

Understanding the early parish registers of Hanslope, Buckinghamshire

Introduction

Parish registers covering the last two and a half centuries can normally be read and understood without difficulty. However there are many reasons why earlier registers may be misunderstood, or may contain errors or omissions. These include :

1. Year Styles, Calendars and Leap Years
2. 16th century Records and Transcriptions
3. Alterations to the registers
4. Language, Spelling and Names, Scripts and Handwriting
5. Practices during the Civil Wars, Interregnum and Restoration

Each of these topics is described, and then illustrated by specific references and examples from the early parish registers of Hanslope. (The early volumes do not have page numbers, so most examples are accompanied by numbers in brackets [n] which correspond to the page numbering adopted by the Hanslope and District Historical Society.)

1. Year Styles, Calendars and Leap Years

1.1 YEAR STYLES

Year Styles are defined by the day and month on which the year commences, and are of considerable significance in correctly interpreting dates in old records. Many different styles have been used at different periods, by different religions, for different purposes, and in different countries. The following is a simplified chronology of some principal styles which have been relevant to Britain.

Before 153 BC the ancient Roman year began on 1 March (which is why the months September to December are still named after the Latin words for seven to ten).

From 153 BC the start of the Roman year changed to 1 January (the date on which their Consuls took office). A reversion to this Roman year style remains in use today and has become known as the "New Style" (NS).

Around the 7th century AD the Christian church promoted the use of a year style based on the life of Christ. It began on the anniversary of the Birth of Christ, 25 December, commonly known as "Christmas Day".

In the 12th century AD the Christian church promoted a variant of their year. It began on the anniversary of the Incarnation of Christ, 25 March, commonly known as the "Annunciation of Our Lady" or "Lady Day". Sometimes called the Civil or Legal Year, this year has become known as the "Old Style" (OS). However it was not adopted for all purposes and coexisted with continuing use of the Roman Year, resulting in inconvenience and confusion.

In 1750 the Calendar (New Style) Act of King George II decreed that, in England and its dominions, the Old Style year was not to be used after 31 Dec 1751 and that the following day was to be reckoned as 1 Jan 1752.

To avoid confusion when referencing dates between 1 January and 24 March in any of the years from the 12th century until 1751, when the Old and New Styles coexisted in England, it is necessary to specify which style is used. (A commonly quoted example is the date of execution of King Charles I, which can correctly be shown as 30 Jan 1648 OS or 30 Jan 1649 NS or 30 Jan 1648/49.)

So far as the parish registers of Hanslope are concerned :

- No single style was used consistently in the first few pages, before the end of Baptisms 1574
- The Old Style year was intended to be used from Marriages 1575 until Marriages 1579
— The intention to use this style is indicated by a footnote "**Here begineth from 1575 the [Christ] enyngs begining at the feast daie of the Anniversary of [our] Lady the Virgin Marie for the year following**". This appears on page [9] immediately after the entries for "Christnyngs 1574". However the positions of many of the subsequent year headings do not coincide with the start of the Old Style year.
- The Roman (New Style) year was intended to be used from Baptisms 1579 until 31 Dec 1601
— The intention to use this style is indicated by a heading "**Here beginneth the yere in Janewary**". This appears on page [17] immediately before the heading "Christnyngs 1579". However the positions of some of the subsequent year headings (mainly those of marriages and burials) do not coincide with the start of the New Style year.

- The Old Style year was used from 1 Jan 1601 OS until 31 Dec 1752
—Note that particular care is needed with entries under the year heading 1601 which extends over a period of almost 15 months. The entries commence on page [46] with dates following 1 Jan 1601 NS, and continue until dates approaching 24 Mar 1601 OS on page [48].
- The New Style year has been used since 1 Jan 1753
— Note that this usage began one year later than had been specified by the Calendar (New Style) Act of 1750.

1.2 CALENDARS

Calendars are the means by which dates within successive years are synchronized against the period of slightly less than 365¼ days in which the earth orbits the sun. Calendars are usually of little significance to researchers. Exceptions are when it is required to calculate the period between dates which were recorded under different calendars, or to calculate the day of the week on which a particular date fell. The following is a simplified chronology of some principal calendars which have been relevant to Britain.

The predictability of the length of the year was recognized in prehistoric times. In the British Isles evidence from the neolithic period, ~5000 years ago, is provided by the alignment to the winter solstice of a number of ancient monuments : most notably the World Heritage sites of Newgrange in Ireland and Maeshowe on Orkney.

