

# BAPTISMAL DELAY: SOME IMPLICATIONS FROM THE PARISH REGISTERS OF CRANBROOK AND SURROUNDING PARISHES IN THE KENTISH WEALD

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## **Introduction**

Those who have moulded our understanding of population history in the early modern period have generally accepted that during the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth century rapid baptism was the norm. Avoidance and delay were factors which came slowly but increasingly into play during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The purpose of this paper is to show that for a few decades following 1660, when the monarchy was restored and the Anglican church re-established, some Wealden parishes in particular, and probably other parishes elsewhere, saw substantial delays between birth and baptism. It is further argued that, in calculating population totals, insufficient allowance has been made for such lengthy delays despite the probability that they were widespread. If this is so, then population figures calculated on the basis that during this period baptism commonly followed closely upon birth will substantially underestimate true population totals.

This paper uses evidence which comes from work on the relationship between the family and society in the Kentish Weald in the late seventeenth century. This has involved the total reconstitution of Cranbrook and its six neighbouring parishes of Benenden, Biddenden, Frittenden, Goudhurst, Hawkhurst and Staplehurst for the period 1660–1700.<sup>1</sup> It starts by summarizing the problems for the demographer which are commonly associated with the delay between birth and baptism and looks at attempts to solve these problems. Then, after some background comment on the Cranbrook area, the evidence for the local parishes is explored in more detail and related to the historical context of the last four decades of the seventeenth century.

## **Population figures from parish registers: some problems**

During the last 40 years of the seventeenth century a proportion of those who lived within the boundaries of any parish habitually followed the letter of the law and had their children baptised as the Church of England demanded. They were to 'defer not the Baptism of their children longer than the first or second

Sunday next after their birth, or other Holy-day falling between, unless upon a great and reasonable cause, to be approved by the Curate'.<sup>2</sup> Others, for whatever reason, avoided Anglican baptism altogether.<sup>3</sup> Yet others had their children baptised but delayed that baptism beyond the time recommended by the ecclesiastical authorities, sometimes to a considerable extent. It follows, therefore, that any attempt accurately to calculate population totals by using statistics based on baptismal figures must first determine what proportion of births fell into each of the three baptismal categories.

Of those studies which have set out to gauge the adequacy of Anglican parochial registration as a basis for calculating population the most comprehensive coverage is to be found in Wrigley and Schofield's *The population history of England 1541–1871*.<sup>4</sup> They based their calculations on aggregate totals taken from parish registers, and ultimately chose 404 of these to represent approximately 10,000 parishes in the country. In assessing the validity of their conclusions, it is relevant that they included Cranbrook, along with its neighbours Benenden, Biddenden, Goudhurst and Staplehurst, among the selected parishes. They knew that if they were to achieve an accurate estimation of the total population of England before the nineteenth century they needed to solve the problem of inadequate Anglican registration even among their chosen parishes by devising corrective techniques. Within that global problem, with its many ramifications of registers which were truncated, or had *lacunae*, or were at times slipshod, they needed to look at the specific problem of converting baptismal figures into statistics for total births.<sup>5</sup>

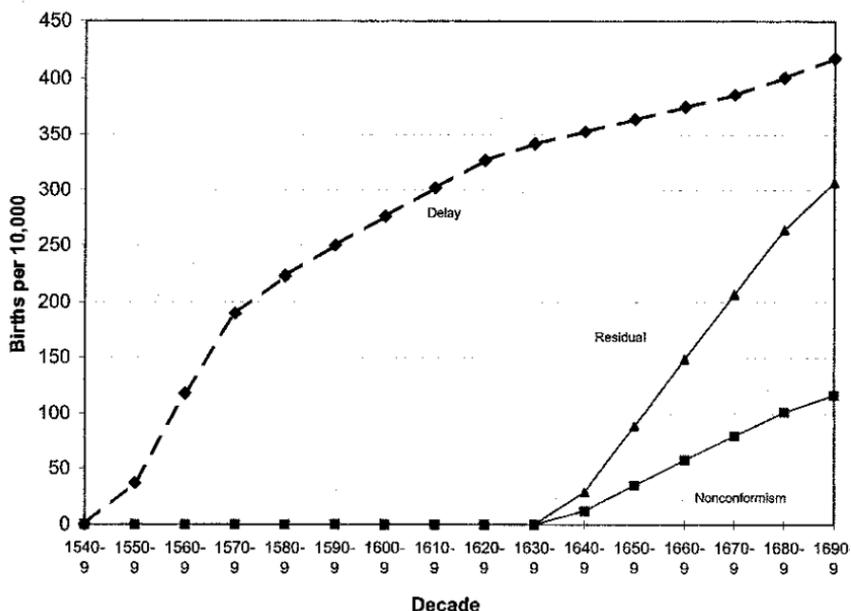
In this context they saw a need to compensate for three factors: the increase in nonconformity, the gradual lengthening of the interval between birth and baptism, and any remaining gap between the totals produced by these changes and 'true' totals of births. In relation to the second of these factors they recognized that there was a gap between birth and baptism; that not to take that gap into consideration by some suitable corrective figures would jeopardize the accuracy of any population calculations; and that the gap was increasing over time.<sup>6</sup>

### **Population figures from parish registers: towards some answers**

The increasing gap between birth and baptism is reflected in Wrigley and Schofield's estimates, decade by decade, of the number of Anglican baptisms, nonconformist baptisms, delayed baptisms and residual non-registration per 10,000 births.<sup>7</sup> In their estimation, for the period 1540–1549 Anglican baptism accounted for all the 10,000 births; from 1550–1559 allowance was made for delayed baptism (37 per 10,000 and growing), and from 1640–1649 allowance was also made for nonconformist baptism and residual non-registration (12 and 29 per 10,000 respectively). Wrigley and Schofield's figures for the entire period 1540–1700 are shown in Figure 1. The graph flattens as delayed baptism increasingly gives way to nonconformity and baptismal avoidance as suggested causes for the under-registration of births.

