

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.

John Opie's registration of birth

Dear Sir,

There have been numerous references to under-registration of births, and to irregular marriages, in the pages of **LPS**.

There is an intriguing story about John Opie, the eighteenth century painter, under the year 1795, in volume 1 of the **Diaries of Joseph Farington, R.A.** (published 1922), page 122, which combines elements of both these features.

December 14:

'Taylor has had several conversations with Opie on the subject of Mrs. Opie's having left him. She went off with an Irishman, a Major Edwards, a married man of 54 years of age, who she had frequently been in company with at Mr. Hickey's. Opie went into Cornwall to examine the parish register for the date of his birth: but his name had not been entered. He could only prove his age, by that of another person, who was known to be older than him. The object of this examination was, to prove that being **under age** when he was married to Mrs. Opie, the marriage was not valid in law: but Taylor observed to him that if he produced such proof He wd render himself liable to be indited for perjury; as at the time of his marriage, to procure a license, He had sworn that He was of age. — At present Opie seems to be pretty well reconciled to his situation, having been assured that Mrs Opie will not put him to any expence by contracting debts — He does not think of applying for a divorce.'

The editor of the Diaries commented: This is quite Gilbertian.

Yours sincerely,
Harold Gough,

Beverley House, 141 Grand Drive, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 8HU.

The cost of photocopying services at the Public Record Office

Dear Sir,

With reference to Lieutenant Colonel Sir David Cooke's letter which appeared in **LPS 29**, Sir David did, of course, receive a full explanatory reply when he wrote to the Office, but I am happy to take the opportunity which you have offered to reach a wider audience.

It is a matter of regret to us that the prices charged to the public seem high and that they attract criticism from those whom we exist to serve. It is, however, Government policy that the full cost of the service to the public must be recovered, and there can be no question of a subsidy. That is the first constraint upon us. Each of the processes is separately costed, and the prices fixed to include not only elements for capital employed, labour, materials and accommodation but also VAT. The prices are under constant review to ensure that they are as low as possible consistent with Government policy.

The second constraint upon us is our duty to protect the records at all times. The Census records, of which Sir David made special mention, are an excellent example of the way in which this duty can affect the price of copies. The original records are fragile and would not long survive the heavy use that is made of them. To preserve them, they have been micro-filmed for public use and copies for sale are made from those films. The cheaper, direct copying processes cannot be used because they would involve just the damage that we seek to avoid. Similar restrictions are applied to other classes of records known to be vulnerable to particular copying methods.

I hope that these comments will enable your readers better to understand the factors which dictate the prices that we charge for copies of the public records.

Yours sincerely,
Patricia M. Barnes,

Deputy Keeper of Public Records, Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU.

A new approach to the study of marriage horizons

Dear Sir,

A member of my extra-mural research class is studying the marriage horizons of a Suffolk market town so I was delighted to see an article on this subject in **LPS 28** but pleasure turned to despair as I read it.

The purpose of a journal such as **LPS** is to communicate to its readers useful information and interesting new ideas, but to do this successfully requires clarity of language and expression and this Mr. Millard signally fails to achieve. In the opening paragraph he states his intention 'to introduce readers of **LPS** to several more powerful techniques which are well

within the grasp of the amateur local historian'. This is an admirable aim, but many amateur and some professional historians will find it difficult to follow his exposition and will be put off by his use of the jargon of sociology. Even if some use of technical terms is unavoidable in the discussion of regression analysis, why for example is it necessary to use phrases such as the 'distance enabling regular face-to-face contact to be maintained' when the writer means enabling regular meetings to take place? It would be tedious to quote other examples, but there is no excuse for writing in obscure and tortuous language. After several re-readings I am still uncertain of the meaning of the second paragraph in the conclusion.

Incidentally I did not pass on the article to my class as had been my first intention.

Yours sincerely,
Nesta Evans,

Mill Green House, Fressingfield, Eye, Suffolk.

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