Calendars are found amongst the earliest examples of writing and numerology. Around the middle of the 3rd millennium BC in Mesopotamia the Sumerians are known to have used a year of 360 days. And the circle describing the orbit of the sun around the earth (as was then believed) was divided into 360 degrees, each corresponding to one day. The figure of 360 allowed for easy division of the year into four seasons, or into 12 months of 30 days. However it required significant adjustments to keep the year aligned to the solar cycle.

By the 8th century BC, calendars averaging 365¼ days had become common amongst civilizations around the world. However there was no single consistent method of determining leap years.

On 1 January 45 BC Julius Caesar introduced what has become known as the Julian Calendar (although it did not become entirely stable until around 4 AD). Under this calendar every Roman (New Style) year which was divisible by four was a leap year, with the addition of an intercalary day by the repetition of 24 February (or, since the middle ages, by the addition of 29 February). This provided an accuracy which was adequate over a single lifetime.

On 15 October 1582 Pope Gregory XIII introduced what has become known as the Gregorian Calendar. Under this calendar Roman (New Style) century years are not leap years unless they are divisible by four hundred. This provides an accuracy which will remain sufficient for around 8 millennia.

Different European countries switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in different years. In most countries the switch of calendars took place many years after the abandonment of the Old Style year. Earliest were mainly catholic countries (eg Spain and Portugal abandoned the Old Style in 1556, and switched calendars 26 years later by omitting 10 dates in 1582). Next were mainly protestant countries (eg Scotland abandoned the Old Style in 1600, and switched calendars 152 years later by omitting 11 dates in 1752). Last were mainly orthodox countries (eg Russia abandoned the Old Style in 1700, and switched calendars 218 years later by omitting 13 dates in 1918).

England and its dominions (including the colonies in North America) were unusual in that the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar took place in the same year as the abandonment of the Old Style. In addition to imposing the change from Old Style to New Style between 31 Dec 1751 and 1 Jan 1752, the Calendar (New Style) Act of 1750 also decreed that the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar was to be implemented during September 1752. Eleven dates were omitted, so that Wednesday 2 Sep 1752 in the Julian Calendar was immediately followed by Thursday 14 Sep 1752 in the Gregorian Calendar. The fact that the two separate issues were addressed by the same Act of Parliament and took place in the same year is, perhaps, why they are so often confused and misunderstood in England and the USA (and in many sources on the internet).

A third provision of the Calendar (New Style) Act of 1750 was to the effect that certain financial obligations were not to fall due any sooner than if the change of year style and the switch of calendar had not occurred. This established the basis for the current British "Financial Year", which is essentially a continuation of the Old Style year but with its start date set back to 6 April (Gregorian) : 365 days after 25 March (Julian).

So far as almost all English records, including all entries in the parish registers of Hanslope, are concerned :

- dates until Wednesday 2 Sep 1752 were in the Julian calendar
- dates between 3 Sep 1752 and 13 Sep 1752 were not used
- dates since Thursday 14 Sep 1752 have been in the Gregorian calendar

1.3 LEAP YEARS

In England variants of the Christian year styles coexisted with the Roman (New Style) year from around the 7th century until 1751. However, during this period, leap years continued to be calculated in accordance with the Roman (New Style) year. An example from the parish registers of Hanslope is :

- Volume I Page [176] Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 1679 OS
 William son of Will^m Corsey Bapt — Feb.29th
 — Although the register shows the year as 1679 OS, it was 1680 NS and hence was a leap year

2. 16th century Records and Transcriptions

2.1 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Following the religious turmoil of the Reformation in England, the requirements for parish registers did not become stable until 1604. The following is a simplified chronology of some principal stages until that year.

On 5 Sep 1538 Thomas Cromwell, the Lord Privy Seal to King Henry VIII, issued injunctions that : "*... every parson ... shall for every church keep one book or register wherein ye shall write the day and year of every wedding christening and burying made within your parish ... and shall there insert every persons name that shall be so wedded christened or buried. And for the safe keeping of the same book the parish shall be bound to provide ... one sure coffer with two locks and keys ...*". However the requirement was resisted by many clergy; many registers took the form of loose sheets; and the material used was often only paper, which was susceptible to deterioration. Consequently few parish registers survive from as early as the 1530s.