The figures most relevant for our purpose are shown in Table 1. They show that, between 1640 and 1700, Wrigley and Schofield saw the nonconformist

Figure 1 Allowance for delayed baptism, non-conformity and residual avoidance



Source: E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541–1871: a reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1989), 561.

factor (column 2) being an increasingly important component of the under-registration of births in Anglican baptismal registers. Concurrently, baptismal avoidance (column 4) is shown to parallel that rise, but to do so about two and a half times more quickly. Even more significantly, the table shows how the authors saw a steady growth in the proportion of delayed baptisms (column 3), reflecting an increasing tendency not to have one's children baptised within a week of birth. The figures also show this trend growing less rapidly throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, relative to nonconformity and avoidance.

The same figures were presented in percentage terms by Jeremy Boulton, and we include his figures in Table 2.<sup>8</sup> Boulton's figures for the relevant years, emphasize the point that the contribution of delayed baptism to under-registration declined over the second half of the seventeenth century from 75 per cent to 50 per cent.

Wrigley and Schofield based their correction figures for population totals on the hypothesis that, whereas in some sixteenth century parishes baptism followed very closely on birth, 'in later centuries the two drifted further and

**Table 1 Recorded Anglican baptisms and baptisms added to take account of various factors, per 10,000 births, 1640–1700**

Decade	Anglican baptism totals	Inflation for		
		Nonconformist	Delayed baptism	Residual non-registration
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1640–1649	9,606	12	353	29
1650–1659	9,512	35	364	89
1660–1669	9,418	58	375	149
1670–1679	9,327	80	386	207
1680–1689	9,233	102	401	264
1690–1699	9,158	117	418	307
1790–1799	7,734	306	647	1,313

**Source:** E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541–1871: a reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1989), 561

**Table 2 Components of under-registration in England, 1640–1700**

Decade	Overall percentage not registered	Percentages of total due to		
		Religious dissent	Delayed baptism	Residual non-registration
1640–1649	3.9	3	90	7
1650–1659	4.9	7	75	18
1660–1669	5.8	10	64	26
1670–1679	6.7	12	57	31
1680–1689	7.7	13	52	34
1690–1699	8.4	14	50	37
1790–1799	22.7	14	29	58

**Note:** These figures have been derived from the same source as those reproduced in Table 1 above. The percentages in the three right-hand columns are percentages of all the under-registration in the relevant decade. Thus, for example, in the decade 1640–1649, 3.9 per cent of births were not registered, and of these 3.9 per cent, nine of every ten were not-registered because of delayed baptism.

**Source:** J. Boulton, 'The marriage duty act and parochial registration in London, 1695–1706', in K. Schürer and T. Arkell eds, *Surveying the people*, (Oxford, 1992), 224.

further apart until, by the later eighteenth century, there was a median interval of about a month between birth and baptism, although with wide variation from parish to parish'.<sup>9</sup> This hypothesis is fundamental to their calculations. They based it entirely on a notion mooted in the seminal paper on age at baptism which Berry and Schofield had published in 1971.<sup>10</sup> Berry and Schofield's conclusions were based on printed registers which they identified from 11 London parishes, 15 northern parishes (in Cumberland, Lancashire, and Yorkshire) and 17 parishes scattered over central and southern England.

Within these 43 parishes Berry and Schofield found the provision of both birth and baptism dates largely limited to just four periods: during the Commonwealth, 1653–1660; the aftermath of the introduction of the Marriage Duty Act, 1695–1705; and two later periods, 1771–1789 and 1791–1812. They treated these four periods as three, conflating the first two into 1650–1700, even though no returns at all were identified between 1671 and 1694 and only two between 1662 and 1694, and concluded that during the period 1650–1700 'baptism generally took place early'.<sup>11</sup> To base conclusions on the two exceptional periods of the Commonwealth (when ecclesiastical registration was officially suspended) and the aftermath of the Act of 1695 (when for a time registration practice was considerably tightened) and to apply them to the whole of the intervening period is clearly questionable. Yet these conclusions are central to Wrigley and Schofield's procedure, despite the fact that at the end of their article Berry and Schofield entered the caveat that 'it would be dangerous to assume that the interval between birth and baptism in any parish, at any point of time, is either early or late'.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent to Berry and Schofield's article a series of notes in *Local Population Studies* added to the available parish samples, using their guidelines, with minor adjustments, as the basis for tables.<sup>13</sup> The resulting picture still fails to cover 1660 to 1695, but it shows such a wide variation in baptismal delay between one parish and another, irrespective of period, that the concept of a gradual drifting apart of birth and baptism is hard to sustain. It follows that the appropriateness of some of Wrigley and Schofield's corrective formulae must be called into question.<sup>14</sup>

In their more recent work *English population history from family reconstitution*, Wrigley, Davies, Oeppen and Schofield continue to accept Berry and Schofield's hypothesis.<sup>15</sup> They do, however, assert that the birth-baptism delay was 'perhaps the weightiest single reason for anxiety about Anglican registration coverage'.<sup>16</sup> They accept that reconstitution data go a long way to correct the under-counting of birth-baptism delays, but are unwilling to readjust the earlier aggregate data on which their population totals were based, on the grounds that such correction is too minor to merit reworking them.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Cranbrook area in context**

Before we look in more detail at the evidence from the reconstitution of some Wealden parishes it would be as well to look briefly at Cranbrook and its environs so that the evidence can be seen in context. Cranbrook itself was one

of the largest parishes in Kent and possibly the most populous.<sup>18</sup> One might even question whether a parish as large as Cranbrook could be considered a single community at all, in view of its floating population, its physical size (over 10,000 acres) and its incorporation of a number of distinct districts and hamlets.<sup>19</sup> As a result of its size some parishioners had to travel up to five miles to attend a ceremony or service at the parish church. To distance was added the sheer difficulty, at least in winter, of moving about on the churned-up muddy tracks which abounded in the neighbourhood where the bye-roads were 'so very deep and miry as to be but barely passable till they are hardened by the drouth of summer'.<sup>20</sup> The six parishes that shared their borders with Cranbrook were smaller and less populous.

