

A DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE PARISHES OF BRUTON AND PITCOMBE IN THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET

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Social, economic and demographic forces have interacted in a complex way to shape our history. It is through local studies such as this one that an attempt is being made to understand these relationships. This paper deals not with the deeds of the rich and powerful, but is concerned with the lives of all of the parishioners. The questions which are investigated are those which would influence a man's attitude to his family and to his community. They are concerned with the realities of life: at what age would a man marry and how old would be his bride? How many children would she bear and how many would survive? The answers to fundamental questions such as these would vary over time and so the period under investigation extends over three centuries from 1554 to 1846.

Bruton is the most populous of the two parishes but it was decided to include Pitcombe as together they form a fairly compact area with most of the population concentrated near the centre. Also they have shared much of their industrial history, both being involved in the medieval wool trade and later in the silk industry which only left the area at about the end of the study period. Throughout this study the two parishes have been treated as a single area.

A number of sources was consulted but most of the data was extracted from the Parish Registers. These Registers can be unreliable for a number of reasons. Where obvious omissions occur, the gaps can be bridged by interpolation, and this has resulted in the addition of 19 baptisms and 148 burials out of a total of 16,391 baptisms and 13,536 burials.

An attempt has been made to assess the extent of any other under-registration. The under-registration of baptisms is likely to affect males rather than females because the former have a higher mortality rate in early life. Therefore, it is to be expected that under-registration will disturb the Male/Female Birth Ratio which is naturally about 105 males per 100 females. The ratios as obtained from the Registers (Table I) are very close to the theoretically expected ratio. In addition to this, Crude Birth Rates calculated with reference to the base populations shown in Table II indicate that it is unlikely that under-registration of baptisms occurred on any significant scale before the end of the 18th century.

TABLE I.

Illegitimacy Rates and Male/Female Baptismal and Burial Ratios. All sex ratios have been calculated as the number of males per 100 females

| Date | Illegitimacy Rate (% age) | Male/Female Baptismal Ratio | Male/Female Burial Ratio |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1541-1580 | | 105 | 115 |
| 1581-1620 | 2 | 100 | 94 |
| 1621-1660 | 1 | 106 | 105 |
| 1661-1700 | 1 | 104 | 102 |
| 1701-1740 | 3 | 109 | 102 |
| 1741-1780 | 7 | 106 | 88 |
| 1781-1820 | 8 | 93 | 83 |
| 1821-1846 | 5 | 101 | 83 |

It is difficult to assess the reliability of the burial records. The greatest deficiency is likely to occur amongst those infants who died very young before baptisms, but 'once a child has been baptised it is unlikely that its subsequent death will go unregistered' (Wrigley 1968, p. 564). Therefore, if it is accepted that the baptismal record is substantially correct, one might also assume that the burial record is reasonably reliable.

Some authorities believe that marriage records are likely to be more complete than either baptismal or burial records, but clearly for the period 1661-1720 the recording of marriages was deficient. This is a phenomenon which has been noted in a number of other parishes and there is as yet no satisfactory explanation. When the number of baptisms for this period is considered and the low incidence of illegitimacy is noted, then it becomes clear that some kind of stable union was being entered into by the parents although no ceremony was being recorded in the registers.

Nonconformity is a common cause of omission in Anglican Registers and therefore an attempt was made to ascertain the strength of any Dissenting communities within the two parishes. The Registration Act of 1695 required that notice of all births should be given to the incumbent, and the register at Bruton contains a section headed 'of all such as are not baptised according to the Rites and Ceremonies of ye Church of England'. During the period 1696-1718 the names in that section make up 2.9% of the recorded births for the period and as these have been included in all of the calculations there is no evidence that Nonconformity detracted greatly from the accuracy of the registers prior to the 19th century. Baptismal registers commenced in 1802 at the Bruton Congregational Chapel. They record 168 baptisms during the relevant period and these have been included in all of the calculations. They make up about 5% of the total for the period 1802-46.

