

BAPTISM TO MARRIAGE RATIOS AND THE RELIABILITY OF LATE-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SCOTTISH PARISH REGISTERS

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Introduction

Pre-civil registration Scottish historical demography has received much more limited attention from historians than that of some of its closest geographical neighbours. English, Scandinavian, and particularly French population studies are greater in number, cover a larger proportion of the population and are more advanced in their methods. In contrast, many topics of early modern Scottish population history remain unexplored, mainly due to the comparably poorer quality and quantity of surviving demographic sources. Studies of the Scottish population before the establishment of civil registration in 1855 are reliant for the calculation of births, deaths, and marriages on the Old Parish Registers; records of baptisms, marriages, proclamation of banns, and burials, kept by individual parishes from the sixteenth century.¹ However, the records are by no means complete and some parishes have few, if any, surviving registers. The information contained within them varies between parishes and over time. The geographical distribution of those registers is heavily skewed towards the lowland regions of the country and many parts of the Highlands and Islands have few extant registers before the end of the eighteenth century, making quantitative study of the population in this distinctive region impossible before this period.

The reliability of Scottish registers has been discussed in the past few decades by a number of historians, in terms of the issues both peculiar to Scotland and those common with the pre-civil registration records of other countries.² Although many are sceptical about the usefulness of the registers, modern historians have certainly proved more willing to make use of the data than their predecessors. Robert Houston declared, for example, that; 'While poor for some purposes, Scottish parish registers do not perhaps deserve the blanket condemnation they have received from nineteenth century reformers and some twentieth century historians. Each needs to be assessed on its individual merits, and the fullest possible use made in conjunction with other documents in order to throw more light on the workings of Scottish local society'.³ Such a comment almost certainly relates to the type of damning criticism levelled by H.M. Registration Examiner, G.T. Bisset-Smith, who declared that 'For the

purposes of statistical science, the parish registers kept in the pre-compulsory registration period in Scotland are almost quite useless'. He described the old parish registers as containing only 'meagre entries' kept with 'irritating irregularity'.⁴

It is the aim of this article to examine the problems posed by the use of Scottish parish registers to extract useable quantitative demographic data and to highlight the ways in which local and national political and religious changes impacted upon the church's recording of vital events in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The particular period studied is a range of 20 years between 1685 and 1705, surrounding the national mortality crisis during the famine of 1695–1700. Parishes have been selected on the basis of quality of the registers and solely from those 186 registers which had been previously tabulated for two demographic studies of this period.⁵ Although there are problems associated with all pre-1855 Scottish population studies, investigating population change during the last decade of the seventeenth century poses unique difficulties which must be addressed before demographic analysis can take place. This period is significant in terms of a watershed in the recording of the majority of vital events within the registers of the established church, due to the reorganisation of church government under Presbyterianism after the Revolution of 1688. Consequently, the reliability of registers kept during this period has been questioned, but no systematic study has yet been attempted to determine whether this was indeed a serious problem. This paper focuses on the ways in which baptism and marriage registers were affected by the social, religious, economic, and political changes of the late 1680s and 1690s. Control and choice over the timing and location of the celebration of these ceremonies was clearly more flexible than that of burials, and thus a greater number of factors could alter the registration of the first two events. In order to determine the reliability of the records of baptisms and marriages, therefore, the ratios between the two have been calculated to test whether or not they represent adequate substitutions for the identification of the birth to marriage relationship. The first and largest problem faced when using these registers, common to the use of non-Scottish pre-civil registration material, is that they do not exactly represent the data which are being sought: births and marriages.⁶

Baptism registers

Baptism registers before the later eighteenth century are considered to be the most reliable of the three register types. These were the records most commonly kept by parishes and have therefore survived in greatest numbers. In addition, the majority of babies born in Scotland, particularly before the later eighteenth century, were baptised, and most very soon after birth,⁷ thus baptism registers can be argued to be fairly representative of births. Despite Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman's claim that, 'There was no strong pressure to get children to the font quickly after birth since baptism was not necessary for salvation', it is apparent that most parents preferred early baptism for their children in the early modern period.⁸ Certainly it is evident

that parents of a weakly child which seemed unlikely to survive sought almost immediate baptism, with a small percentage of baptisms carried out on the actual day of birth. Although the length of time between birth and baptism varied from parish to parish, the majority of baptisms were carried out within one week of birth.¹⁰

Andrew Blaikie examined the accuracy of baptism registers in three north-east parishes from the second half of the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, by which period baptism registration is believed to have been much less complete than in the earlier period, partly due to the impact of the act of 1783 which imposed a 3d. tax on records. Using the 1851 census he identified people born within the three parishes and cross-referenced the parish registers for records of their baptisms. Blaikie concluded that the data contained within the parish registers were reliable with only 9.2 per cent of births not being registered as baptisms between 1751 and 1851.¹¹

On the other hand, the opposite problem, double registration of baptisms, did take place in some parishes. This occurred when a baby was taken to a different parish to be baptised, but the event was recorded in the registers of both parishes. Nevertheless, in most parishes such examples occurred infrequently and, on the whole, the baptism registers of this period have not received as much criticism by historians as marriage registers.

