

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Is L.P.S. too technical?

Dear Sir,

How I welcomed the letter from Mrs. Massey in L.P.S. 6 but even she falls into the trap of being too technical. Population Study is in great danger of following the fate of the Wozzle Wozzle bird if it has not already done so.

An historians job is to explain history and make it live, some of us who are left to explain population study are finding it necessary to explain explanations. If we are not very careful we shall find egghead talking to egghead and none to understand what they mean except another egghead.

History is about people, to produce, as Mr. Bradley has done in his article in No. 5 of L.P.S., a table of birth-baptism intervals for two imaginary parishes is a mathematical digression into a world of fantasy which has nothing to do with people who lived, died, had babies and woke screaming in the night.

Take this as a friendly appeal to alter course and fly not in smaller and smaller circles muttering to ourselves but in a straight line which leads somewhere.

Yours faithfully,

David N. Durant,  
The Old House,  
Bleasby,  
Nottingham, NG14 7FU

Dear Sir,

I might be interested in coming to your meeting on the 16th April, but I would feel a fish out of water among so many who have given so much time to unravelling population statistics, as my interest is only occasional and not very deep. But it may possibly help you in deciding the pattern of issues if I pass a comment on the articles in L.P.S. 6.

Editorial Of interest, even though I am regularly at the P.R.O.  
Look forward to the continuation.

News from Cambridge Group. Is interesting to me as a check list,  
to see what other people are doing, to see if there are  
any ideas I can "pinch". In this case there is nothing  
directly relevant; but I would like to know more about  
the effects of the civil wars on the population, as there  
seems to have been a decline in trade.

Seasonality of Baptisms. I read this to see if there would be any-  
thing in it for me. But I think it is bound to be  
inconclusive and we lack the information to explain  
differences. I have dabbled in this and given it up  
as pointless.

Parish Registers and Mobility. Of interest for technique, but of no  
interest as it deals with the north of England, and I  
am parochial.

Group Research Methods. Too elementary for me as I have  
struggled through these stages.

Miscellany. Good clean fun.

Correspondence. At times tends to be like "Economica" with answer  
and rejoinder; but all the same I am glad to see how  
people deal with their difficulties.

Has L.P.S. become too technical. This is largely what my letter  
is all about. 1542 Muster Rolls has brought these to  
my notice as a source for the future.

Some Recent Publications. I am always glad to look through this to  
see if there is anything that would be of interest to me.

Local Research in Progress. I am always glad to look down this  
list, for the counties and towns which interest me.

In past issues I was glad to see the list of early census  
returns.

I have dabbled with hearth tax returns as local studies.  
I have thought of trying an analysis of the ship money returns, to  
see what would come out in the wash; but have not had time to try it.

Some years ago I did an analysis of the plague deaths in  
Ipswich. Fortunately, the Rev. Ralph Josselin at Earls Colne kept

a diary, and the weather recorded there and in Pepys gave me a rough guide to temperatures. There was a remarkably close relationship between temperature and burials, allowing for incubation.

Yours faithfully,

A.G.E. Jones  
Southborough,  
Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Hearth Tax, a useful reference

Dear Sir,

In the list of references in my article on Hearth Tax (L.P.S. 7) I failed to mention one extremely useful general reference, West J. Village Records, London 1962. In particular pages 134 and 135 which give an interesting list of published and unpublished Hearth Tax returns for different counties.

Yours faithfully,

John Patten,  
School of Geography,  
University of Oxford,  
Mansfield Road, Oxford

Will precedent books?

Dear Sir,

The views expressed by Dr. Margaret Spufford (The Scribes of Villagers' Wills; No. 7, Autumn 1971) accord in the main with those I have formed whilst studying the wills of upper Wensleydale.

I wonder, however, whether there may not have been precedent books (or, perhaps, pamphlets) setting out various introductory phrases for the use of those preparing wills.