At the end of the period the accuracy of the ecclesiastical data was tested by comparing it with the Civil Registers. For the period 1838-46 the Baptismal Registers recorded 85.9% of the births, the Burial Registers recorded 90.6% of the deaths, and the Marriage Registers 98.1% of the marriages. Accuracy of this order is considered to be good, but naturally one would like to know how long these deficiencies had existed. When the Crude Birth Rates are calculated for the various dates shown in Table II it is noted that those for 1731, 1791, 1811 and 1821 are as near constant as one could possibly expect and this suggests that the registration at these dates could well be fairly accurate. But the figures for 1801, 1831 and 1841 are so low as to be suspect. If the Crude Birth Rates for 1831 and 1841 are inflated by 14.1% (this being the deficiency indicated by the Civil Registers) then rates are obtained which are so close to the 1821 value as to suggest that the under-registration had only become serious after 1821. The Birth Rate for 1801 presents a more difficult problem for which there is no apparent explanation.

Despite these minor exceptions it would appear that the registers of these two parishes can form a reliable basis for a demographic study.

In order to calculate the size of the population of Bruton and Pitcombe at various times before the first official census in 1801 a large number of taxation documents was examined, but these mostly proved to be disappointing. However, the Subsidy for 1547 listed 264 taxpayers¹ and, as these would be heads of households, by assuming a Mean Household Size of 4.7 (Laslett, 1969) it can be calculated that the population was then 1241.

Another useful document is the Hearth Tax of 1673.² This roll lists 315 taxpayers for the whole of the Hundred of Bruton, but unfortunately the names have not been allocated to individual parishes. From a consideration of a number of other sources³ it is highly probable that 55% of these taxpayers would have resided within the study area, and therefore Bruton and Pitcombe contained 173 payers of the Hearth Tax. As not all householders paid this tax it is necessary to ascertain how many were exempt, and details of these exist for individual parishes for 1670 and 1674⁴ when there were 167 and 165 relevant exemptions respectively. The exemptions of 1674 have been added to the taxpayers of 1673 to obtain a total of 338 households and, assuming a Mean Household Size of 4.5, this yields a population of 1521.

TABLE II.

Base Populations and Crude Birth Rates. (The Crude Birth Rate indicates the numbers of children born per thousand of the population).

| Date | Population | Crude Birth Rate | Crude B R. inflated by 14.1% |
|------|------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| 1547 | 1241 | 38.1 | |
| 1673 | 1521 | 38.3 | |
| 1731 | 2092 | 32.6 | |
| 1791 | 2022 | 29.8 | |
| 1801 | 1957 | 25.7 | |
| 1811 | 2056 | 29.7 | |
| 1821 | 2507 | 31.6 | |
| 1831 | 2703 | 26.5 | 31.5 |
| 1841 | 2468 | 26.8 | 31.1 |
| 1851 | 2520 | | |

An 18th-century rate book⁵ has been utilized to obtain a population figure for 1731, and the survey made by Collinson in 1791 has yielded a total for that year (Collinson, 1791). All of these base populations, together with those from the official census, have been entered in Table II.

The primary method of analysis used is the aggregative procedure as outlined by Professor Eversley (Wrigley, 1966 (i)). With this method people are allocated to various categories so that for baptisms it is possible to differentiate between male and female, and between legitimate and illegitimate. With burials, differentiation can be made between male and female, and between adults and children and, for some periods, infants. Monthly as well as annual rates can be calculated. The two parishes were treated as a single study area and 9-year moving averages for Baptisms, Burials and Marriages were plotted on Fig. 1.

A number of tables was compiled from the data. Mention has already been made of the Illegitimacy Rates and the Male/Female Baptismal Ratios in Table I. The Male/Female Burial Ratios have also been incorporated into that table.

After 1784, when the ages of those buried were recorded, Infant Mortality Rates could be calculated (Table III).

TABLE III

Infant Mortality Rates 1784-1846. (The Infant Mortality Rate indicates the number of children who die in their first year of life per thousand of children born.)

| Date | Infant Mortality Rate per thousand |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| 1784-1790 | 200 |
| 1791-1800 | 205 |
| 1801-1810 | 188 |
| 1811-1820 | 160 |
| 1821-1830 | 132 |
| 1831-1840 | 198 |
| 1841-1846 | 182 |

Years of Crisis Mortality, defined as those years in which there were twice as many burials as in other years of the same period, were investigated in order to ascertain whether the mortality of these distressing years fell disproportionately upon the adults or the children.

