CORRESPONDENCE

Letters intended for publication in LPS should be sent to RICHARD WALL, 27 Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1QA.

Editor's note
LPS readers are reminded that the editorial board is always prepared to offer advice on subjects within the scope of LPS. Sometimes queries which have been raised are discussed in print in this section of the journal but there are many others which are not published, so if you think we can help do not hesitate to contact us.

Triple Twins
Dear Editors,

I refer to Mr. John Wilson’s letter in LPS 22 and I think I can perhaps cap his reference. Mine comes from the Birth Register of Wymondham, Norfolk.

‘Oct 1751 I baptised Thomas and Susan Twin children of John Thompson Husbandman Suton Division and Sarah his wife which was the fifth time of them having twins. Seven of them were then living and likely to live seeming to be very healthy, strong children.’

RC (Robert Cremer, Vicar of Wymondham)

Yours sincerely,

N. H. Williams.

New Pineside, 36c Cotman Road, Norwich Nor 32T.

Sex Ratios
Dear Sir,

For those interested in the calculation of sex ratios an intriguing entry from the parish clerk’s notebook (from which the parish register was compiled) of St. Saviours, Southwark;

“21 May 1619 Mary Webb a servant hermaphrodite ………”

Yours faithfully,

Jeremy Boulton.

Darwin Cottage, Cambridge.

‘Genealogical’ register entries in Nottingham parishes
Dear Sirs,

I was very interested in Dr. W. J. Sheils’ article in LPS 23, pages 41-44, about the occurrence of very full ‘genealogical’ entries in late 18th century Yorkshire parish registers. Dr. Sheils may also like to know that the practice was known in Nottinghamshire, which was of course at that date part of the Diocese of York. Although I have never systematically analysed how widespread the practice was, such entries can be found in the registers for varying periods between 1777 and 1812 for the parishes of
Beeston, East Stoke, Finningley, Mansfield, Sutton Bonington (St Michael), Syerston and Teversal at least, and there may also be several others. The Teversal registers record that the new format was adopted 'by order of the Archbishop of York at Visitation, 1778'. The entries for the rapidly-expanding market town of Mansfield are especially useful, even though they only cover the years 1777-80, and I have used the baptism entries as evidence of the parents' marriage horizons as part of a study of migration in Nottingham and Derbyshire. For example, in an analysis of 70 entries in 1777-8 where the names and places of residence of all four grandparents are recorded, in only 4% of the cases did all four come from Mansfield, and in 24% none had come from the town.

Yours faithfully,
Adrian Henstock.

Nottinghamshire Record Office, County House, High Pavement, Nottingham, NG1 1HR.

Female blacksmiths

Dear Sir,

The letter from Mr. Alan Gillies about female blacksmiths (LPS 23) reminded me of a conversation I had four years ago with the octogenarian daughter of a blacksmith, who told me that when her father’s health was ‘beginning to fail she used to have to help him shoe the ponies. He’d say ‘Come on girl, you can do that job,’ and she would take the shoes off and clean the feet out and he would fit the new shoes.

Perhaps it was this need to maintain the family’s livelihood that brought the females into the business, and in the absence of a son and heir they might have continued, perhaps with additional help, on the death of the blacksmith.

It was, I thought, quite appropriate that my informant’s blacksmith’s father also kept a public house called ‘The Horseshoes’!

Yours faithfully,
Joy Lodey.

Fieldfare, Etling Green, East Dereham, Norfolk.

Dear Sirs,

Recently I came across a copy of your magazine in the local library and thumbing through the pages I came across a query about female blacksmiths. Although the following information doesn’t relate to the ‘village blacksmith’ image, it still maybe of interest to your reader.

In the Black Country the employment of women in the chainmaking trade was widespread. Indeed it provided what has come to be regarded as a traditional trade for Black Country women during the nineteenth century

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and early twentieth century. Large numbers of women were employed in the trade which was centred on Cradley Heath. The town became the world centre for chainmaking with the men making the larger chains whilst the woman made the smaller sizes. There were two kinds of worker. The 'factory worker' who was employed in one of the larger chainshops. Such 'shops' had anything between six and fourteen hearths at which men and women worked. Many women however (and some men) worked in small backyard shops behind their homes. These were called 'outworkers.' They were open to much abuse and rarely got a fair price for their work. Men had their rods delivered to their homes and at the end of the week a cart came to collect their chain, but the women were expected to collect and deliver their finished chain themselves, transporting it by wheelbarrow to the agent with whom they dealt. At the turn of the century in Cradley Heath alone 37% of the population — about 2,500 people were employed in the chain trade. In 1860 it was estimated that half the work force employed in chainmaking (4,000 people) were employed as 'outworkers.'

