

MARRIAGE HORIZONS AND SEASONALITY : A COMPARISON

Alan Hunter

Alan Hunter was introduced to **LPS** as an Open University student some years ago. His interest is in rural and agricultural history.

From time to time **LPS** has published articles analysing aspects of marriage choice. Having collected data for my local parish, I offer here my attempts to compare and contrast these data with the published findings.

The parish in question, Haynes, is in Bedfordshire, some nine kilometres SSE of Bedford and twenty kilometres north of Luton. Its easternmost part borders the main Bedford-Hitchin road, the present A600, while the western edge spreads over the Luton-Bedford road (A6). Until the First World War the major part of Haynes was an estate village owned by one family, from the 1660s headed by a succession of Lords Carteret. There was no industry other than farming and, apart from the shop and inn-keepers, the majority of villagers must have been employed by the Lord of the manor or his tenants. The Tithe Survey of 1839 shows that about a third of the parish, the area in which the mansion was situated, was grassland and that apart from a few acres of wood the rest was arable. I have yet to discover which crops were grown in Haynes, but details about the kind of farming on the estates of the Duke of Bedford are available from 1795 to 1800, for tenants in a group of eight villages in the general area of Haynes.¹ The villages are not considered separately, but in total 40 per cent of the land was grass and 60 per cent arable. The arable crops were wheat, barley, oats and clover.

Haynes marriage data before 1813 were taken from the transcript of the registers prepared by Brigg.² Data from 1813 to 1833 were taken from the original registers held at Bedfordshire CRO. While no detailed comparisons between Brigg and the original registers were made, spot checks have revealed no major errors of transcription.

Use of transcript data is, no doubt, second best, but doing so made it possible to work at home and not be bound by the very limited time I could spend at the Record Office.

Marriage horizons

Millard³ presents a number of techniques to analyse marriage horizons, but as Haynes data are limited it is possible to attempt only some of these. Haynes, incidentally, comes well within Millard's regional field sketch map area, but just outside his local field. It appears that only one village, Olney, is common to both surveys.

Millard's definition of marriage distance is adhered to, stated as the distance between the parish of residence of the groom and the parish of residence of the bride, on the eve of their marriage as recorded in the register.

Table 1. Marriage distance data for Haynes 1754-1833.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(14)
Year	Total Marriages	Total Extra Parochial Marriages	Extra Parochial Marriage %	Mean Extra-Parochial Marriage Distance km	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	Mean Census Population	Extra Parochial Marriage Rate (per 1000)	Annual Marriage Rate (per 1000)	Marriages 0-25km
1754-1793	183	65	35.52	9.17	5.19	6.64	8.71	—	—	—	96.9%
1774-1813	211	69	32.70	10.50	5.19	6.72	9.01	—	—	—	94.2%
1794-1833	244	54	22.13	10.55	3.86	6.72	10.92	i)704.8 ii)743.7	1.9 1.8	8.7 8.2	92.6%

i) 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831
ii) 1811, 1821, 1931

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Table 2. Marriage Seasonality, 1761-1810

Place	Period	Total No. of Marriages	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Haynes	1761-1810	252	93	103	65	53	79	106	70	42	72	224	159	131
	1591-1810	718	80	109	43	127	92	98	67	36	103	218	125	103
5 Beds. Parishes	1761-1770	193	104	95	67	113	92	126	85	43	44	171	170	79
	1771-1780	198	77	151	42	147	54	86	71	59	37	214	135	125
	1781-1790	291	117	112	69	96	89	88	77	40	67	214	125	105
	1791-1800	302	113	82	62	109	78	78	74	70	85	269	109	74
	1801-1810	309	88	93	57	98	72	59	84	72	110	201	138	126
	1761-1810	1,293	101	104	60	110	79	83	78	58	73	218	133	102
17 Shropshire Parishes	1761-1770	660	98	112	54	87	242	98	81	77	61	89	85	116
	1771-1780	734	89	121	35	94	262	117	76	75	58	76	89	107
	1781-1790	639	94	87	40	97	194	137	94	60	66	107	91	131
	1791-1800	659	95	88	48	101	186	120	70	98	76	82	87	121
	1801-1810	663	89	122	82	95	194	120	71	73	69	89	92	103
	1761-1810	3,355	93	107	53	94	215	118	82	77	66	84	89	116
National	1750-1799	—	89	94	73	99	108	94	87	89	90	132	125	119

The site of the parish church is normally used in measuring these distances. Data have been collected for eighty years, 1754 to 1833. As only five marriages in these eighty years were between partners who lived more than forty kilometres apart, no regional field comparisons are attempted. Distances between parish churches were calculated by Millard's method.⁴ Working from more limited data than Millard makes the chi-square and regression analyses invalid. However, average marriage distances are tabulated in a similar way to Millard,⁵ (Table 1) in forty-year periods, 1754 to 1793 and 1794 to 1833. To reveal any tendency, the intermediate forty years are similarly tabulated. The column numbers are Millard's.

