

The Paper Parish: The Parish Register and the Reformation of Parish Memory in Early Modern London

‘for prooffe he was my childe, search the parish booke, the Clarke wil sweare it, his godfathers and godmothers can witness it, it cost me fortie pence in ale and cakes on the wiues at his christening’.ⁱ (1594)

When the humble figure of Alcon needs to uphold his paternity against denials in *A Looking Glasse For London and England*, Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge’s moral drama of the late 1580s, his recourse is to the parish. He appeals to documentary evidence in the form of the parish register, but this new instrument of sixteenth-century memorial practice is only one item in a catalogue of the memorial resources of the parish encompassing both kinship and community relations where we find the sacramental rites of baptism evoked along with the gossips’ feast that had been used for centuries to mark the time of a child’s birth in the collective memory.ⁱⁱ At the intersection of the textual record and the collective rites to which godparents and gossips can bear witness, appears the figure of the parish clerk, mediating between communal and textual memory, between the parish community and the parish on paper. It is the dynamic of this relationship between the materiality of the written registers, the church officials responsible for them, and the wider parish community that this study looks to examine in the context of early modern London. By investigating the material construction of the paper parish we are able to identify a key moment in the memorial culture of the parish, and the significant place of the parish register in that story.

In *The Parish Registers of England*, published in 1910 and still a standard authority on the history of this class of record, J. Charles Cox was scandalised by what he termed the “culpable carelessness shown ... by a minority of the beneficed clergy as to the safe keeping” of parish registers.ⁱⁱⁱ In the fifty years Cox had been researching and transcribing he noted many examples of registers he had consulted now “hopelessly disappeared” and felt the need to evangelise over the “incalculable value of [parish] registers for genealogical and legal purposes, and the historical and entertaining information contained in their manifold notes”.^{iv} In the century since Cox was writing, both the value and vulnerability of this resource have come to be more fully appreciated, with the deposit of early registers in record offices, and provision for their care, now mandated by law.^v In part this changed fortune is due to the huge explosion of interest in family history. The work of local record societies, family history networks, the Society of Genealogists and other groups (including of course the Mormon Church) in transcribing, indexing and publishing, has made available in print and typescript the content of large numbers of registers.^{vi} By the late sixties Peter Laslett could observe that “millions and millions of entries from obscurely written, badly preserved documents have been painfully transferred into print at considerable expense for the use of thousands of persons bent on tracing their ancestry.”^{vii} Many of these resources are now available online, including via a range of commercial sites that promise to yield to the family historian the secrets of the parish register on the other side of a pay wall. Nor is genealogical research the only line of interest in this resource. The democratisation of family history has been accompanied by the development of other forms of social history that have trained attention on the parish register. Laslett was a leading light in the Cambridge Group for the History of Populations who have been at the vanguard in the developments of approaches to social history and demographic study which have made extensive use of the data compiled from parish registers.^{viii}

The parish register it seems has never been more available for study. And yet if increasing use has been made of the information contained within the registers, their material existence as objects, the products of specific acts of writing, of particular practices of record-keeping, and the focus of various kinds of use, has tended to be obscured. The susceptibility of the parish register to data-harvesting for the purposes of statistical analysis or the compilation of family trees can further the tendency to abstraction. Sites such as dustydocs.com, parishregister.co.uk, or theparishchest.com appropriate the sign of the material record and the appeal of the archive while dealing in transcriptions and databased information. The tireless work of antiquarians and local historians over the past two centuries in publishing editions and extracts from registers has been guided by specific ideas of utility, with editors often prioritising accessibility over precise bibliographical analysis as well as subjecting the textual and scribal formulae of the registers have to adaptation, modernisation and summarisation. It is not uncommon to find such notes as “Considerable space has been saved in this Volume by adopting uniformly the initial letters "s" and "d" to indicate "son" and "daughter"; and the repetition of the formula "were baptized" or "married" or "buried" has also been avoided with a similar result”.^{ix} Such interventions have the effect of further distancing the printed text from the material register and the acts of writing it collects. Treating these items instead as material texts, asking who produced them, how and in what circumstances, leads us to consider the uses to which they were put, and the conditions in which they were both kept and accessed. Exploring the evidence of the parish register in this way provides us with important insights into the memorial culture of the early modern parish, helping us examine the developing information culture of early modern society and how it impacted upon the politics of community.

