

## Hertfordshire Parish Registers.

BY CHARLES E. JONES.

**I**N some twenty English parishes the priests, being of a methodical turn of mind, had kept records of baptisms, marriages and burials prior to the time when registration was made compulsory, the earliest records being those of Tipton in Staffordshire, which were begun in 1513.

In the year 1538 Thomas Cromwell, as viceregent to Henry VIII., enacted that the parson of every parish should on each Sunday, in the presence of the wardens or one of them, enter all baptisms, marriages and burials of the previous week under a penalty of three shillings and fourpence for omitting so to do. Edward VI. reissued these injunctions in 1547, and in 1597 the Convocation of Canterbury directed that registers should be written on parchment, that the old paper ones should be copied on to parchment, and that a duplicate of the parish register should be made each year for preservation with the episcopal archives. These duplicates are known as "Bishops' Transcripts," and it is from these that most of Mr. Brigg's manuscript copies are made, although in some cases (St. Peter's [St. Albans], Harpenden and Much Hadham for instance) he worked from the originals.

Among other taxes imposed in the year 1694 "for carrying on the war against France with vigour" were graduated duties on births, marriages and burials; births ranged from £30 for the eldest son of a Duke to 2/- for a commoner, marriages from £50 for a Duke to 2/6 for commoners, and burials from £50 for a Duke to 4/- for a commoner. In 1783 the Stamp Act imposed a duty of threepence to be paid for every entry in the register, and this charge continued until 1794. Thus we find in the Bengeo register that on December 26th, 1783 was buried "Sarah Lawrence aged 70 years a pauper, the first after the Tax." It appears that poverty was admitted as an excuse for non-payment of the threepence, so that the amount collected was small. The words "poor" or "pauper" are frequently written against entries made

while the tax lasted; for example, in the Northchurch 1788 register ten out of thirty-five were marked "poor."

Of the registers transcribed by Mr. Brigg the earliest and most complete is that of St. Peter's (St. Albans), which comprises the years 1558 to 1812, though that of Much Hadham (1559 to 1812) runs it close. There are copies of the registers of forty-five parishes in Hertfordshire, some being more nearly complete than others, and the volumes throw many interesting sidelights on bygone life and customs.

In the old days spelling was far from being an exact science; it was largely phonetic, and a word would be spelt in different ways by the same scribe, according to his fancy of the moment.<sup>1</sup> Illiteracy was rife and a large proportion of the churchwardens were only able to affix their mark to the registers; in 1582, for instance, the two churchwardens and the two sidesmen at both Bushey and Codicote were illiterate, while at Much Hadham, out of 778 persons married between 1754 and 1812, no less than 511 could only "make their mark." Careless mistakes were often made in the registers, as witness "Mary ye Wife of Will and Mary Mouse baptised Decr ye 25th" (Newnham, 1686), "Mary son of Edmund and Agnis Bates" (Watton-at-Stone, 1632), "Margaret Myller the sone of Thomas Myller" (Bishop's Stortford, 1603), "Edward the daughter of Edw Right" (Lilley, 1662), "Dorothy son of Thos Crow" (Stevenage, 1668), "Sam Bird of Gadsdon and James Kempster of Tring married May 4" (Tring, 1673), and so forth. Sometimes a mistake of some importance was made, as shown by the following letter written by the Rev. Antony Watson (Vicar of Watford, 1587—1618):—

"Wth my very hartly remēbrance good Mr. Offitiall wher as this young mā John Hicmā is troubled for his marridge out of tyme, I assure you yt of my knolledge as I am redy to depose he was married the 19 of January, so yt ye note of ye 23 was a slyp and a faut in the writer, he would have appered at ye court, but being a traned soldier was imployd in seryce; good syr let this tru and fathfull allegat: be accepted and in your customed kyndness deel wth him

Watford, martij 10 A<sup>o</sup> 1600  
Your poor frind, to his  
powr to be comāded  
Antony Watson."

<sup>1</sup> In the following extracts from the registers the original spelling and lack of punctuation are retained.

