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THE EARLIEST PARISH REGISTERS OF THE DIOCESE OF CANTERBURY: SOME OBSERVATIONS, QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS

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It is a truth, perhaps not quite universally acknowledged, that anyone in search of a pedigree must be in need of a good parish register. Such registers are amongst some of the largest single sources of historical documents from the post-mediaeval period. In England and Wales every one of some 11,000 parishes should have commenced recording baptisms, marriages and burials from 1538. The opening and subsequent parchment volumes, despite the ever-present traditional dangers of fire, theft, damp and vermin, still survive in their tens of thousands and are the mainstay of genealogy, without which many pedigrees would easily fail before the later 1700s.

What can the Diocese of Canterbury, as a discrete ecclesiastical jurisdiction, tell us about sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice in the commencing and maintaining of registers? There are problems concerning the (sometimes apparent) opening year of each parish's first register, with dates varying widely over several decades, despite governmental injunctions to the contrary, and whether that first register is an original, or a contemporary or later copy. The advent of the English Civil War saw at least a partial abandonment of formal entry-keeping in most parishes, again in spite of governmental injunctions. To what degree is that long-held statement wholly true? What sort of men were appointed as the 'Registers' to main the record-keeping in the 1650s, and what happened to marriage registration in that troubled decade once it had been taken out of ordained ministers' hands and placed into those of mayors, judges and other civil officers?

The Diocese of Canterbury covers the eastern two-thirds of the county (**Fig. 1**). The north-western corner parish is Rainham; the boundary then moves more or less southwards through Maidstone and on to Goudhurst; then follows the county boundary south-eastwards to Lydd, joins the Channel coast and follows it round to its extremity at Broadstairs; it then turns west and returns along the northern coastline back to Rainham, taking in the Isle of Sheppey as it proceeds. In this large and diverse area there are 270 ancient parishes of which 44 now have no register earlier than the Restoration year of 1660, and a few more whose early registers are defective, mutilated or otherwise illegible. This survey therefore assesses the information available from some 220 parishes scattered across the entire region.

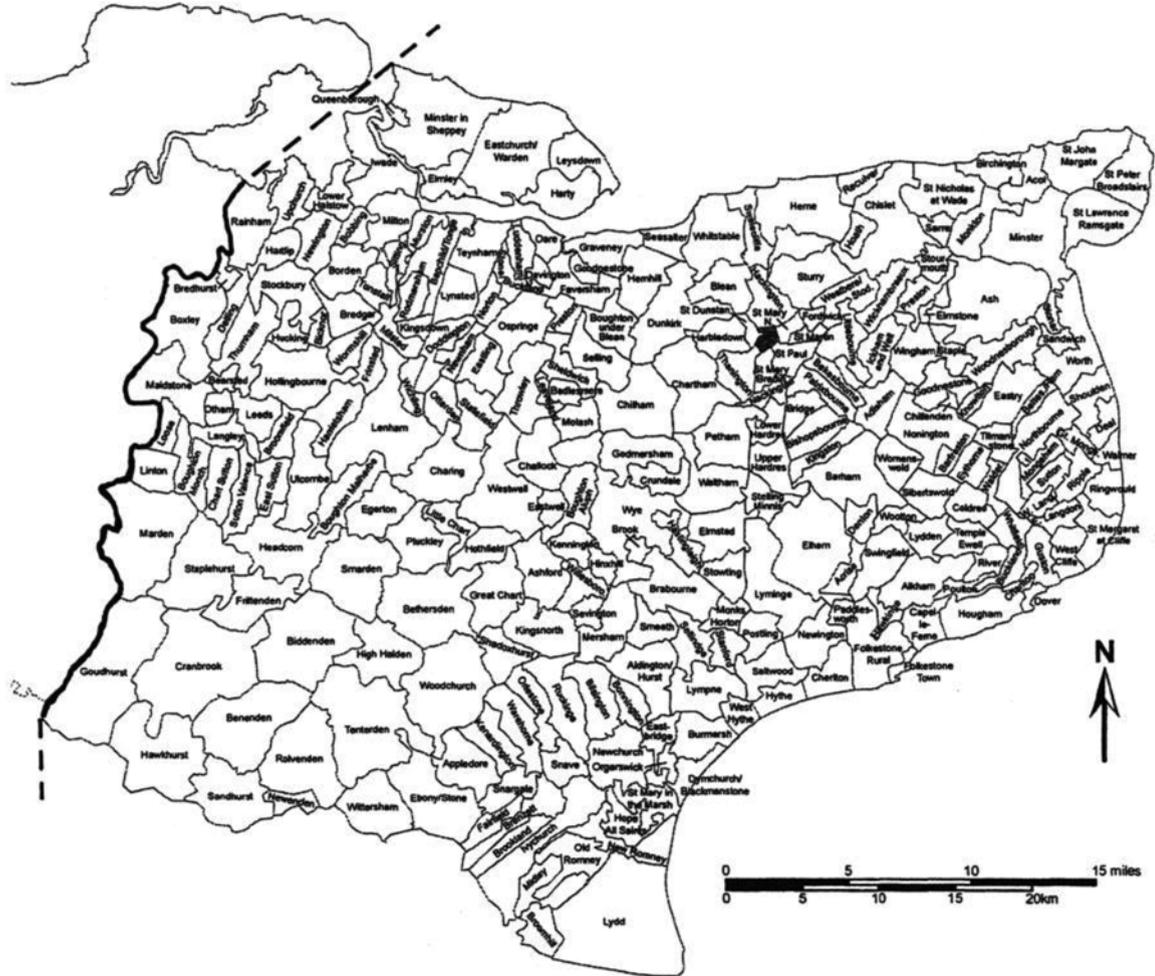


Fig. 1 The Parishes of Canterbury Diocese.

The Introduction of Parish Registers

In July 1535, Henry VIII, by virtue of the Act of Supremacy, appointed Thomas Cromwell (at that time Lord Privy Seal) to be his Vicar-General. In early life Cromwell had resided in the Low Countries and would doubtless have had knowledge of the baptismal registers introduced there by the Spanish clergy; now he would introduce (and at very little expense) a greatly improved scheme to secure the registration in his own country of baptisms, marriages and burials. The inevitable rumours and fears of a tax on the sacraments aroused widespread resentment, and this, along with fresh memories of popular risings against his opening steps in the suppression of the monasteries, led to a temporary withdrawal of the initial plan. A revision was drawn up by Cromwell on 5 September 1538 and sent to Thomas Cranmer on 30 September who issued his mandate for publication on 11 October. Item 12 of the royal injunction stated:

‘... That you and every parson vicare or curate within this diocese shall for every churche kepe one boke or registre wherein ye shall write the day and yere of every weddyng christening and burying made within yor parishe for your tyme, and so every man succeeding you lykewise. And shall there insert every persons name that shalbe so weddid christened or buried. And for the sauff kepinge of the same boke the parishe shalbe bonde to provide of these comen charges one sure coffer with two lockes and keys whereof the one to remayne with you, and the other with the said wardens, wherein the said boke shalbe laid upp. Whiche boke ye shall every Sunday take furthe and in the presence of the said wardens or one of them write and recorde in the same all the weddings christenynges and buryenges made the hole weke before ...’.

A fine of 3*s.* 4*d.* was to be levied on every occasion that this process was omitted, such monies going towards the reparation of the church.

Whispers of disapproval against ecclesiastical or general policy, now more or less tantamount to treason, did not preclude much resentment against the new registration order. The chief misconception was one of greater added expense, when in fact the purchase by the parish of a register book was all that was required – the additional duties and responsibilities connected with the maintaining of it costing in time, but not in money.

Not all parishes by any means started recording baptisms, marriages and burials in 1538, and too many by far (as we shall see) began considerably later. Early concerns about the safe-keeping of registers and their due maintenance included a council of 1547 which reissued almost verbatim the registration injunctions of Cromwell, also including the redirection of the fines into the parish poor-box. On 15 November 1547 a bill proposing a record depository in every shire received its first reading. Subsequent concerns led to regular enquiries in succeeding years, including the reinforcement of the 1538 and 1547 Acts in the first year of Elizabeth, and an article of 1559 requesting that a true presentment be made of how many persons had died in the parish since the feast of St John the Baptist 1558 and the same feast in the following year, and showing a clear distinction between men, women and children.

Archbishop Parker’s articles for the Province of Canterbury, promulgated in 1560, included (at Article 10) directions for the parson, vicar or curate, with the

churchwardens, to make and exhibit copies of the names and surnames of all persons married, christened and buried within their said parishes, under the subscription of their hands, noting the day and year out of the original register kept in their custody. This was elaborated upon by Archbishop Parker in his Easter visitation of 1561, where he required the registers to be copied from Easter to Easter, and to make a particular bill of register on whole sheets of paper. Parishes were to give the names of all those who had been buried, christened or married, to declare how many of the dead were householders, and to cause the same to be exhibited at Canterbury on or before the Wednesday after the next Trinity Sunday.

On 9 March 1563 a bill was first read which authorised every archbishop and bishop 'to erect one Office of Registership of all the Church Books to be kept in every diocese'. Therein was it ordered that annual transcripts of all parochial registers (the so-called 'Bishop's Transcripts') were to be sent to the diocesan centre, and also that copies were to be made of all 'former church books of 24 yeeres continuance already passed or thereabouts' and the entries written up into 'great deacent books of parchment'.

In order that expenses might be covered, the bill provided that the parents of every child baptised, having lands to the value of £40 or goods to the value of £5, should pay *1d.* at the christening; that every man of like possessions should pay *1d.* upon marriage and *2d.* at the burial of his wife; that every woman of like possessions should pay *1d.* at the burial of her husband; and that every such man or woman should pay *1d.* at the burial of a son, daughter or household servant. These fees were to be paid to the churchwardens and transmitted annually to the diocesan registrar.

Widespread opposition on the part of the clergy, doubtless jealous of their long-held rights and privileges, ensured that the 1563 bill was rapidly dropped, as was another for a general registry, arranged under counties, propounded by Lord Treasurer Burghley in 1590 and thwarted by the influence of Archbishop John Whitgift. But these two administrative failures did prepare the way for the adoption of a scheme of general registration to be adopted in 1597. On October 25 of that year a constitution issued by the convocation of the archbishop, bishops and clergy of the province of Canterbury, and approved by Queen Elizabeth under the great seal, directed the more careful keeping of parish registers, now pronounced as being of the greatest utility (*quorum permagnus usus est*).

Thus did parliament request better safe-keeping of what were clearly and increasingly being perceived as priceless national assets. The registers were to be kept more efficiently in parchment books, and parchment copies were to be made of the extant paper registers. For the prevention of negligence and deception in the keeping of the registers, all entries of the previous week were to be read out openly and distinctly by the minister on Sunday at the conclusion of either matins or evensong. The names of the two churchwardens and minister were to be appended to every page upon its completion, and copies of the last year's entries were to be sent annually within a month of Easter, without any fee, to the diocesan registrar.

The 1597 constitution was embodied in the 70th Canon of 1603 which reiterated that each parish was to procure at its own expense a parchment book into which were to be copied the former paper registers 'so far as the ancient books thereof can be procured, but especially since the beginning of the reign of the late Queen'. The

registers were now to be kept in 'one sure Coffe with three Locks and Keys', in the several respective custodies of the minister and churchwardens. The provision for public weekly reading was abandoned, but the order for the transmission of Bishop's Transcripts retained, now to be transmitted within a month after New Year's Day (25th March).

