

People in the parish: The Giggleswick parish register 1558 – 1837

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The parish register of the Ancient parish of Giggleswick in published book form covers the period 1558 to 1837. The Ancient parish up to the 1850s comprised the townships of Giggleswick, Langcliffe, Rathmell, Settle and Stainforth. Thereafter these townships became separate parishes. Henry VIII required registration of baptisms, marriages and burials to be carried out following 1538 but only after about 1558 were parish registers commonly created, in the time of Elizabeth I. People were suspicious about the motives behind registration – taxation was an issue. There were about 10,000 parishes in England. There are only about 66 parishes in the collection of 404 used by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure which have accessible registers which start in about 1558. We are lucky that Giggleswick registration started in 1558 and that an enormous voluntary effort has been put into transcription of the Giggleswick records over many years, 1984 to 2008, led by Professor Richard Hoyle and Ian Roberts. Important but limited work was done by John Foster in the early 1900s. The published books detail the physical state of the original register documents – parchment (made from animal skins), vellum (calf skin) or paper bound in different ways. From 1774 standard forms were used. The original Giggleswick records are kept in the North Yorkshire County Record Office.

The Giggleswick register contains annual lists of baptisms (usually taking place a short while after birth), marriages and burials, and in later years birth dates and details of occupation. Since many people shared the same name the place of residence was commonly noted, whether a township or specific farmstead. The status of a person – infant, adolescent, wife, widow, senior, junior, was sometimes added.

Registers have most commonly been used to obtain population data. The information contained can help to understand the impacts of bad weather, famine and disease on communities. The following material illustrates some aspects of the history of Giggleswick.

Christian names

The very common occurrence of a few names over many decades is notable (Tables 1, 2 and 3). This often leads to difficulties in identifying individuals for statistical purposes and constructing family trees, particularly when the same names were used repeatedly in one family. Three short periods were selected to get a clearer picture of the frequency of the most common names and total number of different baptismal names using the register indexes (Tables 1, 2 and 3).

Table 1 Christian names

1600-1605			
Thomas	41	Margaret	25
William	31	Anna	22
John	18	Elizabeth	19
Richard	17	Jane	16
Robert	14	Ellena	11
	26 other names		16 other names

Table 2 Christian names

1700-1705			
John	26	Elizabeth	20
William	21	Anna	15
Thomas	15	Maria	14
Robert	13	Margaret	12
Richard	10	Jane	9
	23 other names		17 other names

Table 3 Christian names

1800-1805			
John	34	Mary	40
William	30	Elizabeth (Betty)	28
Thomas	26	Ann	23
James	20	Nanny (Nancy)	18
Richard	18	Jane	18
	24 other names		21 other names

There is little change in the total number of names used. John, Richard and Thomas are by far the most common names for males and Elizabeth, Anna and Mary for females. Perhaps surprisingly there is little indication of preference for biblical or royal names.

Surnames

The most common by far are, in order of frequency: Carr, Armitstead, Foster, Lawson and Brown. The large number of surnames may suggest considerable interchange of people between localities in this time period.

Datestones on houses

A recent project to identify people with two, three or four initials on datestones was greatly aided by the register. It is a challenge to find a match because of the inconsistency of arrangement of initials. However, by systematic searching the index of names, both forenames and surnames, combined with appropriate dates, a high degree of success was achieved. Marriages and burials in which the wife's husband is named were most helpful. The baptisms were helpful when a series of children are registered even though a marriage was not, perhaps having taken place elsewhere.

Family trees

A number of family trees have been constructed for Langcliffe families (e.g. see www.dalescommunityarchives.org.uk, item LHC/003/007). The Carrs in Giggleswick parish present a real problem in that there are so many of them, and many with the same Christian name. Fortunately the register often gives the village or homestead name which helps to

separate those in the several townships all of which have had Carrs living in them for centuries.

The other classic case is the Preston name; the forebears of Richard Preston who built the Folly in Settle have long been uncertain. There are 64 entries for Richard Preston prior to late 1695 or early 1696 when Richard of the Folly died intestate. Reg Postlethwaite, a well-respected local historian, has recently shown that Thomas Preston of Long Preston was Richard's father, which demonstrates that one has to look further afield than the Giggleswick register to be sure about positioning someone on a family tree. Furthermore, in all cases wills are an important, if not vital, source of information as in the case of this Richard's brother.

