

THE DEFINITION OF 'PROHIBITED AREAS'

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A recent note in **LPS** has drawn attention to a variety of problems which arise when dealing with the impact of ecclesiastical constraints on the seasonal incidence of marriage.¹ The three periods in the Church Calendar when marriage was discouraged covered Septuagesima to Quasimodo (Low Sunday), Rogation to Trinity and Advent Sunday to Hilary. The first two of these, as Bradshaw quite correctly observes, depend on the position of Easter with the result that the actual impact of discouragement will vary in particular months from one year to the next. Such variation is difficult to accommodate within the established procedures applied in studies of seasonality and most discuss the impact of prohibited or discouraged periods on a traditional monthly basis.² Bradshaw's comments are obviously relevant, but they do require some further qualification.

Three issues are central. The first of these relates to the accuracy of classification and to the validity of the subsequent generalisations. The second involves the identification of prohibited periods and the construction of an alternative index accommodating their variation, while the third concerns the effective duration of the first period of discouragement. In what follows, I offer some comments and supporting illustrative material on each of these issues.

Classifying seasonality data

In the handling of long run series of events, the classifications that are adopted require to be relatively simple. This has been the case in the analysis of marriage seasonality, where the usual practice has dealt with the incidence of events on either a monthly or broad seasonal basis.³ The uniformity that this produces allows comparison between patterns for comparable periods of time and whether based on percentages or index measurements these data allow the overall regularities in the pattern to be appreciated. Such procedures appear to ignore the annual variation in discouraged periods determined by the varying position of Easter; but in fact, over long run series, less detail may be lost than would be expected. Certainly, to be fully accurate, the actual days over which discouragement operated in any year are worth specifying, but this detail complicates both the collection of data and the construction of measures to standardise the material when gathered. Consequently, in inter-

preting monthly patterns, generalisations about the length of prohibited periods have been made as both Bradley and Edwards did in **Population Studies from Parish Registers**.⁴

The first prohibited period between Septuagesima and Quasimodo has been characterised as covering 'roughly three weeks in February, the whole of March, and two weeks in April', clearly not absolutely true for every year, but a generalisation justified in terms of periodisation used with the Shropshire data. Table 1a details the average number of days per month in each decade actually covered by ecclesiastical discouragement for the period 1761-1810 using Cheney's Handbook.⁵ The figures for each decade show a marked similarity which confirms Bradley's generalisation with on average 1.9 days falling in January, 22.8 days ('roughly three weeks') in February, 30.9 days in March and 14.1 ('two weeks') in April for the first discouraged period. The second period from Rogation to Trinity, also dependent on the date of Easter, records 16.2 days ('about two weeks') in May, less than a day in April and four to five days in June. Bradshaw is quite right to note that this period covers three weeks in all, as the Book of Common Prayer specifies, and two of these occur in May. This decadal regularity disguises considerable contrasts through time between individual years, as Table 1b reveals, where the range of days affected by the first and second discouraged periods for each month are noted. The loss of such detail is inevitable if a monthly classification and decadal totals are used, but the annual variation evens itself out over grouped time periods. If a student is dealing with parishes where the incidence of marriage per month is high, then analysis on an annual basis incorporating the variation in periods of discouragement may well be worthwhile as an additional stage in the appraisal of the seasonality record. Such analysis, if undertaken, will certainly add detail, but will complicate the procedure if numerous parishes are dealt with in this manner over long time periods.