The survival of the Bishop's Transcripts has been extremely variable. For reasons as yet not wholly clarified, Canterbury Diocese (along with Leicester, Lincoln, Surrey and perhaps others) preserves its main series from more than a generation before most other counties, that is from around the time of the 1563 Bill or even a little earlier. They stand in stark contrast to dioceses such as London, where there is nothing before 1800. This early date may well explain why they are on paper, and not the regulatory parchment. Most east Kent parishes open their main archidiaconal series (covering Michaelmas to Michaelmas) between 1559 and 1564, and, despite a few early common gaps (mostly pre-1570), continue right down to beyond the advent of civil registration in 1837.

But, and perhaps uniquely, there is a second consistory series (covering Lady Day to Lady Day), starting around 1565-1570 for some parishes and between 1603 and 1611 for the remainder, again all running down well beyond 1837.

Some sixty parishes exempt from the archidiaconal jurisdiction have just the one series, and despite inevitable losses of some of the carefully transmitted individual pieces of paper and the fact that some returns cover only half-years, the two series stand as a supremely valuable source which frequently predates the earliest surviving register by many decades.

Scattered references to what must have been widespread early teething troubles may be found, of which the following are included by Woodruff in the introduction to his *An Inventory of the Parish Registers*. In 1594 the churchwardens of Temple Ewell reported that 'there hath been no Register Book before our time neither for christenings nor burials, but since Michaelmas 1593, which we have kept since' although today the registers actually open in 1581. At Newchurch in 1569 the churchwardens responded to Archbishop Parker's *Article of Enquiry* by stating that, 'The Register Book is not well kept because we have no Vicar continually dwelling among us', and the wardens at Teynham in 1581 said that 'Our Register Book is not kept because our Vicar is absent.'

More predictable poor register-keeping might arise through the keeping of only occasional rough notes, all pending proper writing-up: the churchwardens of Alkham in 1593 declared that, 'We know not whether our Register Book be duly kept, nor whether the Minister do enter the marriages, christenings and burials therein as required, for that our Minister would not bring his key to open the chest by the space of 12 or 13 weeks together'. At Boughton Monchelsea the wardens lamented in 1594 that, 'Our register Book hath been duly and orderly kept since our Minister came unto us, but before that it was mangled and many things cut out by whom we know not'. Finally, the first register of Luddenham has a note after the baptisms in 1563 that 'from this present yere until 1560 can be found nothing remembered nor written', after which there are no more entries until the latter year (CCA: U3/130/1/1).

The new system under way

By the end of the Tudor period, then, it can be seen that most teething-troubles of the new system had been seemingly disposed of: each parish was now carefully recording (despite many late starts) the three types of events in the correct parchment books, securely locked away when not in use, and sending carefully written-up copies to a central registry for safe-keeping. Officialdom might smile benignly as its precepts were now properly obeyed, but certain problems, unrectified from the earliest days and soon to pass from human memory, could now never be resolved.

In or after 1538 a parish would subscribe to the new system by obtaining a register book in which to record baptisms, marriages and burials. Cromwell had not prescribed its nature, and therefore a paper volume was the choice of the vast majority because of its relative cheapness over parchment. A few parishes had nobler beginnings and chose the more durable material, even if not in customary form – Brenchley and Nursted in west Kent (Rochester Diocese) procured parchment strips or membranes which were then stitched together to make a decidedly classically antique-looking roll.

Most parishes maintained a single volume in which were recorded the three types of event either in a single continuous sequence, such as at Acrise, Alkham, Capelle-Ferne, Nackington and Tilmanstone, until the volume was full and a successor commenced or, much more commonly, three distinct sequences in one book, with staggered starting pages, but often jumbled up and entered on odd pages (sometimes upside down or back to front) as one type of event outnumbered the other two and space became at a premium. But even when the second volume was commenced, it might initially be only for one type of event, the other two catching up only when the first volume was completely full. Entries of one type interlined (or entered in the margin) in the sequence of another are not unknown. Larger parishes, perhaps with additional funds available or overseen by a tidy-minded clerk, might start a separate volume for each event, and indeed at Maidstone burials were kept in separate volumes from 1559 (KHLIC: P241/1/E1-2). Some parishes started as they meant to carry on but were quickly disappointed: the opening baptismal pages for 1572-1574 at tiny rural Bicknor are carefully ruled to show every month, but with many nil returns the plan was quickly jettisoned.

Which came first – the parish register entry or the Bishop's Transcript? In some parishes a day-book or other form of daily recording was used to record events, whilst in others loose pieces of papers were utilised. Later on, at some time convenient to the clerk or minister, the entries were formally written up into the permanent register, perhaps monthly, quarterly or annually, depending on the total numbers of entries. Many parishes display different sets of uniform handwriting, reflecting sporadic rather than regular record-keeping, and sometimes punctuated by interlined entries which must have been initially overlooked. Some entries omit the forename or surname, or bear an incomplete date, leaving spaces on the page, and so suggesting that the information was unknown at the time of writing – compelling evidence that the entry was made at some considerable time after the actual event. Loose sheets bearing odd events must have gone astray, sometimes to be recovered, and sometimes not. Where the parish register was written up, perhaps annually, it is possible that the Bishop's Transcript was made at the same time.

There are cases where the latter contain entries not in the register, thus offering evidence for the transcript being compiled from some daily account rather than from the register itself. The differences between the register and the transcript may therefore sometimes be ascribed to both the register and the transcript being copied from the day-book at the same time, or, probably more frequent, to simple errors occurring in the highly fallible copying process – a grievous problem which has exercised the minds of textual critics of classical texts for centuries.

More registers than might be expected open in 1538, the earliest possible year, and one which has attracted much interest. In 1831 enquiries were made to all clergymen as to the condition, date and number of volumes in their care (British Library Addl. MS 9355), subsequently printed in 1833 as the *Parish Register Abstract*. Its findings are not considered wholly reliable, with an error margin of up to perhaps 20 per cent, a figure easily evidenced by the statement that 40 registers opened before 1538, most of which were later proved to be either cases of casual rough entries added into the beginning of the register upon purchase, or simple (and very easy) instances of misread dates. The *Abstract* further claimed that 772 registers opened in the year 1538 (a figure which was reduced within a few decades to around 650), and that 1,822 out of a grand total of 10,984 volumes were opened between 1538-1558.

The First Paper Registers

Once the original paper register been copied up neatly in or around 1597-1598 into a new parchment volume, and now seemingly displayed the cachets of completeness, greater legibility and permanence, it would naturally be presumed as redundant and so discarded. It is the sad lesson of history that this was the majority practice, for today just a dozen such paper books have survived. Considering their great rarity and textual importance, the paper survivors are now itemised along with some comments on their make-up and contents.

Biddenden, 1538-1597 (KHLC: P26/1/1). Written neatly in a single sequence, and foliated until 1572. The volume displays some regular half-page size gaps for each month of the year, not filled up, perhaps because of over-anticipation of many entries. The second volume is of parchment and covers 1559-1688 (KHLC: P26/1/2). It is headed ‘This booke hitherto from the begynninge of her Ma’ties Raigne that now is agreeth with our olde Regester’. Typically it is signed as a true copy by the rector and churchwardens on every page, and then carries on from 1599. In this parish, therefore, we may see the first two decades of the paper register which were not copied up, and then the next forty years existing in two versions.

Brenzett, 1538-1598 (KHLC: P46/1/1). Entries are in English in three sequences, a little untidily. The heading ‘The true copie of the Register ... 6 October 23 Henry’ suggests a predecessor, and indeed the rubric continues ‘... and for that the other Booke was badly kept as it was most evident to be sene. Therefore I take upon me two Amende sertayne places that were a mys leaving nothinge out that was [...] two be set in to this booke begynninge the yeare at our Lady Daye. By me Thomas Barrett, Curate’. Uniquely, the parchment copy register for this parish also starts in 1538 (KHLC: P46/1/2).

- Brookland, 1538-?1557 (KHLC: P49/1/1). A single sequence of entries in English, with no years indicated.
- Canterbury St Andrew, 1538-1637 (CCA: U3/5/1/1). The heading declares it to have been made in 1538, but after a false start of just one page for that year, it resumes properly, although somewhat out of order, in 1564. The volume is then in a single hand until 1593, and this is consonant with Woodruff's statement that it is a fair copy by William Swift who became rector in 1592.
- Charing, 1590-1686 (KHLC: P78/1/1). The opening year is attributable to the burning of the church in 1590 and the consequent loss of an earlier register. The contents are in English in three sequences.
- Chislet, 1538-1563 (CCA: U355/1/A1). Disarticulated, and written in Latin, with some short runs of numbered entries. Woodruff noted some lost leaves and a few others added subsequently. The register is headed *Regis Henrici 8avo 30mo 4 kalendas octobris*. The second register survivor claims to be 'those baptisms from 20 April 1562 until 12 November 1598' (CCA: U3/55/A2). This is the Tudor parchment copy, all in one neat hand, whose scribe has presumably ignored the contents of the first paper register but copied a now lost second one.
- Hawkhurst, 1579-1670 (KHLC: P178/1/1). A first paper register has not survived. The present second (parchment) register was bought by Edward Woodgate the churchwarden for 36s. in 1598 to start copying in 1550 from the now lost paper book. It explicitly states (KHLC: P178/1/2) that the volume is only a transcript from two paper register books, one starting in 1550 and the other in 1579. A further comment warns that the two churchwardens who annually signed the parchment transcript cannot possibly have been in office for 48 years. A modern note, inserted at 1643, advises that the transcript has omissions and that the paper register has a fuller record, seemingly because entries continued to be made in the paper register after the purchase of the 1598 book.
- Little Chart (KHLC: P82/1/1) is disarticulated and now catalogued in four sections. The first has scrappy entries 1538-1563; the second from 1562-1590 made by the parson Nicholas Champion; the third from 1560-1562 made by the pastor Francis Lindly; and the fourth a series of accounts.
- Maidstone, 1542-1553 (KHLC: P241/1/A1). Dated from '3 Sep 34 Henry'. There are 218 pages in a book of considerable size displaying three sequences in English, all signed by Sir John Porter, the parish priest until 1549, and then by his successor Thomas Pyne. The general impression is of great tidiness, and the fact that the 'signatures' are incorporated neatly into the text rather than free-standing, suggests that the volume is a copy and not the original.
- Minster-in-Sheppey. In 1921 Woodruffe listed a first paper volume covering 1548-1593. This seems not to have survived.
- Seasalter is a curious and interesting remnant, presently mistaken for the Bishop's Transcripts and so housed with them at KHLC, Maidstone. It is headed *The Regester of the Parishe' of Sessalt'* and consists of four folios on watermarked paper, all in the same hand. There are three sequences of events, in English, covering 1555-1561, and so antedating the first parchment register (in the case of marriages and burials), by a dozen years. There

are several final blank pages, implying that it must be a draft transcript, subsequently abandoned, of a lost first paper register.

Staplehurst, 1538-1596 (KHLC: P347/1/1). The first paper register of this parish, like that of Maidstone, is a substantial book and indeed a precious survival. It has supplementary pages for 1622-1643 with a mediaeval paste-down and later indexes. There is a single sequence for all three events, the first, a burial, dated 29 September 1538. In the 1540s each succeeding year starts, and is marked out, on that same Michaelmas date, seemingly a mere repetition of the arbitrary date of the first entry. The openings of the reigns of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth are similarly highlighted.

The second parchment book (copied in 1598) opens in 1558. The fact that the paper 1538 book still survives is irrefutable proof that the scribe of the second elected to dispense with the first two decades when copying began. The Staplehurst paper register may be compared with its parchment copy with considerable profit, not least for the types of error which occurred as thousand of entries were laboriously transmitted from one volume to another. Dates were converted from Roman to Arabic numerals as, in this case, an extremely modern-looking transcript was produced. Occasional editing is noticeable as in 'having no certayne dwelling place' becoming 'vagrant'.