In at least one instance a register was lost, for, attached to a Hitchin transcript, we find the following note: "These are to certifie all persons whom it doth or may concerne, That the registry for Christnings Mariages and Burialls in the Parish of Hitchin Countie of Hertford diocesse of Lincolne and Archdeaconry of Huntingdon through the carelesnesse and neglect of former Regesters is wholly lost for the space of seventeene yeares and upwards last past (that is) from the first day of February one thousand six hundred fowerty and eight to the first day of August one thousand six hundred sixtie and five Wittnesse our hands this 8 day of November 1667. Will: Gibbs Vic. of Hitchin," followed by the signatures of three churchwardens and six other persons.

Each of the Wheathampstead transcripts from 1701 to 1706 has a footnote almost identical with that for the last-named year, which runs: "Most worthy Sir this I doe deliver as the very truth which have kept the [them] 53 years and recorded All my selfe and am allmost 4 sore [score] and 6 years old Witness my hand Benjamin Peter Parish Clarke."

The earliest registers were written in Latin, but at the beginning of the 17th century this practice died out, giving place to English. Latin, however, was still reserved for entries such as those recording a parish scandal, and these are occasionally found sandwiched between the English ones. Thus we find "Henricus filius populi ex matre Elizabetha Benet vidua baptizatus fuit" (Bishop's Stortford, 1608), although, when a similar occurrence had to be related of the same lady four years later, the Vicar thought it time to state the fact in plain English.

To the transcripts was often added a list of "Church goods," of which the following are examples:—

"Imprimis one fayre cōiō cupp w<sup>th</sup> a cover both of silver. A cōion table and 3 table clothes for the same one of selke one of hollawne and one of darnix. one bible. 2 cōion bookes. Jewells workes. A register booke of parchmente, 2 pewter flagons for wene. A pulpitt cusheon. A surplice. 2 greate chestes<sup>2</sup> bounde w<sup>th</sup> iron w<sup>th</sup> 3 locks a peece. 5 greate bells and a lettle bell w<sup>th</sup> their furniture" (Hatfield, 1616),

and,

<sup>2</sup> In 1603 it was enacted that the Register must be kept in "one sure Coffe with three Locks and Keys."

“ An Inventorye of the church goods of barkhamsted Peter made the first daye of October año dom'i 1608 by Oliver Haines and George Dover churchwardens.  
 Imprim. a comunion table with a frame and towe formes thereunto belonginge.  
 Item to the table a carpet a liñen tableclothe and tow towells.  
 Item a Surplis for the minister.  
 Item a faire comunionne cuppe of silver with a cover to yt.  
 Item a bible a booke of common prayer and ij psalters.  
 Item ij homilye bookes and a booke betweene Mr. Hardinge and Mr. Jewell.<sup>3</sup>  
 Item a register booke of marriages christiniges and burialls.  
 Item the Cannon booke and Bishoppes articles.  
 Item a pulpit cloth and an herse clothe.  
 Item towe chests and a towne hooke.<sup>4</sup>  
 Item a table of tythinge.  
 Item a forme for children to sitt upon.  
 Item a beere to carye the dead.  
 Item a new shovel.  
 Item a mattocke.”

We sometimes find with the registers the certificates given at visitations, of which the following (Abbots Langley, 1685) is a specimen:—

“ Abuds Langley

A Bill of P'sentmt made and exted by ye Churchwardens of ye pish aforesd in ye County of Hartford att a visitacon held before ye R<sup>t</sup> Reverend Father in God Henry<sup>5</sup> by divine pmission L<sup>d</sup> Bpp of London in ye pish Church of S<sup>t</sup> Albans in S<sup>t</sup> Albans in ye County aforesd on the *Twenth fourth* day of July Anno dni 1685

Concerning the Church wth ye Ornamts and furniture thereunto belonging	<i>omnia bene</i>
Concerning the Tythes wth other Eccl'call Dutyes	<i>omnia bene</i>
Concerning ye Minister	<i>omnia bene</i>
Concerning ye pishioners	<i>omnia bene</i>
Concerning ye pish Clerk Sexton Schoolemasters Schooles Physitians Chyrurgions and Midwives	<i>omnia bene</i>

John Baldwin  
 The marke of X Joseph Preist } Church Wardens.”

