

CORRESPONDENCE

L. P. S. No. 1

Dear Sir,

May I congratulate you and the editorial board on producing Local Population Studies. There is much worthwhile in it.

I would suggest that in future editions the interesting details of "Recent Publications" carries more detail, for example it is not clear from the details given if the publications mentioned are books or magazines, to take one example "La population de l'Angleterre du pays de Galles (1789-1815)". I have now discovered that this in fact an article published in Annales de demographie historique for 1965, this is not at all clear from the details you give, quite apart from this and no fault of yours it is proving impossible to get hold of the publication. Whilst, no doubt, it would be quite clear to an historian, that Population 1967 is a magazine it is not at all clear to one who has never heard of the publication before. The World We Have Lost, we all know to be a book and available from any library, but there is nothing to distinguish this from say, Past & Present 1967.

Would it also be possible to include some fuller commentary on the publications mentioned so that one can decide if it is worthwhile getting a photo-copy of some of the more remote articles.

Yours faithfully,

David N. Durant,
The Old House,
Bleasby,
Nottingham

Dear Sir,

Congratulations on the first number of Local Population Studies Magazine and Newsletter, which I have read with great interest. I wonder whether you would be interested in a few thoughts which occurred to me as I read.

I can well imagine that the wide range of your readers, from the experienced academics to the amateur like myself, keenly interested, but not in command of the more sophisticated techniques such as Dr. Wrigley uses, will present difficulties. I would put in a plea for the amateur! The more sophisticated demographers are not lacking in appropriate publications, and I would hope that Local Population Studies, whilst giving an opportunity for printing good, well-based population studies, would take care to see that they are such as can be made by the careful and diligent amateur and can be understood by him, and do not call for recondite mathematical treatment. It seems to me that, since an important part of your readership will be people who are learning demographic techniques, articles should either clearly expose the techniques used or should be accompanied by comments which do so. I wonder whether authors would welcome questions and discussion of their articles, including criticism of their techniques. Only so, it seems to me, can we improve our methods.

Readers like myself will mainly be interested in the light which demographic studies can cast on the history of their own locality. At the same time I think that most would welcome brief "progress reports" from Cambridge indicating the directions which their work is taking.

Yours sincerely,

L. Bradley,
Sheldon Cottage,
Elton,
Matlock, Derbyshire

Population Research in Colleges of Education

Dear Sir,

I and my students are most interested in the first issue of the magazine as we are at present working on the enumerators' books for this area and one of the group has been working for some time on the registers for a local parish.

If there are other college tutors working on similar lines, I would be very pleased if they would contact me.

Yours sincerely,

T.G. Thompson,
Senior Lecturer,
Chorley College of Education,
Union Street,
Chorley, Lancs.

M For?

Dear Sir,

Your correspondent, Mr. David Pam, has noted that the letter "M" has been written in the margin of the burial registers of Tottenham High Cross, Middlesex, against a number of entries from the first half of the 17th century. He asks for a possible interpretation of this. May I suggest that "M" includes the payment of mortuary fee.

A rapid survey of the burial registers of Eckington, Derbyshire, has produced a list of thirteen entries against each of which there is the note "Mortuary paid 10d." The first entry which I was able to find is dated 15th January 1719 and the latest 17th October 1756. There are no references to the payment of mortuary during the years 1734-1751 inclusive, but the year 1752 has no fewer than four such references. A thorough examination of the registers (which are in good condition and date from 1558) may reveal further instances. Does the fact that the mortuary fee appears to have been noted as '10d paid' against the names of such substantial parishioners as e.g. George Sitwell Esq. (1722) or Gervase Newton Esq. (1728) indicate

that 10d was a higher rate than normally paid or that payment was locally expected only from the estates of the wealthy deceased?

The Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'Mortuary', has a number of literary references to this ecclesiastical fee from the time of Wyclif to the nineteenth century. Some sources indicate that the incumbent was entitled to the best of a dead man's goods; others that he claimed the second best. Inevitably, from a lay standpoint, mortuary fee appears to have been an unpopular source of clerical revenue. This would suggest another explanation why in only a minority of instances does a burial register indicate the payment of mortuary fee to the incumbent. Clerical difficulties in extracting tithe from reluctant landowners would afford a parallel.

Yours faithfully,

J.O. Drackley, (The Rev.),
Tansley Rectory,
Matlock, Derbyshire

Dear Sir,

Although there are difficulties, it seems likely that the marginal "M" against 20% of entries in the Tottenham High Cross Burial Register in the early 17th Century stands for "Mortuary (paid)". By an act of 1529, strangers, non-residents and non-householders were not liable for mortuaries. Two explanations are possible. (1) The parson illegally exacted mortuaries for strangers, children etc. Although I have encountered a case of a mortuary being exacted for a stranger, I have never come across a similar exaction for a child and would therefore favour (2). That the term "mortuary" was loosely used as synonymous with "burial dues", the two perhaps having frequently become totally confused. The figure of 20% does not, of course, imply that "mortuaries" were not paid for the remaining 80%. It merely suggests that this percentage of relatives paid up by the time the burial was registered. I would be interested to learn if any reader has come across any evidence to suggest that "mortuary" might have been used with this meaning.

Yours faithfully,

D.J. Steel,
Editor, National Index of Parish Registers,
3 Crescent Road, Wokingham, Berks.

On another source of clerical revenues, Miss Bertha K. Barnardiston writes:-

(In Bromley). Having had a baby, it was customary to be churched and to pay a shilling. In 1714 an absolutely furious clerk records that the Rev. Mr. Bagshaw, for reasons best known to himself, had possessed himself of the whole shilling instead of sharing it equally with the clerk as had been done from time immemorial. He went on doing it, too. And the clerk recorded every enormity as it occurred. The Rev. Mr. Bagshaw held out for over forty churchings, but seems to have capitulated after doing a lady suitably named Goodeal.

Marriage Seasonality

Dear Sir,

It is often asserted by folklorists that May was traditionally an unpropitious month for marriages and therefore avoided. The Folklore Society's British Calendar Customs (1938) ii p. 271 states, "Marriages in May are unlucky", and says that this belief has been recorded in eleven English counties. Miss Christina Hole, in 'English Customs and Usage' (1950) p. 77 says "It is still generally considered unlucky to be married in May", and discusses possible Roman and mediaeval roots of the belief. Older sources e.g. Brand's Popular Antiquities (1849 Bohn edn.) ii p. 151 seem to specify the belief as Scottish. Henderson's Folklore of the Northern Counties (1879) p. 34 gives some significant statistics for Glasgow marriages in that decade.

A report by the East London Population Study Group on Stepney 1606-10 reveals May as a significantly popular and sometimes even a peak month for marriages (1608 and 1610). Dr. Wrigley has informed me that the Stepney situation is not at all unusual. It would seem that either the folklorists' assertion of a general disinclination to marry in May is unfounded or (one may hazard) that this disinclination did not manifest itself until relatively recent times. I would value the comments of other researchers on these suggestions.

Yours truly,

A.W. Smith,
The Coopers' Company's School,
Tredegar Square,
London, E.3.