

PARISH REGISTERS IN THE SALFORD HUNDRED OF LANCASHIRE

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This is intended to be an introductory guide to the contents, location, accessibility and historical uses of parish registers in south-east Lancashire, with particular reference to those which were compiled before the introduction of civil registration in 1837.

Anglican registers of baptism, marriage and burial form by far the most useful source of information for the population history of individual parishes for this period, as well as throwing light on many other aspects of a parish's social and economic history. They *can* form a continuous series from the year the system started, 1538, to the present day, though it should be stressed at once that historical accident has led to only a handful of such a complete sequence of registers in each county. Until 1598 there was no direction as to how the events were to be recorded. From that year, when books of parchment were introduced, incumbents were required to copy what notes had survived from earlier decades, especially from 1558. Many parishes had already lost some or all of these notes, and some clergymen were content to transcribe the minimum amount of information for their earlier years — the names of children and not their parents, for example, a practice which continued in Leigh down to 1637.

The Civil War and Interregnum mark significant gaps in many registers which did survive, and at one stage they were temporarily removed from the custody of the clergy, resulting in the loss of several of the oldest volumes. No single event, even the Second World War, has since caused a similar catastrophe, but individual books have gone astray or been destroyed in an annoying, and often unnecessary trickle. It has been estimated that, since 1831, when there was drawn up a national list of all register books, with dates covered, that every three weeks has seen another book disappear through fire, damage, theft, or other accident. In contrast, the earliest registers in the Salford Hundred have emerged almost unscathed since 1831 — only the earliest three books from Ashworth near Rochdale, and the earliest volume of Birch in Rusholme have disappeared, but at the same time several others, not listed in 1831, have come to light.

Odd, stray years surviving in the register or diocesan copy, known as the Bishop's Transcript (eg. Bolton 1573-4, Chorlton-cum-Hardy 1639, and Rivington, 1637/9 are ignored in this table). On the whole, the larger centres of population are well represented among the earliest survivors, with the smaller chapelries beginning in the

STARTING DATE OF SURVIVING PARISH REGISTERS IN THE SALFORD HUNDRED, 1538 — 1837

- 1538 — 1540 None
- 1541 — 1560 Middleton (‡1541), Radcliffe (‡1557)
- 1561 — 1580 Didsbury (‡1561), Eccles (‡1564), Manchester Collegiate (Cathedral) (‡1573), Flixton (1570†)
- 1581 — 1600 Ashton-under-Lyne (‡1594), Bolton (‡1590), Bury (‡1590), Gorton (‡1599), Rochdale (‡1582), Stretford (1598†)
- 1601 — 1620 Blackrod (‡1606), Deane (‡1613), Prestwich (‡1603)
- 1621 — 1640 Salford (1636†)
- 1641 — 1660 Blackley (‡1655), Horwich (1660†), Newton Heath (1655†)
- 1661 — 1680 Todmorden (‡1666)
- 1681 — 1700 Denton (‡1695)
- 1701 — 1720 Littleborough (1716), Milnrow (1715), Ringley (1709†), Rivington (1703), Shaw (1704), Turton (‡1720)
- 1731 — 1740 Ainsworth (1727), Ardwick (1740), Chorlton-cum-Hardy (‡1737), Darwen (1723†), Edenfield (1728), Heywood (1733), Holcombe (1726), Manchester St. Ann (1736), Unsworth (1730), Westhoughton (1732)
- 1741 — 1760 Astley (1760), Birch-in-Rusholme (1752, †only), Hey (Lees) (1743), Manchester St. Mary (‡1754), Mossley (1756), Peel (1760), Royton (1755), Wardleworth (1747)
- 1761 — 1780 Bury St. John (1770), Ellenbrook (1765), Heaton Norris (‡1767), Hollinwood (1769), Manchester St. John (1769), Manchester St. Paul (1765), Oldham St. Peter (1768), Pendleton (1776), Saddleworth Friarmere (1769), Whitworth (1763)
- 1781 — 1800 Bolton St. George (1796), Cheetham Hill (1794), Chorlton-on-Medlock St. Luke (1800), Dobcross (1787), Little Lever (1791), Manchester St. Clement (1793), Manchester St. George (1798), Manchester St. James (1788†), Manchester St. Michael (1789), Manchester St. Peter (1795), Salford St. Stephen (1794), Swinton (1791), Tottington (‡1799)
- 1801 — 1820 Ashworth (1813), Chorlton-on-Medlock, All Saints (1819), Hulme Christ Church (1810), Radcliffe St. Thomas (1819)
- 1821 — 1837 Ancoats Christ Church (1824), St. Andrew (1831), Ashton-under-Lyne St. Peter (1824), Birch, Hopwood (1829), Deane St. John (1826), Farnworth (1836), Hulme St. George (1828), Manchester St. Matthew (1837), Oldham St. James (1830), Salford Christ Church (1833), St. Philip (1833), Spotland St. Clement (1837), Stand (1827), Tyldesley (1825), Wardleworth St. James (1821)