The general area retained much of its ancient woodland and had been settled comparatively late. Some of its hamlets and scattered farms did not develop until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and all of these were probably enclosed from the beginning. The emphasis of farming was pastoral rather than arable, and the forests provided work in wood crafts such as carpentry, turning and charcoal-burning as well as iron smelting. The local practice of partible inheritance meant that farms tended to be on the small side but the population which they had to support was large, and this, together with the greater freedom which pastoral farming brought to the people, provided the classic environment for the development of local industry.<sup>21</sup>

Cranbrook provided a market for the surrounding parishes and had long been established as the centre of the cloth-making industry of the Weald.<sup>22</sup> Evidence from family reconstitution for the period 1650–1700 confirms that it was a centre in which cloth-working held a greater sway even than agriculture. The very detailed registers of banns of marriage for the period 1653–1662 show that, among bridegrooms from Cranbrook itself (a sample of 153), 44 per cent were occupied in the cloth industry and 29 per cent in agriculture, these two areas of occupation together accounting for 73 per cent.<sup>23</sup> If we then look at bridegrooms from beyond the boundaries of Cranbrook (a sample of 221), we see that in its neighbouring parishes the reverse was true, with those involved in agriculture (36 per cent) predominating over those in the cloth industry (29 per cent). The distinction between those involved in farming and those involved in the manufacture of cloth is somewhat blurred at the edges, however, as wealthier clothiers, like the local gentry to whose ranks many of them aspired, owned land and sometimes called themselves yeomen.

The registers after 1662 show that work in the cloth industry remained a major occupation for a large proportion of men in Cranbrook and its environs; clothiers continued to be active at least to the end of the century. By the time of the Civil War, however, the industry was already declining. This decline continued in the following decades both in Cranbrook and in nearby Biddenden, the rector of which wrote in 1683: 'The parish of Biddenden ... [is] ... not so populous now as formerly when the clothing trade there flourished.'<sup>24</sup>

## Factors affecting population estimates

So far, doubt has been cast upon the adequacy of the allowance which Wrigley and Schofield made for baptismal delay in the late seventeenth century when they were calculating national population statistics. We now need to look at the evidence as it appears in the reconstitution of Cranbrook and its environs, and see to what extent it supports their calculations. Inevitably the discussion will touch on the kindred problem of how many people deliberately avoided baptism altogether, but it is not the purpose of this paper to attempt that calculation. The effect of baptismal delay on the validity of projecting total population statistics may not be as radical as the effect of total avoidance, but because of the nebulous nature of the evidence it is more easily overlooked. For our purposes the effects of delayed baptism on population figures are best looked at under three headings: infant deaths, multiple delayed baptisms and other late baptisms.

### Infant deaths

Wrigley and Schofield considered the effect on their calculations of the one month delay between birth and baptism which they accepted as the norm by the end of the eighteenth century. Taking the not untypical scenario of an infant mortality rate of 200 per 1000 live births, with one half of all those deaths occurring in the first month of life, they argued that one live birth in ten would be lost if there was a month's delay before baptism.<sup>25</sup> The infants whose lives were so cut short would bypass the baptismal register and appear directly in the burial register; we would know of their existence only from their burial. The extent of this problem in the Wealden parishes under consideration between 1650 and 1700 can best be illustrated by the figures given in Table 3.

Because the registers actually record some infants as dying unbaptised we have a figure for those who, either because of delayed baptism or because of baptismal avoidance, escaped the baptismal register. We also know the number of live births. In consequence we can be reasonably certain that in Benenden 103, or seven per cent, of the children who were born live at this period were not registered in the baptismal register. In Biddenden the figure is 177, or 11.3 per cent, and in Cranbrook 213, or 6.8 per cent. In these three parishes unbaptised infant burials represent between 37 and 47 per cent of all infants dying within the year, somewhat less than Wrigley and Schofield's estimate that 50 per cent of deaths under one year were of unbaptised infants excluding still births. The corresponding figures for Hawkhurst (18 per cent) and Staplehurst (22 per cent) may reflect a different pattern of infant mortality or a more rapid baptismal rate. One should also bear in mind the very clear instruction from the church authorities that those dying unbaptised should not receive a Christian burial; it is possible that the ministers at Hawkhurst and Staplehurst were more punctilious than their colleagues in the other three parishes about not burying unbaptised infants. The evidence from Hawkhurst, however, confirms a rapid baptismal rate there, with less burial in church of the unbaptised. The same may be true of Staplehurst.

**Table 3 Live births of children from the reconstitution of five parishes in the Weald of Kent, c. 1650–1700**

	Benenden	Biddenden	Cranbrook	Hawkhurst	Staplehurst	Total
<b>Absolute numbers</b>						
Total children recorded	1,474	1,562	3,129*	1,601	922	8,688
Number dying aged under 10 years	444	580	1,399	326	286	3,035
Of whom infants aged under 1 year	275	375	548	110	111	1,419
Of whom unbaptised	103	177	213	20	24	537
<b>Percentages of children recorded</b>						
Dying aged under 10 years	30.1	37.1	44.7	20.4	31.0	34.9
Dying as infants aged under 1 year	18.7	24.0	17.5	6.9	12.0	16.3
Dying unbaptised	7.0	11.3	6.8	1.3	2.6	6.2
Dying unbaptised as a percentage of those dying aged under 1 year	37.5	47.2	38.9	18.2	21.6	37.8

**Notes:** \*The Cranbrook burial register often refers to deaths of children simply as ‘child of ...’, without specifying a name. As a result, in 284 out of 3,271 entries it has been impossible to tell whether the deceased was an established child or a newborn. The figure of 3,129 quoted for ‘total children recorded’ represents the mean between the maximum of 3,271 and minimum of 2,987 children born alive. Correspondingly, the percentages given for Cranbrook in rows 5, 6 and 7 also therefore represent the mean between, for row 5: 42.8 per cent and 46.8 per cent; for row 6: 16.8 per cent and 18.4 per cent; and for row 7: 6.5 per cent and 7.1 per cent.

**Source:** Reconstitution of the five parishes for the period 1650–1700.

Wrigley and Schofield’s concern, that a substantial number of infants died unbaptised because of the delay between birth and baptism, is therefore well founded in the cases of Benenden, Biddenden and Cranbrook, but less so in Hawkhurst and Staplehurst. What needs to be stressed, however, is that they assumed that the numerical effect of delayed baptism in the late seventeenth century was less than half that at the end of the eighteenth (Table 1).