Table 1a. Average number of days per month in periods of ecclesiastical discouragement of marriage by decade 1761-1810

	Septuagesima — Quasimodo				Rogation — Trinity			Advent — Hilary		
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Ap.	Ap.	May	June	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.
1761-1770	3.3	23.8	30.7	12.8	0.6	16.0	4.4	1.6	30.5	12
1771-1780	2.3	23.4	31.0	13.3	0.1	17.2	4.2	1.5	30.6	12
1781-1790	2.7	22.8	30.9	13.6	0.4	16.0	4.6	1.2	30.6	12
1791-1800	2.5	22.2	30.9	14.4	0.3	15.4	5.3	1.2	30.6	12
1801-1810	1.3	22.4	31.0	16.3	—	16.3	5.1	1.6	30.7	12
1761-1810	1.9	22.8	30.9	14.1	0.3	16.2	4.8	1.4	30.6	12

Table 1b. Range of days per month in periods of ecclesiastical discouragement of marriage from 1761-1810

	Septuagesima — Quasimodo				Rogation — Trinity			Advent — Hilary	
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Ap.	Ap.	May	June	Nov.	Dec.
	0-14	9-29	29-31	0-29	0-5	5-21	0-19	0-4	28-31

Source: C. R. Cheney, **Handbook of dates for students of English History**
Royal Historical Society, London 1945.

Classifications are developed to aid comparison and analysis. While never perfect, (and it is useful to have their weaknesses documented) they are functional tools with defined limits and should be seen as such. Employing a monthly framework and the discouraged periods as defined by Bradley there seems little justification for questioning the validity of the conclusions presented for the Shropshire data. It may well be however that these generalisations can be refined, both in terms of the impact of periods of prohibition and how this varied in different parishes across the country. Such variation has already been established in Wrigley and Schofield's analysis⁶ and is now being explored in the interpretations advanced by Kussmaul.⁷ This leads on to the question, identified earlier, of what can be achieved by disaggregating the monthly record.

Accurate dating and index construction

Reference has already been made to Cheney's useful text which provides details, in Tables 1-36, of the ecclesiastical calendar and all possible dates of Easter.⁸ Using these tables, it is a relatively simple task to define, for the years under consideration, the **actual** days of each month when discouragement of marriage might have occurred. Once these data are collected however standardising them for comparative purposes is rather more complicated, for the extent of the prohibited period will vary between months and differ from year to year. Averages therefore have to be used if data are assembled over a decadal period.

The length of the first two prohibited periods is clearly specified in the Book of Common Prayer as ten weeks and three weeks respectively. The former period will sometimes cover part of January, part or all of February, not always the whole of March and either a few days or nearly all of April. The second period can cover days in April, May and June. Indeed the shifting extent of these discouraged periods can affect April at both its beginning and end, and January too incorporates a discouraged period from its start to Hilary, as well as having its latter days affected by Septuagesima. As these shift on an annual basis, a decadal average number of days affected is required and a subdivided index covering all months in the year needs to be calculated. Once constructed, such an index describes the number of marriages per day for periods of varying length and very short periods can produce both exceptionally high and low values.

As an initial stage in any seasonality analysis it seems sensible to collect details of the total number of marriages per month. This allows assessment over the year as a whole, comparison with other studies and can be handled in either percentage or index form. If a disaggregated index is required, then using Cheney's tables, the marriages that actually took place on the prohibited days and the number of those days in each affected month have to be calculated. It is a simple matter to subtract the prohibited days from the total days in each affected month and the marriages on prohibited days from all marriages in the month. Using the derived figures, the levels of marriage on prohibited and non-prohibited days can then be calculated and converted to an index, in which one hundred represents an even distribution of all marriages throughout the year.⁹ This index is however for twenty-two time periods rather than twelve.

It is possible to illustrate such an index by using the marriage seasonality data for Wem in north Shropshire, a populous parish and small town, included in a previous

study.¹⁰ Table 2a presents the marriage seasonality index for this parish from 1761-1810 based on a monthly calculation of the index. Above average rates of marriage are evident in both December and January indicating the non-observance of the period of prohibition from Advent to Hilary. February also shows high levels of marriage as do April and May for individual decades. March, with the exception of the last decade, shows below average rates, as might be expected as it falls within the first period of prohibition. The record for April, May and June may well be affected in individual decades by the shifting impact of the second period of prohibition from Rogation to Trinity. A summer trough in marriage frequency is also evident in this parish as has been regularly identified elsewhere.

