

Note: on List of Occupations

No comment is offered here on these occupational names, some of which like inkleweaver and coalgrive are new to the Cambridge Group, though doubtless well known to Scottish social historians, and those of Northern England. One of them (Dytter) is unintelligible to us and may be a misprint. Some of the descriptions, such as Present Deacon of the North Quarter Journeymen in Glasgow, or Deacon of the Red Club in Glasgow, both men being weavers, have an obvious interest for the development of friendly societies or even trade union organisations.

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BAPTISM/MARRIAGE RATIOS IN
LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

Baptism/marriage ratios are sometimes used as a rough measure of fertility in a parish or group of parishes. They may be calculated either in a straightforward manner by relating, say, the number of baptisms 1680-9 to the number of marriages in the same period, or the periods chosen may be staggered to reflect the fact that marriages in any one year contribute to baptism totals over a period of years (e.g. baptisms of 1685-94 and marriages 1680-89). In general the value to be expected for the ratio lies between 3 and 5, but in particular parishes, because of special local circumstances, the value may be well outside this range (e.g. because the church was unusually popular and attracted couples to marry there though neither partner lived in the parish). Even where there is no reason to suspect distorting circumstances of a special kind, the ratio is to be used with the greatest caution, since it may be affected by such things as

remarriage frequencies, local migration trends and the overall trends in total population.

In analysing late seventeenth century registers, to all the other caveats about the use of the ratio must be added a further caution, one which may make it necessary to abandon its use altogether, or rather to convert it into a rough measurement of something quite different. For in this period in very many parishes the ratio rises to a very high level indeed. Values between 6 and 8 are quite common and occasionally the ratio rises above 10. Total fertility rates very seldom approach these levels. A true value as high as 6 would be very remarkable in any society in which women married as late as in seventeenth century England.

The Cambridge Group has not as yet made a systematic study of this phenomenon, but it is clear that it is subject to wide regional variations, with some areas showing no unexpectedly high values, while in others most parishes seem to produce high ratios. In any one parish special local circumstances may account for a high ratio but it is most unlikely that this will serve to explain the frequency of the phenomenon in the total of 465 aggregative analyses now held in Cambridge. Moreover it is reflected in the material published in the 1841 census which was based on parish register data collected from incumbents at Rickman's behest in 1836. This covered a large but varying number of parishes and is difficult to use with precision because it was published in a compressed and transposed form. However, it suggests that the national baptism/marriage ratio increased by 16 per cent between 1600 and 1670 and by 9 per cent between 1630 and 1670, but that by 1700 the ratio was falling. In certain regions the changes were very much more striking, notably in the following groups of counties: Derby and Leicestershire; Middlesex, Surrey and Buckinghamshire; Durham and Northumberland; and Somerest, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

That high ratios were common (they are most commonly found over the decades between 1660 and 1720) is the more surprising in that the population of England as a whole was not growing rapidly, and in certain areas was probably falling. It would occasion less surprise if the ratios observed has been generally lower in the late seventeenth century than before or after. The pattern seems sufficiently marked and widespread to call in question the completeness of marriage registration, (it is inherently improbable that over-registration of baptisms occurred, so that if the ratio attains exceptional levels it is natural to think in terms of under-registration of marriages.)

The purpose of this note is to invite those with intimate knowledge of local circumstances to suggest reasons for very high baptism/marriage ratios at this period, if this happens to have occurred locally. It should be borne in mind that until Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 it was possible to contract a valid marriage without the celebration of the marriage taking place in church. Any man and woman who exchanged vows in the presence of witnesses (and who were free to marry) could establish a union recognised in ecclesiastical law. It is conceivable that the change in the ratio may be due to the frequency with which couples in some parts of the country decided to forego any church ceremony. Their offspring would be legitimate and would therefore, presumably, be recorded in the baptism register exactly as if their parents had married in church. There are some indications that the period in which baptism/marriage ratios were often so high was also a period when a particularly low percentage of children were registered as bastards at baptism. And it is possible therefore that the two traits are related, since the distinction between a legitimate and an illegitimate birth might be harder to draw. Many offspring of semi-stable unions, which in an age of universal church marriage would be registered as bastards, might be given the benefit of the doubt when their parents were not obviously less 'married' than many other couples.

Any comments upon this curious feature of late seventeenth century parochial registration would be most welcome. What we have suggested above is no more than a ballon d'essai. We should be equally happy to see it puffed up or pricked.

THE USE OF THE DESCRIPTION 'WIDOW' IN PARISH REGISTERS

Mr. D.J. Steel in Volume 1 of his new National Index of Parish Registers (London, 1968) notes (page 83) that 'the term Widow was often used in the eighteenth century, not only in the modern sense but also to indicate a woman past middle age who lived alone and was either of independent means or maintained herself by her own efforts'. We are greatly interested in this question since it may affect the interpretation of parish registers and listings of inhabitants both in demographic and social structure analysis. Accordingly, if any reader is familiar with the extent of this usage of the word 'widow' locally, we should be most grateful for information which would help to clarify the circumstances in which it occurred and the time period over which it was used in this sense.

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