## Multiple delayed baptisms

Wrigley and Schofield's corrective figures take no account at all of the effect of delayed baptism where individuals did not die but went on to be baptised years later. The year in which such persons' baptisms were registered was sometimes far removed from their year of birth. It would be useful to gauge the effect such misplaced baptisms might have on the aggregate analyses which provide the basis for population estimates.

That great numbers of parishioners of Cranbrook were not bringing their children to church for baptism is made abundantly clear by the *crie de coeur* of the vicar, John Cooper, in the baptism register in August 1664, '*Multi in Parochia nostra nati, Pauci Sacramento renati*'.<sup>26</sup> More pertinent to topic of baptismal delay, Cranbrook displayed a pattern of multiple baptisms which stretched from 1664 to at least 1697. Between these dates there was a fairly constant flow of family baptisms, with six figuring in each of 1670, 1671, 1672, 1684, 1685 and 1697, and at least one in virtually every year.<sup>27</sup> John Cooper was the vicar responsible for the first of the major series by bringing into the Church the family of Richard and Ann Knowles, whose four children (aged six, four and three years, and two months) were all baptised on 18 June 1665. During the next three years, before his death in July 1668, a further seven families had several of their children baptised at the same time by John Cooper.

Charles Buck succeeded John Cooper as vicar of Cranbrook, and continued the process begun by his predecessor of bringing into the Church whole families of children by multiple baptism. On occasions the oldest of the children being baptised was no longer properly a child; thus on 2 February 1671, five members of the Unycombe family, children of William and Jane, and a sixth (presumably a cousin), were baptised; the eldest was 21 years of age, the youngest two months.<sup>28</sup> On 30 November 1684, six children of William and Elizabeth Rofe were baptised, ranging in age from 19 years through 14, 9, 8 and 4 years to 18 months. The following year saw Thomas and Mary Merryal's five children (aged between 18 and 2½ years) all baptised on 20 April. Even as late as 1697 we find Peter and Mildred Walter having their children baptised *en bloc* on 5 April: Mildred aged ten years, John (nine), Peter (eight), Benjamin (seven), Elizabeth (four), Abraham (three) and Isaac aged ten months.

These examples are drawn from those children for whom the registers give birth dates as well as baptisms. There are also instances of multiple baptisms where we do not know the ages of the children, as for example the three daughters of James and Mary Potter baptised on 29 December 1697. Though possibly triplets, it is more likely they include at least two coming late to baptism. Robert and Elizabeth Spillet, whose daughters Elizabeth and Sarah were baptised respectively in 1668 and 1671, had three other children, John, Henry and Elizabeth, who were all baptised together on 4 April 1681, some six months after their father's death. These family baptisms give us ample warn-

**Table 4 Percentages of those with known birth and baptismal date who were baptised within specified periods after birth**

	Cranbrook 1661-1699	Benenden 1663-1679	Benenden 1680-1699
Percentage with both dates known	28	61	98
Percentage of those baptised within			
1 week	11	8	28
4 weeks	25	48	74
1 year	41	76	92
2 years	50	82	96
4 years	62	90	97
10 years	83	97	98
20 years	96	99	99
30 years	100	100	100

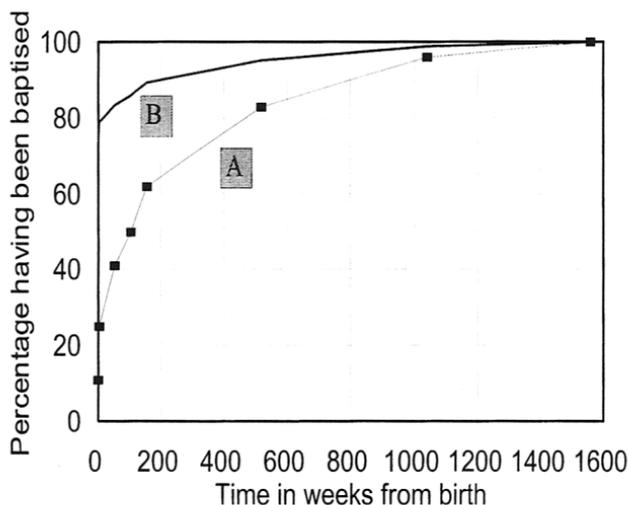
**Source:** Parish registers of Benenden and Cranbrook, with percentages limited to baptisms where birth dates are also given.

ing that the date of baptism can bear little relationship to the date of birth in the post-Commonwealth period. We should also remind ourselves that these are only 'delayed baptisms' because we are viewing them with the benefit of hindsight; to the contemporary, until the decision to baptise was taken, these families were avoiding baptism altogether.

### Other late baptisms

To the incidence of delayed family baptisms can be added evidence from the Cranbrook registers for the main bulk of parishioners. For 28 per cent of baptisms in the registers between 1661 and 1700 we have dates of birth as well as baptism. The delay between birth and baptism ranges from a few hours to 30 years (Table 4). For whatever reason, in the period after the Restoration only 25 per cent of the population of Cranbrook for whom we know both birth and baptism date had their children baptised within a month of birth. If it is assumed that all the 72 per cent of baptisms with unrecorded birth dates were baptised within one week, an upper limit can be calculated for the proportion of all live births that were baptised within a certain number of weeks. This upper limit is shown as line B in Figure 2, where line A represents the data for Cranbrook in Table 4. The incidence of multiple baptisms within families, with no birth dates given, shows that it is unlikely that the true distribution is very close to line B.