(The words in italics are those added at the visitation).

The Rickmansworth transcript of 1582 is accompanied by the following report: “At this time nothings to exhibete you as touchinge the last articles but they are accomplished yeat somewhat necligente to come to Catechisme yeat some come whose names are heare under written the booke of articles that is to be red thrise in the yeare I have not yeat in the parishe admonishe them of hit I praye you that hit may be provided the rest of the

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the Anglo-Roman controversy waged by John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, and Thomas Harding.

<sup>4</sup> These hooks were kept in many churches, and were used in case of fire to pull down burning thatch. A specimen can be seen outside the Welwyn police station (formerly the church house).

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Henry Compton, Bishop of London, 1675-1713.

articles I have not called to mynde annybreche or offence interim et semper vale—J Savage." This is followed by the twelve names of the "faithful few" who went to Catechism.

We find in these records particulars of money collected in response to "Briefs"<sup>6</sup>; for instance, at Walkern 4s. 7d. was raised in 1668 for "captives in Turkey," 4s. 5d. in 1669 for "captives in Sally," £3 5s. 10d. in 1670 for "captives of Algiers," and 7s. 11d. in 1673 "for the Theatre Royall."<sup>8</sup> At Hatfield £5 10s. 0d. was collected in 1665 for "the poore visited w<sup>th</sup> the plague," £1 5s. 10d. in 1669 "for y<sup>e</sup> Captives of Algiers," 12s. 2d. in 1673 "for ye Theatre royall," £21 14s. 1d. in 1689 for "Irish Protestants," 9s. 4d. in 1699 for "Loss by Fire in Drury Lane in London," £6 13s. 0d. in 1700 "For the Redemption of y<sup>e</sup> Captives in Angire," etc.

In addition to the Harpenden register there is "A Register of Births Burials and Marriages belonging to ye Curate of Harden"<sup>9</sup>, which is full of interest. It appears to have been kept by the Rev. Charles Lambe (curate 1701—1712), and continued by his two successors (James Horton, 1713—1715, and George Barnard, 1716—1717). Some of the entries made by the first-named have an informal ring about them that is very refreshing, though not unknown in other registers<sup>10</sup>; members of his flock are mentioned by such titles as "Old Goody Inwood," "Old Daniel Parrat," "Sarah Sorrey (an old Maid)" and "Goodman Cooper who hanged himself." Another entry says "Mr. Gawing when He dyed he was reputed very poor, Mrs. Floyd his Executrix," so possibly he was not so poor after all. Then we have "An account of the perquisites arising from Wheathamstead and Harden and wch I have received," amounting to

<sup>6</sup> These were letters patent issued out of Chancery to churchwardens or other officers for the collection of money. Though now obsolete they are still named in one of the rubrics of the Communion service.

<sup>7</sup> Prisoners taken by the Sallee Rovers of the Barbary coast, who captured vessels and made raids as far as Devon and Cornwall, carrying off the population of whole hamlets.

<sup>8</sup> In Drury Lane. Burnt down in 1672; rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren and reopened in 1674.

<sup>9</sup> Harpenden was originally a Chapelry attached to Wheathampstead and served by a curate. In 1859 it became a Perpetual Curacy in the gift of the Bishop of Peterborough, and in 1866 was made a Rectory.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. "Owld mother Woorsley," "Ould father Cherrie" and "Goodwiffe Skant" (Watton-at-Stone, 1625-26).

£4 1s. 6d. in 1706, £14 9s. 3d. in 1707, £6 1s. 10d. in 1708, £5 7s. 8d. in 1709 and £3 13s. 10d. in 1710. From this we learn that in 1707 the curate was paid from 2/6 to 5/- for baptisms, 5/- for marriages, from 8d. to 2/- for burials (10s. to £1 3s. 6d. if he added a sermon), and 10/- for a Fifth of November sermon; that he received £1 10s. "Easter dues at Harden," a present of 10/9 from "Mad<sup>m</sup> Whittrewrong" on Good Friday (increased to £1 1s. 6d. the following year), and was left a legacy of £5. At two of the weddings our friend returned 2s. 6d. and 1s. respectively out of his modest fee.

