

SOME COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON TWO EARLY-VICTORIAN REGISTRARS OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN RURAL LINCOLNSHIRE IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Dennis Mills, Rob Wheeler and Matthew Woollard

Dr Mills is author of the *Local Population Studies Supplement Rural Community History from Trade Directories* (2001), Dr Wheeler is parish historian of Harmston, Lincolnshire, and Dr Woollard is Head of Digital Preservation and Systems at the UK Data Archive, University of Essex.

Introduction

Local population historians have learned to consider what kind of men made up the 'army' of Victorian census enumerators.¹ That is hardly the case with those who oversaw their work—the registrars of births and deaths.² This article capitalises on what is known about two of their number, Robert Coddington Moore, registrar of the Lincoln South (or South-West) sub-district, and James Reeve his deputy, who in 1837 were the first to be appointed to those posts. A study of their careers is the basis for raising (and *partially* answering) questions such as how typical they may have been in social and occupational background, how effective was the service they offered the public and the state, how appropriate was the system for appointing them and what sort of supervision was exercised over them. The study also raises questions about the relationship between the central organs of government and those who were responsible for the delivery of services in specific localities at a time when local-central relationships were undergoing fundamental structural change. Thus our comparisons involve both our registrars as individuals, and the registration district in which they worked. The registration of marriages is outside the scope of the article since, although some registrars of births and deaths were also marriage registrars, the appointments were made on a separate basis.³

The 1836 Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages in England initiated the practice of civil registration in England and Wales, which began the following year.⁴ In addition to being responsible for the registration of vital events, the registrars were also put in charge of the enumerators at the decennial censuses starting in 1841, and it is in the latter context that the two following divergent views of the registrars came to be expressed. Thomas Lister, the Registrar-General who did the preliminary planning for the 1841 census, believed that for 'these duties they are peculiarly qualified by the local knowledge which they must necessarily possess. The majority are very efficient men, and I believe them, with scarcely an exception, to possess all the

intelligence requisite to perform such duties satisfactorily'.⁵ Yet in 1890, after the Act had been in operation for over 50 years, William Ogle, Superintendent of Statistics at the General Register Office (GRO), when referring to the role of the registrar in the census process, stated: 'He is not the kind of man who can do a thing which requires considerable accuracy. A great many of them are very ignorant men. In a large town the appointment may be worth having, but in country places the emoluments are not such as to secure good men'.⁶

At the parish level there had been a link between poor law administration and census-taking since 1801, because the overseers in England and Wales had been appointed as enumerators. Precedent, as well as convenience, therefore probably led to registration being administered through the poor law unions, formed in 1834 under the Poor Law Amendment Act; and the registration districts were to be coterminous with poor law union boundaries.⁷ The Act specified that the clerk to the board of guardians for each union was to become the superintendent registrar, so long as both the board and the Registrar-General felt that the clerk was suitably qualified.⁸ However, it needs to be appreciated that while the unions came under the control of the Poor Law Commission, the registration process was overseen by the GRO. By the end of 1838 there were a total of 618 superintendent registrars, of whom 500 held their post by virtue of being clerks to boards of guardians, 62 through appointment by guardians on the refusal of the respective clerks, plus 56 who were linked to 'temporary' districts where poor law unions were yet to be formed.⁹

The role of registrar was laid down carefully in the Act and the Registrar-General subsequently published, at regular intervals, instructions for his work. Registration was a legal obligation, and a poster issued in 1837 brought the necessity of registration before the public and referred to the list of registrars' names and addresses which superintendent registrars were required to publish. However, there were no explicit penalties for non-registration until 1874.¹⁰ After the 1874 Registration Act registrars were instructed to seek out births and deaths (some took their register books with them to get them signed) and individuals could be fined if they failed to register events. It was also an offence to withhold information from registrars, although prosecutions seem to have been relatively rare.¹¹ Nevertheless, Wrigley and Schofield stated that: 'Civil registration of births was notoriously incomplete in its early years,' and for the years 1838–1841 they used inflation factors ranging from 1.170 down to 1.120 to produce 'corrected totals of births' from the figures of registered births.¹²

At the time of a census, additional responsibilities were passed to the registrar from the GRO, which included the formation of enumeration districts, appointment of enumerators, distribution of documents before census day and collection afterwards, the checking of the enumerators' books against the schedules, signing of the books and passing of them to the superintendent registrar for inspection and counter-signature (both therefore identifying themselves conveniently for historians) and the completion of payment claims for themselves and their enumerators.¹³