Marriage registers

The links between marriage registers and actual marriages celebrated are complicated by a number of factors. Firstly, some parishes did not record the date or event of marriage, but that of the marriage contract, or proclamation of the banns in the church. James Stark claimed that of all register types it was only the proclamation of banns, 'which have been kept with anything approaching to accuracy'.¹² These registers, however, as Michael Flinn pointed out, were often only records of the fee paid to register the proclamation, or 'consignation money', and as such were not always maintained as separate registers from the kirk session minutes and accounts.¹³ Furthermore, Stark failed to identify the complexities of the relationship between proclamations registered and those marriages which were formalised. Proclamations were the declaration of intent to marry which were recorded before the marriage ceremony. Examination of those registers often provides detailed information about both intended spouses, but it is impossible to tell by study of proclamations alone whether the marriage actually took place. Because both brides and grooms had to have their request to marry granted in their own parish, marriage proclamations for one event are frequently recorded in two parishes. Often the date of marriage was later inserted into the proclamation register to confirm that the ceremony had taken place, even when it occurred in another parish. Analysis of the registers of Caputh (Perthshire) and Ayr (Ayrshire) parishes, which recorded both proclamations and marriages, led to the conclusion that the number of marriages not solemnised following a proclamation was actually very small.¹⁴ However, most parishes did not register both events and even

those that did occasionally allowed one register to lapse, or failed to record vital details which would permit comparison.

Even those registers which recorded the actual marriage ceremony varied in content from parish to parish. Some provided only details of the marriage of female parishioners, as a woman would traditionally be married in her home parish. Others recorded the marriages of all males and females from the parish, whether the ceremony actually took place in the parish or not—thus one event could be recorded twice. If marriages were double registered in both the bride and groom's parishes on a regular basis, this would give an excessively high level of marriage. Of course marriage did not always take place in the woman's home parish, it could have taken place in the man's parish or even in a third parish to which neither bride nor groom had any residency claims. The proclamations had to be registered in both home parishes, but provided a record of this was given, couples were occasionally married elsewhere. An example of this is found in the kirk session minutes for Abernethy parish (Perthshire) in November 1695. The session recorded the proclamation for marriage of a couple, both of whom were residents of the adjacent parish of Newburgh (Fife), 'in regard they have no min[iste]r and that parochine comes here for sermon'.¹⁵

Alternatively, Pamela Sharpe's study of marriages in Colyton parish, Devon, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries revealed that if couples lived closer to the church in another parish they were less likely to marry in their own parish.¹⁶ The general impression taken from the Scottish marriage registers is that this was less common and couples marrying in a parish in which neither of them was resident frequently attracted comment, as in the above example.

Irregular marriage

This issue of registration is further complicated by the existence of irregular marriage which took place outwith the church. Mitchison and Leneman identified three different types of irregular marriage: 'verba de praesenti, that is the statement of consent by both parties' or verbal agreement to live as a married couple, 'verba de futuro, a promise of marriage in the future, followed by sexual intercourse', and 'by habit and repute' when 'a couple [were] living together and regarded as married' by family, friends and neighbours. These types of marriage were recognised by both the church and the law, as 'the irregularity lay solely in the way the union had been initiated, not in its legal status once established'.¹⁷ The key problem with the existence of these types of marriage is that they were not recorded in the parish register and cannot, therefore, be included in the data collected. If a significant proportion of all marriages in Scotland were formed by these means, rather than performed by a minister of the established church, then calculations based on marriage registers would seriously underestimate the number of marriages taking place. If baptism to marriage ratios return excessively high numbers of baptisms taking place per marriage then this would be an indication that the numbers of irregular and unregistered marriages was indeed fairly high.

The greatest difficulty associated with the interpretation and use of marriage registers is that far fewer marriages took place and were recorded than any other vital event. In addition, they tended not to be distributed regularly across a 12 month period as was more normal in the case of baptisms and burials,¹⁸ making gaps in the register less easily identifiable. However, Michael Drake identified a test for under-registration of marriages using English parish registers that could also be applied to the Scottish registers. He stated that the ratio of marriages to baptisms should be approximately 1:4 or 1:5, but that ratios of 1:7 or 1:8 would indicate under-registration as 'this would mean a rate of marital fertility far higher than any other evidence we have would suggest was possible'.¹⁸ E.A. Wrigley identified the marriage to baptism ratio in English parishes 1675–1699 at 1:4.45.¹⁹ The important difference when considering how this would apply to Scottish registers is the existence of common law marriage not solemnised by established church ceremonies. This would indicate that the ratio between the two types of register should be higher, but the extent of irregular marriage cannot be fully measured. Mitchison and Leneman compiled figures from a sample of kirk session records identifying the number of irregular marriages that were later registered by couples. Their figures highlighted large regional differences with particularly high numbers in the south-west of the country, but crucially very few irregular marriages were identified before the late 1680s, after which point there was a small increase in numbers with significant increase only beginning in the 1720s and 1730s.²⁰

Disruption to registration in the late seventeenth century

Religious change in the hierarchy of church government disrupted the registration of vital events in many parishes in Scotland at a time when economic and demographic crises impacted upon the population altering the birth, death and marriage levels. This factor in part caused, and in part increased, many of these registration problems experienced in the late seventeenth century and at least the first half of the eighteenth century.