When this monthly pattern is disaggregated in Table 2b into periods in each affected month when marriages were or were not discouraged, greater detail is added and the actual impact of discouragement can be more easily established. In these data, and this is an important caveat, because clearly the role of individual incumbents and curates in influencing local practice is extremely relevant, the discouraged period from Advent to Hilary only produces below average marriages in one decade in January and levels remain high on all other occasions. The period from Sep-

Table 2a. Marriage seasonality in the parish of Wem 1761-1810

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1761-1770	158	135	79	74	151	74	79	79	37	93	74	172
1771-1780	139	175	38	111	133	92	70	70	78	51	39	202
1781-1790	141	59	74	104	107	97	107	94	97	60	76	201
1791-1800	139	125	33	117	80	82	86	80	82	106	82	192
1801-1810	133	168	139	78	89	98	70	44	85	76	78	152
1761-1810	142	133	73	97	111	89	82	69	77	77	70	183

Based on 891 marriages recorded in Wem Parish Register (Lichfield, vols 9 & 10) published by the Shropshire Parish Register Society.

A value of 100 = annual average monthly distribution

Table 2b. Index of marriage seasonality for discouraged and non-discouraged periods for Wem 1761-1810

	January			February		March		April			May		June	
	D	Nd	D	Nd	D	Nd	D	Nd	D	D	Nd	D	Nd	
1761-1770	204	113	201	28	153	—	80	52	97	—	153	148	51	78
1771-1780	130	140	171	52	193	—	38	103	119	—	164	96	187	76
1781-1790	138	165	385	76	45	—	74	76	130	—	208	111	180	82
1791-1800	171	99	246	117	111	—	31	199	40	—	54	106	27	140
1801-1810	96	141	294	89	172	—	137	113	39	—	121	51	100	100
1761-1810	130	133	255	75	136	—	73	112	86	—	120	101	79	91
	July		August		September		October		November		December			
	Nd	D	Nd	D	Nd	D	Nd	D	Nd	D	Nd	D		
1761-1770	79	—	79	—	37	—	93	—	70	139	—	175		
1771-1780	70	—	70	—	78	—	51	—	40	—	—	205		
1781-1790	107	—	74	—	97	—	60	—	79	—	—	203		
1791-1800	86	—	80	—	82	—	106	—	86	—	—	206		
1801-1810	69	—	43	—	83	—	75	—	81	—	—	153		
1761-1810	82	—	69	—	77	—	77	—	71	29	—	183		

See notes to Table 2a.

Modified version of Table 2a

D = discouraged period for marriage

Nd = non-discouraged period for marriage

tuagesima to Quasimodo is observed with different degrees of stringency: when January falls in it little discouragement is evident, but very few days are involved and the index is therefore less stable. Discouraged days in February too, with one exception, are above average and here the days involved are uniform between decades. On the non-discouraged days in this month the index is very low for the first two decades and is below average on two other occasions. The evidence does not suggest that marriages were 'packed' into this period, but so few days actually fall in the non-discouraged time in February that the index may be unstable. March is generally observed except for the final decade, but the pattern is irregular in April. These April variations do not relate to different numbers of days being affected, for over each decade these are relatively constant. Interestingly, this record shows no surge of marriages in these months on non-discouraged days. Higher rates occur in both discouraged and non-discouraged days in May and June, which is the period of prohibition stretching from Rogation to Trinity. When April falls in this period no marriages are recorded, but one day or less on average is in this month throughout individual decades; May shows high levels of marriage in the discouraged period on all but one occasion and only in two of the decades in June is the record below average.

This extra detail certainly adds to the researcher's understanding of the degree to which periods of prohibition were observed, but it does not greatly change the observations that might have been made, if the analysis had been based on the monthly record alone. The conclusion remains that the period of prohibition from Advent to Hilary had no effect in this parish in reducing the number of marriages, nor did the Rogation to Trinity period discourage marriage solemnisation in any uniform way. Over the longest period from Septuagesima to Quasimodo the impact of discouragement varied in its effectiveness, clearly having an impact in March, but having less effect and often none at all in January, February and April. This suggests that the value of a disaggregated index, incorporating the movement of Easter, may be limited and certainly is more time consuming to produce. Other parishes however may have records that could be profitably explored at this level of detail. Such a conclusion though begs the question raised by Bradshaw about the generally observed length of the first prohibited period and this requires further attention.

