If you are interested in writing a contribution and are eligible, there is still space for you to have your work published in *Local Population Studies* issues 114 and 115.

Publishing in *Local Population Studies*

Local Population Studies has traditionally been a forum in which both professional and non-professional historians can publish the results of their research. The journal is keen to attract more submissions from non-professionals, and to publish a greater proportion of research notes of 2,000-3,000 words, while still welcoming 'full articles' of 5,000-7,000 words. We are also happy to publish 'miscellanea' and other short contributions which may interest readers and which may be as little as 500 words in length. For members of the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS) these contributions would include pieces which might formerly have been sent to the LPSS *Newsletter*. If any reader has come across an interesting event or trend in a specific locality and would like to write a short piece about it, we should be happy to receive it.

Roger Schofield Local Population Studies Research Fund

Small research grants are available to researchers in the field of local population history from the Roger Schofield Local Population Studies Research Fund.

Subject to annual financial constraints, the Fund Committee will consider applications of between £75 and £1,000. Applicants should be aware, however, that grants exceeding £500 will only be awarded in exceptional cases.

The kinds of activities that the Fund is interested in supporting are travel to archives or libraries, overnight accommodation, the cost of photocopying or other reproduction of documents, data entry and programming, or the costs of putting data online to allow other historians to access them. The grants could also contribute to personal scholarships to enable research projects or dissertations to be completed. For further details and eligibility criteria see the Local Population Studies Society web site at http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/the-society/funding-for-research/ or contact Dr Chris Galley at chrisgalley77@gmail.com.

Successful applicants will be asked to write a short report about the research project to which the grant contributed, and to submit this for publication in *Local Population Studies*.

Editorial Board

We have room to expand the membership of the *Local Population Studies* Editorial Board by one or two people. If anyone is interested in joining the Board, please feel free to contact the Editor (editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk OR PRAHinde@aol.com) and I can provide more information about the duties and the time commitment involved.

Can I remind all readers that the members of the Editorial Board are always happy to offer advice and support in the editorial process to those who have limited experience of publishing their work? Please do send us anything you think might be worth publishing, even if it is in a very preliminary form, and we can suggest ways to improve it, or new avenues to investigate.

Thanks and acknowledgements

My thanks are due to the members of the Editorial Board for their work in producing this issue and for Antony Dales and his colleagues at Evolve Print for creating and distributing the hard copies.

Andrew Hinde

Notes on Contributors

Romola Davenport is Chair of the Local Population Studies Society. She is also a Senior Research Associate at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. She is a historical demographer and historical geographer interested in mortality, urbanisation and migration, particularly the long-run epidemiological consequences of urbanisation and rural-urban migration.

Following a career in the law, firstly as a solicitor and then as a judge, in retirement **Peter Jolly** obtained a research masters degree focussing on Victorian bigamy. He then obtained a PhD from Reading University for a thesis on early twentieth-century Berkshire domestic service.

Max Satchell is a Research Associate at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. He is a historical geographer with research interests in using GIS to explore diverse range of historical data including transport geography c.1360-1921 and various aspects of disease in the past.

Philip Thornborow was the Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives, advising the Church and those institutions preserving its records from 2007 to 2018. He is currently an editor of one of the Church's community archives. He was an academic librarian, and was awarded an MA in English Local History in 1997.

REPORT

Local Population Studies Society Spring Conference 2024: Women in History*

Andrew Hinde[1]

The 2024 Spring Conference of the Local Population Studies Society was held at Sanders Hall Postdoc Centre in Eddington Place, Cambridge, with the theme of 'Women in History', and an emphasis on the sources of data that historians might use to reveal the lives of women in the past.

Charmian Mansell (University of Cambridge) opened the Conference with a talk entitled: 'Ubiquitous but invisible: writing a history of female service in England, 1550-1650'. She pointed out that for this period there are no diaries or autobiographies to draw on to place the servant experience at the centre of research. Instead, the history of service has to be written using indirect and fragmentary pieces of evidence. For example, Church courts are good sources, as they dealt with a range of issues, such as pursuing delinquent parishioners, arbitrating in disputes, the payment of tithes and matrimonial issues. Depositions by witnesses and litigants in these courts can be useful: they are not necessarily direct evidence about the lives of servants but they provide 'guides to the plausible'. However, obtaining depositions for female servants is laborious, as they formed only 2 per cent of witnesses and so thousands of pages of records have to be read. If this work is carried out, however, something can be learned about the women who became servants in England at this time. The women ranged in age from 7 years to 60 years but most were aged 15-30 years. Poverty tended to encourage early entry into service and young servant women were highly vulnerable to exploitation by bad masters. On the other hand, for some women service could provide opportunities, for example to learn to read and write. Service agreements were often oral and varied widely, even departing from the rule that stated that contracts should be for at least six months. There are examples of servants marrying their masters after the latter became widowed. Whether a servant could leave a post to

* https://doi.org/10.35488/lps112.2024.6.

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marry someone else depended on the individual master but, in practice, there was little that a master could do if a servant were determined to leave.

The second talk was by **Amy Erickson** (University of Cambridge) on 'Female occupations and where to find them'. Amy's talk concerned the period before 1851 and the sources that could provide evidence about women's occupations. One example would be probate records. Since all a wife's goods belonged to her husband under the English law of coverture, inventories of married men's goods in their wills can be used to infer their wives' occupations. Local population listings for the pre-censal era can be useful, but they often only given the occupations of household heads, who were (by definition) mainly men. Occasionally (for example in Ealing 1599) female servants can be identified in these listings, as can nursechildren and hence wet nurses. The 'gold standard' so far as the description of female occupations is concerned is the listing for Cardington in 1782, which has been widely used by social and demographic historians.[2] Some individual-level returns survive for the first four censuses, but only for a few parishes, and these mention occupations such as washing or 'laundry work', 'schoolmistress' or 'school assistant'. The 1767 Return of Papists recorded occupations, and there is an online list of all Roman Catholics. Other sources that can furnish information about female occupations are account books, apprenticeship indentures and business cards. The latter reveal that many women were dealers and ran shops, and that women could take over their husbands' businesses when their husbands died.

Stephanie Brown (University of Warwick) gave a talk entitled 'Crime or male crime? The importance of gender in homicide studies'. This talk concerned homicides in the medieval period, and Stephanie began by exhibiting medieval murder maps of homicide in York, London and Oxford, which can be used to identify murders and to ascertain whether the perpetrators were male or female. Coroners' Rolls have been used to identify 1,500 cases of homicide in medieval Yorkshire. While these Rolls enable the identification of cases, coroners were only interested in who the suspects were and what the weapon was, not in the motive or why a murder happened. In Yorkshire, one in 50 homicides involved women. Since a similar proportion involved clergymen (who were all male) clergymen provide a comparison group. It turns out that the characteristics of the clergymen were similar to those of the suspects as a whole (who were almost all men), but that

2 See, for example, O. Saito, 'Who worked when? Lifetime labour-force participation in Cardington and Corfe Castle in the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries', *Local Population Studies* 22 (1979), pp. 14-29 (reprinted in D. Mills and K. Schürer (eds) *Local Communities in the Victorian Census Enumerators' Books* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 184-99; and in N. Goose (ed.) *Women's Work in Industrial England: Regional and Local Perspectives* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 209-27. The Cardington listing is available as D. Baker, *The Inhabitants of Cardington in 1782*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 52 (Luton, 1973).

the women had quite different characteristics. Only 36 per cent of women were sole suspects, and women were much more likely than were men to be accomplices. Nearly one in three of all homicides took place on a Sunday, as they tended to happen when people moved in unstructured environments, but the homicides in which women were involved were much more evenly spread across the week. Among men, knives and other weapons were most commonly used, whereas women tended to use 'tools', for example domestic utensils, that were not designed to cause harm.

Jenny Smart (University of Cambridge) then presented her paper ' "Probably climacteric': mental illness and the menopause in nineteenth-century asylum records and medical texts'. The main source of her data was the records of the County Pauper Lunatic Asylums in Derbyshire and Norfolk. The 'climacteric' refers to the period of life starting around the time of menopause and continuing into old age. The idea that episodes of insanity might be associated with the 'climacteric' was first elucidated in the 1860s, took off in the 1870s and peaked in the 1890s. 'Climacteric insanity' was primarily a female phenomenon, but there was a male form associated with retirement. All kinds of causes were suggested (such as the decline of the reproductive system, alcohol abuse, or hereditary causes), and the range of symptoms associated with the condition was broad (including melancholy, suicidal tendencies, delusions and jealousy). Confinement in an asylum was believed to be a treatment, and the records of asylums show that 'climacteric' admissions could constitute more than half of admissions of females aged 40-60 years. Other useful sources for studying the phenomenon include patient records, admissions registers and case books. The latter contain a great deal of information about patients, but were produced by the asylums and are often unorganised and written to defend the asylums against potential challenges.

Finally, **Samatha Williams** (University of Cambridge) presented her paper 'Locating poor women in the English archive, 1700-1850'. In this she talked about the sources she had used for her two books: *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle* and *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis.*[3] The sources are difficult because poor women are often invisible. However, overseers' accounts provide details of weekly payments. Williams looked at these in Campton and Shefford in Bedfordshire. Women tended to dominate payments under the Old Poor Law. By linking the payment records to family reconstitutions, we can find out which family members were still alive at the time of the payments and therefore trace the relationship between payments and the number of dependents over the life-cycle. The results show that young single women without children were not relieved in Campton and

3 S. Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History new series 81 (Woodbridge, 2011); S. Williams, *Unmarried Motherhood in the Metropolis, 1700-1850: Pregnancy, the Poor Law and Provision* (London, 2018).

Shefford. Unmarried mothers were relieved, as were single-parent families. Old women were paid a good pension and formed the bulk of those on relief. Old men were also relieved, and pensions were about 62 per cent of the average income of a labourer. Williams then turned her attention to unmarried mothers. Much of the documentary evidence relating to unmarried mothers derives from the authorities' desire to locate the father of each child born to an unmarried mother and compel him to support the mother and child. Other records are associated with the births themselves, such as those of lying-in hospitals and workhouses (where single women who were about to give birth took advantage of workhouses' lying-in facilities). The records of foundling hospitals also often include correspondence which reveals a lot about the lives of those giving up their children.

After the five main papers, a session was devoted to three 'flash talks'. These are very short talks of a few minutes in which the presenter quickly describes a research project. We had three such talks. The first was from **Lyn Boothman**, who described her demographic analysis across the generations of the women living in Long Melford, Suffolk in 1861 who were grandmothers. The second was from **Frances Richardson**, who examined the introduction of the Old Poor Law in Wales. Finally **Sue Paul** gave a short presentation on occupational migration, using the example of the paper-making industry.

The conference ended with a talk by **Andy Hinde,** Editor of *Local Population Studies*, on the process of writing for academic publication.

Thanks are due to Romola Davenport for organising the conference and for her assistants on the day. The venue was very convenient, being located close to the Madingley Road Park and Ride, where parking was free. Free of charge also to the Local Population Studies Society was the venue.

Malaria, Migration and Merry Widowers in the Essex Marshes 1690 – 1730*

Romola Davenport and Max Satchell[1]

Abstract

Scientific, medical and anecdotal evidence indicates that malaria was endemic in the coastal marshes of England before the early twentieth century. However the lethality of historical malaria in England remains contested. One of the most influential anecdotes regarding malaria is Daniel Defoe's early-eighteenth-century account of agues in the Essex marshes. Defoe reported that marsh farmers had very high rates of remarriage because they married brides from upland parishes who were unused to marsh diseases and who suffered very high mortality rates as a consequence. We tested the veracity of Defoe's anecdote using marriage registers for Essex parishes. Contrary to Defoe's claims, we found no evidence of high remarriage rates for marsh grooms and no evidence that men from marsh parishes married women from 'upland' parishes in unusual numbers. These results suggest, as Defoe himself hinted, that his informants may have been exaggerating the exceptional nature of marsh conditions, and that this anecdote should not be used as evidence for the health impacts of malaria in early modern England.

Introduction

Malaria remains a major disease in many tropical areas and is expected to extend its range under the influence of climate change. The disease is caused by several species of the *Plasmodium* parasite and the parasite life cycle involves transmission by mosquitos that feed on infected human hosts. The disease therefore flourishes in environments where mosquito vectors are abundant, most notably tropical and equatorial regions. However the historical range of malaria was much more extensive and included temperate areas of Europe as far north as Finland and Russia.[2] In England malaria was endemic in some coastal marsh areas, most notably

* https://doi.org/10.35488/lps112.2024.10.

1 Romola Davenport: rjd23@cam.ac.uk; Max Satchell: aems2@cam.ac.uk.

2 O.S. Knottnerus, 'Malaria around the North Sea: a survey', in G. Wefer, W.H. Berger, K.-E. Behre and E. Jansen (eds), *Climate Development and History of the North Atlantic Realm* (Berlin,

the marshes of Essex and Kent that bordered the Thames estuary.[3] Early modern descriptions of 'ague', marsh fevers' and 'tertian' and 'quartan' fevers accord in many instances with clinical symptoms from modern laboratory-confirmed cases, and these diseases were associated by contemporaries with marshes and poorly-drained land. However definitive proof of indigenous malaria was lacking until the identification of the malarial parasite in the 1880s and the development of microscopy-based blood tests. Examination of blood samples in the early twentieth century confirmed the presence of indigenous malaria in residents of the Essex marshes who had never travelled to known malarial areas or had contact with imported cases, and identified the indigenous malarial species as *Plasmodium vivax*.

P. vivax is the dominant malarial species in tropical areas of Asia and Latin America and is often dubbed 'benign malaria' to distinguish it from the much more lethal *P. falciparum* found predominantly in Africa. Indigenous malaria also appears to have been a relatively mild disease in northern Europe by the nineteenth century. Sweden and Denmark introduced compulsory notification of malaria cases in 1861 and 1862 respectively, and the clinical descriptions and geographical distribution of cases fit well with the predicted epidemiology of northern *P. vivax* strains. Malarial deaths were rare and areas with high malaria prevalence were not characterised by excess mortality.[4]

Despite the reputed low mortality of *P. vivax* malaria, a number of historians have argued that endemic malaria was associated with very high death rates in England and in Scandinavia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[5] The most

Heidelberg, 2002), pp. 339–53; L. Huldén, L. Huldén, and K. Heliövaara, 'Endemic malaria: an "indoor" disease in northern Europe. Historical data analysed', *Malaria Journal* 4 (2005), article 19, https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2875-4-19; T.T. Chen, F.C. Ljungqvist, H. Castenbrandt, F. Hildebrandt, M.M. Ingholt, J.C. Heson, J. Ankarklev, K. Seftigen and H.W. Linderholm, 'The spatiotemporal distribution of historical malaria cases in Sweden: a climatic perspective', *Malaria Journal* 20 (2021), article 212, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12936-021-03744-9; L.J. Bruce-Chwatt and J. de Zulueta, *The Rise and Fall of Malaria in Europe* (Oxford, 1980).

3 W.D.L. Smith, 'Malaria and the Thames', *The Lancet* 267 (1956), pp. 433–6; M.J. Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1997).

4 Chen *et al.*, 'Spatiotemporal distribution'; M.M. Ingholt, 'The epidemiology and medical history of malaria in nineteenth-century Denmark' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Roskilde, 2022). Malaria did not become a notifiable disease in England and Wales until 1919.

5 Chen *et al.*, 'Spatiotemporal distribution'; Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*; M.J. Dobson, 'History of malaria in England', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 82, supplement 17 (1989), pp. 3–7; M.J. Dobson, 'Death and disease in the Romney Marsh area in the 17th to 19th centuries', in J. Eddison, M. Gardiner and A. Long (eds), *Romney Marsh: Environmental Change and Human Occupation in a Coastal Lowland* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 166–81; A. Nicholls, 'Fenland ague in the nineteenth century', *Medical History* 44 (2000), pp. 513–30, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0025727300067107; Huldén *et al.*, 'Endemic malaria'; L. Huldén, and L. Huldén, 'The decline of malaria in Finland – the impact of the vector and social

compelling evidence for the lethality of malaria in England is provided by Mary Dobson's influential work on marshy and upland areas of south-eastern England in the period *c.*1550-1850.[6] Dobson used counts of burials and baptisms from parish registers to demonstrate very high mortality in the marshes of Kent and the Thames estuary and hypothesised that malaria was a key driver of this excessive mortality. Acknowledging the lower virulence of *P. vivax* malaria compared with *P. falciparum* strains she argued that the main impact of malaria in England was probably to cause debility (via anaemia and liver damage) that exacerbated the lethality of other infections and co-morbidities. She also argued that this pattern of heightened mortality in marsh areas waned after the mid eighteenth century, a trend she attributed to drainage as well as other more general improvements in health and land management.

In addition to demographic evidence of high death rates in marsh areas, Dobson drew on a wealth of literary, medical, official and anecdotal evidence to document the presence of malaria and to build a case for its lethality. This paper examines one of the most compelling of these anecdotal sources relating to the virulence of endemic malaria, Daniel Defoe's account of malaria in the Essex marshes.

Defoe commenced his famous *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724) by describing a journey from London along the northern coast of the Thames estuary through the ancient Essex Hundreds of Barnstable, Rochford and Dengie (see Figure 1).[7] This area was characterised by extensive salt marshes ramified with rivers and tidal creeks, an area that Defoe described as 'both unhealthy, and unpleasant' but also as very rich grazing land.[8] He concluded his brief description of the three hundreds with an anecdote that has been widely quoted by historians as evidence of the historical malignancy of malaria in this area (and by extension other marshy areas of Britain). The anecdote is repeated in full below:

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variables', *Malaria Journal* 8 (2009), article 94, https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2875-8-94; P. Reiter, 'From Shakespeare to Defoe: malaria in England in the Little Ice Age', *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 6 (2000), pp. 1–11, https://doi.org/10.3201/eid0601.000101; K.G. Kuhn, D.H. Campbell-Lendrum, B. Armstrong and C.R. Davies, 'Malaria in Britain: past, present, and future', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 100 (2003), pp. 9,997–10,001. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1233687100.

6 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*; M.J. Dobson, ' "Marsh fever" - the geography of malaria in England', *Journal of Historical Geography* 6 (1980), pp. 357–89, https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-7488(80)90145-0; Dobson, 'Death and disease in the Romney Marsh area'; Dobson, 'History of malaria in England'.

7 D. Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 3 vols (London, 1724-1726). This may be read online at https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Defoe.

8 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. 7.

> I have one Remark more, before I leave this damp part of the World, and which I cannot omit on the Womens Account; namely, that I took notice of a strange Decay of the Sex here; insomuch, that all along this County it was very frequent to meet with Men that had had from five to six, to fourteen or fifteen Wives; nay, and some more; and I was inform'd that in the Marshes on the other Side the River over-against Candy [Canvey] Island, there was a Farmer, who was then living with the five and Twentieth Wife, and that his Son who was but about 35 Years old, had already had about fourteen; indeed this part of the Story, I only had by Report, tho' from good Hands too; but the other is well known, and easie to be inquired in to, about Fobbing, Curringham, Thundersley, Benfleet, Prittlewell, Wakering, Great Stambridge, Cricksea, Burnham, Dengy, and other Towns of the like Situation: The reason, as a merry Fellow told me, who said he had had about a Dozen and a half of Wives, (tho' I found afterwards he Fibb'd a little) was this; That they being bred in the Marshes themselves, and season'd to the Place, did pretty well with it; but that they always went up into the Hilly Country, or to speak their own language into the Uplands for a Wife: That when they took the young Lasses out of the wholesome and fresh Air, they were healthy, fresh, and clear, and well; but when they came out of their native Air into the Marshes among the Fogs and Damps, there they presently chang'd their Complexion, got an Ague or two, and seldom held it above half a Year, or a Year at most; and then, said he, we go to the Uplands again, and fetch another; so that marrying of Wives was reckon'd a kind of good Farm to them; It is true, the Fellow told this in a kind of Drollery, and Mirth; but the Fact, for all that, is certainly true; and that they have abundance of Wives by that very means: Nor is it less true, that the Inhabitants in these Places do not hold it out, as in other Countries, and as first you seldom meet with very ancient People among the Poor, as in other Places we do, so, take it one with another, not one half of the Inhabitants are Natives of the Place; but such as from other Countries, or in other Parts of this County settle here for the Advantage of good Farms; for which I appeal to any impartial Enquiry, having myself Examin'd into it critically in several Places.[9]

This quotation has been reproduced by historians and scientists to support two main points with respect to malaria in Britain. First, it has been used to demonstrate the lethality of malaria, which is assumed to be the cause of the high death rates of

9 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 1, pp. 14-15.

brides from upland areas.[10] Second, it has been used to demonstrate a characteristic feature of malaria, which is the difference in susceptibility between those who live permanently in malarial areas and newcomers from non-malarial areas.[11] Malarial infection confers short-lived immunity on those who survive an attack. Regular reinfection sustains this immunity and therefore long-term residents of malarial areas may suffer few or no acute effects of malarial infection. However, newcomers from non-malarial areas lack acquired immunity and therefore experience more severe symptoms if infected. Defoe specifically described the marsh farmers as 'seasoned' to the local environment and relatively immune to its malign influence. Brides from 'upland' areas, on the other hand, were healthy when they left their upland parishes, but quickly sickened in the marsh atmosphere, 'changed their complexion, got an ague or two' and died.[12]

Dobson used Defoe's quotation repeatedly as evidence of the acquired resistance of marsh residents to malaria.[13] While Defoe was speaking only of the Essex marshes, Dobson used his anecdote to describe the immunity of long-term marsh residents throughout her study area of Essex, Kent and Sussex in south-eastern England.[14] Other scholars have similarly extrapolated Defoe's anecdote to other marshy areas.[15] Alice Nicholls in her study of malaria in the Cambridgeshire Fens in the nineteenth century relates that:

> Every couple of years men from the Fens would visit the surrounding upland counties, such as Nottinghamshire, in search of new brides, their previous wives having succumbed to the ague. This event tended to occur

10 Dobson, 'History of malaria in England'; Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, p. 318; Reiter, 'From Shakespeare to Defoe'; Nicholls, 'Fenland ague'; G.H.F. Nuttal, L. Cobbett, and T. Strangeways-Pigg, 'Studies in relation to malaria. I. The geographical distribution of Anopheles in relation to the former distribution of ague in England', *Journal of Hygiene* 1 (1901), pp. 4–44; P. MacDougall, 'Malaria: its influence on a North Kent community', *Archaeologia Cantiana* 95 (1979), pp. 255–64.

11 B. Cracknell, *Canvey Island: the History of a Marshland Community,* University of Leicester Department of Local History Occasional Papers 12 (Leicester, 1959); Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, p. 318; R.A. Hutchinson, 'Mosquito borne diseases in England: past, present and future risks, with special reference to malaria in the Kent marshes' (unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University, 2004); R. Kendall, 'Past endemic malaria and adaptive responses in the fens and marshlands of eastern England' (unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University, 2014). See also Nicholls, 'Fenland ague'; and Reiter, 'From Shakespeare to Defoe'.

12 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. 14.

13 Dobson, 'History of malaria in England', p. 3; Dobson, 'Marsh fever', pp. 374-5; Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, p. 318.

14 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, p. 339.

15 For recent examples see Hutchinson, *Mosquito Borne Diseases*, p. 22; Reiter, 'From Shakespeare to Defoe'.

> every two to three years because the new wives, being strangers to the Fens, would quickly become infected, and not having encountered this disease in their upland parishes, they had little immunity to it and consequently died. This oral tradition is corroborated by evidence in Defoe's book that this practice also took place in the marshes of Essex.[16]

However Nicholls provides no evidence for any oral tradition in the Fens, and the only source she cites for this practice is Defoe's account of the Essex marshes.