The key event from which many of the registration problems stemmed, particularly those relating to marriages, was the change in church government from Episcopalian to Presbyterian following the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89.²¹ In the south of the country many Episcopalian ministers were forcibly ejected from, or voluntarily vacated, their parishes. Between 1689 and 1702 this accounted for an estimated 664 ministers out of approximately 900 parishes.²² The registers of many parishes contain gaps during the 1690s, as there was a vacancy between the departure of an Episcopalian minister and the settlement of a Presbyterian one. In the north-east, and particularly Aberdeenshire, where Episcopalian adherence was strong, many ministers continued in their stipends. Some of those ejected set up illegal meeting houses to provide an alternative type of worship to the 'imposed' Presbyterianism. Despite the fact that it was illegal for an 'outed' minister to perform either baptisms or marriages, it is clear that some Episcopalians did choose to have these ceremonies performed outside of the established church and risk the censure of church discipline. Those ceremonies which took place outwith the church were

frequently not recorded in the parish registers resulting in under-registration of both events. Tyson claimed that in Aberdeenshire, where religious dissent was greater than in other regions, by the mid-eighteenth century: 'Episcopalian baptisms were so numerous that these established church registers are virtually useless for giving any indication of population trends. But this is not a serious problem before 1695 when only a handful of Episcopalian ministers had been ejected'.²³ This watershed date at the very beginning of the famine period obviously poses a problem to the identification of baptism trends. The number of baptisms recorded during the famine would have fallen as the number of births fell in response to the crisis.²⁴ However, this trend would indicate an exaggerated demographic crisis if a greater number of baptisms are 'missing' from the established church register of a parish during this period because they were carried out illegally by an ousted minister. This would probably be noticeable in the baptism trends after the famine period as levels neither returned to normal, nor showed evidence of post-famine recovery. In effect, examination of Longside parish registers (Aberdeenshire) revealed very little difference in the baptism to marriage ratio. The extent to which illegal baptism ceremonies significantly altered the trends of baptisms and marriages recorded before 1705 is probably very low.

The increase in irregular marriage from this period was also connected to the reorganisation of the church under Presbyterianism. James Stark of the General Registrar for Scotland Office estimated in 1865 that, 'during the whole of the eighteenth century, a third of marriages had been irregular'.²⁵ Chris Smout highlighted the end of the seventeenth century as the start of the growth of irregular marriages, which in the parish of South Leith (Midlothian) by the 1740s actually outnumbered regular marriages.²⁶ The extent to which this issue causes problems for the estimation of marriage trends in the earlier period being studied is probably not very serious. South Leith and Edinburgh in many ways are exceptional in terms of the numbers of irregular marriages; particularly due to the residence there of a large number of Episcopalian ministers, and before 1705 the number of irregular marriages recorded in other parishes was extremely small, often less than one per year.²⁷ That they were rarely recorded, of course, does not mean that they did not actually take place, but frequently the couple actually admitted their irregular marriage to the established church in order to have it registered, a particularly important step for a couple requiring the baptism of their child. One of the prime motivations for a kirk session to pursue and register a couple who had married irregularly was so that they could be 'rebuked, admonished, and ordered to pay the charges'.²⁸ In light of this it is likely that kirk sessions would have a financial as well as an ecclesiastical interest in seeking out parishioners who resorted to marrying outwith the established church. For example, Coldstream kirk session cited only two couples as guilty of irregular marriage between December 1690 and December 1700. The pursuit of the first case in 1694, however, clearly had an ecclesiastical motive as it involved one of the parish elders of the established Presbyterian Church, Alexander Trotter, who was suspended from his position after he was married 'clandestinely and irregularly by ane Episcopal minister at Edinburgh'.²⁹ A combination of the importance of

proper marriage registration for couples requiring the baptism of their children and the ecclesiastical motives of Presbyterian kirk sessions, mean that identification of irregular marriage was probably fairly accurate. Since few parishes recorded many irregular marriages before the end of the period selected for this study, it is unlikely that this had much impact on the marriage trend.

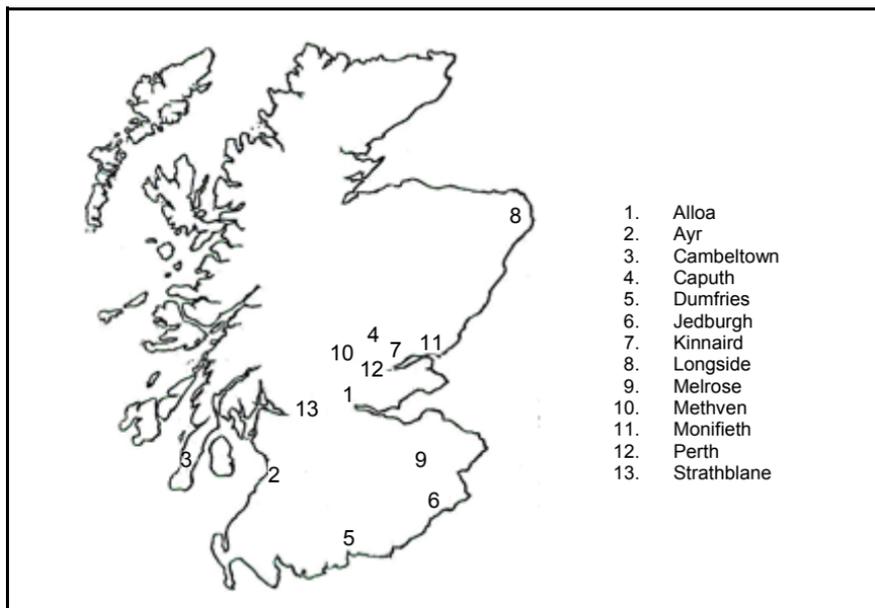
What is evident therefore, is that the identification of demographic trends and any changes during this period is not only hampered by the original problems associated with church registration of vital events through records of religious ceremonies, but also through changes in the reliability of those records to reflect the numbers of such ceremonies actually taking place.³⁰ Simultaneously, the demographic crisis of the late 1690s and the resultant temporary change in population trends may help to mask any otherwise obvious changes in the quality of record keeping.

