

THE IMPACT OF THE COMMONWEALTH ACT ON YORKSHIRE PARISH REGISTERS

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*The Act touching marriages and the registering thereof, and also touching births and burials*¹ was passed on 24 August 1653 and came into force on 29 September 1653. A large part of the Act was concerned with the establishment of civil marriage. A certificate giving proof that banns had been called was to be presented to a Justice of the Peace who, if he were satisfied that everything was in order, would proceed to marry the couple. During the period that the Act remained in force 'no other marriage whatsoever within the Commonwealth of England ... shall be held or accounted a marriage according to the laws of England'.²

The Act also laid down new regulations about the keeping of parish registers. It ordered that:

'a book of vellum or parchment shall be provided by every parish ... for the safe keeping of which book, the inhabitants and householders of every parish chargeable to the relief of the poor, or the greater part of them present, shall ... make choice of some able and honest person (such as shall be sworn and approved by one Justice of the Peace ... and so signified under his hand in the said Register-Book) to have the keeping of the said book, who shall therein fairly enter in writing all such publications [i.e. banns], marriages, births of children, and burials of all sorts of persons, and the names of every of them, and the days of the month and year of publications, marriages, births and burials, and the parents, guardians or overseers names. And the Register [i.e. Registrar] in such parish shall attend the said Justice of Peace to subscribe the entry of every such marriage. And the person so elected, approved and sworn, shall be called the Parish-Register, and shall continue three years in the said place of Register and longer, until some other be chosen, unless such Justice of the Peace, or the said parish with consent of such Justice, shall think fit to remove him sooner.'

In addition it was ordained that 'all Register-Books for marriages, births and burials already past, shall be delivered into the hands of the respective Registers [i.e. Registrars] appointed by this Act, to be kept as records'.

I

In theory the 1653 Act should have had a substantial effect on parish registers and it is the purpose of this article to assess its impact on a large number of Yorkshire registers. Altogether 354 Yorkshire registers have been consulted which amount to nearly seventy per cent of all extant Yorkshire registers that start before 1660.³

One of the immediate results of the Act was that in a large number of Yorkshire parishes a new register was started in 1653 or the early months of 1654. It is not always possible to be sure whether or not a new volume was started because in many cases a number of registers or loose sheets were bound together at a later date, but new registers were begun in at least 128 parishes during 1653-4. For twenty-eight other parishes there is a complete gap in the entries for the years 1653-60 and it seems likely that in many of these places a new register was begun in 1653 but subsequently lost. This was certainly true at Hinderwell, NR, for the register lists baptisms 'in the year 1653 until the new book take place'. Unfortunately this 'new book' has not survived. A considerable number of the registers which do have entries for the period 1653-60 contain serious gaps, that is, a gap in one or more sections of the register for a year or more. A careful analysis of the ninety-six registers covering this period which have been printed by the Yorkshire Parish Register Society and the Thoresby Society reveals that thirty-four of these registers have such a deficiency. However, in twelve of these the gap is confined to the marriage section of the register mostly during the period 1658-60 after marriages other than those conducted by the JPs had been made legal again.⁴ It is possible that in some of these parishes the missing entries were kept in another book that has not survived. Thus the register for Bossall, NR, has a gap in the marriage section for the years 1651-1662 but it was noted down that they were 'registered in another book so appointed by that Parliament which gave the power of marrying to the Justices'.

Although the registers of the period 1653-60 contain a great deal of interesting information — which is discussed below — the overall quality of Yorkshire registers during the 1650s is poor. Some registers — such as the register for Danby-in-Cleveland, NR — became much neater after 1653 but the appearance of complete gaps in some registers and serious, partial gaps in others will make it difficult to complete satisfactory family reconstitution, or even aggregate analysis, for many Yorkshire parishes during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. In a number of other registers, where the gaps are less serious, there are specific references to missing entries. Thus the register for Beverley Minster, ER, points out that 'there have been many omissions because (as I suppose probably) people denied the payment to the register [i.e. registrar], imposed by that foresaid Parliament for that office'. At Leeds, WR, in July 1660, a different explanation of deficient entries was suggested:

'Mr Broone curate of the old church hath baptised children in several mens houses, and neither he nor the parents hath acquainted me therewith, and so hath there been many children baptised at new church and at the several chapels and therefore they that want the names hereafter blame nobody but them that are worthy'.⁵

The extent to which the 1653 Act led to an alteration in the format of the registers varied considerably from parish to parish. Of the 326 registers that contain entries for the period 1653-60 forty-two seem to have been totally unaffected by the Act.⁶ These registers do not mention the Act at all and entries continued to be made in exactly the same way as during previous decades. The impact of the Act in some of the remaining 284 parishes was substantial,⁷ as at Leeds. A new register was started there in 1653 and the Registrar, who was elected in September, proceeded to list both the dates of birth and baptism for each child and also provide a considerable amount of detail relating to the calling of banns and subsequent marriages by JP. Elsewhere the impact of the Act was much less marked. Thus at Almondbury, WR, a new volume was begun in 1653 and the Registrar was sworn in in December of that year, but apart from this the register continued to be kept as before, in Latin.