‡ = Published, at least in part † = Transcript held by Lancashire Parish Register Society

eighteenth century. Often, in these cases, a record of events at chapelries may be entered earlier in the registers of the mother church.

The precise form of entry was not determined by law until 1753 (for marriages) and 1812 (for baptisms and burials). Until then, the amount of data varies from the minimal single-name baptismal or burial entry (and even 'John Smith and his wife' for a marriage entry!) to those where the clerk records names of parents (in the cases of baptisms, child burials, and occasionally marriages), the place of residence, the father's occupation (at baptism and child burial), and marital status. Age and cause of death appear in burial registers increasingly during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. From 1754, marriage entries should include names, parishes, sometimes occupations, signatures of both parties and witnesses, and whether arranged by banns or licence. From 1813, books of baptisms have spaces for date of ceremony, name of child and parent, occupation and abode; burials include name, date, abode and age. The format of the baptismal and burial record was unaffected by the introduction of civil registration in 1837, but marriage registers had to conform to that laid down by the legislation (and are unchanged since).

There are several books on the history of parish registers, the most recent being those of Steel¹ and the reprint of Cox². Burn³ and Waters⁴ were rather more anecdotal, but nevertheless offer a nineteenth century view of their importance. McLaughlin's pamphlet is written very much with genealogists in mind.⁵ Still closest to many hearts, however, is Tate.⁶