The calculation of baptism-marriage ratios

In order to determine whether parish registers of this period are useable, the ratios of baptisms to marriages have been calculated for Scottish parishes to compare with the more reliable English figures. Parishes were selected for which both baptism and marriage records were extant without breaks for a minimum of 10 years of the 20 year period studied. Only records for which the actual date of marriage was provided were included. Harvest years (October to September) were used instead of calendar years since this was how the tabulated data had been recorded for the studies by Flinn and Cullen. Due to the selection criteria placed upon registers, the combined tabulated data obtained from the demographic studies of this period returned only 13 parishes with useable data. This low number was primarily an issue related to gaps in registration and the paucity of useable marriage registers. Even within the selected 13 registers, these problems meant that results for some parishes could only be obtained for part of the period studied.

A number of issues relate to how representative the selected parishes are and consequently whether the results can be said to reflect Scottish trends. The first is that the geographical range of the parishes represented is limited to lowland regions,³¹ predominantly from the eastern part of the country. Parishes from only 9 of the 34 Scottish counties are represented with 4 parishes included from a single county, Perthshire. The second is that out of approximately 900 parishes in Scotland, this sample is based on only 13 of them, less than 1 per cent of all parishes. This figure is low, but not incomparable to the proportion of parishes included in the extensive study of *The population history of England*, which relied on results from a maximum of 404 parishes out of an approximate 10,000.³² It certainly would be possible to extend this study to include more parishes, particularly if only the standard ratio—the ratio of baptisms to all marriages—was used, although the numbers would be severely restricted by the problems associated with the sources and the geographical biases would not be altered, since surviving registers exist in both the greatest quantity and

Figure 1 Map identifying the location of parishes used in the sample



quality for these particular regions. For example, in the north and north-west of the country, seven counties—Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness-shire and Nairnshire—with a total of 114 parishes, have no single parish with baptism and marriage registers which are unbroken for ten consecutive years during this period.

After selection, two different ratios were calculated for each parish. Basic baptism totals were used for each, but two different definitions of marriage registration were used. Firstly all marriages which took place in the parish were used to define the standard ratio. The problem when examining marriage registers is consistency of content. In order to compare baptism to marriage ratios between parishes, therefore, it is necessary to compare records of the same type of event.³³ The second set of results used only those marriages recorded in which the bride was a parishioner. Neither method is, of course, ideal. There certainly would have been cases in which women were married outside of their parish of residence without a record of the ceremony being made in their home parish. This may especially relate to women migrating to urban parishes. Equally, due to the preference for early baptism and other religious factors, children were frequently baptised outwith their parish of residence.³⁴ Since complete registers do not exist for all baptisms and marriages during this period, it is not possible to identify all of the baptisms or marriages of parishioners of a single parish.

Table 1 Baptism-marriage ratios in selected Scottish parishes, harvest years 1685-1704

Parish	County	Baptism-marriage standard ratio	Baptism-marriage ratio (marriages of female parishioners only)	Harvest year range
Alloa	Clackmannanshire	3.948:1	5.083:1	1693-1704
Ayr	Ayrshire	3.995:1	4.713:1	1688-1704
Campbelltown	Argyllshire	4.840:1	5.124:1	1688-1703
Caputh	Perthshire	2.230:1	2.230:1	1685-1700
Dumfries	Dumfriesshire	3.897:1	4.431:1	1685-1704
Jedburgh	Roxburghshire	4.176:1	4.438:1	1685-1704
Kinnaird	Perthshire	3.521:1	4.204:1	1685-1704
Longside	Aberdeenshire	3.341:1	3.425:1	1692-1704
Melrose	Roxburghshire	3.752:1	3.804:1	1691-1704
Methven	Perthshire	3.862:1	4.233:1	1694-1704
Monifieth	Angus	3.302:1	4.382:1	1685-1704
Perth	Perthshire	4.161:1	4.464:1	1693-1704
Strathblane	Stirlingshire	2.580:1	3.146:1	1690-1704
Average		3.662:1	4.129:1	1685-1704

Source: Scottish Population History Research Papers: OPR 218/1, Longside baptisms 1692-1704; OPR 507/1, Campbelltown baptisms 1688-1704; OPR 799/1, Melrose baptisms 1691-1704; OPR 821/1, Dumfries baptisms 1685-1704. GROS: OPR 218/2, Longside marriages 1692-1819; OPR 310/3, Monifieth baptisms 1649-1780; OPR 310/5, Monifieth marriages 1649-1819; OPR 337/1, Caputh baptisms 1670-1719, and marriages 1671-1719; OPR 368/1, Kinnaird baptisms 1632-1819, and marriages 1639-1802; OPR 380/1, Methven baptisms 1662-1819, and marriages 1662-1789; OPR 387/3, Perth baptisms 1691-1729; OPR 387/18, Perth marriages 1653-1736; OPR 465/1, Alloa baptisms 1609-1690; OPR 465/2, Alloa baptisms 1690-1740; OPR 465/3, Alloa marriages 1609-1740; OPR 491/2, Strathblane baptisms 1672-1814, and marriages 1678-1819; OPR 507/1, Campbelltown marriages 1681-1771; OPR 578/2, Ayr baptisms 1684-1720; OPR 578/7, Ayr marriages 1687-1761; OPR 792/1, Jedburgh marriages 1669-1772; OPR 792/2, Jedburgh baptisms 1670-1712; OPR 799/1, Melrose marriages 1642-1722; OPR 821/4 Dumfries marriages 1616-1743.