Keeping the Parish Record

The story of the parish register is well known in outline. In the seventeen royal injunctions of September 1538 Cromwell had formally required every parish in England to keep a record of all weddings, christenings and burials.

Item, That you, and every parson, vicar, or curate within this diocese, 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 for your time, and so every man succeeding you likewise: and also there insert every person's name that shall be so wedded, christened, or buried... which book ye shall every Sunday take forth, and in the presence of the said wardens, or one of them, write and record in the same all the weddings, christening, and buryings, made the whole week before.^x

The injunction prescribes a certain record keeping practice, nominating the minister as the person responsible, particularising the information to be recorded, and setting down the occasion and conditions for writing up the record. For G.R. Elton the introduction of the parish register was to be seen in the context of the Tudor Revolution in government, its purpose being “almost certainly... to provide a statistical basis for government action,” but his reading of the register as an instrument for governmental use has been challenged by recent historians who emphasise its importance to the early modern parishioner.^{xi} By providing the means to secure title and inter-generational transmission of property the parish register represents for Simon Sretzer, “the first general registration system in history created to serve the civil and legal needs of a populace.”^{xiii} The inspiration for Cromwell’s project has been linked to catholic initiatives for the recordkeeping of baptisms and marriages in Spain, France and the Netherlands, but the injunction also mapped onto well-established local

practices of recordkeeping and most notably, the church wardens' annual accounts which survive in reasonable numbers for the period prior to the injunction.^{xiii} Early churchwardens' accounts include notes on christenings, marriages and burials, within the format of the annual reckoning for parish income and expenditure made by the two churchwardens at the end of each year and signed off by the minister. Given the diversity of expenses and receipts, these materials have increasingly proved a rich resource for historians recovering the organisation of parish life. In particular scholars have used them to explore the history of popular religion, reconstructing the pre-Reformation parish life of All Saints, Bristol or the microhistory of Morebath in Devon under the reformation, through to broader examinations of parish culture from selected samples as undertaken by Ronald Hutton, Beat Kumin and Steve Hindle.^{xiv} Of the parishes within the twenty-five wards of the city of London, several preserve churchwardens' accounts predating Cromwell's injunction, including the extensive fifteenth century series extant from St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap and St Mary at Hill.^{xv} The verbal formulas used make it clear that the written volume preserved an account rendered before the parish. In the earliest extant volume from St Alphage, London Wall, in the city's Bassishaw ward and dating from 1527, the record speaks of "Acompte made... byffore the parsun and the parishoners of the parisch of Saynte Alpheges w^tin Creplegate London."^{xvi}

If earlier forms of community recordkeeping provided precedents for the parish register, its introduction nevertheless marked a significant moment in parish life. The new stipulation was sufficiently momentous to be recorded in chronicles of the period where it appears alongside another of the injunctions, the requirement for each parish to purchase, by the following Easter, the Great Bible on which Coverdale was then at work: "whereas your parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and reade it."^{xvii} The dual obligation to make available to parishioners the bible in English and to record the rites of parish life creates a new symbolism of the textual parish in which the right of access to the word of god