An exact collation of several hundred entries in 1561 and 1562 reveals mostly predictable types of error, but not all accidental ones. There are myriad different (as we would categorise them) spellings, such as Maria to Mary, Johan to Jone, Payne to Paine, and Owtryd to Outrid, the rewritten Christian names now shedding their original Latinity. Of more concern are the omissions: the loss of one baptismal entry is easily attributed to the preceding entry bearing the same parents and surname (the classicist's *saut du même au même*), but more worrying are the many omissions of epithets such as 'baptised at home', 'from Ulcombe', 'his owne child', '10 years of age', 'being but a ladde', 'a lustie yongman', 'late before decessed', and 'the son of Richard Water'. It does not look as if all of these omissions are deliberate in order to produce a transcript with neat line-endings, as the copy has many entries running over onto a second line. Carelessness, perhaps combined with the absence of checking, will account for most. Elsewhere, others have noticed the suppression of Catholic sentiments, such as 'on whose soul God have mercy' and the like.

Stone-in-Oxney, 1538- c.1600. A single sequence, written in English.

The First Parchment Registers

It must therefore be stated emphatically that, with just the above-mentioned exceptions, searches between 1538 and 1598 will be made in an Elizabethan parchment copy register, made in around 1597-1598, of the original paper one which would have started in or a little after 1538, or perhaps some good few years later than that. The 1597 injunction was generally obeyed – but more often in the breach than the observance in that the potentially lengthy and arduous copying process was commenced with the entries at the beginning of the Queen's reign in 1558 rather than at the beginning of the system two decades earlier in 1538.

Larger parishes with many entries annually thus made immediate and considerable savings in time, parchment and money. In general this transcript will be in a fair and regular hand, probably by a clerk or paid copyist rather than the minister or a churchwarden, the latter two of whom normally sign off the work at its conclusion in 1598, and occasionally on every page.

How long did the 1598 parchment register last after the initial copying had been completed? Various factors will have influenced its duration: the physical size of the volume and the number of folios; how tidily entries were recorded and whether all in one sequence or in separate sections; and of course the size of the population and the numbers of entries to be written in. A large number of first registers run well down into the later 1600s, as many again into the 1700s and not a few right down to 1812 when printed registers of a common design were introduced for baptisms and burials, therefore necessitating the purchase of new books.

In east Kent 35 registers open in 1538 (a few not for all three types of event) – some 15 per cent of all parishes. What can be observed from these earliest beginnings? Cranmer's mandate was dated 11 October 1538, but how long did this take to reach the parishes? Although it was not retrospective, Staplehurst (as noted above) has its first entry on 29 September, so is perhaps simply an earlier entry tidily entered as it lay to hand. Woodchurch states (KHLC: P400/1/1) that baptisms date from 3 October 1538 (entries illegible), marriages from 6 October (first entry 7 October) and burials from 2 October (first entry 3 October), and although of course these may have been entered retrospectively from rough notes, they do at least show that authority was being obeyed from the very beginning. A good many other parishes also have their first events dating from early in October 1538, and some may now be noted.

Adisham is inscribed 'in the year 1538 and so forward' (CCA: U3/70/1/1). Sixty years of entries now follow in a neat and regular hand, after which there is a smooth transition where entries from 1598 onwards follow, generally in a different hand. This process may be commonly observed (Elmsted, Harrietsham, Kingsnorth, Rodmersham, Sturry, Waltham and a great many others).

At Birchington, as elsewhere, no especial comments are made, the register merely showing six decades of entries, arranged neatly in three sequences (CCA: U3/76/1/1). Eastwell is similar save that there is just the one sequence (KHLC: P130/1/1). The Willesborough volume claims 'those baptised from 1538 and forwardes' (KHLC: P396/1/1) and differs slightly in that baptisms have at least one change of hand before 1598, marriages are uniform throughout, and burials display several hands over the six decades.

Canterbury St George (CCA: U3/3/1/1) has a note on the flyleaf explaining the problems it has encountered:

The minister and church Wardens of the parrish of St George within the Cittie of Canterburye finding certain Records of Christenings, mariages and burials bearing date from the yeare of oure Lorde 1538 and the firste daye of October in the 30 yeare of oure Soveraig' Lord Kinge henrye the eight have thought it necessarie to Coppye oute the same and so to proceede accordinge to the st'ute in that behalf Provided but findinge the saide records (some of them) Imperfectly Wrotten, and Confuzedlye bounde toghether, they could not so orderly proceade as they desired'. The next page adds 'A true Copie so neere as may be taken out of the Olde Register booke

How much editing and how many omissions occurred in making the untidy tidy?

At Elmsted the first register covers 1538 right down to 1812 when printed volumes were introduced. Again, the heading discloses that the first sixty years are ‘copied out of the old Register’ (CCA: U3/250/1/1). The baptisms, marriages and burials are in the usual three sequences, and must replicate the layout of the original – to disentangle an original composite sequence and reorder it as three separate ones would have been a large and futile task, when all that was required was to preserve what had been written down before. At Shadoxhurst the register was ‘... written out of old register and reduced into a better Order in Anno Dom’ 1598’ – again, one hopes without too much editing taking place (KHLC: P332/1/1).

Lyminge’s first register has suffered mishaps in that baptisms begin in 1544 and burials in 1538, but there are no marriages until 1655. Did some leaves perhaps fall out when this book was transferred at an early date to the British Library collections (BL: MS Addl 33732)? Milton Regis is very similar in having no marriages until 1622 (KHLC: P253/1/1), perhaps again through some physical accident – or were they from the beginning in a separate and now lost volume? At Ruckinge marriages and burials open in 1538 but the baptisms not until 1549 (KHLC: P311/1/1); were a few paper leaves lost some time before the register was copied (in this case in 1602)? It is hardly likely that there were no baptisms for over a decade. Examples of this kind could be multiplied considerably.

In preparation for the copying process at Old Romney the parson Kenelm Digby ‘Payed to Mr Thomas Man in Paternoster rowe bookbynder for this book of Lxxii leaves of parchment vi s. viii d. the thirde day of maye A(nno) 1598 et A(nno) Reg. Elizabeth 40’ (KHLC: P310/1/1). In it Digby stated that it was a true copy of christenings, marriages and burials from 16 September 1555 kept by Mr William Jumpe, then minister or curate, who in all his records ‘accompted the yeare to begin in Januarie until the year 1566, so that the yeares 1562 and 1565 conteyne XXten monthes a yeere. It behoveth therefore the searchers of the regester to be well advised therein, but for their helpes I have noted the trew date in the margen as I think’. Now Digby commented further on the difficulties of copying: ‘Here is also recorded in pap(er) at the beginning of the booke a copy of all the former recordes even from the begynninge so much as may be founde rightly dating the yeares in the margent neere as I can gesse, yet truly setting downe the substance as I find it’. He noted finally that the old records of Old Romney dated from 1 October 1538.

Otham’s paper register was copied onto parchment by the parson John Broome in 1598 ‘according to the canon in that behalfe published 40 Elizabeth’ (KHLC: P280/1/1A). He was nothing less than punctilious in how the result should be achieved and that the regulations should be exactly observed, listing three directives (which are also included at Eastling and Lenham):

- 1) *In the lower end of everie page or syde of a leafe a convenient space must be left wherein the names of the Minister Churchwardens and Sydesmen are to be subscribed;*
- 2) *Everie yeer certificates must be made of all Baptisms Marriages and Buryalls wch shall happen to bee in the sayd parish from Easter to Easter or from ye Annunciation to the Annunciation, and from March to March to the Commissarye;*
- 3) *This booke must be kept in a Chest wth three lockes and the keyes by the officers above named.*

The preliminaries to Sandwich St Mary state that the old register began at St Michael the Archangel 1538 and is now newly copied out 25 April 1598 (CCA: U3/1/1/1). Sandwich St Peter is similar, but copied 25 March 1598 (CCA: U312/1/1). Stourmouth's first register (CCA: U397/1/1) was bought for 8s. on 30 September 1538. At Teynham, when the 1598 copying process was complete, the last page was signed to this effect, signifying the completion of the legal requirement (CCA: U3/222/1/1). The vicar of Alkham, William Hull, and his two churchwardens signed at the foot of every page of the forty-year transcript (CCA: U3/267/1/A1).

This considerable number of 1538 registers affords the opportunity of observing whether English or Latin was the preferred language for ministers and parish clerks. Latin was not wholly abandoned in favour of English in certain parliamentary records until 1733, although many classes of other records did so considerably earlier. Of the 35 registers beginning in 1538 (seven paper and 28 parchment), only three are in Latin: Birchington, which continued thus until well into the 1600s, Chislet until 1562 when a new volume was commenced in the vernacular, and Harrietsham which retained Latin until at least the Civil War. It may also be noted that many other parishes, although written in English, retained Latin for display material such as headings, dates and regnal years.

Registers Opening in 1558 or Later

As has been stated, less diligent clerks would have interpreted the 1597 Act in their own way and copied the first paper register from 1558 rather than 1538. Some 69 registers in the Diocese begin around this latter date, twice as many as those opening in 1538, and so an indication that the majority of clerks chose the easier task. Some open baldly with hardly a title or preliminary description, sometimes with just the single word 'Baptisms' and nothing more.

As in the case of the 1538 openers, parishes were keen to emphasise that they had been assiduous in copying: Fairfield recorded that matters had been undertaken 'so neere as they can be collected out of the former bookes which have bin kepte there' (KHLC: P141/1/1), and Thanington that 'The which said Register booke is trulye collected and gathered out of the Registere bookes of the said parish' (CCA: U3/126/1/1).

The splendid opening calligraphic page of Cranbrook's first register (KHLC: P100/1/15), which states that it begins in August 1559, explains what has been done and who has done it:

These were first written in a book of Paper appointed for that purpose and so continued from the yeare above written unto the First day of December Anno Domini 1598 at which tyme all that were written before until then were taken oute of the sayed booke of Paper and placed into this Booke of Parchment by commandement from authorities for the better continuance of the same unto Posteritie ... The Pastor or minister then of this parrish of Cranbrook was William Eddy in artib' magister of the universitie of Cambridge and borne in the Cittie of Bristoll whoe wroat or coppied it owte this Register to the end it mighte more faithfullie donne with his owne hand.

Other registers have shorter but similar preambles, in which they state that they are conforming to the 1597 Act by making a true copy, adding the date from which the copy commences, and will now continue – Blean, Canterbury St Mary Bredman, Eastling, Great Chart, Littlebourne, Molash, Newenden and Thanington are some of the many examples.

Although the Act stipulated that copying should proceed from either ‘the beginning’, that is 1538, or at least from the beginning of the Queen’s reign in 1558, many parishes have the first entry dated a year or two either side. Hollingbourne states that it starts from 1 February 1556 (KHLIC: P187/1/1), and indeed the first baptism is on that date; Hernhill, Ickham and Leeds start in 1557, and so does Borden although the register claims to date from 1555. Others, such as Chillenden, Deal, Eastry and Eythorne, start in 1559. It is probable, especially in the smaller parishes, that many of these ‘late starts’ will reflect the fact that there were no entries in every year, but unless the register explicitly states the date from which it begins, certainty is not possible. Bishopsbourne copied from 1558, but recorded that it had no baptisms 1558-1562 or marriages 1558-1560, while burials do not open until 1571 (CCA: U3/166/1/A1). A good many other parishes have slightly staggered starting dates, such as Crundale, Rolvenden and Wickham-breaux.