Moore and Reeve

The Lincoln Poor Law Union and Registration District was one of the larger districts in the country—in terms of area, of number of townships, and of population. The wide extent of the district was largely the result of the competing towns of Gainsborough, Market Rasen, Horncastle, Sleaford, Grantham and Newark being at considerable distances from Lincoln, which was the most convenient administrative centre for the registration district. Its area in 1851 was 248 square miles, its population was 42,062, and it had been divided into three registrars' sub-districts, which were coterminous with the poor law union's relieving officer districts. The Lincoln Home Sub-District, with a population of 20,756, comprised the 15 ancient parishes of the City of Lincoln and 12 rural parishes to the north and south. In the North East (or North) Sub-District there were 35 townships with a population of 8,302, and in the more densely populated South West Sub-District 25 townships with a population of 13,004.¹⁴

The number of events (births and deaths combined) in 1851 in the three sub-districts was 1,074 (Home), 440 (North East) and 670 (South West).¹⁵ Lister had recommended that for a registrar's district of 'average density' a population of about 5,000 would be adequate, giving a total number of births and deaths per annum of less than 300, but this proviso had been set aside in our area to suit its geography. The original Act also stipulated that for any registrar's district a deputy registrar could be appointed, and such appointments were made in both the Lincoln rural sub-districts, the populations being nearer 10,000 than 5,000 but widely dispersed, unlike the much larger city population.¹⁶ Hence for the Lincoln South Sub-District we have two men to study: Robert Coddington Moore, the registrar, and James Reeve his deputy.

Initially they were responsible to Robert Cooke, the first clerk to the guardians and superintendent registrar, described in Pigot's 1839 *Directory of Lincolnshire* as 'attorney and accountant and clerk to the board of guardians'. On 3 May 1843, following Cooke's death, the guardians elected John William Danby, solicitor, as their clerk and presumably also as superintendent registrar, although the latter appointment was not minuted.¹⁷

Moore was appointed registrar in 1837 when he was the village schoolmaster of Harmston, a village about six miles south of Lincoln. As such, he would have been readily accessible to visitors wishing to register a birth or death. However, he was soon to change his profession to that of land agent and surveyor and in this capacity he maintained an office, where he could attend to both his public and private business. His new official position would have put him in contact with clients needing surveys, especially the numerous parish surveys made necessary by the Tithe Commutation Act (1836). So, it seems that he used his position as registrar to underpin an otherwise risky career shift, his fees as registrar giving him some financial stability.

In the early years of civil registration, registrars were paid fees as distinct from salaries, a practice that was open to abuse (see below, p. 17). They received a

fee of 2s. 6d. per event for the first 20 events in a quarter, 1s. per event thereafter. The practice for the Lincoln Union (and presumably elsewhere) was that they submitted claims quarterly and the payments were authorised in the board of guardians' minutes. For example, four successive claims by Moore in 1839–1840 came to £31 16s., which implies 516 events in the year (£10 for the first 80 and 436 for the remaining £21 16s.). By 1841 Moore's career change was complete, since at the time of the census he was employing a surveyor's clerk. Also in his household (and listed with the servants rather than the family) was James Reeve, his deputy. In later life, when the demand for surveys had died down, Moore farmed on an increasing scale and also gained some of his income as a landlord of a couple of groups of cottages.

Following the general remarks of Lister and Ogle, it is interesting to examine Moore's early life, which is intriguing but often obscure. He was born 20 August 1801, the illegitimate son of Robert Moore of Harmston—of whom nothing is known—and Ann Coddington of nearby Navenby.¹⁸ His youth is a blank until he appears as a witness to a marriage at Waddington (one mile north of Harmston) in December 1815, followed by five more at Waddington in 1818–1819 and a further eight at Harmston in 1820–1823. That he was invited to witness so many marriages suggests some status or position. Was he perhaps an assistant master at Robert Hall's Gentlemen's Academy at Waddington? We know from William Wright's diary that this establishment taught surveying.¹⁹ Perhaps Moore had been a pupil there; all we know about his education is that it had not extended to Latin. His move to Harmston seems to mark the start of his association with the Thorold family, who were squires there, owning about four-fifths of the parish, besides land in two adjacent parishes. This association bears more of the characteristics of eighteenth-century patronage than we might expect so far into the nineteenth century and outside the sphere of the established church.