On 9 Mar 1563 a Bill was read in Parliament under which copies were to be made of "*all former church books of 24 years continuance already passed or thereabouts*" into "*great decent books of parchment*". Transcripts were also to be sent to the diocesan centre. However the clergy opposed the proposal, and it was not implemented.

On 25 October 1597 a constitution of the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury, subsequently approved by Queen Elizabeth I in 1598, directed that registers were in future to be kept on parchment, and that parchment copies were to be made of those old records which were on paper. It also required that copies of future records were to be sent annually to the diocesan register. This explains why many series of Bishop's Transcripts in Diocesan records commence around 1599-1600. However the constitution did not refer to the Queen's heirs and successors, and the requirement lapsed when the Queen died.

In April 1604 King James I approved new "*Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, of the Church of England*". Commonly known as "*Canon Law*", these comprised 141 rules which had been considered by the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury during the winter of 1603-04. They were to remain unchanged for more than 250 years. Canon 70 is headed "*Ministers to keep a Register of Christenings, Weddings and Burials*". It states : "*In every Parish-church and Chapel within this realm, shall be provided one parchment book at the charge of the parish, wherein shall be written the day and year of every Christening, Wedding, and Burial, which have been in that parish since the time that the law was first made in that behalf, so far as the ancient books thereof can be procured, but especially since the beginning of the reign of the late Queen. And for the safe keeping of the said book, the Church-wardens, at the charge of the parish, shall provide one sure coffer, with three locks and keys; whereof the one to remain with the Minister, and the other two with the Church-wardens And the Churchwardens shall once every year, within one month after the five and twentieth day of March, transmit unto the Bishop of the diocese, or his Chancellor, a true copy of the names of all persons christened, married, or buried in their parish in the year before ...*". The reference to the beginning of the reign of the late Queen explains why the registers of a number of parishes commence in 1558. And the requirement to generate the Bishop's Transcripts after 25 March each year may explain why many registers from that period are compiled in the Old Style.

2.2 16TH CENTURY ENTRIES IN REGISTERS OF HANSLOPE

So far as the parish registers of Hanslope are concerned :

- All entries until the end of 1599 are believed to be transcripts
 — The spacing of their layout in separate blocks for each type of event, and with burials (in some years) being listed before the corresponding baptisms, could hardly have been achieved unless they had been written retrospectively. And 1599 follows shortly after the introduction of the requirements of 1597-1598.
- The transcription is believed to have been undertaken by a single clerk
 — This is indicated by the consistency of the handwriting over the entire period. (It is noted that a new vicar, William Jones, is recorded in 1598. It may be that the transcription was undertaken by him).

The original 16th century records may be considered in five groups :

- before 1558 — There are no entries in the register for this period. Any original records may have already been lost by 1599; or they may have deteriorated and become unreadable; or the clerk may simply have taken advantage of the ambiguity in the requirement, and decided to ignore them.
- 1558 - 1570 — There are no longer any entries in the register for this period. Any original records should have been transcribed, and it is understood that when the register was seen by an antiquarian in the 1730s the entries went back at least as far as 1566. But none now remain.
- 1571 - 1574 — The entries in the register for this period are not consistently in any single year style. This may suggest deficiencies in the creation of the originals, or that they had deteriorated and become difficult to read.
- 1575 - 1579 — The entries in the register for this period are indicated as being in the Old Style. This suggests a different originator. However the positions of many of the year headings do not coincide with the start of the Old Style year. This may suggest deficiencies, as for the previous group.
- 1579 onwards — The entries in the register for this period are indicated as being in the New Style. This suggests yet another originator. However the positions of some of the year headings do not coincide with the start of the New Style year. This may suggest deficiencies, as for the previous groups.

2.3 ASSESSMENT OF 16TH CENTURY YEAR SPLITS

In view of the variation in year styles which were used, and the lack of conformity of the positions of many headings to the year styles which are indicated in the register, it is necessary to assess the most likely actual years for each entry during the 16th century. Such an assessment can be undertaken with equal validity either against Old Style years, with the split before 25 March; or against New Style years, with the split before 1 January.

Working backwards from 1599 to 1573 it is observed that the vast majority of entries in each of the three separate categories of baptisms, marriages and burials run in a continuous chronological sequence by day and month. So within that period it is usually straightforward to assess the proper positions of the year splits.

Earlier entries present additional difficulties of interpretation. In particular, there is an unexplained gap of three months in the sequence of baptisms during Jan-Mar 1572/73. And there are two separate sequences of baptisms which each appear to correspond to Jan-Mar 1571/72.

