

Few deaths before baptism: *clerical policy*, private baptism and the registration of births in Georgian Westminster: a paradox resolved¹

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Introduction: private and public baptism in early modern England

The main purpose of this paper is to resolve the apparent paradox that very few children actually died before baptism in eighteenth-century London, despite very high local rates of infant mortality and a lengthening interval between birth and baptism. The paradox came about, because, in essence, christening a child in eighteenth-century London was often a *process*, rather than a discrete *event*. Only by understanding the nature of baptism practices and customs in the capital (and by implication elsewhere) can one really understand local registration practices, and appreciate how they impact on demographic studies.

The pioneering article on this subject is that by Berry and Schofield in 1971. They noted that the Church rubric provided for both public and private ceremonies, that no child should be baptized twice, discouraged lay baptism and noted that from 1662 children should be baptized by the first or second Sunday after birth. Given the equal status accorded to private and public baptism they argued that it was probable that ‘private baptisms were included in parish registers’.²

Berry and Schofield’s article suffered from a relative paucity of data from parishes outside London, and the fact that their sub periods comprised of different mixes of parishes. Nonetheless the overall finding was that birth-baptism intervals were lengthening over the eighteenth century. That said, their figures were avowedly preliminary and, due to the amount of local variation, not predictive:

Local variation between parishes, and variations over time within the same parish, were very great, and it would seem premature to attempt any general explanatory scheme. It is to be hoped that evidence from other registers may help to clarify the picture. Meanwhile, it would be dangerous to assume that the interval between birth and baptism in any parish, at any point of time, is either early or late.³

Many local studies followed - and continue to follow - Berry and Schofield’s pioneering 1971 article on ‘the age at baptism in pre-industrial England’. Most of these, in the main, confirmed their findings about the lengthening interval between birth and baptism in the eighteenth century. It was noted, however, that their observation that there was considerable local variation in the patterns uncovered was also true. A few articles drew attention to localized christening customs in rural areas which gave rise to unusual patterns of intervals, notably Dennis Mills’s study of Melbourn in Cambridgeshire, where many children in the late eighteenth century were baptized during the parish feast in July.⁴ The causes for observed variation in baptism customs included the attitudes of local clergy, periods of particular hardship, size of parish and distance to church, and so on.

Only a few authors, notably Ambler, returned to the actual meaning of a baptism recorded in a parish register and argued that it might be problematic. Ambler drew attention to the complications in registration practice produced by the incidence of private baptisms. He found baptisms carried out at home in cases of emergency when the child’s life was in danger, but also, and apparently *increasingly*, private baptisms performed for social reasons. Children baptized in private ceremonies might – if they lived – be then be brought to church for later certification. The incidence and chronology of private baptism is difficult establish since the practice was recorded only rarely, but Kitson has recently argued that ‘evidence relating to the performance of baptism during the eighteenth century suggests that there was a widespread move away from the public performance of the rite’ and that ‘it became the normal manner in which the rite was administered in many parts of the country’. Private ceremonies could include a substantial proportion of all baptisms that took place in a parish.⁵

Londoners, as is well known, were particularly prone to private, clandestine marriages.⁶ There seems to be little doubt that private baptisms were likewise found most often in the capital. Contemporaries hostile to the practice made explicit reference to the frequency of their occurrence in the metropolis. Complaint literature and a few diaries suggested to David Cressy that there was a ‘rise of private baptism’ in London after the Restoration, driven less by fear for the child’s life than by the imperatives of social status and a desire for privacy amongst the better off. Such privacy also allowed dissenters to evade elements of the Anglican liturgy that they objected to. By 1682 it was alleged by one hostile cleric that:

Public baptism is now very much grown out of fashion; most people look upon it as a very needless and troublesome ceremony, to carry their children to the public congregation, there to be solemnly admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s church. They think it may be as well done in a private chamber, as soon as the child is born, with little company and with little noise.⁷

London it was claimed in 1754 was the original site of the ‘infection’ of private baptism that was spreading out into the surrounding country.⁸ Outside the capital, private baptism is sometimes said to have been confined to emergency christenings only, although this is actually contradicted by the proportions found in some rural areas.⁹

The prayer book rubric

The eighteenth-century prayer book rubric laid down a (relatively) clear procedure for baptism, under two main headings. The ‘Ministration of PUBLICK BAPTISM of Infants, to be used in the Church’ was not be administered but ‘upon Sunday and other Holy-days’ although ‘if Necessity so require’ children could be baptized upon any other day. Parents wishing to baptize their children ‘shall give Knowledge thereof over Night, or in the Morning before the Beginning of Morning Prayer, to the Curate’. The ‘Godfathers and Godmothers, and the People with the Children’ were to be ready at the font at end of the last lesson of morning or evening prayers. The service would *begin* with the question ‘Hath this child been already baptized, or no?’ Given such practicalities, therefore, unbaptized children in imminent danger of dying could rarely have received public baptism.

The second form prescribed was ‘the Ministration of Private Baptism of Children in Houses’. Although such baptisms were discouraged, it is clear from the elaborate rubric that they were carried out routinely. Curates were to admonish parishioners not to defer the baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday after the birth, or other Holy day, ‘unless upon a great and reasonable Cause to be approved by the Curate’. Parishioners were not to baptize ‘at home in their houses’ ‘without like great Cause and Necessity’ but ‘when Need shall compel them so to do’ a truncated service was prescribed. The ‘Minister of the Parish (or in his Absence, any other lawful Minister that can be procured)’ would say the Lord’s Prayer and prescribed Collects from the public form ‘as the Time and present Exigence will suffer’. The child would then be ‘named by some one that is present’ and the minister would pour water upon the child, intoning the vital phrase ‘N[ame] I baptize thee, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen’ to be followed by suitable admonitions. The rubric continued:

‘And let them not doubt, but that the Child so baptized is lawfully and sufficiently baptized, and ought not to be baptized again. Yet, nevertheless, if the Child, which is after this Sort baptized, do afterwards live, it is expedient that it be brought into the Church; to the Intent that if the Minister of the same Parish did himself baptize that Child, the Congregation may be certified of the true form of Baptism by him privately before used...

The minister was then to publicly certify the time and place of the original private baptism. If the child had been baptized ‘by any other lawful Minister’ the Minister was to question those bringing the child according to a precise interrogatory. If satisfied the minister was to ‘certify you, that in this case all is well done’ and would carry out a truncated version of the public rubric. However, if those bringing the child ‘do make stick uncertain Answers to the Priest’s Questions, as that it cannot appear that the Child was baptized with Water, ‘in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, (which are essential Parts of Baptism), then let the Priest

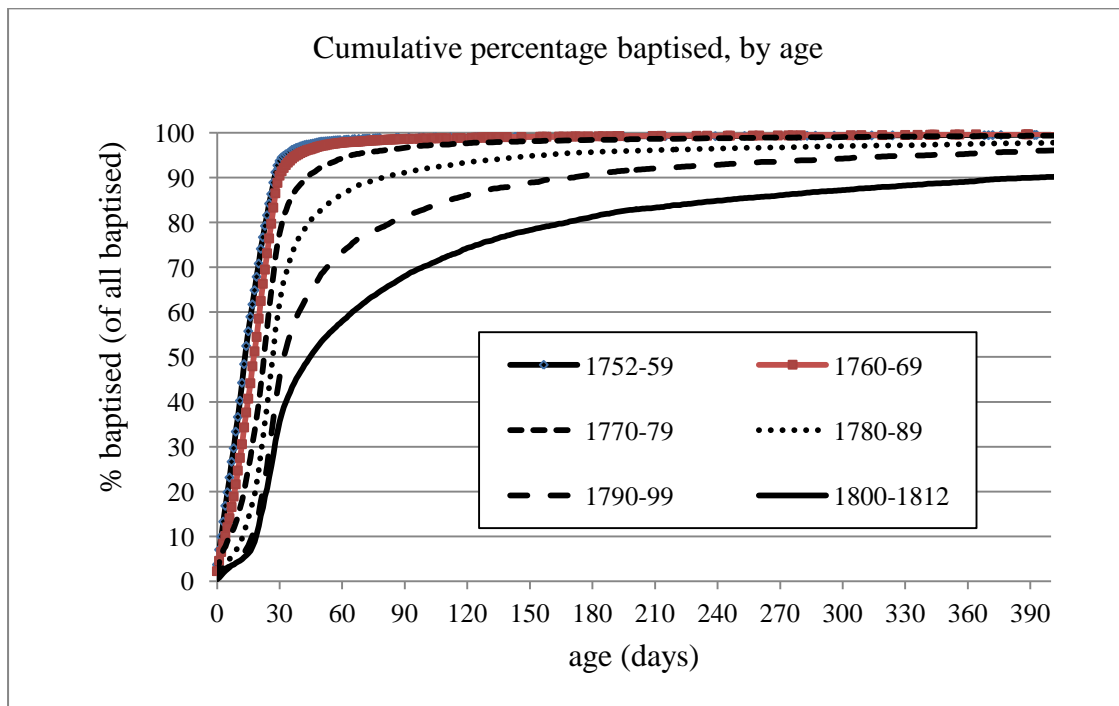
baptize it in the Form before appointed for Publick Baptism of Infants'. The rubric played it safe since at the point when the child was dipped in the font the form of words here was a conditional 'If thou art not already baptized, N. I baptize thee, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen'¹⁰

The prayer book rubric therefore, at a number of points, accepted the reality that many children were baptized at home but expected them to be brought to church for a public certification or reception. For some infants, therefore, christening was not a discrete event but a two stage process. The complexities and implications of the rubric are not always appreciated or remembered in the literature on the birth-baptism interval.