I have recently published a booklet about the Black Country chainmakers which has been well received by academic historians as well as Black Country people familiar with the chain making industry. I can supply copies at 80p each, which includes post and package, should anyone be interested.

Yours faithfully,
Rob Woolley.

9 Aulton Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B75 5PU.

Dear Editor,

According to the published reports of the census of occupations, small numbers of female blacksmiths existed throughout the nineteenth century. In 1851 the total for England and Wales is given as 561, eight of whom were recorded in the county of Surrey (excluding the metropolitan area) and one of whom resided in the Reigate area. For details at parish level it would be necessary to consult the unpublished enumerators' returns at the Public Record Office (H.O. 107 and R.G.9).

I think it is safe to assume that the majority of blacksmiths recorded in largely rural counties such as Surrey would have been traditional village blacksmiths, rather than smiths employed in other manufacturing industries. I have yet to come across any evidence, however, that any of these female blacksmiths actually worked at the forge and I think it must be assumed that they were owners of family businesses whose employees undertook the work of smithing. Mrs. Whitton of Fringford, Oxfordshire (the actual Dorcas Lane of Flora Thompson's Candleford Green) was such an owner; she is listed in the Kelly's Directory as a blacksmith and farrier. It would be interesting to hear of any evidence of a woman working at the forge herself.

Yours sincerely,
John S. Creasy.
Librarian and Information Officer, University of Reading, Institute of Agricultural History and Museum of English Rural Life, Reading RG6 2AG.

**Did the Commonwealth Act of 1653 lapse in 1657?**

Dear Sir,

I see from note 4 on page 47 of the Spring 1980 Issue of *Local Population Studies* that 'Hair was incorrect in claiming that the Act of 1653 lapsed in 1657.' (Misprinted as 1567.) If so, he is not alone. Having transcribed a number of registers in Devon, mostly to the west and south of Exeter, I find that in every case civil marriage lapsed, and marriages by ministers resumed, late in 1657. Moreover, at Moretonhampstead where the minister and the 'Register' made duplicate entries from 1653 for births/baptisms and burials, the latter ceased at this time.

There is therefore definite evidence in these parts to support Hair's assumption; possibly the Act remained on the books, but the practice (at least locally) ceased.

Yours sincerely,

R. R. Sellman,

Pound Down Corner, Whitestone, Exeter EX4 2HP.

**An irregular marriage**

Dear Sir,

The register entry recording the marriage of George Lambe, widower of High Easter and Lydia Westwood of Abbess Rooding at Abbess Rooding in 1797 is preceded by a note 'The underwritten marriage would not have taken place had I discovered in time, that George Lambe had been married to the sister of Lydia Westwood.'

Marriage with a deceased wife's sister was not legalised until 1907 so the parties were guilty of incest in the eyes of the church and also, having been married by licence had, presumably, committed perjury by swearing that there was no impediment to the marriage. (E.R.O. D/P 145/1/3).

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Sellers,

1 Chignall Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2JA.

**Marriage to his wife's cosyn**

Dear Sir,

William White grocer was maryed to Anne Harrys, servant to John Payn, myller on the 12 day of November in the yer of Our Lorde, 1542. And by cause that his late wife and she were brothers and sisters children, it was dowyt whether it might be lawfully done or noe, for which he went to
London and consulty'd with Mr. Doctor Rokeby which kepith the Seal of Dispensations unto my Lorde of Canturbury: which detmyed that by reason of a statue late made he might lawfully marye ith his wives cosyn his wife being disseyd. Teste Robto. Johnson Registr. Chelmsford Marri age Register: Essex Parish Registers, Phillimore, Vol. II.

Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth Sellers,

1 Chignall Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2JA.

Twins delivery interval

Dear Sir,

On 5 October 1834 twins, Emma Henrietta and Henry Joseph Dunham, were baptised in Ashwell, Hertfordshire. Their respective birth dates were 15 August and 4 September 1834, which means there was a twenty day gap between births. Both children seem to have been strong as they lived until April 1839, when they were 4½ years old.

As it seemed unusual for twins to be born so far apart I made enquiries to see if any cases had been recorded by medical science. A case has been reported where the delivery interval was 65 days. A few other cases, where the interval has been shorter, have also been reported.

I would be most interested to hear if anyone else has come across this phenomena, and if so whether both children were born alive, and how long they lived.