The conclusions are tabulated below for each combination of year heading and subject heading in the register. Entries for which the actual year is assessed as differing from the year indicated by the headings in the register are shown in red. Queries "?" indicate assessments which remain uncertain.

In order to minimize the number of anomalies all entries until Marriages 1579, in the first column of page [17], have been assessed against the Old Style.

HEADINGS	Baptisms or Christenings	Marriages or Weddings	Burials
1571	The entries on [4] are indistinct 5 entries on [5] are 1571 OS ??	The entries on [4] are indistinct	The entries on [4] are indistinct
1572	10 entries on [6] are 1571 OS ? 14 entries on [6] are 1572 OS	6 entries on [5] are 1572 OS 1 entry on [5] is 1573 OS	13 entries on [5] are 1572 OS 3 entries on [5] are 1573 OS
1573	8 entries on [7] are 1572 OS 3 entries on [8] are 1572 OS 11 entries on [8] are 1573 OS 1 entry on [8] is 1573 OS Burial	9 entries on [6] are 1573 OS 2 entries on [6] are 1574 OS	21 entries on [7] are 1573 OS
1574	14 entries on [9] are 1573 OS 20 entries on [9] are 1574 OS	8 entries on [8] are 1574 OS	12 entries on [8] are 1574 OS
1575	1 entry on [11] is 1574 OS 29 entries on [11] are 1575 OS 9 entries on [12] are 1575 OS	3 entries on [10] are 1575 OS	22 entries on [10] are 1575 OS 7 entries on [10] are 1576 OS
1576	26 entries on [13] are 1576 OS 1 entry on [13] is 1577 OS	2 entries on [12] are 1576 OS 5 entries on [12] are 1577 OS	4 entries on [12] are 1576 OS 6 entries on [12] are 1577 OS
1577	15 entries on [14] are 1577 OS	4 entries on [14] are 1577 OS	4 entries on [14] are 1577 OS
1578	9 entries on [16] are 1577 OS 19 entries on [16] are 1578 OS	9 entries on [15] are 1578 OS 2 entries on [15] are 1579 OS	6 entries on [15] are 1578 OS 1 entry on [15] is 1579 OS
1579		5 entries on [17] are 1579 OS 6 entries on [17] are 1580 OS	

A simple example of the assessment process is provided by page [16]. In the register the headings of each column appear to state "Christnyngs 1578". However the heading of the first column appears to have been written originally as 1577 but subsequently altered to 1578; whilst the heading of the second column appears to have been written originally as 1578 but subsequently altered to 1577. The position is complicated by a note at the bottom of the first column which states "Here followeth the [Christ]nyngs in 1577 ...", although the figure of 1577 may itself have been altered. The 28 entries on the page are all in chronological order by day and month, and it is quite clear that the Old Style year changes between the ninth and tenth entries. Accordingly the assessment concludes that the page actually contains 9 entries in 1577 OS followed by 19 entries in 1578 OS. (If the assessment had been undertaken against the New Style, it would have split them into 6 entries in 1577 NS followed by 22 entries in 1578 NS)

In order to minimize the number of anomalies all entries from Baptisms 1579, in the second column of page [17], onwards have been assessed against the New Style.