The birth baptism interval in St Martin in the Fields

Just as in other London parishes those giving birth in St Martin's apparently waited an increasing amount of time to baptize their children in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Cumulative percentage baptized, by age, St Martin in the Fields, 1752-1812



Source: City of Westminster Archives Centre (COWAC) Baptism Fee Books, Accession 419/210-227; St Martin in the Fields Baptism and Burial Registers.

The lengthening of the birth-baptism interval is conventionally taken to imply that large numbers of children must have died before baptism. In the 1750s in St Martin's, it was three weeks or so before 75% of baptisms had taken place. Or, put another way, more than 25% of couples were apparently waiting more than three weeks to baptize their infant children. By the 1770s it took a month for coverage of baptisms to reach 75% and by the first decade of the nineteenth century it was *four months* before 75% of all baptisms had taken place. The length of time that elapsed between birth and baptism increased particularly dramatically after the 1760s, driven by the appearance of a large number of long intervals, as well as a substantial reduction in very short intervals. St

Martin's was typical of other eighteenth-century London parishes. The lengthening interval in London in the eighteenth century was particularly dramatic since those baptizing children in the capital in the late seventeenth century had tended to do so relatively early compared to elsewhere. However, by the end of the eighteenth century 'London parishes were amongst the latest-baptizing parishes in the country'.¹¹

Stillbirths and the deaths of very young children

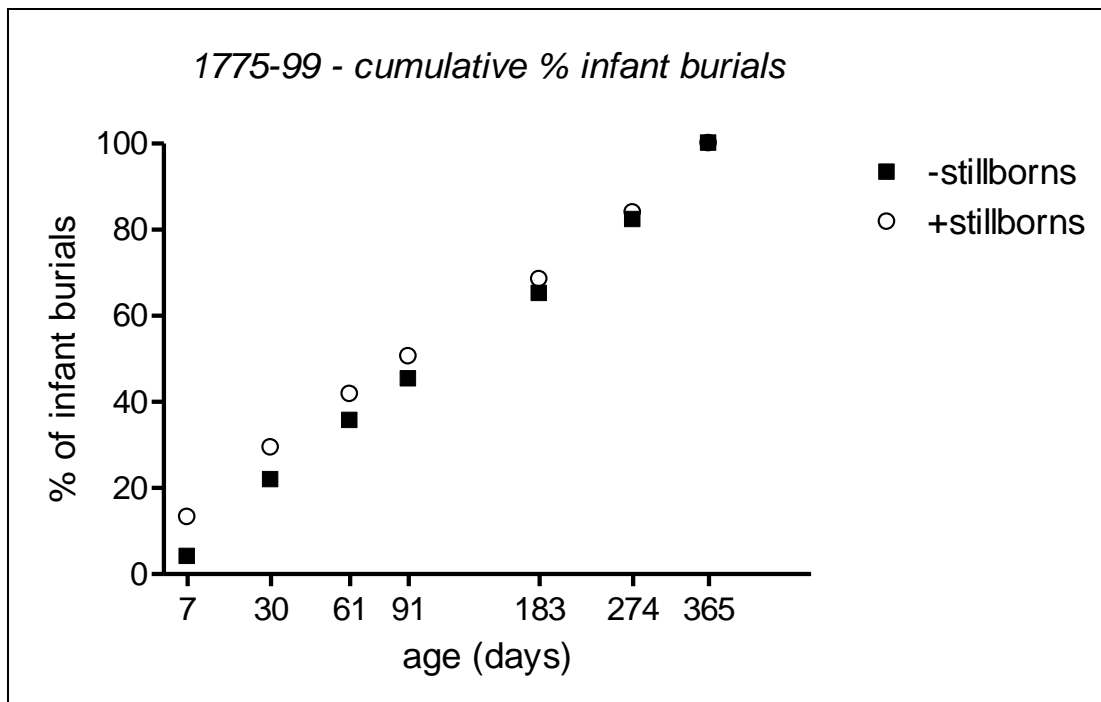
If private baptism was ubiquitous in London – as many commentators at the time alleged – this may partly explain two other features of the burial books, namely the substantial number of stillborn children and relative absence of named children dying within 48 hours of birth. It is worth noting here that, at least in London, those labelled as stillborn or abortive were interred in the parish churchyard, rather than in unconsecrated ground as was envisaged in the contemporary midwifery oath.¹² It would have been a gross breach of convention for ministers to be present at a birth in the eighteenth century so, in the event of an emergency, one would have had to have been called. Lay baptism had been prohibited by the canons of 1604.¹³ The chances of finding or contacting a local cleric to christen a child must have increased rapidly with age of child, so only those dying in the first couple of days (whether sickly, or apparently healthy) or those born in conditions of secrecy or relative isolation (due to illegitimacy, language difficulties or perhaps recent arrival) would normally have been at risk of dying without at least a 'naming'. Since we know that there was a shortfall of children dying in the first few days of life, it must be the case that a substantial proportion of children returned as unbaptized stillborns had actually been born live.¹⁴

In this connection it is worth mentioning that there were 50 cases out of 3,302 cases (1.5%) of 'abortive' or 'stillborn' children where a forename was given, suggesting that an emergency baptism (presumably, but not necessarily, of a live child) had been followed by an incorrect classification as a stillbirth.¹⁵ A further 17 children – all without forenames – were described as 'chrisom' children, a term that probably referred to an unbaptized child rather than a stillbirth proper.¹⁶ Roger Finlay found that in Hawkshead, Lancashire, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a proportion of 'stillborn' children must have been live births. Their distance to church prevented speedy baptism which resulted in a relatively large number of stillborn 'abortive' children listed in the burial register of that parish, some of whom must, in fact, have been born live. Hawkshead, like St Martin's, had very small numbers of *unnamed* children in its burial register and in fact the *disappearance* of such entries in the register coincided with the *appearance* of those labelled as stillbirths.¹⁷ The treatment of stillbirths in London, however, really requires a separate paper. If a *significant* proportion *were* live births, this would distort calculations of infant mortality in the capital.¹⁸

The Bourgeois-Pichat test provides strong evidence that a high proportion of stillbirths were, in fact, born live (Figure 2). Taking only burials recorded as live-born, there is a serious deficit of infant burials aged under 1 week (these comprised only 4% of all infant burials in the period shown in the figure, 1775-99, although this is the most dangerous period of life). In particular, the first day of life is exceedingly dangerous, yet of 6,360 deaths aged under one recorded in this period, only one was recorded as occurring on the day of birth (compared with an average of 17 per day averaged over the first 365 days of life). Clearly there was an under-registration of very early neonatal deaths.

However this should not be taken to imply that early neonatal deaths were not buried. In stark contrast to the paucity of early neonatal burials there was a very large number of stillborn and abortive burials (15% of all burials aged under one in this period). It is very unlikely that parents would neglect the burial of day old infants, yet scrupulously bury their stillborns. It is more likely that many of these stillborn burials represent early neonatal deaths. When stillborn (but not abortive) burials are included with live-born burials, then the distribution of deaths in the first year of life becomes more plausible (Figure 2). Almost all stillborn burials were unnamed, and it is likely that a substantial proportion of them represent the burials of unbaptised newborns who were born live.

Figure 2 Stillbirths and infant burials in St Martin in the Fields, 1775-99



Source: COWAC Sexton's Books of St Martin in the Fields, 419/237-241

However, misclassification of infants as stillbirths can only have occurred amongst children dying in the first hours and possibly days of life. There is no evidence of any burial deficit after one week of age. Since a substantial number of parents were delaying baptism by some months, and given the lethal rates of infant mortality in London in the eighteenth century, we would surely expect to find large numbers of *unbaptized* infants in the parish *burial* register (and large numbers of unbaptized infants in the live population). Even allowing for improving infant mortality rates in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with many parents leaving baptism for months many children, surely, would have been expected to die 'before baptism'.¹⁹ In fact, oddly, this is not what we find at all.

Unbaptised children buried in St Martins 1747-1825

One obvious way of looking at the extent to which the lengthening interval between birth and baptism generated large numbers of unbaptised children is to look at how children were described in the parish burial books. We will begin with those designated 'C' rather than as abortive or stillborn, which raises other questions. It seems clear from the settlement examinations that possession of a name required an act of baptism.²⁰ Those with a given forename, therefore, must have undergone a christening of some sort. Children buried *without* forenames, cannot have undergone any form of baptism.