sits alongside the rite of inscription in the Christian community. We see the marking of this moment in some of the opening formulas used in early parish registers. The paper register book of St Martin, Ludgate records the date and occasion of the register's commencement: "Thys boke made the viith day of October the yere of oure lorde M CCCCC xxxix and in the xxxth yere of the Reyng of ore Sowfren lorde Kynge Henry the viiith."^{xviii} Several examples cite the injunction specifically. The register of St Stephen Coleman Street has a carefully indicted opening (fig. 1). Mirroring the structure of religious authority reflected in the Great Bible titlepage it identifies Henry VIII as "supreme heed under Christe of the Church of England" before referring to the local moment of promulgation in 1538 "Iuntions yeuen and exhibited" in the nearby "saynt laurens church in the old Iurye in the Visitacion of the archedecon."^{xix} Evaluating the moment of the registers' commencement is generally complicated by the fact that so many of the extant register covering the sixteenth century are copies dating from the later injunction of 1598 which required the transfer of paper registers onto parchment. At a national level, later copies have been estimated to make up more than 95% of registers beginning in 1538, of which there are believed to be around 1500.^{xx} In the city of London, parish registers beginning in 1538-9 are extant for 27 churches, and while the majority of these are later copies, there are several exceptions including the two cited above and the much decayed register of St Michael Bassishaw, which lacks any kind of title-page or headings and uses the briefest of formulas in its early entries.^{xxi} The present study draws on examination of 50 parish registers from the City of London covering the period 1538-1620. If relatively few original registers survive from 1538, the number of London parishes for which paper registers survive predating the injunctions of 1598 is considerably higher, including several cases where both paper registers and parchment copies survive together, enabling comparative analysis that illuminates a barely investigated memorial moment at the close of the sixteenth century.

Of the paper registers that survive one of the most striking features is the diversity of recording formats, for while the injunction lays down the duty of recordkeeping, denotes the information to be recorded and defines the occasion, it gives no precise prescription for the formula of the records. Within this diversity, however, it is possible to distinguish three principal types of organisation each of which has implications for how the register is kept and consulted. The simplest form of compilation is that found in the register of St Stephen Coleman St (fig. 1), consisting of a list mixing all three forms of entry together in chronological sequence, their difference indicated only by an initial C,W or B to denote christening, wedding, or burial. This format, which has the most in common with the eclectic inclusivity of churchwardens' accounts, is designed around ease of compilation rather than to facilitating searching – in some such registers the differentiating mark has been inserted later to improve utility. A second, more schematic format, is illustrated by the tabular distribution of entries in the St James, Garlickhithe parish register which reserves a column on the page for each of the 3 forms of entry.^{xxii} This layout presents a clearer arrangement of information on the page, but it is structured around an apparent expectation of balance between the three categories of entry that makes for a chilling illustration of disruptions within parish life as demonstrated by the pages covering the plague outbreak of 1563 (fig.2). For page after page in this year, and in the many outbreaks that followed from the 1590s to the 1630s only the column of death has entries. In this format, like an account book of parish community, the register illustrates the imbalance in parish life as death outstrips either the supply of new parishioners, or the marriages that might promise new life. The third and most common format in the extant registers is a separation of the three categories of entry either into three different books, or three sections of the same book often marked with tabs for ease of use.

This format facilitates more targeted searching of the register, although it does presents some complications in the keeping.

Just who was involved in the keeping of the records is significant for an understanding of the paper parish. Cromwell's injunction addressed itself explicitly to "parson, vicar or curate", laying the responsibility of the new record upon the incumbent minister. A number of scholars have accepted the evidence of the injunction as evidence that the minister complied and indicted the registers. Eamon Duffy's use of the Morebath churchwardens' accounts of a rural Devon parish, explored brilliantly the ventriloquism of the priest in authoring the ledgers, noting that "Like many Tudor priests, Sir Christopher was the most literate man in his parish" and for a nominal fee "acted as scribe for the churchwardens and stewardens of the parish."^{xxiii} In the urban context of sixteenth century London, however, the situation was different, and the extant records of early modern London provide a more complex picture of how recordkeeping operated within the city parishes. The records of St Botolphs without Aldgate illustrate the way in which parish recordkeeping depended upon the interactions of clergy, vestry and parishioners. The new parish register begun in 1570 opens by proclaiming:

This booke was bawght for a Regester apartayninge unto the Parishe
 Church of Saint Butoles without algate of London the xxu daye off
 Marche annot predicto and In the therteenne off the Raigne Off our
 Soueraigne ladie Elizabeth by the grace of god Queene off England/