HEADINGS	Baptisms or Christenings	Marriages or Weddings	Burials
1579	17 entries on [17] are 1579 NS 12 entries on [18] are 1579 NS		5 entries on [18] are 1579 NS 9 entries on [18] are 1580 NS
1580	9 entries on [19] are 1580 NS 10 entries on [20] are 1580 NS	4 entries on [19] are 1580 NS	7 entries on [19] are 1580 NS 9 entries on [19] are 1581 NS
1581	9 entries on [20] are 1581 NS 20 entries on [21] are 1581 NS 1 entry on [21] is 1582 NS	3 entries on [20] are 1581 NS	4 entries on [20] are 1581 NS 4 entries on [20] are 1582 NS
1582	24 entries on [22] are 1582 NS	8 entries on [21] are 1582 NS	15 entries on [22] are 1582 NS
1583	9 entries on [23] are 1583 NS 15 entries on [24] are 1583 NS	8 entries on [23] are 1583 NS	17 entries on [23] are 1583 NS
1584	34 entries on [25] are 1584 NS	3 entries on [24] are 1584 NS 2 entries on [24] are 1585 NS	16 entries on [24] are 1584 NS
1585	18 entries on [26] are 1585 NS	4 entries on [26] are 1585 NS	19 entries on [26] are 1585 NS
1586	23 entries on [27] are 1586 NS 8 entries on [28] are 1586 NS	3 entries on [27] are 1586 NS	11 entries on [27] are 1586 NS 9 entries on [27] are 1587 NS
1587	9 entries on [28] are 1587 NS 16 entries on [29] are 1587 NS	3 entries on [28] are 1587 NS	17 entries on [28] are 1588 NS
1588	27 entries on [30] are 1588 NS	7 entries on [29] are 1588 NS	3 entries on [29] are 1588 NS 4 entries on [29] are 1589 NS
1589	25 entries on [31] are 1589 NS	5 entries on [30] are 1589 NS	2 entries on [31] are 1589 NS 10 entries on [31] are 1590 NS
1590	26 entries on [32] are 1590 NS	2 entries on [32] are 1589 NS 6 entries on [32] are 1590 NS 2 entries on [33] are 1590 NS 7 entries on [33] are 1591 NS	14 entries on [32] are 1591 NS
1591	27 entries on [33] are 1591 NS 4 entries on [34] are 1591 NS	2 entries on [34] are 1591 NS 1 entry on [34] is 1592 NS	6 entries on [34] are 1592 NS
1592	19 entries on [34] are 1592 NS 7 entries on [35] are 1592 NS	9 entries on [35] are 1592 NS	16 entries on [35] are 1592 NS
1593	9 entries on [35] are 1593 NS 25 entries on [36] are 1593 NS	6 entries on [36] are 1593 NS 4 entries on [36] are 1594 NS	16 entries on [36] are 1593 NS 6 entries on [37] are 1593 NS
1594	21 entries on [37] are 1594 NS	10 entries on [37] are 1594 NS	20 entries on [38] are 1594 NS
1595	30 entries on [38] are 1595 NS 6 entries on [39] are 1595 NS	8 entries on [39] are 1595 NS	17 entries on [39] are 1595 NS
1596	16 entries on [39] are 1596 NS 20 entries on [40] are 1596 NS	11 entries on [40] are 1596 NS	15 entries on [40] are 1596 NS
1597	23 entries on [41] are 1597 NS 4 entries on [41] are 1598 NS	4 entries on [42] are 1597 NS	19 entries on [41] are 1597 NS 19 entries on [42] are 1597 NS
1598	22 entries on [42] are 1598 NS 4 entries on [43] are 1598 NS	5 entries on [43] are 1598 NS	24 entries on [43] are 1598 NS
1599	4 entries on [43] are 1599 NS 28 entries on [44] are 1599 NS	14 entries on [44] are 1599 NS	30 entries on [45] are 1599 NS

The majority of the conclusions in these tables are considered to be obvious and uncontentious. However a minority are less certain, and should be reconsidered if other evidence becomes available.

2.4 VALIDATION OF DATES AGAINST OTHER DOCUMENTATION

Some entries in the 16th century transcripts of burials can be validated by comparison with the dates of original wills and probates. Wills were commonly made when a person was known to be terminally ill, and it is not unusual to find that the dates of wills and probates were separated by only a short period. Clearly the date of death must always lie between the two, and it is normally followed closely by the date of burial. Two examples from Hanslope are :

- The will of John Coxe of Hanslope was dated 25 Dec 1587, and proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Buckingham just a few days later on 2 Jan 1588 NS. So his death occurred within that very short period. Volume I Page [27] includes an entry "**John Coxe was buried the xxvith of December**". This is under the heading "Buriales 1586", which is one year too early. But it is within a range of entries which the assessment reassigns to 1587, which would be correct. So the assessment is supported.
- The will of Dame Jane Stafford of Hanslope was dated 8 Nov 1591, and proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury less than four months later on 23 Feb 1592 NS. So her death occurred within that short period. Volume I Page [32] includes an entry "**Lady Jane Stafford was buried the xiiith November**". This is under the heading "Burials 1590", which is one year too early. But it is within a range of entries which the assessment reassigns to 1591, which would be correct. So the assessment is supported.

2.5 ASSESSMENT OF ERRORS IN TRANSCRIPTION

Any work of transcription is likely to introduce errors. A rule of thumb for modern transcriptions is that up to 10% of entries are likely to contain some sort of mistake. And this is likely to be an underestimate for transcripts in the 16th century, in the light of the limited literacy of those days.