Samuel Thorold of Harmston Hall died in January 1820 and a week later, the village's elderly schoolmaster, William Goode, followed him. Samuel was succeeded by his son-in-law, Benjamin Hart, who dropped the surname Hart and became Benjamin Thorold. The new squire was the son of a nonconformist minister, and his good fortune stemmed in part from an excellent education paid for by his father's friends and family.²⁰ He was to show exemplary concern for the well-being of the poorer inhabitants and it seems likely that he acted promptly to replace William Goode and to restore the school to something of its former standing—it had latterly declined to a mere Sunday school. He may already have known Robert Hall (who was to attend his funeral 16 years later) so it may be that Hall recommended Moore to succeed Goode. All this is necessarily speculative, because there is no documentary reference to Moore as schoolmaster until 1832. Nevertheless, he was certainly resident in Harmston in this period, there is no other person described as schoolmaster, and no other satisfactory explanation of how he was supporting himself from 1820 to 1832.

We must also introduce the son of Benjamin Thorold (alias Hart), another Benjamin Hart. In 1820 this Benjamin *added* the surname Thorold without

dropping Hart, thus becoming Benjamin Hart Thorold. Two years older than Moore, he had been trained in the law but was a man of strong passions, poor judgment and extravagant habits: for some time he maintained a mistress at Willesden Green, at that time a rural hamlet outside London accessible only by post-chaise or carriage. In 1842, he would be declared bankrupt, which necessarily tamed his extravagance. There are suggestions that Benjamin Hart Thorold and Robert Coddington Moore were closer than the difference in their station might suggest. Firstly, when B. H. Thorold is first recorded as a parish officer (surveyor of the highways, 1825–1826) Moore, though not yet a ratepayer, also served as surveyor (and no doubt did all the work). Secondly, after the bankruptcy, it was Moore who undertook the job of listing the Thorold muniments at Harmston.²¹ Thirdly, Moore's wayward son (another Robert) married B.H. Thorold's illegitimate daughter by his Willesden Green mistress.²²

We are on firmer ground with Moore's involvement in parish administration. The first record is a payment to him in 1822–1823 for making three copies of the church terrier (survey of church property). His work steadily grew, so that by 1838 he was churchwarden, overseer of the poor, surveyor of highways, assessor of taxes, and secretary and treasurer of the Harmston charity. For at least two of these offices he received a salary; this was not a legitimate charge on the rates, so was paid for out of an 'auxiliary or voluntary' rate—collected of course by R. C. Moore. He had also, in 1831, assisted in producing the census return for the neighbouring parish of Coleby.

By 1832 Moore was occupying freehold property in Harmston which included his school. The building concerned still contains a well-lit, high-ceilinged extension, which appears to have been added for this purpose. White's 1842 *Directory of Lincolnshire* describes the school as supported by public subscription. It would have been unusual for a charitable school to be on private premises in this way. Perhaps Moore had aspired to turn the old village school into another 'Gentleman's Academy'.

Despite the gaps in our knowledge, usual in such contexts, there is a sufficiently clear profile of the sort of man Moore was when he applied in February 1837 for the post of registrar of births and deaths for the Lincoln South Sub-District. It is perhaps unsurprising that the board of guardians was unanimous in appointing him. That the guardian of the poor for Harmston was B.H. Thorold, and that his position as a major landowner led him to sometimes chair meetings of the board, would scarcely have been prejudicial to Moore's prospects.²³

By 1856 Moore had additionally become registrar of marriages for his sub-district.²⁴ In 1867, financial problems of an unknown nature led to his bankruptcy.²⁵ The following year he died still in post as registrar, despite having been through bankruptcy proceedings. Curiously, his death register entry was signed 'Robert Moore, registrar, *pro tem.*'. We are unsure by what powers the son of a deceased registrar could exercise his functions in this way.

Figure 1 Robert Coddington Moore about 1860



Source: Rosina Morgan & Julie Madison.

James Reeve first came to our notice in his capacity as the enumerator in 1841 for the parish of Coleby, one mile south of Harmston, because he had made a duplicate of his enumeration book. This 'village copy' remained there until 'discovered' in 2005, when it was deposited in the Lincolnshire Archives. It is possible that Reeve was conforming to the precedent set by the 1831 enumerator, George Minnitt, who had kept a copy of the printed forms which he had used for the much simpler process of preparing this census.²⁶

Judging by the 1841 duplicate, Reeve was a very careful clerk. He had purchased a foolscap book of plain pages, which he ruled immaculately in imitation of the official enumerator's book and with equal effect entered the details of all 427 people living in Coleby. It is worth noting that both Reeve and

his registrar signed this village copy. It is much easier to read than the microfilm version of the enumerator's book, with which it has been compared line for line. The differences are minimal, the most serious being an incorrect addition of the number of males on page three of the 'official' version, where the figure 12 is given instead of the correct 13, as shown in the village copy. There are three very minor discrepancies between the two books in spelling names. Against this, there are eight instances where the official CEB carries additional information, but some of these are trivial, such as the double marks for the ends of households. Finally, there are about 10 pages in the official version where ditto marks reassure the reader that the street name has not changed since the last time it was entered, which are missing in the copy.