By Henry Tunstonne Citize[-] And saddler of London And Thomas
 Barber Marchaunt, and of Theast Smythfelde Botthe off them for the
 tyme beinge Churchwardens

Robertu Hease doct ^{xxiv}

The frontispiece foregrounds the role of the churchwardens. As administrators of the parish revenues, the purchase of the register is their act and they ensure their role is memorialised in the gateway to the register, taking precedence over the minister. On the verso of the frontispiece, the churchwardens influence is again manifest with the record of quarterly payments received from them for “the engrosser of this register” who remains unnamed. The record of payments cover only the first year of the Register’s active life, however and thereafter the minister insistently asserts his control over the volume. Already that is evident in the opening leaf of the record proper where the repairs to the tab have not obscured the minister’s monogram “RH”, next to the category label for christenings. Later in the register we find a prominent insertion into the page from the curate (fig.3)

Here is to be noted, that I robart Heaz curat of this church under hir
maty beganne in my Seruice the . 14. off Iuly anno. 1564. ffrome the
Which tyme & daye until this present /20/ of Iunne 1581 I haue
baptized in number of children 193 RH^{xxv}

Attention is drawn to the curate’s notice by a crosshatched, marginal textbox that flags up the calculation of his service. Heaz makes a similar account of his own performance in burials of the dead, numbering the more than 2000 funerals he had conducted for his parish and in the concluding entry of the completed register he adds a valediction:

Heare I conclude & Make an end //
He that lacketh Money lacketh his frend
Finis the 4 of October
1593

By me Robert Heaz Curat //^{xxvi}

In these details, Heaze uses the parish register to assert his role within parish life. He does this not only by registering his own officiation at the principal rites of the parish but by further shaping its paper record. By inserting his monogram on the divider tabs, his name at beginning and end, and the notes on his service at intervals through the register he makes himself integral to navigating the fabric of the paper parish. The presence of Heaz on the parish's pages is not unique. In St Stephen Coleman St, the name of the vicar Richard Kettil, is added to the regnal year in the running headers of the parish register, and “et octavo anno Richardi Kettil Vicarii” appended to the opening declaration.^{xxvii} This kind of framing of the register, in common with devotional habits of framing the sacred, ensures that the name of the minister is memorialised in the textual memory of the parish.

The Parish Clerk and the Paper Parish

Yet if Heaz provides an example of a minister actively fulfilling the terms of Cromwell's injunction, within a few months of this the duties of “keping and entring of the Regester belonging to the said *parish* Church for Christninges Wedinges and burials” were entrusted (with a stipend of 40s per year) to Thomas Harrydance, the parish clerk, who would hold that role for over 40 years.^{xxviii} Harrydance, would be responsible not only for the parish registers, but for the extraordinarily detailed series of records known as the Parish Clerk's Memoranda Books, making his own substantial contribution towards shaping the image of his parish.^{xxix}

The role of the parish clerk in the keeping of records is attested by a significant number of registers. The register of St Laurence Jewry is inscribed “This Book belongeth to the Clarke of the prishe Church of St Laurence in the Old Jury.”^{xxx} References in the St Botolph without Aldgate records suggest that Thomas Harrydance took his responsibility for the register

extremely seriously and was reluctant to allow it out of his keeping – a 1594 vestry meeting memorandum notes that he was “warned” to supply them to one Dr Alsop who wished “to p[er]use the same as he said for some matter which did conserne himselfe”.^{xxxii} These references put the register in the possession of the clerk as the person responsible for its safekeeping, yet the hand of the clerk in the maintenance of the register is also well evidenced. The paper register of St Giles, Cripplegate, begun in 1561, has an elaborate, if much annotated title page concluding emphatically ‘WRITTEN BY ME: RICHARD Eales Clarke’.^{xxxiii} The assertion of the parish clerk’s hand in the text however is once again in dialogue with other presences on the page. Lower down on the page a new vicar would assert his authority over the register noting: “George Conway came to serve the cure upon St Thomas daye in the yeere of our Lord 1578,” and at the conclusion of the three forms of entry in 1588 the minister is the voice of the record in the addition “finis quod George Conway”. In this way the shifting and competing authority of the minister, the churchwardens and the parish clerk is displayed through the appropriative inscriptions in the parish register.