The average of the standard ratio, 3.662 baptisms to every 1 marriage, falls below Drake's suggested average of 4 or 5 baptisms to every 1 marriage. By contrast, the average ratio including only the marriages of female parishioners, 4.129 baptisms to every 1 marriage, falls just inside it. The difference between the two ratios is not great, but if the former figure is indeed too low to accurately represent the true ratio of baptisms to marriages in Scotland, then clearly this would support a need for caution to be employed when using data contained within marriage registers. In most parishes there was little difference between the two figures indicating that marriage registers generally were records of female parishioners' marriages. For Caputh the two ratios were exactly the same since the register only recorded the marriages of female parishioners. Uniquely, in August 1695, two entries recorded male parishioners producing testificates of proclamation (records of proclamation of the banns

issued by kirk sessions) with women from another parish, however, no record of the actual marriages taking place were made and as such they were omitted from the total of actual marriages celebrated.³⁵ By contrast, in Jedburgh beginning in harvest year 1700 there was a significant number of marriages recorded in which either the bride, or both partners, were resident in another parish: 1700 – ten, 1701 – three, 1702 – six, and 1704 – four, compared to only four previous instances of such types of marriage recorded between harvest years 1685 and 1699.³⁶ In Strathblane, a similar alteration in record keeping occurred with marriages in which the female partners were resident in another parish regularly recorded between harvest years 1690 and 1699, but none appeared in the following five years.³⁷ As such, inclusion of these marriages in any estimation of marriage numbers in Jedburgh and Strathblane significantly inflates the marriage rate in those particular years. Of the number of non-resident marriages taking place in Jedburgh and Strathblane, very few can be attributed to couples or brides belonging to a parish with a ministerial vacancy.³⁸ However, it is difficult to account for the frequent short absences of ministers from their parishes which could lead to a couple being married elsewhere. Some examples of non-resident marriage took place because the minister of the resident parish was actually preaching elsewhere and a couple proclaimed in his parish and due to be married on that particular day simply accompanied him to the other parish to celebrate their marriage there. Thus the marriage was recorded in the register of the parish in which it actually took place, but may have also been recorded later in the parish of proclamation. For example in 1702 a bride from Ayr and her groom from the neighbouring parish of St Quivox were married in the church of St Quivox by the visiting minister of Ayr, although the event was recorded in Ayr's marriage register.³⁹

In Monifieth, the regular registration of marriages in which either the bride or the bride and groom were resident in another parish, meant that the difference between the two ratios was significant. The total number of marriages in that parish was 24.6 per cent higher than the number of female parishioner's marriages. Thus, a straightforward comparison of the standard baptism to marriage ratio between this parish and a parish such as Caputh would not provide comparable results.

The average baptism to marriage ratios for the period harvest years 1685–1704, and particularly that which includes the marriages of female parishioners only, would seem fairly compatible with those calculated for England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: 1680–1689 3.989:1, 1690–1699 4.369:1, and 1700–1709 4.127:1.⁴⁰ Analysing the calculation of the baptism to marriage ratios for individual Scottish parishes, however, provided varying results outwith this range. Both Wrigley and Drake suggested that the key problem relating to the calculation of baptism to marriage ratios in England was the reliability of marriage registration. Wrigley claimed that although the 'expected' ratio is between three and five baptisms to every one marriage, local circumstances could significantly alter this. He explained that a particular church may have been 'unusually popular and attracted couples to marry there though neither partner lived in the parish'. Alternatively, the under-registration of

marriages which consequently produced inflated fertility levels was a particular problem of late seventeenth-century registration. Ratios of six or eight baptisms to every one marriage were not uncommon and even returns over ten were recorded.⁴¹

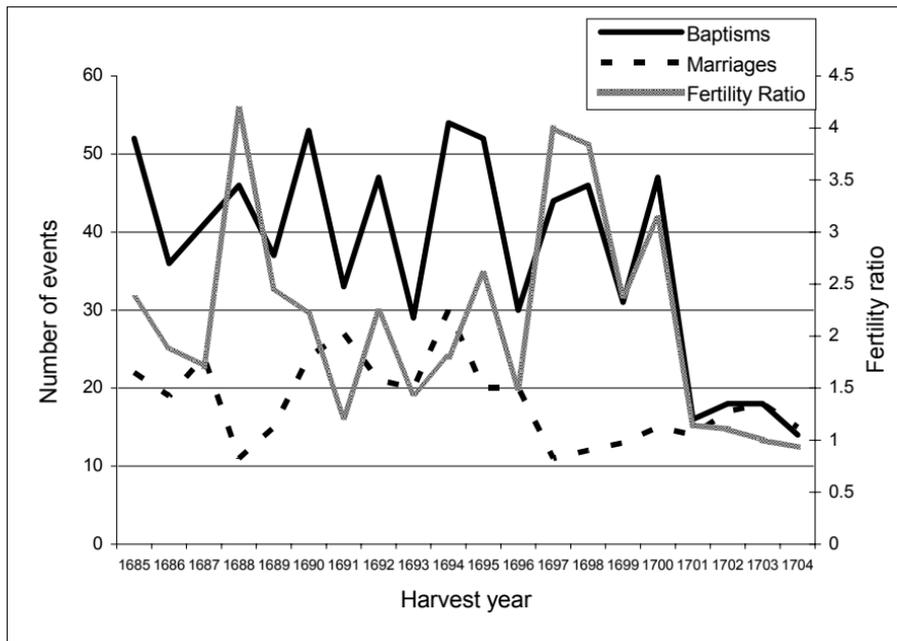
Due to the problems associated with the registration of marriage in Scotland throughout this period it has been assumed that marriage registers were more unreliable than baptism registers as indicators of vital events. The results displayed in Table 1 indicate that registers were not generally unreliable, and the very low ratios returned in some parishes indicate that when registration was questionable it was not marriage registers that were at fault. However, it should be noted that this would not highlight cases in which both types of events were under registered. The marriage register for Caputh (Perthshire) returned the lowest baptism to marriage ratio, a little more than 2:1 between harvest years 1685 and 1700. The reasons for this are unclear. Non-resident baptisms made up a very small proportion of baptisms recorded in Caputh, only 4.9 per cent, and are considered to have had very limited impact on the accuracy of the register. The registers kept during the ministerial vacancy, between 1701 and 1705 were deemed to be defective and were not included.⁴² Even despite this, the ratio is much too low, indicating levels of marital fertility far below the average. Clearly there is a serious problem with the way in which these particular registers have been kept, as the presumption is that too few baptisms were recorded.