TABLE IV

This table shows whether the exceptional mortality of a Crisis Mortality Year was disproportionately more fatal to children or adults. The data for the Normal Year was obtained by averaging the data for the five years preceding the Crisis Year.

| Crisis Year | Number of Burials | | Child/Adult Burial Ratio | |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| | Normal Year | Crisis Year | Normal Year | Crisis Year |
| 1588* | 20 | 107 | 56/100 | 22/100 |
| 1597* | 32 | 96 | 42/100 | 30/100 |
| 1624* | 34 | 63 | 60/100 | 40/100 |
| 1625* | 34 | 57 | 60/100 | 39/100 |
| 1651 | 29 | 79 | 40/100 | 216/100 |
| 1728 | 53 | 101 | 68/100 | 124/100 |
| 1741* | 55 | 134 | 47/100 | 41/100 |
| 1742 | 55 | 96 | 47/100 | 78/100 |
| 1763* | 46 | 82 | 45/100 | 19/100 |
| 1813 | 49 | 75 | 59/100 | 103/100 |

*These years were exceptionally bad for adults.

Marriages were investigated in order to examine the extent and the variation of the Marriage Horizon. This was measured by taking the distances between the parish churches of the bride and the groom. It is to be expected that when people migrate their marriage horizons will be extended. The results indicated that there was low mobility in the 17th century, considerable mobility during the period 1721-1770, and rather less mobility thereafter. Many more brides than grooms married within their own parish churches, and many of the outsiders originated in other West Country textile centres. The dominant feature was that in 85% of the marriages both partners lived within 4 miles of the centre of the study area.

As a secondary method of analysis a Partial Family Reconstitution was carried out. The marriages which took place in 1601, 1651, 1701, 1751 and 1801 were investigated and, in order to increase the size of the sample, the years before and after the designated years were included. The registers were searched for details of ages at marriage and at death of both the grooms and brides, and the dates of births, marriages and deaths of their children. In some cases the information was not complete, either because vital events were not recorded, or because there were insufficient details to ensure positive identification of individuals. Some of the samples were disappointingly small, but the results helped to explain the trends found in the aggregative analysis. The results of this section of the study are shown in Tables V and VI.

TABLE V.

Results of Partial Family Reconstitution Exercise.

| Date | Mean Age at Marriage | | Average Length of Marriage | Average Number of Children |
|------|----------------------|-------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Groom | Bride | | |
| 1601 | 25.4 | 25.6 | 16.5 yrs | 3.9 |
| 1651 | 25.7 | 25.2 | 14.3 | 3.7 |
| 1701 | 24.0 | 24.7 | 16.0 | 3.3 |
| 1751 | 22.7 | 24.5 | 23.4 | 3.2 |
| 1801 | 25.3 | 23.7 | 27.0 | 4.0 |

TABLE VI.

Mean Birth Intervals obtained by Partial Family Reconstitution Exercise. (The Mean Birth Interval 1-2, is the average length of time in months between the 1st and 2nd children born to all of those couples who were married during the designated year. Similarly, 2-3 and 3-4 shows the average length of time between the births of the 2nd and 3rd and the 3rd and 4th children born respectively.)

| Date | Rank Order of Birth Intervals (months) | | |
|------|--|-----|-----|
| | 1-2 | 2-3 | 3-4 |
| 1601 | 39 | 39 | 30 |
| 1651 | 37 | 38 | 32 |
| 1701 | 25 | 34 | 29 |
| 1751 | 35 | 27 | 62 |
| 1801 | 34 | 27 | 31 |

THE ANALYSIS

From a study of the Nine Year Moving Averages of marriages, baptisms and burials which are all plotted on Fig. 1, it appears that the population history of the two parishes falls into four main phases which will each be considered in turn.

PHASE I (ending in 1579)

This phase had already started before the commencement of the study period, and the part which is recorded in the parish registers is too short to give a clear indication of the trends throughout the phase. However, it seems to have been a time of declining baptisms, those recorded around 1580 numbering only half as many as those recorded twenty years earlier. The number of burials also declined, but not so steadily. The natural increase did not suffer unduly by these changes but generally remained above ten persons per year.

