
Living same-name siblings and English historical demography: a final comment

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In an attempt to provide some closure to the debate about the existence and extent of living same-name siblings in England, here we intend to provide a summary of both positions.

Razzell's position is that there were no, or an 'insignificant number' of, living same-name siblings by the end of the seventeenth century.¹ Consequently, if, in a series of baptisms, a subsequent son or daughter is given the same name as an older sibling, then the older one must have died and its burial has not been recorded. On the basis of this logic Razzell has estimated levels of under-registration in parish registers and produced revised estimates for demographic measures such as the infant mortality rate.

Galley *et al.* have argued that there are three problems with Razzell's method:

1. With careful searching it is possible to find evidence of living same-name siblings in English historical sources. They certainly did not exist in large numbers, but even the existence of a single pair will do serious damage to the internal logic of Razzell's argument.
2. By using more transparent Scottish data, it is possible to show that census-type listings give a relatively poor view of the extent of living, same-name siblings since some siblings may have left home and others may have died before the census was undertaken. Other sources such as probate documents also give a poor guide to levels of sibling same-naming.
3. The Scottish data also suggest that it is not possible to generalise from levels of mortality in 'same-name' families to the rest of the population. This means that even if Razzell is able to establish that there were no living same-name siblings in England, his methodology still needs to be questioned.

Razzell's latest contribution to the debate concerns only point 1; he remains silent about 2 and 3. He successfully establishes that some of the same-name siblings listed in the Marriage Duty Returns are a consequence of transcription errors. Galley *et al.*, however,

1 Peter Razzell, 'Living same-name siblings and English historical demography: a commentary', *Local Population Studies*, 88 (2012), 76–81.

have noted a progressive weakening of Razzell's position and his latest contribution concedes that 'the existence of living same-name siblings did not occur to *any significant extent* at the end of seventeenth century' (our emphasis).² While 1 and 2 may be resolved by the type of detailed analysis that Razzell has demonstrated in his comment, 3 may prove to be a far more intractable obstacle to overcome.³

2 Razzell, 'Living same-name siblings', p. 80.

3 As Razzell has stated, more detailed research is needed to establish levels of living same-name siblings; for example see the promising discussion in the letters page of *Domus Historiae, Journal of the Barnsley Family History Society*, 20(1), 4.