

INTERPRETING THE COMPTON CENSUS RETURNS OF 1676 FOR THE DIOCESE OF LLANDAFF

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Introduction

One of the main sources for estimating population totals in the later-seventeenth century is the Compton census of 1676. This ecclesiastical census was intended to provide estimates, made up from individual parish returns, of the number of conformists, popish recusants and protestant dissenters in England and Wales. Whiteman in her critical edition of the census discusses very fully the problems of interpreting the data, particularly with regard to the inconsistency of the individual returns.¹ Whiteman and Arkell have shown that in some areas, with certain qualifications, the Compton returns can be compared with the returns of the contemporary Hearth Tax in order to throw some light on these inconsistencies.² Since publication of the critical edition, Whiteman has suggested that the very low totals returned for the diocese of Llandaff may be due to the omission of the cottagers from the incumbents' returns.³ This paper examines the Compton returns for part of Llandaff diocese, and by a comparison with the Hearth Tax returns, shows that Whiteman's supposition may well be correct. Such an exercise could be applied to other dioceses, in order to elucidate the Compton returns more fully, and thus obtain a more accurate tool for estimating population numbers.

To ensure a valid comparison, the Compton census and Hearth Tax data must first be examined to sift out those totals, which appear to be reliable, and where the areas of collection coincide.

The Compton census

Most of the returns for the province of Canterbury have survived only in a copied form known as the Salt manuscript. There the information for most (but not all) parishes is listed under the three headings: conformists, papists and nonconformists. Superficially, these columns appear to accord with the inquiries sent out to each diocese in the southern province for the Archbishop of Canterbury, by Bishop Compton of London, but the neat well-written figures recorded in the Salt manuscript pose several problems for their twentieth-century interpreters.

The first question, as sent out by Compton, asked the incumbent the number of persons in the parish, rather than the number of conformists. The second question requested the number of popish recusants and the third how many of its other dissenters refused to take part in the services of the Church of England. Richards, in his study of the Compton census, mainly with reference to Wales,⁴ was convinced that the number of dissenters was severely underestimated, but Whiteman, supported by Jackson's work on Devon has shown for a variety of reasons, that this is unlikely.⁵ Her view is that the incumbents endeavoured to give a truthful answer to each of the three questions. Such endeavour was further hampered by the difficulty of categorising the dissenters. There is evidence to show that the Quakers and some of the Baptists refused to go to church, but that some of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists regularly attended both church and a conventicle as a matter of course.⁶ Such differences in worshipping practices provide further scope for individual interpretation of question three by the incumbent.

In answer to all three questions, the figures given in the Salt manuscript represent the final stage in a process in which the figures were collected at parish level, then tabulated at diocesan level before transmission to London. In some places, the number of persons as given in column one was further altered at the diocesan level, to create a conformist total by subtracting the last two columns from the first. Thus for certain dioceses, the total number of persons is found in column one, while for others, the figures from all three columns should be added to obtain a total of persons. Whiteman and Clapinson's evidence shows that the figures in column one for Llandaff diocese were not recalculated, so that they ostensibly represent the number of persons—the estimate with which this study is concerned.⁷

Unfortunately the first question was worded so loosely that few actually recorded the total number of persons in their parish. In fact the Archbishop of Canterbury really wanted to know how many men and women of 16 years and over, which was then regarded as the age to receive communion, were living in the given parish. In some dioceses this explanation was added to the original question or the question was rephrased to make this clear; in many it was not. Whiteman has shown that many totals do reflect the number of communicants in each parish, but some include children as well, while others are merely confined to men aged 16, or just the number of households or families.

The Hearth Tax

The Hearth Tax returns list the names of the householders liable for the annual two-shilling tax (payable half yearly) and the number of hearths for which they had to pay. Certain categories of the population were exempted from the tax—those not paying church or poor rates; those dwelling in houses worth not more than 20 shillings a year, and certain properties such as almshouses, furnaces, blowing houses and kilns. Such exemptions are not always listed and even within the exempt categories, sometimes those receiving poor relief were omitted.

The administrative boundaries of the Hearth Tax normally conformed to the areas of jurisdiction of the petty constables, whose areas were often smaller than those of the parishes. In many cases, the constabularies were listed according to parish, and since the non-tax payers were exempted on a parish basis, it is generally possible to calculate the household totals also on a parish basis. Those parishes where there is doubt about the geographical areas have been omitted from the study.

