

ART. XII.—*Baptisms and burials in twenty northern parishes.* By G. P. JONES, M.A., Litt.D.

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THE following observations are based upon a tabulation of baptism and burial figures extracted from the registers of twenty parishes or chapelries in Cumberland and Westmorland,¹ parishes widely distributed geographically from Lanercost in the north to Witherslack in the south and from Newbiggin on the east to Muncaster on the west. The tabulation is so arranged as to show in each case the proportion of baptisms to burials during each half of the century. It is assumed that the ratio provides not indeed a measure but an indication of the state of health at a given time in each parish and is important also in connection with the attempt to assess the upward or downward trend of population. Whether that was an important consideration with the Rev. John Stubbs, assistant to an 18th-century incumbent of Sebergham, is not altogether clear, but certainly in year after year from 1771 onwards he noted the facts: "In the year 1785," e.g., he wrote, "30 have been baptized and 13 Buried. The Proportion Births bear to burials is as 2 and 4/13ths to one."² In the matter of baptisms and burials he was mainly concerned with one year at a time and did not, apparently, pay much attention to the totals for decades or longer periods.

¹ The sources used are the following: edited transcripts of the registers of Bridekirk, Crosthwaite cum Lyth, Middleton in Lonsdale, and Millom by J. F. Haswell; with C. S. Jackson, of Newton Reigny; by F. W. Gilbanks of Great Orton registers; by Rev. J. Thornley of Kirkoswald registers; by H. Brierley of Skelton registers; by Mary E. Noble of Askham registers. M. E. Kuper, register of Sebergham. The figures for Bootle, Muncaster, Nether Wasdale and Ulpha were gathered directly from the manuscript registers. Those for Witherslack were taken from an unpublished transcript by G. P. Jones.

² M. E. Kuper, "Sebergham Parish Register", CWI ix 61.

The present purpose is to see what a study of the baptism/burial ratio may suggest with regard to any demographic difference there may have been between the earlier and the later half of the 18th century. The data are accordingly set out in epitome in the following table under two main headings, one relating to the period before 1750 and the other to the period from 1751 to the end, or nearly to the end, of the century.³

Baptism/Burial Ratios.

	Before 1750.			After 1750.		
	Total Baptisms.	Total Burials.	Baptisms to one burial.	Total Baptisms.	Total Burials.	Baptisms to one burial.
Askham	417	343	1.2	557	414	1.3
Bootle	350	309	1.1	614	391	1.5
Bridekirk	1,107	740	1.5	1,187	789	1.5
Crosthwaite cum Lyth	610	654	0.9	714	478	1.5
Great Orton	355	294	1.2	396	249	1.6
Kirkoswald	735	598	1.4	834	598	1.4
Lanercost	802	314	2.6	1,426	969	1.5
Middleton in Lonsdale	485	372	1.3	454	339	1.3
Milburn	329	262	1.3	419	236	1.8
Millom	807	722	1.1	849	484	1.9
Muncaster	243	203	1.2	487	281	1.7
Nether Wasdale	109	102	1.1	194	119	1.6
Newbiggin	148	133	1.1	208	125	1.7
Newton Reigny	278	272	1.0	290	181	1.6
Sebergham	662	481	1.4	1,016	657	1.5
Skelton	367	210	1.8	867	556	1.9
Ulpha	304	258	1.1	370	231	1.6
Whicham	323	253	1.3	327	184	1.8
Whitbeck	251	216	1.2	199	116	1.7
Witherslack	330	223	1.5	494	276	1.8
	<u>9,012</u>	<u>6,959</u>	<u>1.3</u>	<u>10,902</u>	<u>7,673</u>	<u>1.4</u>

If the ratio of baptisms to burials can be accepted at all as a guide, it is clear that the second half of the 18th century was healthier than the first. In three parishes, Bridekirk, Kirkoswald and Middleton in Lonsdale, there would seem to have been next to no difference between the two periods. In another, Askham, there was very little, and that little indicates

³ Because of gaps, usable figures for Bootle start in 1711, for Skelton in 1721, Muncaster in 1724, Ulpha in 1705. Those for Muncaster, Nether Wasdale, Whicham, Whitbeck and Ulpha end in 1799 and for Lanercost in 1796.

an improvement after 1750. The one parish in which conditions seem to have been better during the first half of the century is Lanercost; but the figures available for that parish relate only to the years following 1730 and may not reflect the truth about the whole half-century. In most of these twenty parishes, certainly, the indications are that the margin between baptism and burial was greater in the second than in the first half of the 18th century.