The baptism-marriage ratio in Caputh (Perthshire)

One obvious possible indicator that Caputh's baptism register is inaccurate during this period is that the baptism trend was remarkably unresponsive to the famine of harvest years 1695 to 1699. If the overall number of baptisms of babies born in the parish was affected by the famine, which is likely, it seems implausible that the number of baptisms among babies born to parents who did choose to have them baptised in the parish did not also fall. The reduction in marriages between harvest years 1697 and 1700 indicates that the marriage trend was affected by the crisis. This would correspond to a national drop in marriages, particularly in harvest years 1698 and 1699,⁴³ and is unlikely to be due to a short-term preference for couples to marry in other parishes. The reduction of baptisms after 1700 to half of the previous level is accounted for by the absence of a minister from harvest year 1701. The majority of babies born during the vacancy were presumably baptised in neighbouring parishes, those registered as baptised in Caputh were probably baptised by supply ministers. The failure of marriage levels to fall equally significantly could be due to the fact that couples would have been able to wait to celebrate their marriage until a supply minister was available and that perhaps a smaller proportion of marriages rather than baptisms were performed outwith the parish.

The crucial point this example demonstrates is that in this parish it is likely that the marriage register is much more accurate than the baptism register. There are, however, a few possible alternative explanations which suggest that the

Figure 2 Baptisms and marriages in Caputh (Perthshire), harvest years 1685–1704



Source: GROS, OPR 337/1, Caputh baptisms 1670–1719, and marriages 1671–1719

registers were not necessarily badly maintained. Firstly, there may have been restricted employment opportunities for married women in the parish, therefore women married in the parish, but moved away shortly afterwards and as a result their children were born and baptised elsewhere. An example of this was given by Anderson and Morse’s demographic analysis of Borders parishes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which revealed very low fertility levels. They explained that women were not able to retain their jobs in textile mills when married which acted as a disincentive to marriage.⁴⁴ It is, though, highly unlikely that by the late seventeenth century there would be such levels of local economic specialisation, particularly in this upland Perthshire parish. Textiles were an important part of the local economy, which women would have been engaged in, but on a part-time basis within households also engaged in agriculture.⁴⁵

The other two possibilities are more likely and both presume that more children were born in the parish than were actually baptised by the established church. The first is that there were a large number of Catholics in the parish. The ratio would be skewed because it would be more important in terms of church discipline to be married in the parish church, but easier to get away with not registering a baptism.⁴⁶ This option also seems unlikely since the church registers for Caputh and the surrounding parishes do not indicate any problems relating

to large numbers of Catholics who did not conform to the discipline and authority of the established church.⁴⁷ Related to this issue of course, is a matter that is a specific problem when using parish registers from the post-Revolution period: non-conforming Episcopalianism. The trends in the registers could be unrepresentative if either large numbers of parishioners opted to have their children baptised or marriages solemnised by deposed Episcopalian ministers. To some extent this was reduced by the 'Act concerning the Church' of July 1695 which, in light of the continuing religious problems in the north-east and the lack of replacement Presbyterian ministers throughout the country, stated that Episcopalian ministers prepared to take the Oath of Allegiance could continue in their stipends.⁴⁸ On the other hand, it is unlikely that the figures for illegal Catholic or Episcopalian ceremonies could have been large enough to produce such a low baptism to marriage ratio. The examples provided in James Gordon's Diary of the ceremonies that he performed at the Episcopalian meeting house in Montrose (Angus) are very small in number.⁴⁹

Although the last suggestion seems to be the most plausible explanation of why so few baptisms occurred in the parish, the actual reasons for this very low baptism to marriage ratio remain uncertain. These issues cannot all be dealt with here and clearly much more investigation of the links between Scottish baptism and marriage registers and their reflection of births and marriages is necessary. What should be considered, however, is that the famine crisis could play a part in skewing the ratio. Caution must be exercised especially when analysing marriage registers from a period of high adult mortality. If significant numbers of widows or widowers remarried then this could inflate the marriage level within the baptism to marriage ratio.⁵⁰ Despite the famine that occurred in Scotland in the late 1690s, marriages did not increase significantly either during or in the years immediately after the crisis.⁵¹ It seems unlikely, therefore, that excessively high numbers of marriages were celebrated in the wake of the famine and consequently this cannot be the factor responsible for some of the low baptism to marriage ratios uncovered.