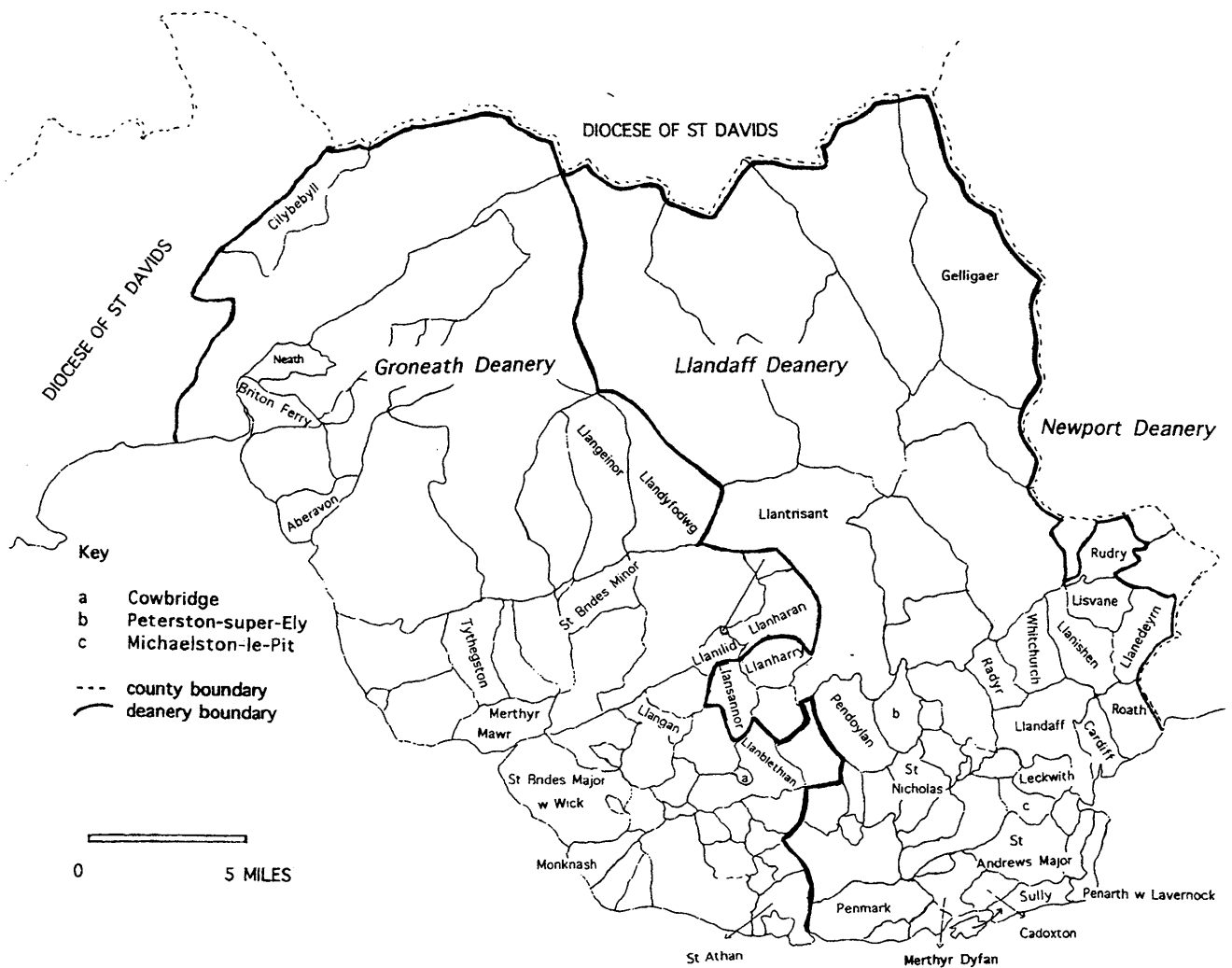
The interpretation of the Hearth Tax returns is further complicated by the fact that throughout the life of the tax from 1662 to 1689 its collection was administered in several different ways affecting both how the households were recorded and the number recorded.⁸ Most of the surviving lists date from two periods of 1662–6 and 1669–74 when detailed accounts were sent for auditing to the Exchequer. From 1664 onwards, all householders both liable and exempt should have been listed but this did not always happen. Occupiers rather than owners were supposed to be taxed, but empty and tenanted properties provided loopholes and thus are recorded inconsistently. Some individual entries include several households so these have to be adjusted in order to obtain an estimate of total household numbers. Finally, within each administration, the local collectors of the tax exhibited different collecting procedures so the return listing the most accurate number of households for each parish may not be of the same date as that for its neighbouring parish.