In the 16th century Bruton was a busy marketing centre and owed much of its prosperity to the wool trade. Inflation and fluctuations in the fortunes of that trade probably led to economic uncertainty which, reinforced by the high mortality of 1558-59, caused a decrease in the number of births and marriages. That the natural increase did not suffer from this lessening of activity can be attributed to the low infant mortality rate which prevailed at that period (Hoskins, 1963, p. 148).

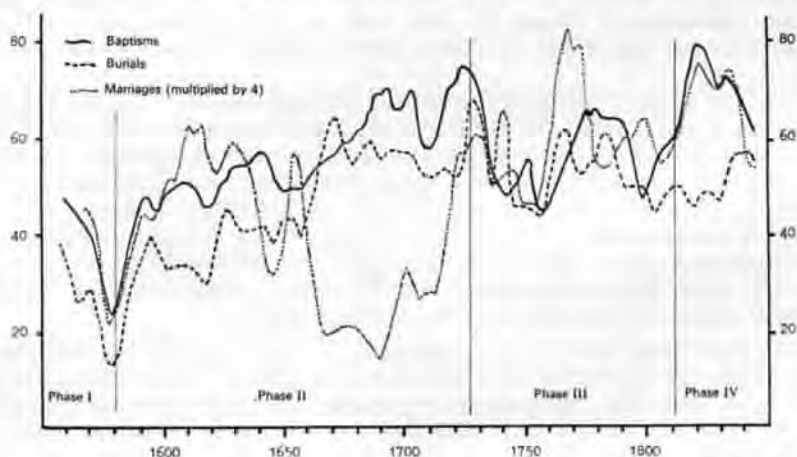


Fig. 1. The Nine Year Moving Averages of Baptisms, Burials and Marriages for Bruton and Pitcombe during the period 1554 to 1846.

It might be considered that Phase I merely represented part of Phase II, but the number of births recorded before 1570 is too high to fit in with that period and the entries in the Pitcombe registers which date back to 1538 suggest that the high level of births was being maintained before the commencement of the study period.

PHASE II (1580-1725)

This phase, which lasted for 145 years, was characterized by four great cycles of birth increases and decreases. The amplitude of these 'waves' became greater with time, but the overall trend was for a steady increase in the number of births.

It is noticeable that with the first three increases in baptisms the number of burials also rose, so that the first few years of a baptismal increase did not produce a rise in the natural increase but actually coincided with a fall in numbers. During the third cycle the number of burials actually rose so rapidly that there was a natural decrease for several years around 1670. However, the rise in the number of burials at the beginning of each cycle did not persist and the annual totals fell back to a plateau which, although higher than the level for the previous cycle, was still sufficiently low enough to ensure a natural increase of about 15 persons per year.

The fourth cycle, starting in 1712, was unlike the previous three cycles in that the rise in the number of baptisms was not accompanied by a rise in the number of burials, and therefore the natural increase associated with that cycle took place immediately.

During the years of crisis mortality which occurred in Phase II, adults were usually the chief sufferers, but it is significant that this seems to have had little effect upon the birth rate and it can only be presumed that when marriages were disrupted by the death of one of the partners, the survivor must generally have married again quickly to reform a family unit.

It is of interest to investigate the causes of the high mortality of the Crisis Years. Typhus was the cause of many deaths in 1588 (Creighton, 1894, Vol. I, p. 350) and although 'persons of all ages are susceptible to typhus ... as age increases the case fatality rate rises sharply' (Shrewsbury, 1970, p. 125). 1597 was a year of great scarcity as well as of influenza. The former probably caused most of the trouble in the study area as influenza would have been more dangerous to children. Spotted fever and dysentery proved fatal to many adults in 1624-25 as did bubonic plague which visited the area in 1666. The monthly pattern of burials suggests that the plague lingered on until 1670 to be followed by smallpox in 1674-75. The monthly pattern of burials for 1651 appears at first sight to be a clear example of plague, but the extraordinarily high proportion of children involved makes this most unlikely. Creighton does not record any outbreaks of plague for that year but quotes descriptions (Vol. I, p. 566-8) given by two physicians of a fever which appears to have been dangerous to children.