House histories

The register often names individual ancient farmsteads such as Close House, Fieldgate, Gawthropp, Grainhouse, Green, Hollin Hall, Huggon House, Lumb, Mearbeck, New Hall, Rome, Swainstead, and others. It is then possible to determine which families occupied these places, as tenants or owners, often in the hands of one family for long periods in early times. Several of these places have been studied in detail and reported in the North Craven Heritage Trust Journal at various times.

Occupations

A study of occupations is warranted, a very wide range being listed after 1770. Most commonly listed are the trades of blacksmith, builder, carpenter, cotton spinner, farmer, husbandman, labourer, mason, servant, shoemaker, tailor, weaver and yeoman.

Brevity and Longevity of life

Studies of populations all show very high mortality rates of infants up to the 1900s. About one quarter to one third of those baptized died before they reached four years old. This was the case up to the early 1900s when medical interventions became successful in treating many problems. The Giggleswick data for the 1700s to 1837 include the age at which people died; the Langcliffe parish register dates from 1851 to modern times and also gives ages at death. It is otherwise very tedious (and success is limited) to try to obtain age at death by matching names at baptism (or birth) with burial of that person. Table 4 illustrates a continuing high mortality after 1770. In the 1500s and 1600s the data for Giggleswick are too uncertain to be quoted. Babies struggled to survive.

Table 4 Infant burials

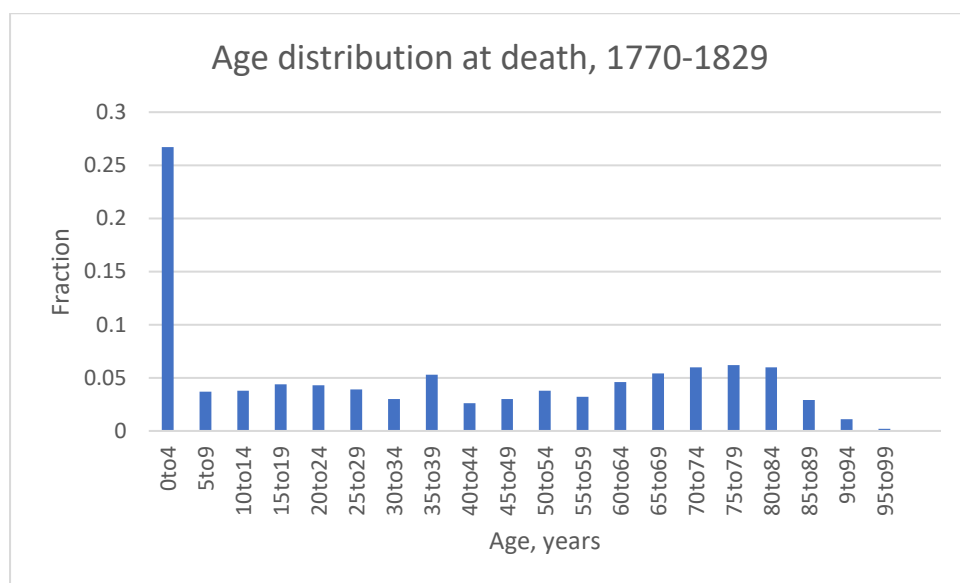
Register	Date range	% of those baptized who died at less than one year of age
Giggleswick	1770-79	17%
	1780-89	16%
	1790-99	16%
	1800-1809	9%
	1810-1819	11%
	1820-1829	13%
Langcliffe	1852-76	20%
	1877-1901	18%
	1902-1926	18%
	1927-1951	5%

Despite a low average age at death in these centuries, about 30 to 40 years, some people did reach the age of 90 or more. For Giggleswick between 1% and 2% of total burials were such old people.

Life expectancy

The distribution of ages at death reflects the conditions of life and is easily calculated for various time ranges. The distribution is very skewed with a large fraction of child burials with some indication of higher mortality of females of child-bearing age compared to males. A large sample is needed to give a clear picture. The Giggleswick data show that the fraction of child deaths in the 0 to 4 year-old range, at over 25% of all deaths, is similar to national figures (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Age at death distribution 1770-1829 for Giggleswick



The average ages at death have been calculated for Giggleswick and Langcliffe (Table 5).