The data for Llandaff diocese

Whiteman comments that the Compton returns for Llandaff diocese present a particular problem. 'The figures given in the "conformists" column are so small that it is clear that most cannot represent either conformists or inhabitants In many parishes, householders, households or families must have been reported.'⁹ Guy has shown that in the replies to the 1763 Visitation queries in Llandaff diocese, a number of the clergy distinguished between families and cottagers.¹⁰ Whiteman considers that perhaps the clergy in their 1676 returns drew the same distinctions, and omitted some of the cottagers, hence the very low Compton totals.

The diocese of Llandaff at this time was the poorest in England and Wales and was viewed as a stepping stone to higher things. Bishop William Lloyd had been nominated to the See in 1675. He has been described as an exact and aggressive prelate although in his favour he was resident and Welsh-speaking.¹¹ The diocese had no dean and there is no evidence of the activities of rural deans. The administrative problems were further compounded by the fact that the diocese straddled the two counties of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire and the bishop's palace was a long way from the cathedral. More importantly the bishop had little control over his see because not a single living in Glamorgan was in his gift.¹² Against such a background it is perhaps surprising that the Llandaff response to Bishop Compton was received during Lent, only a few weeks after the receipt of the Bishop's letter.

Figure 1 Map of Glamorgan showing the boundaries of the two deaneries in Llandaff diocese



Of the Llandaff returns to Bishop Compton, this paper is confined to the Glamorgan parishes, for which there are two sets of Hearth Tax data for comparison. Within the county, the 82 parishes were divided into the 2 deaneries of Gronoath to the west and Llandaff to the east as shown in Figure 1.¹³ Both deaneries had their share of smaller coastal parishes of the nucleated lowland type and some huge upland parishes of scattered communities, where Welsh was the predominant language. Furthermore, the urban development of the county was such that some of the towns were served by chapels of rural parishes such as the wealthy market town of Cowbridge, a chapelry in the parish of Llanblethian. In Gronoath deanery there were two other towns, Aberavon and Neath, while Cardiff, the largest town of the diocese, was in Llandaff deanery.

The Salt manuscript records 24 parishes in Groneath and 29 in Llandaff deanery. Aberavon, Cardiff and Neath are included in the list. Eighteen parishes in Groneath and 11 in Llandaff deanery are not listed probably for a variety of reasons. The living could have been vacant or some of the returns may have been lost. In possibly 12 of the 18 upland parishes, the incumbents did send in a return, in spite of the huge areas and the moorland terrain.

Glamorgan has two surviving Hearth Tax returns of 1666 and 1670 which include all the parishes in the county.¹⁴ For some parishes, the total number of households is similar in both returns but for others there are appreciable differences between the numbers recorded in 1666 and 1670 and also in the number of exempt noted.¹⁵ Whether those receiving poor relief are included among the exempt is open to conjecture. Comparison of the two lists does throw up anomalies which cast doubt on the accuracy of some of the household totals and hence their use as a valid yardstick for elucidating Compton Census totals. In the parish of Newton Nottage, for example, the higher household total in 1670 omits the exempt, while the lower 1666 total includes both chargeable and not chargeable households. On this evidence, it is difficult to know which is the more reliable total, so that figures from such parishes have been excluded.

The comparison of Compton/Hearth Tax ratios

A comparison of the Compton returns with those of the Hearth Tax, where the latter totals are reliable and the areas coincide, can help elucidate which category of population the incumbents returned. Where the Compton return for a certain parish is the same as, or very similar to the Hearth Tax total, this would suggest that the incumbent probably returned the number of households rather than the number of males or all the adults. In this instance, the ratio of Compton census total/Hearth Tax total would be close to one. Whiteman has suggested that the low Compton returns in Llandaff diocese may be due to omission of some households and probably the poorer ones. One way of testing this hypothesis is to compare the Compton returns with the chargeable Hearth Tax totals which include only those households paying church and poor rates or whose rent was more than 20 shillings a year. If such revised ratios are close to one, it implies that the incumbent did omit the poorer households in his return, though his idea of poverty was no doubt different from that required for Hearth Tax exemption.