What of registers with more widely varying starting dates? These are not easy to explain satisfactorily. Some ministers may have been too busy or too anti-authority to implement what would be a possibly demanding and certainly continuous duty. One long-held view is that in Tudor England news from London, even of a national nature, would have travelled slowly and reached different parishes at different times, but even a casual glance at the parish map hardly bears this out. In the south-western corner, which includes some large and prosperous parishes and towns, sample dates are Biddenden and Staplehurst (1538), Tenterden (declared as complete from 1544), Hawkhurst and Wittersham (1550), Benenden, Cranbrook, Goudhurst and Marden (1558-59), Rolvenden (1561) and Sandhurst (1563; ‘The register book of christenings, marriages and burials from 18 October 1563. Engrossed into this parchment book according to the old register in 1598’; KHLIC: P321/1/1). For the most part these parishes have many entries annually from the very beginning, so does this presuppose a first paper register already full after the initial decade or so which was either lost or simply not copied?

Other late starters are Maidstone (1541), Staple (1544), Bredhurst (1545, copied out 10 October 1598), Wootton (1546), Minster-in-Sheppey (1568), Walmer (1560), Ospringe (1561), Canterbury Cathedral (1564), Elham and Hythe (1566) and Thanet St Peter (1582). These parishes are highly variable in population size: in the case of the larger ones at least, are the lost years to be attributed to human negligence, the first few pages of a fragile paper register having come adrift, or the loss of a complete volume? Elham is entitled ‘All such christenings, marriages and burials as may possibly be found from 25 March 1566, the which book was taken and written out of all the register books that could be found by us’ (CCA: U3/32/1/1). Most others make no comment about the opening year.

This in summary, then, is the position in east Kent, and is doubtless not too dissimilar from many other dioceses, with the caveat that survivals have generally been better in the south of England than in the north, and far better than in Wales.

Today, the vast majority of parish registers whose first entry is more than one hundred years old are now safely preserved in record offices – and not before time, for there have been signal losses in the Diocese, even since Woodruff made his survey in 1922.

A final word on the transmission of texts. It is of course not only early parish registers where the reader may have to discern the hand of the author behind one or more copyings of an original autograph. Classicists have wrestled with this problem since the Renaissance; the history of textual criticism is rich and fascinating, and one which has exercised some of the greatest literary and critical minds in trying to recover the words of the author as first written down. The transition from manuscript to print, as has been indicated, in no way lessened a problem which is still firmly with us: many (and some famous) printed texts have suffered from corruption, even in the twentieth century.

The 1653 Registration Act

The widespread disturbances which ensued after the outbreak of the Civil War and the ejection of so many episcopal clergy from their benefices would inevitably bring about much irregularity in record-keeping, and in many parishes a serious dislocation, if not complete temporary cessation, was the natural corollary. For some two decades baptisms, marriages and burials might be at best ill-kept, at worst abandoned altogether. But such registers, however imperfectly kept, have survived in large numbers and still represent valuable original source material. But is it true to say that ministerial register-keeping was abandoned at one fell swoop to leave the often-quoted ‘Commonwealth gap’ within large numbers of parishes? It seems that the time is now overdue for a rigorous examination of the surviving evidence to see what actually has survived.

Canterbury Diocese is justly famed for the extent and completeness of many types of records, especially in the probate classes, and although the outstanding Bishop’s Transcripts have already been referred to, there is one major caveat. The diocesan registry was closed from 1 May 1642 for nearly two decades, not reopening until 25 April 1660, and, apart from literally odd scraps, there are no transcripts for any parish over these eighteen years. This is indeed a harsh blow, and one which cannot be avoided. The evidence of the registers themselves is all that can be investigated.

Royal supremacy was abolished by the Long Parliament which then exercised supreme judgement in ecclesiastical matters. Clergy who refused to take the Covenant were ejected in 1643; those who had managed to retain a benefice, but then found the Prayer Book proscribed, lost their positions in 1645; and any remaining found themselves ejected by Cromwell’s 1653 Committee of Triers which examined every candidate for a benefice.

On 4 January 1644/5 there was passed ‘An Ordinance for taking away the Book of Common Prayer, and for establishing and putting in execution of the Directory for the publique worship of God’. The ‘inconveniences’ of the Prayer Book, unchallenged for over a century, were abolished in favour of a new Puritan rubric for all priests, called the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, a manual of directions, not devotions. Subjoined were further instructions:

That there shall be provided at the charge of every Parish or Chappelry in the Realm of England, and Dominion of Wales, a fair Register Book of Velim to be kept by the Minister and other Officers of the Church; and that the Names of all Children Baptized, and of their Parents and of the time of their Birth and Baptizing shall be written and set down by the Minister therein; and also the Names of all Persons Married there, and the time of their Marriage; and also the Names of all Persons Buried in that Parish, and the time of their Death and Burial. And that the said Book shall be shewed by such as keep the same to all persons reasonably desiring to search for the Birth, Baptizing, Marriage or Burial of any person therein registered, and to take a Copy, or procure a Certificate thereof.

There are not many parishes in east Kent in which these new regulations were obeyed to the letter; indeed, not one commenced a new register in deference to the 1645 Act, probably because most, if not all, were already maintaining a parchment book and saw little need for extra expense. But civil war and the attendant chaos of the interregnum would have been the subject of much concern for efficient record-keeping. The ousting of the parish minister meant that baptisms, marriages and burials would be recorded haphazardly, perhaps by a man with only modest literary skills. There was a clearly perceived need for good order instead of increasing chaos touching civil registration, and this was now supplied by one of the twenty-six Acts passed between 4 July and 13 December 1653 by the Assembly of Nominees, known as the Little or Barebone's Parliament.

The extra-parliamentary committee for law reform began its work early in 1652, under the wise guidance of Matthew Hale. By the summer it was reported that many excellent bills for the ease and benefit of the Commonwealth had been prepared, and although none reached the statute book during the lifetime of the Rump Parliament, the interim administration immediately adopted two of Hales' suggestions, the second of which was a law prescribing civil marriage.

On 24 August 1653, but only after severe criticisms and referral to committees, 'An Act touching Marriage and the Registering thereof; and also touching Births and Burials' was promulgated, coming into force on 29 September 1653 (**Fig. 2**):

... a Book of good Vellum or Parchment shall be provided by every Parish, for the Registering of all such Marriages, and of all Births of Children, and Burials of all sorts of People within every parish; for the safe keeping of which Book, the Inhabitants and Householders of every Parish chargeable to the relief of the poor, or the greater part of them present, shall on or before the Two and twentieth day of September in the year One thousand six hundred fifty three, make choice of some able and honest person (such as shall be sworn and approved by one Justice of the Peace in that Parish, Division or County, and so signified under his hand in the said Register-Book) to have the keeping of the said Book ...

Concerning marriage, it was directed that any couple desiring to be wed on or after 29 September 1653 must deliver to the Register (on whom see just below) of the parish where they were resident, and at least three weeks before the intended date, the names, surnames, 'additions' and places of abode of both themselves, and of their parents, guardians or overseers. The Register was then to publish this information on three several Lord's Days next following at the close of the morning 'exercise' in the public meeting-place 'commonly called the church or chapel',

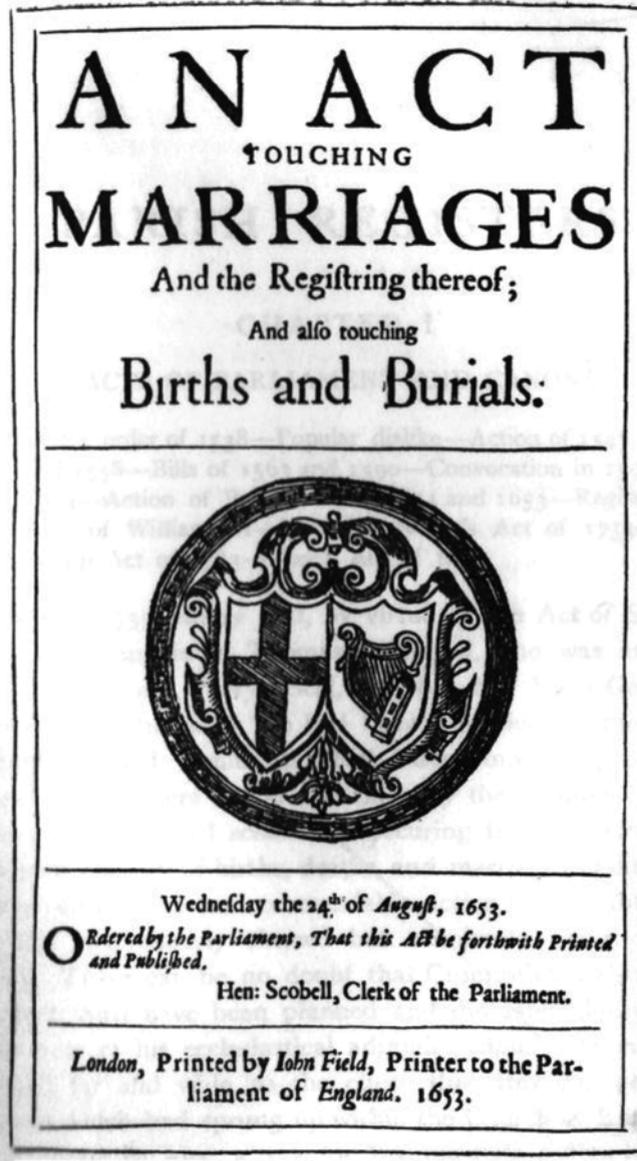


Fig. 2 The 1653 Marriage Act frontispiece.

or (if the couple desired it) in the market-place next to the church or chapel on three market-days in three several weeks following, between 11 and 2 o'clock. Afterwards, the Register was to make a true certificate of the proceedings, without which no wedding could proceed. If there were any objections, its nature and the name of the complainant and his parish were to be added to the certificate.

All parties were then to go before a Justice of the Peace of the same county and town, show him their certificate and, if either was under 21, prove the willing consent of parents or guardians. The Justice would then examine witnesses concerning the veracity of the certificate, any objections to be investigated by him at a subsequent quarter-sessions. If all was in order, the marriage could then proceed in the presence of two witnesses. Any marriage conducted after 29 September would be lawful only if conducted in this manner. A parchment certificate of the ceremony could be prepared by the Justice, his clerk receiving 12*d*. A final rider added that in the case of dumb persons the usual words spoken by the parties at the ceremony might be dispensed with, and that the traditional joining of hands need not apply 'in case of persons that have not hands'.

The information on such certificates would be a wonderful ancillary source to what was recorded in the registers, but it would seem that their loss has been universal. Not a single one has ever been seen by the present writer.

The New Officials

True and full accounts of all future baptisms, marriages and burials in a good book of vellum or parchment were now demanded. But to be maintained by whom? A new secular official with the highly confusing title of the 'Parish Register' (in this essay always with a capital 'R') was to be determined. The circumstances of his election are detailed in the 1653 Act cited above. He was enjoined to physically keep the parish register and enter all 'publications' (or banns), marriages, births and burials 'of all sorts', together with the day and month of each event, and the parents', guardians' or overseers' names. After election the Register was to be approved and sworn by a magistrate, the process to be recorded in the new register book.

The Register was to attend the Justice to subscribe every marriage, discharge his position for three years and longer until either a successor be chosen or he was removed. Attractive fees were applicable: for the publication of banns and the certificate, 12*d*.; for entering a marriage, 12*d*.; and for every birth/baptism or death/burial of a child, 4*d*. No fees were to be levied in the case of the poor or those receiving alms.