Figure 2 Cranbrook: delayed baptisms 1661–1699

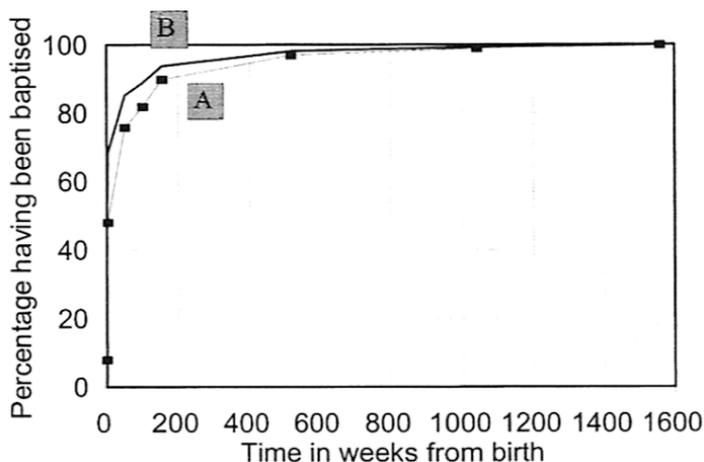


**Notes:** Line A is based on the baptismal records that include the date of birth.  
Line B is calculated using all baptismal records, assuming that those without a date of birth were baptised within one week of birth.

The Cranbrook figures are supported by the baptismal registers of its neighbour Benenden which provide an exceptionally comprehensive view of baptismal practice, with 61 per cent of birth and baptism dates known between 1663 and 1679, and nearly 98 per cent for the period 1680–1699. Just as at Cranbrook, lengthy delays do occur, cases of 28 and 29 years being recorded in 1681 and 1689 respectively. However, the concentration of longer delays (of more than a year) is in the 1660s and 1670s, as is the incidence of parents bringing their children along for family baptism. Between 1663 and 1679 only 48 per cent of the population of Benenden for whom we know both birth and baptism date had their children baptised within a month of birth, whereas by 1680–1699 (when virtually all entries have both birth and baptism dates) this figure had risen to 74 per cent (Table 4). Figures 3 and 4 show the upper and lower limits on the true distribution of baptism delays for Benenden in 1663–1679 and 1680–1699 respectively.

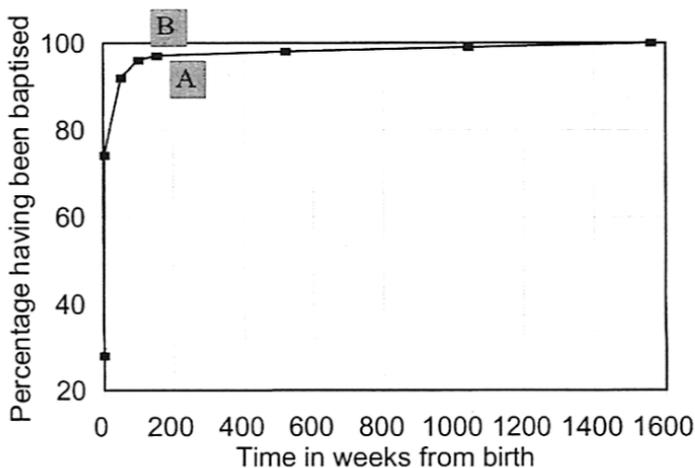
At nearby Biddenden the registers between 1650 and 1699 provide both birth date and baptismal date for a mere seven per cent of births, a situation which precludes analysis. At least part of the pattern is repeated, however, with some families delaying baptism, for instance Christopher and Ann Clarke in 1663 (children aged 16, 14, 12 and 11 years); John and Mary Henman in 1664 (children aged seven, five and three years and an infant), and Richard and

Figure 3 Benenden:delayed baptisms 1663-1679



Notes: See Figure 2.

Figure 4 Beneden: delayed baptisms 1680-1699



Notes: See Figure 2.

Martha Venos in 1675 (aged five years, three years and one year). Hawkhurst provides birth dates for more than a third of those baptised, but in this case the pattern is generally for rapid baptism (81.5 per cent within the month). There were a few remarkable exceptions including seven adult baptisms. For example, on 27 October 1676, John Nokes, 'aged about 24 years desiring the sacrament of Baptism and answering for himself was baptised'; and on 7 December 1677, Susannah Edmeate, 'being of years of discretion and able to answer for herself was then Baptised, but she was borne 28 February 1653'.

The effect of baptism delays on aggregate baptismal totals can be estimated by tabulating the total number of baptisms in each parish for five-year periods, deducting those over the age of twelve months whose year of birth is inaccurately reflected thereby, and assigning them to their correct year of birth (Table 5). From this it will be seen that Cranbrook provides the greatest percentage of entries misplaced (in 1661–1665 the total baptised should be increased by 14 per cent, in 1681–1685 the total decreased by 12 per cent). Overall, the pattern is to increase the baptismal totals by between three and four per cent in 1661–1670, and correspondingly to reduce them in 1676–1695 by between two and six per cent.

### **Reasons for baptismal anomalies, 1660–1700**

There can be little surprise that the pattern of delay between birth and baptism was transformed at or soon after 1660. In 1643 the Episcopal hierarchy had been officially abolished, and over the following years the structure of the established church collapsed; it could not re-establish itself overnight. The Restoration in 1660 found the uniformity of the established church shattered, and sectarian practices and anticlerical sentiments jostling alongside each other. Thus, although the Act of Uniformity of Public Prayers made orthodox public baptism mandatory again in 1662, strict enforcement proved impossible. Church court records of the 1660s list page after page of laymen 'refusing baptism' for their children. The churchwardens of Great Parndon, Essex, regretted in 1664, 'many children as yet unbaptised which were born in that notorious rebel's time'. As late as 1699 Robert Barrett, a medical writer, refers to bringing children to baptism as 'a duty nowadays too much neglected and slighted'. In some parishes there was much rejoicing at whole families returning to the fold, with several children being baptised at the same time.<sup>29</sup>

In their work on Terling in Essex, Wrightson and Levine note that in 1679 approximately 15 per cent of the householders were practising only a very severely limited conformity to the restored Church of England, while in addition something over 20 per cent were failing to attend church at all. They go on to note: 'A number of former Baptists or Quakers were also won back in the course of the 1670s, bringing in droves of children to be baptised all at once and to have their dates of birth and baptism entered in the parish register.'<sup>30</sup> This parallels the situation in the Weald, and helps to explain delayed baptisms in Cranbrook and its environs in these years. It could also apply to parishes across the whole of the country.