It is remarkable that very few children were buried without forenames but with surnames (that is, they were not anonymous foundlings) in the burial register. In fact, there were only 70 cases - in a database containing 35,974 records of those labelled as children - who lacked a forename at burial. In a few cases this was due to damage to the register and some of the others may have been due to clerical negligence.²¹ There appears to have been no particular period when these were particularly common. This is remarkable because of the lengthening birth-baptism interval, and because of the very high rates of infant mortality in London at this time.

In only five of these 70 cases did marginalia make mention of the fact that a dead child lacked a forename. It is very significant that four of these cases were of workhouse children since we know that workhouse children were usually baptized very quickly after birth, presumably because their survival chances were so poor.²² These unbaptised workhouse children were either 2 or 3 days old. These cases occurred in a three-year period (November 1779- December 1782). Two of the children were stated to have died ‘not baptized’, one was stated to be an ‘infant (sic) baptized’ while the other was stated to have died ‘not named’ at two days old – a striking testament to the fact that it was the act of baptism that conferred a name. The only other case of the burial of an explicitly unbaptised child was completely different. This was a ‘Miss’ Staremborg, a five-month-old infant imported from the neighbouring parish of St James to be interred in St Martin’s, who had died of ‘fits’ in 1793. A marginal note reported that she died ‘Not being Christened’. The ‘Miss’ was thus presumably a device to conceal her unbaptised state. Since dying in fits suggests a sudden death this might have forestalled an emergency home baptism of an apparently robust child, whose parents had (most unusually) delayed any form of christening.²³

Table 1 Percentage of infants lacking forenames at burial by age cohort, 1747-1824

Given age at burial in days	Total infant deaths	Unknown forename burials	% lacking forenames at burial by age
121-365	9193	10	0.11%
91-120	1262	2	0.16%
61-90	1441	2	0.14%
31-60	1444	3	0.21%
22-30	828	1	0.12%
15-21	1227	6	0.49%
8-14	1462	5	0.34%
0-7	920	10	1.09%
	17777	39	0.22%

Source: Sexton’s books and burial books of St Martin’s, COWAC, MS 419/233-244; 419/265-269; F2465, F2467, F2469. Camden Town Registers, 419/123. Anonymous children (i.e. those lacking both forenames *and* surnames) were excluded from the unknown forename column. All infants of unknown ages excluded. Only those designated as children ‘C’ were counted. All stillbirths and abortives were excluded, for reasons discussed in the text

Table 1 compares the pitifully few children lacking forenames against the total number of children buried in infancy (with known ages of 365 days or less) and described as children (‘C’). Only 39 cases of infants lacking forenames but with given ages one year and under were found, 15 were said to be older than one year and 16 lacked age information. Clearly only a few children were living for some time without a given forename. However, since these cases are very rare in proportion to the huge total of children buried this surely suggests that all but a tiny minority of children must have received some form of baptism *before* their demise. There is not one case, incidentally, where two unbaptised children seemingly came from the same family so there is no sign that families with religious scruples against infant baptism were responsible for even these small numbers. Only one in a hundred children buried within a week of birth lacked a forename at burial and the proportions were, as one might expect, much lower than this for infant children at more advanced ages.²⁴ It is almost certain, as noted above, that many unbaptised very young children were registered as stillbirths. However, older infants (those aged over a week or so) who would surely have been very unlikely to have been misclassified as stillborn, were also very unlikely to die without a forename. Some mechanism was enabling virtually *all* London children to receive a name before they died. For this reason, hardly any London children ‘died before baptism’ even though the median interval between birth and ‘baptism’ was exceptionally long by the end of the eighteenth century. Evidence from the baptism fee books of St Martin’s resolves this apparent paradox.

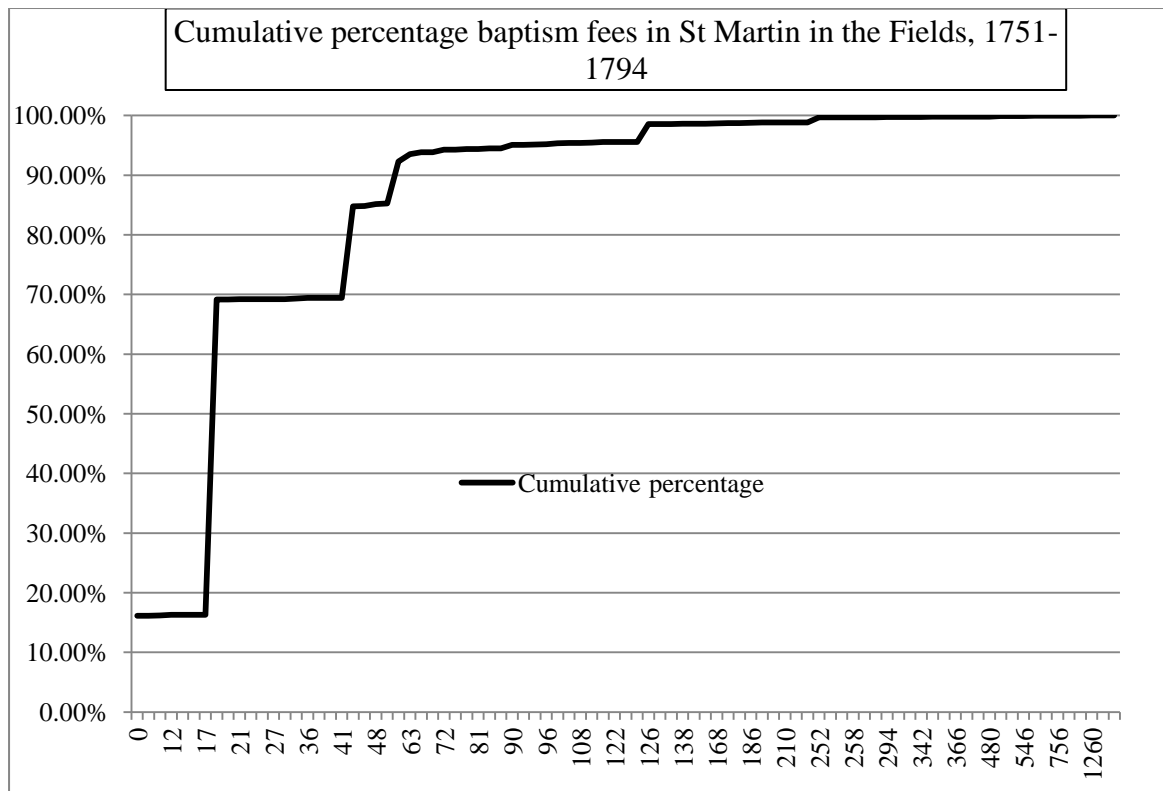
Baptism fees in St Martin in the Fields, 1751-1812

The main database for the project is a virtually unbroken list of some 43,004 records of baptisms that took place in St Martin in the Fields between 1st September 1751 and 30th September 1810. The data is mostly drawn from parish baptism fee books, although 3391 entries were also taken from the parish register.²⁵

These baptism fee books are extremely revealing about christening practices in the parish and also, arguably, the rest of London. The social structure of St Martin's in the period in question can best be described as heterogeneous, with significant numbers of titled and wealthy inhabitants, government officials and very substantial numbers of shopkeepers, craftsmen and servants who provided for their every need. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the parish operated one of the largest workhouses in London and spent very substantial sums of money, in addition, on relieving its numerous outdoor poor. Since the parish was essentially a huge urban district that contained between 25 and 30,000 people what was happening locally is surely likely to have resembled closely baptism practices in other parts of London. That said, there is clear evidence in what follows that the potential for local variation in registration practice over time was considerable.

As noted above, both the fee books and the parish register give both dates of birth and baptism throughout our period. This has enabled the calculation of what proved to be unexceptional birth-baptism interval data - albeit on a hitherto unparalleled scale (see above, Figure 1). The fee books also give the addresses of those baptizing children and contain marginalia relating to payments, the particular circumstances of baptizing couples, exceptional cases, a few certificates of baptism, and letters amplifying individual entries. Those baptizing children outside the workhouse who were considered poor and thus excused fees were labelled as such. The fee books and registers also reveal that over a thousand baptisms were recorded as coming from, or taking place in, the parish workhouse. Private baptisms were labelled as 'P' and (after 1783) 'HC' (home christening). It is very probable that only a proportion of private baptisms were so labelled (see below). It is not currently clear what all of the other letter labels refer to, although some seem to refer to officiating clerics.²⁶ Not all the 5,963 individuals' excused fees, or for whom no fees were recorded, were poor. Members clergymen, some squires, a few military men, members of the titular aristocracy, and once even a member of the royal family (whose baptism actually took place at Carlton House), for example, were not recorded as being charged fees.²⁷ Only two explicit cases of refusal to pay are recorded.²⁸

Figure 3 Cumulative percentage baptism fees in St Martin in the Fields



Source: COWAC Baptism Fee Books, Accession 419/210-227; St Martin in the Fields Baptism and Burial Registers.