James Reeve was born in Leicester on 12 March 1811. By 1836, when he unsuccessfully applied for a post of relieving officer, he was living in Lincoln, probably with John Walker Reeve (not his father, but presumably a relative), the master of the National School in Silver Street. It looks as though he was taken on by Moore as an assistant teacher: he was 'of Harmston' when he again came to the attention of the board of guardians in 1837, and in 1838 he and Moore both witnessed a will, both giving their occupation as schoolmaster.²⁷ The occasion of his 1837 appearance in the board of guardians' minutes was his appointment as 'Deputy Registrar of Births and Deaths for the South-West District to act during illness or unavoidable absence of Mr Moore the Registrar.'²⁸ In June 1839, following the resignation of the relieving officer of the South District, he applied again for that position and obtained it by a margin of a single vote. Relieving officers were employees of boards of guardians, paid to ascertain the eligibility of individuals for relief or for admission to a workhouse.²⁹ Reeve's post carried a salary of £100. He needed to find two sureties for £100: they were John Walker Reeve and R.C. Moore. Exactly how Reeve and Moore interpreted 'unavoidable absence' is not known, but both the circumstances and practice elsewhere suggest that Reeve might have done most of the work as registrar, especially after he had been appointed to the relieving officer post.

On 3 April 1843, he married Bridget Day, the daughter of Harmston's second most substantial farmer, who by then was Harmston's guardian of the poor. For the next ten years, they lived at the Manor House, one of the largest houses in Harmston. The circumstances of this are somewhat odd: the squire, B.H. Thorold, had lived there before the death of his father, and he was to move in again in 1853; in 1843 he had just been declared bankrupt. So the arrangement was perhaps more akin to house-sitting than to a commercial lease.

Reeve continued as relieving officer and deputy registrar until December 1859, when he was appointed surveyor to the Lincoln Turnpike Trust. He continued to live in Harmston until 1866 but seems to have regarded his resignation as relieving officer as encompassing his duties of deputy registrar.³⁰ Thus in the 1861 census he appeared as 'surveyor of turnpike roads, land surveyor and auction clerk', but no longer 'dep. reg.' In 1867 he was at 59 Monson Street,

Lincoln, described as turnpike surveyor and accountant, a description which also appears in White's 1872 *Directory of Lincolnshire*. His office was at 9 Witham Street and his home Rose Villa, a good-class terrace house at 15 South Park, facing on to the park. However, the directory was out of date: in March 1871 he had resigned his position with the Lincoln Turnpike Trust—perhaps his health could no longer stand the travelling.³¹ Conveniently, the relieving officer and registrar for the Lincoln Home District, Henry Holmes, was also suffering from ill-health. On 6 June 1871, the board of guardians authorised Reeve to carry out Holmes's duties as relieving officer for three months; on 10 October they formally appointed him as relieving officer at £100 per year. Holmes retained the post of registrar, and the board regarded this as sufficient reason for turning down his application for superannuation. They did, however, allow Reeve an additional £3 per year towards the expenses of his Witham Street office. James Reeve died in 1891, the year in which his eldest son became bishop of the Mackenzie River See in Canada.³²

It is pertinent to consider the synergy between Reeve's two posts of deputy registrar and relieving officer. Any activity that would help him not to miss any births and deaths, especially births, would have been welcome. Such was the time he spent travelling around the district as the relieving officer, presumably able to maintain a horse, as his district was formally categorised as a 'riding district' in the context of registration. He needed to be in contact with parish officers such as overseers and churchwardens, and also with resident clergy, doctors and midwives, who would be able to keep him informed about the activities of paupers and likely paupers—the sort of people who might be disposed neither to have a child baptised, nor to register its birth. Conversely, however, 'the long distances the poor had to walk to find the relieving officer' have been noted.³³ In 1834 executive decisions about relief of individuals had been taken away from overseers and transferred to the union relieving officers acting on the instructions of the guardians, but overseers were still important as rate collectors and a voice through which parish opinion could be expressed.³⁴ It seems unlikely that Reeve made use of paid assistants to hunt down births.