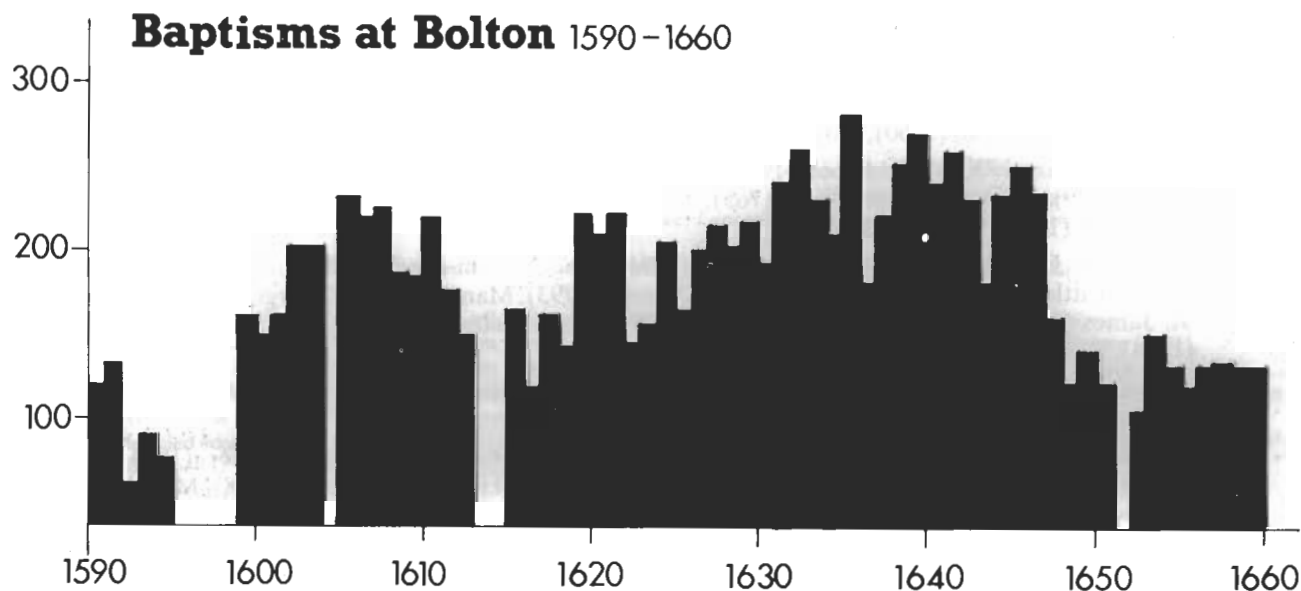
The term 'parish registers' refers specifically to those of the Church of England. Historians, however, are also interested in the complementary series of 'non-parochial registers' of a wide variety of denominations. Unexpectedly, Roman Catholic registers do not survive in large numbers even in Lancashire (sixty-five in the county as a whole), and only three commence before 1800 in the Salford Hundred, those of Bolton, 1794, Manchester St. Chad, 1772, and Manchester St. Mary, 1794. Similarly, Quakers are better represented further west and north. On the other hand, industrialisation in the south-east of Lancashire was accompanied by a very significant growth in Protestant nonconformist sects, and an increase in the number of their registers even before the massive expansion of separate Methodist chapels in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The content of non-parochial registers is similar to those of the Anglicans, and can exhibit similar variations even within the same denomination. Some differences reflect beliefs and attitudes — Quakers record birth, not baptism; Jews normally baptise only converts, but also have circumcision books; Roman Catholics often include godparents and date of marriage at baptism.⁷ Sects ideologically close to the Anglicans tended to use similar registers, but there are few marriages from 1754 to 1837 because, apart from those by Anglican, Jewish and Quaker ceremony, they were invalid in law.

Before the Industrial Revolution, it is rare for any parish save the largest to have more than one register series; increasingly from the middle of the eighteenth century, however, people in south-east Lancashire were transferring their allegiance to non-Anglican forms of worship, and the population history of a parish can no longer be based entirely on its register.⁸ Indeed, even when the Anglican church enjoyed an apparent monopoly in a parish, the registers should never be regarded as complete. People of other denominations were prepared to travel many miles, even across other parishes, in order to worship at the church of their choice; and clerks were not always assiduous in completing the register book at the time of the event. The simplest way to assess the extent of the resulting imperfections for a specific parish is by studying histograms compiled by counting the number of events.

This form of presentation quickly demonstrates defects in the register. Some years are missing altogether. In a parish of this size, large variations in the annual number of baptisms look rather suspicious, an indication of under-recording; and while an increase in the average number of baptisms would be consonant with an increase in population, the sudden decrease in that average in the 1650s can hardly reflect a halving of it! Bolton here is one example, but should not be regarded as typical — *no* register is 'typical'. It should be added that the same exercise for a non-parochial register would scarcely have any meaning, as its geographical boundaries were not nearly so clearly defined, and there is normally little prospect of devising any mathematical relationship between them and a local population.

Other clues to the incompleteness of Anglican registers may be found by comparison with Bishop's Transcripts, (copies of registers which should have been sent annually to bishops from the late sixteenth to the nineteenth



centuries — in our case, to the Bishop of Chester), from the sequence in which entries were written in the register, and from reports of non-attendance to be found in, for example, churchwarden's presentments. From 1696, incumbents were expected to record births, as well as baptisms, in the parish, and the few extant records of those who did so indicate the extent of under-registration in the more normal times — some 25 per cent in Childwall in the Lancashire Hundred of West Derby for example. It has recently been noted that the published register of Ashton-under-Lyne should have been augmented by extra entries from the Bishop's Transcripts, and researchers are always advised to read the introduction to volumes of printed registers in order to see if collation with Bishop's Transcripts has been effected.