Figure 3 sets out the fees charged for baptisms in St. Martins between 1751 and 1794 (after 1794 the fee structure was greatly simplified). The graph shows a step-like fee structure. Sixteen percent of fees of the 29,028 fees listed in this period were zero charges. More than half (53%) were charged a standard fee of 1s 6d and a further 15 % were charged 3s 6d. Some 92 % of all fees were 5s or less. Only a relatively small number of baptisms therefore incurred relatively large fees and less than 5% were charged 10s or more. As one might expect, those paying the higher fees were often from the social elite of the parish.²⁹

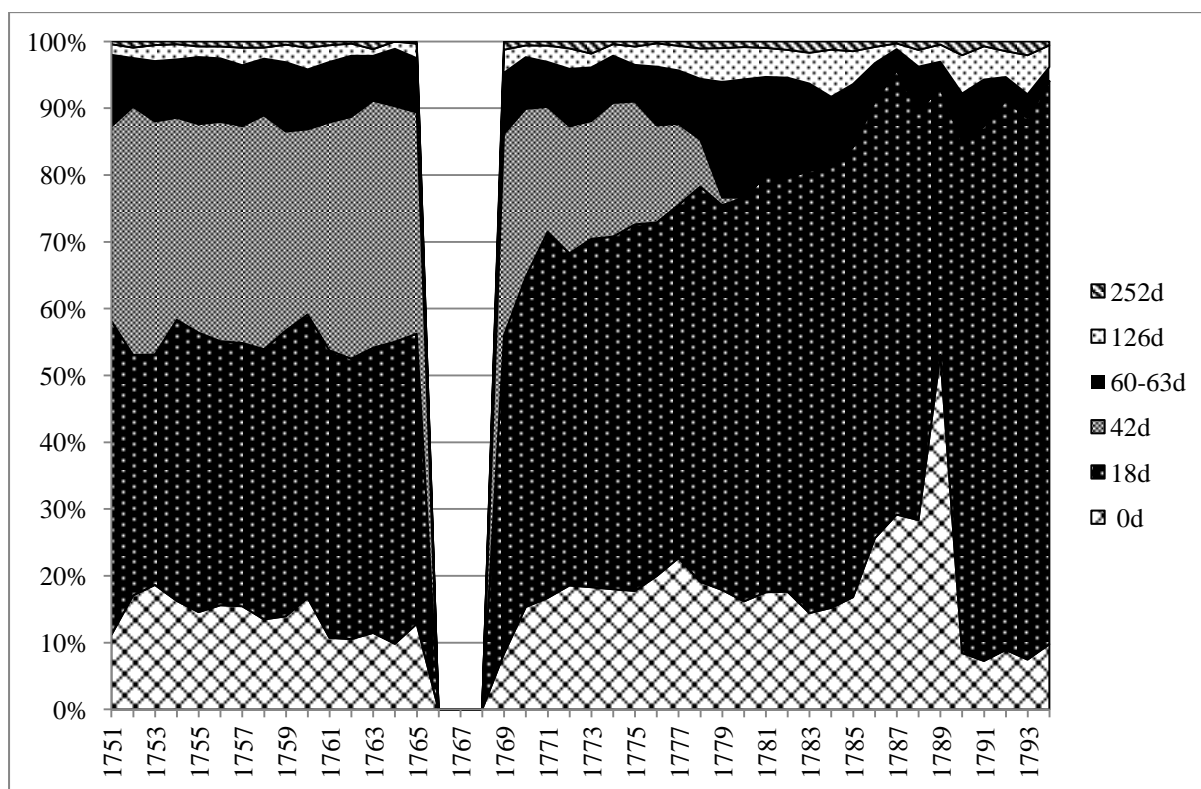
What were these fees levied for? Conventionally christening or baptism fees were charged for the registering of the child, rather than for the service itself.³⁰ The huge range of burial fees charged in most London parishes covered the provisions of parish palls, attendance of bearers, bell ringing, prestige or otherwise of burial location, searchers costs and so on. The baptism fee books, however, do not specify what large fees might have purchased. One assumes such payments might been for the attendance of particular clerics or parish officials, perhaps bells or a private service but in not one case are such details specified. It is entirely possible that some of the larger fees represented expected voluntary donations, on top of the standard fee.

We are on safer ground with the lower fees. Fees were clearly excused for the baptisms of those considered too poor to pay. Workhouse baptisms were zero rated as were many of those baptized out of the workhouse and labelled as 'poor'. The 'labour' of baptism registration of these infants did not go unrewarded since local churchwardens paid clerics a flat fee to carry out the registrations of poor children.³¹ Such poor children included those born in the workhouse.³² That said, baptisms where no fee at all was recorded were almost as common as those excused on grounds of poverty.

A table of church fees that exists for 1724/5 shows that 1s 6d was the basic fee then charged for what was described as for christenings 'at Church'. The next most commonly charged fee 3s 6d was explicitly for

‘Christnings at Home’. It seems a reasonable assumption, therefore, that all fees charged above 18d must have been for ‘christenings at home’, although this assumption might be slightly undermined by the extent to which the fee books record voluntary offerings rather than flat rate pro rata charges for services rendered and ignores cases where private baptisms are known to have been excused fees. However, it is also apparent that the distribution of fees changed over time. In addition to the fact that there was sharp discontinuity in the fees charged in September 1794 (when all but zero fees and 1s 6d fees were abolished) there was clearly movement within fee categories before then. To illustrate this, Figure 4 displays the percentage composition of the fees charged between 1751 and 1794. For the sake of clarity the figure includes only fees of 0d, 18d, 42d, 60-3d, 126d and 252d. These latter fees comprised 96% of the fees charged during the period.

Figure 4 Percentage composition of fees charged for baptism in St Martin in the Fields



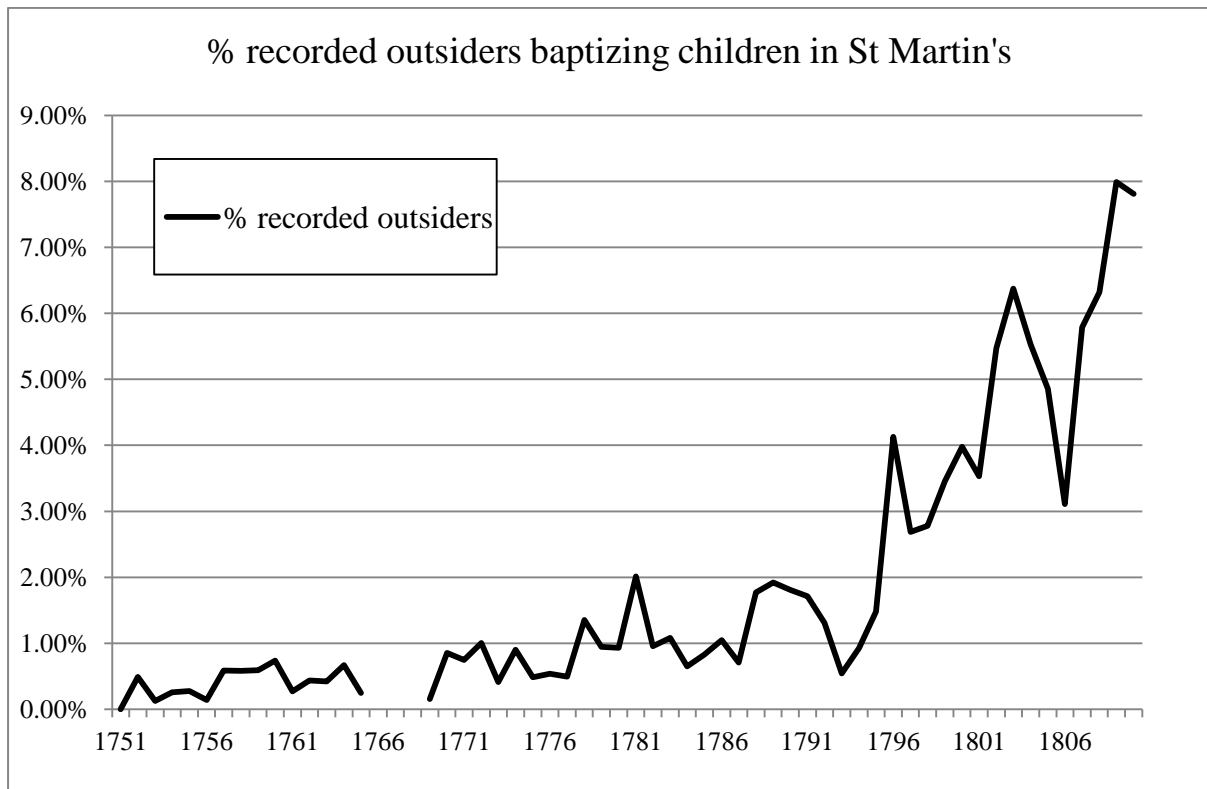
Source: COWAC Baptism Fee Books, Accession 419/210-227; St Martin in the Fields Baptism and Burial Registers.