We suggest that a number of questions about deputy registrars merit further investigation. Did such deputies necessarily reside in the same place as their principals? They would have needed some other source of income, so was it usual for them to be employed in another capacity by their principals? If no deputy existed, what did the public do when the registrar was ill or absent? In this context we note that Harmston was by no means a convenient location for a district for which the regular markets were in Lincoln, and the most distant parish was about 15 miles from Harmston.

The national scene

Moore and Reeve conformed to Lister's expectations in that he had particularly noted that the work would 'not fully occupy the time and attention of a registrar; but it must be remembered that the registrar will not be a person

occupied *exclusively* with the business of registration'.³⁵ The Registrar-General also laid down a number of rules for the recruitment of registrars. They were to be resident householders within their districts, should not be a member of the board of guardians (with some exceptions), could neither hold more than one registrarship nor be a superintendent registrar and could not be either an undischarged bankrupt or have obtained benefit under any Act of Parliament for the relief of insolvent debtors.³⁶ Our men fitted these criteria, except that Moore continued to exercise his functions after his bankruptcy.

A number of generalisations about registrars were made at the Census Committee in 1890. First, Sir Hugh Owen suggested that many relieving officers also held the post of registrar because both posts were under the patronage of the boards of guardians. The additional pay offered by the relatively undemanding task of registrar may have made up a proper salary. Second, William Ogle suggested that one of the reasons for the continuing alterations in the boundaries of registrars' districts was because boards of guardians wished to get a little more patronage, and by splitting a single district into two an extra appointment was made possible.³⁷ However, it could equally be that many amendments were made to the boundaries of registration districts and sub-districts because of the need to recognise the population growth of some urban areas, which increased the work of registrars, while it fell off in declining rural areas. For example, in 1892 a major reorganisation occurred in central Leicestershire, which affected seven sub-districts and four registration districts,³⁸ but where, as in the case of Lincoln, urban expansion was much more limited, district boundaries could remain very stable.³⁹

Circumstances must have varied considerably across the country because not only was there no stipulation that 'double posts' should be the norm, but also the sub-division of a union territory could be made differently for the two different functions. As an example, Lincolnshire in 1851 comprised 13 registration districts, split into anything between two and six sub-districts. The three covering the biggest areas had three sub-districts, but the Spalding RD, with much the smallest area, was split into no less than five sub-districts which contained only nine parishes between them.⁴⁰ White's 1856 *Directory of Lincolnshire* gives sufficient detail to follow up this statement from the standpoint of both the poor law and civil registration, demonstrating quite widely differing circumstances.⁴¹ Thus, in the Louth Union there were only three relieving districts, but five registrars' sub-districts, only one of the registrars also carrying out the duties of relieving officer. At Brigg there were three identical sub-districts for both purposes, but only one double post, while at Caistor the three sub-districts were identical, but there were no double posts. Spilsby and Spalding shared similar circumstances: there were five registrars, none of whom was one of the two relieving officers. At Grantham there were three sub-districts, the two rural districts having double posts, the posts in Grantham town being separately held.

One of the factors to be taken into account is that the unions were set up a year or two before registration began, and thus a body of relieving officers was established before registrars had to be appointed. The superintendent registrars and the boards of guardians, therefore, did not work on a 'blank

sheet' when making their first appointments of registrars. In all six of the unions mentioned the clerks also held the posts of superintendent registrar, another factor to be considered in the assembling of teams tailored to local geography and the availability of willing and suitable men to fill the posts. Nationally about five-sixths of these senior posts were held jointly, whereas under a quarter of registrars were also relieving officers. About the same proportion of registrars were working for the unions in other posts, mostly as surgeons, but even allowing for that less than half the registrars had double union appointments (see Table 1, below).

Lodey has published a detailed account of the initial organisation of the Aylsham Registration District in Norfolk, where the guardians adopted the relieving districts for registration purposes and chose three medical officers to be registrars. In the district where the medical officer declined they appointed the relieving officer; they also appointed deputy registrars. The guardians' choices were not altogether well judged, since very soon the superintendent registrar and a deputy registrar were successfully prosecuted for financial irregularities in their poor law roles, a deputy registrar was suspended and another absconded. For these and other reasons there were several changes to districts and personnel by 1838!⁴²

Over-registration appears to have been a significant problem in a small number of large urban sub-districts in which registrars tried to increase their fee income by adding spurious births and deaths to their registers. Some of them were 'reported' by assistants whom they paid for visiting houses to enquire about births, probably because they were reluctant to spend time in disease-ridden slums. The spurious events ran into hundreds, equivalent to about one quarter or one third of the usual figures, enabling the GRO to detect the frauds easily by means of local comparisons, or fluctuations from year to year.⁴³

