

BIRTH-BAPTISM INTERVALS IN SOME FLINTSHIRE PARISHES

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The monthly analysis of baptism registers is meaningful only in those parishes where birth is followed by baptism consistently within a short period of time. A crude method of making sure that the register under consideration is suitable for aggregative analysis is to conduct a one in ten systematic sample where a series of birth and baptism dates is given in the register. The result of such an analysis of two Flintshire registers in the late eighteenth century was 97 per cent of children baptised within a month of birth in Mold and 99 per cent of children in Northop.

These crude figures have been supplemented by the figures of Flintshire parishes in Table 1, which have been arrived at by following the techniques advocated by S. Jackson and P. Laxton in their article in **Local Population Studies**, 18, Spring 1977. I am also indebted to Dr. Laxton for his valuable advice.

Table 1 Interval in days (+ 0.5) by which the stated percentile of births was baptised two sample periods from Flintshire parish registers.

		25%	50%	75%	90%	N	IE ¹	Mean
Cilcain and Ysefiog	1686-90	2	4	7	9	148	0	4.6
Hope	1686-90	8	11	15	19	224	0	11.8
Mold	1686-90	4	7	9	13	210	0	7.5
Hope	1783-86	4	11	18	39	224	0	17.2
	1787-90	4	11	24	63	269	0	27.8
	1791-94	4	9	22	61	220	0	26.5
	1795-98	4	11	23	54	230	0	25.6
	1799-1802	4	12	25	55	243	0	26.4
Northop	1783-86	1	3	7	14	246	0	5.9
	1787-90	1	4	7	15	268	0	6.6
	1791-94	2	4	8	17	278	0	7.7
	1795-98	2	5	10	20	307	0	8.0
	1799-1802	2	6	9	17	299	0	7.3
Mold	1784-85	1	4	7	16	222	2	6.5
	1788-89	1	3	9	17	220	0	7.7
	1792-93	2	4	8	17	207	8	8.7
	1796-97	2	4	8	23	259	5	11.5
	1800-01	1	4	11	22	262	14	11.1

¹Denotes the number of incomplete entries

The parishes of Cilcain and Ysefiog, Northop, Mold and Hope are situated on a line running roughly west to east in the north-east corner of Wales. Northop, Mold and Hope are about equal in area and are similar geographically and economically: all are mainly agricultural, mostly hill-farming with some richer land in the valleys; there has, however, also been coal and lead mining in the district since late medieval times. Assuming that the annual tables calculated every tenth year for baptisms and burials in the Parish Register Abstract are correct, it would seem that Flintshire experienced one of the highest rates of population growth during the eighteenth century and that there was considerable in-migration.

As there are no seventeenth century figures for Northop, Cilcain and Ysefiog have been included for comparison for these years, although they are small, more mountainous, parishes and therefore unlike the three large parishes.

All the parishes would seem to have had a tradition of early baptism, although there are some differences. In the early period baptisms in Hope were delayed in comparison with the other parishes but there is no marked skewing: the oldest baby baptised in all parishes in the early period was just twenty-nine days old. In the later period baptisms at Hope were again later than in the other parishes, but all parishes show a skewing of data, for there seem to be two conflicting trends at work. The 25 percentile is earlier in the late eighteenth century than in the late seventeenth century, but the mean age at baptism is markedly later and the age range at which baptism takes place is greatly extended. During the later period the oldest baby baptised at Northop was 124 days, at Mold 290 days and at Hope 989 days; (the last was the only case found where two children of the same family were baptised on the same day). The second oldest baptism at Hope was 399 days.

A possible explanation of the differences between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be that in the latter these parishes comprised two sets of people, the old, established families who maintained the tradition of early baptism and the newcomers who were more loosely connected with the parish church and so felt less urgent need of early baptism. It is also possible that nonconformity made some parents reluctant to bring their children to be baptised in the parish church. This would need to be looked at more closely. The majority of newcomers to Flintshire at this time probably came from the more remote parts of Wales. It could be that such newcomers to the scattered mining villages of Flintshire would be more likely to be attracted to the fellowship of the village chapel than to the more distant and formal parish church, but would still want to have their children baptised in the church.

It is well known that parish registers become less reliable towards the end of the eighteenth century as a complete record of the local community. This study also shows that monthly totals become less meaningful during this period, even in parishes which have a low mean age at baptism. The implications for the aggregative analysis of parish registers are obvious but, as long as the disadvantages are borne in mind, such analyses should not be considered totally worthless. Indeed, it is hoped that this paper will make a small contribution to our understanding of the reasons for variation in the birth-baptism interval and to the possible classification of early and late baptism regions.