During the whole of Phase II the natural increase totalled 1351, but the population only increased by about 70% of that and it must be assumed that the remainder left the area. Why emigration should have occurred on such a large scale is not known, but the export of undyed broadcloths upon which the town depended would have been severely disrupted, firstly by the schemes of Alderman Cockayne to prohibit the export of undyed cloth, and later by the Thirty Years War. At an unknown date prior to 1648 most of the land in the open fields had been enclosed, and it is highly unlikely that under these circumstances all of the extra population could have found employment either on the land or in the woollen industry.

The destination of most of the emigrants is unknown but the Indentures of Apprenticeships for the period 1676-1696 show that 206 boys were sent to tradesmen in the London area. That members of both sexes must have emigrated is indicated by the fact that the Male/Female Burial Ratios (Table I) remained near normal during Phase II.

While the size of the natural increase was fairly consistent and tended towards a level of 15 persons per year, as the population was growing it can be deduced that

the actual rate of natural increase was declining. The reason for this is probably the steady decline in the average number of children per marriage from 3.9 in 1601 to only 3.3 a century later. In view of the decreasing length of time required by a family to produce their children, it would seem that the decrease in family size was due to a deliberate policy of family limitation.

PHASE III (1726-1810)

During the 85 years of the third phase the pattern of baptisms and burials was much less regular than in the previous phase. It is convenient to subdivide the period into three sections:

(i) 1726-1773:

The baptismal numbers dropped from the level which they had reached in 1725 and did not regain that level for nearly half a century (1773). The cumulative natural increase between these two dates was nil, mainly because for nineteen of these years burials exceeded baptisms.

(ii) 1774-1790:

The parishes experienced a higher and steadier number of births, but half-way through the period the number of burials rose to almost equal the number of baptisms. These years provided the most sustained period of natural increase during Phase III.

(iii) 1791-1810

These years were notable for a gentle decrease and then increase in the number of baptisms. On two occasions the burial numbers increased and for a short period actually exceeded the number of baptisms.

The percentage rate of increase during Phase III was only about a quarter of that for Phase II, and while there can be little doubt that the low number of births was the major reason for this, the situation was exacerbated by the fluctuation of the death rate which was more variable than before. Episodes of high mortality followed each other in rapid succession, reaching peaks in 1728, 1741, 1763 and 1785. After 1785 when the burial numbers did fall there was little in the way of natural increase because the number of baptisms fell even more rapidly, although they did increase during the last ten years of the phase.

The high death rates were associated with years of crisis mortality. 1727 was a bad harvest year (Hoskins, 1968, p. 23) and smallpox was prevalent in the following year when 25 of the burial entries in the Bruton Registers were marked 'S.P.'. There is evidence that the disease was still present in 1729 and again in 1736-37 as well as in 1753 and 1765. The 'Raging Fever' of 1741, which Creighton (Vol. II, p. 78) identified as typhus, continued in association with smallpox in 1742.

Smallpox, whooping cough, scarletina and measles were the common diseases of the period and they all had one characteristic in common, namely that they were all more dangerous to children than to adults. This change from the Phase II diseases such as plague and typhus, which killed adults, to the diseases which killed mainly children as in Phase III is of fundamental importance because the presence of a disease in a community imparts a certain immunity to the survivors. If the illness attacks adults the children receive their immunity and there is less chance of another epidemic of that illness for a generation. But if the illness proves fatal to children only the survivors and the adults, who are not seriously at risk in any case, receive protection and after a few years when more children have been born the same disease may strike again.

Another feature of this change in the pattern of fatality would be that marriages would be less likely to be broken by death. It has been noted in Table V that marriages during Phase III were of longer duration, and as they were being entered into by younger people it is perplexing to find that the number of children born to each family was actually decreasing. This can only be explained if family limitation is envisaged on a considerable scale. Possibly an explanation of this behaviour is to be

found in a study of the economic situation which for convenience will be reviewed after a consideration of the demographic trends in Phase IV.

PHASE IV (1811-1846)

The number of burials had started to decrease in 1790 and they remained low until 1830. This coincided with a sharp decline in the Infant Mortality Rate (Table III) and in spite of 1813 being a bad year the period was comparatively free from epidemics. From 1810 onwards the number of both marriages and baptisms rose and the natural increase was the largest recorded during the whole three centuries of the study. The rate of increase was probably greater than at any time since 1564.