And so now every parish duly elected a man of good character to act as their Register. He would now write up the parish register, oversee its safekeeping, witness marriages, and generally see to the efficient running of the parochial records and other matters touching them. Once the election had taken place, the candidate would be confirmed by the signatures of at least the parish minister (if still in office) and the churchwardens, and often of several men of local good standing or birth. He was then formally sworn in by one or more Justices of the Peace. Summaries of the wording of the Act (in varying forms) and the elections and confirmations may be found in about a dozen parishes including Benenden, Canterbury St Peter, Chislet, Cranbrook (where the candidate was sworn in 'according to the best of his skill, power and knowledge'), Westbere – and Betteshanger:

On ye 20th of September 1653 Richard Boteler of the parish abovesd in ye sd county was by the Maior part of the parishioners of the said parish then present & chargeable to the Releese of the poore elected to bee Register of Betteshanger

aforesaid the Register all marriages, publications of marriages Births of Citizen & burials of all persons within the said p'ish according to the Act of Parliament in that case made and provided. Witness our hands: (signed) John Boys, R Scudder. ... I doe approve of the said Richard Boteler to be Register of the parish of Betteshanger abovesd and the said Richard Boteler hath taken his oath before me according to ye act of Parliament in that case made and provided. Witness my hand hereunto subscribed (signed) John Boys. (CCA: U3/75/1/1)

Existing ministers, or at least those whose sympathies had not led to their ejection from the parish, were now doubly deprived. Marriages were now the sole prerogative of a justice (but after which the minister could perform a religious ceremony, then to be entered in the parish register by the Register who now had care of the records), or, in the rare cases where the minister himself had been elected as the Register, he would then be constrained in performing only civil ceremonies.

Final instructions in the Act wisely and practically suggested that small parishes together with other places not in any parish where there was a usual Lord's Day morning religious service during which the calling of banns was now normally exercised, could be severally united under a Justice and recognized as a single parish for the purposes of the Act. Only two apparent instances of this have come to light: the clerk Hezekiah Holland who had authority at both East Sutton and Sutton Valence, and at Staple where in 1655 the minister Thomas Wood noted that Simon Barrow of Ash (already Register of that parish), after an order made at the quarter-sessions would now act as well in the same capacity at Elmstone Preston, Staple and Stourmouth. He concluded in lamenting that the parish register was now made public and that he could keep it only 'for my private use and satisfaction' (CCA: U3/183/1/1).

At Nonington the prospect of a new system was not looked forward to. Woodruff noted a comment of 1650 (the date seems unaccountably early, and the entry is not located) saying that, 'A newe Regessor to bee kepte in the Parish of Nonington the Justices being to marry and the Regessor to aske, 29th Sept, this to be put in execution in the yeare 1653 a simple and silly practice'.

As has been stated, no parishes obtained a new parish register after the 1645 Act and only a few seemingly did so in deference to the Act of 1653, generally being content merely to continue with the existing book: the title of the Act and some of its phrases were copied out (in varying manner), and then all continued without comment. Henceforth, marriages in some parishes, at least until about 1657 or 1658, would be written with much more detail than had previously been the case, but the stipulation that dates of birth as well as of baptism should be recorded was maintained far more in the breach than in the observance, and that for noting dates of death as well as of burial hardly at all.

It is to be presumed that every parish recorded somewhere (but not, it seems, always in the parish register) the election and name of their newly elected Register, of whom some sixty have been found, stated explicitly in the parish register by the majority, and obliquely by a few others, usually in another nearby parish. For the most part little can be gained of their standing or occupation other than the presumption of literacy and penmanship, as well as respectability and trustworthiness within the parish. The majority seem to have performed their (fairly demanding) duties conscientiously, sometimes even more efficiently than the pre- or post-Reformation

holder. Were the majority automatically re-elected after the first three-year term? Virtually no evidence has appeared to the contrary save the few later dates in the following list which may imply a second or subsequent man, whose predecessor's election has not been found. Elections (and swearings-in if noted) were frequently, but not always, on the same day. Dates are in modern form.

- Ash: Simon Barrow, 1 September 1653 (to at least 1661); and also of Elmstone, Preston, Staple and Stourmouth from 8 January 1655
- Ashford: Nicholas Prigge, 1653;
William Kennett, schoolmaster, 5 January 1655;
John Mortemar (1660)
- Bapchild: Lewis Hart, vicar, 23 February 1654
- Benenden: George Boys, 13 September 1653
- Betteshanger: Richard Boteler, 20 September 1653
- Borden: John Woodcocke, minister of this parish, 23 March 1654
- Boughton-under-Blean: Richard Wood, 6 December 1658
- Bredgar: William Turkill, 24 March 1654
- Canterbury St Andrew: Peter Johnson, 21 September 1653
- Canterbury St Mary Northgate: Thomas Wilkes, 21 September 1653
- Canterbury St Peter: John Berry, victualler, 20 October 1653
- Charing: Arthur Large, 6 August 1654
- Chart Sutton: John Case, 3 March 1654
- Chislet: Peter Randall, parish clerk, 1653
- Cranbrook: John Butcher, 17 September 1653
- Eastchurch: William Harley
- Eastry: William Kingsland, 22 September 1653
- East Sutton: Hezekiah Holland, clerk of Sutton Valence, 20 October 1653
- Elmstone: *see* Ash
- Folkestone: John Angell, 1653-1660
- Frinted: Joshua Slatyer, 2 January 1655
- Goudhurst: Thomas Stephens, joiner, 1 October 1653
- Great Chart: William Smale, 4 April 1654
- Harbledown: Henry Weekes, 27 November 1656
- Hawkhurst: Ephraim Bothell, 12 September 1653
- High Halden: John Crawford, clerk, 27 September 1653
- Iwade: William Pound, yeoman, 24 August 1653
- Kenardington: Richard Lightfoot, rector, 13 September 1656
- Kingston: Nicholas Dingley
- Lenham: William White, late 1653;
Robert Marriot, 1658
- Linton: William Morgan
- Loose: Abraham Page the elder, 19 October 1653
- Luddenham: Richard Newburgh, rector
- Maidstone: Henry Pierce, 29 September 1653
- Milton Regis: Robert Nickson, 11 February 1654
- Murston: William Allen, 6 February 1654
- Newington near Sittingbourne: John Collins, 22 March 1654
- Newington-next-Hythe: John Collins, vicar, 22 August 1653
- Preston next Wingham: *see* Ash

Rainham: Richard Pratt, maltster, 14 February 1654
 Rodmersham: John Raynolds, 5 February 1654
 Rolvenden: Henry Maplesden, 21 September 1653
 Richard Steel, 29 August 1657
 Sandwich St Peter: John Shervie (1653)
 Edward White (1657)
 Shadoxhurst: Robert Springett, gentleman, 21 September 1653
 James Dunk, clerk, 8 October 1655
 Sheldwich: Abraham Bromeadge, vicar, 24 August 1653
 Sittingbourne: John [?Hurt], 6 February 1654
 Staple: *see* Ash
 Stone-in-Oxney: Edmund Witherden, 23 March 1654
 Stourmouth: *see* Ash
 Sutton Valence: Hezekiah Holland, clerk of this parish, 20 October 1653
 Tenterden: Thomas Baker, town clerk 19 September 1653;
 William Aldcroft, town clerk;
 William Olderst
 Teynham: James Wood, minister, 31 March 1654
 Thanet St John: Francis Cory, 1656
 Thanet St Lawrence: Thomas New, 22 October 1653
 Upchurch: George Milway of Halstow, yeoman, 11 February 1654
 Westbere: Richard Roydon, husbandman, 4 February 1654
 Wickhambreaux: James Parker, 3 January 1654
 Wittersham: William Tufton, 17 September 1653
 Woodchurch: Thomas Brissenden, tailor, 10 January 1654

What happened under the new system?

Clear and firm instructions now obtained concerning civil registration, even if some parishes were seemingly quite ignorant of the new system. Others were positively scornful, as when the minister of Kildwick-in-Craven in the West Riding noted, 'that most unjust thing called an act by that pitiful convention then unlawfully assembled'. From 1653 only civil marriage by a justice was legal, although a couple could be married afterwards by a minister. But compulsory civil marriage did not survive the Commonwealth: the clause from the 1653 Act (and this single one only), 'And no other marriage whatsoever in the Commonwealth of England after 29 September 1653 shall be held and accounted a marriage according to the laws of England', was subsequently annulled when the 1653 Act was confirmed on 26 June 1657. The annulment was to continue 'for six months from and after the end of the first session of this Parliament'. As the session ended on 26 June 1657 and as there appears to have been no later continuation Act, it is to be presumed that the 1653 Act ceased to have effect in January 1658; and indeed, as we shall see, marriages in the busiest parishes drop away suddenly and sharply around that time. Some marriages thereafter, however, do show justices' signatures, indicating that such marriages were not made illegal in 1657, and indeed from now until the end of the Commonwealth many marriages were performed jointly by the magistrate and Register, and even also by the minister. The legality of civil marriages solemnised between 1653-1660 was retrospectively confirmed by an Act of 12 Charles II, *c.*33. (1660).

It is believed that many clergy failed to hand over the parochial registers in their care to the new officials, perhaps because they were considered suitable to continue in their existing position. This may well account for many new volumes opening in 1653 and duly prefaced with at least the title of the Act (Ash, Chilham, Cranbrook, Otham, Teynham and about fifteen others), but rapidly abandoning the greater levels of detail now required. These volumes are sometimes only for marriages, sometimes for all three types of event. Here may be observed overlappings (mostly of marriages) maintained temporarily in the old and new registers but usually petering out in the old as the effects of the new Act came into force, although simple oversight or a change of clerk must also have contributed. There is also a smaller group of registers opening around 1654-1657 (Hougham, Saltwood and Sutton Valence). Perhaps there were many more, never returned to the parish at the Restoration, and so explaining the common marriage lacunae in so many parishes.

But most parishes simply continued with the existing register, some making no comment or physical division, this perhaps attributable to the fact of the parson or his clerk being appointed as Register. Others began a headed fresh page where sudden jumps in entry numbers are observable.

The Act remained unpopular, and many parochial clergy, especially rural ones not seriously affected by political and religious upheaval, did indeed continue to maintain their registers. In such parishes a Register would be appointed *pro forma* but his office, by common assent, would remain a sinecure, his principal concern being the collecting of the stipulated 4*d.* and 12*d.* fees. Marriages suffered more as additional factors affected them. After the ejections of 1643 and 1645 it was not uncommon for Royalists in a parish with an intruded minister to go to the nearest Anglican clergyman who had managed to retain his living – will this explain no or few marriages in some parishes and large numbers in others? Frequently, a marriage would be recorded by the Register at the nearest town and would appear in the register of that place rather than in the parish of one of the parties. Some marriages are recorded in the registers of more than one parish, the details sometimes differing considerably between the two.

In and after 1660 one finds entries explaining the gaps in the registers, especially from about 1642 to the advent of civil registration in 1653. After 1660, with the monarch restored, ministers and civil registrars who had held a living were ejected and the former incumbent or his successor would return to the benefice. If the parish clerk had acted as Register, this position he would now relinquish but continue to maintain the registers.

If a parish had lacked a minister or retained one unwilling to use the *Directory*, many persons would have gone unbaptised. This problem was rectified by the office for ‘The Ministration of Baptism to such as are of riper years’, drawn up and approved by Convocation in 1661, and led to numbers of adult baptisms immediately thereafter. Some missing baptisms may be attributed to the absence of a minister, Puritan religious reasons, or because Laudian clergy refused to baptise according to the *Directory*. For the most part, post-Restoration registers, no longer subject to the elaborate Commonwealth legislation, and now maintained by the clergy, revert to pre-Commonwealth levels of detail.