More sceptical scholars have quoted Defoe with greater caution. William MacArthur in his 'Brief story of English malaria' (1951) contrasted Defoe's account of the rapid remarriage of marsh farmers and the short lives of Essex marsh residents with his account of the East Anglian Fens where Defoe asserted that 'the natives of the Fen country, especially those who are used to it, live healthy except now and then for an ague which they make light of, and there are many ancient people among them.'[17]

While Defoe referred to ague in the Fens and to the phenomenon of seasoning (of 'natives … who are used to it'), his comment on the prevalence of 'ancient people' in the Fens contrasts with the apparent rarity of the elderly poor in the Essex marshes.[18] Defoe was relieved to leave the region 'for 'tis a horrid Air for a Stranger to breathe in'.[19] However he clearly did not regard the Fens as being as unhealthy as the Essex marshes. Notably, Defoe also had little to say about the unhealthiness of several other major areas of coastal marsh. The Romney marshes, the most extensive area of marshes in Dobson's study area, and which she regarded as particularly unwholesome, were described by Defoe without any comment on the quality of the air or the health of the inhabitants.

The Essex historian Margaret Tabor dismissed Defoe's account of high bridal turnover in the Essex marshes as implausible.[20] She conducted a search of the marriage registers of a number of Essex parishes and found what she regarded as very few examples of men who remarried frequently. She stated 'the records do not show any evidence to support Defoe's story beyond the fact that five wives in a man's lifetime was not very uncommon and that the inhabitants in general and the infants in particular did not live very long'.[21] Tabor provided little detail regarding how she conducted her study but she did give specific examples of certain men

16 Nicholls, 'Fenland ague', p. 528.
17 Cited in W. MacArthur, 'A brief story of English malaria', *British Medical Bulletin* 8 (1951), pp. 76–9, here at p. 77.
18 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. 15.
19 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 2, p. 145.
20 M. Tabor, 'Marsh marriage', *Essex Journal* 4 (1969), pp. 215–21.
21 Tabor, 'Marsh marriage', p. 217.

who she thought had remarried frequently, although in the 12 marsh parishes she examined she seems to have identified only one man whom she thought might have married as many as five times. Tabor evidently thought that five wives was not a large enough number to validate Defoe's claims regarding the high turnover of marsh wives. However there are reasons to think that Tabor's method would have produced an undercount of remarriages, because examination of individual parish registers would omit the marriages of residents of those parishes who married elsewhere.

In this paper we test whether Defoe's claims regarding marriage patterns in the Essex marshes are supported by demographic evidence. We extend Tabor's work by tracing, where possible, all the marriages of residents of the Essex marsh parishes identified by Defoe. We begin by setting out the demographic implications of Defoe's account and how these might be expected to manifest in marriage patterns as recorded in marriage registers. We then test for evidence of the types of patterns predicted by Defoe.

Testing Defoe's claims

Defoe's first claim is that marshland farmers married wives from 'upland' parishes. The passage is brief and so we are not told why marshmen were marrying women from outside the marshes instead of locally-born women. However Defoe did begin the passage with a comment on 'the strange Decay of the [female] Sex', implying that, in the marshes, sex ratios were skewed towards men, a situation that would make it harder for marsh men to find a bride in their own or neighbouring marsh parishes.[22] Defoe also concluded with the comment that 'not one half of the Inhabitants are Natives of the Place' but instead came from elsewhere in Essex or beyond to exploit the agricultural riches of the marshes.[23] Dobson characterised early modern marsh parishes as frontier communities dominated by men, and this impression is supported by later evidence of persistently skewed sex ratios in early nineteenth century censuses.[24] This pattern could have arisen for several reasons. First, the Essex marshes are likely to have been affected by sex differences in migration and labour markets, as men were drawn in to work in agriculture while women were drawn away to work in London (which was characterised since the late seventeenth century by an excess of women over men due to high demand for female labour especially in domestic service). Secondly, married women may have experienced higher death rates than their husbands, even if they were locally born

22 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. 15.
23 Defoe, *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 1, p. 15.
24 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, pp. 181, 216, 301.

in the marshes, if they were more susceptible to malaria during pregnancy. In areas where *P. vivax* malaria remains endemic, malarial infection is associated with higher morbidity in pregnancy and with higher rates of infant and maternal mortality.[25] Indeed, evidence from family reconstitution studies provides indirect support for this pattern. Among the 26 parishes reconstituted by E.A. Wrigley and his colleagues, marsh parishes were associated with high neonatal and maternal mortality relative to other parishes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[26] Therefore marsh men may have married outsiders because there was an insufficiency of locally-born women. An alternative explanation is that marsh-born women preferred to marry outside the marshes, something we will test.

Defoe also claimed that marshland farmers remarried frequently because their upland wives succumbed quickly to the lethal marsh environment. The pattern he describes implies that death rates were especially high amongst married women, and amongst recent immigrants. To summarise, Defoe's description of the Essex marshes implies that:

(1) marsh men often married wives from upland parishes;
(2) brides from upland parishes experienced very high mortality rates when living in marsh parishes; and
(3) marsh men were frequently widowed and experienced high remarriage rates.

Testing whether these behaviours and experiences really occurred is not straightforward. Our main sources of demographic data before the first census in 1801 and the advent of civil registration of births and deaths in 1837 are parish registers of burials, baptisms and marriages. These are often terse lists of events registered in the parish, and their patterns depend on the composition of the parish population and on local cultural and socio-economic as well as epidemiological factors. They therefore require careful interpretation. A second issue, discussed later in the paper, is whether the phenomena described by Defoe applied only to farmers, who formed a minority of men in marsh parishes.

The most obvious place to start our inquiry is with burial registers. Defoe claimed that women suffered higher mortality rates than men in the marshes due to ague, and that married women were at especial risk (as a result of their lack of resistance to local conditions and possibly also because of heightened vulnerability

25 A.P. Phyo, P. Dahal, M. Mayxay and E.A. Ashley, 'Clinical impact of vivax malaria: A collection review', *PLoS Medicine* 19 (2022), e1003890, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003890.

26 See E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837* (Cambridge, 1997).

during pregnancy). Therefore *a priori* we would expect to see a high ratio of burials of wives relative to husbands in marsh parishes, because we expect many marsh men to have outlived their wives. Unfortunately, however, burial registers are not much help in identifying such patterns. While English burial registers often assiduously recorded the marital status of married or widowed women, they almost never recorded the marital status of men, and this makes it impossible to distinguish the burials of married from single or widowed men. This limitation therefore precludes a direct comparison between death rates of spouses. At first glance a simpler alternative might be to compare counts of adult female to adult male burials in marsh parishes to detect sex imbalances in mortality. However this is also a problematic measure, because the sex ratio of burials in a parish depends not only on the relative longevity of men and women, but also on the sex ratio of the living population, which was probably skewed towards men (as discussed above). Therefore any excess mortality amongst women that may have occurred could have been masked by large numbers of male burials simply because there were more men in these parishes than women.[27]

Given the difficulties of interpreting burial patterns, can we test Defoe's claims using marriage registers? Marriage registers often recorded marital status (single or widowed) and parish of residence of both bride and groom. Therefore they can in theory be used to identify marriages between residents of marsh and upland parishes and, more specifically, the marriages between marsh widowers and upland brides that Defoe claimed were so abundant. The registers should also allow us to identify individual men who remarried frequently, and to test whether remarriage was unusually common for marsh men.

The first step is to formulate what we would expect if Defoe were correct. If wives of marsh men died in rapid succession and marsh men resorted to upland parishes to source new brides, then we would expect *a priori* to see large numbers of marriages involving widowers from marsh parishes and single or widowed women from upland parishes. But what would constitute an *unusually* large number of such marriages? At first glance an obvious approach is to compare marriage patterns in marsh parishes with patterns in non-marsh parishes. However we chose not to take this approach because the results of such a study would be difficult to interpret. This is because rates of remarriage and exogamous marriage depend not

27 We might also expect that, if married women suffered high mortality relative to their husbands, we should find relatively few widows in the burial records compared to married women (certainly relative to the ratio of widowed to married women in the burial records of upland parishes). However the preponderance of widows in the living populations of parishes depends not only on mortality rates but also on remarriage rates, and remarriage rates may have been higher for widows in marsh parishes given the high (male-biased) sex ratios in these parishes. Therefore, widows may be scarce compared to married women in marish burial registers because widows remarried quickly in these parishes.

only on the levels of adult mortality in the parish, but also on economic, demographic and cultural factors that regulated marriage practices. For example, the time to remarriage for widows was generally much longer than for widowers, and depended on the number of living children a widow already had and her financial position, factors that could vary from parish to parish.[28] The tendency to choose a spouse from outside one's own parish also depended on the size of the local marriage market and on opportunities for meeting potential spouses.

Our approach sidesteps the problems of comparing parishes of different types and instead compares marriage patterns by sex *within* marsh parishes. Since the behaviours and experiences that Defoe described were sex-specific, we should expect to find very different marriage patterns for men and women from marsh parishes. We test (1) whether marsh men had markedly higher rates of remarriage compared with marsh women; and (2) whether marsh men were more likely to marry a spouse from outside the parish compared with marsh women. We discuss the limitations of these approaches below.

Methods

Marsh parishes

To identify 'marsh' parishes we used a Geographical Information Systems dataset of ancient marsh grazing land created by Adrian Gascoyne and Maria Medlycott as part of the Essex Historic Grazing Marshes project.[29] They used the 1777 Chapman and Andre map of Essex to identify and map areas of ancient coastal grazing marsh, and generously allowed us the use of their dataset. The distribution of ancient coastal grazing marshes corresponded fairly closely to land that is currently 5 m or less above sea level (see Figure 1). These ancient grazing marshes were created by the progressive enclosure of salt marshes by sea walls and the digging of drainage ditches, a process that was under way since at least the period of Roman occupation. This process created large pools of stagnant brackish water behind the sea walls and in ditches that were ideal breeding sites for the main malarial vector *Anopheles atroparvus.*[30]

Figure 2C shows the percentage area of each parish that was coastal grazing marsh in the Essex hundreds described by Defoe, and in adjacent 'upland' areas.

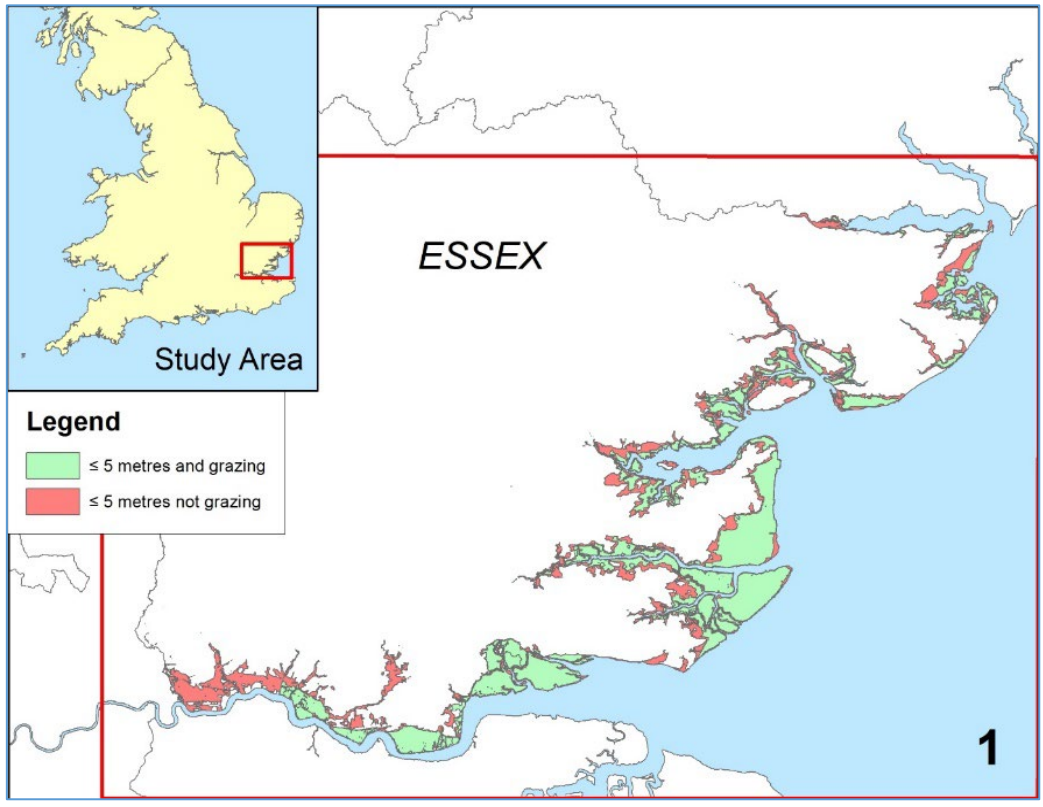
28 Wrigley *et al.*, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution*, pp. 171-82.

29 A. Gascoyne and M. Medlycott, *Essex Historic Grazing Marsh Project* (Chelmsford, 2014).

30 F.M. Hawkes, J.M. Medlock, A.G.C. Vaux, R.A. Cheke and G. Gibson, *Wetland Mosquito Survey Handbook: Assessing Suitability of British Wetlands for Mosquitoes* (Chatham, 2020), pp. 90-1.

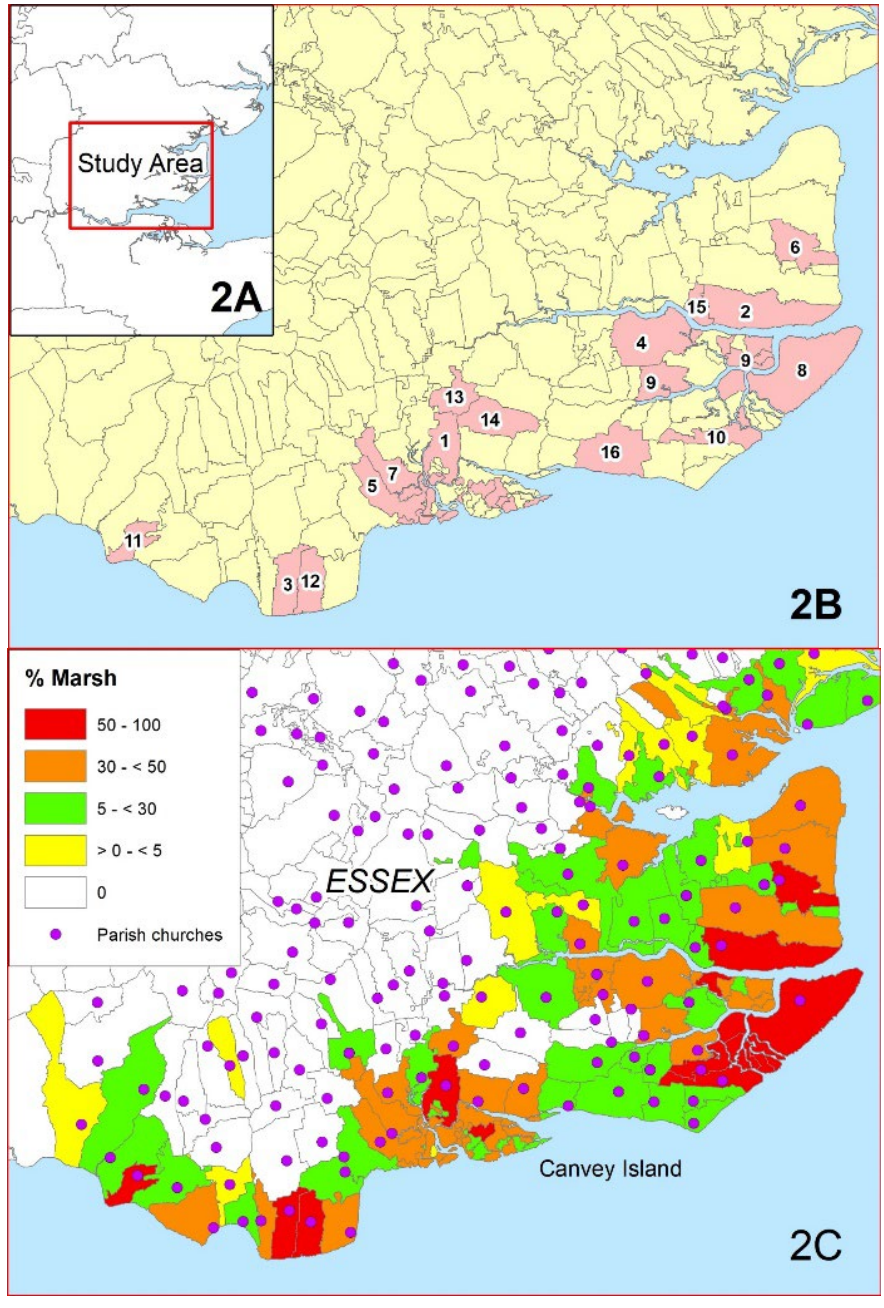
The parishes for which we collected full marriage data are indicated in Figure 2B and in Table 1. We included all the parishes singled out as unhealthy by Defoe, together with several additional parishes in the same hundreds that contained large areas of marshland. While it is not clear from Figure 2, many parishes that were predominantly located in upland areas also had separate, detached parts of the parish that gave the inhabitants access to valuable coastal marshes and to grazing

Figure 1 **Ancient grazing marshes and low-lying land, Essex**



Source: Five-metre contours generated from OS Terrain® 50 raster data (Ordnance Survey, United Kingdom) and ancient grazing marshes area from A. Gascoyne and M. Medlycott, *Essex Historic Grazing Marsh Project* (Chelmsford, 2014).

Figure 2 **Location of study parishes (2A, 2B) and percentage marshland per parish (2C)**



Notes: Figure 2B indicates the marsh parishes included in the study, and those named by Defoe: 1 Bowers Gifford, 2 Burnham-on-Crouch, 3 Chadwell St Mary, 4 Canewdon, 5 Corringham, 6 Dengie, 7 Fobbing, 8 Foulness, 9 Great Stambridge, 10 Great Wakering, 11 Wennington, 12 West Tilbury, 13 North Benfleet, 14 Thundersley, 15 Creeksea and 16 Prittlewell.

Source: A. Gascoyne and M. Medlycott, *Essex Historic Grazing Marsh Project* (Chelmsford, 2014).

rights. Canvey Island for example (indicated in Figure 2C) was divided into detached portions of grazing land belonging to nearby parishes. Hence some areas of marshy coastal land are coded in Figure 2C as having a low percentage of marsh because they belonged to parishes located mainly on higher land. Conversely, parishes that were predominantly 'dry' could contain large areas of marsh. This was the case for North Benfleet. The main part of the parish (labelled 13 in Figure 2B) contained no marsh. However, one third of the parish area consisted of a detached portion of marshland located on Canvey Island.

Figure 2C also shows the position of the parish church of each parish. We used this information to estimate how close the majority of the parochial population would have lived to marshlands. This was an area of nucleated settlements, and the earliest Ordnance Survey maps available for Essex indicated that the parish church was generally located in the main settlement. We calculated the distance between the parish church (as a proxy for the location of the majority of the parochial population) and the nearest marsh edge for each parish (Table 1). *A. atroparvus* mosquitoes breed in brackish water and the newly-hatched mosquitoes fly to find shelter and food. They can fly up to several kilometers and live and overwinter preferentially in barns and houses.[31] Therefore, even in parishes without extensive marshes, it is possible that the inhabitants were routinely exposed to mosquito bites, if they lived in proximity to the marshlands.

We used these two measures of 'exposure' to potentially malarial conditions to define parishes in our study as 'marsh', 'marginal' or 'upland'. Table 1 shows the parishes we focussed on in our study, ranked by the percentage area of marshland. We defined marsh parishes as those parishes where 5 per cent or more of the land area was deemed ancient grazing marsh. We chose a threshold of 5 per cent marshland because this definition incorporated 10 of the 11 parishes singled out by Defoe as particularly unhealthy (Burnham-on-Crouch, Creeksea, Curringham, Dengie, Fobbing, Great Stambridge, Great Wakering, North Benfleet, South Benfleet and Prittlewell). The remaining parish, Thundersley, is located on a clay

31 Hawkes *et al.*, *Wetland Mosquito Survey*, pp. 62-3.

Table 1 **Characteristics and summary of data available for sample marsh parishes and parishes named by Defoe**

Parish	Per-cent-age marsh	Distance to edge of marsh (m)	Type	Percentage of marriages with marital status given for both partners	Percentage of marriages with residence given for both partners	Number of marriages	Date range	Years missing or illegible
FOULNESS	94	0	Marsh	6.5	40.3	62	1690-1730	
WENNINGTON	64	64	Marsh	0.0	50.0	20	1712-1730	1690-1711
BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH*	59	1,043	Marsh	28.6	13.2	189	1690-1730	1691-1694
CHADWELL ST MARY	58	582	Marsh	39.7	63.2	68	1690-1730	
DENGIE*	55	600	Marsh	17.9	82.1	28	1704-1730	1690-1703
BOWERS GIFFORD	54	183	Marsh	76.5	88.2	17	1690-1730	1722-1729
GREAT WAKERING*	54	210	Marsh	62.5	19.6	56	1690-1722	1722-1730
WEST TILBURY	50	157	Marsh	37.5	57.8	64	1690-1730	1692-1694
CORRINGHAM*	48	295	Marsh	47.1	50.6	85	1690-1730	
FOBBING*	45	274	Marsh	81.8	54.5	55	1690-1730	
CANEWDON	37	1,009	Marsh	66.2	77.9	77	1690-1730	
GREAT STAMBRIDGE*	34	749	Marsh	17.3	40.0	75	1690-1730	1696-1701, 1706-1708
NORTH BENFLEET*	33	2,806	Marsh	32.7	69.4	49		
South Benfleet*	33	138	Marsh					1690-1730

Table 1 ***Continued***

Parish	Per-cent-age marsh	Distance to edge of marsh (m)	Type	Percentage of marriages with marital status given for both partners	Percentage of marriages with residence given for both partners	Number of marriages	Date range	Years missing or illegible
PRITTLEWELL*	5	2,885	Marsh	16.5	28.3	127	1691-1711	1699-1700, 1712-1728
Creeksea*	5	1,102	Marsh					1690-1730
Thundersley*	0	2,398	Upland	62.5	37.5	16	1690-1730	1697-1721

Notes: The sample marsh parishes used in this analysis are named in UPPER CASE; and the parishes named by Defoe are indicated with an asterisk (*).South Benfleet was named by Defoe as 'Benfleet' and was a marsh parish, but the registers were too poorly kept to warrant extraction. No registers were available for Creeksea before 1769.