Table 1 shows the Registrar-General's occupational breakdown of the 2,193 registrars in post at the end of September 1838, and indicates that a little under half of these registrars were also poor law union officers. However, only 500 (less than a quarter of the total tabulated) held the double posts of registrar and relieving officer, which might have offered the greatest economy of effort, followed by 416 who were medical officers, probably surgeons rather than physicians, using the old descriptions that gave higher status to the latter group.⁴⁴ Some registrars could be described as 'full' professionals, such as the 678 medical men recorded in Table 1, or the 262 'in other professions' (or 43 per cent of the total), but full professional status was not essential, unlike in the case of superintendent registrars. The stipulation that the unions should appoint their clerks if possible suggests that the GRO envisaged the need for full professional status as a guarantee that they would have a grasp of policy issues.

In Kent, as Table 2 shows, a higher proportion of registrars held double posts, perhaps because the analyses for this tabulation were carried out for the later dates of 1851 and 1881. Almost one third of all registrars (49 out of 154) in post at the time of these two censuses were relieving officers.⁴⁵

Table 1 Registrars appointed by 30 September 1838

Registrars being officers of a Poor Law Union		
Medical officers	416	
Relieving officers	500	
Other officers	105	
Sub-total		1,021
Registrars not being officers of a Poor Law Union		
In medical profession	111	
In other professions	262	
In trade	437	
Not included above	362	
Sub-total		1,172
Total		2,193

Note: For purposes of discussion in the text we have had to assume that men were not accredited with more than one occupation, other than registrar.

Source: Taken from *First Annual Report of the Registrar General* (London, 1838), 4.

Table 2 Secondary occupations of registrars in Kent in 1851 and 1881

Registrars with no secondary occupations	16
Relieving officers	49
Retail or drink trades	20
Public offices such as overseers, collectors, clerks to public bodies	19
Accountants, house, estate, or insurance agents, or the like	15
Medical men, including two pharmacists	11
Various other occupations	15
No information or unemployed	8
Total	153

Note: The fact that some registrars reported more than one secondary occupation has been omitted from the analysis; there is also the possibility that some secondary occupations, such as positions as local officials, were not reported on their census schedules.

Source: Calculated from D. Wright, *The Kentish census returns, 1801-1901* (Whitstable, Kent, 2003), 18-81, omitting those explicitly given as superintendent registrars, marriage registrars, or assistant registrars.

Against that proportion, 16 appear to have had no other occupation. Many of the secondary occupations were, like those of Moore and Reeve, 'sub-professional', land/house/estate agents for example; or holders of minor public offices, such as rate and tax collectors; or were involved in retailing or the drink trade. Only a handful could be described as fully professional, being doctors, but—perhaps significantly—none were lawyers.

Conclusion

Civil registration has been well studied in terms of how the GRO was run internally and how it was buffeted by intellectual debates and inter-departmental rivalries.⁴⁶ We know much less about how it operated at a local level. It is important to recognise that, along with the co-joint Poor Law Board and its unions, registration represented an important new departure in the relationship between central government and local institutions and administrators. It was not entirely unprecedented since, for example, Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue were government departments operating locally. However, the poor law and registration between them represented a massive increase in the amount of administration to be conducted in this way. Hitherto, government had generally relied for these purposes upon lords lieutenant, sheriffs and magistrates in quarter sessions (with their clerks), or on similar individuals acting as commissioners in such fields as land tax collection. The landed classes were able to exert their influence on administrative geography in the period when the poor law unions were being set up, as demonstrated by the example of Oxfordshire.⁴⁷ After this, the aristocracy and gentry were to decline in administrative importance, but only with the setting up of county and local councils towards the end of the century was there a new structure of local government with which central government departments could work. The registration service was influenced, and still is influenced, by having been established during the half century or so separating two very different types of central-local relationship.

How does our microscopic local view enrich the picture from national sources? First and foremost, it sets civil registration in the context of nineteenth-century career patterns in local public administration, introducing a class of person who had no legal training but knew how the law operated, and who often had a range of technical skills in, for example, surveying or accountancy. Such people might serve as the first port of call for their own small communities on all quasi-legal matters. Secondly, our local study reminds us that boards of guardians, as well as exercising patronage in their own right, could be channels for more traditional forms of patronage. Squires, even bankrupt ones, could still pull strings. Thirdly, we find that our board of guardians, once its first clerk had died, became almost slapdash in its exercise of supervision over registration, not formally appointing its superintendent registrar, allowing Moore to continue in office despite his bankruptcy, and allowing at least one death to be registered by an unappointed 'registrar *pro tem*.'