Yours sincerely,
C. D. Short.

Advisory Teacher for Environmental Education, Merchant Taylors' School, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts SG7 5LY.

County record office closures: the archivist's dilemma

Dear Sirs,

May I set the record a little more straight in the matter of county record office closures referred to in the editorial of the Spring 1980 issue of Local Population Studies.

Before appointing a place of deposit under section 4(1) of the Act, the Lord Chancellor is required to be satisfied that it affords suitable facilities for the inspection of records by the public and, under section 5(5), that the arrangements for inspection are comparable to those made for public records in the Public Record Office. The definition of those arrangements, however, goes no further than the 'reasonable facilities' referred to in section 5(3). In advising the Lord Chancellor in the matter of appointments under section 4(1), the Public Record Office has always interpreted section 5(5) as requiring that there shall be facilities for the public to inspect, under supervision, public records which are open to inspection
and to obtain photocopies of them. Particular or even regular opening hours have never been specified as a prerequisite for recommending an appointment. Indeed, in appropriate cases, access by prior arrangement only has been countenanced. Opening hours have always varied between local record offices and have never been tied to those obtaining at the Public Record Office, which have themselves varied over the years.

Were access to public records to be denied to the public altogether, then no doubt the Lord Chancellor would require the removal of those records, unless reasonable access arrangements were made. Similarly in such circumstances a member of the public who was denied access to public records would be entitled to apply to the courts for an appropriate order. This, however, is a different matter from closure on one or two days a week, which varies, but does not remove, facilities for public access. Public records transferred to places of deposit under section 4(1) are almost certainly records under the control of a local authority for the purposes of the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, Section 1(1)a of which gives local authorities broad powers to determine their own conditions for access by the public.

So much for the point of law. More important, however, is the point of principle. Your editorial chose to attack the reduction of opening hours in some local record offices without, in the view of the Association, adequate serious consideration of the problems which have led to those steps. Local authority record offices are under increasing pressure. The number of people using their facilities, either to deposit or to consult documents, has increased dramatically in recent years. During this period resources in terms of both staff and premises have not kept pace with demand. Many offices entered the present round of cuts with hopelessly inadequate resources, only to see those resources further diminished. The archivist has a duty to both searcher and depositor and must use his judgement in determining how to allocate limited resources as best he can.

The backlog of uncatalogued and therefore virtually unusable archives in many record offices is very large and in recent years has grown at a disturbing rate. Such a situation is unsatisfactory to the would-be user but is also less than attractive to potential depositors. Indeed, the inability of the archivist in some cases to promise the appearance of a catalogue within even four or five years deters many owners of archives from depositing and thereby deprives the researcher of valuable new material. Few record offices can keep pace with indexing, let alone introduce indexes where none exist. Even fewer now have the resources to sustain a positive acquisitions policy. Many have to wait for deposits to come to them since in maintaining a service in a search room they have no-one available actively to seek deposits. In such a situation, potentially significant collections are inevitably being lost or destroyed every day.

Meanwhile, the Parochial Registers and Records Measure, with its requirement for inspection of records in situ, has placed new strains on already limited resources in England. In Wales, the agreement reached in 1976 between the Church in Wales and the County Councils has produced similar pressures.
Survey, rescue, acquisition and the production of adequate catalogues and indices: all are undertaken in the ultimate interest of the researcher. The Record Office which stands still in any of these areas risks the justifiable opprobrium of future historians. But with limited resources the archivist has to run the gauntlet, risking the sacrifice either of the goodwill of his present users or of the material which future users will expect to find available. The choice is neither easy nor enviable.

In Lancashire, Shropshire and Glamorgan, the decisions to reduce opening hours until more resources become available were taken with great reluctance. In each case, regard was paid to the particular local circumstances, and this solution chosen as the least damaging to all concerned of the possible alternatives. Above all, the choice was made in the long-term interests of the user, interests which we would hope your editorial board would share. The way to an early return to improved services must be through the united energies of archivists and historians — applied, after careful consideration, in the right quarters.

Yours faithfully,

V. W. Gray.

The Association of County Archivists, c/o Essex Record Office, County Hall, Chelmsford SM1 1LX, Essex.

Editors’ note: Letters of a similar nature have been received from Miss S. J. Barnes and Dr. D. B. Robinson, the county archivists of Oxfordshire and Surrey. It is unfortunate that they arrived too late for publication but the issues they raise are considered in our editorial.

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The deadline for LPS 26 is May 31st 1981.