This exercise can only be conducted with a proportion of the Glamorgan parishes listed in the Salt manuscript. Some parishes have been omitted because it is uncertain what geographical area they represent. The huge parish of Llantrisant, for example, had five dependant chapelries, two of which were entered separately in the Compton return, but how many of the remainder were included under Llantrisant is impossible to say. Similarly with the return for Tythegston. This was a chapelry and so may or may not have included its mother church and its sister chapelries. Cardiff has also been omitted because a Compton return of 2,407, even if interpreted as the total number of inhabitants, does not correlate with Hearth Tax household totals of 342 and 375. Radyr and Rudry have been excluded since the Salt versions of 'Ruddry' and 'Rudry' make it impossible to distinguish between them. Some parishes have been omitted

Table 1 Compton/Hearth Tax ratios

Compton category	Possible range	Ratio
Inhabitants	upper limit - (100 per cent of 5.2)	5.2
	lower limit - (100 per cent of 3.7)	3.7
Adult males	upper limit - (36 per cent of 5.2)	1.9
	lower limit - (27 per cent of 3.7)	1.0
Households	upper limit	1.2
	lower limit	0.9
Chargeable households	upper limit	1.3
	lower limit	0.8

because with a Hearth Tax total of under 15 households the level of inaccuracy would be proportionately too great. Other parishes with dubious Hearth Tax totals, as shown by widely varying figures for 1666 and 1670, have also been left out.

For the remaining parishes, we cannot be sure that the Hearth Tax totals recorded all the households, and it is probable that most, if not all of those people in receipt of poor relief were excluded. Such an underestimate would result in a ratio of greater than one, and for this reason the upper ratio range has been extended arbitrarily to 1.2. To take account of a possible underestimate by the incumbent when noting his return, the lower limit has been set at 0.9. Thus a ratio range of 0.9 to 1.2 would indicate that the Compton census returned all households. Similar allowances must be made when using ratios based on chargeable household totals, but here there is a further variable to consider. Each incumbent was interested in the number of his parishioners, rather than those who were eligible for a civil tax. Thus, his return may have included people exempted from the tax, or he could have omitted distant parishioners who paid duty on all their hearths. To allow for such eventualities, the ratio range has been extended from 0.8 to 1.3.

Compton/Hearth Tax ratios greater than 1.3 can also help to elucidate the category of population noted in the Compton return. If one assumes that the mean household size ranged between 3.7 and 5.2 and that both the Compton total and the total households number given in the Hearth Tax are reliable, then a ratio of between 3.7 and 5.2 would indicate that the Compton return represented all inhabitants i.e. children as well as men and women. Whiteman has identified some parishes where the count probably included only those males over 16 years of age. Arkell has suggested that the proportion of adult males in most communities varied from about 27 to 36 per cent.¹⁶ If the mean household size varied between 3.2 and 5.2, then the mean number of adult males in most

communities would vary between 27 per cent of 3.7 and 36 per cent of 5.2; that is a Compton/Hearth Tax ratio of 1.0 to 1.9. The proposed ranges of the Compton/Hearth Tax ratios can be summarised as shown in Table 1.

Arkell has used this method to interpret the Compton returns for four counties in England, but in Glamorgan most of the ratios fall below the value of 1.3 and some below 0.8.¹⁷ A Compton/Hearth Tax ratio of less than 0.8 could mean that the incumbent under-recorded his count. If he was counting in terms of households, he could have omitted some, as occurred in 1763, or included the single-member households with larger family groups.

An analysis of the Glamorgan ratios is given in Table 2 in which the parishes are listed in descending order of the Compton/Hearth Tax ratio as given in column 3. Deanery or geographical location appeared to have little effect on the ratios, so those differences have been ignored. Those parishes with Compton returns of 20 or less are so small that they have been listed separately and will be discussed later. Column 4 lists the chargeable household totals from the Hearth Tax and column 5 the revised Compton/chargeable household ratio. Column 6 lists the likely interpretation of the Compton return based on these ratios which will now be discussed more fully.