II

Of the 326 registers which contain entries for the years 1653-60 some 187 mention the Registra⁸ including 167 which give details of his election. The registers give the occupation or status of fifty-five men who filled the post although, of course, local research could expand the list considerably. The most obvious candidate for the job was the parish clerk and the registers give the names of thirteen 'parish clerks' and fourteen 'clerks' who were sworn in as Registrar. There is, however, a problem with the title 'clerk'; in most cases 'clerk' probably meant parish clerk although in some cases it referred to the vicar or possibly a curate. Thus at Kildwick, WR, John Toune 'clerk' was elected Registrar; elsewhere in the register he was called 'minister' although this title was crossed out and the word 'intruder' inserted. By choosing the parish clerk as Registrar the parishioners were helping to ensure continuity in the registers and the same was obviously the case when the vicar was chosen. Vicars were elected as Registrar in fourteen of the parishes studied. In small communities the vicar may have been the only man sufficiently literate to fill the post; at Elvington, ER, it was noted that 'there is none ... fitted for the office of Parish Register there except the minister' and he was duly sworn in. The importance of a high level of literacy is underlined by the election of the 'schoolmaster and parish clerk' in two parishes and of the 'schoolmaster' in another. Others who filled the post were six yeomen, an ex-vicar, a weaver, a husbandman, a constable and a skinner.

As the Act suggested, men did not necessarily keep the post of Registrar throughout the period 1653-60 and a number of registers refer to new elections during the later 1650s. Thus the yeoman who was elected Registrar at Rudston, ER, in November 1653 was buried in August 1655. His place was taken by the vicar until April 1656 when a new Registrar was appointed. Further elections were held in July 1657 and July 1658. Elsewhere the same man held the position throughout the period; thus at Hackness, NR, Thomas Richardson, parish clerk since 1630, was elected as Registrar. He continued as parish clerk until 1676.⁹ Occasionally an inappropriate choice was made — at West Heslerton, ER, the name of the first Registrar was crossed out and the terse comment 'a Quaker' added.

Little can be said about the relationship of the Registrar to the vicar and community although it must be assumed that he was a popular choice for according to the Act he was to be elected by 'the inhabitants and householders ... chargeable to the relief of the

poor or the greater part of them present'. Normally the registers merely reveal that the Registrar was elected by 'the majority of inhabitants' or by 'the major part of the parishioners present'. However in five registers the electors were listed and in each case all the electors were male.¹⁰ Occasionally the registers give hints about the Registrar's relationship with the incumbent. At Gilling (Ryedale), NR, it was recorded that the register was delivered to one of the churchwardens in January 1661 'having been kept till now at the hands of Thomas Pape, pretended parish register'. The vicar was then at pains to demonstrate his superiority by switching back to using Latin as he had before 1653. At Easingwold, NR, a similar contemporary comment was made:

'The keeping of the register being put into the hands of those who are termed laymen by such as had no good will to the ministry was afterwards made void, restored and continued as followeth 1659.'

Finally it is clear that the minister of the small chapelry of Rosedale, NR, was reluctant to hand over the register to a man he clearly regarded as a usurper. However he agreed to do so with the warning that:

'You (as doth appear by your note unto me) having a great desire to trouble yourself with the custody of our register book may now by the receipt, charge and custody thereof receive unto yourself needless charge, in my judgement, and, sure I am, unprofitable trouble'.

III

As all historical demographers are aware the registers of the Church of England normally give baptismal dates and not the date of birth. However, the 1653 Act actually laid down that births should be registered.¹¹ In Yorkshire this led to a substantial variation in practice from parish to parish. Nearly half (forty-eight per cent) of the 326 registers studied which cover the period 1653-60 record birth dates only, although twenty of these provide both birth and baptism dates for some children. In addition, fifty registers provide a larger number of cases where both the date of birth and baptism are given. Thus sixty-three per cent of the registers provide a lot of information relating to births; the remaining registers continue as before to list baptismal dates only. In parishes where the date of birth only is given or where both birth and baptism dates are given the switch back to recording baptism only occurred during the 1660s. Normally this occurred between 1660 and 1662 although occasionally the practice continued for some years longer.¹²

Recently interest in the birth/baptism interval has been growing because of its crucial importance to studies of bridal pregnancy and to accurate family reconstitution.¹³ In order to provide further information about local baptismal customs the birth/baptism interval has been calculated for thirty-four Yorkshire parishes for which data exist on an adequate scale. The data provided, which are set out fully in Appendix I below, are mostly for the 1650s although some of the information belongs to the 1640s and 1660s. The method used to present the data is a modification of the method employed by Berry and Schofield.¹⁴ Whereas they only used eighty sample cases for each parish where both dates are given, here all the cases listed in a particular period have been included.

However in some registers a number of entries are deficient (i.e. only one date is given). Consequently the findings have been arranged in two tables — Appendix IA where not more than twelve per cent of the entries are deficient and Appendix IB where the deficient entries are greater than twelve per cent.

As in the study of Berry and Schofield percentile values have been preferred to the mean and standard deviation. For each parish the following calculations have been made:

- (i) the interval after birth, in days, by which one-quarter of the children had been baptised;
- (ii) the interval after birth, in days, by which one-half of the children had been baptised;
- (iii) the interval after birth, in days, by which three-quarters of the children had been baptised;
- (iv) the interval after birth, in days, by which ninety per cent of the children had been baptised.

In Appendix I two figures are provided in each column:

- (a) the first figure relates only to those entries where both the dates of birth and baptism are given;
- (b) the second figure — given in parentheses — assumes that where single date entries occur baptism took place after the longest recorded birth/baptism interval for that parish. As some of the intervals would have been shorter than this the figure in parentheses exaggerates the birth/baptism interval.

Parishes have been ranked in Appendix I according to their deviation score from the median in order to indicate relative speeds of baptism. The median for the various percentiles employed is four days at twenty-five per cent, six days at fifty per cent, eight days at seventy-five per cent and twelve days at ninety per cent. Thus Horbury, WR, with the figures of eight days (+ four) at twenty-five per cent, thirteen days (+ seven) at fifty per cent, sixteen days (+ eight) at seventy-five per cent and twenty-one days (+ nine) at ninety per cent, scores a rating of + twenty-eight from the median value.