Sources: Essex parish registers: see Essex Archives Online, *Parish Registers* [n.d.] https://www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk/ParishRegisters.aspx [accessed 1 August 2024] and FindMyPast [n.d.] (https://www.findmypast.co.uk/);
A. Gascoyne and M. Medlycott, *Essex Historic Grazing Marsh Project* (Chelmsford, 2014). D. Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 3 vols (London, 1724-1726). The relevant sections of this may be read online at https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Defoe/2.

ridge behind the coast and contained no marshes. Nor was it very close to marshes (the church and the main settlement were roughly 2.4 km from the nearest area of marsh). We therefore classified Thundersley as upland.[32] Most of the marsh parishes in our sample contained large areas of marsh and the main settlement was located within roughly a kilometre of the marsh edge. North Benfleet andPrittlewell were atypical because they both had detached areas of marsh at some distance from the main settlement (Table 1). In the case of North Benfleet these detached marshlands comprised one third of the parish area and so it seemed likely that many of the inhabitants would have been exposed to marsh environments in the course of tending cattle, cutting reeds, fishing, hunting and the exploitation of other resources associated with the coastal portions of the parish. Prittlewell, however, included only a small area of marsh, and could perhaps have been classified as marginal rather than marsh.[33] All Essex parishes with marshes where the area of coastal marshland was less than 5 per cent of the parish area were categorized as marginal. We defined 'upland' parishes as parishes with no coastal marshes. The term 'upland' is used advisedly, because the whole of Essex is less than 150 m above sea level. Defoe himself indicated that 'uplands' was a local term for what he preferred to call 'hilly country'.

Marriage registers

Complete transcripts of surviving marriage registers for Essex parishes are available as searchable entries via the genealogical website FindMyPast. However, we required access to the underlying datasets and these are not publicly available. We therefore extracted information on marriages in selected parishes directly from images of the original registers available through the Essex Record Office.[34] Using marriage registers for the parishes named by Defoe, as well as several additional marsh parishes in the same area (Foulness, Wennington, Chadwell St Mary, Bowers Gifford, West Tilbury and Canewdon: see Figure 2B), we extracted details of marital status (single or widowed) and parish of residence for marriages in the four decades flanking the period when Defoe may have visited the marshes, *c.* 1690-1730 (Table 1). This exercise identified marriages that took place in 14 marsh parishes. However, it only identified marriages that occurred *in* these marsh parishes: it did not capture the marriages of residents of these parishes who married in other parishes outside our sample. Where brides and grooms came from different

32 Defining the parish as marginal or omitting it from analysis did not change the results substantially.

33 Defining Prittlewell as marginal did not change the results substantially.

34 See https://www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk/ParishRegisters.aspx [accessed November 2022 to March 2023].

parishes then the marriage could take place and be registered in either parish (or more rarely in a third parish). Indeed Keith Snell argues that, by the second half of the eighteenth century at least, it was the norm for marriages to take place in the bride's parish.[35] This was a critical issue for our study because we were particularly interested in identifying marriages of marsh residents to upland partners, and many of these marriages may have taken place in upland parishes. In order to identify non-local marriages of marsh residents we used the search engine facility in FindMyPast to search for all marriages in the years 1690-1730 that involved a bride or groom whose parish of residence was identified as one of the marsh parishes in our sample. We recorded the parish in which they married, the parish their marriage partner belonged to, and the marital status of each partner at marriage. We identified marriages of marsh residents in a wide range of Essex parishes, and these were classified into 'marsh', 'marginal' or 'upland' as described in the previous section.

The amount of detail given in the marriage registers varied. Some registers recorded only the names of the bride and groom and the date, and so were of no use for our present purposes. On the other hand, some registers recorded the marital status and parish of residence of brides and grooms for every entry. Unfortunately such full description was relatively unusual (Table 1). In most cases the place of residence of the groom or bride was recorded only occasionally. In these cases the residence recorded was generally a parish other than the marriage parish and this suggested that the incumbent noted the parish of residence only when one of the marriage partners was resident outside the parish of marriage.[36] However it was not possible to tell whether this was indeed the case, or whether omission of residence information was more random. We therefore tested our hypothesis involving inter-parochial marriage patterns on two assumptions; (1) that omission was random (in which case we used only entries where parish of residence was noted for both partners); or (2) that those entries without any mention of residence referred to marriages where both parties were 'of the parish'. Similarly, where marital status was given for some but not all brides and grooms then we either (1) used only entries where marital status was recorded for both partners; or (2) assumed that entries lacking a descriptor referred to single persons.

Most of the variation in registration practices reflected the scrupulousness of the incumbent priest or his agent (the curate or churchwarden), and therefore a run of years of excellent recording could be followed by an abrupt reduction in

35 K.D.M. Snell, 'English rural societies and geographical marital endogamy, 1700-1837', *Economic History Review* 55 (2002), pp. 262–98, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0289.00221.

36 Following Snell, 'English rural societies'. This assumption is only justifiable, as Snell argued, where the marriage registers appear to have been well kept, and where residence was recorded at least intermittently.

information content upon a change of incumbent. This begs the question of why we did not confine our study to the period after 1753, when Hardwicke's Act 'for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriage' improved marriage registration (and led to the use in most cases of printed forms). While this approach would indeed have provided much fuller information on residence at marriage in particular, the second half of the eighteenth century was, according to Dobson, the period when malaria receded as a cause of significant mortality. Therefore it was possible that the phenomenon that Defoe described was disappearing as marriage registration improved, and so would not have been detectable using post-1753 evidence. The variation in registration practices between parishes is described in Table 1. Where registers did not provide usable information for the whole period of analysis (1690-1730) then shorter periods of good recording were used. Parishes with long gaps in recording or with no usable detail were omitted.

Results

We tested two hypotheses, and we discuss our results with respect to each hypothesis in turn.

Hypothesis 1: Marsh men experienced higher rates of remarriage than marsh women. Formally, remarriages involving widowed marsh residents would form a higher proportion of marriages for marsh men than for marsh women.[37]

Altogether we identified 850 marriages of men and 937 marriages of women who were resident at marriage in the 14 marsh parishes in our study (Table 1), and who married within Essex in the period 1690-1730. Table 2 shows the percentage of marriages of marsh residents who were single or widowed at marriage by sex (excluding Wennington because marital status was poorly recorded, as shown in Table 1). Of marriages involving marsh grooms 11.0 per cent were remarriages (where the groom had been married before) (Table 2, column (2)). For marsh brides the comparable figure was 19.0 per cent of marriages (where the bride had been married before) (Table 2 column (1)). The proportion of remarriages for marsh women was substantially higher than for marsh men ($p < 0.001$, two-sided t-test of

37 In fact our null hypothesis was that there was no difference in the proportions of marriages that were remarriages by sex of marsh resident. We therefore used two-sided t-tests, which tested the likelihood that the proportions of remarriages in each sample differed (in either direction) simply due to chance. The likelihood is indicated by the p-value. For example, a p-value of 0.05 indicates that there was a 5 per cent probability that the observed difference in proportions between brides and grooms arose by chance rather than due to a true difference between the samples.

proportions). This was also the case when we confined the sample to marriages where marital status was explicitly stated for both bride and groom (Table 2 columns (3) and (4)). In this case 42.2 per cent of marriages involving female residents of our marsh parish sample were remarriages, compared with 33.5 per cent of those involving male residents ($p = 0.05$). This result was the opposite of what we would expect if Defoe were right and marsh men remarried unusually frequently.

It is also notable that the total number of marriages involving marsh women was larger than the number involving marsh men (921 compared with 838).

Table 2 Marital status of marsh residents at marriage, 1690-1730

Marital Status	Sample includes entries with no stated marital status		Sample excludes marriages with missing information on marital status	
	(1) bride	(2) groom	(3) bride	(4) groom
Single	81.0% (746)	89.0% (746)	57.8% (148)	66.5% (149)
Widowed	19.0% (175)	11.0% (92)	42.2% (108)	33.5% (75)
n	921	838	256	224
p-value	0.000		0.050	

Note: The parishes included are Bowers Gifford, Burnham, Canewdon, Chadwell St Mary, Corringham, Dengie, Fobbing, Foulness, Great Stambridge, Great Wakering, North Benfleet, Prittlewell, West Tilbury. Wennington was excluded due to a lack of marital status indicators in the registers. The *p*-values refer to the probability that the proportions widowed are the same for brides and grooms.

Sources: Essex parish registers: see Essex Archives Online, *Parish Registers* [n.d.] https://www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk/ParishRegisters.aspx [accessed 1 August 2024] and FindMyPast [n.d.] (https://www.findmypast.co.uk/).

Inspection of Table 2 indicates that the numbers of marriages involving marsh residents who were single at marriage was the same for brides and for grooms (746). That is, the excess of marriages involving female marsh residents was entirely due to remarriages of marsh widows. This excess of widows implies either that female marsh residents were more likely than marsh men to outlive their spouses, or that marsh women were more likely than marsh men to remarry upon widowhood. Since women usually experienced longer durations to remarriage than men in early modern England, it seems likely on balance that marsh wives tended on average to outlive their husbands (contrary to Defoe's claim).

It is also important to note that many of the widows that we observed remarrying in marsh parishes may have come there originally as brides from upland parishes. The marriage registers recorded place of residence at remarriage, not place of birth. Therefore a woman who married a marsh man acquired marsh residency if she went to live in her husband's parish, and retained that status when he died. We test whether many upland women married marsh grooms in the next section.

Hypothesis 2: Marsh men were more likely (as a consequence of high bridal turnover) to marry partners from non-marsh parishes than was the case for marsh women. That is, the proportion of marriages involving partners from non-marsh parishes would be higher for marsh men than for marsh women.

Table 3 shows the distribution of marriage partners for marsh brides and grooms. Again, the results do not support the hypothesis. Most marriages involving marsh residents were contracted between partners who were both from marsh parishes (either the same or another marsh parish). Partners from marsh parishes accounted for 89.9 per cent of marriages for marsh women (77.9 per cent from their own parish and 12.0 per cent from other marsh parishes), and 93.0 per cent of all marriages involving marsh men. For marsh brides, only 5.1 per cent, and for marsh grooms only 3.5 per cent, of marriages involved a partner from an upland parish, and there was little statistical difference between brides and grooms in the propensity to marry upland partners ($p = 0.100$, two-sided t-test of proportions). Marsh brides were, however, more likely to marry partners from non-marsh parishes (that is, upland or marginal parishes and excluding other/not identified parishes) ($p = 0.046$). This pattern is the reverse of that predicted by Defoe.

To check that these results were not dependent on our assumption that brides and grooms with no stated residence were from the parish in which they were marrying, we conducted the same test using only marriages where parish of residence was explicitly recorded for both bride and groom. The results were very similar to those obtained with the full sample. Marsh brides and grooms were equally likely to marry upland partners. For marsh brides, 10.0 per cent of partners

were from upland parishes (32/320 marriages) and for marsh grooms the figure was 9.8 per cent (26/265) ($p = 0.963$, two-sided t-test of proportions).

Taken together these results do not provide any support for Defoe's description of the Essex marshes as particularly inimical to women or characterised by a rapid turnover of brides from upland parishes. Instead we found that women from marsh parishes were more likely than men from the same parishes to remarry,

Table 3 Sources of marriage partners for marsh residents, 1690-1730

Partner's parish	Marsh bride		Marsh groom	
	%	n	%	n
Same as marsh spouse	77.9	730	85.9	730
Other marsh	12.0	112	7.1	60
Marginal	0.8	7	0.4	3
Upland	5.1	48	3.5	30
Other/not identified	4.3	40	3.2	27
Total	100.0	937	100.0	850

Notes: Figures are percentages and counts of all marriages involving either a bride or a groom who was resident in one of the marsh parishes in our sample (Bowers Gifford, Burnham, Canewdon, Chadwell St Mary, Corringham, Dengie, Fobbing, Foulness, Great Wakering, Great Stambridge, North Benfleet, Prittlewell, Wennington, West Tilbury). Where the marriage entry did not state residency then marriage partners were assumed to be 'of the parish'. Percentages do not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Sources: Essex parish registers: see Essex Archives Online, *Parish Registers* [n.d.] https://www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk/ParishRegisters.aspx [accessed 1 August 2024] and FindMyPast [n.d.] (https://www.findmypast.co.uk/).

and slightly more likely to source marriage partners from parishes outside the marshes.

Obviously, some caution is needed in interpretation. While more marsh widows than marsh widowers remarried in our sample, we cannot tell from these patterns

whether men or women were more likely to be *widowed* in marsh parishes. If the high sex ratio in marsh parishes evident in the early nineteenth century (where adult men outnumbered women) was also evident in the early eighteenth century, then women may have found it easier to remarry than men. However, the patterns regarding the sources of marriage partners are clearer. Women living in marsh parishes were at least as likely as men from the same parishes to marry partners from outside the marshes. This is surprising given the probable excess of men in marsh parishes who constituted potential marriage partners for marsh women.

So far we have taken a statistical approach to what was in fact a collection of anecdotes. Importantly, Defoe's account of high rates of spousal turnover referred specifically to marsh farmers rather than to all male inhabitants of marsh parishes. The marshlands were frequently described as providing very rich farming prospects, and it is likely that many marsh farmers had sufficient means to remarry frequently, to attract brides from upland parishes and to lure them to their deaths in the marshes. However most men in marsh parishes were probably not farmers. Indeed Mary Dobson characterised the English marshlands as populated by 'lookers' (shepherds) and 'smugglers' and their wives, and avoided by wealthy yeomen and clergy.[38]

We do not know the occupations of men who were marrying in marsh parishes in the eighteenth century. However baptismal registers from the early nineteenth century indicate that farmers comprised a low proportion of fathers (a reasonable proxy for married men) in the 14 marsh parishes in our study. Of 270 baptisms recorded in these parishes in the years 1813-1820 (the first period in which paternal occupation was routinely recorded in baptism registers), only 24 (8.9 per cent) had fathers with descriptors consistent with the status of farmer ('farmer', 'yeoman' or 'husbandman').[39] Therefore it seems likely that the types of men described by Defoe were a relatively small minority of the adult male population of the Essex marshes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[40] We have conducted our study on the assumption that the extravagant marriage behaviours described by Defoe were sufficient to produce a clear signature in aggregate marriage data. However, if the

38 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, pp. 53-6.

39 These numbers are drawn from the unpublished dataset: '1813-20 parish register occupational data for England and Wales', prepared by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure as part of the project *The Occupational Structure of Britain 1379-1911*. This figure was very close to that for 'upland' parishes in Essex as a whole (8.4 per cent).

40 It is possible that farmers were more abundant in Defoe's period, and that the progressive draining of the Essex marshes in the eighteenth century resulted in rising levels of arable cultivation and rising labourer to farmer ratios. In this case farmers would have comprised a higher proportion of grooms in our sample, and this would strengthen the significance of our statistical results.

pattern were more muted, we may have been unable to detect it clearly (although notably our analyses not only fail to confirm our hypotheses, but provide some statistical support for marriage patterns that were the opposite of those predicted if Defoe were correct).

To test for the presence of individual men who exhibited the behaviours described by Defoe we extended Margaret Tabor's search for individual men from marsh parishes who remarried frequently. Instead of searching individual parish registers, as Tabor did, we searched the FindMyPast database for repeated instances of marriages involving men with the same or similar forenames and surnames, who were resident in the marsh parishes in our study.[41] That is, we attempted to identify all grooms who were likely to have been residents of marsh parishes in our sample (either because they married in that parish and were not described as resident elsewhere, or because they married in another parish but their residence in a marsh parish was recorded). This strategy should have identified marsh residents who married in other parishes, except in cases where their parish of residence went unrecorded. Tabor did not define the period of her study. We initially searched records within the period 1650-1740 in order to ensure that we would observe at least a fraction of remarriages of men with multiple wives who married in this period. In cases where we identified three or more marriages involving men of the same name and marsh parish, then we used this information to search for additional marriages for the same putative individual in a wider time frame (date of first observed marriage plus or minus 40 years) in order to observe their full marriage career.

For the 12 marsh parishes in our sample in the period 1650-1740 we did not identify any male residents who appeared to have married more than three times. When we searched for further marriages involving men of the same or similar name using a wider date range then we did not identify further marriages. While we may have missed some marriages of men from marsh parishes (if the marriage register failed to record their parish of residence), the failure to find any evidence of frequent remarriage is striking, and consistent with Tabor's findings.[42] That is, contrary to Defoe's claims of marsh farmers who married from 5 to 35 wives, we were unable to identify high rates of remarriage for individual men in Essex marsh parishes.

41 We searched the FindMyPast datasets *Essex Marriages and Banns 1537-1935* and *England, Clandestine Marriages* (the latter in order to include the huge volume of marriages conducted at the Fleet prison in London in this period): see FindMyPast, *Essex Marriages and Banns 1537-1935 [2024]* https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/essex-marriages-and-banns-1537-1935 [accessed 1 August 2024]; and FindMyPast, *England, Clandestine Marriages* [2024] https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-clandestine-marriages [accessed 1 August 2024].

42 Tabor, 'Marsh marriage'.

Conclusion

Daniel Defoe's *Tour* provides an unparalleled overview of the English economy in the early eighteenth century. However historians (as well as Defoe's contemporaries) have pointed to inaccuracies and exaggerations in some areas of his account. In this sense, the findings of the present paper are unsurprising. We find that Defoe's account of high female mortality and rapid bridal turnover in the Essex marshes, which he attributed to ague, is not borne out by the evidence of marriage registers. Instead it seems likely that the marsh farmers that Defoe interviewed exaggerated their penchant for upland women and for remarriage.

The purpose of this article is not to undermine Defoe's credibility as an historical source. In the case of the Essex marshes, Defoe himself acknowledged the unreliability of his informants. Our argument is that these unreliable anecdotes should not be used at face value as evidence of the lethality of English malaria and the vulnerability of immigrants, nor extrapolated to other geographical areas. These anecdotes may well reflect a widespread contemporary perception that immigrants into marsh areas were more susceptible than locals to endemic diseases. However such anecdotes cannot be taken as specific evidence of high malarial morbidity or mortality. Acquired immunity is a common feature of many other infectious diseases, and was widely recognised as a feature of urban populations in this period. Indeed Defoe's reference to the seasoning of marsh residents recalls John Graunt's description of London's population:

> As for unhealthiness, it may well be supposed, that although seasoned Bodies may, and do live near as long in *London,* as elsewhere, yet new-comers, and Children do not: for the *Smoaks, Stinks,* and close *Air,* are less healthful than that of the Country; otherwise why do sickly Persons remove into the Country-*Air?*[43]

Both towns and marsh areas were characterised by higher than average mortality rates in early modern England. Much of their lethality of towns reflected the impact of epidemic diseases that spread easily through the transport networks that linked the urban hierarchy. In addition, the high density of urban populations promoted the faecal contamination of water and the rapid transmission of diseases. While marshes were characterised by relatively low population densities, they were generally associated with poor-quality water supplies that were easily contaminated. Marsh areas were by definition poorly drained and lacked fast-flowing streams. The

43 J. Graunt, *Natural and Political Observations Made upon the Bills of Mortality*, 1676 edition edited by C.H. Hull (Cambridge, 1899), p. 63.

water table was high and so well water was easily contaminated by surface pollution. Therefore at least some of the excessive mortality of marsh areas probably reflected their vulnerability to waterborne diseases, as Dobson and others have argued.[44] The Essex marshes may also have been subject to a relatively high risk of disease importation, in common with towns. Dobson noted that the marshes of the Thames estuary were particularly lethal even compared to other marsh areas, and suggested that this might reflect high disease exposure associated with proximity to London and to international shipping and military populations.[45] That is, the similarities in demographic patterns between early modern towns and marsh areas (excessive mortality and possibly the relative immunity of long-term residents) may reflect in part some commonality of risk factors that was independent of any influence of malaria. This is not to deny that malaria may have contributed a considerable additional burden of morbidity in early modern marsh communities. However this paper does draw attention to the fragility of some of the evidence for this phenomenon.

Finally, our study raises the question of where Defoe's story came from, and why it has proved so enduring. Marsh populations were often portrayed by their historical contemporaries as 'wild', 'wretched', stunted and uncivilised.[46] However in the case of the East Anglian Fens at least, much of this critique was politically motivated and propagated by those who wished to see marshes drained, either for personal profit or in the broader pursuit of 'improvement'.[47] Did some marsh inhabitants also play up to these stereotypes, including Defoe's Essex informants?

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44 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, pp. 25-8, 335-6; R. A. Hutchinson and S.W. Lindsay, 'Malaria and deaths in the English marshes', *The Lancet* 367 (2006), pp. 1,947–51, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(06)68850-8. Mortality from epidemic cholera, a waterborne disease, was notably high in the Thames estuary including the Essex hundreds singled out as unhealthy by Defoe, see R.J. Davenport, M. Satchell and L.M.W. Shaw-Taylor, 'Cholera as a 'sanitary test' of British cities, 1831-1866' *History of the Family* 24 (2019), pp. 404-38, here at p. 420, https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2018.1525755; W. Farr, *Report on the Mortality of Cholera in England, 1848-49* (London, 1852), pp. lvii, cxxxv, 11, and 243-6.

45 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, pp. 499-500.

46 Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease*, p. 301.

47 J. Hoppit, *Britain's Political Economies* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 179-215.

Gascoyne and Maria Medlycott for allowing us to use their shapefile of the ancient grazing marshes of Essex.

Unregarded but Ubiquitous: a Demographic Study of Rural Charwomen, Household Structure, and Familial Relationships*

Peter Jolly[1]

Abstract

Using raw data from the 1911 Census to conduct a largely statistical analysis, illuminated with individual case studies, this paper explores the domestic arrangements of over 300 charwomen in the towns and villages of Berkshire and compares them with the wider population. Discussion of methodological issues is followed by an analysis of household size and structure, the latter broadly adopting the approach of Peter Laslett. With a mean age of over 50 years, the older age profile of Berkshire charwomen was reflected in their residing in smaller domestic units than the national average. The majority of charwomen were widows and over half of all their households comprised charwomen either living alone or with unmarried children. This survey confirmed the apparent correlation of widowhood, charring and financial expediency.

Introduction

Charwomen fulfilled an important role in the Edwardian domestic economy, undertaking some of the hardest and least pleasant cleaning tasks in the homes of those of higher social standing living nearby. Behind their own closed doors, however, they have rarely engaged the interest of social historians.[2] My previous investigations have focused principally upon links between poverty and widowhood amongst Edwardian charwomen (the results of which were published

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2 Chars were described by Lucy Delap as 'ubiquitous' figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century homes (L. Delap, *Knowing their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 35-6). The first important demographic study of charwomen relates to the Dublin workforce: C. McCabe, 'Charwomen and Dublin's secondary labour force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', *Social History* 45 (2020), pp. 193–217, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2020.1732128.

in 2022) and the locational stability of the rural char population.[3] The present research centres on the entire working char demographic in rural Berkshire, comprising a pool of 326 women found by the 1911 Census in villages and smaller towns around the county.[4] Berkshire provides suitable material for a detailed case study. As a county it is neither too large to be unmanageable, nor too small to be representative, nor was its female occupational structure dominated by a particular industry, such as straw plaiting in Buckinghamshire, or employment in textile mills in Lancashire. The purpose of this paper is to direct the focus towards the nature and structure of the households of which charwomen formed part, to seek to understand the extent to which many Edwardian households containing charwomen may lie at one end of a spectrum of typological configurations, comparing results with other demographic statistics. It is important in any study of household structure to consider the impact of the life cycle, the more so because of the unbalanced age profile of the Berkshire char demographic, its members ranging in age from 19 to 83 years, of whom 187 (57.4 per cent) were aged 50 or above.[5]

This paper will first address some preliminary conceptual and methodological matters before examining in more detail the size of the households in which our Berkshire cohort resided. The bulk of the article analyses the various structural forms which those households took, discussing examples taken from certain selected categories. This is followed by generic concluding observations on comparisons between Berkshire charwomen and the wider national demographic.

3 P. Jolly, 'Strategies for survival: charwomen in rural Berkshire', *Local Population Studies* 108 (2022), pp. 58–67. In this paper I identified similarities with Ciarán McCabe's Dublin and found that charring was often driven by necessity, being a means to avoid descent into the workhouse.