Finally, it may also be useful to point out that it is not difficult to identify registrars and superintendent registrars and the bounds of their districts by referring to trade directories, and sometimes also to family history society publications. Their signatures also occur in all the census enumerators' books for their districts. The survival of the minutes of poor law guardians is less certain, and, as noted, may not even be full enough to contain a record of all appointments, let alone any significant references to day-to-day matters. Beyond this the local population historian must rely on vestry records and

scattered references in a range of documents, such as those used for our account of Moore and Reeve and for Barbara Woollings' account of her enumerator ancestor.⁴⁸

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NOTES

1. See, for example, D. Mills and K. Schürer eds, *Local communities in the Victorian census enumerators' books* (Oxford, 1996), chapters 2 and 4. There is also a good profile of an individual enumerator by one of his descendants in B. Woollings, 'An Orsett census enumerator', *Local Population Studies*, 56 (1996), 54-9. Perhaps the present article might stimulate into activity family historians with registrar ancestors.
2. Our original literature search revealed nothing comparable to what is offered here, despite including all previous numbers of *Local Population Studies* – not just articles, but also the literature reviews. However, 'The new registration service', *Local Population Studies*, 38 (1987), 54-60 and 'The new registration service (part two)', *Local Population Studies*, 39 (1987), 54-64, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the introduction of civil registration, contain useful information, as does R. W. Ambler, 'Civil registration and baptism: popular perceptions of the 1836 Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages', *Local Population Studies*, 39 (1987), 24-31. Subsequently we have found or had brought to our attention: Audrey Collins, 'Our payment is but trifling', *Ancestors*, 43 (March 2006), 42-7; M. J. Lodey 'The introduction of civil registration: a case study from Norfolk', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 20 (1981), 223-31; and Peter B. Park, 'Over-registration of births and deaths in the 1840s', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 25 (1996), 265-71.
3. Readers, however, may be interested in referring to Olive Anderson, 'The incidence of civil marriage in Victorian England and Wales', *Past and Present*, 69 (1975), 50-87; Roderick Floud and Pat Thane, 'The incidence of civil marriage in Victorian England and Wales', *Past and Present*, 84 (1979), 146-54; Olive Anderson, 'The incidence of civil marriage in Victorian England and Wales: a rejoinder', *Past and Present*, 84 (1979), 155-62; and Michael Anderson, 'Marriage patterns in Victorian Britain: an analysis based on registration district data for England and Wales, 1861', *Journal of Family History*, 1 (1976), 55-78.
4. An Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages in England [17 August 1836], 6 & 7 Will. IV. c.86. Parts of this Act, later Acts, and related regulations were published in the articles cited in n. 2 above entitled, 'The new registration service' and 'The new registration service (part two)'.
5. The National Archives (hereafter TNA) RG 27/1. History of the census of 1841, 3.
6. *Report of the Committee appointed by the Treasury to inquire into certain questions connected with the taking of the census*, BPP 1890 LVIII.13 (C.6071), 4. It can also be said that Ogle had a very poor view of both enumerators and the clerks in the Central Office. See M. Drake, 'The census 1801-1891', in E.A. Wrigley ed., *Nineteenth-century society: essays in the use of quantitative methods for the study of social data* (Cambridge, 1972), 24, 26.
7. For a summary of the setting up of poor law unions see V.D. Lipman, *Local government areas, 1834-1945* (Oxford, 1949), 42-54.