Given that no register is a complete record of the vital events of any parish, or even denomination, it becomes important to gauge the extent and nature of omissions in relation to the use which is to be made of the data. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that a register omits a significant percentage of the actual events. There is a spectrum of studies at one end of which such a notional deficiency can be regarded as a minor irritant and at the other a disaster.

General Social History

Parish registers included compulsory registration of occupations only from 1813, with the introduction of standardised baptismal forms following George Rose's Act the previous year. However, it had long been the practice to include the data in not only baptismal but also burial entries (sadly, discontinued in 1813) so that reference to these registers helps to pin down both the starting date and the development of specific industries. Bleaching came to Heaton Norris at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, whereas dyeing was there a generation earlier. Colliers appear in Ashton-under-Lyne and Hyde before the Civil War, hatters in Radcliffe in the 1730s, and so on. M.T. Wild's analysis of the Saddleworth registers demonstrates the rich findings which await students who systematically exploit this source.⁹ Often, in the absence of other listings of inhabitants, references in these registers provide the only evidence for the presence of such professions as schoolteachers or doctors, and the extent of secondary and service occupations is very clear. For such a study, the random omission of, say, one in five entries would probably not have serious consequences.

The same could be said of many other aspects of social history of the Manchester region for which registers can provide primary data, from the least to the most significant. The burial of John, son of Ann Held at Didsbury in 1665, 'kild with a faule at footbawle', suggests that our violence off the field was once matched on it. The extent of the system of excommunication can be judged by entries from the Bolton register in 1632-3, about 20 per annum, with surprisingly few recorded absolutions. Parish registers are a principal source for the study of migration, particularly before the industrial revolution. Male migration is easier to spot than female, because much of the data relates to the distribution of surnames.

Many casual references may be found in a register's miscellaneous entries, away from the main baptism/marriage/burial sequence. Most are related to church affairs, including the collections of 'briefs' for worthy causes in other parishes. See, for example, the 35 briefs at Prestwich, 1661-5, which varied from the needs of individuals in Lincoln and London, repair of two churches in Scarborough, maintaining a Bolton student at university, and relief to shipwrecked sailors, and to those

who had lost their homes during fires in Hexham, Northumberland and Grantham, Lincs. Other references can provide insight into early collection and disbursement relating to poor relief, or the early growth of non-conformity.

Marriage registers have also been extensively used in order to study literacy at different periods, but there are difficulties in doing so. Signatures of brides, grooms and witnesses should be found on all entries since 1754; but witnesses were often those regularly in attendance at ceremonies, such as the parish clerk, or perhaps asked to witness *because* they could write, and it is known that some grooms and especially brides did not sign even though it is known from other evidence that they could write.

Historical Demography

E.A. Wrigley and his colleagues have provided an immense stimulus, based on the work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, to anyone interested in the exploitation of parish registers but dissatisfied with their current use.¹⁰ At its simplest, the counting of vital events ('aggregate analysis' gives the activity a respectability beyond its deserts) in order to assess the quantitative significance of demographic change has been used for hundreds of years. Clerks would sometimes record the number of burials in times of crisis, and the London bills of mortality extended this principle in order to differentiate between causes of death. Government statisticians early in the nineteenth century began to correlate data from parish registers (see the 1831 Abstract of parish register returns, part of the general census of that year), from the census, and eventually from civil registration. There is a long tradition in the Manchester area for the study of local as well as national demographic trends which goes back to the late eighteenth century; for a fund of references to their published works, see Wyke.¹¹ For more general reading, see the list provided by Palliser.¹²