4 The current analysis focused on communities with populations of less than 10,000 but excluded those charwomen in institutions. Otherwise, all those designated by the census officials with the 1911 occupational code '020' for charwomen were included in the study. The terms, 'char', and 'charwoman' are interchangeable.

5 It is noticeable that female life expectancy in Berkshire also exceeded the national average, and whereas nationally 5.7 per cent of females were 65 years of age or older, in Berkshire the figure was 7.7 per cent (statistics extracted from Census of England and Wales 1911, *Vol. X. Occupations and Industries [Part 2]*, British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter BPP) 1913 LXXIX [C. 7019], pp. 2 and 26-8).

Methodological issues

Censuses

The 326 Berkshire charwomen were identified through searching on a commercial genealogy site using the criteria of 'Berkshire' and '1911', against 'char', 'charring' 'charwoman' (with or without a hyphen), and 'cleaner'.[6] These were the only occupations given the occupational code '020' for 'charwoman' by census officials. Those cleaners in specific industries allocated a separate census occupational code, such as railway cleaners, were excluded, as were charwomen both retired and in institutions, such as the workhouse or county asylum. Those in the County Borough of Reading, and in the three largest urban communities of Newbury, Maidenhead and Windsor, each with over 10,000 inhabitants, were also eliminated, leaving a complete list of working charwomen in the villages and smaller towns in the county.

No official record is without its limitations, and the decennial census is no exception.[7] Not all household schedules were fully completed, and researchers rely upon both the honesty and the recollection of householders for the accuracy of entries. In general, details taken from the 1911 Census are adopted for analysis as written, or officially corrected, in the original schedule, save some incomplete entries, where lacunae could be filled from prior or subsequent censuses. In the course of record linkage, age discrepancies of up to two years were considered as offering reliable connections. Much of the ensuing analysis focuses on widowed charwomen, who formed 57.4 per cent of the Berkshire char demographic, three percentage points higher than in Ciarán McCabe's Dublin study.[8] McCabe described charring as the most common form of paid work for married women and widows in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Dublin, with 1,296 appearing in the 1911 census, of whom 657 were widows. Charring was, he described, part of the precarious daily working and domestic life for large swathes of Dublin's working classes. It is far from inconceivable that some women with children could have adopted the appellation 'widow' to disguise the misfortunes of illegitimate childbirth or marital separation. Although during other research the

6 The site used was FindMyPast: https://www.findmypast.co.uk/ [accessed 27 August 2024].

7 As to census accuracy see the extensive studies by Edward Higgs in particular, including his Public Record Office publication: E. Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census* (London, 1996); and E. Higgs and A. Wilkinson, 'Women, occupations and work in the Victorian censuses revisited', *History Workshop Journal* 81(2016), pp. 17–38, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbw001.

8 McCabe, 'Charwomen and Dublin's secondary labour force', p. 203.

genealogy of most of these charwomen has been verified, hitherto undiscovered back stories of a small minority might yet yield the unexpected.[9]

Households and housefuls – parameters and definitions

The concept originally of most relevance was household size, enabling a multiplier to be ascertained from which, prior to the 1851 Census, lists of householders might be used to derive estimates of the total population. Household size is a concept not without value to historical demographers, even though scholastic focus is frequently directed more to analyses of the formal structure of the household itself. In the case of a house occupied only by a so-called conjugal family of husband, wife, and two infant children, the 'household' can readily be seen to constitute the four co-resident family members. This simple example presents no problem, but as Peter Laslett pointed out in his seminal introduction to the 1972 volume *Household and Family in Past Time*, the presence of visitors, boarders, and lodgers ('inmates') within the home, some of whom may have been wider kin of the householder, creates uncertainties, which need addressing in any statistical analysis of household and family.[10] Laslett used the expression 'houseful' to represent all persons occupying the same set of premises (another word not without definitional opaqueness), within which was the 'household' of familial kin and their servants.

9 Whilst the census was the principal research source given both its universal applicability and decennial regularity, other material was used to supplement and fill apparent lacunae. Of the 1911 pool of charwomen, 243 were traced in each of the previous three censuses. The nine youngest charwomen, all aged under 30 years in 1911, would not have appeared in the 1881 census in any event, and another 53 could not be found, whilst others were missing from one or more intervening censuses. No systematic research was undertaken of the pre-1881 genealogy of the 1911 cohort of Berkshire charwomen.

10 P. Laslett, 'Introduction: the history of the family', in P. Laslett and R. Wall (eds, *Household and Family in Past Time; Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America, with further Materials from Western Europe,* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 1-90, here at pp. 34 onwards. This is the more important in analyses of census records at the turn of the twentieth century because of the prevalence of lodging and boarding. In all my investigations of 1911 Census data for rural Berkshire, visitors have comprised under 2 per cent of entries and, nationally, visitors on the night of the 1911 Census amounted to just over 1 per cent of the entire enumerated population (Integrated Census Microdata, *Disseminating Standardised and Integrated Historical Census Microdata for Great Britain for the Period 1851 to 1911* [2002-2024] https://icem.data-archive.ac.uk/#step2 [accessed 27 August 2024]).

Understandably, servants were unlikely to be kept by charwomen, and play little part in the ensuing analysis.[11]

In theory, the 1911 Census should be comparatively free of problems created by multiple occupancy as lodgers should have been identified on separate household schedules, thereby each comprising a separate 'household', but it is clear from the household schedules observed in this exercise that the practice was not universally followed. To maintain methodological consistency both within this exercise, and with other statistical analyses, all 'inmates' are excluded from the definition of households. Adopting the 'Laslett-Hammel' approach, which was followed in the wide-ranging historical survey conducted by Kevin Schürer and his colleagues, institutional occupants too are ignored in calculations of household size and structure, so that the focus remains on the private family.[12] Although the presence of lodgers potentially provides income to an otherwise impecunious charwoman, enabling her to remain out of the workhouse, as was the thesis of my earlier paper 'Strategies for survival', it is the presence of relatives within the household (who may be disposed to share any surplus income for the benefit of other family members, including the charwoman, on the basis of a communality of kin) that characterises the household and distinguishes it from the houseful.[13] It is therefore the household on which we shall focus.

Household size

Calculations of household size on a wider scale are impeded by inclusion of institutions within the number of household schedules returned within the census records. The entirety of Berkshire, less the County Borough of Reading, yielded 44,768 schedules covering an enumerated population of 195,891, suggesting a mean household size of approximately 4.38 persons. According to one of the statutory census reports laid before parliament there were 38 institutions within the historic county housing some 4,767 inhabitants. Applying the appropriate adjustments to

11 Maria Howell in Swallowfield appears to be an exception. Totally blind, but working as a charwoman, she is enumerated with an 18-year-old servant to help her. For the purpose of analysis Maria is treated in the 'indeterminate', or residual, category.

12 K. Schürer, E.M. Garrett, H. Jaadla and A. Reid, 'Household and family structure in England and Wales (1851–1911): continuities and change', *Continuity and Change* (2018) 33, pp. 365–411, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416018000243. The 'Laslett-Hammel approach' was proposed in E. Hammel and P. Laslett, 'Comparing household structure over time and between cultures', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (1974), pp. 73-109.

13 Jolly, 'Strategies for survival'; Census of England and Wales, 1911, *Areas, Families or Separate Occupiers, and Population. Vol. I. Administrative Areas. Counties, Urban and Rural Districts, etc.*, BPP 1912-13 CXI [C.6258], p. 3. This calculation to separate the 'household' from the 'houseful' assumes that all lodgers have been correctly returned on individual household schedules.

the above figures leaves 191,124 inhabitants comprised within 44,730 private dwelling schedules, resulting in a mean of 4.27 persons per household.[14] This arithmetical reduction of 0.11 persons accords very much with the national picture identified by Laslett.[15] In more recent comparative analysis of national census statistics through the Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) database, Kevin Schürer and his colleagues have calculated that in 1911 the mean household size was 4.13 persons.[16] The difference between these figures and the statistics from our Berkshire charwomen will be seen to be startling.

If we exclude from our pool of 326 charwomen those shown as lodgers (whether on separate schedules or not), boarders, and others of indeterminate status, the 308 remaining charwomen lived in households containing on average 3.25 persons.[17] In other words, whereas charwomen on average lived with 2.25 other persons, the population of Berkshire at large each lived in households with not far short of half as many persons again. Given that those lodger charwomen could strictly be regarded as single householders in their own right, including them would, if marginally, further reduce the mean size of Berkshire households in which charwomen resided.

One reason for such a marked discrepancy between the char demographic and the wider population lies in the age profile of charwomen. Whilst multi-generational households might be expected to contain older members of society, as will be seen, a very substantial number of our charwomen lived as single women, either unmarried or widowed, with widowhood dominant in the oldest age brackets. Amongst our Berkshire charwomen aged 20 years and above, only 72 (22.2 per cent) declared their status to be married, compared with a national statistic of 57.9 per cent of all women over 20.[18] No charwoman was below 19 years of age and, whilst economic and social self-sufficiency as a single occupant might be a realistic possibility for those above that age until infirmity overtook them, it was not a

14 Census of England and Wales 1911*, Areas, Families or Separate Occupiers, and Population. Vol. I.*, pp. 501-2.

15 P. Laslett, 'Mean household size in England since the sixteenth century', in Laslett and Wall, *Household and Family in Past Time*, pp. 125-58, here at pp. 138 and 141, suggests a national discrepancy not exceeding 0.11 per cent.

16 Schürer *et al.*, 'Household and family structure', p. 369. The notes to the relevant table indicate the use of retrospective population totals taken from the report on the 1921 Census, with its historic data.

17 The 18 who fell into this residual category include seven boarders (one also being a niece of the householder), two lodgers, blind Maria Howell previously noted, three described as servants (presumably living-in), and one caretaker, who was perhaps looking after a house in the temporary absence of the true householder.

18 Census of England and Wales, 1911, *General Report with Appendices*, BPP 1917-18 XXXV [C. 8491], p. 89. Only two Berkshire charwomen were below the age of 20 years, both of whom were single and aged 19.

possibility for children and, nationally, nearly 40 per cent of the population was below the age of 20.[19] The age profile of our charwomen therefore predisposed them to living in smaller size households than the national demographic.[20] In collating national statistics Schürer and his colleagues assessed the mean age of all persons nationally living as solitaries in 1911 to be 54.1 years.[21] The equivalent calculation for our Berkshire singleton charwomen was 60.7 years.

It is now appropriate to move to a more detailed consideration of the composition of household units containing charwomen.

Household structure

Introduction

The classic categorisation of co-resident domestic groups within comparative settings originated with Peter Laslett over 50 years ago, and was framed around the conjugal family unit, separately identifying solitaries; those outside such a unit, such as co-resident siblings; simple family households of sometime married persons and their unmarried children; and extended and multiple families.[22] Any form of classification inevitably involves elements of subjectivity in the allocation procedure, and some aspects of household sharing are more clearly defined than others. Some technically correct entries may perhaps fail to reflect the reality of household dynamics. One example is Emily Jane Francis, a 44-year-old from Thatcham categorised in the ensuing analysis as a married woman with no husband but with never-married children. Described as married in the 1901 Census, although without any husband in residence, she is silent on her marital status in 1911. With no evidence of her husband's intervening death, she has been presumed as still married. Resident at the house, however, is a longer-term 'boarder', a single man of a similar age to Emily whom she would subsequently marry.

19 Census of England and Wales, 1911, *General Report,* p. 60.

20 Older charwomen with limited financial resources might also benefit from almshouse accommodation, which (on grounds of ineligibility or unsuitability) restricted multi-occupancy. One such was 65-year-old Sarah Maynard in a Peach Street, Wokingham, almshouse.

21 Schürer *et al.*, 'Household and family structure in England and Wales', Table 4.

22 Laslett, 'Introduction', p. 31.

Analysis

Although I followed Laslett's categorisation, apparent peculiarities of the char demographic showed the benefits of a slightly more refined breakdown as seen in Table 1 below, an analysis excluding the 18 charwomen of indeterminate status. This (and Table 3) replicates many of the 'Laslett' categories but distinguishes some specific co-residency patterns that might otherwise be subsumed into a wider category. By far the largest group of charwomen, (97 in number forming 31.5 per cent of the cohort) were living in households comprising a widow with never-married children, whilst another 60 (19.5 per cent) were charwomen living alone, more than the total number in Laslett's classification of extended and multiple family units comprising the bottom two rows of the table. The analysis separates out those persons stated to be married, but with no husband present. Their husbands may have been absent on active service, or working away from home, and contributing an allowance to their spouses, or the marital relationship may have broken down, in which case for practical purposes such women are equivalent to their widowed counterparts. The census cannot assist in determining the nature or length of matrimonial separation, even if occasional clues may be glimpsed from schedule annotations or previous census records. Two specific types of co-resident blood relatives call for note. There were ten widows whose only other kin in their household was a single grandchild, to whom we shall refer later, and five unmarried women with never-married children.

Schürer and his colleagues have helpfully drawn together national statistics for 1911 (as well as other years) from the I-CeM database.[23] The calculations applied above to the Berkshire database related to the percentages of individual charwomen but analysis based on the 303 separate households would differ only slightly. Table 2 compares the Berkshire charwomen's demographic with key national statistics extracted by Schürer and his colleagues from the I-CeM database showing household composition as a percentage of individuals and of households.

As Berkshire charwomen were ten times as likely as the overall population to be living alone, a feature of the older demographic, it is perhaps more beneficial to direct attention to those aged 45 years or over, for whom Schürer and his colleagues have extracted national statistics for 1911.[24] Five per cent of females nationwide over the age of 45 lived alone, a percentage that was nearly double the equivalent for men. Amongst our Berkshire charwomen all except one of our 60 singletons were aged 45 years or over, the sole exception being just one year younger and

23 Schürer *et al.*, 'Household and family structure', Table 4.
24 Schürer *et al.*, 'Household and family structure', Table 4.

Table 1 Household structure amongst Berkshire charwomen

Category	N	%
Solitary widows	45	14.6
Solitary single persons	13	4.2
Solitary married women	2	0.6
Co-resident siblings	7 (*6*)	2.3
Married couples alone	12	3.9
Married couples with never-married children	40 (*39*)	13.0
Widows with never-married children	97 (*95*)	31.5
Widows with never-married grandchildren	10	3.2
Married couples just with never-married grandchildren	1	0.3
Married women without husband but with never married children	11	3.6
Unmarried women with never-married children	5	1.6
Other co-resident relatives not otherwise specified and not within the preceding categories	7 (*6*)	2.3
Vertically extended families	36	11.7
Complex and multiple households, including lateral extensions	22	7.1
Total	308 (*303*)	

Notes: Bracketed italic numbers are numbers of households after adjusting for five instances of more than one charwoman living in the same household. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911 (see Integrated Census Microdata, *Disseminating Standardised and Integrated Historical Census Microdata for Great Britain for the Period 1851 to 1911* [2002-2024] https://icem.data-archive.ac.uk/#step1 [accessed 27 August 2024]).

these 59 single charwomen represented a staggering 25.8 per cent of our char household demographic in that age-bracket. In other words, even amongst the over-45s, Berkshire charwomen were more than five times as likely as the female population generally to live alone. They were also over four times as likely as the national population to be in households comprising a lone parent and children. Of

Table 2 Berkshire charwomen and national statistics

	Berkshire: percentage of individual charwomen	Nationally as percentage of individuals (both sexes)	Nationally as percentage of all households
Solitaries	19.5	1.9	8.4
Married couple, no children	3.9	5.8	12.8
Married couple with children	13.0	54.2	49.1
Lone parent (widow or single person with children)	33.1	8.1	10.5

Note: The calculations of the national percentages of individuals include 9.7 per cent of the total living outside family groups.

Sources: K. Schürer, E.M. Garrett, H. Jaadla and A. Reid, 'Household and family structure in England and Wales (1851–1911): continuities and change', *Continuity and Change* (2018) 33, pp. 365–411, here at Table 4, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416018000243; Census of England and Wales, 1911.

this category the charwoman was in 11 instances the daughter of the householder, and in one instance the mother, whilst the remaining 85 charwomen were themselves householders, typical of which were the widows—often with dependent young children to support: a dominant feature to which we shall return. Contrastingly, charwomen living with their respective husbands but no other kin, were four times less frequently observed than within the national demographic.

Of our cohort of 308 charwomen, nearly two thirds (201), were either described as head of the household, or in one instance were presumed so to be. Inevitably all singletons were householders but, in all, there were 162 widowed charwomen heading households. Of these, 19 headed what might be described as vertically extended or laterally extended or complex families.[25] The point within the life

25 Vertically extended families comprise three generations, laterally extended units include where there are siblings of the married or widowed head of a stem family, and complex units are where there are multiple distinct conjugal units linked by kin or marriage, effectively combining those in Laslett's categories 4 and 5 (see Laslett, 'Introduction') The 18

Table 3 Household structure of charwomen householders

	Charwomen householders (*n* = 201)	Widowed charwomen householders (*n* = 162)
Solitary widows	45	45
Solitary single persons	13	0
Solitary married women	2	0
Co-resident siblings	4	0
Widows with never-married children	85	85
Widows with never-married grandchildren	10	10
Married women without husband but with never married children	11	0
Unmarried women with never-married children	5	0
Other co-resident relatives not otherwise specified and not within the previous categories	4	3
Vertically extended families	12	10
Complex and multiple households, including lateral extensions	10	9

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911 (see Integrated Census Microdata, *Disseminating Standardised and Integrated Historical Census Microdata for Great Britain for the Period 1851 to 1911* [2002-2024] https://icem.data-archive.ac.uk/#step1 [accessed 27 August 2024]).

cycle at which notional headship of any household is transferred from the widowed mother to the generation below is a subjective matter of family dynamics, economics, practicalities, and not least, emotion, all matters upon which the census can at best only offer the occasional hint. These extended family units exemplify inter-generational support and the largest of them contained ten members.

The mean age of the 85 widowed charwomen householders with unmarried children at home was 51.1 years, ranging from 30 to 81 with a third of them (27) in

charwomen who are themselves boarders or whose status is unclear are excluded from this analysis.

their 40s.[26] No fewer than 29 of these widows were the sole breadwinners in the family for themselves and their dependent children, and a further 40 had just one child earner to assist. The census is, of course, silent as to receipt of charity payments or other relief, formal or informal, or the extent (both in terms of hours occupied and money earned) of their charring activity, but for many this would have involved balancing child care with work. In some instances, wider family or friends may have assisted: elder children may have looked after younger siblings, or the services of any boarder or lodger may have been exchanged for adjustments to the weekly 'rent'.

Younger widows were statistically pre-disposed to have only dependent children, with older widows having the benefit of teenage and older children at home joining the workforce. The most extreme example of the former was Charlotte Tocock, a 33 year old from Spencer's Wood, near Wokingham, whose 13-year marriage had left her with seven children to support, aged from 3 to 13 years. She was one of 11 widows aged under 40 years who were supporting their children alone: in another three instances an older child was also employed, whilst Mary Knight in Ashampstead had the benefit of potential income from her two eldest children working on local farms to assist in the upkeep of two younger school-aged children. Financial contributions from older boys working may have been variable in amount and of potentially limited duration as, statistically, children left home on average some six years before marriage. Older daughters going into service might provide a modest allowance for their widowed mothers.[27]

It would be wrong to posit any patterns of future mutual support with any confidence. On the one hand, recently widowed Ellen Scott of Sunningdale was left in 1911 with five children at home, the eldest a laundry hand and so, one might presume, producing sufficient for her own keep. A decade later, none of her five children, then ranging in age from 16 to 27 years had married, and all remained at home in employment supporting their widowed mother to the extent that she no longer worked. The future of Emily Tilbury, similarly with five young children in 1911, followed a different trajectory, although it is impossible from the records to do other than guess how the household developed. By 1921 Emily was working as a cook, together with her married daughter Annie. There is no sign of Annie's husband, but two of Emily's children seen in the 1911 Census are still at home and not working. Kate, now aged 16 years is described in the 1921 Census as having 'home duties'. She may have been acting as carer both for her niece, and for twins

26 In addition to the 85 householders who were widowed charwomen with children (Table 3, above) there were 12 other widowed charwomen who were not the household head, being in 11 cases the daughter of the named householder, and in 1 the mother.

27 Schürer *et al.* 'Household and family structure', Table 12.

to whom her mother gave birth in 1914, whose (unnamed) father was, by 1921, dead. The houseful is completed by a boarder.

One way that widowed charwomen could be both financially and emotionally supplemented was through remarriage. Although it has not been possible to trace forward all our cohort, at least 11 remarried in the ensuing decade, ten of them aged 42 years or under on census date, a total that included both the 30-year-old widows. Seven of our 15 widowed charwomen in their 30s remarried. Sarah Hitchman, aged 37 and widowed in 1907, was heavily pregnant at the time of the 1911 census and thereafter gave birth to twins. Later that year she remarried. Additionally, two other widows remarried and started new families.

Caring for grandchildren

Study of publicly available records reveals tantalising glimpses into families and households, but much is left to imputation and the imagination. Examination of our ten widows looking after grandchildren in their homes is no exception and offers a wide variety of possible motivations and outcomes, as well as an exercise revealing the difficulties of family reconstitution through record linkage. What remains largely unknown is the duration of these seemingly substitute parenting arrangements as, by the time of the ensuing census, many of the children had left home or the grandmother had passed away. Michael Anderson discussed the prevalence of such 'parentless' children in the Preston area in 1851, suggesting several reasons. The children might have been the illegitimate offspring of daughters who had moved on either emotionally or geographically; they could have lost one or both parents, or the surviving parent had remarried. Alternatively the reason could be the relief of family overcrowding; or the provision of company to aged grandparents.[28] Our char demographic yielded a much lower prevalence of 'parentless children' than Anderson's Preston survey, but that may partly reflect the present focus on one selective occupational cohort in preference to the population generally. In our survey, ten widows (6.1 per cent of all widowed charwomen householders) ranging in age from 54 to 77 years were co-resident with a young grandchild and, between them, they represent many of the types identified by Anderson.

The youngest, Mary Anne Eggleton, in Brightwell near Wallingford, shared her three-roomed house with her five-year-old granddaughter Caroline. However, closer examination reveals this as an instance of double enumeration, as Caroline

28 Michael Anderson, 'Household structure and the industrial revolution; mid-nineteenth-century Preston in comparative perspective', in Laslett and Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time*, pp. 215-36, here at p. 227.

was also recorded as living with her parents Thomas and Laura, a younger sibling, and a boarder in the neighbouring village of North Moreton. Examination of census schedules for 1911 reveals many instances where parents included all unmarried children of their union, only then to delete those absent on census night. Was this how Thomas completed the form, but failed to delete Caroline, or did Caroline spend time both with her parents and widowed grandmother sharing parenting, and perchance Caroline was at grandmother's home on census night? The records are open to several possible interpretations.