**Table 5 Baptisms realigned to year of birth where known**

	1661–1665	1666–1670	1671–1675	1676–1680	1681–1685	1686–1690
<b>Benenden</b>						
Before realignment	133	133	135	106	95	117
A	17	16	20	8	4	6
B	25	19	4	7	4	5
After realignment,	141	136	119	105	95	116
% change	+6%	+2%	-12%	-1%	0%	-1%
<b>Biddenden</b>						
Before realignment	124	130	84	84	95	127
A	11	0	4	1	1	4
B	1	1	4	2	3	1
After realignment	114	131	84	85	97	124
% change	-8%	+1%	0%	+1%	+2%	-3%
<b>Cranbrook</b>						
Before realignment	236	195	180	198	250	236
A	8	28	30	40	48	25
B	41	46	38	23	18	28
After realignment	269	213	188	181	220	239
% change	+14%	+9%	+4%	-9%	-12%	+1%
<b>Hawkhurst</b>						
Before realignment	148	178	149	121	153	160
A	2	1	11	4	10	2
B	4	3	12	5	1	2
After realignment	150	180	150	122	144	160
% change	+1%	+1%	+1%	+1%	-6%	0%
<b>Staplehurst</b>						
Before realignment	76	88	106	83	123	91
A	10	0	0	5	8	2
B	3	0	4	8	2	0
After realignment	69	88	110	86	117	89
% change	-9%	0%	+4%	+4%	-5%	-2%
<b>Overall totals</b>						
Before realignment	717	724	654	592	716	731
After realignment	743	748	651	579	673	728
% change	+3.6%	+3.3%	-0.5%	-2.2%	-6.0%	-0.4%

**Notes:** A – baptisms of children (sometimes adults) over 12 months old subtracted from the 5-year total because the birth date fell outside that period;  
 B – baptisms added to the appropriate five-year period.

**Source:** Parish Registers of Benenden, Biddenden, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Staplehurst.

Wrigley and Schofield identified areas which featured rural handicraft industry as 'settings in which nonconformity was strongest, but in which there was also the most pronounced tendency to eschew all religious ceremonial or to be intermittent and laggard in observance'.<sup>31</sup> That there was a real nonconformist problem in the Wealden parishes is borne out by consideration of the Compton Census of 1676. In his return Charles Buck, the vicar for the central parish of Cranbrook, indicated approximately 1,300 persons in the parish over the age of 16 of whom one or two were suspected to be papists and 400 to be 'sectaries' of all sorts, including for the most part Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists and Quakers. Over 30 per cent of the adults of Cranbrook, therefore, remained nonconformists, and actual communicants numbered only 100.<sup>32</sup> For Benenden, Nicholas Monyman reported, 'I find by diligent inspection 560 persons, men and women over 16', as well as 24 papists and 45 nonconformists (six or seven Anabaptists and Quakers, the rest Presbyterians); more than ten per cent of adults in Benenden remained nonconformists of one hue or another. He added that there were '82 at Holy Communion this Easter-tide'.<sup>33</sup>

When Jonathan Pleydell made the Hawkhurst returns he said, 'I finde upon diligent Inquiry 1,000 men and women over 16'; of these he estimated about 150 (15 per cent) to be nonconformists. For Frittenden Robert Newton made a typically precise return, recording approximately 215 persons of years of discretion, men and women, and near '100 under age boys and girls; in all 300 and over'. Among 84 nonconformists he included '2 or 3 obstinate dissenters,' 31 Anabaptists or so suspected, two Quakers, two Brownists, between 30 and 40 'Newtralistes between Presbyterians and Conformists', and 11 or 12 'licentious or such as profess no kind of Religion'. In broad figures some 20 per cent of his flock were nonconformist.<sup>34</sup>

Stephen Sowton, responsible for the Staplehurst returns, noted 455 inhabitants over the age of 16 of whom 295 were conformists and 160 nonconformists. In terms of the proportion of nonconformists to conformists this bears out the importance of Staplehurst as a centre for dissent: 35 per cent of parishioners were not conforming to the established Church. This no doubt reveals the influence of Daniel Poyntell, the nonconformist minister who stayed put in the parish in which he had held the benefice under the Commonwealth. Finally in what Ann Whiteman picks out as 'an example of returns given in a slipshod or feckless way', the Rector at Biddenden, Moses Lee, reported: 'I conceive there cannot be less than 7 hundred'; of the dissenters: 'I conceive there are betweene fourescore and an hundred of all sects of what denomination soever, mostly Anabaptists, some Browne'.<sup>35</sup>

The Compton returns, therefore, confirm that the parishes under consideration possessed substantial nonconformist populations (Table 6). With some marked exceptions, the further a parish was from Cranbrook the less nonconformity it displayed, but local circumstances (the personality of the incumbent, for instance) seem to have played a more important part in this than local industry or topography. The presence of a nonconformist element, however, does help to explain the proliferation of delayed multiple baptisms,

**Table 6 Percentage of non-conformists in central Wealden parishes of Kent according to the**

	Inner ring	Middle ring	Outer ring		
Beneden	12	Headcorn	18	Bethersden	12
Biddenden	13	High Halden	18	Brenchley	0
Cranbrook	31	Horsmonden	5	Hunton	5
Frittenden	23	Lamberhurst	7	Pembury	35
Hawkhurst	15	Marden	4	Pluckley	2
Goudhurst	10	Newenden	7	Wittersham	13
Staplehurst	35	Rolvenden	10	Woodchurch	8
		Sandhurst	39	Yalding	3
		Smarden	48		
		Tenterden	25		

**Note:** The 'rings' are defined as follows:  
 'inner ring': Cranbrook and immediately adjacent parishes;  
 'middle ring': Kentish Wealden parishes adjacent to the inner ring;  
 'outer ring': Kentish Wealden parishes adjacent to the middle ring but not in inner ring.