Conclusion

Without more extensive study both of a greater number of parishes and over a longer time period it is difficult to determine how representative these results are. Smout argued that it was only with the beginning of civil registration in 1855 that it was 'possible to consider marriage in a quantitative manner'.⁵² Tentative conclusions from this small sample, however, indicate that marriage registers of this period for lowland Scotland are not as unreliable as previously estimated. Indeed, it is possible that baptism registers need to be examined with a greater degree of caution than currently exercised. Ultimately, despite the difficulties of using late seventeenth-century Scottish parish registers to provide demographic data, it is evident that by comparison with the results obtained from English registers, Scottish registers can produce usable and meaningful results.

Without further research, such as carrying out a detailed family reconstitution study, it is not possible to confirm whether the results obtained in this paper

really do indicate that Scottish marital fertility levels were slightly lower than English levels during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Unfortunately, the two current localised family reconstitution studies in Scotland are both based on a later time period and are focused on only one particular aspect of demographic experience—illegitimacy—and can thus provide no supporting data for these conclusions.⁵³ On the other hand, this study has demonstrated that late seventeenth-century Scottish parish registers would not appear to have suffered from the same type of registration problems as in parts of England.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, examining Scottish registers on an individual basis, as suggested by Houston, reveals the extent to which registration varied widely between parishes and that caution must be employed when contrasting the results of marriage registers in particular. It seems crucial to approach comparisons between the data obtained from different parishes with an element of caution. The point that can be supported by this sample, however, is that marriage registers did not under-represent the number of marriages taking place in Scottish parishes.

NOTES

1. In 1552 the Church ordered that parishes were to keep registers of baptisms and proclamations of banns, and in 1565 requested that burial registers should also be kept. The earliest surviving parish register is for Errol (Perthshire) which records baptisms from 1553. M.W. Flinn et al, *Scottish population history from the seventeenth century to the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), 46–7. The author would like to thank Professor Chris Whatley, Dr Mary Young and the *Local Population Studies* Editorial Board for their many helpful comments and suggestions relating to early drafts of this article.
2. *Ibid.*; T.C. Smout, 'Scottish marriage, regular and irregular 1500–1940', in R.B. Outhwaite ed., *Marriage and society: studies in the social history of marriage* (London, 1981); R. Houston, 'Births and baptisms: Haddington in the mid seventeenth century', *Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society*, 18 (1984); R. A. Houston, 'The demographic regime', in T.M. Devine and R. Mitchison eds, *People and society in Scotland volume 1, 1760–1830* (Edinburgh, 1988); R.A. Houston, *The population history of Britain and Ireland 1500–1750* (London, 1992); R.E. Tyson, 'The population history of Aberdeenshire, 1695–1755: a new approach', *Northern Scotland*, 6 (1985); R. E. Tyson, 'Famine in Aberdeenshire, 1695–1699: anatomy of a crisis', in D. Stevenson ed., *From lairds to louns: country and burgh life in Aberdeenshire 1600–1800* (Aberdeen, 1986); A. Blaikie, *Illegitimacy, sex and society: northeast Scotland, 1750–1900* (Oxford, 1993); R. Mitchison and L. Leneman, *Girls in trouble: sexuality and social control in rural Scotland 1660–1780* (Edinburgh, 1998).
3. Houston, 'Births and baptisms', 44.
4. G. T. Bisset-Smith, 'A statistical note on birth registration in Scotland previous to 1855; suggested by inquiries as to verification of birth for old age pensions', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 72, 3 (1909), 618.
5. K.J. Cullen, 'Famine in Scotland in the 1690s: causes and consequences' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Dundee, 2004). Flinn, *Scottish population history*; tabulations of baptisms and marriages from the research papers of this text are held by the School of History and Classics, University of Edinburgh. The author is grateful to the School and in particular Professor Michael Anderson for access to the papers.
6. Flinn, *Scottish population history*, 45–51, 110–11, 271–4; see, for example, R.D. Lee, 'Methods and models for analyzing historical series of births, deaths and marriages', in R.D. Lee ed., *Population patterns in the past*, (London, 1977), 33.7
7. Flinn, *Scottish population history*, 49.
8. Mitchison and Leneman, *Girls in trouble*, 14.
9. Flinn, *Scottish population history*, 285; Houston, 'Births and baptisms'; Houston, *Population history of Britain and Ireland*, 18; Tyson, 'Population history of Aberdeenshire'; and Cullen, 'Famine in