Commonwealth Baptisms and Burials

In comparison with marriages where there are often significant lacunae, baptisms and burials appear not to have always fared quite so badly. All parishes have been searched from 1635-1665 to determine pre- and post- Commonwealth levels of entries with the interregnum, but strict analysis of the entries and their degree of completeness is wholly fraught by the complete absence of any Bishops' Transcripts from 1642-1660. In small parishes where there might often be years with no entries at all, and where the sequence was maintained smoothly, a false impression may easily be given of unbroken continuity, as at Acrise, Coldred and Patricbourne. At Dover St Mary baptisms 1635-1641 look very full but there then follows a long period of apparent under-recording over 1642-1665. Some parishes have a 'full' sequence of one or two events and broken ones of the other(s), for example, Bridge and Ickham where baptisms are continuous but marriages and burials not, and Bishopsbourne and Harbledown where baptisms and burials are continuous but marriages are not. These may be contrasted with, for example, Blean, Lower Hardres and a great many others where all three events are continuous, perhaps attributable to the appointment of the minister or his clerk as the Register, when the volume was never handed over to the custody of a lay registrar.

But the vast majority of parishes do have spasmodic or regular gaps in some or all three events, such lacunae typically starting in the early 1640s and continuing to the mid- to late 1650s. In many parishes the 1653 Act, sometimes coinciding with a fresh section in the register, or the purchase of a new one for the purpose, brings increased numbers of entries, but seldom maintained for long before dropping away again. At this juncture, some omissions are commonly entered late or back-dated and interlined, often with considerable visual confusion, as at Lydden and Sholden, whilst Harrietsham has a much disordered single sequence of all three events with many retrospective entries.

At Leaveland it was noted that attempts had been made to bring the register up to date. The volume has lacunae for all three events over a decade and more:

In ye Late troubles this booke was lost & not found till ye yeare 1663 when it first came into ye hands of Mr William Bagnall Rector who from yt time hath set downe ye Christenings Weddings Burialls in their due place and order (CCA: U3/185/1/1).

The Rector (and Register) of Luddenham, Nathaniel Newburgh who had been instituted in 1645, had attempted to patch up what he saw as an imperfect register by copying out 1644-1658 from 'the old Register'. Inserted into the volume is a printed item about Newburgh's view of troubled times: *Bello plusquam civili inter Regios et Parliamentarios per plurimam partem Angliae horribiliter grassante. Bene Vixi quia bene latui* (CCA: U3/130/1/1). [In the civil war between Royalists and Parliamentarians there were violent proceedings to a high degree throughout the greater part of England. I lived well because I was securely hidden.]

Where one or more events drop away sharply or completely, might they have been entered at a nearby parish, especially if the two shared a minister, curate or other functionary? The Act provided for the amalgamation of small or remote places, and it has already been noted that Simon Barrow was Register of the five contiguous parishes of Ash, Elmstone, Preston, Staple and Stourmouth. Baptisms at Staple are almost unbroken throughout the period and look rather fuller than

the numbers of marriages and burials might suggest. However, baptisms at the other four parishes do not conclusively bear out this theory, for Ash and Preston are sparse, Elmstone and Stourmouth less so. Did parents from the surrounding area bring their children to Staple at the convenience of the minister or Register? Perhaps entries for parishioners from other parishes were entered without any note being made to that effect.

The 1653 Act stipulated that births rather than baptisms, and deaths rather than burials, should now be recorded. Of the former there was widespread, if haphazard, practice, usually of not more than two or three years, but there are births at Chilham 1653-1658 (CCA: U3/191/1/2) and Linton 1653-1660 (KHLC: P229/1/1). Sandhurst provided separate columns for births and baptisms 1644-1665 (KHLC: P321/1/1) and so did Sittingbourne 1654-1661 (KHLC: P338/1/1). At Goodnestone next Wingham the time or day of birth plus baptism were noted from 1653 (CCA: U3/232/1). The injunction concerning deaths was hardly obeyed at all, very few parishes indeed showing anything more than a handful of dates of death as opposed to burial. A notable exception is Sandwich St Mary which shows dates of death and burial 1653-1659, usually between one and three days apart (CCA: U3/11/1/1).

Unsettled times and the common lack of an ordained man in this period could easily bring problems. At Waldershare there is a note that the misplacing of births and baptisms 1643-1655 resulted from the lack of a settled minister (CCA: U3/209/1/A1). The first register of Dover St James continues as far as 1661, even though the second was commenced in 1645. The Rector, Robert Bostock, had been trying to make good obvious deficiencies, now easily evidenced by back-datings and interlinings:

From the first of August Ao 1645 I find this booke wholly imperfect. The names that follow were supplied out of the private notes of parents and other persons present at the private baptism: because of ye persecution and neglect of those times wch would neither admit nor countenance the public. And this register began to be rectified and defects supplied Ao Xti 1664 Feb. Imo per me, Robert Bostock, Rectr of St James (CCA: U3/26/1/2).

Commonwealth Marriages

Along with baptisms and burials, a new sequence of marriages (and, for the first time, banns) would begin in 1653. Here the need was more pressing as by now many parishes were bereft of a minister and therefore without any legally sanctioned officiant, whereas baptisms and burials might still continue to be recorded, albeit in increasingly broken sequences. In consequence, the majority of parishes show far more frequent, or longer, lacunae in their marriages than the other two events.

The 1653 Marriage Act was something of a two-edged sword. Tiresome though it might have been for prospective couples to present themselves with a licence before a justice from within the county in order to have their credentials verified (and perhaps also the consent of parents or guardians), at least the new system was available to anybody of any faith with the funds to pay.

Most people would have seen the 1653 Marriage Act as a grievance in that they could no longer marry in church, and so to some extent this was lessened by the 1656 confirmation which dropped the requirement that only the presence of

a magistrate was legal. Thereafter it became quite common for marriages to be celebrated jointly by a minister and a mayor or other civic functionary.

The opening of a new marriage register was marked by some:

Bethersden: Memorandum That the Names of all that weare married in the p'ish of Bethersden from and after the seaven and Twentieth Day of Sept 1653 untill the Seaventeenth of December 1660 were registered in another Booke and in the Custody of those yt keepe this present Registers (KHLIC: P21/1/A2).

Teynham: The Register Booke of the parish of Tenham made and provided according to an Acte of Parliamt (inserted in the end hereof) for the Registering of Marriages, Births & Burials &c. from the Twentie Nineth of September One thousand six hundred Fifty & three (CCA: U3/222/1/2).

Banns had never previously been recorded (and after this short period would not be again until 1754 and the passing of Rose's Marriage Act), but now a great many parishes show both banns and marriages, nearly always in a single well-written sequence. As happened in succeeding centuries, the publication of banns was no guarantee that a marriage would follow, and thus those which did so proceed were often annotated to that effect, usually with the officiant's signature. The banns were called either in the church, or, more commonly, in a local meeting- or market-place.

The system would seem to have worked well in those relatively few parishes where there are sufficient numbers of entries from which to make meaningful inferences. The marriage centres all peak around 1654-1657, after which there is a sudden collapse, marked by dramatic drops in the annual numbers of entries. Detailed analyses of some of these are below.

It has long been assumed that marriages more or less ceased in rural areas and that the towns took up most of the marriage business, no doubt also enjoying the rapidly increased fees accruing from them. This is indeed the case in east Kent. Large numbers of rural parishes have a handful (at best a page or two) of marriages with the greatly increased details, sometimes with banns as well, but they more or less universally and rapidly fall away, perhaps in part because there were by now enough urban centres set up where the justices had established regular marriage business in places most convenient for them to attend.

As marriage was now a civil affair, the officiants would consequently all be justices, some also of recognized standing in other fields, such as mayors and members of the aristocracy. Many registers have good runs of their signatures signing off marriage entries, and represent a rich and perhaps under-used source of names. Those few ministers not ejected from their livings may also be seen still acting, no doubt against their consciences, as marriage registrars, sometimes also marrying couples 'properly' after their civil ceremony, although of this type of entry hardly any at all have been observed by the present writer.

One problem concerns the actual location of the wedding itself. Did it actually take place in the church whose register records it or perhaps elsewhere? There is but a single explicit reference to this issue: in the Selling register there is a later comment added alongside a marriage in 1652 that 'During this period marriages were solemnized before a magistrate at Sheldwich & are registered there in the Church Regr. of marriages' (CCA: U3/229/1/1). Alas, that Sheldwich volume has not survived, and so no inferences can be made.

It is now time to look at where most of the marriage business actually took place. Parishes fall quite readily into three fairly distinct groups, and as there is enough variation in the way events were recorded and amounts of detail given, a representative selection of entries is appended.

The *first* group contains those parishes which were more or less impervious to the new regulations. Rural by nature, ample numbers may be cited. At Broomfield, Eastwell, Lower Hardres, Swalecliffe, Wootton and many others the injunctions of the 1653 Act were wholly ignored, no comment pertaining to it or the election of a Register made in the register, and entry-keeping maintained as hitherto, with highly broken marriage sequences and often substantial lacunae of a decade or more.

Of the *second* group it may be observed that some rural and urban parishes made an attempt at obeying the new Act, but after a promising start with greater detail there is early abandonment and very few entries, perhaps because of the purchase of a (now lost) new register. Adisham shows just one or two entries recorded in more detail than the rest, but with no dramatic increase in totals.

5 November 1649. David Austen of this parish and Elizabeth Harreson of Norbourne married by Mr Francis Prentin pastor of ye Congregationall Church in Sandwich in ye public meeting place called Peeteres (CCA: U3/70/1/1).

Colonel John Humfrey of Westminster was maryed to Mrs Ann Eyton daughter of Sir George Eyton of Eyton in the County of Darby, Knt in dunkerk, on the seventeenth day of agust 1658 by Mr Frances Quintin minister of Adisham in the dwelling hous of the Lord [...] Lockart together with Severall of the Chef offeceaers of the army and garesen. (Ibid.)

Ash had from five to fourteen marriages annually between 1635-1640; then a complete blank until the new volume opens in 1653 when numbers average ten annually for the rest of the decade, and then drop back. No doubt the proximity of Sandwich took away many prospective couples from this enormous parish. Some entries add banns:

The publications of Thomas Goldfinch and Susanna Bax both of Winsburrow wear on the 13.20.27 days of September published in Sandwich market place. And they wear married the 13 day of October 1656 By Henry Twiman An Alldar of Canterbury (CCA: U3/272/1/2).

Of the ten marriages at Ash in 1657, banns were published in either Sandwich market place or in Ash church itself, and display a rich and not untypical variety of celebrants, including William Mandy and Thomas Brown, jurats of Sandwich, Alexander Bradly, minister of Elmstone, William Donbar, minister of 'Winsburrow', Edward Fellows, minister of Birchington, and B. Johnson, minister of Lambeth.

Canterbury Cathedral, unsurprisingly, was no magnet for civil marriages, and not even particularly popular for religious ones, probably because of the demands of residency within the parish. Until 1648 there was only a handful annually. The 1650s rise steadily to 22 in 1658 and 24 in 1659 before falling away. Every single entry is quite plain, not even recording the parish of each party.

Deal was a populous town, a fact reflected in its marriage registers. Until 1647 there were up to twenty marriages annually, after which the totals hold up in double

figures until 1657. After a short gap numbers resume in 1663. Although there are many banns and consents, often followed by marriage, there are no extra personal details, as if the minimum requirements, or not even quite that, were adhered to.

The figures at Dover St Mary are extraordinary. From 1630-1640 the totals are in the thirties and forties annually. There are no more than a handful of entries over two decades 1641-1662, and then a great jump to 75 in 1666. The likely explanation is that a separate register has been lost (also including burials which show a similar gap).

Faversham was marrying up to 34 couples annually until the early 1640s. A dramatic drop ensued in 1647, recovering to 26 in 1657, and then holding up well beyond the restoration. Entries are plainly written with no extra details, and show little evidence of extra marriage business.

At this date Folkestone was of modest size in terms of population (just a single church), and the marriage totals reflect this: between 1635-1665 hardly any years reach double figures, although the sequence is virtually unbroken throughout. Entries are fuller between 1653-1658 but scarcely more numerous. There are some banns, and most weddings show witnesses and a variety of officiants, but no home parishes.