In their study of the birth/baptism interval Berry and Schofield took information from a number of Yorkshire registers including three which cover the 1650s. They came to the conclusion that in Yorkshire, as in Shropshire, 'baptism was relatively early' and that with a few exceptions (including Horbury, WR, during the 1650s) 'parishes from these counties were amongst the earliest-baptising at all periods'. The data provided by Berry and Schofield for Yorkshire during the 1650s are set out in Table 1.

Because of the different method adopted in the present study the intervals for both Horbury and Gisburn given in Appendix I are slightly longer than those given in Table 1.

Appendix I demonstrates that the range of birth/baptism intervals in Yorkshire during the 1650s was substantially greater than Table 1 would suggest. In a number of parishes children were being baptised rather earlier than at Gisburn or St Michael le Belfry, York, and in half a dozen other parishes baptism was spread over a substantially longer period than at Horbury. Even so, baptism came relatively early for most Yorkshire children. In sixteen out of the twenty-five parishes listed in Appendix IA ninety per cent of the

TABLE 1

Interval in days (± 0.5) by which the stated percentile of 80 sample births had been baptised

	Parish	25%	50%	75%
1653-5	Gisburn, W.R.	2	4	7
1653-7	Horbury, W.R.	7	12	15
1653-4	York, St Michael le Belfry	4	6	8

Source: Berry and Schofield, op. cit., p. 456.

children had been baptised within a fortnight of birth. In the remaining nine parishes the ninety per cent level was reached by the end of the fifth week.

Differences in the birth/baptism interval from parish to parish do not seem to have been the result of random behaviour. In those parishes where there are sufficient entries to allow an annual breakdown the pattern of baptism which emerges is remarkably consistent. This is demonstrated by the information for Leeds presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

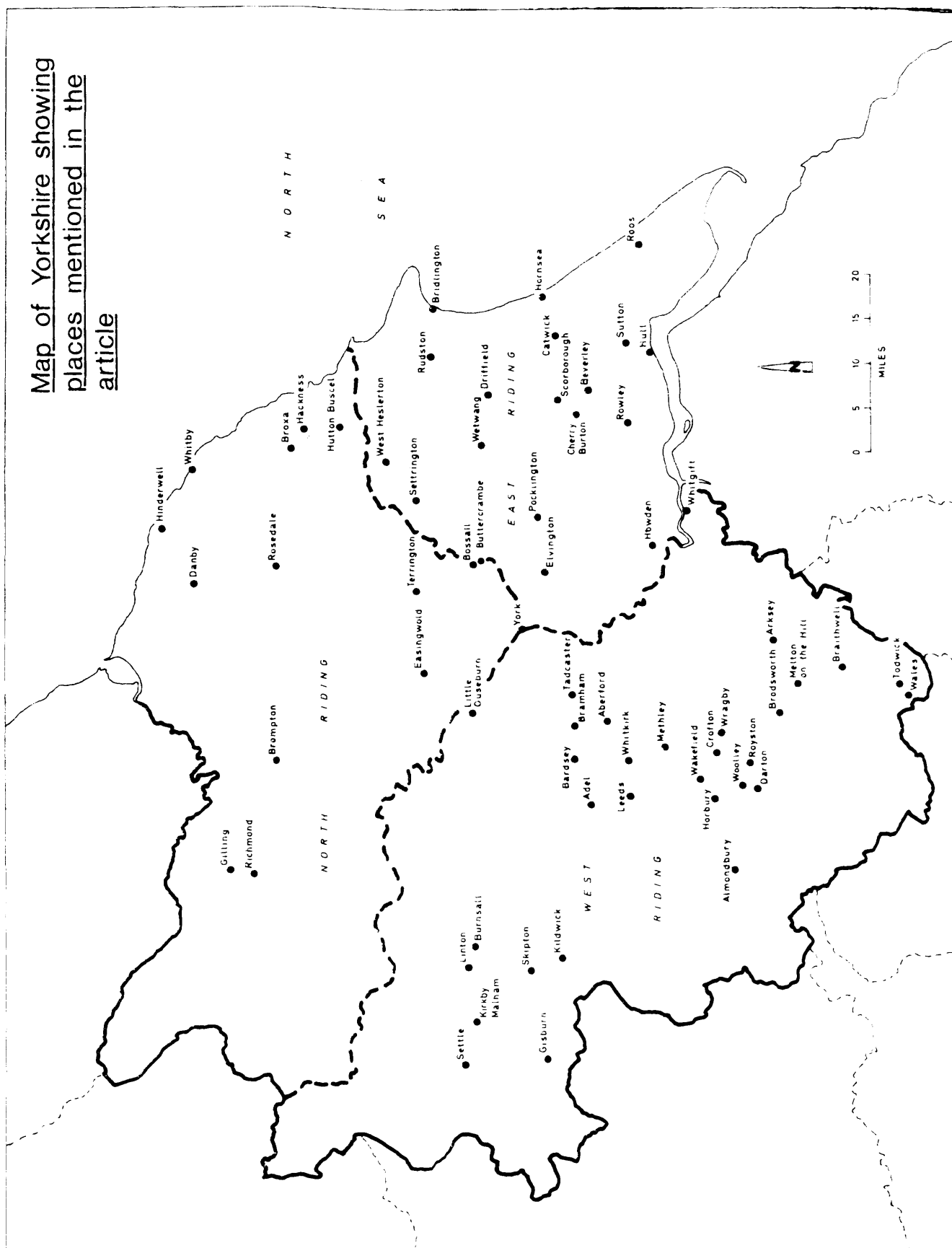
Interval in days (± 0.5) by which children were baptised at Leeds during 1653-60