Until the mid 1770s the fees charged remained roughly in proportion albeit with a suggestion that 18d fees were becoming more common. The year 1777 marks a dramatic change, with the swift abolition of the 42d baptism fee and its replacement (seemingly) with the 5s (or so) fee. The 18d fee became increasingly common at the same time. Another change is observable in 1783, when the 5s fee starts to decline and zero fees increase. Finally there is a sharp drop in zero fees in 1790 and a commensurate increase in 18d fees. In September 1794 or thereabouts all fees other than 18d fees and zero fees were no longer recorded as being charged.

How are we to understand these movements in the distribution of fees charged? The 1794 move to a payment of 1s 6d or nothing produced a fee structure similar to that uncovered in London by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Parochial Registration in 1833. Witnesses quoted 1s 6d or thereabouts as the standard baptism fee ‘to the registry’ in London parishes. No higher fees were reported.³³ The growth in zero fees which paralleled the falling popularity of the 5s fee is explained by the fact that ‘home christenings’ were increasingly charged no

fee at all from March 1784. From August 1794 home christenings were always free (which may mean that no fee was formally recorded, rather than an excuse on grounds of poverty). To date there is no evidence about why this apparent reduction in fee after 1794 took place. Given that similar fees were being charged across London by 1833, the most likely explanation is external official intervention but no trace of this has yet come to light. It is also possible, of course, that local policy changes occurred.³⁴ The drastic reduction in baptism fees in 1794 had an immediate impact on the proportion of christenings recorded for the children of non parishioners. Until the fee reduction it was rare for more than one percent of all baptisms to be of outsiders. After 1794 the percentages climbed dramatically (Figure 5)

Figure 5 % Non parishioners baptizing children in St Martin in the Fields



Source: COWAC Baptism Fee Books, Accession 419/210-227; St Martin in the Fields Baptism and Burial Registers.

Local policy changes also explain the fee movements in the 1770s and early 1780s and are exceptionally revealing about baptism practices.³⁵

Clerical policy and private baptism in St Martin in the Fields

The notion that private baptisms conferred a name explains why such things were sometimes given the alternative description of ‘namings’. This is exactly how they were represented in an intriguing order that appears in the Baptism fee book for 22nd March 1783 and which is depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Order of Mr Wrighte regarding private baptisms or naming, 1783

22^d March 1783
By Order of M^r. Wrighte, all
P. B's., or namings, are henceforth not to be
paid for ~~to be~~ Registered, ~~as if~~ they have been
received into the Church. —

Source: COWAC Accession 419/221, 22nd March 1783.

This order has clearly been corrected and is oddly written. The second line extends to the right hand part of the page, and the second line extends awkwardly into the left hand margin. Three sets of words of have crossed out, for no apparent reason. This order, we think, is actually a good example of hasty official back-tracking. If one accepts the corrections, then the passage currently reads, and would have read *after* the corrections:

“22nd March 1783

By order of Mr. Wrighte, all P: B's., or namings, are henceforth not to be paid for [~~to be~~] or Registered [~~as if~~] until they [have] been received into the Church”

However, if we take off the matter extended into the right and left hand margins, restore the crossed out matter, and remove substituted words we get back to an original order:

“22nd March 1783

By order of Mr. Wrighte, all P: B's., or namings, are henceforth [to be] Registered [as if] they [had] been received into the Church”

The *corrected* order therefore actually represents a local policy *reversal* relating to the treatment of private baptisms. The *original* order on 22nd March 1783 suggests a policy change which would have elevated private baptisms to the same status as public baptisms. This latter was precisely the kind of clerical compliance that had been attacked since the seventeenth century as subverting the rubric of the prayer book since it made nonsense of the public reception and acknowledgement of the new member of the communion of the Church of England.

Incredibly, we can say a lot more about this since this exact incident is discussed explicitly by an aggrieved local clergyman in a hostile pamphlet published by its author in London in 1784. The pamphlet's content is pretty well summed up by its title, *Clerical Policy; or, A Short Account of the Impositions, Encroachments, and Regulations, of The Revd. William Wrighte, Clerk in Orders, of the Parish of St Martin in the Fields*.³⁶ This pamphlet deserves an article all of its own.³⁷ It describes in some detail the small army of officials and clerics who fed on the fee income deriving from baptisms, burials, marriages and associated services in this large Westminster parish. Some of the clergymen mentioned served as deputies of deputies and are thus otherwise invisible in other parish records. It also reveals the often considerable disjuncture between those holding posts and those who actually did the requisite clerical work. The pamphlet gives a fascinating insight into the murky world of eighteenth-century parish patronage networks, multiple office-holding, the apparently ceaseless clerical search for office and income, and the self-serving behaviour of both the Reverend Wrighte and also, it has to be said, the author of the pamphlet the combative Reverend William Boyer.³⁸ The pamphlet was prompted by the dismissal, apparently at Wrighte's insistence, of Boyer from *all* the latter's parochial appointments in the summer of 1783. This effectively ended Boyer's ten-year career in the parish.³⁹ Wrighte was a powerful opponent since he was closely connected to the then Vicar of St Martin's, Anthony Hamilton. Despite the detail

of the charges and (we now know) their relative accuracy, a committee of the whole vestry went to the trouble of publishing a rebuttal ‘delivered by the Beadles to the principal Inhabitants of this Parish’ of Boyer’s charges against Wrighte on 8th March 1784 (within three weeks of Boyer’s publication) and carefully laid any blame for extortionate fees firmly onto lesser parish officers:

‘having attended to their Evidence, and after taking into their fullest Consideration the several Circumstances alledged against Mr. *Wrighte*, are unanimously of Opinion, that Mr. *Boyer* hath in no Degree supported the Charges against him: But it appearing, upon further Inquiry, that improper Demands have for many Years past been made by some of the inferior Officers of the Church, it is at this Meeting recommended to the Vicar and Churchwardens, forthwith to direct that proper Tables of Fees, according to antient Custom, be hung up in the Vestry Rooms for the Information of the Parishioners.⁴⁰

This illuminating dispute is useful for it provides us with a detailed commentary on the treatment of home and public baptisms for a vital ten-year period in the parish. It also explains some of the fee movements discussed above (Figure 3). Boyer served locally in various capacities from around 1773/4 until 1783. Wrighte succeeded to his Clerkship in Orders on the death of the previous incumbent in 1777 and is known to have been active in the parish until the early 1790s.⁴¹

What does this pamphlet tell us about fees for baptism? The fee hike in 1777 turns out to have been part of Wrighte’s wider campaign to generate more personal income from the fees under his control. Shortly after his arrival in the parish (in 1777):

He found the fees for *home christenings*, 3s 6d (which is the common fee throughout London, Westminster, &c) but the Rev. Mr. Wrighte ordered that they should be 5s. very wisely judging it would be better⁴²

The observable disappearance of the 3s 6d fee in 1777 (Figure 4 above) was thus a product of this order. According to Boyer, Wrighte was also worried by the loss of income produced by children dying before public baptism:

But long before this [i.e. long before March 1783], the Rev. Mr. Wrighte had very wisely ordered, that the fee should be demanded at the time of the *private baptism*, perceiving that many children died without having any thing more than *private baptism*

It is interesting that Boyer was not apparently worried about children dying before *any* baptism. However, again according to Boyer, Wrighte’s order, designed to negotiate the niceties of social position and privilege, was couched in such a way that it proved very unpopular:

If the people seem poor, or where there appears no likelihood of the child’s living, always demand the fees; but if the people appear genteel, unless there is no probability of the child’s living, do not mention it, lest it should displease them; but if they happen to be people of fashion, be sure you do not name the fee at all, but come away. But the misfortune was, that poor people, and even where there was no probability of the child’s life, would refuse to comply with this unjust demand.

This order, and the tenor of Boyer’s report, both suggest (again) that home baptism was routine even amongst ‘poor people’. The problem for Wrighte, therefore, was how to make parishioners pay an up-front fee at the point of private baptism, rather than risk a wait for a public reception/baptism and registration. His solution led directly to the row with Boyer, and the latter’s dismissal.