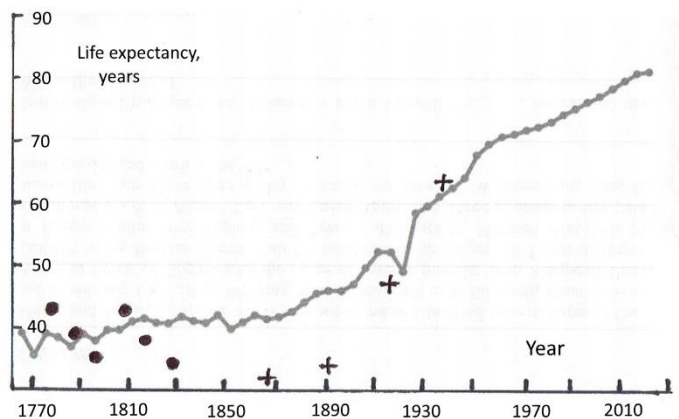
Table 5 Age at death in Giggleswick (1770-1829) and Langcliffe (1852-1951)

Date range	Average age at death, years
Giggleswick	
1770-79	42
1780-89	39
1790-99	35
1800-09	42
1810-19	38
1820-29	34
Langcliffe	
1852-1876	31
1877-1901	33
1902-1926	47

The average age at death, reflecting living conditions in previous decades, is not quite the same as life expectancy at birth, but will be similar in the absence of large increases in population or substantial movement of people in and out of the parish (zero migration). The various results for later years are very similar to national data but there is a suspicion that life expectancy in Giggleswick parish was slightly lower than in more favoured regions of England with better weather there, better crops and a higher standard of living (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Life expectancy

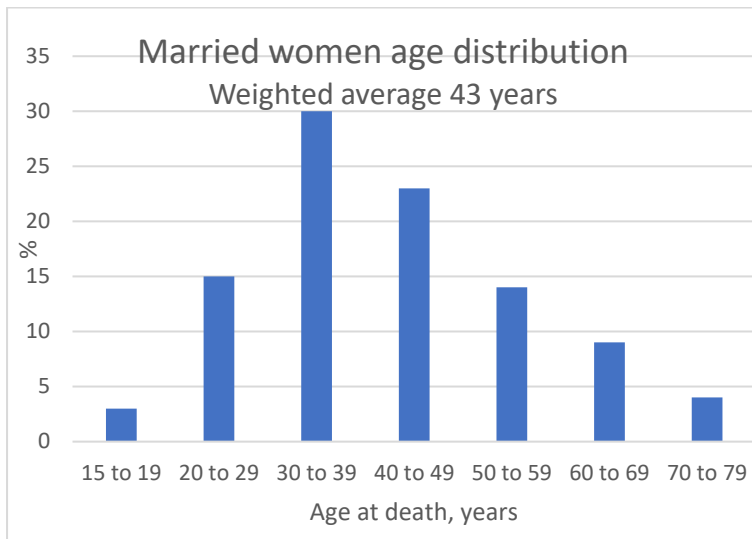
● Giggleswick + Langcliffe National



In contrast to the average age at death, looking backwards in time, the average life expectancy at the time of birth looks forward in time with its unknown hazards. This number can only be calculated using the technique of family reconstruction in which a named individual can be followed through the register to the date of death. This is extremely tedious and unless a very large number of cases can be identified reliable estimates cannot be made. This procedure was carried out by the the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure founded in 1964 for a small selection out of 404 parishes studied for times after 1580. It was found generally to be an unsatisfactory method for Giggleswick on account of the small size of the parish.

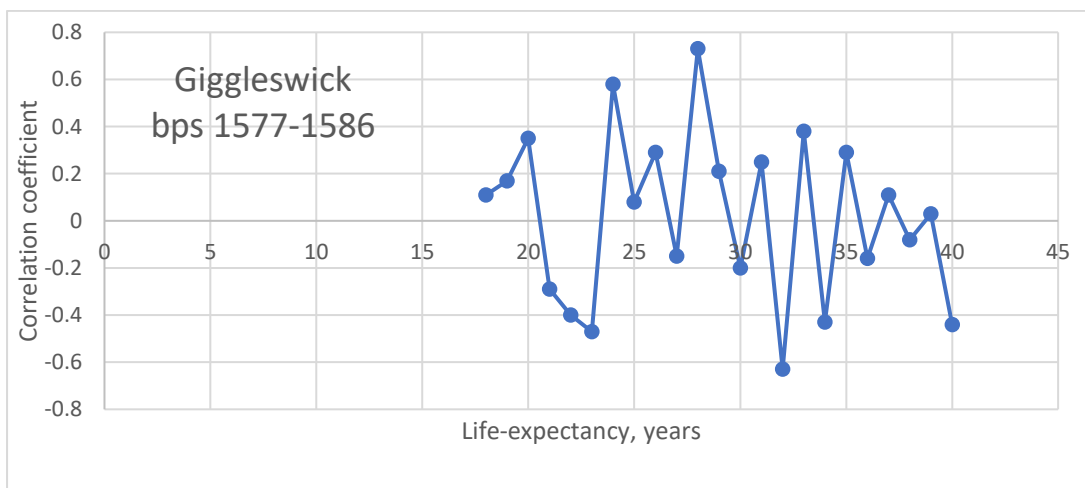
For Giggleswick a study of specified, more easily identified, married women in Elizabethan times was possible with a small number of individuals but the result must be treated with caution (Figure 3). The large effect of childbirth mortality is clear.