The nature of the available data limits comparison between my chosen parish of Haynes and Millard's area, centred on Stony Stratford. There are, however, three main points of difference for the years common to both sets of data. In Haynes, the percentage of extra-parochial marriage decreases rather than increases, as at Stony Stratford. The marriage distance, as calculated from an inspection of means, medians, upper and lower quartiles was much less than Stony Stratford, and rises slightly for Haynes, but that for Stony Stratford falls over the eighty years. For Haynes by the later period, 1794 to 1833, the lower quartile shortens while the upper increases. During these forty years not only was a bigger proportion of brides chosen from Haynes itself, but the nearest village, Wilstead, on the north-west provided a much increased percentage. Southill, to the east, which in previous years had been a favoured choice, was now almost neglected. Wilstead was directly connected to Haynes by a main road while Southill was not. In the other extreme four brides (7.4%) were chosen from at least twenty-five kilometres away, the mean distance being fifty-one kilometres. The reasons for these differences may only be guessed, possibly they are related to the status of those married. For Haynes, no direct indication of this is given in the registers at these dates. However, the large number of marriages which took place about Michaelmas suggests a high proportion of farm and domestic servants.

Seasonality

W. J. Edwards⁶ has presented data for fifty years for seventeen Shropshire parishes, in the form of a standard index, in which the figure 100 represents the number of events that would occur in a month if the annual total of marriages occurred evenly, taking account of the different number of days in each month. Table 2 presents these data with that of Haynes, five neighbouring Bedfordshire villages and national figures.⁷

Taking the months in the order in which Edwards discusses them, March, in Haynes, was almost as unpopular as in the five Bedfordshire villages, Shropshire and nationally. Haynes, in the common fifty years, made April almost the least popular month for marriage, in contrast to Shropshire, the national figures and especially local Bedfordshire. I have yet to discover the reason for this anomaly, for over the whole 220 years April is a favoured month. However, the data agree with Edwards' conclusion that, 'it appears that the main impact of ecclesiastical prohibition is concentrated in March'.

May marriage totals, too, show marked differences between Bedfordshire including Haynes, on the one hand and Shropshire on the other. In Bedfordshire this month

was far from 'dominating the marriage pattern' as in Edwards' findings. June was a fairly popular choice in Haynes, below the Shropshire ranking, but above that in the adjacent villages.

December was more or less equally popular in all four areas. August, third least chosen within Shropshire, and about equally unpopular nationally, was even less favoured in Bedfordshire including Haynes.

It is in October and November that the greatest contrast occurs between Shropshire and the other areas. Haynes couples consistently preferred October to any month throughout the period and indeed the whole 220 years. November was second favourite for the fifty years to 1810, and very nearly so for the 220 years. The five Bedfordshire villages figures agree well with Haynes and while the national figures rank October and November as most favoured, the proportion of October marriages is a good deal less than Haynes. These two highly popular months in drier⁸ Bedfordshire, with its arable-type farming,¹ differ strongly from wetter,⁸ pastoral Shropshire. This relationship between marriage seasonality and farming type agrees well with Wrigley.⁹

Date of Marriage

The analysis of month of marriage in Haynes between 1591 and 1810 shows the three preferred months to be October, April and November as detailed above. However, the combined three months of September, October and November produce a figure of 37 per cent of marriages against a statistically expected 25 per cent. Listing the data by dates shows a preference for the fifteen days from Michaelmas, i.e. 29 September to 13 October; 13.5 per cent of all marriages in the 220 years have taken place within this period as opposed to an expected 4.1 per cent. Within these fifteen days, a marked choice at 29 September to 1 October and 10 October to 13 October.

In attempting to discover why these dates might have been chosen, it was noticed that 11 days separated the two groups. 29 September to 1 October were chosen days pre-1752, while after 1752 10 October to 13 October were preferred, i.e. Michaelmas before 1752, 'Old' Michaelmas after.

As mentioned above, it is likely the great majority of marriages at this time of the year would involve farm or domestic servants. If this is correct, presumably these servants would have had little opportunity of a break from work following their marriage at any other time of the year.

I believe it is interesting that Michaelmas weddings and, I suppose, Michaelmas itself was still celebrated 'Old Style' until at least 1812. A check through the registers shows a continued marked preference for October marriages until about 1830 at least.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank May Pickles for her continued patience, encouragement and assistance throughout the preparation of this paper.

NOTES

1. C. E. Fitchett, **Bedfordshire pt 55, The Land of Britain**, 1943.
2. W. Brigg, **The Parish Registers of Haynes (formerly Hawnes) 1596-1812**, 1891.
3. J. Millard, 'A New Approach to the Study of Marriage Horizons', **Local Population Studies**, No. 28, 1982, pp. 10-31.
4. Millard, p.30. This method gave me the opportunity of writing a programme, albeit of just a few lines, for a newly acquired Sinclair ZX81.
5. Millard, p.22. In table 1, the population figures, column 8 have been taken from the census returns. Mean populations were calculated in the first instance, using the returns for 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831. As I have some reservations about the validity of the 1801 figure, a second mean using returns from only 1811, 1821 and 1831 is given.
6. W. J. Edwards, 'Marriage seasonality 1761-1781: an assessment of patterns in seventeen Shropshire parishes', **Local Population Studies**, No. 19, 1977, pp. 23-7.
7. Data for the five Bedfordshire villages were analysed from records generously supplied by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. The main reason for the choice of these particular villages, apart from geographic, was the simple one of availability of data. The villages, with their 1811 census figures are as follows: Ampthill (1299), Clophill (721), Flitwick (413), Flitton-with-Silsoe (862) and Mauldon (850). Haynes had a population of 609 at this time. The national data is from E. A. Wrigley, and R. S. Schofield, **The Population History of England 1541-1871**, 1981, p.300.
8. Met. Office, **Average of Rainfall for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1916-1950**, 1958.
9. Wrigley, p.304.