Boyer painted himself throughout as a supporter of the orthodox position that ‘*Private baptisms* ought not to be performed, but in cases of danger, and are always without *Sponsors*’ and generally as defending correct practice. On 22nd March 1783 in the words of Boyer a:

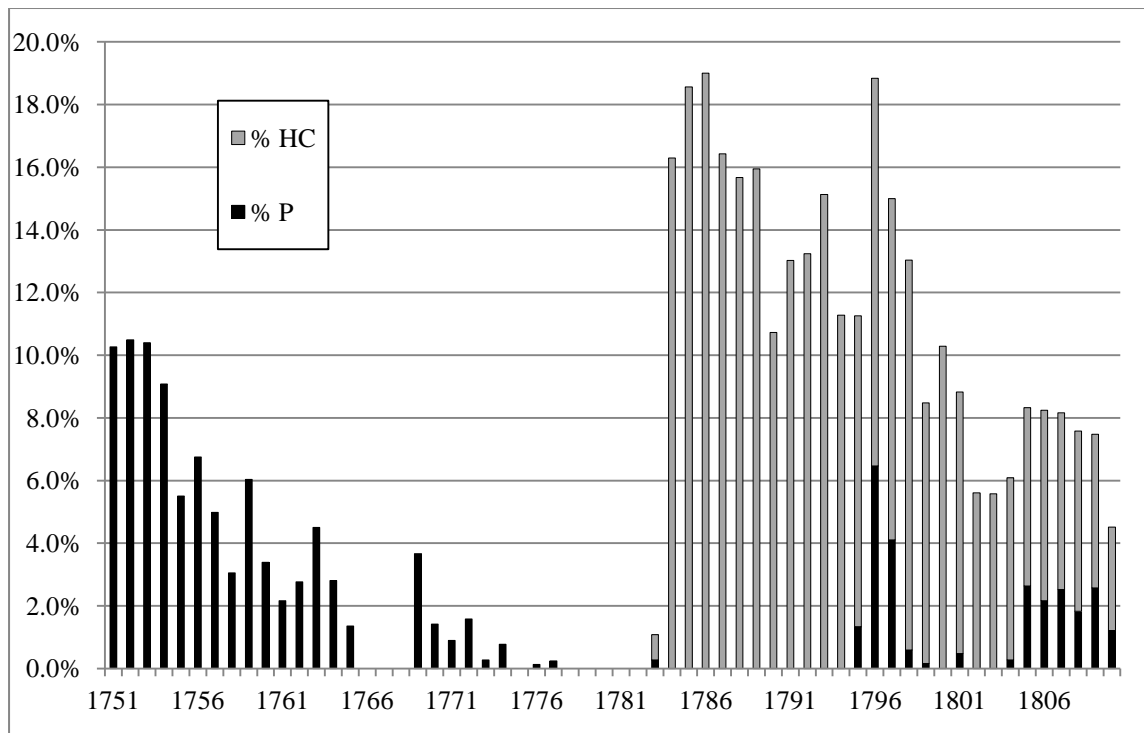
‘dispute happened between the Rev. M. Wrighte and Mr. Boyer, about the register; the Rev. Mr. Wrighte insisted, that *private baptisms* should be registered, the same as *christenings* ... This was to give the Rev. Mr. Wrighte a more plausible pretence for demanding the *fees* at that time; the *fees* are for *registering*, though commonly called the *christening fees*’.

This thus explains the original, *uncorrected* order, of precisely the same date, found in the baptism fee books (see above Fig 6). *If* that order had been followed through, the baptism fee books would have included home baptisms masquerading as public christenings. However, Wrighte’s order was resisted. Boyer continued:

altho’ the Rev. Mr. Wrighte was obeyed in the money’s being frequently then demanded [*i.e. at private baptisms*], it was impossible for Mr. Boyer so far to debase the register, while in his care, as to enter *private baptisms*. For had that been done, many children (according to the register) would have appeared to have been christened, though they never had. And likewise duplicates, of the same thing must frequently have happened; as for instance, *John Nokes of Richard and Mary*, baptized on the 22nd of March 1783, and *John Nokes of Richard and Mary*, baptized on the 17th of July 1783; making it appear by the register, that the same persons must have had twins, baptized at different times by the same name, and that likewise without any specification of which was the first born.

Boyer’s refusal thus explains the countermanded, corrected order in Figure 6. Rev. Mr. Wrighte ‘is no great adept in church matters, yet he knew sufficient to see the impropriety of this, had not interest blinded his eyes. However, the Rev. Mr. Wrighte very reluctantly gave up the point, upon Mr Boyer’s positively refusing to do it ...’⁴³ Presumably therefore the corrected order must represent a *return* to normal practice, whereby private baptisms ‘or namings’ were not paid for or registered *until* the infants had been officially received into the church. It is a great pity for demographers that Wrighte’s order of 22nd March 1783 was not carried out, since it would have produced the holy grail of early modern historical demographers – a rare period when baptisms in the church represent very closely the true incidence of parochial births (with the exception of very early unbaptised neonatal deaths). This also raises the possibility that there may have been some periods in the parish when this sort of policy *was* followed, as it sometimes was elsewhere.⁴⁴

Figure 7 Percentage of baptisms described as privately baptized or as home christenings 1751-1810



Source: COWAC Baptism Fee Books, Accession 419/210-227; St Martin in the Fields Baptism and Burial Registers.

Figure 7 sets out the percentage of baptisms in the parish which were annotated as P or HC events. It is clear that the dismissal of Boyer coincided with a surge in the recording of home christenings - recorded as 'HC' - which reached 19% of all baptisms in 1784-5, the percentages peak again at that figure in 1796 a time when 'P' labels had reappeared in the books. Before 1783 the percentage of private baptisms is very different. They are all labelled as 'P' and the percentages are much smaller. Few if any are recorded in the 1770s, but up to 10% of christenings are so labelled 1752-3. It is, of course, not clear what this graph means, since we cannot know from a simple count whether these represent private baptisms registered as if they were public ones (in contradiction to prescribed official practice) or simply record a prior home baptism which was then formally received into the church according to the established form. Nor, of course, can we be sure that the absence of a label means that home baptism did *not* take place. Reference to Figure 4 (percentage level of fee charged over time) and the underlying data in Figure 3 (percentage distribution of fees) would (assuming that *all* fees over 18d represented a 'home christening' of some sort) suggest that private baptisms must have taken place in at least 31% of *all* christening 'processes' in the parish between 1751 and 1794. Moreover if we allow for 545 cases in this period when labelled home christenings were *not* charged fees, we get an overall figure of 33%. Therefore the fees charged alone suggest that something like one third of *all* registered baptisms involved a private ceremony of some sort prior to, or instead of, a standard public ceremony. If this estimate is reasonable, it must explain why so few infant children died without given forenames in the burial register. Both the sick *and many others* had already undergone a 'naming' even though they died before a registered public baptism.

Conclusion

All this requires a reconsideration of the nature of the baptisms recorded in parish registers. It would be quite wrong to think that these were all christenings at the font carried out by a local cleric. In fact a significant

proportion *must* have been either home baptisms registered as public baptisms, or registrations of the public reception of children *previously baptized at home*. The birth-baptism interval is thus NOT necessarily therefore measuring the interval between birth and *baptism*. It is often measuring the interval between birth and the public reception of a previous private baptism. One reason that parents were so relaxed about baptizing their children in the eighteenth century was because a growing number had persuaded a cleric of some description to baptize their children at home on social as well as medical grounds. The later church ceremony being for legal or perhaps status reasons. This practice explains why the *burial* register of St Martin's in the Fields contains so few unbaptised children in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, despite the dramatic lengthening of the 'birth-baptism' interval (see above Table 1).

Wrigley and Schofield noted long ago that:

when a child died young its death often occurred before baptism, and even in parishes where home baptism was widely practiced such baptisms were often not entered in the register unless the child lived long enough to be received into the church by public ceremony⁴⁵

As Tony Wrigley pointed out (just like William Boyer two hundred years earlier), if both home and public ceremonies were registered this would lead to the double registration of events.⁴⁶ Technically, therefore, an increasing number of baptisms in an aggregate series could be due to the growth of private baptism and double counting rather than an increase in the local population, although there is no evidence that we know of that this happened on a significant scale. Wrigley also quoted the following fascinating note left by a vicar of Linton (a rural Cambridgeshire parish on the Essex border) in 1780:

'N.B. It has not been usual for many years past to register the sickly children who are named at home, till they are brought to Church to be incorporated. Consequently all that die and are never incorporated come into the List of Burials but not of Baptisms. This circumstance should be known to the curious who may be inclined to form their ideas of population from these lists'⁴⁷

The point made here is that if private baptisms had *not* been widespread, cases of dead infants lacking forenames would surely have been a lot more commonly found in the burial books, given the growing proportion of parents who delayed public baptism, often for months, in the later eighteenth century. In fact we know of no study anywhere that has reported an *increase* in the proportion of explicitly *unbaptised* children in burial registers during the *eighteenth* century. Nor is there any study we know of that has found growing numbers of children buried lacking forenames. All this therefore suggests that the lengthening birth-baptism interval in eighteenth-century England must have been accompanied by a substantial growth in the number of home or private christenings. It is, in this literal sense therefore, quite wrong, to write (as many historical demographers still do), that high infant mortality rates and lengthening birth baptism intervals produced a significant risk of 'dying before baptism'. The significant risk was that such children died before a *public* baptism or public reception of a private baptism. In the event – apart from those who died within a couple of days of birth - very few children died before baptism in Georgian London.