While churchwardens were generally annually elected by the parishioners or the vestry, the selection of the parish clerk had originally been the choice of the parish priest, but the role of the parish clerk had altered significantly with the impact of Reformation.

As a member of the minor clergy, the pre-Reformation Parish clerk had enjoyed a significant role in the ritual life of the parish, assisting the priest in the liturgy, responsible for reading the epistle at Mass, and for singing the responses in services.^{xxxiii} He was also particularly associated with the supply of Holy Water, carrying the ‘aspergilla’ or holy water dispensers in parochial procession and distributing Holy Water within the parish.^{xxxiv} In London the parish clerks enjoyed a strong collective identity as members of the Fraternity of St Nicholas, accorded the anomalous status of a City Company when it was recognised by Royal Charter

in 1442, with the ‘aspergilla’ featuring prominently in the grant of arms. Founded as a religious fraternity, their peculiar status enjoying as Henry Machyn noted in his book of remembrance ‘as sure a corporation as any craft in London’, protected them from dissolution and although they lost their principal assets, the parish clerks were re-incorporated under the Lord Mayor’s own seal.^{xxxv} One of the few treasures of the company to survive is an ornate bede roll, with the names of the company’s dead brethren recorded from 1450 to 1520.^{xxxvi} Their grant of arms was however judged to be “overmuch charged with certayne superstition” and in 1582 they received a new grant with the Holy Water dispensers replaced by song books to match the lessening of reformed opposition towards their musical accompaniment at funerals and other ceremonies.^{xxxvii} The sixteenth-century transformation of the parish clerk’s role brought with it specific new responsibilities through which the clerk became increasingly associated with the keeping of the records. From 1542, the clerks of St Stephen’s Coleman St were charged with weekly reporting of deaths, marriage and baptisms to the Curate and Churchwardens.^{xxxviii} This accorded with the responsibility to provide weekly bills of parish mortality to the Corporation and to notify the Clerk of the Court of Orphans of the deaths of any freemen in the parish as mandated in parish clerks oath of office sworn at Guildhall.^{xxxix} Where once the clerk had been appointed by the minister, the bond between priest and clerk was now loosened and in city parishes such as St Boltolph without, it was the vestry who made the selection, which was often for life. In this context the parish clerk increasingly had the opportunity to shape the image of the parish more actively.

For a parish clerk such as George Clint, who held office at St George Botolph Lane, from 1570 until his death in 1605, the keeping of the parish register enabled him to translate the communal rites of the pre-Reformation clerk into textual acts of remembrance. Clint frames the parish register with historical materials which locate his office and his parish in an unbroken continuity with the pre-Reformation parish. Immediately prior to burials section of

the register he copies a 1497 list of charges paid specifically to the parish clerk for ringing for the dead, a practice tolerated within the church, but rejected by many reformers.^{xl} Near the back he makes a textual map of the churchyard and burial plots in the church which he justifies with the addition “to the end to know what places be free to bury in”.^{xli} Not content with this pragmatic mapping of the dead, he commences the burial section with:

A breife Note of certain worshipfull persons wch were buried in ye church and churchyard of Saynt George in Buttolph lane wch you may fynde written in ye olde tyme upon their tombe and Gravestones in letters of brasse and now being collected & gathered by mee George Clynte College Clarke of ye same parish in ano Dom 1574 are registered in the Churche Booke^{xlii}

At a time of shifting practices of remembrance, Clint extends to parishioners of the past one of the new methods of memorialisation, producing a textual monument for the parish that connects parishioners with their predecessors and inscribes himself within the memorial fabric.^{xliii} In doing so he fashions a carefully constructed continuity in the role of the parish clerk through the century in his concern with the remembrance of the dead.

