

## CORRESPONDENCE

### The Smallpox Controversy

Dear Sir,

Let me answer Dr. Razzell's final question first (see Notes and Queries Section). Yes, I have read his doctoral thesis, and I have my voluminous notes on it beside me as I write. It was, in fact, my feeling that in his thesis he had drawn his conclusion about a very high degree of smallpox mortality from inadequate evidence which led me to contrast it with the evidence of contemporary observers such as Bernoulli — evidence which Dr. Razzell dismisses contemptuously as "not worth the paper it was written on". Yet Dr. Razzell himself writes: "I prefer to rely on direct contemporary statistics of case-fatality rates". He cannot have it both ways.

In any case, it would appear that he has justified my objections by abandoning the position which he took up both in the thesis and in his article in the *Economic History Review*. But now the ground has shifted from smallpox to the inadequacies of parish registers. That under-registration of baptisms occurred has never been in dispute. What is in dispute is the same kind of exaggerated claim as to that to which I objected in the smallpox discussion. Dr. Razzell writes "only about two-thirds of baptisms were recorded". He bases this claim on a study of five parishes in the second quarter of the nineteenth century which he then proceeds to regard as typical of the whole country and, since he uses the argument in respect of smallpox mortality, the previous century. His generalisation proceeds from two statements:

- a. "the registers were *often* kept by semi-literate parish clerks or by clerics who relegated the onerous task of making the entries in the register to moments of leisure" etc.
- b. (of baptisms outside the parish of birth) "it is unlikely that this practice took place on any scale", and he quotes one parish, Colyton.

He repeats, too: "there is a limited amount of evidence to suggest that smallpox victims were *often* buried in private burial grounds". One must presume that Dr. Razzell is aware that there were great variations as between parishes and, in the same parish, at different periods and one asks: how often?; how unlikely? My experience would lead me to different conclusions. But I don't jump to the conclusion that my parishes are typical. The evidence is, at the moment, just not available, either to Dr. Razzell or to me. Generalisation is, of course, a legitimate process, but it has to be used with caution. It really will not do for Dr. Razzell to make generalisations for which the evidence does not yet exist and yet to talk about "conclusions . . . *scientifically* reached through a detailed examination of all the available evidence".

Yours faithfully,  
Leslie Bradley,

Sheldon Cottage, Elton, Matlock, Derbyshire.

### Abortion, Infanticide and Pleading One's Belly

Dear Sir,

I have recently seen the extracts from Willughby *Local Population Studies 8* (1972) pp. 58–61, and note the editorial request for information on the legal point involved in the case of the idiot hanged, apparently, for not having a midwife present.

I am currently writing, under the auspices of the Wellcome Foundation, a history of Tudor and Stuart obstetrics and gynaecology, and have been enquiring into the legal aspects of abortion, infanticide and 'pleading one's belly'. This case is unique as far as I know, but there are others, some mentioned in printed works, one in the record office here, which afford material for study in this field. If you have not received any helpful information I will make a special point of exploring this problem and let you have the results (if any).

I also have in mind a study of the infant and maternal mortality rates, using the Bills of Mortality, but it seems such an obvious topic I wonder if it has not already been done?

Yours sincerely,  
Audrey Eccles,

Westmorland Record Office, County Hall, Kendal, Westmorland.

### **Local Population Studies in Schools, Colleges and Groups**

Dear Sir,

I would like to make a number of comments on your communal editorial in L.P.S. No. 10 (Spring 1973) entitled "Local Population Studies in Schools, Colleges and Groups."

My own experience is with the first two kinds of institution, particularly the second, in the form you imply, a college of education. The points I wish to make concern staff and students in both kinds of institution.

Your comment on the "remarkable paucity" of college lecturers and teachers who read L.P.S. is, I think, impressionistic. Your own records can supply the number of college libraries which subscribe to L.P.S. and this figure would be an interesting statistic and one that would provide some basis for opinion. Even if the number of subscribing college libraries is low, this would not necessarily be a good measure of the influence of the journal which is available in many libraries and presumably at all Record Offices. Publicity directed at any college library or archive office which does not already subscribe, would be more profitable than a critical lament. From the evidence of courses for college history lecturers run by the D.E.S. or the History Section of the A.T.C.D.E. there is apparently widespread interest in the use of quantification techniques and population study in colleges. Such studies are already a part of many college history courses. They need to be no more than a small part. As a method of approach to history they do not necessarily provide a better training in history for the potential teacher than the diplomatic or the political struggles of Anne's reign. These studies have the attractions of a fresh approach and are undeniably popular with some students but they can be vastly time consuming to do in any worthwhile way. As a tutor who has subjected various third year groups to two reconstitutions, a dozen or more aggregations and various statistical analyses of local documents as part of a course on 18th century Social History I think it an admirable approach. The students who selected this option also seem satisfied, at least there was no academic mutiny, but they did have a choice between that option and ones on Roman Britain, Elizabethan England and Modern America, and even the 18th century group studied problems and topics not readily treated by quantificatory methods or related to demography.

Teachers, I think, must make the same kinds of choice. If their enthusiasm and knowledge lead them to emphasising world history, archaeology, local history, or twentieth century history, in which quantification and population study form merely a part, I personally would not fear for the future of history in schools, provided the approach was informed by enthusiasm, knowledge, and defined objectives. There is an intellectual austerity about quantitative history. This appeals to some adults, but, despite the "new" maths, many children find the arithmetic texture of such studies forbidding. The vital statistics of history are not necessarily vital to school children who have an old fashioned and, to my mind, a sensible desire, to learn something of people in the past from the more colourful primary, literary and visual sources available. History for them should be more than a story of the mere man or woman of the parish.