	25%	50%	75%	90%
1654	3	6	9	11
1655	4	6	9	12
1656	4	6	9	12
1657	4	6	9	12
1658	5	7	9	12
1659	4	7	9	12
1653-60	4	6	9	12

There is no doubt that these figures reveal a local custom of some strength and a similar, if not always quite so consistent, pattern can be demonstrated for ten other parishes which have been analysed in this way.¹⁵

In an article of this nature it will not be possible to give a complete explanation of the variations in the birth/baptism interval discovered for Yorkshire during the 1650s. A number of possible influences can be suggested although a great deal of detailed local research on a comparative basis will be necessary if satisfactory conclusions are to be reached.

Map of Yorkshire showing
places mentioned in the
article



The speed of baptism does not seem to have been affected by the numbers of children brought forward for baptism. Baptism occurred substantially earlier at Hull, ER, and Leeds, WR, where large numbers were baptised each year, than at much smaller places such as Wales, WR, Roos, ER, and Whitgift, WR.

Perhaps the birth/baptism interval was related to the size of the parish and the pattern of settlement. Thus it might be imagined that in parishes where the parishioners had to walk a mile or two, or even more, to the church baptism would be relatively late. However, the evidence for Yorkshire runs counter to such an easy geographical explanation. In rural areas there seems to have been little correlation between parish size, settlement pattern and the birth/baptism interval. Both Roos, ER, and Catwick, ER, were nuclear settlements with few outlying farmsteads and yet the interval was long at Roos and short at Catwick. In the West Riding the parishes of Darton, Wales and Whitgift were characterised by concentrated settlement and yet the birth/baptism interval was long, whereas in the large Pennine parishes of Kirkby Malham and Burnsall where settlement was much more scattered the interval was much shorter. Similarly in the North Riding baptism was relatively early at Hackness although the register for this large parish contains references to over twenty outlying hamlets and farmsteads including some which were four miles or more from the church, over the moors.

Having suggested that parish size and settlement patterns do not seem to have been significant factors in determining the birth/baptism interval it should be pointed out that the data presented in Appendix I seem to suggest rural-urban differences. Baptism came early or relatively early in the East Riding towns of Drifffield, Hornsea, Hull and Pocklington, in a number of York parishes and also in Leeds and Wakefield, both WR. However there are significant differences between these towns. Drifffield, Hornsea and Pocklington were small market towns. York and Hull were much larger, the former with a large number of small parishes and the latter with only two large parishes. The parishes of Leeds and Wakefield, on the other hand, catered not only for the needs of the townsfolk but also for a number of outlying settlements. Unfortunately there is no easy explanation for this apparent pattern of early urban baptism. In most towns parishioners did not have far to go to church but the same was also true in the nucleated villages some of which, as we have seen, were characterised by late baptism. It is possible that relatively high urban death rates induced early baptism but it is difficult to believe that this would have had more than a marginal effect. It is also possible that at least a part of the answer lies in differing theological attitudes which will now be discussed.

In their study of the birth/baptism interval in pre-industrial England, Berry and Schofield discuss the attitude of the Church of England to baptism as laid down in the Prayer Books. They conclude that the church 'encouraged universal baptism with a delay of not more than seven days up to about 1650, and of not more than fourteen days after that date'. However, they do add that whether "the laity paid any attention to this advice" can only be tested by turning to the parish registers. They also suggest that Puritan attitudes did not differ from the official view of the established church and quote from the tract of *Domesticall Duties* (1622) by the Puritan William Gouge.¹⁶ But did all Puritans share this view? The Church of England contained within its ranks many Puritan ministers and it is well known that the official attitude of the Church of England to baptism was one of the points which came under strong attack from Puritan theologians.

To medieval theologians baptism was absolutely essential for salvation. Children who died unbaptised were either consigned to limbo, or, according to some theologians, to hell. Popular belief enhanced the baptism ceremony still further and it was common to believe that baptism was essential if a child were to survive. Under the English Reformation baptism lost some of its significance — but not a lot. For Anglicans the fate of unbaptised children was controversial and some theologians believed that the unbaptised would probably be damned. The first Prayer Book stressed the need for baptism within the first days of life and the Elizabethan Prayer Book emphasised its urgency by permitting baptism on days other than Sundays and holidays in cases of 'necessity'. Anglican divines also believed that private baptism was necessary whenever imminent death prevented the arrangement of a public service. Puritans, on the other hand, did not consider baptism so important that the unbaptised child would be damned. Nor did they approve of private baptism. However, most Puritans were not prepared to follow the Baptists in dispensing with infant baptism altogether although they considered it much less important than did Anglican theologians.¹⁷

We can suggest that there were two possible results to these differing attitudes to baptism:

- (i) that Anglican ministers would tend to encourage earlier baptism than those with a Puritan outlook;
- (ii) that Anglican ministers would be more inclined to conduct private baptisms.

There are, however, dangers in such an hypothesis. Puritanism did not consist of a set body of theology and attitudes to baptism could have varied considerably from minister to minister. It is also not at all easy to identify Puritan ministers in many cases in order to test the hypothesis; some Puritan ministers are easy to identify — such as those ejected in 1662 — but others are much more difficult.¹⁸ Ralph Mason, the vicar of Driffeld, ER, has been classified as a Puritan in a recent study although his Puritanism may have been luke-warm; a contemporary reference to him noted that 'Mr Ralph Mason preaches after his fashion.'¹⁹ Finally it is impossible to know to what extent a minister could mould local opinion and custom.