Another pointer to the conclusion that the second half of the century was healthier than the first is the difference in the number of decades during which the burials outnumbered the baptisms. In the second half there was one, in Newbiggin, in 1751-60, when the baptisms totalled 30 and the burials 33; but in the earlier half there were four, during which ten parishes suffered.⁴ There was, naturally, a difference in the number of years of relatively high mortality. Here a year of that kind is taken, quite arbitrarily, to be one in which the burials amounted in number to twice the average for the other nine years of the decade. Thus, to take an instance, the average for nine years between 1721 and 1730 in Kirkoswald was 9.2 years, and 1721, during which 23 persons were buried, has been counted a year of high mortality. There were thirty such years in the earlier part of the century and twenty in the latter part.⁵

There seems little doubt that in these parishes after 1750 more people were being born than there were being buried, and that consequently the parishes were becoming more populous. This is confirmed, e.g., for Sebergham by the Rev. John Stubbs. He and two churchwardens found by a survey in 1782 that the population was then 655. In 1791 the number,

⁴ 1701-10 Crosthwaite; 1711-20 Crosthwaite, Milburn, Nether Wasdale, Newton Reigny, Whitbeck; 1720-29 Bootle, Crosthwaite, Millom, Newton Reigny, Whicham; 1731-40 and 1751-60 Newbiggin.

⁵ See Appendix.

“accurately taken”, was 736.⁶ There is, however, one alleged case of a decrease. In 1786, according to William Hutchinson,⁷ Skelton had 678 inhabitants but by 1792 the number had fallen to 631. If the figures of natural increase, 14, as taken from the parish register, be added to 678, the total, 692, is 61 more than that given by Hutchinson as the population in 1792. He explains that the population decreased because “the inclosure of common lands . . . occasioned many cottagers to quit the country” to become tramps and the growth of the factories absorbed many children. This, however, seems to be a prejudiced and incorrect explanation of a decline that never occurred. The Census of 1801 puts the population at 729, and it is highly unlikely that in nine years it could have risen from 631 to this level.

It may well have been that the weather had a considerable influence on rates of mortality both by its effects on the supply of food and by its exacerbation of respiratory and rheumatic diseases. During the first half of the century there are said to have been three periods of abnormally cold, wet weather, in 1708-10, 1725-9 and 1739-42.⁸ If these occurred in Cumberland and Westmorland they may partly explain the high mortality, in the first period, in Whitbeck; in the second, in Askham, Bootle, Crosthwaite, Millom, Sebergham, Ulpha, Whicham and Whitbeck; and in the third, in Bridekirk, Muncaster and Witherslack. Some notes on the weather in particular years in the latter part of the century were made by the Rev. John Stubbs of Sebergham.⁹ In 1786, for example, during which there was a very cold spring, there were

⁶ This is 13 short of 655 plus the natural increase from 1783 to 1790, a shortage conceivably the result of emigration from the parish. The same method would suggest an emigration of 91 by 1801 but this is not easy to believe.

⁷ *History of the County of Cumberland . . .* (2 vols., Carlisle, 1794) i, 514 n.

⁸ T. S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The 18th Century*, 4.

⁹ M. E. Kuper, *loc. cit.*, 61 *et seq.*

16 burials, and in 1787, with a late spring, a cloudy summer and incessant autumn rain, 18 burials. In 1790, when there occurred the wettest spring and summer ever remembered, 20 people were buried. On the other hand, in 1784/5, when a frost lasted from December to April, there were only 9 burials. On the whole, we know too little about weather in the North in the 18th century to be able to assess its influence on mortality before and after 1750.