The partial family reconstitution shows that for those married in 1801 the duration of marriage was slightly increased, but much more significant was the increase in the number of children per family (Table V). This high rate of natural increase was brought to a close in the last few years of Phase IV as the number of births fell and the numbers of burials rose. This rise in the number of burials was due to a rise in the Infant Mortality Rate which was occasioned by the active return of infectious diseases.

ECONOMIC SITUATION DURING PHASES III AND IV

Bruton's marketing functions continued to be important and communications were improved with the establishment of the Bruton Turnpike Trust in 1756. The industrial situation was less satisfactory. The cloth trade, which declined in the South West in the first half of the 18th century, probably ceased in Bruton in 1757.

Silk throwing was introduced into both parishes in the middle of the century but contemporary reports make it clear that its introduction did not ensure steady prosperity.⁶ However, by the end of the 18th century the industry had expanded and the busy years lasted with minor fluctuations until about 1830.⁷ Thereafter business was less stable and the silk industry deserted the area in the early 1860s.

The silk industry was notable for the large proportion of children and young women who were employed. Those over the age of eight worked for 11½ hours a day, but some younger children were also employed.⁸ The Sadler Committee⁹ heard evidence regarding the harm done to young people who worked such long hours, but even when the Educational Provisions of the Factory Acts were introduced, they did not apply to the silk industry,¹⁰ although children under the age of thirteen years formed a higher proportion of the work force than in any other industry.

This type of employment encouraged parents to have many children. It also encouraged women to come into the area, while men seeking employment often had to leave. The Census Reports reveal that the balance between the sexes was greatly disturbed. During the first two decades of the 19th century the Male/Female Ratio was only 78. The 1821 Report is particularly helpful as it provides a breakdown of the population for the Hundred of Bruton by sex and age. The greatest imbalance occurred in the reproductive age groups so that for people aged between 21 and 40 there were only 68 males per 100 females and there is evidence to indicate that within the parishes of Bruton and Pitcombe the situation was even worse. Additional evidence is derived from the Male/Female Burial Ratios (Table I) which suggest that the imbalance had existed for the whole of Phases III and IV. Thus the proportion of women in the population who could have been married was relatively low.

The decrease in the Infant Mortality Rate which occurred in Phase IV must be attributed mainly to the comparative freedom from epidemics which existed at that time, but the greatest improvement coincided with a period of comparative prosperity in the silk industry. Because of the organization of the industry, with the employment of large numbers of outworkers, the increased prosperity which followed an improvement in trade would be diffused into a large number of households and there are indications that the diet of the working people was undergoing a certain improvement during the 1830s.¹¹

SUMMARY

During the first two phases of the study period the birth rate was high and generally steady for most of the time and, as the periods of heavy mortality were well spaced, a high rate of natural increase was achieved. In spite of a fairly high level of emigration the population of the parishes increased. Emigration is generally selective in age and sex but the balance between the sexes does not appear to have been seriously disrupted until the end of the 17th century. It is probable that much of that early movement of population away from the study area was caused by young men and women becoming servants. Laslett (1971, p. 262) has calculated that there were 107 male servants per 100 female servants, and such a sex ratio among emigrants would not be seriously disruptive.

Demographically, the most noticeable feature of the three centuries which were investigated is the stagnation which prevailed throughout most of the 18th century. The predominant cause of this can be attributed to the changed pattern of mortality of which Creighton wrote in 1894: 'The plague, which was the great infection of the later medieval and earlier modern period, was peculiarly fatal to adult lives; on the other hand, the mortality from infectious diseases in our own time falls in much larger ratio upon infants and children.' (Vol. II, p. 18.) Thus it became possible for epidemics to occur more frequently and the effect of the heavy mortality among the young was to limit the proportion of those born who would survive to become adults and subsequently parents. The situation in Bruton and Pitcombe was worsened by the form of the industrial activity which developed in the area. Labour requirements were so female orientated that the population became unbalanced. It is significant that the birth rate declined from 38.3 in 1673 to only 32.6 in 1731.