Subjectively it might be supposed that the likelihood of errors would be greater in respect of the earlier entries from the 1570s, since the original records would have had longer to deteriorate and there would have been fewer opportunities to check against any other records or personal memories. By contrast original records from the 1590s should have deteriorated less by 1599, and there might have been more opportunities to check them.

This subjective view is consistent with the results of the assessment of year splits, in which the misplaced year headings were found to be most numerous during the 1570s, and least numerous during the 1590s.

A more objective basis for assessing the likelihood of errors is provided by an analysis of the baptismal entries. The current (1662) edition of the "Book of Common Prayer" includes instructions (essentially unchanged from the earlier 1559 edition) which state : "... **Baptism should not be administered but upon Sundays, and other Holy-days ... Nevertheless, (if necessity so require,) Children may be baptized upon any other day.**" Analysis of the baptismal entries at Hanslope shows that the proportion recorded as having taken place on a Sunday rises from little more than 30% in the early 1570s to around 70% in the late 1590s. If the 16th century transcripts are correct, these results would represent a significant and unexplained change of practice in the village. So it seems plausible to conclude that the analysis indicates a greater number of errors in the transcription of the earlier records.

3. Alterations to the registers

As with other documents, parish registers may contain alterations. It is rare to find alterations which are deliberate attempts at falsification, but quite common to find alterations that are mistaken. Each needs to be carefully considered on its own merits. The following is a summary and assessment of some categories of alteration which have been identified in the registers of Hanslope.

The 16th century transcripts represent a substantial alteration to the original records and are believed to contain a significant number of errors, as already described. However they were clearly undertaken in response to an explicit legal requirement.

Some individual entries during the period 1571-1575 show a year as well as the day and month. In some of these cases the year is not well aligned to the rest of the entry, and may be a later addition. However the years do appear to be in the same hand and ink as the entries themselves. They may represent an attempt by the clerk who carried out the 16th century transcription to make sense of the earliest records being copied.

Some headings have been altered, in a hand and ink which appears to be later than the original. The example of page [16] has already been described. These may represent an attempt by someone, other than the clerk who carried out the 16th century transcription, to assess where the year splits should actually be. However the changed headings are not all believed to be correct.

Volume I has been rebound at least once. This is inferred from the fact that the leaf which contains entries from 1 Feb 1601 OS on page [48] to Nov 1603 on page [49] is bound out of sequence and lies between an entry for 1 Oct 1610 on page [57] and one for 4 Oct 1610 on page [58]. The reason for the rebinding is not known. It seems likely that it was undertaken since the 1730s, and may well have been when any transcripts for years earlier than 1571 were lost. No other consequences have been identified with respect to the interpretation of the contents of the register. (Note that the images are restored to their proper chronological order on the HDHS website).

Page [49] also includes seven alterations which provide evidence of confusion between the Old and New Styles. The page is within a period where the Old Style was used at Hanslope. Its first eight entries were originally written as 1602. A line drawn after the ninth entry was presumably intended to show the split between 1602 OS and 1603, but the line is misplaced and should be after the eighth entry. In addition, an attempt has been made to convert the first eight entries to New Style. All except the fifth have been altered to read 1603. The correct interpretation is surely that first eight entries are for 1602 OS, whilst the ninth entry is the first in 1603. The alterations appear to be the work of someone who did not appreciate that the Old Style was in use at Hanslope at this period.

Finally, some alterations appear to be simple corrections of clerical errors. One later entry, which has been selected as an example because it can be logically explained, is :

- Volume II Page [86] Baptisms 1765
John son of Samuel & ~~Hannah~~ Susan Cox — Jan:13
— Elsewhere in the registers there are entries for the death of Hannah, the first wife of Samuel, and his subsequent second marriage to Susanna. It seems that, when making this entry, the clerk simply failed to remember the name of Samuel's current wife.

4. Language, Spelling and Names, Scripts and Handwriting

4.1 LANGUAGE

Latin is used in the early registers of some parishes. However virtually all the contents of the parish registers of Hanslope are written in English. A few entries in Latin were made around the 1720s and 1730s by the Rev. Shadrach Garmston in respect of members of his own family. An example of an entry which is mostly in Latin is :

- Volume I Page [232] Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 1727 OS
Georgio-Gulielmus, Filius Shadrach Garmston Vic̄ de Hanslope & Elizabethæ Uxoris Sue, Natus est Februarij 25^o die, Baptizatus Martij 28.
— George-William, son of Shadrach Garmston Vicar of Hanslope & Elizabeth his wife, was born the 25th day of February, baptized 28 of March.