This suggestion is made as a result of noticing similar phrases in wills from many parts of the country. In particular, may I draw your attention to one phrase from the will of Thomas Staploe in 1668, quoted by Dr. Spufford on p.40: "First being penitent

and sorry from the bottom of my heart for sins past most humbly desiring forgiveness for the same, I give and commit my soul unto Almighty God my Saviour and Redeemer."

The identical phrase, verbatim, occurs in the will of Thomas Rudd of Bainbridge, miller, made 10 Jan 1690/1. I find it difficult to believe that a will made in East Anglia in 1668 and one made in north Yorkshire in 1691 did not use the same source, rather than that Thomas Staploe was using his own words, although I would agree that the phrase would be used to express Staploe's personal feelings, and that would also apply to Thomas Rudd.

Yours faithfully,

Dear Sir,

May I add to my earlier letter this preamble which I particularly like, and which may interest Dr. Spufford. It is from the will of Henry Deacon, yeoman, of Burton in Bishopdale, dated 11 April 1677: "First as touchinge my wife with whome I coupled my selfe in the feare of god, refusinge all other women, I linked my selfe unto her, livinge with her in the blessed estate of honorable wedlocke And albeit I doubt not but that god after my departure accordinge to his promise will bee unto her A husband; yea A father, a patron and A defender and will not suffer her to lacke if she trust, feare and serve him diligently callinge upon his holy name; yet for asmuchas god hath blessed me with some worldly substance and she is my owne flesh, and who soe provideth not for his, denyeth the fayeth, and is worse than an Infidell, I therefore give and bequeath unto Hellenay my wife dureinge her naturall life The occupacon of this howse and killne with the appurtenances (wherein I now dwell)..."

It seems to me clear that it was the testator himself who was expressing his own feelings, for surely no-one would put just those words into the mouth of another.

Yours sincerely,

Hartley Thwaite  
7, Manor Park,  
Scarcroft, Leeds LS14 3BW

## Margaret Spufford Comments

Dear Sir,

I found Mr. Thwaite's letter enquiring whether there were formulary books in general use in the seventeenth century very interesting. It raises a point I have been puzzling over myself for some time, and one, indeed, which I would appreciate help with, since I have found no satisfactory answer. I do agree that the approximate coincidence between dedicatory clauses in a cross-section of wills from different settlements within the same area made at the same date is very striking. I must point out that Mr. Thwaite has used my example of the initial part of the dedicatory clause of Thomas Staploe's will made in Cambs. in 1668, and compared it with that of the identical opening to Thomas Rudd's will made in the East Riding in 1691, but not used the really idiosyncratic clauses of Thomas Staploe's will, which follow the opening. I doubt if these are identical?

However I admit the approximate coincidence in dedicatory clauses over the same period in widespread parts of the country. I can only say to this, that in the first place, whatever general ecclesiastical fashion was in vogue did percolate right down to the humble levels of society and that only a finite number of phrases existed. In the second place, I have shown that, although the approximate coincidence between wills made at the same time over a wide area no doubt existed, the exact coincidence between the wording of the same scribe working in the same place, unless he was writing for a man of strong opinions, was even more remarkable. Thirdly, I have shown that most wills, in the few villages I have examined, were not written by ecclesiastical officials, or by notaries public, who might be expected to have a formulary book to hand, but by villagers, and shopkeepers. I would not necessarily expect them to be pre-equipped with a formulary book; even though very minor gentry, and schoolmasters might well be.

I would still be glad to have Mr. Thwaite's question answered myself. The only formulary book I have been able to find (although I have not been able to look extensively myself) is that of H. Swinbourne (or Swinburne) A Brief Treatise of Testaments and Last Willes (1611). This is entirely a legal guide, although it does state that in 'unsolemne' testaments, which are those that concern us, it does not matter if the will is written on paper or parchment, or in what hand or language 'either faire or otherwise, so the same may be read and understood'. He also states that the words are immaterial 'Words and sentences are not required for the forme of a testament,

but for expressing the Will and meaning of the testator'. (My italics)  
He nowhere gives an example of a clause bequeathing the soul. This is not conclusive; but it is suggestive. It is also suggestive that Mrs. Owen, Archivist to the Bishop of Ely, tells me that there are no formal examples of dedicatory clauses in the manuscript formulary books of the diocese. These include one of the appropriate date, the second half of the sixteenth century. I simply do not believe that most village scribes copied from a formulary, now that I know who, in one county, they were; I believe that they followed the fashion in vogue in the particular village at that time, although this naturally reflected general fashion to some extent.