- Scotland', 21–4.
10. Blaikie, *Illegitimacy, sex and society*, 67–74.
 11. J. Stark, 'Contribution to the vital statistics of Scotland', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, **14**, 1 (1851), 48.
 12. Flinn, *Scottish population history*, 271.
 13. For example, in Caputh between October 1685 and September 1705 only nine proclamations were recorded that did not result in marriages, General Register Office for Scotland (hereafter GROS), Old Parish Register (hereafter OPR) 337/1, Caputh Marriages 1671–1719.
 14. GROS, OPR 326/1, Abernethy kirk session minutes, 10 November 1695.
 15. P. Sharpe, 'Locating the "missing marryers" in Colyton, 1660–1750', *Local Population Studies*, **48**, (1992), 51.
 16. Mitchison and Leneman, *Girls in trouble*, 53.
 17. See, for example, L. Bradley, 'An enquiry into seasonality in baptisms, marriages and burials. Part one: introduction methodology and marriages', *Local Population Studies*, **4** (1970); L. Bradley, 'An enquiry into seasonality in baptisms, marriages and burials. Part two: baptism seasonality', *Local Population Studies*, **5** (1970); L. Bradley, 'An enquiry into seasonality in Baptisms, marriages and burials. Part three: burial seasonality', *Local Population Studies*, **6** (1971); E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541–1871* (London, 1981), 286–305.
 18. M. Drake, *Historical demography: problems and projects* (Milton Keynes, 1974), 63.
 19. E.A. Wrigley, 'Births and baptisms: the use of Anglican baptism registers as a source of information about the numbers of births in England before the beginning of civil registration', *Population Studies*, **31**, 2 (1977), 281.
 20. Mitchison and Leneman, *Girls in trouble*, 55–7.
 21. A L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Scottish church 1688–1843* (Edinburgh, 1973).
 22. R. Mitchison, 'Local and central agencies in the control of famine in pre-industrial Scotland', in M. W. Flinn ed, *Proceedings of the seventh international economic conference vol. 2* (Edinburgh, 1978), 400; P G B. McNeill and H.L. MacQueen, eds, *Atlas of Scottish history to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), 401.
 23. Tyson, 'Population history of Aberdeenshire', 114.
 24. *Ibid.*; Flinn, *Scottish population history*, 180–5.
 25. As quoted in Smout, 'Scottish marriage', 218.
 26. *Ibid.*, 216, 219.
 27. J.S. Marshall, 'Calendar of irregular marriages in the South Leith kirk session records 1697–1818', *Scottish Record Society*, **95** (Edinburgh, 1968), iii; J. S. Marshall, 'Irregular marriage in Scotland as reflected in kirk session records', *Scottish Church History Society*, **17** (1974), 11, 13, 20.
 28. *Ibid.*, 10, 16.
 29. GROS, OPR 733/2, Coldstream kirk session minutes, 2 December 1694.
 30. English parish registers were not, of course, immune to all of these problems either, some of these issues are discussed in, Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 89–103.
 31. The data for Campbelltown in Argyllshire relates to the lowland congregation only.
 32. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*.
 33. Differing illegitimacy ratios could, of course, be a cause of different baptism to marriage ratios between parishes and regions. Mitchison and Leneman, however, despite acknowledging that Scottish illegitimacy ratios were higher than in England prior to the 1750s, nevertheless claimed that illegitimacy in Scotland was low in the late seventeenth century and that regional variation was not as marked as in the nineteenth century. Mitchison and Leneman, *Girls in trouble*, 75, 122–3.
 34. The numbers of non-resident baptisms recorded in a parish varied significantly. For example, in Abernethy parish Perthshire, between October 1690 and September 1705 the numbers ranged from one to ten per year, but were never more than 19.6 per cent of the yearly total of resident baptisms. In Aberdalgie (Perthshire), however, during the same period, non-resident baptisms actually outnumbered resident baptisms in harvest years 1698 and 1702. GROS, OPR 326/1, Abernethy Baptisms 1690–1733, and OPR 323/1, Aberdalgie Baptisms 1615–1819.
 35. GROS, OPR 337/1, Caputh marriages 1671–1719, 10 and 24 August 1695.
 36. GROS, OPR 792/1, Jedburgh marriages 1669–1772.

37. GROS, OPR 491/2, Strathblane marriages 1678–1819.
38. H. Scott, *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticanae: the succession of ministers in the church of Scotland from the reformation. vol. 2: synods of Merse and Teviotdale, Dumfries and Galloway* (Edinburgh, 1917); H. Scott, *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticanae: the succession of ministers in the church of Scotland from the reformation. vol. 3: synod of Glasgow and Ayr* (Edinburgh, 1920).
39. GROS, OPR 578/7, Ayr marriages 1687–1761, February 1702.
40. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England, 189–91*.
41. E.A. Wrigley, 'Baptism/marriage ratios in late seventeenth-century England', *Local Population Studies*, 3 (1969), 15–16.
42. GROS, OPR 337/1; H. Scott, *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticanae: the succession of ministers in the church of Scotland from the reformation. vol. 4: synods of Argyll and of Perth and Stirling* (Edinburgh, 1923), 147.
43. Cullen, *Famine in Scotland*, 232.
44. M. Anderson and D. J. Morse, 'High fertility, high emigration, low nuptiality: adjustment processes in Scotland's demographic experience, 1861–1914, part II', *Population Studies*, 47, 2 (1993), 334.
45. L. Ewen, 'Debt and credit in early modern Scotland: the Grandtully estates, 1650–1765' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1988), 137–8; M. Young, 'Rural society in Scotland from the restoration to the union: challenge and response in the Carse of Gowrie, c.1660–1707' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Dundee, 2004), 282–4, 293, 301.
46. In Aberdeen, however, some Catholics had their children baptised both by a priest and a member of the established protestant church, see G.R. DesBrisay, 'Authority and discipline in Aberdeen: 1650–1700' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of St Andrews, 1989), 339.
47. See J. Watts, *Scalan: The forbidden college, 1716–1799* (East Linton, 1999), 5.
48. T. Thomson ed., *The acts of the parliament of Scotland vol. 9 1689–1695* (Edinburgh, 1822), 449–50.
49. G. D. Henderson and H. H. Porter eds, *James Gordon's diary 1692–1710* (Aberdeen, 1949).
50. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 190.
51. Cullen, 'Famine in Scotland', 232–5.
52. Smout, 'Scottish marriage', 204.
53. D.L. Baker, 'A demographic study of illegitimacy in Ceres Parish, Fife, 1841–1861', *The Scottish Genealogist*, 30, 4 (1983), 113–20; Blaikie, *Illegitimacy, sex and society*.
54. Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history of England*, 23–30.