In Hume's *History of England* we read with regard to the Barebones Parliament, "Of all the extraordinary schemes adopted by these legislators, they had not leisure to finish any, except that which established the legal solemnization of marriage by the civil magistrate alone, without the interposition of the clergy." We find that on September 19th, 1653, Richard Wilkinson was appointed Registrar for the parish of Hatfield under the Act of August 24th, 1653. His last certificate was given in the year 1659-60, which he signed "By Rich. Wilkinson sworne Register according to an Ordnance of y<sup>e</sup> little thing cal<sup>d</sup> Parliam<sup>t</sup>." This was followed by a note by the Rector, "Memorandu y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> 12th of Febra. 1660 and not before Mr. Wilkinson would deliv<sup>r</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Register book though oft demanded by Tho. Hair and Georg Basil church-wardens. Then Mr. Lee y<sup>e</sup> Rector received it and layd it up according to an Injunction in y<sup>t</sup> case pvided and since hath made entryes. Rich. Lee, Rector." Again we read in the Harpenden register, "November the 24th day 1655. Edward Marshall and Anna Nealle his wife ware married before John King Esq<sup>r</sup> one of the Justes of the Pesse in the Countie of Hartford the day and yeare above said in the presense of these witnesses Thomas Neale Thomas Waket an John Squier [signed] John King."

From the records transcribed by Mr. William Brigg we are able to reconstruct the life-history of those who lived and died in the County in past centuries.

To begin with the children, we find that the more ordinary names were chiefly in favour, although there were some parents who aimed at originality. Thus we

come across such boys' names as Affable, Emman, Fittkin, Grimpton, Honylove, Kidgel, Parson, Philologus, Phylagothis, Seeloy and Zophonie, and such girls' names as Deriah, Dionesse, Dunzy, Helepee, Phalatias, Scevola, Theophania, Vally and Woollmerdine. When we learn that such surnames existed as Abrafet, Aperope, Bareleggs, Boost, Bottfish, Buns, Corps, Deafnisse, Dolt, Funerall, Graygoose, Gue, Gummy, Hadduck, Highnoonnes, Horsenayle, Hottoste, Leper, Milksops, Outlaw, Poney, Rainbird, Scaffold, Sheerhogge, Spiltimber, Squirge, Troyend, Tuppeny, Uncle and Virgin, we are inclined to think that parents so handicapped would be wise in choosing simple Christian names for their offspring, yet we find strange combinations like the following: Abednego Atkins, Doily Tipping, Gabriell Angell, Giver Battell, Herodias Styles, Lazarus Stopps, Mathew Divine, Naarjah Cooke, Obsingoldsbey Humblebee (surely a gem!), Paternell Bunne, Plampin Cooley, Radulfus Doffer, Youthfull Eyres, Zacharias Fouch and Zilpher Spittle. At Wigginton, between 1779 and 1809, there were three pairs of twins christened Moses and Aaron respectively, while another *jeu d'esprit* was the name of Adam Eve (Bishop's Stortford).

Infant mortality was terribly high; out of 119 deaths in St. Peter's parish in 1578 fifty-nine were those of infants, while at Tring in 1807 eighty-two died, of whom thirty-nine were infants. But even more tragic are the deaths of "nurse children from London," which occurred in nearly every parish. There were six such deaths at Harpenden in 1610, eight at Watford in 1674 and nine at Aldenham in 1697. There are 211 of these deaths recorded in the transcripts, but it is probable that this is not the full number and that many more were described merely as "infant." On the plea that infants would thrive better in the country, parents in London frequently sent them away to people whom we should now call "baby farmers." There is little doubt that they were sent because they were "unwanted," and it is sad to think that so many of them died from neglect or worse and were buried unnamed, being entered in the registers merely as "a nurse child from London."