At first glance the evidence which it has been possible to assemble for the East Riding seems to support the hypothesis. Puritanism was not very strong in the area²⁰ and baptism came early in most parishes. Furthermore, at Roos where the interval was long the minister was a Puritan and was ejected from his living in 1662.²¹ However, Hull was the most important centre of Puritanism in the East Riding with a corporation that followed a moderate Puritan policy. The city also contained the only separatists in the area and a number of extreme Puritan lecturers and yet the birth/baptism interval was at the median level.²² Similarly, in Ralph Mason's parish, Driffeld, baptism came relatively early although there the interval was tending to lengthen during the later 1650s (see Appendix IB).

In the West Riding Puritanism was considerably stronger²³ and this seems to tie in with the long birth/baptism intervals found in a number of parishes. But again closer examination shows the difficulty of establishing the hypothesis. Thus it is possible to point to the existence of Puritan ministers at Bramham, Brodsworth, Crofton, Leeds and Whitkirk during the 1650s, and possibly also at Braithwell and Kirkby Malham.²⁴ However, in none of these places was baptism particularly late, nor for that matter was it particularly early.

Unfortunately very little information relating to private baptism is available. Only the Leeds register lists private baptism regularly; between 1653 and 1660 the register lists 189 children who were baptised 'domi'. Interestingly the birth/baptism interval was slightly longer for children baptised at home than for those baptised in church.²⁵

The evidence which has been brought forward here neither proves nor disproves the hypothesis that the birth/baptism interval was at least in part a consequence of theological attitudes. However, other possible explanations are no more satisfactory. No doubt the emergence of a distinctive local custom was the result of a whole series of forces and it is to the historical demographer working intensively on a group of parishes that we must turn if adequate explanations are to emerge. It would be interesting to learn what effect a change of incumbent had on the birth/baptism interval.

IV

The most revolutionary aspect of the 1653 Act was the establishment of civil marriage. This is reflected in a large number of Yorkshire registers; of the 326 registers consulted which contain details for the 1650s some two-thirds give detailed information relating to the calling of banns and/or marriage by the JPs.²⁶ In a few dozen parishes the Registrar not only gave the names of the couple but also their ages and occupations or status, and even in some cases the names and occupations of their parents.

A number of registers also provide details about where the banns were called. According to the Act details of a proposed marriage were to be delivered to the Registrar in writing:

'which the said Register [Registrar] shall publish or cause to be published, three several Lords-days then next following, at the close of the morning exercise, in the public meeting-place commonly called the church or chapel; or [if the parties so to be married shall desire it] in the market-place next to the said church or chapel, on three market-days in three several weeks next following, between the hours of eleven and two'.

Although in some parishes — such as Sutton, ER (near Hull), and Hutton Buscel, NR — all banns were called in the church, at most places for which this information was given some banns were called in the market place. Thus at Gisburn, WR, most banns were called in church but the banns of five couples were called at Skipton market cross and those of a further two couples at Settle market cross. At Skipton, WR, on the other hand, it was more fashionable to publish banns in the market place; between late 1653 and February 1658 the banns of thirty couples were published in church while those of fifty-six other couples were published in the market place.

In the majority of registers some mention is made of marriage by the JPs and often the Justices actually signed the register. In the larger parishes civil marriage added a considerable burden to these already over-loaded and unpaid officials. At Leeds, WR, during the three years 1654-6 584 marriages were solemnized by thirteen JPs, of whom five conducted no less than 534 of the marriages or just over ninety per cent of the total. The most active JP was John Thwaites who conducted 178 marriages; his busiest day was 8 May 1655 when he married seven couples. The activities of Thwaites and the other energetic JPs of Leeds is summarised in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Marriages (conducted) by 5 JPs at Leeds during 1654-6

	No. of marriages solemnized				No. of days involved			
	1654	1655	1656	Total	1654	1655	1656	Total
John Dawson	9	49	56	114	7	36	47	90
Marmaduke Hicke	—	—	69	69	—	—	47	47
Martin Iles	29	58	3	90	16	35	3	54
Henry Roundell	—	11	72	83	—	10	46	56
John Thwaites	95	74	9	178	45	34	7	86
Totals	133	192	209	534	68	115	150	333

However, the solemnization of marriages did not always involve the JPs in travelling. The Aberford, WR, register records two JP marriages which were conducted 'at my house' while the Bardsey, WR, register lists five church marriages and six 'at his house'. Although it was illegal to be married by any person other than a JP it was quite legal for a couple to be married first by a JP and afterwards by a clergyman. The Tadcaster, WR, register records that four couples went through two ceremonies in this way while at Todwick, WR, a couple were married by a JP 'and also the same day married at Todwick according to the ancient custom of the Church of England by me William Fletcher rector of Todwick'.

Compulsory civil marriage did not survive the Commonwealth. On 26 June 1657 the 1653 Act was confirmed with the exception that the clause 'And no other marriage whatsoever in the Commonwealth of England after 29 September 1653 shall be held and accounted a marriage according to the laws of England' was declared null and void.²⁷ Thereafter, in most parishes, civil marriage quickly disappeared although not always immediately. In most parishes JP marriages were not recorded after 1657 although in a few parishes they survived into 1658. At Leeds the first marriage by a minister occurred on 8 October 1657 although the last recorded JP marriage took place over a year later on 23 November 1658. Similarly at both Methley, WR, and Richmond, NR, the last JP marriage occurred in December 1658. As these cases illustrate marriage by JP was not made illegal in 1657 and it is possible that in some places JP marriages continued after 1658. Perhaps this was the case at Cherry Burton, ER, for the comment 'here ends marriage by Justices' appears in the register along with other entries for June 1660.