More important, it may be, was the influence of epidemics, possibly in the years 1712-17, 1728/9, 1746 and 1763-5. It was exceptional for an incumbent to note in his register the supposed causes of death, and such instances as there are belong to the second half of the century. We can, therefore, only conjecture what the worst epidemics were, especially in the first half. It is believed that smallpox, e.g., was endemic during the century but was in time somewhat checked by the practice of inoculation. This was not widespread even in the South by 1750 and probably only slowly reached the North, but an instance of its use in Ulverston in or soon after 1764 is known, and in some villages near Carlisle general inoculation was carried out in 1779 and 1781.¹⁰ It is, however, not impossible that any reduction there may have been in the ravages of smallpox were the result of an increased immunity in the population or a change in the nature and virulence of the germ itself.

An outbreak of smallpox,¹¹ influenza or some other disease, if indeed any such occurred, would be the more dreadful if it coincided with a dearth. There are said to have been, during the first half of the 18th century, periods of scarcity in 1709/10, when bread and meat prices approached famine levels, in 1729/30

¹⁰ J. D. Marshall, *Furness in the Industrial Revolution*, 117; P. E. Razzell, in M. Drake, *Population in Industrialisation*, 155.

¹¹ There was smallpox in the Lancaster region in 1721 and 1725 but it has left no trace in local parish registers or those of Furness (J. D. Marshall (ed.), *Autobiography of William Stout*, 183, 275).

and in 1742/3.¹² About the first of these there can be no doubt: the average annual price of wheat reached 71s. 11d. a quarter in 1709 and 71s. 6d. in 1710, compared with 23s. 9d. in 1706 and 26s. 1d. in 1707. In these years, however, high mortality does not seem to have been widespread in the twenty parishes we are considering. In 1729/30, on the other hand, when mortality was high in Bootle, Millom, Whicham and Sebergham, wheat prices were much lower than in 1709/10, being 42s. 10d. in 1729 and 33s. 5d. in 1730. During the third period there was high mortality in Muncaster and Bridekirk. That was in 1742, when the annual average price of wheat was 31s. 1d.¹³ It has, of course, to be borne in mind that wheat prices are not highly relevant to the situation in the North, where the bread corn was oats. Unfortunately no adequate series of oat prices is available but it is here assumed that the prices of oats would move, at a lower level, in a similar way to those of wheat.

On weather and corn prices in some years in the second half of the century there is information in the notes of the Rev. John Stubbs. These unfortunately do not give such details for years before 1786 and are, in any event, only of local application. In the two years 1786/7, when burials amounted to 34, the price of oats, according to Stubbs, was "very reasonable". The year 1790, when 20 were buried, though "the corn was all well got in", was "a most dear year and hard upon the poor".¹⁴

Clearly there is not enough evidence to show any close connection of high mortality with weather or high prices, but it is nevertheless reasonable to suppose that a scarcity of food or fuel might in some cases have a disastrous effect and might even now and again

¹² T. S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The 18th Century*, 84.

¹³ Prices taken from D. G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws*, 297.

¹⁴ M. E. Kuper, *op. cit.*, 63.

cause death by starvation. Anything therefore which made food easier to get tended to lower the burial ratio and for that reason the cultivation of the potato may well have been important as providing a cheap alternative to oats. No information about the quantities produced is available but it may be conjectured that time would be necessary for the practice of cultivation to spread and that consequently the potato was less common as an article of food before 1750 than it afterwards became. Seed potatoes were bought for Swarthmoor in 1674; in 1728 they were, fortunately for the poor, cheap in the Lancaster region, as they were also in 1730, 1733 and 1735, but they were dear in 1741.¹⁵ By 1763 John Dickinson was producing considerable quantities on his farms near Lamplugh and selling his output in Whitehaven, Workington and Cockermouth.¹⁶ Arthur Young, in 1771, describes the method of cultivation and indicates that the yield might reach 300 bushels to the acre.¹⁷ Towards the end of the century Sir Frederick Eden highly commended the use of the potato in the dish called lobscouse: "the potatoe . . . a constant standing dish, at every meal, breakfast excepted, at the tables of the Rich, as well as the Poor".¹⁸

It can be proved that in some of these twenty parishes, e.g., Askham and Sebergham, the population increased during the second half of the 18th century and it probably did so in most of them.¹⁹ From what sources this greater population drew its sustenance is, so far, anything but clear. If agricultural improvement, other than in potato cultivation, contributed signif-

¹⁵ N. Penney (ed.), *Household Account Book of Sarah Fell*, 57; J. D. Marshall (ed.), *Autobiography of William Stout*, 201, 204, 213, 231.

