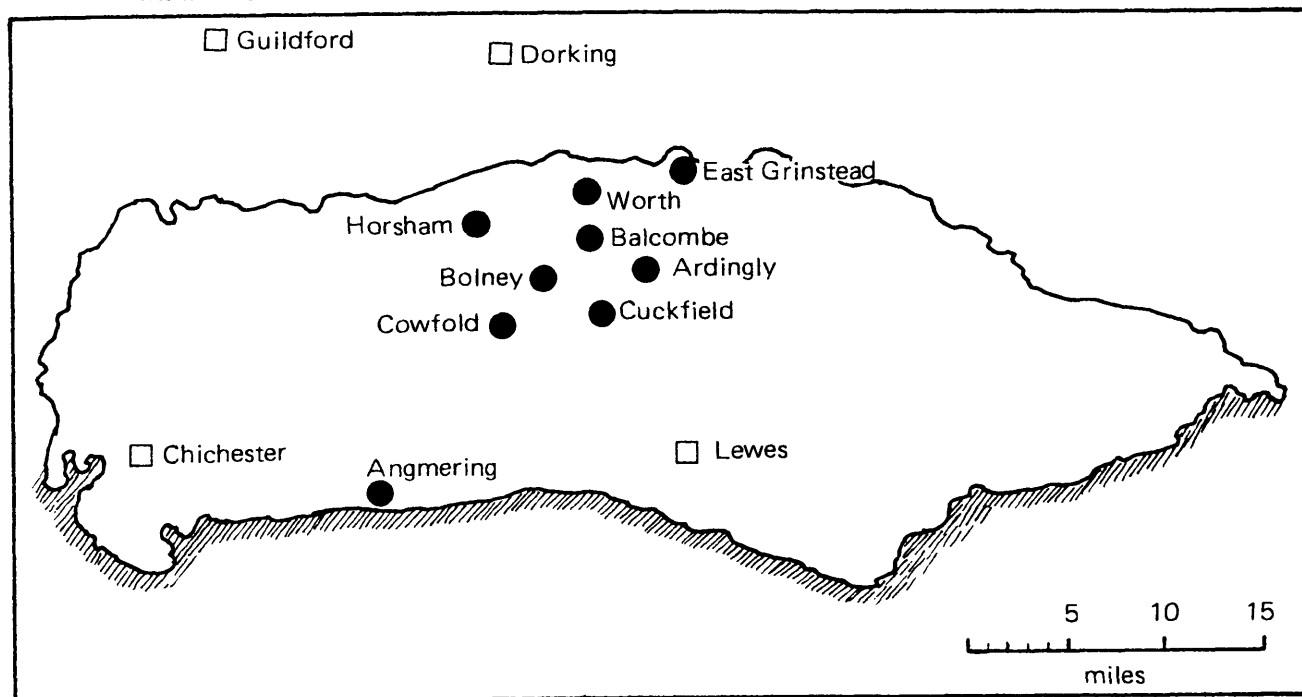


## MAP OF MID-SUSSEX SHOWING POSITION OF PARISHES ANALYSED



### Common Law Marriage : a possible cause of under-registration

In the course of work on the parish registers of Eyam, Derbyshire, I have come across a number of cases which may have some relevance to Dr. Wrigley's very interesting article in *LPS* No. 10 on clandestine marriage.

In the aggregative survey, I noticed very high baptism/marriage ratios in the decades 1641-50, and 1651-60, but thought at first that they were probably due to errors in registration. Later, in the reconstitution, I found that there were fewer baptisms recorded of illegitimate children than one would expect. Moreover, I found a number of cases in which a succession of children were baptised to, say, Christopher and Sarah Smith, followed after a brief interval by a succession of baptisms to Christopher and Mary Smith. In other words, all the appearance of a remarriage except that there was no record of the marriages or of the burial of Sarah. There were, in my opinion, too many such cases to be due to under-registration. One possibility, of course, was that the marriages and the burial of Sarah took place in neighbouring parishes. I carefully examined the printed register of a large neighbouring parish with which Eyam had close connections, but was unable to trace any of the missing marriages or burials, though other marriages, burials and baptisms of Eyam residents were recorded. At this stage I began to wonder whether there might have been, in Eyam at this period, a considerable degree of common-law marriage, with an incumbent prepared to baptise the offspring.

I understand that Mr. E.P. Thompson has been investigating cases of "wife-selling" and has concluded that in many, if not most, cases the selling was not a commercial proposition but a sort of formal act of divorce. Could it, I wonder, have been related to common-law marriage?