Starting at the top of the table, a ratio of 1.9 in column 3 for St. Brides Minor indicates that the Compton return records the number of adult males. Pendoylan with a ratio of 1.2 may indicate a count of adult males or if the Hearth Tax total is an underestimate then a count of households. For Whitchurch and Penarth with Lavernock a ratio of 0.9 would suggest a count of total households. A ratio of 0.8 (in column 3) could indicate a count of total households if the Compton return is an underestimate. When the ratios are recalculated using chargeable Hearth Tax totals, that is omitting the non-chargeable (see column 5), the ratios for 13 parishes fall between 0.8 and 1.3 and so suggest that the incumbents did omit some households and probably the poorer ones. In St. Nicholas and Cadoxton (marked with a cross in column 6) the incumbent appears to be counting more than the chargeable household total but less than the total of all households. In both these parishes the Hearth Tax list records a large proportion of exempt households. In the group of parishes shown by a question mark in column 6, the Compton returns are much lower than the chargeable Hearth Tax household totals. There may be a variety of reasons why this should be. Such apparent under-recording may be due to the incumbent's count relating to a smaller area than that covered by the Hearth Tax or perhaps he omitted the single-member households entered as separate entries in the Hearth Tax or he omitted some of the chargeable households that were least well-off.

The parishes with Compton returns of 20 or less present their own particular problems partly because with small total numbers, slight differences can result in a proportionately large shift in the ratios. Such small parishes are also more likely to have a mean household size outside the range 3.7 to 5.2 and the proportion of males to females may be outside the normal range.

Table 2 Compton census and Hearth Tax totals

Parish	1 1676 CC Total	2 1670 HT Total ho	3 CC:HT Ratio	4 1670 HT Ch ho	5 CC:Ch ho Ratio	6 Compton Category
Compton total of 21 and over						
St. Brides Minor	63	*33	1.9	-	-	males?
Pedoylan	81	*69	1.2	-	-	ho?
Whitchurch	70	*82	0.9	-	-	ho
Penarth with Lavenock	29	33	0.9	-	-	ho
St. Nicholas	74	89	0.8	32	2.3	X
Sully	28	*35	0.8	22	1.3	n-p ho
Llanharry	34	40	0.8	32	1.1	n-p ho
Llandaff	155	*183	0.8	151	1.0	n-p ho
Llangeinor ^u	39	*48	0.8	421	0.9	n-p ho
Llanharan	34	*44	0.8	36	0.9	n-p ho
Cadoxton	28	*38	0.7	19	1.5	X
St. Andrews Major	58	77	0.7	44	1.3	n-p ho
Merthyr Mawr	25	33	0.7	23	1.1	n-p ho
Preston-super-Ely	32	*46	0.7	36	0.9	n-p ho
Penmark	51	79	0.6	51	1.0	n-p ho
Gelligaer ^u	107	*175	0.6	106	1.0	n-p ho
St. Brides Major with Wick	123	*200	0.6	141	0.9	n-p ho
Cilybebyll ^u	30	51	0.6	44	0.7	?
Llandyfodwg ^u	26	49	0.5	28	0.9	n-p ho
St. Athan	28	*59	0.5	44	0.6	?
Lisvane	31	62	0.5	59	0.5	?
Llanilid	23	47	0.5	30	0.8	n-p ho
Llanedeym	35	91	0.4	65	0.5	?
Llanishen	33	76	0.4	46	0.7	?
Compton total of 20 and under						
Leckwith	15	*20	0.7	12	1.2	n-p ho
Briton Ferry ^u	11	20	0.6	16	0.7	?
Llansannor	16	35	0.5	18	0.9	n-p ho
Michaelston-le-Pit	9	*19	0.5	10	0.9	n-p ho
Monknash	14	27	0.5	18	0.8	n-p ho
Merthyr Dyfan	16	*34	0.5	24	0.7	?
Llangan	19	*48	0.4	36	0.5	?
Roath	20	67	0.3	46	0.4	?

Notes: CC = Compton census; Ch ho = chargeable households; u = upland parish; HT = Hearth Tax;
* = the higher total of 1666 rather than that of 1670; n-p ho = non-poor household.