¹ This research has been funded by the ESRC Grant Ref: ES/I035400/1 whose support we gratefully acknowledge. A version of this paper was given to the Cambridge Population Group, 11th March 2013.

² B. M. Berry and R. Schofield, 'Age at baptism in pre-industrial England', *Population Studies* 25, 3 (1971), 454.

³ Berry and Schofield, 'Age at baptism', 463. Tony Wrigley summarised their findings thus 'Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the average interval between birth and baptism increased substantially, and with it the danger that a young child would die before baptism', E. A. Wrigley, 'Births and Baptisms: The Use of Anglican Baptism Registers as a Source of Information about the Numbers of Births in England before the Beginning of Civil Registration', *Population Studies* 31, 2 (1977), 281.

⁴ There is a large literature on the birth-baptism interval, see, for example: Dennis Richard Mills, 'The christening custom at Melbourn, Cambs', *Local Population Studies* 11 (1973), 11-22; R. W. Herlan, 'Age at baptism in the London parish of St Olave, Old Jewry, 1645-1667', *Local Population Studies* 24 (1980), 42-8; M.

Saxby, 'Age at baptism in the parish of St Nicholas Pevensey, 1761-1800', *Local Population Studies* 61 (1998), 56-7; M. J. Saxby, 'Ages at baptism in the parish of All Saints, Sudbury, 1809-1828: a new approach to their interpretation', *Local Population Studies* 70 (2003), 49-56; John Perkins, 'Birth-baptism intervals in 68 Lancashire parishes, 1646-1917', *Local Population Studies* 85 (2010), 11-27; Roger Finlay, *Population and Metropolis. The Demography of London 1580-1650*, (CUP: Cambridge, 1981), 37-43..

⁵ R. W. Ambler, 'Civil registration and baptism: popular perceptions of the 1836 act for registering births, deaths and marriages', *Local Population Studies* 39 (1987), 24-31; R. W. Ambler, 'Baptism and christening: custom and practice in 19th century Lincolnshire', *Local Population Studies* 12 (1974), 25-7; Wrigley 'Births and Baptisms', 283; P. M. Kitson, 'Religion change and the timing of baptism in England, 1538-1750', *Historical Journal* 52, 2 (2009), 275-6; E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*, (CUP: Cambridge, 1989 edn), 97. See also J. T. Krause, 'The changing adequacy of English registration, 1690-1837', in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History. Essays in Historical Demography*, (Edward Arnold: London, 1965), 389.

⁶ Jeremy Boulton, 'Clandestine marriages in London: an examination of a neglected urban variable', *Urban History* 20, 2 (1993), 191-210.

⁷ David Cressy, *Birth, marriage & death. Ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (OUP: Oxford, 1997), 192.

⁸ *A Letter from a Clergyman Giving his Reasons for refusing to administer Baptism in Private, by the Public Form; As desired by a Gentleman of his Parish*, (London, 1754), 40.

⁹ Will Coster, 'Tokens of innocence: infant baptism, death and burial in early modern England' in B. Gordon and P. Marshall, eds., *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (CUP, Cambridge: 2000), 266-287 ; Y. T. Tjondrowardjojo, 'Stories Baptismal Registers Told: Private Baptism in Seventeenth-Century England', *History* 95, 318 (2010), 177-93. For early examples of private baptism see Wrigley, 'Births and Baptisms', 283 For private baptism see also A. Wilson, 'The ceremony of childbirth', in V. Fildes, ed., *Women as mothers in pre-industrial England : essays in memory of Dorothy McLaren* (Wellcome Institute: London, 1990), 80.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer, And Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of The Church of England* (London, 1763), 246-56.

¹¹ In St Martin Orgars half of all baptisms had taken place within 6 days of birth in the late seventeenth century, but by 1796-1807 the figure was (apparently) 35 days. Birth baptism intervals were relatively uniform across the capital, Berry and Schofield, 'Age at baptism', 460.

¹² Midwives were sworn to dispose of stillborn infants' bodies in suitable 'secret places', keeping them from animals and out of public lanes, Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present* 156 (1997), 108. A *Book of Oaths* in 1649 gave the relevant clause 'if any childe bee dead borne, you yourselfe shall see it buried in such secret place as neither Hogg nor Dogg, nor any other Beast may come unto it, and in such sort done, as it may not be found or perceived, as much as you may; And that you shall not suffer any such childe to be cast into the Jaques or any other inconvenient place'. This oath was taken by Ellen Perkins, of St Martin in the Fields, in 1686, see Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (CUP; Cambridge, 2000), 206-7 and Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men. A History of the Struggle for the Control of Childbirth* (Historical Publications, London, 1988 edn), 236-7.

¹³ Kitson. 'Religion change and the timing of baptism in England'. 274.

¹⁴ This may, in some ways seem odd, given the anxiety surrounding the definitions of stillborn children found in Coroner's Inquisitions. A common experiment was to float the lungs of stillborn infants to see if breath had been drawn. This method usually led medical men to swear that a child had been stillborn. This procedure related to the law on infanticide since 'infanticide was treated as murder only if the live child was fully out of the body when it died', Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide', 98.

¹⁵ Of these 50 cases all but 8 were male, suggesting some prioritisation of male children for some unknown cultural reason. These cases were concentrated early in the period: 36/50 occurred between 1747 and 1758. There is also clustering in 1786 and 1792, suggesting that (perhaps) particularly obliging local clerics were then available. There was thus no relationship between the incidence of baptised 'stillbirths' and the lengthening interval between birth and baptism since most occur in the early period. None of baptised fifty named stillbirths appear in the baptism fee books.

¹⁶ One of these chrisom children was stated to be '4 hours' old in a marginal comment. Another was 4 days old when it died of convulsions in 1762. In the 1725 burial fee table stillborns and chrisoms were grouped in the same fee bracket. The term chrisom was rather old fashioned by the eighteenth century. Most chrisom cases in St Martin's occurred in the 1740s and 50s. The last case was in 1765. Coster found that the term invariably referred to an unbaptized child by the mid seventeenth century, Coster, 'Tokens of innocence', 283. There are four other cases all involved named children whose ages were given in hours. These children were distributed evenly across the period, in 1760, 1773, 1795 and 1822. Mary Pearce was 3 hours old when she died in the

workhouse in 1760. Although named she does not appear as baptized in the baptism fee books. Ann Farmer '1 hour' old at her death in 1773 was born in Kings Court and again does not appear in the fee books, although she must have been christened. Thomas Clark was said to be 6 hours old at his interment, but he was brought from the neighbouring parish of Covent Garden in 1795. Sarah Peake buried on 11th July 1822 was said to be 20 hours old: this is after the baptism fee book coverage ceases but she does not appear to be in the parish baptism register. Mary Pearce and Ann Farmer's cases are further evidence that death before *publicly registered* baptism did *not* necessarily mean death before a *private* baptism.

¹⁷ Roger Finlay, 'Distance to church and registration experience', *Local Population Studies* 24 (1980), 26-40, 35-6.

¹⁸ P. Laxton and Naomi Williams, 'Urbanization and infant mortality in England: a long term perspective and review', in M. C. Nelson and J. Rogers, eds., *Urbanisation and the Epidemiologic Transition* (Uppsala, 1989), 125 noted that 'the extent to which unbaptized infants were omitted from burial registers, and thus whether births really were much less comprehensively recorded, as has commonly been supposed, is crucial' but did not refer to the nature of stillbirths recorded in the Bills. Apart from stillbirths, which *were* omitted from the parish burial register proper, we are in effect arguing that virtually *no* children went unregistered in the parish, and *very few at all* from the Bills. John Landers' seminal study excluded stillbirths, *Death and the Metropolis. Studies in the demographic history of London 1670-1830* (CUP: Cambridge, 1993), 169. Landers remarked that for his calculation of vital rates 'the numbers of stillbirths and "abortions" were also subtracted from the burials in the 0-1 year age group from the 1730s, although it is likely that these included a number of early neonatal deaths'. We think it was a very substantial proportion.

¹⁹ John Landers believed that falling early infant death rates in London in the late eighteenth century more than offset the effect of lengthening birth baptism intervals. For this reason he reduced his inflation factor for this effect from the 1770s, Landers, *Death and the Metropolis*, 165-6. This is in stark contrast to Wrigley and Schofield's allowance which increases steadily over time.

²⁰ A number of examined paupers made reference to anonymous children (often illegitimate) that had not yet been baptised in settlement examinations.

²¹ Thirteen of these cases involved children exported to other parishes for interment. Such cases were more likely to lack information on the deceased.