The kind of history for which you are pleading is new. The pedagogical and academic demands made upon teachers are experiencing their own kind of inflation; time for new work is shrinking. In the new areas of learning, such as quantified population studies, there must be a time lag between promulgation of an approach in university text books and associated journals and the acceptance of this approach in the classroom. This time lag is sometimes as long as thirty years. Population studies, as you define them, are less than a decade old, possibly the time gap in this instance could be reduced by the production of practical, interesting and unpretentious textbooks, pamphlets, archive units and kits directed at specific age and aptitude groups in schools. It is unrealistic to expect many teachers to have either the time to work up the primary source material in their own locality or to be in touch with library facilities good enough for them to master a growing corpus of published material. A popularising process for teachers who have the interest and lack the time, is a necessary process if this new approach is to become generally accepted. You are over pessimistic in your attitude towards the reception of these new studies in the classroom. On your own showing, if I express your statistics rather differently, nearly 20% of the history teachers' associations which answered your questionnaire were engaged in some form of demographic work. This is not bad progress for a fledgling branch of historical studies and one that, because of its very considerable educational and historical attractions, is growing and will grow, in and out of college and school classrooms.

Yours faithfully,  
J.A. Johnston, M.A., Ph.D.,

Deputy Principal, Bishop Grossetest College, Lincoln.

### Comment by the Editors:

We are glad to find that Dr. Johnston does not share our pessimism over the state of local population studies in schools and colleges and it is encouraging to discover that many colleges do include population study in their courses. Whilst accepting that many of the points that Dr. Johnston makes are valid, some require further comment.

Our complaints about the paucity of college lecturers and school teachers amongst our subscribers was not without statistical basis. Of subscribing educational Institutions and libraries, only about a quarter are colleges of education. Only one school and one teachers' centre subscribe. It is difficult to identify teachers and lecturers amongst private subscriptions but ostensibly they form only one per cent of the total. This impression of limited enthusiasm is confirmed by the poor response to the questionnaire sent to teachers' associations. Dr. Johnston is correct in stating that twentyfive per cent of those who did reply were engaged in population study but the fact remains that eightytwo per cent failed to reply at all.

On the basis of these figures our editorial comments were surely reasonable, yet it would be fair to concede that it is schools and teachers' centres rather than colleges which seem to show particularly little enthusiasm for population study. It would be sad if the valuable training in historical demography, which Dr. Johnston and others like him have given to teachers, never reaches the school classroom for lack of any incentive or resources in school to apply it.

Dr. Johnston correctly points out the traditional time-lag between university research in a new field and its classroom acceptance, but it is precisely this unnecessary time-lag which LPS aims to diminish by making available to the lay reader, inexpensively and in non-technical terms, the results of researches in local demography, and by drawing attention to available sources and ways of using them. Publishers too have begun to produce demographic source material in kit form – one can instance Longman's 'Population' pack in ***Social Problems arising from the Industrial Revolution***. The support that the overworked secondary teacher requires to embark on a local population study already exists – provided schools and teachers' centres are prepared to make a modest investment in the necessary materials.

Finally, it would be unfortunate if Dr. Johnston's letter left the impression on teachers that population study in the classroom is necessarily intellectually austere, quantitative history. Using the more personal family history approach (see for instance 'Peas and Fertility' in this issue) quantification is hardly required. Where it does play a larger part, the sorting, arrangement and presentation of statistical material can be achieved with the most elementary arithmetical skill.

## Seasonality in parish registers

Dear Sir,

Following the tabulations for Burton Joyce and Oswaldkirk in recent issues of *LPS*, I applied the process to the aggregations for Herne, Kent, and its neighbour parish, Reculver, both rural coastal parishes on the north coast of the county; I carried the tabulation down to the decade 1831–40, since through that decade the seaside resort of Herne Bay was developing, while its registration figures went into the Herne registers. With one exception, the change of population-balance would seem to have had little effect. I also recorded minima, so far as possible.

The striking marriage seasonality shown for November in both Burton Joyce and Oswaldkirk is firmly transferred to October here, while the spring baptism peaks are similar to Mrs. Massey's, compared with Mr. Rowley's more even distribution. The midsummer minimum which they found is borne out by the Herne and Reculver tables.

As regards burials, the minima show a distinct falling-off in midsummer which compares fairly with the apparent minima of the earlier findings. The exceptional August peak at Herne in the 1831 decade is almost entirely due to a cholera outbreak in Herne Bay in August 1834, which accounts for about half the total burials for that month in the decade.

As usual, the Commonwealth period produces unsatisfactory figures in both parishes, but at Reculver a further complication is introduced in the period 1808–1813, thus affecting two decades, when the church, which was threatened by coast erosion, was demolished, and replaced by another further inland. Notes in the registers confirm that parish incidents were celebrated and recorded in neighbouring parishes, mainly at Hoath, which was legally a chapelry of Reculver. Thus the totals for these two decades are incomplete, but the basic pattern is unchanged.

I must compliment all concerned on the new look which *LPS* has acquired – the readability has improved enormously (and I don't simply mean legibility either).

Yours sincerely,  
Harold Gough

141 Grand Drive, Herne Bay, Kent.