It is difficult to make comparisons between the experiences of Bruton and Pitcombe and other areas which have been studied because the results of such research are often presented in different ways. The Baptismal/Burial Ratios can be used, however, to give an indication of the main periods of population growth. These ratios for the study area along with those of Hartland in Devon which have been plotted for comparisons are shown in Fig. 2. The high ratios in Hartland at the end of the 16th century declined during most of the 17th century and a similar situation existed in the Vale of Trent (Chambers, 1957) and in the Morley Wapentake (Drake, 1962). Bruton and Pitcombe conformed closely to this pattern. An increase in growth in

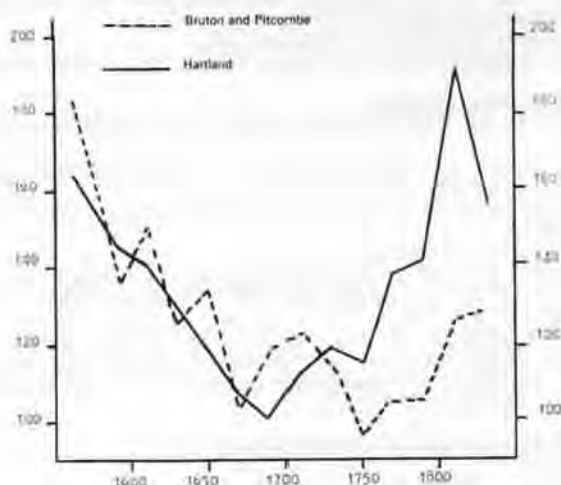


Fig. 2. Baptismal/Burial Ratios (the number of Baptisms per hundred Burials) for Bruton and Pitcombe and Hartland. The high ratios generally indicate the periods of most rapid growth.

Hartland is indicated after 1760. In Morton Say, Shropshire (Jones, 1968) it occurred after 1740, and in other Shropshire parishes investigated by Sogner even earlier (Sogner, 1963), but in Bruton and Pitcombe the increase was delayed until the end of the century. Although it is difficult to account for this late commencement of population growth, it should be noted that during the last three decades of the century the silk industry was depressed and it is doubtful whether Infant Mortality had ever been higher. When the data for the two parishes is treated separately the same trends are to be found in each and it would be of interest to investigate the registers of the surrounding parishes to see whether the same pattern persisted over a wider area.

There is no direct evidence as to the causes of firstly, the decline, and secondly, the rise in the Baptismal/Burial Ratio. It is clear that more children could have been born into the average family and thus it must be assumed that family limitation was being practised. Wrigley (1966, (ii)) has argued that in the 16th century limitation of families was largely brought about by the delaying of marriage for women, but in the 17th century restraint was exercised within marriage. The findings of this study would largely support this, for it appears that within the study area deliberate family limitation was practised with increasing intensity until the end of the 18th century when family sizes increased again, although even then it is clear that all restraint was not abandoned. The decrease in family size took place while Bruton was becoming more industrialised and it is possible that the decrease was associated with a shift in the ratio of agricultural/industrial workers. Unfortunately the Registers do not contain enough occupation information to allow an investigation on these lines. It could be argued that the increase in family size resulted from the increased demand for child labour in the silk industry which was particularly heavy in the early 19th century.

Thus throughout these three centuries of demographic history three main themes appear to have been of great significance:

- (i) the changing pattern of fatality of infectious diseases;
- (ii) the changing ratio between the sexes which was caused by economic factors;
- (iii) the changing attitude to the practice of family limitation which was influenced by economic and social factors.

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5. S.R.O., D/P/brut 13/2/5.
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7. Report on the Present State of the Silk Trade, B.P.P. 1831-32 (628) XIX (J. S. Ward of Bruton gave evidence on 18th April 1832).
8. B.P.P. 1816 Vol. III (evidence before the Select Committee by G. S. Ward of Bruton, 6th May 1816).
9. B.P.P. 1831-32 Vol. XV.
10. Factory Inspectors Reports, B.P.P. 1839 (42) XLII.
11. Report from Commissioners for inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws 1834 (44) Vol. 30. Appendix (B1) Answers to Rural Questions. Contains answers both from the Parish of Bruton and from the Hundred of Bruton.

This article is an abridged version of a B.A. Dissertation of the same title. The original, which is located in the Cambridge University Library (Classmark B.A. Geog. 13), contains all of the original data, full details of the analytical techniques which were used, and several other tables which are not given here. An extended bibliography and a list of acknowledgements are also included.