However, those with the most pressing need to study such matters were neither historians nor civil servants, but firms trying to keep their heads above water in the life insurance business, having to translate statistical probabilities into £sd for individual clients. They did not have the means to study the life expectancy of individuals — only since 1939 has this country maintained a documentary system by which the birth and death of individuals can be linked with some certainty. Until the post-war period, historical demographers used methods similar to those of the actuaries, dealing with numbers of vital events, of those dying within specified age brackets, those born in certain townships, and so on. The mere counting of individual events over time can be quite revealing.¹³ The culmination of these studies in England, arising particularly from the work of the Cambridge Group, may be found in Wrigley & Schofield.¹⁴ Based on aggregate analyses of over 400 parishes (including Ashton-under-Lyne, Deane, Radcliffe and Rochdale), its sophisticated statistical analysis of parish registers has provided a clearer image of English population trends and a deeper understanding of the factors responsible for population change than would have been thought possible even a generation ago.

Family reconstitution is another technique used by the Cambridge Group in order to extract fresh insights into the population history of communities from parish registers. Pioneered by French demographers this powerful but time-consuming technique involves compiling genealogical trees for the whole parish in order

to derive more detailed statistical data, as well as to answer questions in areas where aggregative analysis cannot penetrate. To make sense of this operation, firm data concerning marital and genetic relationships must be established, involving as complete a vital profile as possible for identifiable individuals. This allows, for example, an assessment of age at marriage, average family size, age at death, or expectation of life which would be impossible to glean by counting the events themselves in the register. A fascinating exercise, it is nevertheless extremely time-consuming, and best done by a team; access to a mini-computer would facilitate many of the calculations, but would lengthen the initial data-recording stage. As an added incentive, it should be added that all too little research of this kind has been done on registers in the Salford Hundred. Students may be kept aware of such research in other areas of the country via *Local Population Studies*.¹⁵

What are the consequences for this level of demographic study of significant numbers of omissions? That depends very much on who was omitted! If random, it would not make a serious difference to calculations of rates of marriage or life expectancy, for example; but suppose the omissions related to social class (could the poorest afford baptism?) or religion (as was presumably the case with many at Childwall). Further, how can we establish *who* was omitted?

A starting point must be the assumption that all registers, however apparently complete, are in some degree defective, and probates possibly offer the easiest measure of omission. (These would all have to be consulted as an essential contribution to reconstitution anyway.) Further indications may be obtained by comparison with named individuals from such sources as the Protestation, Poll Tax, Hearth Tax, Test Oath, or Land Tax, which often reveal the presence of those who do not enter the registers, especially the unmarried adults who are subsequently buried in another parish. It should be noted, however, that the obligation to pay taxes or rates does not always arise out of residence in the parish concerned.

Historians have shown a particular interest in parish registers for the analysis of mortality as a major variable in the cause of population change, though birth and marriage rates are now shown to be at least as influential in long-term demographic trends. Barbara Hammond's pioneering essay is based almost entirely on Manchester, but the region is not well provided with modern studies.¹⁶ There are, however, plenty of registers which provide, for example, details of cause of death long before civil registration. Normally, cause of death is given only in unusual circumstances; but in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, many incumbents began to enter this as a matter of course. It should be said, by way of warning, that diagnosis was often rudimentary, and whereas 'asthma' or 'small pox' are probably accurate enough, 'decline', 'fever', 'killed' or 'fits' are a bit vague to be meaningful, and 'bowels', or 'mortification' verge on the ridiculous. The problems should not be underestimated but equally they should not deter the researcher from undertaking a systematic analysis of those vital demographic variables which remain hidden from view in the region's registers.

Name Studies

Parish registers provide a wealth of data relating to the history of first names, surnames¹⁷ and place names, and once again it is unlikely that our enemy, a significant number of omissions, will invalidate results except in unusual circumstances. For example, the chronological

distribution of surnames can provide a measure of geographical mobility; but where Scots or Huguenots, for example, are numerous enough to start their own churches, the Anglican registers lose their validity. It is important to know which institutions were in existence, not merely those whose registers happen to have survived. An allied study is that of pronunciation, as so many clerks wrote as the words sounded orally to them.