If any reader could enlighten me on the number, and volume of willformularies in circulation up to 1700 and their dates and prove me wrong, I as well as Mr. Thwaite, would be grateful for help with a problem I have found difficult.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Spufford,  
Lucy Cavendish College,  
Cambridge CB3 0BU

### Errata

#### Editor's Note

Dr. Spufford has identified a number of errors and omissions in her article *The Scribes of Villagers' Wills in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their influence* L.P.S.7. We can only apologise for these mistakes and thank Dr. Spufford for drawing them to our attention.

Page 36 line 26 supply 'y' to Almighty  
page 39 line 11 delete 'n' to read 'God that gave it me'  
page 39 last three lines. Third line from the bottom, delete 'books incidentally'; second line from the bottom, delete the whole of the sentence beginning 'Neither of the' and also delete the first two words of the last line. Begin a new sentence, giving 'Four' a capital letter.  
Page 41 through a misunderstanding, Dr. Spufford's conclusion was not printed as she would have wished and a number of lines were omitted.

Notes

19. This should read Studies in Church History,  
8, 1971, 203-11.
21. W.M. Palmer not W.N. Palmer.

In Search of Nonconformity L.P.S. 7

Dear Sir,

I have some experience in Nottinghamshire of the problems relating to the location of Non-conformist records cited by your correspondent Mrs. Thoday in your last issue and possibly can give you some general assistance.

Unfortunately the records of non-conformist bodies are some of the hardest to track down since there is no central agency to retain them: the individual churches themselves very often keep their documents though the appointment of denominational archivists has resulted in this becoming less common. Many of the Baptist records for the E. Midlands have recently been handed over to the appropriate county or city record office, or occasionally to the University: where the appeal has had no response at least those concerned with the church have been made aware of the importance of their holdings. A similar operation is being mounted for the Methodist records which it is hoped will bring considerable material into the record offices where it can be preserved and seen by the public. Current records, or those of a confidential nature are of course excepted, though the latter are often deposited with a time limit imposed upon them. The Quaker records for Notts. and Derbys., up to about 1850, are all held in the archives department of the Nottingham Central Library in Sherwood Street. These are a particularly satisfactory group in that the Society of Friends was exceptionally careful to record all their meetings and business. The Congregationalists either still retain their records - for instance those at Castle Gate Congregational Church in Nottingham - or have made small deposits in the record offices: the most interesting Presbyterian material - that connected with High Pavement chapel - is at the University with other similar deposits for the Old Meeting House in Mansfield. The local records are therefore scattered between the University, the city and county record offices and the individual churches. It seems likely that this is a familiar pattern

throughout the country.

At a national level, apart from the sources mentioned by your correspondent, there is also Dr. William's Library in Gordon Square, London, where there are considerable deposits including statistical surveys. Other libraries such as the one at Friends House in the Euston Road, or the Methodist Archives in City Road, have substantial printed and manuscript sources which are well worth checking through. Unfortunately not all the large deposits are even in London: for example a very large corpus of material on the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion from 1769 onwards is at Cheshunt College, Cambridge. All the foregoing information is mainly concerned with the manuscript material, but it must not be forgotten that many of the most important records have been printed and are thus much easier to obtain and use. An indication of some of the main printed sources can be found in a very useful article on Protestant non-conformity and its sources in the Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research vol. xxv (1952).

It would be possible to elaborate indefinitely on the whereabouts of non-conformist records but perhaps this will give other searchers some guide lines on which to work. It need only be added that records frequently exist when the custodians are unaware of them, and it is often only because of the diligent and persistent enquirer that they come to light.

Yours,

Helen Forde,  
18 Linden Drive, Evington,  
Leicester, LE5 6AH