Figure 3 Married women age at death distribution, 1558-1598



Another technique has been devised for conditions in which there is little immigration or emigration so that population size is near constant, a case in which people born in Giggleswick parish also died there. It is most appropriate for the 1500s when no other reliable data are available. This method compares sets of numbers (in decades) of baptisms with sets of numbers of burials in later years. The numbers change irregularly year by year and a similar pattern is sought of yearly increases/decreases. The best match (obtained by cross-correlation) provides an estimate of life expectancy at birth. Figure 4 shows an example for the decade 1577-1586 with a highest cross-correlation coefficient peak of 0.73 at 28 years most likely estimate of life expectancy (a perfect match of patterns has a coefficient of 1.0, a complete absence of a match denoted by 0). The method is subject to many *caveats*.

Figure 4 Cross-correlation example for Giggleswick baptisms 1577-1586

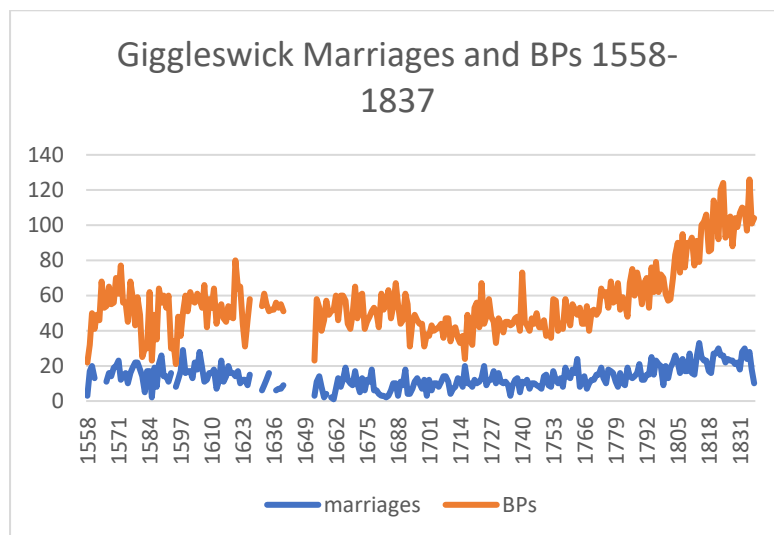


Population estimates

The annual numbers of baptisms, marriages and burials appear reasonably steady up to about 1750 (Figure 5). Burial numbers follow the same pattern as baptisms but they are generally slightly lower. From 1558 to 1750 there were 8646 baptisms and 7092 burials (a burial rate of about 38/year). This surplus of births over burials would usually suggest that the population is gradually increasing but this is not consistent with the steady numbers of baptisms, marriages and burials. Since the population seems not to be increasing markedly one might wonder if some infant burials were not recorded by parents with little money to pay for funeral expenses. A stationary population (no migration) has a crude death rate equal to the birth rate and hence population growth rate of zero. The population size can then be estimated using the life expectancy at birth multiplied by the annual death rate, e.g. using rough figures of 35 years x 38/year = 1330 for the parish.

The number of baptisms per marriage up to 1750 is about 4.4, falling to about 4.2 for 1800-1837. If about one third of these children died before the age of four a family size of around five persons or fewer is likely, typical of a commonly quoted (but rather variable) national average of 4.5 persons per household.

Figure 5 Giggleswick baptisms and marriages 1558-1837



Conclusion

The seemingly simple lists of people in the parish register prove to be an historic record of great value in revealing some of the details of the good and bad aspects of lives of inhabitants in our local townships in times gone by.

Sources

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