V

The Act of 1653 was not entirely clear about what the Registrar should enter in the register when a parishioner died. Within the space of a few lines the Act stipulated that:

'a true and just account may be always kept ... of *deaths* of all sorts of persons ... Be it further enacted, that a book of good vellum or parchment shall be provided in every parish, for the registering of ... *burials* of all sorts of people' [my italics].

In the remainder of the Act the word 'burial' is used four times and 'death' only once. It seems that the great majority of Registrars took this to mean that they should register the date of burial; in only fourteen of the registers were death dates recorded on more than a handful of occasions. However, this apparent confusion in the Act led the Registrars of six parishes to record both death and burial dates on many occasions. The data which these registers provide — which is set out in Table 4 — confirms the recent suggestion that burial was normally early during the pre-industrial period.²⁸

* **Table 4: Interval in days (± 0.5) by which corpses were buried**

Parish	Not given	Same day	1	2	3	4	Total
Brodsworth, W.R., 1647-62	7	22	22	1	—	—	52
Driffield, E.R., 1648-66	55	203	167	5	1	—	431
Hackness, N.R., 1654-61	3	24	85	11	—	1	124
Scorborough, E.R., 1653-8	1	16	15	—	—	—	32
Woolley, W.R., 1653-60	39	6	30	7	—	1	83
York, St John Ousebridge, 1653-63	10	53	105	7	—	—	175

The information presented in Table 4 suggests that in seventeenth-century

The information presented in Table 4 suggests that in seventeenth-century Yorkshire burial followed death very quickly indeed. At Brodsworth, Driffield, Hackness, Scarborough and York in over ninety per cent of the cases in which both dates were given burial occurred by the end of the day after death whereas at Woolley over eighty per cent were buried by the same time. Whether or not burial occurred on the day of death would depend to a certain extent on the actual hour of death. Thus when Ann Dickinson died at Hackness 'early in the morning' of 30 August 1656 she 'was buried in the afternoon of the same day' while Stephen Courte who died on a Saturday night during 1659 'was buried the next day in the afternoon being the Lord's day'. At Hackness, many of the deaths were at night and burial was recorded as occurring the next day; this means that many of the burials at Hackness recorded as next day burials in Table 4 were burials within twenty-four hours of death. Indeed, some of these burials probably took place on the day of death, for a death which occurred in the small hours of say 3 June may well have been recorded as occurring during the night of 2 June with burial the next day.

It is also possible that the death/burial interval was affected by the seasons. On *a priori* grounds we might expect burial to occur more frequently on the day of death during the summer months. The ground can be equally hard in winter and summer but in summer a far longer period is available for digging graves each day. In addition, a faster rate of corruption of the corpse during summer may have hastened burial. There is some slight evidence that such influences were important at Driffield, ER. At Driffield where fifty-four per cent of burials occurred on the day of death, an above average number of same-day burials was recorded for March, June, July, October and December and a slightly above average number for August and November. Below average numbers of same-day burials occurred during the remaining five months; the lowest month was January with only thirty-five per cent same-day burials.

The timing of burial may also have been affected by variations in the level of mortality. Again this can be illustrated from the Driffield register. During the years 1648-66 recorded burials averaged 22.5 p.a. and same-day burials occurred in fifty-four per cent of known cases. However, during the two years 1657-8 when ninety burials were recorded the proportion of same-day burials rose to nearly sixty-five per cent.

In many of the instances in which burial was delayed beyond the day after death special circumstances were operating. Sometimes the corpse had to be moved a few miles. In other cases the dead man or woman belonged to the gentry and the desire to arrange a grand funeral could have delayed burial.²⁹ Another source of delay is illustrated by the Hackness, NR, register. The Widow Ann Sterriker 'being [a] distracted woman drowned herself on the back side in her well' on 10 June 1654 and was not buried until 14 June after the coroner's inquest.³⁰

Little has been written about the burial of common folk during the pre-industrial period. In many cases, especially with child deaths, it is probable that little more than the digging of a grave was required. Perhaps the construction of a coffin could delay matters but it is by no means certain that the majority of burials involved a coffin. At Howden the register lists the burial fees due to the sexton and there was a differential rate for burial depending on whether a coffin was required; burial without a coffin was at half the rate of a coffin burial.³¹ In the days before the development of the laying-out parlour it was simply commonsense to bury corpses as soon as possible. Even a short delay could lead to the gruesome result recorded at Hackness during 1657:

'Thomas Warde of Broxa fell sick on Saturday afternoon and laid speechless till he died upon the Lord's day at night being the 23rd of August and was buried the 25th day of the same: *and his body was somewhat corrupted at his burial being kept so long*' [my italics].

VI

Along with much other legislation of the 1640s and 1650s the Act of 1653 — 'that most unjust thing called an act by that pitiful convention then unlawfully assembled'³² — came to an end at the Restoration. In parish after parish the registers were handed back to the incumbent, church wardens or parish clerk; however, in some cases the parish clerk merely relinquished his position as Registrar but continued to keep the registers. Gradually most registers returned to normal. Information about births petered out in most places during the early 1660s and the details of banns and deaths were no longer entered. This is a development which historical demographers have cause to regret. Many of the Yorkshire registers contain much more interesting information for the 1650s than for the post 1660 period when so many registers reverted to listing that A was baptised, that B was married to C and that D was buried. The information available to us would be considerably richer if the revolution of 1653 had not been stamped out at the Restoration.