These studies are really in their infancy; not so that of place names, which can again be illuminated through entries in these registers. The work of the English Place Name Society, whose main publications are based on individual counties, uses these and a host of other sources in an effort to trace the long-term development of locative names, and their relationship to the county's economic and social history in addition to the Society's principle etymological interest.¹⁸

Genealogy

The study of the genetic connection between generations of the same family is nowadays often used synonymously with 'family history'. However, the difference between the two can be clearly seen in their relationship to parish registers. For the family historian, omissions are about as significant as for most other social historians; but even a single missing baptismal or marriage entry can be catastrophic for the genealogist, who must be confined to the particular. In some ways, genealogy should not be regarded as a normal branch of history, because causations and generalisations are not ends in themselves, justifying the form of study; they are rather supporting evidence, or educative clues, for achieving the main purpose — but knowing the average age of marriage of, say, stonemasons, is irrelevant if the marriage of, say William Peers, stonemason, (1813-48) cannot be found. Nevertheless, genealogists use the same source material as many historians, and have to assess the relative merits of conflicting evidence. The genealogical process tries to prove genetic routes over long periods of time, routes which are most commonly reconstructed, prior to civil registration in 1837, by linking data provided by parish and non-parochial registers.

Access

Access to registers of baptism, marriage or burial depends on whether or not they are Anglican. Those of all other denominations are private so that, unless they have been deposited in a public repository, it is a matter for the individual church or minister to decide. Access to those may sometimes be more readily granted to those of the relevant faith. Almost 9,000 volumes, almost all Protestant, were deposited nationally in the nineteenth century, and are now in the Public Record Office. Many are locally available on microfilm.

Anglican registers — the 'parish registers' proper — are controlled by the 1978 Parochial Registers and Records Measure. Any in which the most recent entry is more than one hundred years old are to be either deposited in a repository designated by the bishop (normally the Diocesan Record Office which, in the case of most of the Salford Hundred, is also the Archives Department of the City of Manchester library), or kept in the church in a 'rust-proofed, vented steel cupboard' whose temperature must not vary more than 10 degrees Celsius in any one week, and whose relative humidity must not fall outside the 50 to 65 per cent range. These and other specifications are monitored by an officer appointed by the bishop, usually a qualified archivist. The cost of maintaining these conditions falls on the individual parish church, and is so

great that the vast majority of such records, together with many more recent volumes, are now deposited. To those which are kept by the church, access is normally granted by the incumbent, though ownership is vested with the Parochial Church Council.

Any person having custody of an Anglican register must allow searches to be made "at all reasonable hours" (1978 Measure, s.20). In practice, however, you may find some difficulty in discovering what a few incumbents believe to be "reasonable", and an archivist will probably urge you to search a copy of the register in order to preserve the original. The incumbent can charge a fee for access, but an archivist may not do so on his own behalf. The fee is £4.00 for the first hour, and £3.00 for each subsequent hour or part thereof, a fee which applies to baptismal, burial, and pre-1837 marriage registers. Access to later marriage registers is governed by s.63 of the Marriage Act (1949) which, while guaranteeing right of access, does not specify a search fee.

It is often far more convenient, for many research purposes, to have access to a copy of the register rather than to the original, and such copies can take various forms. The most useful is normally a printed, published copy, because it would probably be indexed as well as available in a large number of libraries. The County Palatine of Lancaster is comparatively fortunate in having a thriving Parish Register Society since 1898, with 125 volumes printed. Of those with a single dagger above, only Oldham, Rochdale (1582-1641) and Saddleworth were not published by this Society. It is a sobering thought, however, that if publication continues at its present rate, the pre-1837 Anglican registers of Lancashire would take a further 550 years to complete. For this reason, the Society has started to publish microfiche copies of registers in addition to its annual volume. Though not as convenient to use, microfiche has

the advantage of being many times cheaper to produce than the printed book.