Illegitimacy may lie behind 11-year-old Edwin Redvers Buller Minns living with his 72-year-old maternal grandmother Eliza Minns in Abingdon. Edwin's mother was Eliza's unmarried daughter Alice. As the 1901 Census reveals Edwin living locally—not with Alice but with his uncle and aunt—it appears that he was cared for successively by various wider family members, leaving his mother Alice to live a life freed from the burdens of illegitimate childbirth. Similarly, Elsie Wickens, aged ten years in 1911, being brought up by her grandmother charwoman Ann Wickens in Brimpton Common, was baptised in Wimbledon as the daughter of a soldier, Henry Wylde and Ann's daughter Lydia. No evidence of any marriage can be traced, and Lydia shortly afterwards appeared in the 1901 Census under her maiden name, single and working as a domestic servant in Chelsea. Meantime 'Elsie' was enumerated in the guise of a nurse-child 'Millicent E. W. Wylde' in Brimpton with her grandmother Ann. Elsie is later registered at school by her grandmother as 'Elsie Millicent Wynberg Wylde Wickens'. Seven-year-old Joseph John Johnson Dale lived with the oldest of our group of widowed charwomen, 77-year-old Leah Dale in Stanford-in-the-Vale in 1911. Joseph was the son of Leah's unmarried daughter Leah Julia who, five years after Joseph's birth, married Fred Belcher and bore him a son.[29] Placing a child born out of wedlock with a widowed grandmother offered a young single mother opportunities otherwise denied to her.

It is perhaps unsurprising that five-year-old Sidney Maynard was living with his widowed grandmother mother Sarah, albeit that she was living locally in an almshouse. His parents had four other children, including a one-month-old baby and another under the age of two years, and their five rooms also housed Sidney's aunt. Nine-year old Laura Fryer lived with her maternal grandmother Harriet Piper near Newbury, and her parents had five other children aged under 11 years living with them at the Naval Ordnance depot at Marchwood, near Southampton. Margaret Cheeseman, aged ten years, lived with her widowed grandmother Ellen Lewington in Woolhampton. Margaret's father was a police officer in west London and he and Margaret's mother had produced eight living children by 1911, five

29 Joseph's 1904 birth certificate is silent on paternity, so it is reasonable to assume that Fred Belcher was not his biological father.

residing with them. In these instances, pressures of living space and the burdens imposed by the upbringing of so many young children may have played a part in the decision to house one child with their grandmother, although maternal ill-health (undetectable from the sources) can never be discounted.

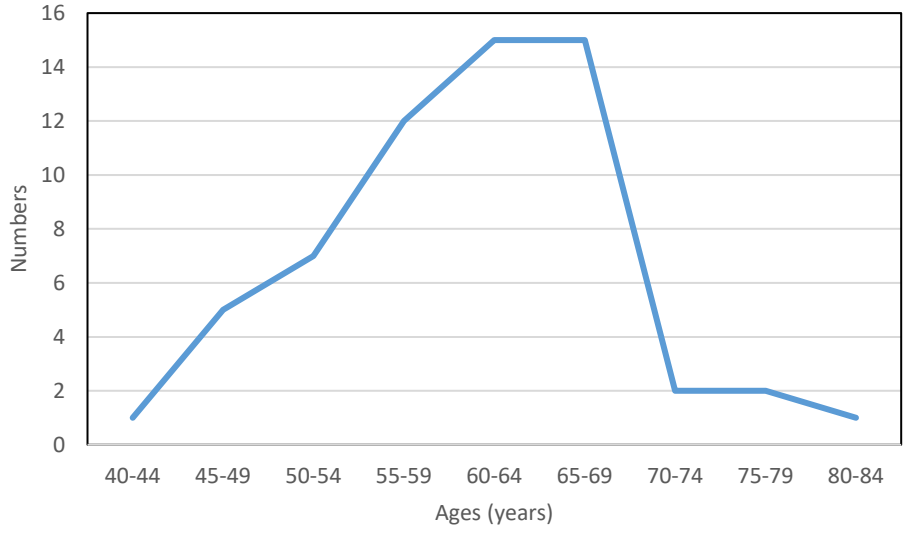
Familial proximity, both emotional and geographical, may have contributed to another ten year old, Gladys Floyd, living with her widowed grandmother Louisa Floyd close to the river Thames at Swinford. Gladys's parents and her two younger siblings were living in the same group of cottages. In contrast, we may wonder if 13-year-old Winifred Brown suffered from parental rejection, or simply voted with her own feet. The only child of a farm carter and his wife, in 1911 she lived with her grandmother, Mary Brown, a school cleaner.

Solitaries

The presence of, and responsibility for, a young grandchild could eliminate the otherwise solitary nature of a charwoman's home. The census is silent on both the intensity of the working patterns of these Berkshire charwomen, and the extent to which they welcomed the potentially modest degree of social interaction that charring brought. We have already noted that nearly one fifth of Berkshire charwomen lived alone and their average age (60.7 years) was substantially higher than the 1911 national statistics for solitaries. Using the household as a denominator in preference to the individual distorts the statistical pattern particularly when considering solitaries. Schürer and his colleagues showed that 8.4 per cent of households nationally comprised a solitary, yet solitaries formed only 1.9 per cent of the national population (see Table 2 above). The larger the proportion of solitary households within any analytical pool, the less the difference between ratios based on individuals and households. In our study the 308 relevant charwomen represented 303 different households, symptomatic of inherent biases within an occupationally based sample with a significantly imbalanced age profile.

Living alone was then, as now, primarily a feature of later life. Within the national population aged over 45 years, the rate of females living alone rose successively by approximately two percentage points for every five years, from about 2 per cent of the demographic at age 45 years to a peak of approximately 14 per cent among those in their mid-70s. The age profile of our Berkshire solitaries is seen in Figure 1 but, comparing these solitaries as a proportion of our char demographic to the picture of solitaries within the national population we similarly start at 2.4 per cent among those aged between 40 and 44 years, but peak as high as 40.5 per cent in the age bracket 60-64 years. Some statistical variations between the overall national and local char populations might be expected in view of the

Figure 1 Age profile of solitary Berkshire charwomen



Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911 (see Integrated Census Microdata, *Disseminating Standardised and Integrated Historical Census Microdata for Great Britain for the Period 1851 to 1911* [2002-2024] https://icem.data-archive.ac.uk/#step1 [accessed 27 August 2024]).

relatively small size of the Berkshire demographic, but the threefold differential in the topmost level of solitaries within the respective demographics in part reflects the peculiar age profile of charwomen, most numerous in their 60s, as well as the high proportion of widowed charwomen. Married charwomen are likely to have a spousal cohabitee so, even if they are without other co-resident family members, could not qualify as solitaries. By contrast widows in the population, unless living with other family members such as offspring, are pre-disposed to solitary home-occupation. The situation is accentuated with each passing year as the children of recently widowed charwomen reach adulthood and set up their own homes leaving their mother on her own. Both the children of Martha Reason in Shrivenham had left the nest many years before she was widowed; whereas Eliza Evans in Sunningdale could be found in the 1891 Census married with three children, a decade later in the 1901 Census she was widowed with two of her children, and in 1911 she was a solitary occupier. Such transitions may not be representative of all family dynamics but may reflect the development of many household structures.

Solitaries, both the never married and widows, left alone after the passing of their parents and the departure of any siblings, contrast with the married charwomen, living with their spouses, who (as shown in Table 2) comprised just under one sixth of all Berkshire charwomen. The proportions of those married charwomen without children in the Berkshire sample are about two thirds of those in the national population but by far the greatest variance between national and local char populations occurs with those married with children, who as individuals were four times as prevalent in the entire national demographic as amongst Berkshire charwomen. This leads to the presumption that the contemporary accepted role of the wife was to remain at home, to look after the house and home for the husband breadwinner, to rear and care for children. Nevertheless, in some childless marriages, and where the child-rearing role of the wife in time diminished, a limited number of women sought some form of employment. Although without direct evidence we cannot tell, it is not unreasonable to assume that for some, any additional source of income was welcome, as the passing years increased the likelihood of their husband suffering infirmity, illness, or irregularity of employment. The ready availability of casual or part-time charring opportunities nearby, for which their experience of household duties equipped them well, could have offered what work in the fields in mid-Victorian times did for their mothers and grandmothers.

Extended and multiple family households

The 58 Berkshire charwomen in various extended and complex non-conjugal family units as a proportion of the total number of charwomen broadly correspond with the national figures quoted by Schürer and his colleagues (17.9 per cent).[30] In nearly two in five cases the charwoman herself was the householder but, for reasons mentioned, that may not be determinative of any role as materfamilias. These extended and multiple related conjugal family units represent a wide variety of individual models. Those of widowed Abingdon charwomen Agnes Batten and Ellen Grimsdale reflect the complex range of family units when extended periods of marital (and extra-marital) fertility obscure the generational divide. Agnes Batten could be found in 1911 in Abingdon with three children, two of whom were in work and the youngest still at school. The household was completed by Agnes's unmarried sister May, aged 19 years and hence 25 years her junior, and even

30 Allowance should be made in drawing precise comparatives as Schürer *et al.*, 'Household and family structure', included those living outside a family group in their percentages, and I separately allocated widowed charwomen living with a single grandchild, otherwise not separately distinguished within the Laslett/Hammel classification scheme.

younger than her own eldest daughter. They were both machinists. In 1901 Agnes and her husband Israel had been enumerated locally with their three children. Agnes was then the sole breadwinner, working in a local marine store. The next decade saw two deaths, that of Agnes's and May's mother in 1902, when May was only ten years old, and that of Agnes's husband Israel in 1909. The records do not tell us whether May moved in with her much older sister Agnes when her mother died, or when her father subsequently re-married and moved away, either event potentially prompting a move to live with a sister old enough to act as a mother substitute.

Ellen Grimsdale, aged 50 years, had been widowed since 1899 and, by the time of the 1901 Census, she was a charwoman in Abingdon, employment doubtless driven by the need to provide for five of her children following the death of her carpenter husband John. Widowhood did not prevent her giving birth to two further children and, by 1911, she was living in the town with five of her unmarried children, plus one grandson, who was older than her youngest child. In contrast Agnes Andrew from Faringdon was not a householder. A widow aged 45 years with a 13-year-old daughter, they both lived with her parents, John and Emma Franklin, just as they had done a decade previously. It would appear that Agnes's husband had died in 1899, after less than six years of marriage, during which time they had lived in south London.[31] One might presume that Agnes, as a young widow, came back to live with her parents who could offer her and her young daughter care, support and, above all, a home.

Conclusion

Although the totality of critical events, moral imperatives, and aspirations which underlay the structural development of the familial units in which rural Berkshire charwomen lived will remain largely hidden from view in the sources analysed, we have glimpsed sufficient examples of probable domestic dynamics to observe some clear trends.

Single occupancy was far and away more dominant amongst charwomen than in the national demographic, peaking at two in five of those in their early 60s. Adult children leaving the family home and elderly husbands passing away contributed both to smaller households and widowhood. As nearly three in five charwomen were widows, a status associated with financial imperatives to wage-earning, connectivity between widowhood, single occupancy and charring becomes inevitable. The impact of single occupancy within the char demographic

31 It is difficult to disentangle the publicly available records as Emma Franklin had given birth in 1863 to twins, named Agnes Emma and Emma Agnes respectively!

contributes to the average size of charwomen's households being significantly less than the county mean of all households. Equally impacted by the age profile of the char demographic, married women were very much less evident amongst charwomen than within the overall national population. In contrast, the lone parent with never-married children, represented frequently in the Berkshire sample by the young widow, was far more dominant than it was throughout the national population as a whole. The propensity for women to marry men older than themselves, more pronounced in second marriages, and their greater life expectancy in later life, predicated a preponderance of widows in the older char demographic.[32]

This analysis of household structure adds a further dimension to the thesis that economic necessity was a major driving force in women becoming chars in later life, as well as revealing the extent to which many outside the workhouse lived alone. Research into former charwomen living in workhouse accommodation, and the extent to which their numbers reflect or accentuate their representation within the overall demographic could offer further insights into the lives of these ubiquitous but unregarded Edwardian women.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the reviewers and editorial staff for their constructive comments.

32 *Seventy-Fourth Annual Report of the Registrar General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England and Wales* BPP 1912-13 XIII [C. 6578], pp. xiv- xvii, and in particular tables VI and VII, showing the mean age of widowers marrying spinsters as 43.49, and spinsters with widowers at 34.13; Census of England and Wales, 1911, *General Report*, p. 60.

SOURCES AND METHODS

Total Surrender? The Survival of Methodist Registers from before 1837 in England and Wales*

Philip Thornborow[1]

Abstract

Population historians have relied on parish records before civil registration was introduced in 1837, but nonconformists were missing from these records at a time of great change. It has been calculated that 7.28 per cent of the population were Methodists in 1831. Their registers were surrendered in 1840, but was the surrender total? This contribution to the 'Sources and Methods' series assesses the extent to which this is so, highlighting the regional variations in the Methodist presence. Registers from all the expressions of Methodism are examined to assess the level of information included which might support demographic analysis. The national registers kept by two Methodist denominations are found to be a sample, and whilst the coverage of the local registers is good, there are some significant gaps. Registers from after 1812 contain the richest data. Suggestions as to further lines of inquiry are made.

Introduction

The Local Population Studies Society Spring Conference 2023 was entitled 'Nonconformist local population history'. As the title of the first paper given at that Conference, 'Missing from the parish records' by Frances Richardson, suggests, there is a period, which happens to coincide with major industrial change and population growth, when a section of the community becomes invisible in the official record of demographic change. This is because, before the advent of civil registration in 1837, the measurement of demographic change has been based on the parish registers of the established Church of England, and people who were not adherents of the Church of England often do not appear in these registers.

E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, in their book *The Population History of England 1541-1871: a Reconstruction*, argued that this should not introduce a significant

* https://doi.org/10.35488/lps112.2024.55.

1 Philip Thornborow: phthorn@btinternet.com.

element of bias.[2] For the first 100 years of their study period, there were no legal alternatives to attending the parish church. Even by the beginning of the nineteenth century the annual proportion of nonconformist baptisms was still under 4 per cent.[3] Wrigley and Schofield made adjustments to their data to take account of nonconformity.[4] At a macro level these adjustments are reasonable, but at the local level they are less so. Put simply, the established Church was a universal presence: nonconformist denominations such as Old and New Dissent (and, indeed, Roman Catholicism) operated at a much more local level.

Work carried out since Wrigley and Schofield's book was published in 1981 has tended to be firmly based on the records of the Church of England, the majority confessional community. Yet nonconformist denominations also kept registers of vital events. This article concerns the registers of the Methodists, a prominent nonconformist denomination. It assesses the extent to which family, local and Methodist historians can rely on the fact that all Methodist registers were surrendered to the Registrar General in 1837 and are now looked after by The National Archives. Is the absence of a register a true measure of the absence of a Methodist presence? Should a register survive, what level of information is included which might support demographic analysis? However, before those questions may be answered it is necessary to consider the context of these registers.

Who are the Methodists?

The term 'Methodist' was used to describe members of a group of reforming Christians who met at Oxford University in the 1720s as part of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. It is also used of followers of the Welsh revival of the early eighteenth century, and of followers the Countess of Huntingdon. All the leaders of these groups were at some stage friends, and influenced one another. They eventually diverged theologically with regard to the meaning of salvation, with some members following the views of the Protestant theologian Arminius, and others those of Calvin. Put simply, Calvin's beliefs included 'predestination': that God had predetermined what He wished to make of every person. Not all of humanity would receive eternal life. Arminius took the view that God had predestined that a specific group, those who believed in Jesus Christ, would be saved.[5] The Methodist Church's website explains it in this way: 'Calvinism tends to

2 E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: a Reconstruction* (London, 1981; Cambridge, 1989).
3 Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, p. 92.
4 Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, pp. 89-96.
5 A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 2002), pp. 467-70.

stress the power and authority of God over who can be saved, while Arminianism emphasizes the capacity of each person to choose to respond to God freely and the opportunity for all to be saved.'[6]

The majority of Methodists in England were followers of the Wesley brothers, who were Arminians, whereas the majority of Methodists in Wales were Calvinistic Methodists. What the various groups shared was a belief that people needed to know that God cared for them, and that this was not being expressed by the Church of England. The message needed to be taken out into the field, where the people were, and not just expressed in the parish church. They also shared the belief that they could reform the Church of England from within. This article discusses the documents produced by the denominations who regard John Wesley as their founder, who are generally described as Methodists, and from this point on they will be described collectively as Methodists. The two other 'Methodist' bodies which arose in the 1730s were the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion and Yr Eglwys Fethodistaidd Galfinaidd. The Countess of Huntingdon was able to support evangelical activities by appointing preachers to the livings in her gift. The body she created separated from the Church of England in 1779, and has continued to this day, but is small in number. Yr Eglwys Fethodistaidd Galfinaidd (the Calvinist Methodist Church) is the main expression of Methodism in Wales. Welsh speaking, it separated from the Church of England in 1811.[7]

The divisions within Methodism

Having distinguished the three main strands of revival within the Church of England in the eighteenth century it is necessary to discuss the various divisions among the followers of Wesley.

Wesleyan Methodists

The members of the original Methodist movement regarded themselves as members of the established Church until 1795, after John Wesley's death in 1791.

6 Methodist Heritage *History of Methodism* [n.d.] https://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/methodist-history/history-of-methodism/ [accessed 23 July 2024]. The current Methodist position is that 'God loves you unconditionally, no strings attached' (The Methodist Church, *Faith* [n.d.] https://www.methodist.org.uk/faith/ [accessed 22 July 2024].

7 Since 1928 it has been known as Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru (Presbyterian Church in Wales) reflecting the way the Church is organised.

Wesley was reluctant to allow any actions which identified Methodists as Dissenters, despite holding annual conferences of 'his' preachers from 1744; organising the societies that had been set up into circuits and appointing preachers to them from before 1765 (see below); and ordaining two priests to minister to the newly independent United States in 1784; all of which actions cut across the operation of the Church of England. These original follo.wers of Wesley are referred to in records produced by the state, and themselves, as *Wesleyan Methodists*, or 'Wesleyans', or collectively as the 'Wesleyan Connexion'.

Nineteenth-century divisions

Following John Wesley's death, a number of groups more comfortable with being Dissenters, or that emphasised local leadership came into being. By necessity Methodism depended on lay leadership at the local level, but control was being exercised by the Methodist Conference, whose members were exclusively clergy. In 1797, 5,000 members of the Wesleyan Connexion led by four preachers set up the *Methodist New Connexion*. The main thrust of their constitution was that '[e]very member of the church is entitled to participate, either personally or representatively, in every act of its legislation and government'.[8] Another group who believed in local control (congregationalism) were the *Independent Methodists*. Founded in 1796, they broke away completely in 1806. They are mentioned here for completeness, but did not surrender any registers in 1837.

The next group to break away, in 1807, were the *Primitive Methodists*, who were a people's movement, with a network of local societies and travelling preachers. They began in Staffordshire and, by 1837, had spread throughout the Midland counties. appealing primarily to the working classes. They were also pioneers of female leadership. The *Bible Christians* were founded in 1815 in North Devon, and were a revivalist group with strong lay and female leadership. They were very much based in the West Country, being particularly strong in Devon and Cornwall. In the 1820s they established a strong presence in the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Kent.

The concern that too much power in Wesleyan Methodism was being concentrated in the hands of ministers in London continued through the 1820s and 1830s. The *Protestant Methodists* were mainly based around Leeds, and a major reason for their leaving the parent body in 1827 was that the local congregation voted not to have an organ but were overruled by the Conference in London. The *Arminian Methodists* were expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion in 1832 on doctrinal

8 Methodist New Connexion, *The Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion, being a Grateful Memorial of the Origin, Government and History of the Denomination* (London, 1848) p. 143.

grounds, and were a revivalist group originating in Derby, from which they spread to neighbouring counties. Finally, the *Wesleyan Methodist Association* (or Wesleyan Association) broke away in 1835, over what they saw as the overriding influence of one man, Jabez Bunting, within Methodism. They were very much the largest and most widely spread group of those seeking more local say in how Methodism was run, and within two years both the Protestant and Arminian Methodists had merged with them.[9]

The organisational structure of the Methodists

All the bodies mentioned in the last two sections described themselves as 'connexions'. Unlike other nonconformist bodies, where the individual congregations operate independently (in the main) and choose their own ministers, in a connexion the individual congregations are connected, sustaining one another and sharing resources. They have annual conferences or assemblies, where matters of mutual concern are discussed, and ministers are allocated.

Unlike the Church of England, historically Methodists do not have parishes, each served by a church and priest. Whilst individual Methodists are members of a specific society (or chapel), ministers are appointed to a *circuit*, an administrative and pastoral unit which contains a number of societies. The relevance to this paper is that it is the ministers who administer baptism. The major issue for any study involving Methodist records is that circuits constantly evolve in response to the growth and decline of Methodism, both generally and in a specific area. The first list of circuits (1765) includes 27 in England and Wales. In 1837 the groups described in this paper had 649 circuits. The evolution of the Wesleyan circuits may be followed in *Hall's Circuits and Ministers,* which is available online.[10] Circuit records may not be deposited where expected as circuits may cross county boundaries, and

9 There was a further major secession in 1849-1851: the Wesleyan Reformers, many of whom came together in 1857 with the Wesleyan Methodist Association to form the United Methodist Free Churches (often known as the Free Methodists). The remaining Wesleyan Reformers formed the Wesleyan Reform Union in 1859. These groups are outside the scope of this article as they postdate the surrender of non-Anglican registers.

10 *Hall's Circuits and Ministers: an Alphabetical List of the Circuits in Great Britain, with the Names of the Ministers Stationed in each Circuit, together with the Appointments to Departments and other Offices, from 1765 to 1912* (London, 1912), available online at My Wesleyan Methodists, *Hall's Circuits and Ministers: an Alphabetical List of the Circuits in Great Britain, with the Names of the Ministers Stationed in each Circuit, together with the Appointments to Departments and other Offices, from 1765 to 1912* [2021] https://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk/content/research-resources/lists-of-circuits-and-their-ministers/halls-circuits-and-ministers-1765-1912-2 [accessed 26 July 2024].

administrative changes may not be reflected in the cataloguing of deposited Methodist records. Within the Primitive Methodist Connexion, for example, large parts of the country were missioned from the Tunstall, Hull and Sunderland circuits. Although there is the potential for baptisms in Scotland and the Channel Isles (for example) to be recorded in the home circuit registers, those three registers seem to contain only local baptisms.

The size of the Methodist community prior to 1837

John Wesley was very concerned to keep accurate figures of the number of Methodists, and he and his successors took a close interest in numerical evidence of growth or decline. As Table 1 shows, the membership of the various Methodist denominations in England and Wales amounted to 297,582 in 1831.[11] Membership had been 46,559 at the time of the first Methodist registers in 1786, and was 91,825 in 1801, so there had been a rapid growth in the movement over the first three decades of the nineteenth century.[12] The figures collected are of members, and membership of a Methodist society is acquired as an adult, and has defined responsibilities and privileges. To obtain the total size of the community, which includes those who attended Methodist services or Sunday Schools, or who are members of a Methodist family, it is necessary to apply a multiplier. Clive Field has suggested 3.4, from which a total Methodist community in 1831 of 1,011,799 is suggested.[13] As the 1831 Census recorded a population of England and Wales of 13,897,187, the Methodist community equates to 7.28 per cent of the total population. There were also 2,247 Wesleyan Methodists in the Channel Islands; 2,300 on the Isle of Man; and 4,062 in Scotland. There were small numbers of Primitive Methodists in those places, and about 100 Bible Christians and some members of the Methodist New Connexion in the Channel Islands.

The geographical distribution of Methodists can be better understood from membership statistics from 1837, which are more easily accessed at a more local level (that of the circuit). These are given as Table 2. The significance of the total Methodist presence in each county is illustrated by Table 3, where a potential Methodist population is derived from the membership figures, and compared with an extrapolated total population. Besides the unavoidable difference in timing (the

11 From now on, we shall refer to the various groups within the Methodist Church as 'denominations'.

12 The earlier figures are from A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London, 1976), p. 31.

13 C.D. Field. 'Counting religion in England and Wales: the long eighteenth century, *c.* 1680 - *c.* 1840', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63 (2012), pp. 693–720, here at pp. 705-6, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046911002533.