Perhaps the most interesting findings of this study relate to the birth/baptism interval. It is possible to demonstrate the existence of wide variations in local customs from parish to parish, although it is not yet possible to provide an adequate explanation of these differences. As Berry and Schofield have pointed out, local custom could change over

time. But why did such changes occur? How did they come about? It is in this twilight region of surmise and uncertainty that much more work needs to be done before satisfying conclusions can emerge about the nature and genesis of local customs which could have such a significant influence on our interpretation of the recording of vital events.

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Notes

1. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum* (3 vols, London, 1911), vol. 2, 715-18. Spelling has been modernised in all quotations.
2. The Act also discusses the age of consent and many other matters relating to marriage.
3. The registers consulted comprise printed registers, manuscript registers and some transcripts. The manuscript registers and transcripts were consulted at the following record repositories: Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York; Humberside County Record Office (formerly East Riding County Record Office), Beverley; Hull City Library, Local History Section; Leeds City Libraries, Archives Department; Leeds Central Reference Library; North Yorkshire County Record Office (formerly North Riding County Record Office), Northallerton; Sheffield City Library, Archives Department; Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Leeds. In addition, some registers were consulted in church. Because of the large number of registers used they have not been listed in the article and anyone who wishes to consult the list of registers consulted should apply to the author.

Reasonably accurate information about the starting dates of parish registers is provided by the maps produced by the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies.

4. See below page 24.
5. For other comments relating to the difficulty of keeping up the register see the registers for Adel, W. R., Rowley, E. R., and Whitby, N. R.
6. It is difficult in the case of printed registers to be certain about this; not all transcribers note changes in handwriting.
7. In four parishes — Bridlington, E. R., Hutton Buscel, N. R., Kildwick-in-Craven, W. R., and Terrington, N. R. — a copy of the Act was bound into the register.
8. This is a minimum number; some other registers seem to refer to the Registrar but the early section of these registers is damaged.
9. For a discussion of some of his entries see D. Woodward, "Some difficult confinements in seventeenth-century Yorkshire", *Medical History*, 18, 1974, 349-53.
10. Bardsey, W. R., nine names; Brompton (nr Northallerton), N. R., 16 names; Gilling (Ryedale), N. R., fourteen names; Settrington, E. R., twenty-four names including the 'pastor'; Whitby, N. R., 67 names.
11. The registration of births was also laid down in January 1645 but if the Yorkshire registers are anything to go by this earlier Act was not implemented on a large scale. Firth and Rait, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 583. This appears in the ordinance which suppressed the book of common prayer and substituted the "Directory for the public worship of God", *ibid.*, 582-607.
12. At Leeds the custom of recording both dates continued into the eighteenth century.
13. P. E. H. Hair, "Bridal pregnancy in rural England in earlier centuries", *Population Studies*, 20, 1966/7, 233-43; P. E. H. Hair, "Bridal pregnancy in earlier rural England further examined", *ibid.*, 24, 1970, 59-70; B. M. Berry and R. S. Schofield, "Age at baptism in pre-industrial England", *ibid.*, 25, 1971, 453-63; D. R. Mills, "The christening custom at Melbourn, Cambs", *Local Population Studies*, 11, 1973, 11-22.
14. At this point the present article leans heavily on the technique developed by Berry and Schofield, *op. cit.*
15. Bramham, W. R.; Gisburn, W. R.; Horbury, W. R.; Hull, E. R.; Kirkby Malham, W. R.; Pocklington, E. R.; York — Holy Trinity, St John Ousebridge, St Martin cum Gregory, St Michael le Belfry.

16. Berry and Schofield, *op. cit.*, 454. There is a vast literature on baptism; in the index to the *Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books etc collected by George Thomason, 1640-1661, 2 vols.*, 1908, there are 126 items listed under the heading *Baptism and Baptists*. *Students of seventeenth-century demography would be indebted to the brave scholar who attempted to elucidate differences in Puritan attitudes to baptism.*
17. K. Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic* (London, 1971), 36-7; 55; J. F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan, the basis of their opposition, 1558-1640* (London, 1964), 65-9; G. S. Wakefield, *Puritan devotion* (London, 1957), 39-42.
18. On the difficulty of identifying Puritans see R. A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the church courts in the diocese of York 1560-1642* (London, 1960), 222. See also J. A. Newton, "Puritanism in the diocese of York (excluding Nottinghamshire) 1603-1640", unpublished Phd thesis (University of London, 1955), 11-18.
19. Marchant, *op. cit.*, 262.
20. H. I. Dunton, "Religion and society in East Yorkshire, 1600-1660", unpublished MA thesis (University of Hull, 1956), vii-viii, 240, 289.
21. A. G. Matthews (ed), *Calamy revised* (Oxford, 1934), 462-3; B. Dale, *Yorkshire Puritanism and early Nonconformity* (Bradford, 1917), 149.
22. K. J. Allison (ed), *Victoria County History, East Riding of Yorkshire, I, Hull* (Oxford, 1969), 95-8, 107-9; Dale, *op. cit.*, 76, 141-3; Matthews, *op. cit.*, 434-5; Dunton, *op. cit.*, 218, 228-32; Newton, *op. cit.*, 21, 158-75.
23. Dunton, *op. cit.*, 289; Newton, *op. cit.*, 21-55, 63-6.
24. Dale, *op. cit.*, 66-70, 76-7, 112, 155-6; Matthews, *op. cit.*, 247, 253, 263, 487, 508-9, 558; Newton, *op. cit.*, 55.
25. *Interval in days (± 0.5) by which children were baptised at Leeds during 1653-60*