5 December 1653. John Harvey son of Roger Harvey and Ann Minter daughter of Thomas Minter, desesed, were married by Mr Henry Jenken Esquire Maior of the Towne of Folkestone.

30 April 1657. Nicholas Huntt and Dorothy Round were published three Lords dayes in our parish church of Folkestone and weare married at Rumney in the presents of John Underall and Richard Baker.

Hawkhurst offers evidence from overlapping paper and parchment registers, where reference has already been made to a comment about deficiencies in the latter being rectifiable from the former. They agree exactly between 1635-1642 with up to fifteen entries annually, when the parchment book now shows a complete lacuna until 1662. The paper register has entries 1645-1648, resuming in 1653 with twenty entries in 1654 before dropping away to lowish single figures by the late 1650s. Thus the Act seems to have been obeyed, even if no reference is made to it in either volume. Very curiously, of the 87 entries between 1653-1660 almost every single one shows at least one party (usually the groom) being of this parish, in great contradistinction to the large numbers of foreign couples in most of the other 'busy' parishes.

High Halden was a country parish with just ten marriages between 1653-1659, sometimes including occupations, parents and banns. The parties came from Bethersden, Cranbrook, Smarden and Tenterden, and it perhaps resembles an incipient marriage centre. No precise date of marriage is recorded in the following:

1659. Richard Farmer and Mary Lucas both of Tenterden were married by John Crawford Minister of Halden the banes being first proclaimed in the church of Tenterden aforesaid three severall Lords dayes 17 April, 24 April and 1 May and no exception being thereunto made as was certified by me William Olderst register there (KHL: P164/1/1).

At Kingston, another small rural parish with a corresponding population, there is just the odd fuller entry, including banns as well as marriages:

April ye 22 [1656] were married Robert Turner of ye parish of Kingston and Ann Cooper of ye parish of Eastry year banes having beene published 3 marktett days in ye city of Canterbury according to ye late act for publishing. Per me Nic. Dingley. Reg. parochie de Kingston (CCA: U3/168/A1).

Minster-in-Sheppey, despite its great physical size, saw few marriages: ten at most annually in the 1630s, three nil returns in the 1650s, and double figures again only in 1663. Some parties are described as married at Minster, others elsewhere off the island.

*4 June 1651. Publication made after intention of marriage between Christopher Kittlestringe & Elizabeth Shepley vid' both of this parish three Severall Sabbath days in the said parish church viz. the 4th 11th & 18th of June and noe acception made against the said intended marriage
[Added in the margin] The said P'ties married at Eastchurch (KHLC: P254/1/1).*

Sandwich St Clement, the smallest of the three town parishes, has corresponding totals, barely ever into double figures, and showing only slight increases in the 1650s. Little extra detail is recorded except for a few officiants' names. There are no banns.

James Croakenden the sonne of Thomas Croakenden deceased was maryed to Elizabeth White the daughter of Widdow White 29 October 1654 (CCA: U3/17/1/1).

The first register of Sheldwich has been lost at some point between 1922, when Woodruff saw it, and now. He noted that there were customarily two or three marriages annually, and then 126 between 1648-1657 which included 24 in 1654, 26 in 1655, 33 in 1656 and 16 in 1657. This small rural parish would therefore seem to have attracted considerable business.

Just outside Canterbury, Thanington is unusual in recording only marriages and no banns. From 1635-1646 numbers are quite regular (up to a dozen annually), then rising sharply with a full run over 1647-1660 of up to 30 in 1649 and 23 in 1654. After the Restoration the numbers reduce greatly. Only status and parish are given.

The *third* group, although not numerically large, offers much fascinating information as each parish obeyed the letter and spirit of the new Act. Many of these would amply repay further individual study.

At Ashford from 1635-1643 there were around ten marriages annually. There is nothing at all 1644-1652, after which 26 in 1655, 48 in 1656, 54 in 1657, 34 in 1658, and then a marked drop after the Restoration to the levels of the 1630s. The entries are generally full with occupations and fathers' names. Banns note any objections, and marriages are all signed by John Hayter. Of the 162 entries over 1655-1658, about a half have both parties from some 40 other parishes, including most of the Weald, many others within a ten-mile radius, and the usual outliers.

The purpose of marriage betweene Daniel Smith of Wilsborow, Labourer, & Anne Rogers of Ashford, widow & daughter of Richard Hancock of Ashford was published in this parish Church of Ashford Aprill 29 May 6 & 13 dayes [1655] none excepting.

23 April 1656. The marriage betweene Richard Webb of braborn husbandman the sonne of John Webb of Wye and Jane Snoad of Mersham spinster the daughter of Thomas Snoad of Mersham deceased was solemnised in Ashford upon Certificate of the intended marriage according to the act (Signed) John Hayter.

A note in the Benenden register alerts the reader to marriages by justices in one section and marriages by a minister in another. Typically, after 1662 no officiant's name is given. There are 146 civil marriages over 1653-1661, peaking with 54 in 1654, and eighteen religious ones over 1657-1660 (all repeated from the earlier volume), these latter mostly conducted by the minister, William Hieron, or the master of the free school, Alexander Reade.

15 January 1656. Robert Earle of Goudhurst in the Countie of Kent, Broadweaver, sonn of Abraham Earle, late of Brenchley, and Elizabeth Faulkner of the sayd Goudherst, Singlewoman, daughter of Steeven Faulkner of Wythyam in the Countie of Sussixe, husbandman, did Solemnize there marriage in due forme of law before Edward Sharpe of Benenden Esq. Also in the Presence of Thomas Earle And Abraham Earle, Broadweavers, both of Goudherst (KHLIC: P20/1/2).

Bethersden was a larger rural parish but with only nineteen entries 1653-1658. They include banns published in the 'public assembly', and parties married by a variety of Justices of the Peace. The following entry shows the banns having been called in the bride's parish and also alludes to the Register of Cranbrook:

5 January 1657. The banns of matrimony betwixt John Blacke of Tenterden husbandman and Mary Prat of Cranbrooke (being published three severall market days in Cranbrook aforesaid as is attested by a certificate under the hand of John Butcher parish register there) the said John and Mary were married in the parish church of Bethersden by the minister of the said parish (KHLIC: P21/1/A2).

In later times Canterbury St Margaret was long a popular one for marriages by virtue of the presence in the church of the ecclesiastical court. The first surviving register opens in 1654 with four entries, then seven in the next year, followed by 14 in 1656 and 23 in 1657, before falling away. Most entries are banns only. Of the 37 entries in 1656-57, 25 are for couples where both are of 29 different foreign parishes, often from the city itself, but as far away as Ashford, Brabourne, Eastwell, Hothfield, Mersham and Warehorne.

Published an intention of marriage between Roger Goldstone of Bennenden in the County of Kent, Gent, ye one party, & Mrs Kathrin Oliver of this parish, ye other party, without any opposition to ye Contrary, that is to say twice in St margrets church & once at St Mary Bredmans being the severall Lordes dayes August 24 August 31 & September 7th 1656. Roger Goldstone gent and Mrs Kathrin Oliver were married by Mr Henry Knight one of the Justices of the peace of the City for marriages September 9th 1656 (CCA: U3/6/1/1).

This entry appears at Benenden (note the different dates):

23 August there was published an agreement of marriage in Cranbooke between Roger Goldstone of Beneden, gent, and Mistris Katherine Oliver of St Margaret in the Citie of Canterbur.y the second time of publishing was upon the 30th of August, the third was upon the 7th day of September 1656 (KHLIC: P20/1/2).

Rather surprisingly, not many Canterbury parishes attracted marriage business. Along with St Margaret, another exception is St Peter where from one entry in 1635, the numbers rise steadily to sixteen in 1641, 30 in 1642, 35 in 1643 and 31 in 1644. After just six entries in the next eight years, the totals begin to drop to an annual one or two after the Restoration. Most show ‘publications and marriages’, and a fair number are banns only:

9 August 1654. Published a contract between John Saunders of the parish of St George's batchelor and Jane Riggs widow of the p'ish of St Peter in Holy Cross Church on the Lords Day according to an Act of Parliament bearing date the 24 of August 1653 (CCA: U3/90/1/2).

Cranbrook was a substantial Wealden parish, and one which dutifully commenced a new 1653 register in conformity to the new Act. However, the preceding register, which ran on as far as 1667, ignored it altogether and continued to maintain a patchy run of marriages (sixteen between 1653-1662) even whilst its successor was now recording in far greater detail. From 1635-1645 annual figures are in the high twenties; then there is a drop until 1652 until much more regular business ensues: 31 in 1653, 58 in 1654, 100 in 1655, 77 in 1656, 56 in 1657, 36 in 1658, now dropping by half or more by the early 1660s. Many entries show the father's name and parish (quite often different from that of the groom). Of entries between 1653-1657 around a half have both parties originating from 48 parishes other than Cranbrook, these including every parish within an eight-mile radius, plus many outliers. There are separate sections for marriages 1653-1661 solemnized by Justices of the Peace, and for 1657-1661 solemnized by ministers, the former including Thomas Plumer and John Rabson, the latter William Goodrich, who sometimes signs alongside one of the justices.

14 May 1659. A Consent of Marriage was published Betweene Peeter Gardiner of Biddenden in the County of Kent, Clothworker, son of John Gardiner of the same, husbandman, and Elizabeth Hubbard of Rolvenden in the County of Kent, spinster, daughter of Caleb Hubbard of Hauckhurst in the County of Kent, Broadweaver. Were married before (signs) John Rabson (KHLC: P100/1/16).

The registers of Hythe include a complete gap between 1645-1652. Then follow five years in double figures as high as 42 before a dramatic drop in 1658 to a mere handful each year. The entries are fullest from 1654-1657 and almost uniformly written in a plain style:

3 October 1656 Thomas Hatton and Elizabeth Colman were married before James Arthur Jurate. John Greenland & Anne Collard the witnesses (CCA: U3/282/1/A1).

Lenham was a rural parish of great physical size. A beautifully written register (**Fig. 3**) records regular annual totals of around a dozen from 1635-1644 followed by a noticeable dropping away until 1653, thereafter often more than trebling to as many as 43 in 1655 before falling away again in 1660. From 1654-1658 nearly three-quarters (95 of 122) of the marriages relate to couples both originating from 47 other parishes, including more or less blanket coverage within an eight-mile radius. Every entry in these five years until mid-1658 is signed by the officiant

<i>Marriages</i>	
<p>March 27</p> <hr/>	<p>Thomas Sharpp of Bennetton & Susanna Cole of Egenton were duly married according to a late Act intituled an Act touching Marriages & the Registering thereof before Richard Wilkinson Esq: one of the Justices of the peace of this Countie.</p>
<p>April 3</p> <hr/>	<p>William Watkin & Elizabeth Breuthlie both of the next Sutton Valence were duly married according to late Act intituled an Act touching Marriages & the Registering thereof. &c. before Richard Wilkinson Esquire, one of the Justices of the peace of this Countie.</p>
<p>June 4</p> <hr/>	<p>Christin Sturt & Anne Wilson widows both of this p[arish] were duly married according to a late Act intituled an Act touching Marriages & the Registering thereof. &c. before Richard Wilkinson Esq: one of the Justices of the peace of this Countie.</p>
<p>5</p> <hr/>	<p>John Lucas of Redbourne & Marie Tilly of Redcombe were duly married according to a late Act intituled an Act touching Marriages and the Registering thereof before Richard Wilkinson Esq: one of the Justices of the peace of this Countie.</p>
<p>8</p> <hr/>	<p>Thomas Brown of Westwell & Mary Halsned of Roathfold were ^{duly} married according to a late Act intituled an Act touching Marriages & the Registering thereof. &c. before Richard Wilkinson Esq: one of the Justices of the peace of this Countie.</p>
<p>25</p> <hr/>	<p>George Cawerrie & Judith Bristeden widows both of Rolingbourne were duly married according to a late Act intituled an Act touching Marriages & the Registering thereof. &c. before Richard Wilkinson Esq: one of the Justices of the peace of this Countie.</p>
	<p>Richard Wilkinson Esq: 1681</p>

Fig. 3 Extract from Commonwealth marriages at Lenham (KHLIC: P224/1/A1) reproduced by permission of the Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone.