Table 1 Methodist membership in 1831

Denomination	Number of members
Wesleyan Methodists	240,490
Methodist New Connexion	12,226
Primitive Methodists	37,216
Bible Christians	6,650
Protestant Methodists	1,000
Total	297,582

Sources: W. Baggaly**.** *A Digest of the Minutes, Institutions, Polity, Doctrines, Ordinances and Literature of the Methodist New Connexion* (London, 1862), p. 116; J. Petty. *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from its origin to the Conference of 1859* (London, 1860), p. 254; and *A Jubilee Memorial of Incidents in the Rise and Progress of the Bible Christian Connexion* (Shebbear, Devon, 1865), p. 122 (available at https://digitalcollections.vicu.utoronto.ca/RS/pages/view.php?ref=4816&k= [accessed 20 August 2024]; *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, Vol. 7. (London, 1838) p. 45 (available at https://archive.org/details/minutesofmethodi00wesl/page/n5/mode/2up [accessed 20 August 2024].

comparable figures for 1831 are not so readily available) it should be noted that significant organisational change occurred between the two dates. The Wesleyan Methodist Association left the parent body in 1836, and the Protestant Methodists (who had left in 1828) chose to make common cause.[14] Methodist administrative units do not always respect local government boundaries, but the differences will not be numerically significant. Where it is obvious that a circuit covers two counties allowance has been made.

It is noteworthy that in the case of Cornwall and the East Riding of Yorkshire almost 30 per cent of the population identified as Methodist. In Lincolnshire and the North and West Ridings of Yorkshire the proportion was about 20 per cent. In

14 To clarify, the members of the Wesleyan Methodist Association in 1837 had been Wesleyan Methodists or Protestant Methodists in 1831.

Table 2 Methodist membership by county 1837

County	Bible Christ-ians	Methodist New Connexion	Primitive Method-ists	Wesleyan Method-ists	Wesleyan Methodist Assoc-iation	Total
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	3,197	0	3,197
Berkshire	0	0	2,079	2,000	0	4,079
Buckinghamshire	0	0	260	1,250	0	1,510
Cambridgeshire	0	0	535	1,516	0	2,051
Cheshire	0	978	2,964	6,928	1,284	12,154
Cornwall	4,752	50	1,466	19,514	1,155	26,937
Cumberland	0	0	767	2,222	815	3,804
Derbyshire	0	0	2,441	7,171	900	10,512
Devon	2,116	0	0	7,288	291	9,695
Dorset	0	0	700	2,801	0	3,501
Durham	0	281	3,446	7,106	1,488	12,321
Essex	0	0	0	2,233	0	2,233
Gloucestershire	139	0	866	6,481	0	7,486
Hampshire	78	0	620	1,647	209	2,554
Isle of Wight	465	0	0	755	0	1,220
Herefordshire	0	0	1,212	826	0	2,038
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	913	0	913
Huntingdonshire	0	0	0	836	0	836
Kent	374	0	0	7,335	144	7,853
Lancashire	0	2,567	4,993	22,406	8,204	38,170
Leicestershire	0	0	2,038	4,854	438	7,330
Lincolnshire	0	0	3,485	17,042	75	20,602
Middlesex	246	0	0	9,296	560	10,102
Norfolk	0	185	6,013	7,782	0	13,980
Northamptonshire	0	0	206	5,250	0	5,456
Northumberland	0	672	1,800	4,694	79	7,245
Nottinghamshire	0	941	1,257	6,733	571	9,502
Oxfordshire	0	0	330	2,796	0	3,126
Rutland	0	0	0	302	0	302
Shropshire	0	50	3,714	3,478	0	7,242
Somerset	724	0	763	7,844	116	9,447
Staffordshire	0	1,926	3,681	9,310	0	14,917
Suffolk	0	0	2,052	2,339	160	4,551
Surrey	196	98	0	3,014	0	3,308

Table 2 ***continued***

County	Bible Christ-ians	Methodist New Connexion	Primitive Method-ists	Wesleyan Method-ists	Wesleyan Methodist Assoc-iation	Total
Sussex	163	0	0	1,557	0	1,720
Warwickshire	0	394	800	3,149	438	4,781
Westmorland	0	0	0	964	191	1,155
Wiltshire	0	0	1,210	2,696	0	3,906
Worcestershire	0	367	965	3,335	256	4,923
Yorkshire ER/York	0	538	6,658	10,381	467	18,044
Yorkshire NR	0	0	1,407	9,614	184	11,205
Yorkshire WR	0	3,179	7,206	46,250	2,427	59,062
Total England	9,253	12,226	65,934	267,105	20,452	374,970
Anglesea	0	0	0	661	0	661
Brecknockshire	0	0	0	820	0	820
Cardiganshire	0	0	0	885	0	885
Carmarthenshire	0	0	0	583	0	583
Caernarvonshire	0	0	0	858	0	858
Denbighshire	0	0	142	2,002	301	2,445
Flintshire	0	0	0	1,616	0	1,616
Glamorgan	0	0	290	2,241	0	2,531
Merioneth	0	0	0	750	0	750
Monmouthshire	106	0	280	1,568	0	1,954
Montgomeryshire	0	0	0	2,417	0	2,417
Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	961	0	961
Radnor	0	0	220	0	0	220
Total Wales	106	0	932	15,362	301	16,701
Total England and Wales	9,359	12,226	66,866	282,467	20,753	391,671

Table 2 ***continued***

Notes: Methodist circuits do not always respect local administrative boundaries, so these figures will not be completely accurate. ER – East Riding, NR – North Riding, WR – West Riding.

Sources: *Extracts from the Minutes of the 19th Annual Conference of the Ministers and Representatives of the People Designated Bible Christians at Zion Chapel, Langtree in the County of Devon* (Shebbear, Devon, 1837), p. 7; W. Baggaly, *A Digest of the Minutes, Institutions, Polity, Doctrines, Ordinances and Literature of the Methodist New Connexion* (London, 1862), pp. 43-4; Primitive Methodist Connexion, *The Primitive Methodist Magazine for the Year of our Lord 1838* (Bemersley, 1838), pp. 338-43; *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Methodist Preachers in the Connexion Established by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: at their Ninety-Fourth Annual Conference, begun in Leeds, on Wednesday July 26, 1837* (London, 1837), pp. 67-71; *Minutes of the Second Annual Assembly of the Representatives of the Wesleyan Association; begun in Liverpool on Wednesday, August 2nd 1837* (London, 1837), p. 35.

Wales, it would appear that two contrasting areas contained a higher proportion of Methodists from the Wesleyan (or post-Wesleyan) tradition: rural Montgomeryshire and the industrial landscapes of Denbighshire and Flintshire in the north-east of the country.

The surrendered registers

Following the introduction of civil registration in 1837, registers which were not those of a Church of England parish were collected and deposited with the Registrar General under the Non-Parochial Registers Act 1840. Further registers were surrendered to the Non-Parochial Registers Commission of 1857. Since all the registers were transferred to The National Archives, they have been catalogued in three classes: RG4 contains the registers surrendered in 1840, RG5 includes the birth certificates from the Wesleyan Methodist Metropolitan Registry, and RG8 the registers surrendered in 1857. In all, 1,119 registers from the various branches of Methodism were surrendered in 1840 and are preserved in The National Archives (TNA), representing 886 creating bodies. A further 50 registers covering the period 1837-1857, all from Wesleyan chapels, were deposited in 1858. Table 4 shows the numbers of pre-1837 registers deposited by each group of Methodists.

Table 3 Methodist community by county, 1837

County	Methodist members	Methodist community	Total population	Methodist community as percentage of total population
Bedfordshire	3,197	10,870	102,955	10.56
Berkshire	4,079	13,869	154,844	8.96
Buckinghamshire	1,510	5,134	152,201	3.37
Cambridgeshire	2,051	6,973	156,257	4.46
Cheshire	12,154	41,324	371,152	11.13
Cornwall	26,937	91,586	325,143	28.17
Cumberland	3,804	12,934	174,695	7.40
Derbyshire	10,512	35,741	258,198	13.84
Devon	9,695	32,963	517,867	6.37
Dorset	3,501	11,903	168,727	7.05
Durham	12,321	41,981	296,134	14.15
Essex	2,233	7,592	333,990	2.27
Gloucestershire	7,486	25,452	413,637	6.15
Hampshire/Isle of Wight	3,774	12,832	338,714	3.79
Herefordshire	2,038	6,929	112,811	6.14
Hertfordshire	913	3,104	151,661	2.05
Huntingdonshire	836	2,842	56,406	5.04
Kent	7,853	26,700	520,664	5.13
Lancashire	38,170	129,778	1,534,974	8.45
Leicestershire	7,330	24,922	208,321	11.96
Lincolnshire	20,602	70,047	344,547	20.33
Middlesex	10,102	34,347	1,489,314	2.31
Norfolk	13,980	47,532	403,620	11.78
Northamptonshire	5,456	18,550	191,271	9.70
Northumberland	7,245	24,633	239,332	10.29
Nottinghamshire	9,502	32,307	240,077	13.46
Oxfordshire	3,126	10,628	157,848	6.73
Rutland	302	1,027	20,535	5.00
Shropshire	7,242	24,623	232,604	10.59
Somerset	9,447	32,120	423,269	7.59
Staffordshire	14,917	50,718	470,507	10.78
Suffolk	4,551	15,473	307,571	5.03
Surrey	3,308	11,247	544,140	2.07
Sussex	1,720	5,848	288,788	2.03

Table 3 ***continued***

County	Methodist members	Methodist community	Total population	Methodist community as percentage of total population
Warwickshire	4,781	16,255	375,673	4.33
Westmorland	1,155	3,927	55,889	7.03
Wiltshire	3,906	13,280	251,302	5.28
Worcestershire	4,923	16,738	224,548	7.45
Yorkshire ER/York	18,044	61,350	221,655	27.68
Yorkshire NR	11,205	38,097	198,776	19.17
Yorkshire WR	59,062	201,300	1,083,001	18.59
Total England	374,970	1,275,388	14,113,618	9.04
Anglesea	661	2,247	49,865	4.51
Brecknockshire	820	2,788	52,467	5.31
Cardiganshire	885	3,009	67,172	4.48
Carmarthenshire	583	1,982	104,092	1.90
Caernarvonshire	858	2,917	75,235	3.88
Denbighshire	2,445	8,313	86,771	9.58
Flintshire	1,616	5,494	64,156	8.56
Glamorgan	2,531	8,605	153,358	5.61
Merioneth	750	2,550	37,725	6.76
Monmouthshire	1,954	6,644	119,865	5.54
Montgomeryshire	2,417	8,218	68,124	12.06
Pembrokeshire	961	3,267	85,396	3.83
Radnor	220	748	25,074	2.98
Total Wales	16,701	56,783	989,300	5.74
Total England and Wales	391,671	1,332,171	15,102,918	8.80

Table 3 ***continued***

Notes: Methodist circuits do not always respect local administrative boundaries, so these figures will not be completely accurate. ER – East Riding, NR – North Riding, WR – West Riding. The size of the Methodist community has been estimated by inflating the number of members by a factor of 3.4, following C.D. Field, 'Counting religion in England and Wales: the long eighteenth century, *c*. 1680 - *c*. 1840', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63 (2012), pp. 693–720, here at pp. 705-6, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046911002533.

Sources: *Extracts from the Minutes of the 19th Annual Conference of the Ministers and Representatives of the People Designated Bible Christians at Zion Chapel, Langtree in the County of Devon* (Shebbear, Devon, 1837), p. 7; W. Baggaly, *A Digest of the Minutes, Institutions, Polity, Doctrines, Ordinances and Literature of the Methodist New Connexion* (London, 1862), pp. 43-4; Primitive Methodist Connexion, *The Primitive Methodist Magazine for the Year of our Lord 1838* (Bemersley, 1838), pp. 338-43; *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Methodist Preachers in the Connexion Established by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: at their Ninety-Fourth Annual Conference, begun in Leeds, on Wednesday July 26, 1837* (London, 1837), pp. 67-71; *Minutes of the Second Annual Assembly of the Representatives of the Wesleyan Association; begun in Liverpool on Wednesday, August 2nd 1837* (London, 1837), p. 35. Total population in 1837 interpolated from figures given in *Accounts of the Total Population 1841, of each County of Great Britain; Distinguishing Males and Females and Showing the Rate Per Cent Increase or Decrease in each County Compared with Population 1831; also the Number of Houses Inhabited, Uninhabited and Building, According to the Census, 1841; Similar Returns for Channel Islands and Isle of Man; also, Comparative Statement of the Population and Number of Houses, 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, for each County in Great Britain; also, Population of each City and Royal and Parliamentary Burgh in Scotland.* British Parliamentary Papers 1841 II [C. 52].

Denominational analysis of survival rates

Wesleyan Methodists

The original Methodist Movement regarded themselves as members of the Established Church until 1795 although, by ordaining two ministers to serve in the newly independent United States of America in 1784 John Wesley had made an effective break. If a Society referred to itself as 'Church Methodist', this is an

indicator that it maintained a relationship with the Church of England: a relationship that included baptism in the parish church.[15] The indices to TNA series RG4, RG5 and RG8 suggest that eight Methodist baptismal registers start before 1780. In reality the evidence is that The National Archives have taken the earliest recorded date of birth as being when the register commences.[16] The earliest surviving evidence of actual baptisms is at Halifax, South Parade (RG4/3011) in 1772. Greetland (RG4/3010) and Padiham (RG4/1146) both have registers commencing in 1785. All these places were in the Pennines, illustrating how the separation began in communities where Methodist preachers had gone to where the people were, and where meeting houses were built, rather than remaining in the preindustrial centres of parishes. Baptism in their own places of worship by their own ministers became normal for Methodist societies after John Wesley's death in 1791. As Wesley's death was closely followed by the first secessions, the national body was known as the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion.

The Wesleyan Methodists were the largest section of the wider movement, with 240,490 members by 1831. They were to be found across England and Wales. In Wales they worked in both languages. In total, 833 Wesleyan Methodist registers of baptism have survived, representing 122 circuits and 571 individual congregations. The earlier registers tend to be for circuits but, as the movement expanded, chapel registers became more common.

The 1837 Annual Conference stationed ministers in 363 circuits. The significance of the circuit system was that baptism was usually carried out by the minister. All but nine circuits are represented in TNA RG4, some registers stating that they are registers for a circuit, and others stating that they are for the main chapel (but containing entries from others in the circuit). Five of the unrepresented circuits are from Wales, and of these two were ephemeral, not being listed in *Hall's Circuits and Ministers*.[17] The two significant absences are Cardiff (Welsh) created in 1808, and with a membership in 1837 of 398, and the Cardigan Circuit, which had a membership in 1837 of 438. Four Yorkshire circuits are unrepresented. Whilst Hornsea had only been created in 1835 the others (Malton, Otley and Whitby) are of some significance, with memberships in 1837 of 1,024, 979 and 1,100 respectively. The survival of Wesleyan Methodist baptism registers is shown in Figure 1.

15 Methodists met in 'classes' for mutual support and improvement, which combined into 'societies' who met in the local meeting house, preaching place or chapel.

16 See The National Archives (hereafter TNA), RG4/1126 (Leicester, Bishop Street) RG4/2432 (Bury, Union Street) and RG4/3762 (Sowerby).

17 My Wesleyan Methodists, *Hall's Circuits and Ministers*.

Table 4 Methodist registers in The National Archives

Denomination	Registers	Bodies	Post-1837 registers	Post-1837 bodies
BAPTISM REGISTERS DEPOSITED				
Wesleyan Methodists	636	557	30	24
Methodist New Connexion	52	42		
Primitive Methodists	95	92		
Bible Christians	28	29		
Wesleyan Methodist Association	2	2		
Arminian Methodists	2	2		
Free Methodists	1	1		
Total registers of baptism	816	725	30	24
BURIAL REGISTERS DEPOSITED				
Wesleyan Methodists	16	15	17	14
Methodist New Connexion	2	2		
Primitive Methodists	1	1		
Total registers of burial	19	18	17	14
BOTH REGISTERS DEPOSITED				
Wesleyan Methodists	276	135	3	2
Methodist New Connexion	3	3		
Primitive Methodists	5	5		
Total both registers deposited	284	143	3	2
Total	1,119	886	50	40

Note: These figures are based on examination of the registers. The indexes provided by The National Archives and Ancestry are not totally accurate as to the content. 'Bodies' refers to the collectivity to which each register relates: in the early years a 'body' could be a circuit; in later years it was more commonly a single chapel or congregation.

Table 4 ***continued***

Sources: Ancestry.com. *England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1936* [2013] https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2972 [accessed April 2024]; original data from The National Archives RG4, RG5 and RG8.

The Wesleyans had anticipated the state by maintaining a Metropolitan Registry of births and baptisms. This exists in two forms, a register of births and baptisms (TNA RG4/4677, 4678 and 4679, with an index volume RG4/4680) and a series of birth certificates (RG5/0167-0207). The National Archives have indexed the former as covering the period 1773 to 1838, and the latter as covering 1818 to 1840. The evidence of the actual documents is that both sets were created between 1818 and 1838. The numbered sequence of both sets runs to 10,351. For all these Wesleyan Methodists there are three records of their birth and baptism, the two forms in the Wesleyan Metropolitan Registry, and the record in the chapel or circuit register. A full calculation of the number of Wesleyan Methodist baptisms has not been attempted, but as there were 8,588 Wesleyan baptisms in Cornwall during this period, and 1,606 in the Derby Circuit alone, it is likely that the Metropolitan Registry is but a sample.

Methodist New Connexion

In 1797 5,000 members of the Wesleyan Connexion led by four preachers set up a New Connexion. The main thrust of their constitution was that '[e]very member of the church is entitled to participate, either personally or representatively, in every act of its legislation and government.'[18] One of the reasons they gave for splitting away was their desire for baptism in their own places of worship by their own ministers. It took until 1823, however, for them to include instructions on compiling a circuit baptismal register in their 'General rules'.[19] The societies that joined the New Connexion were Alnwick, Ashton, Bolton, Chester, Hanley, Leeds, Liverpool, Macclesfield, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Stockport.[20] By 1831 they had 12,226 members, mainly in the north of England, but with a presence in Cornwall and Southwark in London.

18 *Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion*, p. 143.

19 Methodist New Connexion *The General Rules of the Methodists of the New Connexion*: *Revised, Enlarged and Approved at their Twenty-Third Annual Conference* (Hanley, 1823), p. 10.

20 *Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion*, p. 111.

Figure 1 Survival of Wesleyan Methodist baptismal registers

The surviving registers of baptism of the Methodist New Connexion number 53 in total, representing the whole community: 25 circuits and 19 chapels. The General Baptism Register (or Conference Baptism Register) was compiled between 1 June 1813 and 28 June 1837, and covers baptisms which occurred between 1797 and 1837. The covering note to the register explains that the entries were copied from local registers, but as only 430 baptisms are recorded it would appear to be a representative sample.[21] A sample of 20 entries taken from throughout the volume was compared with the search page of BMD Registers and 6 were found to be matched in other registers, whereas 14 appeared to be unique to the General Register.[22]

The 1837 Annual Conference stationed ministers in 39 circuits. Of these a total of 28 circuits are represented either by a circuit register or by chapel registers. Four circuits had been created in the mid 1830s. The areas where no registers seem to have survived are Birmingham, Liverpool, Chester, Stockport and South Yorkshire (Doncaster and Thorne). As Liverpool, Chester and Stockport were part of the Connexion from the start, this is a significant omission. It is possible to find membership figures by circuit from 1815, and at that time the missing circuits accounted for 1,484 out of 7,679 members, or 19 per cent.[23] Despite these omissions, 23,293 baptisms are recorded in those registers which were deposited. Figure 2 illustrates the surviving pre-1837 coverage of Methodist New Connexion baptismal registers. It should be noted that the map shows the extent to which registers survive in The National Archives, not the relative numerical strength of the Methodist New Connexion. Of the 23,293 baptisms in the registers, 11,700 are from Yorkshire, 5,355 from Staffordshire, 3,456 from Lancashire and 1,056 from Nottingham. It appears that the baptismal register of High Street chapel in Huddersfield was not surrendered. It was deposited more recently however, and is available online: between 1797 and 1837 2,311 baptisms are recorded.[24]

Primitive Methodists

The third denomination, but second largest in terms of membership (37,216 in 1831) was the Primitive Methodists, who were a people's movement, with a network of local societies and travelling preachers. Women had an important role. In the context of the growing democratisation and sense of dislocation caused by

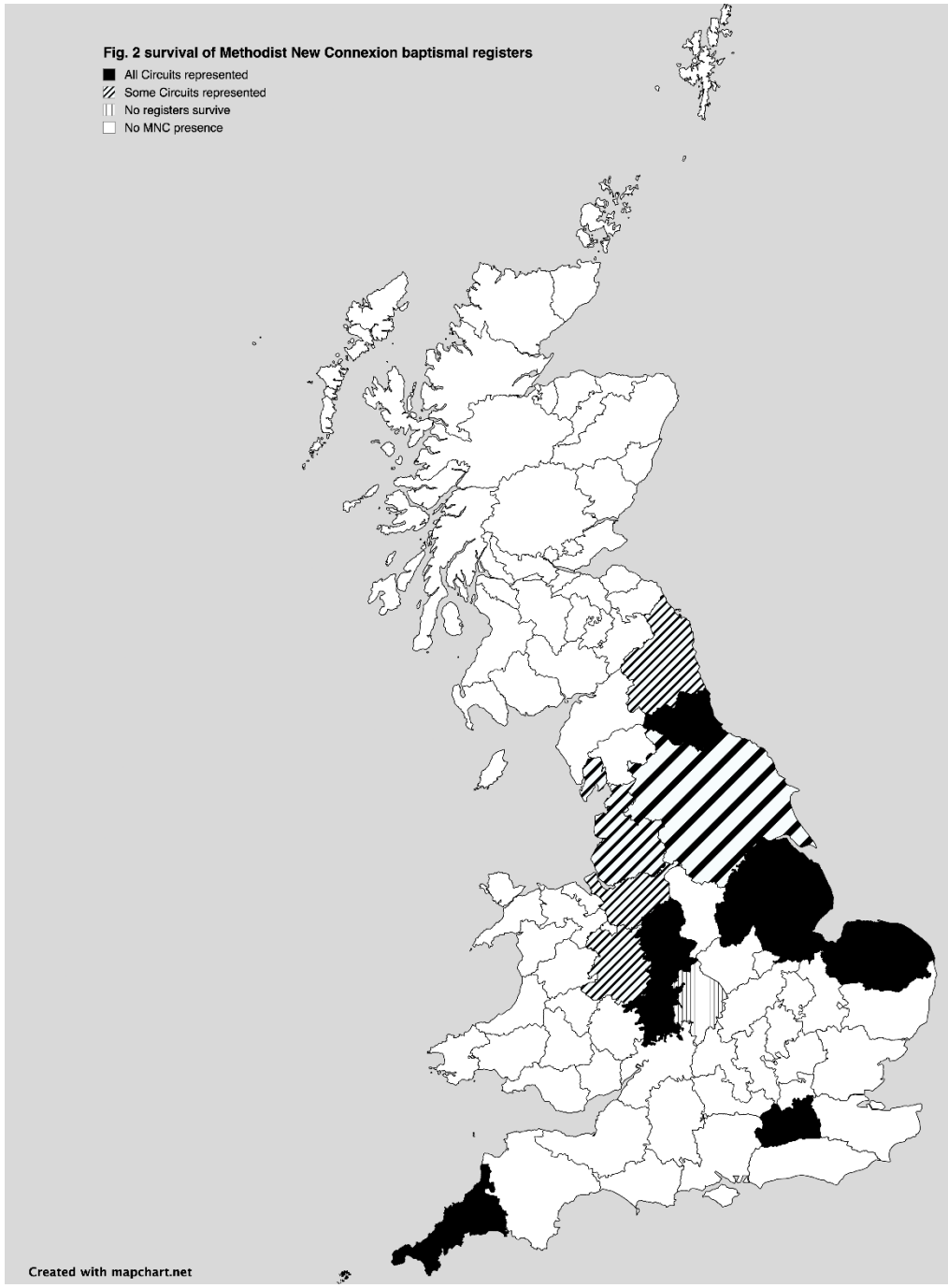
21 The National Archives RG4/2858, note on back of title page.