The impact of Lent

It has been suggested that the **effective** duration of the first prohibited period from Septuagesima to Quasimodo may well in practice have been reduced to the period from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday (the day before Easter Day) as the result of the adoption of The Council of Trent ruling in 1563.¹¹ This certainly seems to be the case for Wem when the data are examined for the shorter discouraged period.

Table 3 presents a modified version of the earlier Table for this first period. The overall index for the longer period is given alongside a breakdown of the data for Lent and the remaining part of the discouraged period. Clearly prohibition on marriage was much more tightly observed between Ash Wednesday and Easter Saturday, with well below average rates in all but one decade. The reverse pattern is evident in the remainder of this discouraged period, with above average marriages in all but one decade.

When the figures are recalculated on a monthly basis for this shortened period consistent contrasts emerge between Lent and the rest of the prohibited period. It is apparent that the Church was effective in discouraging marriages from Ash

Table 3. Index of marriage seasonality for Septuagesima to Low Sunday for Wem 1761-1810

	Whole period Septuagesima to Low Sunday	Ash Wednesday to Easter Saturday			Remaining discouraged period		
1761-1770	105	35			231		
1771-1780	106	26			251		
1781-1790	62	55			75		
1791-1800	100	41			206		
1801-1810	146	144			149		
1761-1810	104	61			182		
By month:		F	M	A	F	M	A
1761-1770		45	39	—	232	533	117
1771-1780	See Table	46	20	28	278	346	190
1781-1790	2b	—	64	84	74	218	67
1791-1800		23	17	152	169	152	253
1801-1810		206	132	124	159	140	79
1761-1810		61	57	82	183	289	147

See notes to Table 2a

F = February. M = March. A = April

Wednesday to Easter Saturday up to 1800 and that this produced greater than average numbers of marriages on days in those months that were not affected by Lent. It would be appropriate to examine whether this regularity occurs in other studies of marriage seasonality.

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that the results presented here are illustrative rather than definitive. Benefits do arise from the disaggregation of monthly records of seasonality, particularly for the Lenten period, but much depends on the level of generalisation required. To accommodate in all studies the shifting position of Easter may obscure much of the clearcut regularity that exists and not greatly expand or advance our understanding of the general trend exhibited by marriage seasonality.

NOTES

1. J. Bradshaw, 'Prohibited areas', *LPS*, 34, 1985, pp. 58-9.
2. L. Bradley, 'An enquiry into seasonality in baptisms, marriages and burials. Part 1: introduction, methodology and marriages'. *LPS*, 4, 1970, pp. 21-40; W. J. Edwards, 'Marriage seasonality 1761-1810: an assessment of patterns in seventeen Shropshire parishes'. *LPS*, 19, 1977, pp. 23-7. Both studies are reprinted in M. Drake (ed.), *Population Studies from Parish Registers*, *LPS*, 1982, pp. 1-19.
3. A. Kussmaul, 'Agrarian change in seventeenth century England: the Economic Historian as paleontologist', *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. XLV, 1985, pp. 1-30.
4. M. Drake, pp. 1-19.
5. C. R. Cheney, *Handbook of dates for students of English History*, Royal Historical Society, 1945.
6. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, 1981, pp. 285-313.
7. A. Kussmaul, pp. 1-30.
8. G. Reynolds, 'Handbook of dates for students of English History', *LPS*, 34, 1985, p. 60.
9. The index usually employed is presented in M. Fleury and L. Henry, 'Nouveau manuel de dépouillement et d'exploitation sommaire de l'état civil ancien', 1956.
10. W. J. Edwards, *LPS*, 4, 1977, pp. 23-7.
11. J. Bradshaw, *LPS*, 34, 1985, pp. 58-9.