Where baptised	25%	50%	75%	90%
At home	5	8	12	16
In church	4	6	9	11
26. About 40 per cent of the registers give details of banns and J.P. marriages; about 25 per cent give details of one or the other.
27. Firth and Rait, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 1139.
28. Berry and Schofield, *op. cit.*, 453.
29. For example, the father of John Evelyn died on 25 December 1640 but was not buried until 2 January 1641. E. S. De Beer (ed), *The diary of John Evelyn* (6 vols., Oxford, 1955), vol. 2, 26.
30. Some years later, on 3 January 1659, a woman was crushed to death at Hackness when her house collapsed after being hit by an avalanche. The woman was buried but "after she was buried the Coroner came and she was unburied the 25th day of January to be viewed".
31. Burial with coffin — over seven years 8d, under seven years 4d; burial without coffin — over seven years 4d, under seven years 2d.
32. Register of Kildwick-in-Craven, W.R.

APPENDIX I:
Interval in days (± 0.5) by which children were baptised

**A: Where incomplete entries amount to 12% or less of the total
(Parishes ranked according to deviation score from median).**

Parish	Date	25%	50%	75%	90%	Total no. of observ- ations	% of in- complete entries	Devia- tion score from median
Hornsea, E.R.	1654-7	2(2)	2(3)	4(4)	4(6)	102	7	-18
Pocklington, E.R.	1653-60	2(2)	3(3)	4(4)	6(6)	162	1	-15
Catwick, E.R.	1646-53	2(2)	3(3)	4(5)	6(7)	52	6	-15
Burnsall, W.R.	1653-6	2(2)	5(5)	7(7)	8(8)	93	1	-8
Bossall and Buttercrambe, N.R.	1654-6	3(3)	5(5)	7(8)	8(-)	108	10	-7
York, Holy Trinity	1653-63	4(4)	5(6)	6(7)	8(13)	201	7	-7
York, St Maurice	1654-63	4(4)	5(5)	7(7)	8(9)	42	4	-6
Hackness, N.R.	1655-61	3(3)	5(5)	8(8)	9(11)	103	7	-5
Gisburn, W.R.	1653-64	3(3)	5(5)	7(7)	12(12)	451	1	-3
York, St Michael le Belfry	1653-7	4(4)	6(6)	8(8)	9(9)	171	2	-3
York, St John Ousebridge	1653-61	4(4)	6(6)	8(8)	10(11)	113	4	-2
Kirkby Malham, W.R.	1653-9	3(4)	6(7)	8(10)	12(13)	197	8	-1
Bramham, W.R.	1654-60	4(5)	6(7)	8(9)	11(-)	137	12	-1
Hull, Holy Trinity, E.R.	1658-60	5(5)	6(7)	8(10)	11(-)	584	12	0
Leeds, W.R.	1653-60	4(4)	6(6)	9(9)	12(12)	2590	0*	+1
Little Ouseburn, W.R.	1653-9	4(4)	6(6)	8(8)	14(14)	78	0	+2
Whitkitk, W.R.	1653-60	6(6)	8(9)	11(12)	15(17)	320	6	+10
Wakefield, W.R.	1654-5	6(6)	8(9)	13(16)	20(-)	136	10	+17
Horbury, W.R.	1654-64	8(9)	13(14)	18(22)	23(-)	199	12	+32
Wales, W.R.	1656-60	6(6)	13(13)	21(21)	26(29)	32	3	+36
Darton, W.R.	1653-9	8(8)	12(13)	23(26)	28(32)	207	8	+41
Roos, E.R.	1653-8	8(8)	14(18)	28(30)	30(-)	63	11	+50
Arksey, W.R.	1656-61	6(7)	16(19)	28(30)	31(-)	83	12	+51
Whitgift, W.R.	1653-5	11(12)	23(25)	28(29)	31(-)	61	10	+63
Royston, W.R.	1654-60	12(13)	25(26)	29(29)	31(32)	249	4	+67
Median of the 25 parishes		4	6	8	12			

* There are a total of 9 cases only where just one date is given.

Note: For an explanation of the methods used in compiling this table see above pp.

**B: Where incomplete entries amount to more than 12% of the total.
(Parishes ranked according to deviation score from median
of the 25 parishes listed in Appendix IA)**

Parish	Date	25%	50%	75%	90%	Total no. of obser- vations	% of in- complete entries	Devia- tion score from median
Wetwang, E.R.	1654-61	1	3	5	6	62	34	-15
Driffield, E.R.	1647-52	2	4	7	8	85	13	-9
Linton, W.R.	1653-61	3	5	7	8	157	44	-7
York, St Martin eum Gregory	1653-63	4	7	8	10	129	17	-1
Driffield, E.R.	1654-60	4	6	10	13	106	22	+3
Brodsworth, W.R	1647-61	4	6	9	15	79	13	+4
Crofton, W.R.	1653-60	5	9	12	15	84	15	+11
Melton on the Hill, W.R.	1654-63	3	6	13	24	55	16	+16
Wragby, W.R.	1653-9	3	8	14	27	131	32	+22
Braithwell, W.R.	1653-8	4	9	15	28	74	21	+26
Royston, W.R.	1661-7	14	25	28	30	275	26	+67
Median of the 25 parishes listed in Appendix IA			6	8	12			

Note: The figures given above relate *only* to those cases where *both* the birth and baptism dates are given.