22 BMD Registers, *The Official Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial BMDs Service* [n.d.] https://bmdregisters.co.uk/ [accessed 4 January 2024].

23 *A Portrait of the New Connexion of Methodists* (Leeds, 1815), p. 8.

24 West Yorkshire Archives NM/HSC/XVIII/1a.

Figure 2 Survival of Methodist New Connexion baptismal registers



the industrial revolution, it appealed primarily to miners and mill hands, farm labourers, and workers in developing factory towns.[25] Founded in Staffordshire in 1807, by 1837 Primitive Methodism had spread throughout the Midland counties. The Primitive Methodists were predominantly a northern and eastern English denomination at this point: there were none in the south-east of England and none in Welsh-speaking Wales. The 1837 Annual Conference stationed ministers in 142 Circuits, and 102 Primitive Methodist registers of baptism have survived, representing 77 circuits and 23 individual chapels.

Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which circuits in each county are represented among those registers surrendered. By comparison with Table 2, it would appear that, in the areas where the Primitive Methodists were strongest, only slightly more than half the potential registers had been kept or surrendered. In Wales and southern England none are extant. Despite these omissions, 14,726 baptisms are recorded in those registers which were deposited. Six baptismal registers have been identified which have been digitised or transcribed by various genealogical organisations, but had not been surrendered. Two, relating to the Lynn Circuit in Norfolk, and the Salisbury Circuit in Wiltshire, appear to have remained in use. The others appear to be for new circuits where entries were transferred to new registers from previous manuscripts. A further 597 baptisms are recorded in these registers.

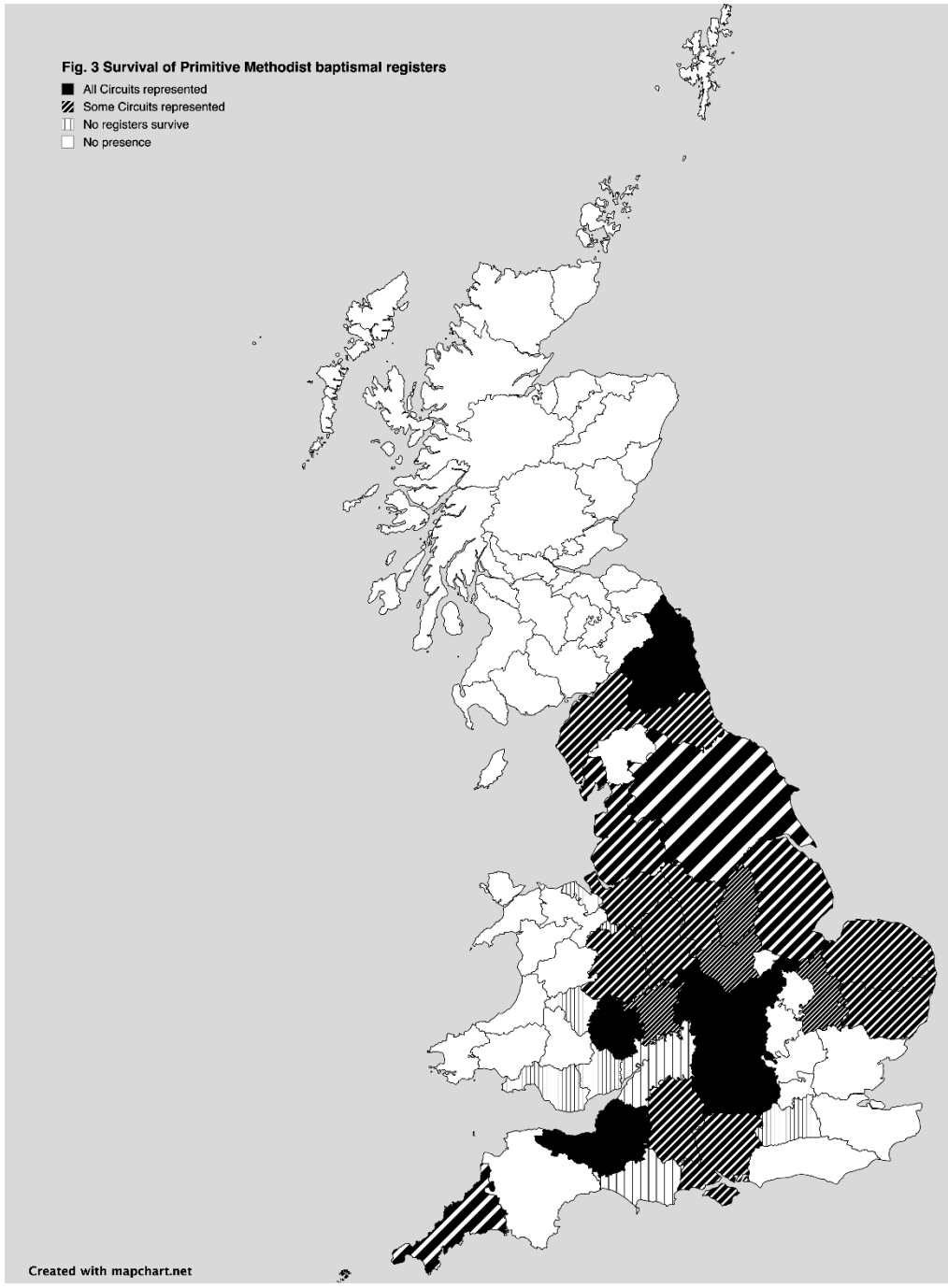
Bible Christians

The fourth group were the Bible Christians, founded in 1815 in North Devon. A revivalist group with strong lay and female leadership, 6,650 adults were in membership by 1831. Whilst not directly relevant to this survey, it is still worth noting that they had female ministers from the start: ten were stationed in 1837. The Bible Christians were very much based in the West Country (Devon and Cornwall were their areas of strength) but by 1837 they had spread north along the Bristol Channel to Somerset and Gloucestershire, and were beginning to evangelise the Forest of Dean and Monmouthshire to the north of the estuary. They had also established a presence in the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Kent.

There are 28 surviving baptismal registers from the Bible Christians, representing 27 Circuits and 2 chapels. In total 5,461 baptisms were recorded in standard registers. These had been approved by the 1819 Conference, and gave the parents' names, occupation of the father and parentage of the mother. The 1837 Annual Conference stationed ministers in 42 circuits: the majority of the circuit

25 J. Barber. *What is Primitive Methodism? A Short Introduction* [2012] https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/subjects-2/primitive-methodist-history/what-is-primitive-methodism [accessed 29 December 2023].

Figure 3 Survival of Primitive Methodist baptismal registers



registers in Devon and Cornwall, the Isle of Wight, Sussex and Kent have been deposited. The exceptions are two small missions in rural Kent, Elham and Chobham (which the records of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship suggest were founded in the late 1830s), but also some larger circuits in the South-West: Helston, Mevagissey, St Austell, Holsworthy and Brentor. As these areas had a total Bible Christian membership of 1,797 it appears at first sight that there may be some significant gaps. Closer reading of the sources, however, reveals that Helston, Mevagissey and St Austell were created from circuits whose registers were deposited.[26] The registers of the Brentor and Holsworthy Circuits from 1837 onwards are deposited in Devon Archives and Local Studies. As Holsworthy was the home town of William O'Bryan, the founder of the Bible Christians it is probably that some baptisms took place between 1820 and 1837: comparing the membership figures and recorded baptisms for the Devon circuits, possibly as many as 350 baptisms may be unaccounted for.

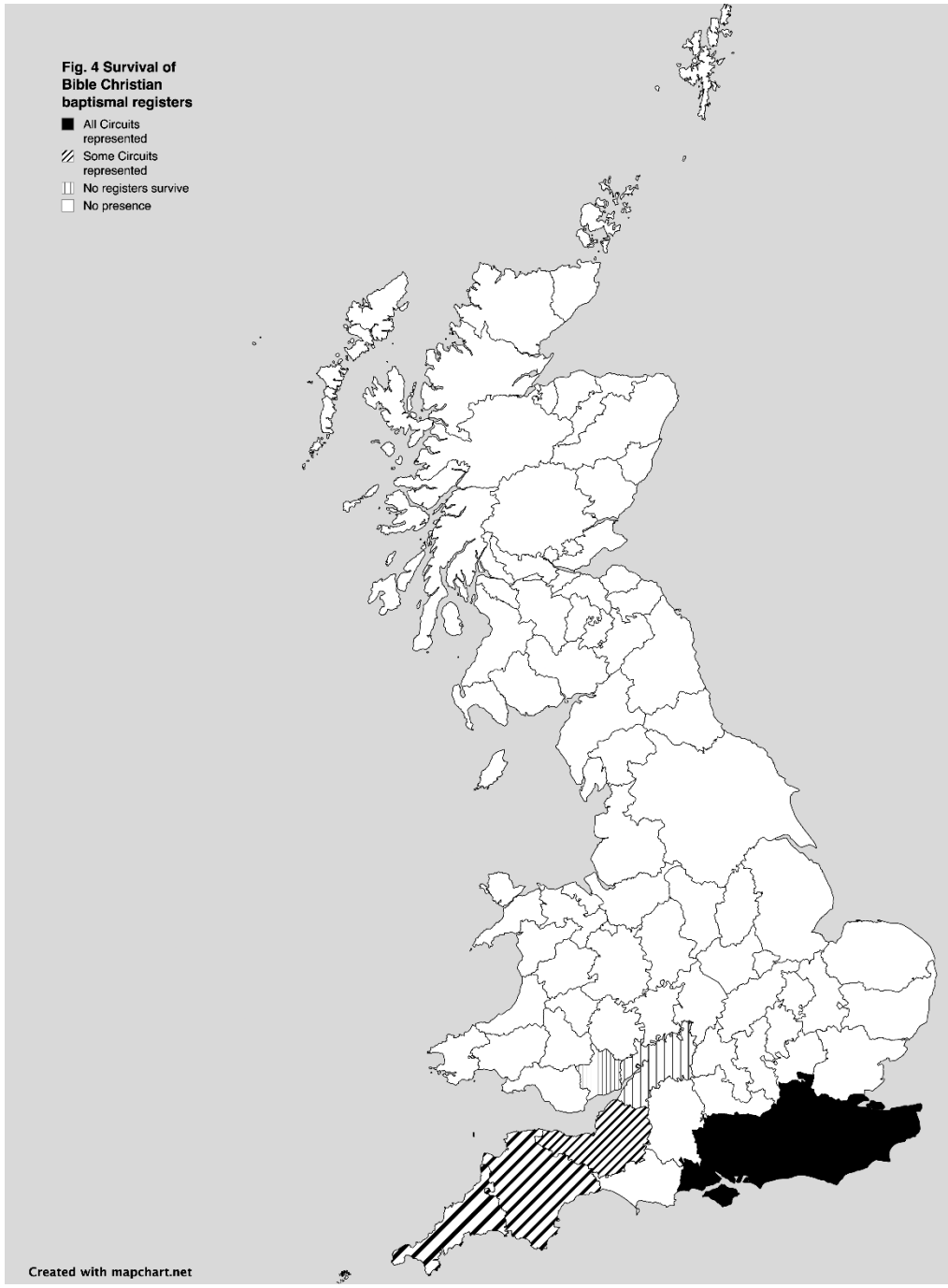
With the exception of Kingsbrompton and Crewkerne, the registers for Somerset, Gloucestershire and Monmouth are missing. Figure 4 illustrates the surviving pre-1837 coverage of Bible Christian baptismal registers. It should be noted that the map shows the extent to which registers survive in The National Archives, not the relative numerical strength of the Bible Christians. Of the baptisms, 2,596 are from Cornwall, 1,000 from Devon, 789 from Kent and 375 from the Isle of Wight.

Reformers 1827-1837

A number of groups broke away in the last decade before civil registration, sharing a concern that too much power in Wesleyan Methodism was being concentrated in the hands of ministers in London. They were relatively small scale. The Protestant Methodists (1827-1837) have left no registers. The Arminian Methodists (1832-1837) had three circuits: Leicester, Nottingham and Redditch, and registers from two of them, Nottingham Barker Gate and Redditch, survive. They had an interesting form of baptismal register in which two people attest they were at the birth, and give the full ancestry of the child (father, mother, mother's parents), with the record going on to state that it was a Trinitarian baptism. Both surviving registers record an average of three baptisms a year.

26 See *A Jubilee Memorial of Incidents in the Rise and Progress of the Bible Christian Connexion* (Shebbear, Devon, 1865), (available at https://digitalcollections.vicu.utoronto.ca/RS/pages/view.php?ref=4816&k= [accessed 20 August 2024].

Figure 4 Survival of Bible Christian baptismal registers



The Wesleyan Association broke away in 1835, with 57 circuits and 166 chapels, but the only three early registers that survive are for Louth, Walbergate; Kingston upon Hull, Sykes Street; and Rochdale, Baillie Street. These record 39 baptisms in total, at a rate of two per year.

Conclusions regarding the survival of registers

It would appear that the majority of Wesleyan Methodist registers dating before 1837 were surrendered and have survived. The exceptions are areas of Yorkshire and South Wales. There are significant omissions among the Methodist New Connexion and Primitive Methodist registers liable for surrender, although a number have subsequently been deposited in local record offices. The majority of the Bible Christian registers appear to have survived, except in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Monmouth where ten per cent of the membership resided in 1837.

There are a number of explanations for non-survival. Like all Methodist records, the registers were in the hands of individuals, and this may have contributed to loss. Whilst circuit registers were completed by the itinerant ministers, which may account for some losses, it is clear from the surrendered registers that they were kept in the main chapel by the chapel stewards.

The earlier registers were fully manuscript before printed registers were acquired. It is possible some have not been recognised as registers. When the registers were surrendered, they were subjected to a process of authentication, and it is known that some were returned. As with parish registers, baptisms from earlier years were transcribed into the new book (or not) as the case may be.[27] When whole congregations split away from Wesleyan Methodism they tended to stay in the same building. The evidence in these cases is that the register remained in place and continued to be used.[28] For example, when the Methodist New Connexion took over Hockley Chapel in Nottingham they also took over the baptismal register (TNA RG4/1780). The Wesleyans regrouped at Halifax Chapel, Nottingham, but transcribed the ten years of Wesleyan baptisms into a new book (TNA RG4/2866).

27 An example being the Methodist New Connexion chapel of Halifax, Salem: see TNA RG4/3351. A printed register book was acquired in 1806 and for baptisms until 1819. Two pages were left blank, and then the baptisms from 1798 to 1806, which had been recorded in a previous register, were transcribed into the printed book. The Commissioners added a note to the register stating that these entries were un-authenticated

28 For example, there is no indication in the register for the Methodist New Connexion chapel of Ovendon, Zion (TNA RG4/3407) as to when they ceased to be Wesleyan.

Information contained within Methodist baptismal registers

Wesleyan Methodists

During the period when Methodism was emerging as a separate denomination baptismal registers tended to follow the same formula as parish registers:

> *AA* son/daughter of *BB and C* of *place* in the parish of *X* was [born *date* and] baptised *date* by me *DD*.

Those chapels and circuits whose registers start before 1800 continue with this formula. After 1812 some chapels and circuits adopt the new form of the Anglican register book. An example is Appleby (TNA RG4/3274) which commences in 1816. There are eight entries to a page, with seven columns:

> When baptised
> Child's Christian name
> Parent's Christian name
> Parent's surname
> Abode
> Quality, trade or profession
> By whom the ceremony was performed.

As the Methodists became more confident of being separate from the established Church but also aware that, in order to qualify for burial in the parish graveyard (in many places the only legal location for interments), one had to be 'properly' baptised, they began to publish their own registers. The Wesleyan Methodists created a Metropolitan Registry of births and baptisms in 1818, as noted above, and it was this body that published 'A Register of Births: and of Baptisms with Water, solemnised in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' in 1819.[29] They make specific reference to the Trinitarian nature of the baptism, but they also believe it is important to know when the birth occurred. As with other bodies publishing printed registers, the Methodist Register Office provided a template of how the information should be recorded:

> *A* the son/daughter of *BB* of *place* in the parish of *X* in the county of *Y (quality trade or profession)* and *C* his wife, who was the daughter of *D* and *EF* was born on the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one

29 An example is TNA RG4/4111 for the Methodist chapel at Towcester.

> thousand eight hundred and *number*. And was solemnly baptised with water, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, on the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number* by me *GG*.

When these details were transferred to the Metropolitan Registry even more information was added. As with the later civil registration, a witness was required to attest to the birth, and the parents attested to the birth and baptism.

> *A* the son/daughter of *BB* of *place* in the parish of *X* in the county of *Y (quality trade or profession)* and *C* his wife, who was the daughter of *D* and *EF* was born at *place* on the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number* at whose birth we were present *GG*.
>
> The first above mentioned *A* was solemnly baptised with water, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, on the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number* at *name of chapel* by me *HH*.
>
> We, the parents of the above named *A* do hereby attest the truth of the above Record of the Birth and Baptism of our said son/daughter *BB* Father *CB* Mother.
>
> Registered at the Methodist Register Office, No. 66 Paternoster Row, near St. Paul's Church, London this *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number*.

Not all Wesleyan Methodist chapels and circuits used the printed registers. Daventry Circuit had a manuscript register from 1801 onwards (although some baptisms were of adults born much earlier).[30] For the first 20 years they recorded in the simplest form, but from 1822 all the relevant biographical information was recorded (Name, Names of parents, Maiden name of mother, Occupation of father, Date and place of birth, Date and place of baptism, Name of minister).

30 TNA RG4/1270.

Methodist New Connexion

One of the reasons the Methodist New Connexion gave for seceding in 1797 was to have their own people baptised by their own ministers:

> 2. The right of the people to receive the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper from the hands of their own ministers and in their own places of worship.[31]

Like the Wesleyans they had a central register, but as it only contains 430 baptisms it is clearly very selective. The General Register of Baptisms of the Methodist New Connexion makes use of the standard Anglican baptismal register from 1783, so the information is the minimum (*AB* son/daughter of *BB and C* of *place* in the parish of *X* was [born *date* and] baptised *date* by me *DD).* This is also the form of the earliest Methodist New Connexion registers. The manuscript register for Ashton-under-Lyne, Stanford Street (TNA RG4/1198) begins in this way in 1797, but in 1812 changes to six columns recording Child's name, When born, When baptised, Number of children [for example '4th son'], Parents' name(s), By whom baptised. The column headed Parents' name(s) includes much more: Father's name and Occupation and Abode, Mother's name and her Father's name, Occupation and Abode.

The Methodist New Connexion appears to have adopted a printed form of register in 1820, entitled Register of Baptisms solemnised with Water, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost by Ministers of a congregation of Dissenting Protestants commonly called The Methodist New Connexion. Unlike the Wesleyans they are clear that they are Dissenters. An example is Boston, West Street, Zion (TNA RG4/1114) which commences in 1827. There are ten entries to a page, with nine columns:

> When baptised
> Child's Christian name and sex
> In what parish born
> When born
> Names of parents with the former name of the mother
> Abode
> Business or profession
> Signature of parents

31 *Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion*, p. 43.

Signature of minister by whom the ceremony was performed.

There are exceptions to this pattern. Zion Chapel, Ovenden, which is a major Methodist New Connexion chapel surrendered four registers covering the period 1779 to 1837. In these registers 6,085 baptisms are recorded, of which 1,735 date from before 1797 when the congregation left the Wesleyan Connexion. All are in manuscript form, with minimal entries which do not record the name of the person performing the baptism.

Primitive Methodists

The Primitive Methodists' printed registers are similar to those of the Methodist New Connexion in being headed 'A Register of Baptisms solemnised with Water, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Kept by the Primitive Methodists'.[32] There are nine entries to a page, but with (broadly) the same nine columns as the Methodist New Connexion:

When baptised
Child's Christian name and sex
In what parish born
When born
Names of parents with the former name of the mother
Abode
Quality, trade or profession
Signature of parents
Signature of minister by whom the ceremony was performed.

Other Primitive Methodist registers are entirely in manuscript form.[33] The form of words used is:

A the son/daughter of *B and CD* of *place* was born at *place* on *Month, Day, Year* and baptized at *place* on *Month, Day, Year* by me *EF* Licenced preacher. Father is a *occupation.* Mother's maiden name is *G.*

The earliest registers date from the first years of the denomination from 1807 to 1819.

32 An example is TNA RG4/3300 for the Primitive Methodist chapel at Newcastle-under-Lyme.

33 An example is TNA RG4/1303 for the Loughborough, Dead Lane Circuit.

Bible Christians

The Bible Christian Conference approved a printed baptismal register in 1819, with a worked example as follows:

> *A* the son/daughter of *BB* of *place,* county of *Y (quality trade or profession)* and of *C* his wife, (who was the daughter of *D* and *EF)* was born on the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number;* and was solemnly Baptized with water, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, on the *number* day of *Month, Year* at *place,* in the parish of *name,* County *name* by me *GG,* Minister.[34]

Arminian Methodists

The Arminian Methodists, when they left the Wesleyan fold in 1832, adopted a version of the Wesleyan Metropolitan Registry form, stressing even more firmly the Trinitarian nature of the baptism, but also ensuring that there were two witnesses to the birth.[35]

> *AB* the *son/daughter* of *BB* of *place* in the parish of *X* in the [town or county] of *Y* and *C* his wife (who was the daughter of *D* and *EF* of place) was born at *place* on *day of the week* the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number* at whose birth we were present *GG* of *Place, HH* of *Place.*
>
> The first above mentioned *AB* was solemnly baptized with water, in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—One God—on *day of the week* the *number* day of *Month* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *number* at *name of chapel* by me *JJ.*
>
> We the above named parents of the above named *AB* do hereby testify to the truth of the above statement, by signing our names thereto.
>
> *BB* Father *CB* Mother

34 An example is TNA RG4/0103 for the Kilkhampton Circuit.
35 The example is TNA RG4/3133 for Nottingham, Salem Chapel, Barkergate.

Table 5 Information contained in the Methodist baptismal registers

Variable	Arminian Methodists	Bible Christians	Methodist New Connexion			Primitive Methodists	Wesleyan Methodists			
Dates covered	1835-1837	1817-1837	1797-1812	1812-1820	1820-1837	1810-1837	1780-1811	1812-1818	1818-1837	post-1837
Name	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sex	Yes	Yes	Yes	Inf.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Father's name	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mother's name	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mother's maiden name	Inf.	Inf.		Inf.	Inf.	Yes		Inf.	Inf.	
Mother's parents' names	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Abode	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Father's trade		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Mother's father's trade				Yes						
Date of birth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Date of baptism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Witnesses to birth	Yes								Yes	
Name of minister	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: 'Inf.' – not present but may be inferred from Name or Mother's parents' names.