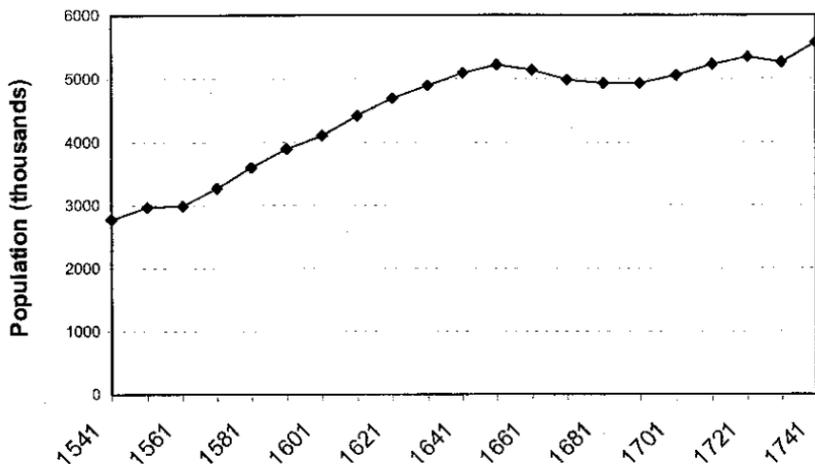
**Source:** A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: a critical edition* (British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, New Series, 10), (London, 1986).

with families returning to the fold and individual adults seeking baptism as nonconformity lost its attraction.<sup>36</sup>

### Consequences for the demographer

In calculating annual baptismal figures Wrigley and Schofield used multipliers to offset the effect of delayed baptism, nonconformity and residual non-registration, but in each of these areas they were punctilious in admitting the tentative nature of their solutions. When they came to apply correction figures to offset the increasing delay between birth and baptism they accepted that 'the estimates of shortfall ... are subject to some margin of error'.<sup>37</sup> They further admitted that any set of correction factors devised to offset the growing importance of nonconformity must necessarily be arbitrary, and concluded that 'it would be idle to pretend' that the full set of final inflation ratios for baptism linked to the schedule of corrections already made for nonconformity was 'demonstrably correct'.<sup>38</sup> Indeed they accepted that, particularly before 1801, their multipliers were based on a 'balancing act of probabilities rather than inference from indisputable fact'.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless they asserted that the 'robustness of the estimates should not be underestimated'.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 5 Population trends 1541-1741



Source: E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541-1871: a reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1989)

From their figures it is possible to calculate the multipliers which they saw as appropriate to delayed baptism alone in each decade between 1660 and 1699: 3.9 per cent, 4.1 per cent, 4.3 per cent and 4.6 per cent (in chronological order). Such figures greatly undervalue the effects of delayed baptism as we have seen them in Cranbrook and its environs. At least for the decade after 1662, a multiplier of some three to four per cent is needed simply to offset the effect of baptisms delayed for a year or more (see Table 5). These are often due to multiple (family) baptisms, which were not accounted for by Wrigley and Schofield, who saw them as rare before the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup> To this three to four per cent one needs to add the calculated percentages of live-born infants dying before baptism, which, for the generation after 1660, average about six per cent in the Cranbrook area (see Table 3). This is the factor which Wrigley and Schofield did account for, but undervalued because Berry and Schofield believed that the median baptismal delay did not reach one month until 100 years later. Wrigley and Schofield assumed a steadily increasing delay, which produced a median of about 18 days by the end of the seventeenth century.

Based on these assumptions, Wrigley and Schofield produced the generally accepted version of the pattern of population change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, illustrated by Figure 5. This shows a downturn in

population between 1658 and 1686 which gradually recovered between 1687 and 1717, at which point the population had returned to the level of 1657. The years of decline, 1658–1686, are precisely the years when in Cranbrook and its environs baptismal dates least represent birth dates; a feature which may well be true of the country as a whole.

## Conclusion

It would be inappropriate simply to apply correction figures derived from the Cranbrook area to the national population graph. They relate only to delayed baptism, and do not therefore take into account the high rate of baptismal avoidance implied by contemporary nonconformity which would require a far greater correction. Moreover, they apply to only one per cent of the 404 parishes which were used to make up the graph, and one cannot argue persuasively from the specific to the general. But there is good evidence of the atypical nature of the decades after 1660 in the Church of England as a whole, and it may be assumed that registration of baptism was affected in many parishes. The least one can say is that the evidence from the Cranbrook area suggests that the accepted downturn in national population between 1658 and 1686 may have been exaggerated.

## NOTES

1. For total reconstitution see P. Sharpe, 'The total reconstitution method: a tool for class-specific study?', *Local Population Studies*, **44** (1990), 41–51. Of the parishes studied, work on Frittenden and Goudhurst is as yet incomplete.
2. The rubric of the 1662 Prayer Book, quoted in R.W. Ambler, 'Baptism and christening; custom and practice in nineteenth century Lincolnshire', *Local Population Studies*, **12** (1974), 25; further to D.R. Mills, 'The christening custom at Melbourn, Cambs', *Local Population Studies*, **11** (1973), 11. B.M. Berry and R.S. Schofield, 'Age at baptism in pre-industrial England', *Population Studies*, **25** (1971), 453–63, summarized the official attitude of the Church of England as encouraging universal baptism 'with a delay of not more than seven days up to about 1650 and of not more than 14 days after that date'. (p. 454)
3. This is particularly true of Baptists, who started in Biddenden in the 1640s and spread to Cranbrook in 1648 (Cranbrook registers survive from 1682) and Quakers who arrived in the area in 1655 and rapidly established themselves. On Baptists see L.J. Maguire, *Cranbrook Baptist Church*, (General Baptist Assembly, 1995). On Quakers see G. Draper, 'The first hundred years of Quakerism in Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, **112** (1993), 317–39 (part 1); and *Archaeologia Cantiana*, **114** (1995), 1–22 (part 2). On the Congregationalist Church see D. Russell, *Cranbrook congregational church: a short history*, (1993). In general see C.C.R. Pile, *Dissenting congregations in Cranbrook* (Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Local History Society, 1953); and G. Nuttall, 'Dissenting churches in Kent pre-1700' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, **14** (1963), 175–89
4. E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541–1871: a reconstruction*, (Cambridge, 1989).
5. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 23–32, 103–54.
6. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 96–102.
7. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 561.
8. J. Boulton, 'The marriage duty act and parochial registration in London, 1695–1706', in K. Schürer and T. Arkell eds, *Surveying the people: the interpretation and use of document sources*

for the study of population in the later seventeenth century, (Oxford, 1992), 222–52

9. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 96.
10. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 96; Berry and Schofield, 'Age at baptism'.
11. Berry and Schofield, 'Age at baptism', 458.
12. Berry and Schofield, 'Age at baptism', 463.
13. The first of these notes was D. Woodward, 'The impact of the Commonwealth Act on Yorkshire parish registers', *Local Population Studies*, **15** (1975), 15–29. Woodward looked primarily at the years of secular registration, 1653 to 1660, and in the process examined the registers of 354 Yorkshire parishes. The concentration of this evidence is almost exclusively on the Commonwealth period, which was in many ways exceptional. In particular Parliament required that births be registered, not baptisms, and that lay registrars be elected to do the registering. As a result some registers are very full, others non-existent. Woodward's Yorkshire parishes during the Commonwealth range from Hornsea (1654–1657), with 90 per cent of the parish being baptised within four days, to Royston (1654–1660), where it took a full month for 90 per cent to be baptised. Even after all these extra examples, the Restoration period remains uncovered, the only two examples to hand failing to meet the parameters laid down by Berry and Schofield; they do, however, imply a very great widening of the birth baptism gap at this time.
14. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 142–52, consider some of the challenges to their procedures. For some interesting points, see also P. Razzell, 'The growth of population in eighteenth century England: a critical reappraisal', *Genealogists' Magazine*, **25** (1995), 137–42; and **25** (1996), 182–8; and P. Razzell, 'Evaluating the same-name technique as a way of measuring burial register reliability in England', *Local Population Studies*, **64** (2000), 8–22 (esp. 9).
15. E.A. Wrigley, R. Davies, J. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English population history from family reconstitution: 1580–1830*, (Cambridge, 1997).
16. Wrigley, Davies, Oeppen and Schofield, *English population history from family reconstitution*, 110–1.
17. They make this point despite indicating that some 6.7 per cent of births between 1630 and 1679 had to be added as 'dummy' births to cover cases where there was no baptism but evidence from burials, and some 5.2 per cent had to be added between 1680 and 1729 (see Wrigley, Davies, Oeppen and Schofield, *English population history from family reconstitution*, 113).
18. P. Collinson, 'Cranbrook and the Fletchers, popular and unpopular religion in the Kentish Weald', in P.N. Brook ed., *Reformation principle and practice*, (London, 1980), 173–202. In 1640 the vicar, Robert Abbott, wrote of his labours among 'above 2000 souls'.
19. Such districts include Chittenden, Colliers Green, Courtstile, Glassenbury, Goldford, Hartley, Hesseldens Wood, Milkhouse, Plushinghurst [Flishinghurst] and Wilsley Green.
20. Hasted, *The history and topographical survey of the County of Kent*, vol. 7, (Canterbury, 1798), 90–113; see also A. Everitt, *Continuity and colonisation; the evolution of Kentish settlement*, (Leicester, 1986), 23.
21. J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', in F.J. Fisher ed., *Essays in the economic and social history of Tudor and Stuart England*, (Cambridge, 1961), 70–88. See also C.W. Chalklin, 'The rural economy of a Kentish Wealden parish 1650–1750', *Agricultural History Review*, **10** (1962), 29–45; Everitt, *Continuity and colonisation*; and M. Zell, *Industry in the countryside: Wealden society in the sixteenth century*, (Cambridge, 1994).
22. F.W. Jessup, *A history of Kent*, 2nd edn, (Chichester, 1974), 81, 85ff.
23. The registers of banns normally provide the date of marriage, name and origin of bride and groom, occupation of groom, and the name of the father (and sometimes mother) of both the bride and groom together with the father's origin and occupation.
24. A.E. Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion 1640–60*, (Leicester, 1977), 27; C. Eveleigh, 'Letters relating to the condition of the church in Kent, 1678–1690', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, **21** (1895), 172–97, quoting his letter to Archbishop Sarcroft.
25. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 97.
26. 'Many are born in our parish, few born again by the Sacrament'.
27. Numbers of family baptisms at Cranbrook by year: 1669 – 3, 1670 – 6, 1671 – 6, 1672 – 6, 1673 – 1, 1674 – 4, 1675 – 1, 1676 – 2, 1677 – 1, 1678 – 1, 1679 – 2, 1680 – 1, 1681 – 1, 1684 – 6, 1685 – 6, 1687 – 3, 1689 – 2, 1690 – 1, 1694 – 4, 1696 – 4, 1697 – 6.

28. 2 February was the Feast of the Presentation or Candlemas, and was (like Easter) a favourite for baptisms.
29. D. Cressy, *Birth, marriage and death: ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, (Oxford, 1997), 174, 181–3.
30. K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and piety in an English village, Terling, Essex, 1525–1700*, (London, 1979), 165; see also M. Spufford, *Contrasting communities: English villagers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, (Cambridge, 1974), 223–318.
31. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 136. See also G. Nuttall, 'Dissenting Churches in Kent'; P. Collinson, *Godly people: essays on English protestantism and puritanism*, (London, 1983) 527–62 (esp. 558); and 12, in which it is written that 'Sectorianism and doctrinal idiosyncracies appear to have persisted obstinately in districts with an old dissenting tradition, such as the Weald of Kent and parts of Essex.'
32. A. Whiteman, *The Compton census of 1676: a critical edition* (British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, New Series, 10), (London, 1986), 26 (note 112).
33. Whiteman, *The Compton census*, lii and 25 (note 106). In Whiteman the incumbent is incorrectly referred to as Nicholas Longman.
34. Whiteman, *The Compton census*, 26 (note 114).
35. Whiteman, *The Compton census*, xlv and 25 (note 107).
36. G. Draper, 'The first hundred years of Quakerism in Kent', 330, makes the point that many second generation Quaker families returned to the Anglican fold. On the other hand there plenty of instances in these Kentish parishes at this time of known nonconformist families who appear in the Anglican registers for marriages and burials, but who avoided Anglican baptism altogether.
37. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 99.
38. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 90, 93, 97–99 and 138.
39. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 138.
40. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, 138.
41. See R.S. Schofield, reply to correspondence, *Local Population Studies*, **19** (1977), 52.