8. This power was probably mainly used in cases of local disputes since, given the number of appointments, it seems unlikely that the GRO carried out many unsolicited enquiries.
9. First Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages in England (London, 1838), 4. Hereafter cited as First ARR.
10. An Act to amend the Law relating to the Registration of Births and Deaths in England, and to consolidate the Law respecting the Registration of Births and Deaths at Sea. [7 August 1874] 37 & 38 Vict. c.88.
11. 'New registration service', 55, and 'New registration service (part two)', 59; and Collins, 'Our payments', 45. The case brought against a Norfolk woman in 1838 for refusing to register the birth of a child within six weeks is reported by both Lodey, 'Introduction', 226-7, and 'New registration service', 57-9. These articles contain other examples of various prosecutions for malpractice on the part of the public or registration staff. The confusion about the relationship between Anglican baptisms and civil registration is highlighted in Ambler, 'Civil registration and baptism'.
12. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The population history of England 1541-1871: a reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981), 132-3.
13. TNA RG 27/5, Item 25. *Instructions to the various officers as to their duties in taking the census.*
14. Census of Great Britain, 1851, i, *Population Tables, 1851, Pt. 1. Number of inhabitants in 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851. Vol. II England and Wales, VIII-XI; Scotland; App. i, BPP 1852-53 LXXXVI, 8.*
15. *Fourteenth ARR* (London, 1855), 67.
16. An Act for Registering Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England. 6 & 7 Will. IV. c.86. § 11.
17. Lincolnshire Archives (hereafter LAO), PL 10/102/2.
18. LAO Navenby PAR 13/4/2.
19. Lincoln Central Library, MS. Diary of William Wright of Folkingham, Lincs., L921 WRI, Glass Cabinet.
20. *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1839.
21. LAO 2 THOR HAR 1/8/2.
22. CEB, Waddington, 1871: household of B.H. Thorold.
23. For example on 14 December 1836.
24. William White, *Directory of Lincolnshire* (Sheffield, 1856) 64. The minute appointing him has not been found.
25. The hearing was in the Birmingham bankruptcy court on 29 August 1867. His property was auctioned and he was discharged 17 March 1868: LAO Exley 27/30; TNA B 6/123.
26. The references for these copies are LAO MISC DON 1247/1 for 1831 and LAO MISC DON 1247/2 for 1841.
27. LAO LCC Wills 1838/362.
28. LAO PL 10/102/1.
29. In 1850 the average annual salary for these officers across 604 unions was £82: Sir George Nicholls, *A history of the English poor law in connection with the state of the country and the condition of the people*, 2, AD 1714-1853 (London, 1904), 412.
30. LAO THOR HAR 1/3/7.
31. LAO KQS Lincoln Turnpike Trust.
32. M. Tarrant, *The Hammonds of Bassingham* (privately printed, 1984). Copy in Lincoln Central Library.
33. In the LPSS Spring Conference Report, 2007, 'The new poor law 1834-1908: regional and local perspectives', *Local Population Studies*, 78 (2007), 13.
34. For example, plentiful comments were recorded in the Town Books for Melbourn, Cambridgeshire, which cover this period: Cambridgeshire Record Office, P/117 Town Book 2, 71, 146, 158, 170 and Town Book 3, 65, 77, 83, 114, 125, 135, 148. On overseers see K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and belonging: community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 2006), chapter 6.
35. *First ARR*, 60.
36. *First ARR*, 65.
37. Report of the Committee appointed by the Treasury, 1.

38. *Fifty-fifth ARR* (London, 1894), xxviii. Alterations to registration districts and sub-districts for the whole country are given year by year in the *ARR*s.
39. Within the city the 15 ancient parishes remained as enumeration districts down to 1901 despite the growth of Lincoln's population from 7,197 in 1801 to 48,784 in 1901: D.R. Mills and R.C. Wheeler eds, *Historic Town Plans of Lincoln, 1610-1920*, Lincoln Record Society, 92 (2004), 12; and *Census Reports*. For the country areas, a comparison of the poor law union sections of the Lincoln entries can be found in, for example, William White, *Directory of Lincolnshire* (Sheffield, 1856 and 1892).
40. R. Ratcliffe and A. Ratcliffe, *The registration districts of Lincolnshire in the nineteenth century* (Lincolnshire Family History Society, 1990).
41. White, *1856 Directory*, 240-1, 288, 398, 670, 842.
42. Lodey, 'Introduction', 223-9.
43. Park, 'Over-registration'. Park checked some of the spurious events and found that the records were not annotated by the GRO after the prosecutions, nor locally (p. 270). This raises the question as to what happened to the incorrect statistics of births and deaths produced by the recording of spurious events.
44. William Fawcett was a poor law surgeon in the Binbrook district of the Louth Union: D.R. Mills, 'The Fawcetts of Lincolnshire and the development of the medical profession', in C. Sturman ed., *Lincolnshire people and places: essays in memory of Terence R. Leach* (Lincoln, 1996), 162-7. Attractions of union work included the regularity of income and the prospect of a pension.
45. D. Wright, *The Kentish census returns, 1801-1901* (Whitstable, Kent, 2003), 9. Wright uses the term deputy registrar to denote a registrar of births and deaths as opposed to a superintendent (or marriage) registrar.
46. E. Higgs, *Life, death and statistics: civil registration, censuses and the work of the General Register Office, 1836-1952* (Hatfield, 2004).
47. B.K. Song, 'The formation of the poor law unions in Oxfordshire', *English Historical Review*, 114 (1999), 314-38.
48. Woollings, 'Orsett enumerator'.