There were other perils awaiting the children who

strayed from their homes, and so met with fatal accidents or perhaps died from exposure, and were buried unidentified:—"A boy killed w<sup>th</sup> a waggon betweene Stanborough and Lemsford Mill" (Hatfield, 1655), "The blinde child y<sup>t</sup> was found in y<sup>e</sup> market house" (Hatfield, 1665), "A stragler a boye of xvj<sup>th</sup> yers Decmbr the xxij" (Tring, 1639), "A strange youth dyinge at o<sup>r</sup> Hamlett was buried" (Harpenden, 1637).

For the young man who survived the perils of childhood there was the choice of a trade or profession to be considered. Omitting the more obvious callings of butcher, baker, and the like, we gather from the records of the 16th to the early 18th century that he might aspire to become an alekeeper, baily, bellows maker, braizyer, chapman, chyrurgion, collector of y<sup>e</sup> Excise, collermaker, cordwinder, curyer, faryer, fellmonger, get man (? gate-man), glover, hempdresser, higler, hooprender, horseler, laceman, lathrender, loader, oatmillman, packman, paperman, patten maker, peruke maker, plowright, pottashman, poynter, ragman, saddletreemaker, scrivner, servingman, sheerman, shovelmaker, staymaker, thatcher, turner, waggoner, watchguilder, weaver, wheeler, woodward or wooll comber.

There were other dangers to be surmounted before one could hope to equal the record of "Widdow Marsh of Selbarnes being about the age of 106" (St. Peter's burials, 1649). Epidemics of plague (variously spelt plauge, plaugue, etc.) and smallpox were frequent in the "good old times," and we learn that at Much Hadham there were thirty-one deaths from plague in 1603, while smallpox caused nine deaths in 1659-1660 and fourteen in 1675. The Bishop's Stortford register for 1582 says "the p at the end (i.e. following a name) doth sinifie the plagge," and this letter follows sixty-three names, while twelve died "de peste" in 1603. In St. Peter's parish there were twenty-nine deaths from smallpox in the eight months ending February 1711.

For life's derelicts the earthly pilgrimage ended with such entries as "A poore Chapwoman" (Harpenden, 1593), "A man found Drownded by Sopwell (A Black)" (St. Peter's, 1799), "A stranger that Died in a barne at Coopers Greene" (Hatfield, 1658), "a walking man," "a travelling man," "a peregrine," "a traveller by the

way," "a poor traveling woman," "a vagrant woman, a creple." At the other end of the scale a special extended form of entry was reserved at Much Hadham, in the middle of the 17th century, for the deaths of persons more or less distinguished, all of which are in similar words to the following:—"Mrs Elizabeth Meade the wife of Mr Edward Meade Exchanged this life Temporall wee hope for life Eternall at much hadham her Funerall obsequies were solemnized and Shee Interred at much hadham aforesaide, in The Church January the 23th 1661."

An Act, as is well known, was passed in the reign of Charles II. and not repealed until 1815, ordering that the dead must be buried in woollen "for the lessening the importation of Linnen from beyond the Seas," and that an affidavit must be sworn that this had been done. No affidavit was necessary for a victim of the plague, but in any other case an infringement of the law was visited with a fine of £5, half of which went to the informer and half to the poor of the parish. Thus we read in our transcripts, "John Porter sonn of Solomon Porter buried the 11th day of August 1678 in nothing but what was made of sheepes wooll onely" (Abbots Langley), "Elizabeth Brewer was buried contrary to the Act of Parliament for burying in woollen for which there was 5<sup>l</sup> paid the one moiety to the Informer the other to the Church wardens of Abbots Langley for the use in the said Act specified as appeareth by a Certificate under the hand of Sr Benjamin Tychbourne beareing date 13th July 1682" (Abbots Langley), "Elizabeth Steep June 15 was buried in Linnen and the money paid to the Church Wardens for the use of the poor" (Bushey, 1695), "Elizabeth Sawell was buried in Linnen and the forfeiture was payed as appeared by the Church Wardens accompts" (Abbots Langley, 1694). In the following instances there is no mention of penalties, though they were probably enforced:—"Mrs. Mary Titus buried in linnen" (Bushey, 1694), "Mrs. Gale buried in linnen" (Bushey, 1694).