¹⁶ I have to thank Mr Ronald Dickinson, of Red How, Lamplugh, for the opportunity to study his ancestor's accounts.

¹⁷ *Six Months' Tour*, iii 96.

¹⁸ *State of the Poor*, i 501.

¹⁹ Though according to Hutchinson (*History of . . . Cumberland*, 1794, i 570 n.) the Muncaster population by 1791 had fallen to 421, because of "the vast increase of manufactures, and sailors and the low wages for husbandmen and artificers in the lower crafts".

icantly that would probably be chiefly late in the century, in response to war scarcity and high prices. The parishes, however, are not to be regarded as purely agricultural in their concerns and there may well have been opportunities of employment in callings other than farming within their boundaries or not far away. An active workman might, e.g., have walked every day from Bridekirk to a job in the textile or leather manufactures of Cockermouth, two miles away, and a similarly active man might travel daily for $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Lanercost to Brampton, where there was in the late 18th century a textile manufacture employing more than 60 weavers.²⁰ Some parishes, e.g., Ulpha and Kirkoswald, had quarries. The population of Newbiggin was concerned in spinning woollen thread and very probably in knitting.²¹ Crosthwaite employed people in a paper mill, operative as early as 1709 and possibly earlier, and mentioned five times in the parish register between 1758 and 1799.²² A good example of a non-agricultural occupation may be found in the Askham census of 1787²³ in which there are enumerated no fewer than nine shoemakers and an apprentice. These, with their wives and families, add up to 33 persons, over 11 per cent of the population.

Whether economic development in the parishes and elsewhere resulted in such a demand for labour as to make earlier marriages possible so that the duration of marriages tended to lengthen and the number of offspring to increase we do not know. That this happened is not improbable, but because the parish registers, especially before 1750, give so little information about the ages of bride and groom it cannot be proved.

²⁰ Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, 130-131.

²¹ For illustration of a spinning gallery there see Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby, *The Old Hand-knitters of the Dales*, 65.

²² *Paper man* occurs twice before 1750 and *paper maker* eleven times between 1763 and 1800.

²³ In the Record Office, Kendal.

APPENDIX.

Years of High Mortality.

1700 in Kirkoswald	1736 in Whicham
1702 Whitbeck, Witherslack	1738 Ulpha
1703 Whitbeck	1741 Muncaster, <u>Witherslack</u>
1704 Whicham	1742 Muncaster, Bridekirk
1705 Bridekirk	1746 Milburn, Millom, Ulpha, Whitbeck
1708 Whitbeck	1751 Great Orton, Whitbeck
1709 Whitbeck	1752 Whicham
1712 Askham, Milburn, Newton Reigny, Great Orton, Ulpha	1753 Whicham
1713 Whitbeck	1754 <u>Witherslack</u>
1714 Whicham	1758 Ulpha
1715 Whicham, Sebergham	1759 Bootle, Ulpha
1716 Bridekirk, Sebergham	1762 Great Orton
1717 Milburn, Whitbeck	1763 Great Orton, Askham, Sebergham, Skelton, <u>Witherslack</u>
1721 Kirkoswald, Great Orton, Whicham	1764 <u>Witherslack</u>
1723 Newton Reigny	1765 <u>Witherslack</u>
1725 Sebergham	1766 Milburn
1726 Askham	1768 Sebergham
1727 Sebergham, Ulpha	1770 Ulpha
1728 Crosthwaite, Whitbeck	1772 <u>Witherslack</u>
1729 Sebergham, Whicham, Bootle, Millom	1773 Milburn, Sebergham
1730 Whicham	1774 <u>Witherslack</u>
1731 Muncaster	1780 Askham, Muncaster
1733 Millom	1781 Millom, Whicham
1734 Lanercost	1784 Milburn
1735 Milburn	1789 Bootle