To account for this, the ratio range in column 3 could be extended to 0.8 to 1.3, but for these Glamorgan parishes none of the ratios fell within this range. When considering the Compton/chargeable household ratios, a further extension of the ratio range beyond 0.8 to 1.3 is not viable because the total numbers are so small. Thus in four of these parishes, namely Leckwith, Llansannor, Michaelston-le-Pit and Monkash, the ratios in column 5 fall between 0.8 and 1.3, suggesting that the poorest households were omitted from their Compton returns. In the remaining four parishes marked with a question mark in column 6, the ratios are less than 0.8, and the possible reasons for such under-recording have been suggested earlier.

Conclusion

Within the limits prescribed, this comparison of the Compton returns with those of the Hearth Tax has shed some light on the interpretation of the Compton figures for Llandaff diocese. To ensure validity, the analysis is restricted to those returns which relate to similar areas and where the figures can be considered reliable. Thus an interpretation can be made for 32 of the 53 Glamorgan parishes listed in the Salt manuscript. Of these 32 returns, one is probably a count of adult males, and three are counts of total households. A further 17 Compton returns would appear to be a count of households which omit the cottagers. In two parishes the Hearth Tax returns appear to be unreliable and in a further nine, the Compton returns appear to be very low indicating that the incumbents not only omitted the cottagers, but also other households. In four of these nine parishes, the returns were so small that the comparison is of questionable value.

For Glamorgan in particular, the incompleteness of the Compton returns makes them unreliable as a source for seventeenth-century population estimates. Elsewhere in England and Wales, this method of comparison (where the areas are similar and the returns are reliable) can be used to interpret more of the Compton Census returns and hence highlight their reliability as a source for seventeenth-century population estimates.

Acknowledgement

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NOTES

1. A. Whiteman ed. (with Mary Clapinson), *The Compton census of 1676: a critical edition*, (British Academy: Records of Social and Economic History, N.S. 10, (London, 1986).
2. A. Whiteman, 'The Compton census of 1676' and T. Arkell, 'A method for estimating population totals from the Compton census returns', both in K. Schürer and T. Arkell eds, *Surveying the people*, (Oxford, 1992), 86, 97.
3. Correspondence with A. Whiteman and T. Arkell; J. R. Guy, *The diocese of Llandaff in 1763*, (South Wales Record Society, 7, 1991), 172-3.
4. T. Richards, 'The religious census of 1676: An inquiry into its historical value, mainly in reference to Wales', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion* (1925-6), Supplement (1927), 47.

5. Whiteman, *Critical edition*, xl; P. Jackson, 'Nonconformity and the Compton census in late seventeenth-century Devon', in *Surveying the people*, 124.
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7. A. Whiteman and M. Clapinson, 'The use of the Compton census for demographic purposes', *Local Population Studies*, 50, (1993), 61–6.
8. T. Arkell, 'Printed instructions for administering the Hearth Tax', in *Surveying the people*, 51–3.
9. Whiteman, *Critical edition*, 511.
10. Guy, *Diocese of Llandaff*, 172–3.
11. *The dictionary of Welsh biography down to 1940*, (London, Cymmrodorion, 1959).
12. E. T. Davies, *Glamorgan county history*, 4 (Cardiff, 1974), 432–7; E. T. Davies, *The story of the church in Glamorgan 560–1960*, (London, SPCK, 1962), 9–41; W. R. Compton Davies, *Historical and pictorial glimpses of Llandaff cathedral*, (Cardiff, 1897), 30–4.
13. A. W. Wade-Evans, 'Parochiale Wallicanum', *Y Cymmrodorion*, 23 (1910), 44–52; Guy, *Diocese of Llandaff*, 24–5, 52–3.
14. Public Record Office, London, E179/221/297 and E179/221/294. The former return is undated, but internal evidence suggests that it refers to the 1666 Lady Day collection.
15. E. Parkinson, *The Glamorgan Hearth Tax assessment of 1670*, (South Wales Record Society, 10, 1994). The totals have been adjusted to take account of divided houses but entries referring to ovens, dairies and forges have been left as found.
16. Arkell, 'A method for estimating population totals', 103.
17. Arkell, 'A method for estimating population totals', 104–113.