²² There is, incidentally, little sign that those born (and lucky enough to survive) in the workhouse were sent out to nurse quickly. Most were kept some weeks or even months before being sent to a parish nurse (mostly located in rural Surrey and Middlesex) so one presumes these were dry nursed. Surviving newborns stayed even longer in the workhouse after the construction of a purpose-built nursery in 1783. This would only apply to infants whose mothers died or left them. Most infants remained with their mothers for at least three weeks in the workhouse, and were apparently breastfed (since there was no seasonality to their mortality in this period. Infants without mothers on the other hand showed a summer peak in mortality, suggesting that there was little non-maternal wet-nursing in the workhouse). Wet-nursing was common amongst London's middling sort - its incidence may have peaked in the early eighteenth century, see Finlay, *Population and Metropolis*, 29, 92-99, 146-8; Valerie Fildes, 'Maternal feelings re-assessed: child abandonment and neglect in London and Westminster, 1550-1800', in Valerie Fildes, ed., *Women as mothers in pre-industrial England: essays in memory of Dorothy McLaren* (The Wellcome Institute: London, 1990), 139-78; Gillian Clark, 'A study of nurse children, 1550-1750', *Local Population Studies* 39 (1987) 8-23.

²³ For these cases see COWAC 419/238 17th October 1780, 5th December 1782, 31st August 1782, 18th November 1779; 419/240, 20th July 1793.

²⁴ Only three causes of death for these are given – all died of convulsions but this is not surprising since 'convulsions' killed 142 out of the 151 one day old children for which a cause of death was given.

²⁵ Most of these were included to fill a chronological gap in the series (01 June 1765 - 22 March 1769 – 2732 entries) - periods when a separate workhouse register of baptisms exists (625 entries covering periods 02 May 1790- 25 September 1810) and 34 entries included which were omitted from the baptism fee books presumably due to random clerical error.

²⁶ Over seven hundred entries were labelled 'R' (possibly for 'registered' or 'received'. This is most unlikely to have referred to a particular parish official since the labels appear in the baptism fee books in 1775 and are found until 1808). Another three hundred or so were labelled 'E' (probably for baptisms carried out by a local curate, the native born, literary man and part-time cleric Charles Este (1752-1828). Two thirds of these took place in one year in 1793. Este is mentioned by name in the baptism books only in 1781 and 1792 but is known to have officiated at 594 weddings in the parish between April 1781 and August 1798. Some 117 or so baptisms, from October 1783, were labelled as 'JH' (the Reverend John Hunt was hired to replace William Boyer from 1st September 1783, see below). The 'JH' labels usually refer only to expensive private christenings and took place almost solely in 1784 and 1785. Hunt is mentioned by name only in 1789 in connection with baptism during

evening prayers. He officiated at 637 weddings between 1 September 1783 and 18 September 1793. For weddings see COWAC St Martin in the Fields Marriage Register.

²⁷ 121 individuals not charged fees were given explicit status titles. These included the children of six Earls, three Dukes and an entry for 11th February 1796 which reads ‘The Princess Daughter of His Royal Highness George Prince of Wales and of Her Royal Highness Caroline Princess of Wales born in Carlton House January seventh 1796. Was baptized this evening at Carlton House by His Grace The Lord Arch Bishop of Canterbury. His Majesty in Person and his Serene Highness The Duke of Brunswick by the Duke of York his proxy standing God Father and Her Majesty in Person and the Dutchess of Brunswick by her proxy The Princess Royal standing God Mother. The Princess was named Charlotte Augusta’. For this latter entry see COWAC Accession 419/225. Private gifts to officiating clergy and parish officers might well have gone unrecorded.

²⁸ COWAC Accession 419/217, 15 July 1779; Accession 419/224, 03 February 1789. Both refusals came from parents baptizing only a single child in the parish, so perhaps they were just passing through and did not consider themselves parishioners.

²⁹ And, frankly, of the country. The fathers of 116 of the 339 baptisms charged £1 or more were (unusually) ascribed a title. These included four Viscounts, 12 Earls, 4 Dukes, 6 Lords, 60 Esquires and a healthy sprinkling of right honourables, military and medical men and a few clerics.

³⁰ See the baptism fees reported by London clergy in *Report from the Select Committee on Parochial Registration; with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (House of Commons, 1833), 22, 36, 98, 111, 122. For a useful discussion of this source, see Ambler, ‘Civil registration and baptism’, 24-31. See also R. Burn, *The Ecclesiastical Law*, Vol. 1 (6th edition, 1797), 117 which discusses a case from St Martin’s where the then Vicar, William Lancaster (in post 1692-1716) failed in his attempt to levy a baptism fee of 3s 6d on a Frenchman who baptized his child at the nearby French Church in the Savoy.

³¹ This is clear from marginalia in the fee books. On a number of occasions in the 1750s it was recorded that churchwardens were paying a flat fee of £2 ‘for Registering the Poor Children Baptized in his year of office’. COWAC Accession 419/210, May 1752-5. This is confirmed by churchwardens’ accounts. Thus an entry in 1750 reads ‘To the Revd Mr Taylor for Registering the Poor Children baptized in the Year 1750’, F115/29. For a similar payment in 1767/8, see F143/44-6.

³² 1777/8, ‘Paid the Revd Mr Este for Registering & Christening the Infant Poor at the Workhouse a years Salary due Midsummer £2 2s’, COWAC F166/28. See also, F157/36; F165/26; F163/17; F160/25.

³³ *Committee on Parochial Registration*, 22 (St Pancras: 1s for the Vicar ‘and a little more goes to the parish clerk’), 98 (St Giles in the Fields and St George Bloomsbury: 1s 6d), 110 (St Saviour’s Southwark: 1s), 111 (Bethnal Green: 1s 6d), 122 (Bermondsey: 10d).

³⁴ A search through the archives of the Bishop of London might reveal some ecclesiastical initiative.

³⁵ Exactly the same responsiveness to lowered fees occurs in the burial register, see J. Boulton, ‘Traffic in corpses and the commodification of burial in Georgian London’, *Continuity and Change* 29, 2(2014), in press.

³⁶ William Boyer, *Clerical Policy; or, A Short Account of the Impositions, Encroachments, and Regulations, of The Revd. William Wrighte, Clerk in Orders, of the Parish of St Martin in the Fields* (London, 1784), 3-22. The pamphlet was printed for the Rev. William Boyer and ‘are to be had at No. 49, Millbank Street, Westminster’, Boyer’s then address. The preface dates the publication to 16th February, 1784.

³⁷ Jeremy Boulton is preparing a short account of this pamphlet.

³⁸ Boyer had at least modest independent means. In 1781 he wrote to the 3rd Duke of Portland, from his house in St Martin’s Churchyard, requesting preferment, in the first instance, to a Readership at Whitehall. In that letter Boyer mentions voting in the 1768 Cumberland election and that he possessed ‘a small farm’ in that county. As a result of supporting Portland’s preferred candidates, Boyer incurred the wrath of Sir James Lowther ‘and have suffered very materially from it’. University of Nottingham Library, PL C 9/28/1.

³⁹ ‘Thus was a Clergyman discharged from a situation in which he had spent very nearly ten years of the prime of his life’, *Clerical Policy*, 19.

⁴⁰ *At a meeting of the committee of the whole vestry, appointed with the consent of the Rev. Mr. Wright, and the Rev. Mr. Boyer, his late assistant* (London, 1784).

⁴¹ *Clerical Policy*, 3 supplies the date of Wrighte’s arrival. Wrighte’s original appointment is not visible in the parish archives because the post of parish clerk was in the gift of the Vicar, not the parish vestry. Wrighte officiated at weddings from 1781 (when ministers present are identified) until 1791. It is difficult to be sure about Wrighte’s career in the 1790s because his similarly named son, Thomas William Wrighte, served the parish as curate at the same time. William Wrighte died in 1813, at which time he was still serving Hamilton, probably as his curate, at Little Hadham, Hertfordshire.

⁴² *Clerical Policy*, 13.

⁴³ For these quotes see *Clerical Policy*, 12-14.

⁴⁴ Tjondrowardojo, ‘Stories Baptismal Registers Told’, 186 reports that the register of St Nicholas Acons began including private baptisms after the Restoration. See also, Wrigley, ‘Births and Baptisms’ 283, n. 9.

⁴⁵ Wrigley and Schofield, 1981, 96-7 and n. 15

⁴⁶ Wrigley, 'Births and Baptisms', 283; *Clerical Policy*, 14. It might therefore, of course, also explain some cases of 'same name' baptism. For the most recent work on this debate see Chris Galley, Eilidh Garrett, Ros Davies and Alice Reid, 'Living same-name siblings and British historical demography', *Local Population Studies* 86(2011), 15-36; Peter Razzell, 'Living same-name siblings in England, 1439-1851' and Chris Galley, Eilidh Garrett, Ros Davies and Alice Reid, 'Living same-name siblings and English historical demography: a reply to Peter Razzell', *Local Population Studies* 87 (2011), 65-77. See also the optimistically entitled Chris Galley, Eilidh Garrett, Ros Davies and Alice Reid, 'Living same-name siblings and English historical demography: a final comment', *Local Population Studies* 88 (2012) 82-83

⁴⁷ Wrigley, 'Births and Baptisms', 283, n. 9.