Roman numerals are frequently used to indicate the day of the month. The letters "v" and "x" can sometimes look similar; a final letter "i" is often replaced by a "j", and the form "iiij" is commonly used rather than "iv".

Greek forms the basis of one well-known contraction. The Greek letter "chi" (which looks like an "x"), usually followed by the Greek letter "rho" (which looks like a "p"), is often used to represent the name "Christ". This is the origin of the practice by which Christmas is still sometimes written as Xmas. Two examples appear in the following entry :

- Volume I Page [31] Christenings 1589 NS
xpofer Cotes with his brother Will^m Cotes were xpened the xxixth of Auguste
— Christopher Cotes with his brother William Cotes were christened the 29th of August

4.2 SPELLING AND NAMES

By the 16th century spelling had not become fully standardized. It varied even amongst those who were well educated, and for important words in printed works. An example is the widespread use of both "Lord" and "Lorde" in the 1559 edition of the Book of Common Prayer.

The 16th century headings in the registers of Hanslope include the following spelling variants for entries of marriage : "Mariages", "Mariges", "Mariags", "Marigs" and "Mariagis". The headings for entries of burial include : "Burialls", "Burials" and "Buriales". With such variety amongst common words, it is not surprising that there is an even wider variation in the spelling of personal names.

Christian names appear in a range of easily recognizable phonetic variations. And they are sometimes abbreviated or changed to versions that would nowadays be considered as nicknames. Common examples which appear in many places include : Agnis for Agnes; Ales for Alice; An for Ann or Anne (or even for Hannah); xpofer for Christopher; Elnor for Eleanor; Elsabeth or Elisabeth for Elizabeth; Harry or Henery or Henrye for Henry; Johane for Joanne or Joanna; Marie or Marye for Mary; Sara for Sarah; Susan or Susanna or Susannah; Will^m for William.

Surnames are subject to even wider variations. Few people could write their own names, so the spelling of surnames was subject to their individual pronunciation by each speaker and their phonetic interpretation by the clerk. This applies even to short surnames of a single syllable, as well as to longer surnames. And different spellings of the same surname are sometimes even found within a single entry in the registers. An example is :

- Volume I Page [21] Christenings 1581 NS
Agnis Cocks the daughter of Thoms Coxe xpened the xth daie of December

Females were sometimes identified not by their Christian name, but by their relationship to a male. One page includes examples in respect of women in three different circumstances :

- Volume I Page [26] Burials 1585 NS
Widow Lewis was buried the xiiijth February
- Volume I Page [26] Burials 1585 NS
Goodwyfe Jenckyns was buried the xxijth of September
— Note xxijth rather than xxijnd to echo the old spoken form of "two-and-twentieth"
- Volume I Page [26] Marriages 1585 NS
Will^m Muskett and Sibtharps daughter were married the xxiiijth October
— Note xxiiijth rather than xxiiijrd to echo the old spoken form of "three-and-twentieth"

Servants were sometimes identified not by their surname, but by their relationship to their master. Examples include :

- Volume I Page [26] Burials 1585 NS
John the servant of Ric. Webb was buried the xxviiijth of Marche
- Volume II Page [25] Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 1740 OS
Joseph de Hanslope Negro belonging to Samuel Jennings Surgeon aged about 16. was Baptized Nov^r 1. 1740.

4.3 SCRIPTS AND HANDWRITING

The script which was used for the 16th century transcripts is known as the "Secretary Hand". The entries are mostly well laid out in a single clear handwriting, which makes them unusually easy to read. One page which has survived in good condition, and is reproduced clearly, is page [26]. This falls in the middle of the period; includes all three types of event during the single year 1585 NS (with no reason to dispute its start or end dates); is the source for several of the examples above; and would provide a good starting point for anyone wishing to familiarize themselves with this script and this handwriting.

Between 1600 and 1620 the Secretary Hand continued to be used in the register. However the entries appear to have been made contemporaneously, perhaps by candlelight in a poorly lit church, and by a number of different clerks. Many entries are less well laid out than in the 16th century transcripts, and many are also in less clear handwriting. Some entries during this period are amongst the most difficult to read throughout all the registers of Hanslope.