Most local studies libraries and record offices also have transcripts of registers, often made with a view to eventual publication. Usually, therefore, these transcripts are not indexed, so are inferior particularly for the purpose of family reconstitution. The Society's brochure lists Lancashire registers in three groups — those which it has printed (in whole or in part); those no part of which have been printed; and transcripts held by the Society.

Transcripts of registers from the Salford Hundred, held by the Lancashire Parish Register Society, are indicated above, and are normally available for public reference in the Archives Department of Manchester Central Library. In the case of one or two, such as Birch-in-Rusholme, the original registers have disappeared since the transcripts were made. Copies of other registers have been undertaken by individuals or groups, and are so extensive that it is not possible to produce a definitive list here. The local library or record office will probably know if such a transcript exists.

Registers have also been microfilmed, a process begun during the war as a precaution against damage by enemy attack. The enemy nowadays is seen as the army of local historians of various hues who could potentially be more harmful to parish registers than the Luftwaffe. While not always easy to read, and rarely indexed, microfilm is clearly achieving its purpose, and diocesan authorities are very wise in pursuing such a programme with vigour. For the Salford Hundred, there are two principal sources of information on the whereabouts of original and copy registers, in whatever form they exist.¹⁹ District libraries, such as those of Salford and Bury, issue their own handlists of sources, including local registers.

NOTES

1. D.J. Steel, *The National Index of Parish Registers, Vol. 1: General Sources of Births, Marriages and Deaths Before 1837* (1968).
2. J.C. Cox, *The Parish Registers of England* (1910).
3. J.S. Burn, *The History of Parish Registers in England* (1829, Revised edition 1862).
4. R.E.C. Waters, *Parish Registers in England* (1883).
5. E. McLaughlin, *Parish Registers* (1986).
6. W.E. Tate, *The Parish Chest* (1983 ed.).
7. A sound introduction to non-parochial registers is D.J. Steel, *The National Index of Parish Registers Vol. 2: Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy and Family History* (1973); Vol. 3: *Sources for Roman Catholic Genealogy and Family History* (1974).
8. The significance of this factor for Manchester has been noted by J.T. Krause, 'English Population Movements between 1700 and 1850' in M. Drake (ed.), *Population in Industrialization* (1969).
9. M.T. Wild, 'The Saddleworth Parish Registers as a Source for the History of the West Riding Textile Industry', *Textile History* 1 (1969-70) p.214.
10. E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (1966).
11. T.J. Wyke, *Population: Research Aids in Manchester History No. 2* (1985).
12. D.M. Palliser, 'What to read on population history', *Local Historian*, Vol. 16 (1984).
13. C.D. Rogers, *The Lancashire population crisis of 1623* (1974).
14. E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541 - 1871* (1981).
15. M. Drake (ed.), *Population Studies from Parish Registers* (1982) contains a selection of stimulating articles from *Local Population Studies*.
16. B. Hammond, 'Urban death rates', *Economic History*, 1 (1928).
17. R.A. McKinley, *Surnames of Lancashire* (1981).
18. There are numerous guides to genealogical research including D.E. Gardiner and F. Smith, *Genealogical Research in England and Wales*, Vol. 1. (1956); M. Mander, *How To Trace Your Ancestors* (1984); C.D. Rogers, *The Family Tree Detective* (1986 ed.); D.J. Steel, *Discovering Your Family History* (1986). The Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society is a flourishing institution which publishes its own magazine and other material for family historians.
19. Lancashire Record Office, *Handlist of Genealogical Sources* (1986 ed.) and Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society, *Parish and Non-conformist registers in Manchester Local History and Diocesan Record Office* (1986). These two publications substantially supersede S. Horrocks (ed.), *Registers Parochial: Non-parochial Monumental inscriptions, names, wills: Contributions Towards a Lancashire Bibliography* Vol.5 (1973).