Sources: Arminian Methodists, The National Archive (hereafter TNA) RG4/3133; Bible Christians, TNA RG4/0103; Methodist New Connexion, TNA RG 4/1198 and RG4 1114; Primitive Methodists, TNA RG4/1303 and RG4 3330; Wesleyan Methodists; TNA RG4/1270, RG4/4111 and RG4/2076.

Wesleyan Methodist Association

Only 39 baptisms are recorded in the three surviving early registers of the Wesleyan Association. They differ in how they record information, but the mother's maiden name is included.

Summary of information contained in pre-1837 registers

Table 5 summarises the information contained in registers before they were surrendered to the Registrar General. The richest data is contained in the Methodist New Connexion baptismal registers from between 1812 and 1820, but for all the denominations the period after 1812 is the most useful for the population historian.

All this variety came to an end when Methodist chapels commenced new baptismal registers to continue those that had been surrendered to the Registrar General. The information is now standard:

When baptised
Child's Christian name and sex
Parent's name (Christian name and surname)
Abode
Child's age when baptised
Minister by whom the ceremony was performed.

Some pitfalls relating to Methodist baptismal practice

It is important to remember that, although some Methodists would not recognise themselves as dissenters, all Methodist baptisms were an act of dissent from the default position that every child brought into an English or Welsh community is a parishioner of the Anglican Church. Another key difference is that, whilst England and Wales were converted to Christianity in the early medieval period, and during the period under discussion everybody entered the established Church at birth, Methodism grew by active evangelisation. In both England and Wales Methodism was part of the evangelical revival. The early Methodist preachers were itinerant; they moved through the country; and all subsequent ordained ministers of the church have followed this pattern.[36] The history of Methodism is, therefore, full of

36 In the period under discussion preachers moved every one, two or (exceptionally) three years. Among the registers deposited there is no evidence that they took the register books with

stories of how the faith arrived in a place and how revivals brought in significant numbers of converts. The denominational magazines report these activities, and a wide range of transcriptions of these reports may be found at the web site *My Primitive Methodists.*[37] The result is that multiple baptisms of adults may be recorded within the registers. Neither the denominational magazines nor the registers record the other side of the coin: when membership fell away in a locality. John Probert dedicates an important section of his work on Cornish Methodism to this issue.[38] He found a 16-year cycle, interspersed by equally significant declines. Six of these cycles took place before the registers were surrendered to the Registrar General.[39] In other words, it would be unwise to assume 'once a Methodist, always a Methodist'. As membership of the Church of England was required in a number of situations in life, Methodist parents might continue to take their children to the parish church for baptism. There are also examples of double baptism.[40]

Burial registers

In contrast to the baptismal practice, most Methodists were buried in the Church of England parish graveyard. This was usually the only option before 1852, and it could cause friction, as some incumbents refused to bury anyone not baptised by an ordained clergyman, an issue not wholly resolved until 1880.[41] As has been noted, Methodist chapels opened where the people were living, rather than in the historic village centres, so a number of the pre-1837 chapels had burial grounds attached. This circumvented the issues of having to travel to be buried and the lack of an established Church baptism among the deceased. The first Methodist burial ground was at Greetland, in the West Riding of Yorkshire.[42]

There are 13 surviving registers in The National Archives which contain burials alone, representing 13 distinct bodies (circuits or chapels). A further 276 registers survive which include both baptisms and burials, representing 141 bodies. These

them when they moved, although the itinerancy of ministers could be an explanation of why some registers are missing.

37 *My Primitive Methodists: Sharing Stories, Photos, Memories and Research* [2014–] https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk [accessed 17 May 2024].

38 J.C.C. Probert, *The Sociology of Cornish Methodism* (Redruth, 1971).

39 Probert, *Sociology of Cornish Methodism*, pp. 28-37.

40 For example Thomas Raven, son of the founders of Quorndon Wesleyan chapel, and Chapel Steward himself as an adult, was baptised in Loughborough Wesleyan chapel on 19 July 1805, and in St Bartholomew's Quorndon on 23 November 1806.

41 D. Leese. 'Methodist burial practices: aspiration and conflict 1780-1880 ', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 64 (2023), pp. 123-34.

42 Leese. 'Methodist burial practices', p. 126.

are overwhelmingly Wesleyan Methodist burial registers (143 of the total 154 bodies). Six Primitive Methodist and five Methodist New Connexion burtial registers survive, containing 16,223 and 1,138 burials respectively.

The locations of the Wesleyan burial grounds are shown in Figure 5. The four major Primitive Methodist burial grounds are in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Two burial registers from Norfolk contain eight burials. The Methodist New Connexion burials are from their heartlands of the West Riding, Lancashire, and Dudley in the West Midlands.

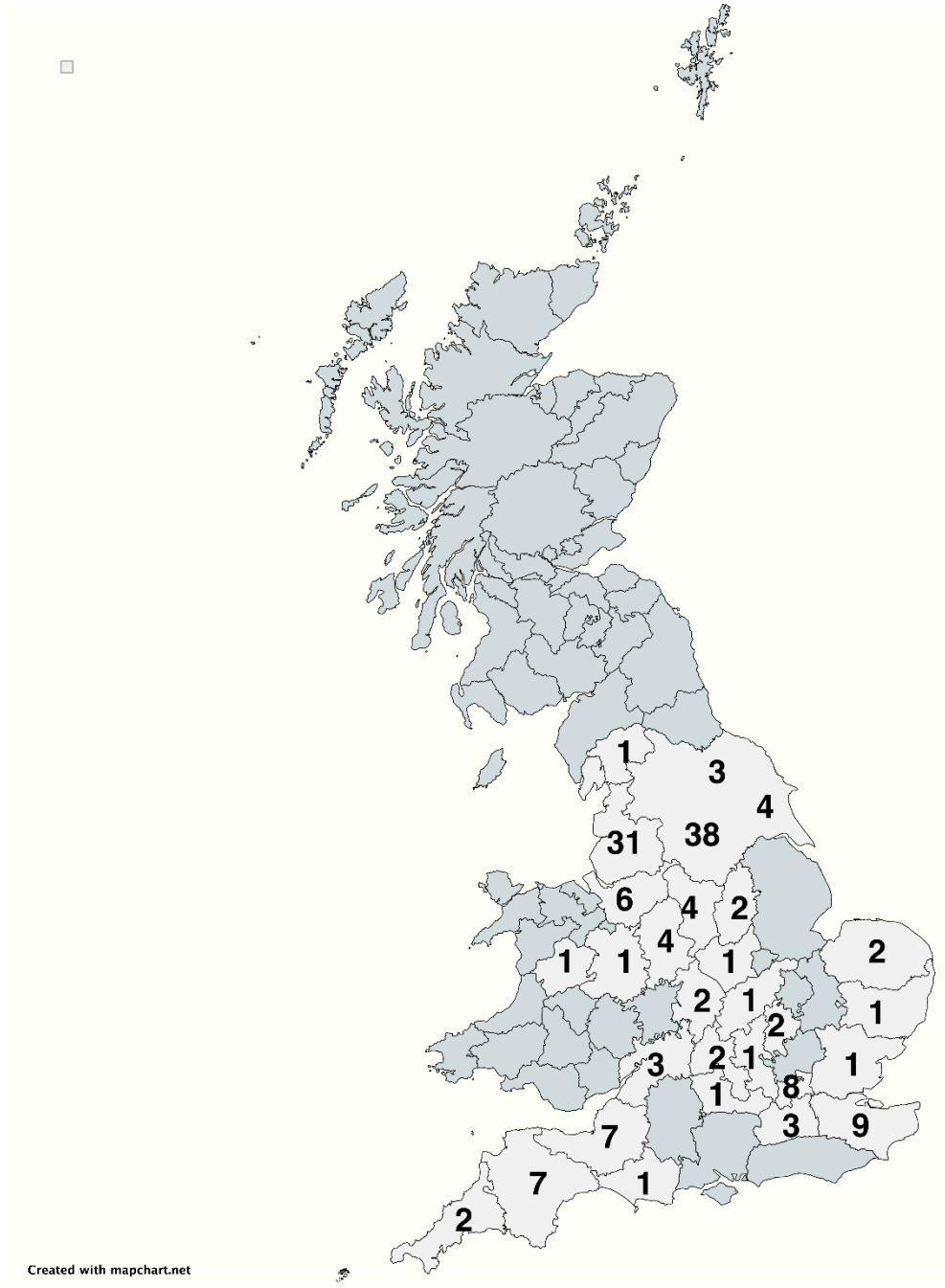
Many of the registers use the standard Anglican format, but there is a wide variation. The registers for the Derby, King Street Wesleyan Circuit (TNA RG4/0698-0700) are an account book, which give details of the graves, occupants, time of occupancy and the various charges levied and paid. Over the 32-year period 1808-1840, 249 burials are recorded. Before 1824 there are an average of five burials per year, whereas after 1824 the rate doubles. A few miles away in the Belper Wesleyan Circuit (TNA RG4/0114), over the same period, the information recorded for 1,099 burials includes the names of the deceased and of their parents or spouse, address and age, in addition to the date of burial. In London, again over a similar period (1820-1837) the register for the Wesleyan burial ground in Stepney, Globe Fields (TNA RG4/4258) is very detailed combining details of the deceased, including age and address, with information relating to the grave space and the name of the undertaker.

A localised resource

As Table 3 and Figures 1 to 5 reveal, Methodism was particularly strong in the new industrial landscapes. Cornwall, a county completely unrepresented in the 404-parish data set used in Wrigley and Schofield's *The Population History of England*, took to Methodism so much that, if the figures given in the 1851 Census of Religious Worship returns are to be believed, 65 per cent of all worshippers in the county on 30 March 1851 were Methodists. A recent study by Gary Crossley of the Bible Christian community on Bodmin Moor has shown the value of reconstructing kinship networks as an aid to understanding the wider community, and the role of nonconformity as a survival tool.[43] Previously, Catherine Brace, Adrian Bailey and David Harvey had identified a lack of knowledge among historical geographers of how communal identities are built on a sense of religious belonging, and had used

43 G. Crossley 'Family and chapel: religion, society and kinship on Bodmin Moor', *Chapels Society Journal* 4 (2023), pp. 61–87.

Figure 5 **Geographical distribution of surviving Wesleyan burial registers**



Cornwall as a case study to illustrate this.[44] Industrial landscapes on the edges of large parishes are where Methodism flourished: through field preaching the Methodists went to where the people were, rather than where the pre-modern settlement centres had been. Similar results to those found by Crossley are likely to be found in the Pennine counties of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Clive Field has written extensively on the social composition of English nonconformists, and his most recent paper on occupational structure cites theses on Methodism in Shropshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, south Lincolnshire, the West Riding and the Black Country.[45]

Overall, then, Methodist registers are likely to be more important for social, economic and demographic research in certain localities than others. However, in some areas they will be almost essential. For example, analysis of the registers held by The National Archives reveal the largest data sets for the Primitive Methodists to be for Belper (Derbyshire), Kingston-upon-Hull (East Riding), Tunstall (Staffordshire), Halifax (West Riding), Leicester, Blackburn (Lancashire) and Ilkeston (Derbyshire). For the Methodist New Connexion, Ovenden, Halifax and Huddersfield (West Riding), Longton and Hanley (Staffordshire) and Ashton-under-Lyne (Lancashire and Cheshire) are the largest data sets. For the Bible Christians, the Cornish circuits saw a large number of baptisms, but so did the Isle of Wight which was missioned in the 1820s and remained a Bible Christian stronghold.

Conclusion

Methodist historians have used evidence from the registers as part of wider studies of Methodism in specific localities. There has been a strong interest in the social structure of the Methodist movement, but post-1840 the evidence has had to be found in other sources. Those other sources: trust deeds, directories, membership lists, marriage registers, newspaper accounts and church administrative records, only provide a partial picture, as only the active leadership of the movement are recorded. There is more work to be done on the lives of the majority of members of Methodist communities.

44 C. Brace, A.R. Bailey and D.C. Harvey, 'Religion, place and space: a framework for investigating historical geographies of religious identities and communities', *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (2006), pp. 28-43, https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132506ph58.

45 C.D. Field. 'Zion's people: who were the English nonconformists? Part 3: occupations (Methodists) and conclusions', *Local Historian* 40 (2010), pp. 292-308.

The Methodist version of 'clogs to clogs in three generations' runs: the first generation are Primitive Methodist workers; the second generation move up the social scale and become Wesleyans; the grandchildren reach the social heights and worship as Anglicans. For a variety of reasons members of a family will migrate between the branches of Methodism and the parish church when marrying, baptising their children and burying their dead. Methodist registers may not tell the whole story, but they may include some important parts of the story. In some communities it may well be the majority of the story.

For the period 1780 to 1837, but especially after 1812, the Methodist registers for Lancashire, the West Riding, Staffordshire and the north Midlands would probably repay close attention by population historians, as would those of Cornwall and the Isle of Wight. In all these cases the post-1837 registers have also been deposited and are available online.

Local Population Studies Society

Local Population Studies Prize

Entries are invited for the *Local Population Studies* Prize.

The prize will be offered each year for the best original essay or paper published in *Local Population Studies* by an author who is

EITHER	a student (at any stage of study)
OR	an early-career researcher based at a university or college (within five years of completing a PhD)
OR	a non-university-based researcher.

The winner will receive free membership of the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS) for three years, to include registration fees for conferences organised by the Society during those three years (this would normally be a total of six conferences).

The prize is being offered in 2024 for articles published in *Local Population Studies* 112 or 113, and will be offered again in 2025 for articles published in *Local Population Studies* 114 or 115.

Please submit entries to the Editor, Dr Andrew Hinde at editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk OR PRAHinde@aol.com. Any enquiries as to eligibility should also be addressed to Dr Hinde.

FORTHCOMING EVENT

British Association for Local History Annual Dymond Lecture

This year's Annual Dymond Lecture will take place on Thursday 5 December 2024 at 7.00 p.m. The speakers will be Craig Lambert and John McAleer of the University of Southampton, who will be presenting a talk entitled 'English merchant shipping and early modern maritime communities, *c.*1588–*c.*1765'.

The talk will examine how England's merchant fleet developed over these two centuries; who sailed in the ships and what roles the sailors played in their local communities; and how war, politics and regional differences affected English seaborne trade.

The lecture is free to members of the British Association for Local History and costs £5 for everyone else. To book, visit https://www.balh.org.uk/dymond2024.

Ships in Bombay harbour, c. 1731
Samuel Scott
Public domain

Roger Schofield Local Population Studies Research Fund

Thanks to the generosity of the late Roger Schofield, the Local Population Studies Society (LPSS), in conjunction with *Local Population Studies* (*LPS*), is able to offer small grants to those undertaking research into local population history and historical demography.

Roger intended the fund to cover research costs such as travel expenses to archives or libraries; copying fees; assistance to those writing up projects or completing dissertations; and data entry. We are sure that today he would have extended this list to include the creation of websites and the dissemination of datasets which benefit those engaged in local population studies.

Applications to the Roger Schofield Research Fund (RSRF) can be for any amount between £75 and £1,000, and are not restricted to members of LPSS.

Requests for funding should be submitted in writing to the RSRF Committee, c/o Ms. Rowena Burgess, Secretary, Local Population Studies Society, Romaine, Sisland, NORWICH NR14 6EF, United Kingdom, or by email to rowena.burgess@uea.ac.uk. They should include an outline of the research to be undertaken, an outline budget and justification of the expenditure, as well as the address, e-mail address and a short CV of the applicant. Alternatively, an application form can be downloaded from the LPSS web site at http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/the-society/funding-for-research/.

Applications will be considered by a panel of experts appointed by the LPSS Committee. The panel reserve the right to decline applications which they feel do not meet the original intention of the fund.

Recipients of an award will be asked to write a short report on the outcome of their work for publication in *Local Population Studies*.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Dr Chris Galley at chrisgalley77@gmail.com.

Book Reviews

Colin Elliott, *Pox Romana. The Plague that Shook the Roman World* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2024). xxiv+304pp. ISBN 9780691219158. £28 (h/b).

At the height of Rome's power in the middle of the second century CE a new disease (the Antonine plague, name after the dynastic name of the family of Emperors who ruled at this time) struck its legions and devastated its cities. This pandemic, perhaps the world's first, marked a turning point in Rome's history as the so-called *Pax Romana*, the roughly 200-year period of imperial expansion, prosperity, stability and relative peace, gave way to a complex set of problems that eventually led to the Empire's decline and fall. Colin Elliott's book, *Pox Romana*, provides an engaging and lucid account of the disease's origins, it's impact on the Roman Empire and the changes that were witnessed throughout the Empire after the disease had receded.

While severe epidemics were a feature of all pre-modern societies, the Antonine Plague that swept through the Roman Empire during the 160s can be traced to its origins amongst troops campaigning in the Near East. As they returned home, they dispersed the disease throughout the Empire. As Elliot acknowledges, very little direct evidence exists about this plague but, by using census records, real estate contracts, climate data, coinage and amphorae finds alongside ancient inscriptions and histories he is able to assess the demographic impact of the disease. It is not possible to determine with certainty which pathogen was responsible for this plague. The Roman medic Galen, who witnessed it first hand, noted that it spread quickly in groups who lived in close contact with each other. He also described that most of its victims experienced fever, some suffered diarrhoea, some coughed up blood and the scabs of ulcers with the most distinct symptom being a dry, black pustular rash occurring between nine and twelve days after infection. From Galen's description many have suggested that the disease was a form of ancient smallpox; however, without genetic confirmation—which may be possible in the not too distant future—it is not possible to be sure of this. It is likely that this mystery disease was viral, but even this remains a speculative conclusion.

Even though mortality rates cannot be calculated, evidence is available about the impact of the disease, with individual legions being hit hard and cities, including Rome, suffering significant outbreaks. This resulted in problems of recruitment to the army and also had unexpected consequences such as an increase in the costs of

gladiators as many were forced to join the army. The plague lasted a relatively short time, perhaps because the surviving population built up some form of immunity, although Rome appears to have suffered another substantial outbreak in 190 CE. Following the murder of emperor Commodus in 192, the Empire was plunged into civil war and decline set in. The timing of these events has led many to believe that the plague was responsible for a significant turning point in Rome's history. However, Elliot views the plague as a 'catalyst of catastrophe' rather than 'a catastrophe in its own right' and instead recounts how many of the factors responsible for this change, such as a stagnant economy, a lack of military success, administrative inefficiency and food insecurity, were already present in the Empire well before the plague struck. Therefore, 'against the fragile Pax Romana, the Antonine plague pressed suddenly and unexpectantly, jolting Roman society into a new era that had been silently prepared in prior decades' (p. 216).

We must be grateful to Colin Elliott for providing us with such a thorough and detailed account of the Antonine plague. The book is well written and can be easily understood by the non-specialist. It is a welcome addition to the literature.

Chris Galley

S. Watts and R. Collingwood, *Shropshire Hearth Tax Exemptions 1662-1674* (n.p., Sylvia Watts and Ralph Collingwood, 2018). vi+423 pp. ISBN 978-0-954826253. £10 (p/b).

The lists of households and individuals in Shropshire that were exempt from paying the Hearth Tax have been collated and transcribed in this valuable contribution. The majority of the book is taken up with a transcription of the exemption certificates for 1662, 1663, 1664, 1670, 1671, 1672 and 1673. These are ordered by year, parish and date. The authors then provide a set of summary tables. The first of these gives the aggregate number of exemptions per parish and year, together with the percentage of households in each parish that were exempt in each year. The second and third give the distribution of houses within each parish and township in 1672 according to the number of hearths. Finally, an alphabetical list is provided of the persons granted exemption certificates, with their parish and the year(s) of their exemption stated. The introductory section of the book consists of a description of the exemption certificates and how they might be used to estimate population totals, together with a discussion of the main features of the Hearth Tax in Shropshire compared with some other counties. Shropshire seems to have had a higher percentage of households with a single hearth than counties such as Kent and Cambridgeshire, which seems of a piece with its less prosperous economy.

One- or two-hearth households were more common in rural areas than in the towns, but even among the towns there was great variation from, at one extreme, Ludlow (43 per cent of households with one or two hearths) to, at the other extreme, Ellesmere (87 per cent). The authors also estimate the percentages of households in each parish that were exempt and try to understand the reasons for variations in these percentages. Apart from the obvious factor of geographical variations in the rural economy, they observe that differences in the preparedness of justices of the peace to grant exemptions, and of parish officers to nominate households who might potentially be exempt, could contribute to parish-level variations in the prevalence of exemptions. Because it includes individuals' names, this volume may be of use to family historians as well as social, demographic and economic historians. It can contribute to both individual-level and aggregate-level analyses of social and economic patterns and change in the past. It will be especially useful as Shropshire is not (so far as this reviewer is aware) one of the counties for which the Hearth Tax exemption certificates have been catalogued by The National Archives.

Andrew Hinde

SUBMISSIONS

Local Population Studies (*LPS*) publishes full-length articles (normally 3,000-7,000 words), which are peer reviewed. Longer papers will be considered on their merits. It also publishes research notes and reports on research in progress (500-3,000 words), debates in population history, information on electronic resources available for local population history, descriptions of sources and methods relevant to population historians, commentaries, correspondence and news of publications and forthcoming events of interest to readers. All submissions should adhere to the *LPS* Conventions, which may be obtained from Editor (email: prahinde@aol.com OR editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk), or downloaded from the Local Population Studies Society website: see page http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/the-journal/submit-an-article/.

All submissions should be accompanied by biographical details of the author (*c.* 50 words), and full-length articles should also be accompanied by an abstract (*c.* 150 words). They should be sent to the Editor, Dr Andrew Hinde, 8 Anstey Mill Lane, Alton GU34 2QP, United Kingdom (email: prahinde@aol.com OR editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk).

BOOK REVIEWS

Books for review and completed reviews should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Dr William Farrell, University of Leicester Library, PO Box 248, University Road, Leicester, LE1 9QD (email: wjbf1@leicester.ac.uk).

LOCAL POPULATION STUDIES SOCIETY WEBSITE

The Local Population Studies Society (LPSS) website is at: http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk. It contains news and information about the Society, including its spring and autumn conferences and LPSS publications.

BACK ISSUES

For open access to digital versions of issues 1-107 of *Local Population Studies* (1968 to 2021), see http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/the-journal/. Hard copies of issues that remain in stock can be purchased for £10.00 each (while stocks last) by contacting the Editor (email: prahinde@aol.com OR editor@localpopulationstudies.org.uk).

ROGER SCHOFIELD LOCAL POPULATION STUDIES RESEARCH FUND

Small research grants are available to researchers in the field of local population history from the Roger Schofield Local Population Studies Research Fund. These grants are designed to cover research costs, such as copying charges or travelling expenses, or to help with data entry and programming, or the costs of putting data online to allow other historians to access them. They could also contribute to personal scholarships to enable research projects or dissertations to be completed. Subject to annual financial constraints, the Fund Committee will consider applications of between £75 and £1,000. For further details and eligibility criteria see the LPSS web site at http://www.localpopulationstudies.org.uk/the-society/funding-for-research/ or contact Dr Chris Galley at chrisgalley77@gmail.com.

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Cover illustration

St Peters Chapel, Bradwell. Established by St Cedd, the patron saint of Essex around 662, built on the site of the abandoned Roman fort of Othona

By Colm O'Laoi

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essex#/media/File:St_Peters_Chapel.jpg