The law as to burying in woollen was sometimes evaded by substituting hay or flowers; as an example we find "Elizabeth Late wife of Georg Rawlen buried with hearbs" (Much Hadham, 1679).

Quakers' burial grounds are mentioned in the registers of Tring and Bengoe. In the former, at the beginning of the 18th century, are given separate lists of the interments "att ye Quackers burieng place," while in the latter during the same period are given "ye names of those Quakers yt were layd in ye ground in ye place commonly called ye Quakers burying place in ye parish of Bengoe 1707." In the same register we find separate lists of "Quakers Burials 1696 in Bengoe" and of "Christian Burials 1696 in Bengoe."

A few entries that are somewhat out of the ordinary must conclude these notes on the Hertfordsire Parish Registers:—"A couple maried in May that came from Buntingford side" (Bishop's Stortford, 1638), which is certainly lacking in detail, "Mary Beaumont of the parish of Welwyn was buried in this parish as I am informed in or about this moneth of March" (Codicote, 1678), which seems to call for Sherlock Holmes' investigation, "Old Jones" (Hitchin burials, 1669), "John a man" (Bishop's Stortford burials, 1588), "Old Silver-side" (St. Peter's burials, 1638), "Rose Winter came to an untimely death and was buryed in y<sup>e</sup> Common" (Aldenham, 1672), "Kisnay Duroy an Indian Black boy aged ab<sup>t</sup> 17. A present to R.R., D.D. Vicar"<sup>11</sup> (St. Peter's baptisms, 1730), "Thomas Reader son Jeremy and Mary borne with six fingers and toes"<sup>12</sup> (Bishop's Stortford baptisms, 1626), "Jois the wife of John Wood carter buried of an Apoplex" (Bishop's Stortford, 1624), "William Mills servant to John Spencer who appeared to have been murdered and then drowned" (Much Hadham, 1679), "Peter the Wild Boy" (Northchurch burials, 1785). The last named<sup>13</sup> was found in 1725 in a field in Hanover by Jurgen Meyer of Hamelin, naked except for a tattered shirt. The poor imbecile, for such he was, was dumb and fond of roving, so, when he was

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Robert Rumney. The entry in the register says that he was for 28 years Vicar of St. Peter's (1715-1743) "in which Time and by whose means the organ and Gallery were Erected in the Church aforesd without any charge to ye Parish, a Branch hung up in ye sd Church wch He obtain'd by ye subscription of ye young men and maidens; six Bells new Run at the Parish Charge and two new ones added by Voluntary subscriptions; a new Pulpit was Built and ye Church in sev'ral Respects Adorn'd and Beautify'd."

<sup>12</sup> His father was excommunicated at the time. The child was buried the day after baptism and was then described as "borne a monster."

<sup>13</sup> See *Ency. Britt.* and *Tompkins' Highways and Byways in Hertfordshire.*

eventually sent to Berkhamstead, he was made to wear a leather collar bearing the words "Peter the wild man from Hanover. Whoever will bring him to Mr. Fenn at Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, shall be paid for their trouble." He was believed to be about 72 years of age at his death.

Those who wish to know more about Registers in general will find much very interesting information in Dr. Cox's *Parish Registers of England*<sup>14</sup>, to which the writer is indebted for many of the historical data given above.

It only remains, at the conclusion of these notes on the Registers of our County, to pay tribute to the marvellous industry of Mr. William Brigg in deciphering and transcribing such a vast amount of crabbed writing, and collecting so much material relating to Hertfordshire—a task that might well occupy a lifetime—and to the generosity and kindness of Mr. Blencowe Brigg in presenting so valuable a collection to our Society.

<sup>14</sup> A copy is in the Society's library. The book appears to contain only one quotation from Hertfordshire registers (Aldenham).

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