During 1620 the Secretary Hand was superseded by a cursive script in the register. Around the transition some interesting variations can be found in close proximity. For example :

- Volume I Page [70] Baptisms, Marriages and Burials Jan 1619 OS - Oct 1620
This page, which is very poorly laid out, includes two scripts in at least three different hands.
Two entries which illustrate different forms of abbreviations, spelling and numbering are :

Ales Emberton widdow was buried the xijth day of may

Alice y^e daughter of John Rawlins buryed y^e tenth day of September

— Note the use of a character which looks like a "y" as a contraction of "th". Originally derived from runic, and still pronounced as "th", this was a successor to the character known as a thorn "þ" which had been common in Old English. However it had become less fashionable, and was seldom used in entries in the register before this period. It lingers nowadays in pretentious signs, such as "Ye Olde Pub". However its origins are not widely appreciated, and it is now commonly mispronounced as the letter "Y".

By the mid-1660s the Chancery cursive or "Italic Script" was used in the registers. Named from its development during the Italian Renaissance, the lettering in this class of scripts is recognizably similar to modern practice. Consequently the majority of entries from this period onwards are straightforward to read.

5. Practices during the Civil Wars, Interregnum and Restoration

THE CIVIL WARS (1642-1649)

During the English Civil Wars the registers of some parishes contain a reduced number of entries, whilst in other parishes the registers cease altogether. The reasons include opposition by parishioners to the religious practices which were being promoted, as well as the fact that in some cases the ministers were displaced.

No such effects have been observed in the parish registers of Hanslope. The number of entries during this period is not significantly different from the preceding years.

The one effect which is seen at Hanslope is a gap in the series of Bishop's Transcripts. These have survived in respect of most years during the early 17th century, and provide an important means of corroborating the entries in the registers. However the series ceases after 1640/41, and does not restart until the end of the interregnum.

THE INTERREGNUM (1649-1660)

On 24 Aug 1653 parliament passed "An Act touching Marriages and the Registering thereof; and also touching Births and Burials". This required that marriages were to be treated as civil contracts and carried out before Justices of the Peace: "whosoever shall agree to be married within the Commonwealth of England, after the Nine and twentieth day of September, in the year One thousand six hundred fifty three ... shall come before some Justice of Peace ... the said Justice of Peace may and shall declare the said Man and Woman to be from thenceforth Husband and Wife ... And no other Marriage whatsoever within the Commonwealth of England ... shall be held or accompted a Marriage according to the Laws of England".

The same act also required that registers were to be kept by civilian officials, who were to be known as Parish-Registers: "a Book of good Vellum or Parchment shall be provided by every Parish, for the Registering of all such Marriages, and of all Births of Children, and Burials of all sorts of people ... for the safe keeping of which Book, the Inhabitants and Housholders ... shall ... make choice of some able and honest person ... who shall therein fairly enter in writing all such Publications, Marriages, Births of Children, and Burials of all sorts of persons ... And the Register in such Parish shall attend the said Justice of Peace to subscribe the Entry of every such Marriage: And the person so elected, approved and sworn, shall be called the Parish-Register ...".

The extent of compliance with this law at Hanslope is unclear. The parish register continues to include many simple entries which appear to be traditional marriages solemnized by the minister in the church. It also includes a number of more extensive entries which clearly describe marriages contracted in accordance with the new law. The contrast is illustrated by the following two consecutive entries:

- Volume I Page [129] 1654 OS

Emanuell ffield & Elizabeth Taylor Married the 14 of January

Be it Remembred that upon the Thirtieth day of January - 1654 - I received a Note for the Publication of an Intended Marriage betweene Thomas Tyrrill of Castle Thrope in the County of Bucks esq and Jane Windebancke of the City of Westminster widdoe, which accordinge to the act for Marriages in the Parish Church of Hanslop in the County aforesayd I did declare and Publish presently after Morning sermon upon Three severall Lords dayes, viz upon y^e fowerth day of ffebruary then next followinge, & upon the eleventh day of ffebruary, next after and lastly upon the eighteenth day of the same month. And that they were Married accordinge to the sayd Act of Parliament the two and twentieth day of the Month of ffebruary one thousand sixe hundred ffiftie and ffower by Simon Bonett esq^r Justice y^e peace of ./.

Toby Tyrrill

Luce Tyrrill

John Fortie

Will Ashby register of the parish of Hanslop present

THE RESTORATION (1660)

After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 responsibility for the registration of baptisms, marriages and burials was restored to the clergy. Civil marriages which had taken place before justices between 1653 and 1660 were legalized by a new Act of Parliament in 1660. And the submission of Bishop's Transcripts also resumed.