Richard Wilkinson, the last few being married by Robert Marriot, clerk. (It might also be noted here in passing that a well-kept register does not automatically imply regular or 'live' record-keeping: after the marriages in October 1655, there is a memorandum that four couples were all married on 17 July before continuing with the November entries, so the neatness of the handwriting is to be attributed to a fair copy made at some remove after the actual events.)

9 October 1655. James Smith of Bredgar husbandman & Ann Doule of the same spinster were duly married according to a late Act Instituted, an Act touching Marriages and the Registering thereof before Richard Wilkinson one of the Justices of the Peace of this Countie (KHLC: P224/1/A1).

Maidstone had the largest population of any parish in the Diocese, and with correspondingly interesting figures. From 1635-1653, amazingly, no year exceeds single figures; then 92 in 1654, 155 in 1655, 136 in 1656, 129 in 1657 and 112 in 1658, including many banns. After the restoration there are twenty to thirty annually. So before the 1653 Act did some nearby parish in west Kent handle most of the local marriage business? In 1653 there is a promising start with every entry showing occupations, the father of each party, and the officiant, although these are not all maintained. Of the 247 entries in 1654-1655, 110, or nearly half, have both parties from 74 parishes other than Maidstone. These include almost every parish within an eight-mile radius, many outliers, and the usual strays from London, Surrey and Sussex.

4 January 1654. Peter Scott of East Farleigh husbandman the son of Alice Scott of Bren[chley], Widdow And Johan Elvie of East Farleigh aforesaid the Daughter of John Elvie of Lenham was Published in this Market place upon November the 16th the 23rd & the 30th 1654. And were Married before James Allen Maior of this Towne & Parish (KHLC: P241/1/A3).

[About a month after banns had been called in May 1654]:

Lambert Godfery Esq doth make exception to the proceedinge of the Marriage of Abraham Hawkes and Mary Emyet for that the said Mary Emyet doth [...] to be not of competent understanding to dispose of herself in Marriage (ibid.).

Milton Regis which had a substantial population and was indeed larger than neighbouring Sittingbourne, recorded no marriages at all 1641-1647, after which a fresh page for 'publications and marriages' shows numbers rising sharply 1653-1657 before dropping back after 1660. Here a civil ceremony follows a religious one which was perhaps not recognized:

James Gammon widower and Martha Lanyer widd' three sev'all Lords daies published in the p'ishe Church of Milton viz the 3 xth and 17th of December and Married the 22th of Januarie 1654 by Hezek. Holland Minister at East Sutton as by Cert. and since Married the 5th of November 1655 before Sir Michael Livesey Barronett (KHLC: P253/1/1).

Rolvenden marriages spike in the mid-1630s and then drop to nothing 1642-53 until the new volume commences with very regular and full business over 1653-1657.

August the 29th 1657: Memorand' that all the marriadges in his Register before

written when mention of itt is made by George Kadwell Esq they were solemnized before me. In witness whereof I have hereunto sett my hand the day above written. (Signed) Geo: Kadwell

Sandwich St Mary shows a gradual lessening of marriages through the 1640s and 1650s, and then a sudden jump to between 23 and 34 annually over 1654-1657. From 1653 agreements and marriages are recorded, often with occupations and brides' fathers, many being signed off by the officiant:

An agreement of marriage between Richard Ashenden of St Peters p'ish in the Towne and Port of Sandwich on the one p'te and Sarah Wells of St Maries parrish and Towne aforesaid daughter of Robert Wells late of Maulden in Essex deceased on the other p'te was entered the 12th of August and published according to order on three severall Lords Days viz on ye 13, 20, 27 of August 1654. And the said Richard Ashenden and Sarah his wife was Married by Mr Thomas Browne Justice of the Peace for and within the Towne and Port abovesaid the 7 of September 1654. [Signed] Thomas Browne (CCA: U3/11/1/1).

Like Sandwich St Mary, its neighbour St Peter shows many banns as well as marriages, neatly and uniformly written out in a new section from 1653, and all signed by the officiant. Numbers are considerably higher than at St Mary, usually in double figures annually after 1636, jumping to the high forties between 1654-1657.

These are to certifie to whome it doth concern that John Shelvy of St Peeter p'ish the Sonne of James Shelvy deceased and Ann Baker the daughter of William Baker yeoman livinge in Hamwell Court in the Parish of Woddensburrowe in the Countie of Kent were Published an agreement of Marriage in the p'ish church of St Clements in Sandwich three severall Lords dayes Viz 7th of Maii 1654, the 14th & 21th of the same month according to the Act of Parliament and noe objection to the contrarie but that they may bee lawfully Married. Witnes John Shervie p'ish Register. And Married the 30th of Maii 1654 by Mr Pantrie Jurat & Justice of the peace whose name is here under written (CCA: U3/12/1/2).

Sittingbourne did not adopt a new marriage register in 1653, simply continuing with the old one. Marriages drop steadily in the 1640s, reaching just three annually by 1652-53. The rest of the decade jumps up to as many as 28, and drops again in 1660 back to 1640s levels. Between 1654-1657 many entries are banns only, and normally give parish and marital status:

Intention of Marriage betweene John Kipps Bachelour & Brickmaker & Anne Cooper widow, was published the 1, 8, 15 of April 1655 who were also married June 12 1655 by Sir Michael Livesey (KHLIC: P338/1/1).

The Isle of Thanet had the three large parishes of St John, St Lawrence and St Peter. Far away in the very corner of the county, they collectively attracted large numbers of couples. At St John, with a population second in size only to Maidstone, marriages are unbroken from 1635-1665. There are only slight increases in the 1650s to a maximum of 22 in 1654 and thereafter mostly in double figures as far as, and beyond, the Restoration. From 1656 the Register, Francis Cory, signs at the foot of every page of banns and marriages.

At St Lawrence marriage totals are high and consistent from 1635-1645 before a large drop which never properly recovers, even after the Restoration. Over 1635-1665 the parish exceeds both St John and St Peter by substantial margins. All entries are written plainly with no extra details of any kind.

As at St John, marriages at St Peter are unbroken from 1635-1665, and only slightly less in total. There is only a gentle diminution in totals in the 1650s, the largest totals not occurring until after the Restoration. Contrary to the general impression, nearly all entries relate to one or both parties of this parish.

Richard Boyman, Bacheller, and Hannah Curling, spinster, both of this parish published the 3rd of October, the 10th of October and the 17th of October 1658 and Married the 10th of November 1658 by Master [Landine?] at Canterburie in 1658 (CCA: U3/120/1/2).

William Loe of the p^{ish} of Stourmouth Kent widdower and Ann Biggenden of this parish spinster published the 7th of August, the 14th and 21st 1659: He is dead since: and not married (ibid.).

Slightly confusing, and a good example of making dangerous assumptions about where the marriage was solemnized is:

St Peter: Elias Wilde and Mary Shonke both of this parish published the 30th of October, the 6th and 13th of November 1659 and Married the 19th daie of December 1659 (ibid.).

Until one reads at the adjacent Thanet St John:

19 December 1659. Married Elias Wild, Bachellor, and Mary Shonke, virgin, both of the parish of St Peter, by Mr Riggs Vicar of this parish whose bands of Matrimony were published there (CCA: U3/140/1/1).

Wye had variable annual totals of up to about a dozen from 1635-1642. In common with many other parishes, a predictable drop ensued until 1654, thereafter remaining in small single figures until beyond the Restoration. But also in common with other parishes, the dwindling 1650s totals may be augmented by a new 1653 Act marriage section opening in 1654 and running concurrently with the former. It is prefaced and suffixed:

The severall persons hereunder named were marryed at Wye at the time and dayes respectively mentioned by Robert Kivill Esq Justice of the peace according to the act then in force; their severall contracts being published and certified according to the said act. ...

All these hitherto were marryed according to the Act made by Oliver Cromwell & his Junto; those which follow according to ye Church of England (CCA:U3/174/1/A2).

Here there are 90 weddings between 1654-1657, then five blank years before nine more in 1663-1665. They are written plainly with virtually no extra details. Of this total of 99 no fewer than 81 have both parties from 39 parishes other than Wye, mostly within a five-mile radius, and in nearly every case both parties are of that same foreign parish.

Considering all the evidence for 1653-1660 marriages, it is clear that in many smaller parishes, and indeed probably in a substantial majority, the 1653 Act was a retrograde step in that far fewer marriages (and often none at all) were recorded, such losses probably not being balanced, and certainly not exceeded, by high totals in a relatively small group of other 'busy' parishes. The benefits are to be seen in the few parishes which did adhere to the new registration system, even if generally only for about five years, when enormously increased amounts of personal details are given, greatly superior to both pre- and post-Commonwealth levels.

Mention must be made of one valuable source for missing marriages in this difficult period. Following the outbreak of Civil War and the collapse of both the church courts and general authority, London witnessed the rapid emergence of a huge clandestine marriage trade. Certain churches and chapels, such as Holy Trinity Minories and St James Duke Place, saw prodigious increases in marriage totals, so much so that between 1676-1683 the combined totals (of these two places alone) of around 2,500 marriages annually, equalled perhaps half of all weddings taking place in the capital at that period. Such registers of clandestine and irregular marriages are now for the most part indexed and will reveal fair numbers of Kentish people being married far from home.

Conclusion

Parish registers are the mainstay of English genealogy, but something ought to be said briefly about other types of information, some of it of the highest interest, which may be found throughout the centuries down to the advent of printed books in 1812 when, ironically, neat and efficient pre-printed spaces automatically precluded such additional casual record-keeping.

Anyone who idly scans the inside-covers, fly-leaves and marginalia of such registers may find a veritable microcosm of human life in past centuries: there are contemporary references to church fabric, furniture and plate, ecclesiastical fees, rites and usages, crime, the weather, social behaviour, human peccadilloes and misfortunes, local censuses, parochial libraries, lists of parish officials, the children of Anabaptists and other dissenters, the collecting of money for local and national disasters (when sometimes extraordinarily large sums were offered), excommunications and much more besides, all haphazardly but carefully penned by a zealous clerk or minister in the recording of daily life in his own little part of the great patchwork of English parishes.

To take a few examples at random: Stone-in-Oxney has detailed lists of churchwardens, sidesmen, collectors and surveyors for the 1620s-1630s (KHLC: P353/1/2); at Rolvenden there are analyses and totals of baptisms and burials from 1558-1598 (KHLC: P308/1/1); and Thurnham notes churchwardens, overseers and sidesmen 1631-1640 and 1662-1679 (KHLC: P369/1/1). In summary, then, there is no telling what is to be found other than by serendipitous casual browsing.

Note. Parish register references: those housed at the Canterbury Cathedral Archives are prefixed by CCA: U3/ ; those at the Maidstone Kent History and Library Centre by KHLIC: P/. In practice, all but a dozen parishes may be consulted on microfilm at Canterbury, whereas Maidstone holds films only for those parishes actually deposited there. Hardly any at all are foliated or paginated, but many of the above quotations will be found at or close to the consonant subject-matter. Images of many east Kent parishes are now included on the *Findmypast* website.

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