In his conscious shaping of the register, Clint’s work looks forward to a more general moment of reassessment for the parish register – and for parish memory - at the close of Elizabeth’s reign. In 1598 fresh injunctions required the keeping of the parish register on parchment, and further that the old registers should be recopied into the new parchment books.^{xliv} The result was that sixty years after their inception, parish registers were the focus of an intensive programme of copying register at least as far back as the beginning of the Queen’s reign, often requiring the employment of professional scribes at considerable expense to the parish. By far the majority of registers covering the sixteenth century are

parchment copies datable to this moment and the further injunctions at the beginning of James's reign. The differences in practice between the serial compilation of a register over many years and the production of a parchment copy are of central significance to interpreting the paper parish but have been obscured by the reliance on printed editions and transcripts. This was a moment for re-ordering the representation of the parish, and despite the costs involved, the extant volumes demonstrate that many London parishes seized that opportunity. The new register book of St Michael Bassishaw reveals the churchwardens' investment from the outside in the detail of its ornate leather strapwork binding and tooled clasps.^{xlv} Many registers announce the occasion on the opening leaves. The parish of St Antholin, Budge Row, known for its Reformist associations and sponsorship of a Puritan Lectureship, described its new volume as "the booke of the memoriall of the Christenings, Buryings and also weddings newly wrytten for the parish church of Saint Antholins in Budge Row in the yeare of our Lord 1598."^{xlvi} The ornate titlepage of the St Lawrence Jewry parchment register announces itself "new written by Injunction in the xlith yeare of the Raigne of our Soueraigne Lady Queene Elizabeth" (fig.4).^{xlvii} Perhaps the most striking example of a parish monumentalising itself on the page is from St Giles Cripplegate where the new parchment register of 1598 was furnished with its own printed title page (fig.5), complete with typeset cartouche recording the parish officials.^{xlviii} There is no place here for the name of the parish clerk whose role as author of the records had been affirmed in the titlepage of the paper original. Given the prominence of his name on the titlepage, it may have been through the contacts of the influential Launcelot Andrewes, then vicar at St Giles that the parish had their titlepage printed and typeset. The source of the engraving was the titlepage of the edition of the *Bishops' Bible* issued by the Royal Printer Christopher Barker and his son Robert, who lived on the intramural boundary of the parish at Noble Street (fig.6). The use of this opening

feature furthers the association between the Church Book with the Book of God within the textual parish established in the injunctions of 1538.

The memorialising strategies of parchment copies are not confined to the titlepages. The St Lawrence Jewry volume uses ornamental features such as illuminated initials, with a roman script deployed for the names, placed at the beginning of each line and contrasting with the neat mixed-secretary hand of the entries. Comparisons between paper originals and parchment copies shows some variation of approach. In the case of the St Michael Bassishaw registers the copied entries often reduce additional information so that the burial of "John Gybbon the sone of Hew Gybbon taylor" on 15 November 1561 is reduced to "John sonne of Hugh Gibbon" and the parentage of "George Smyth" buried in the same month, is not transferred across.^{xlix} Differences of this kind have been noted in other cases of dual survival, and in their diminution of detail are a source of frustration for social historians reliant upon copied registers for reconstructing sixteenth century lives.¹ Yet for contemporary parishioners, the parchment copy represented a new act of memorialisation rather than a curtailment, designing an ordered visual framework in which the names of the dead are more clearly visible, while the old paper register of St Michael Bassishaw was both preserved and continued to be used and periodically copied into the parchment register.^{li} Other dual survivals show less variation. The register of St George, Botolph Lane was carefully copied into the parchment book by George Clint, including the extensive notes he had collected on earlier burials "now thought fitt to be registered in this newe Booke".^{lii} The parchment register of St Olave, Jewry, along with that of St Martin Ludgate, is a full and careful transcription that includes kinship relations and occupation from the paper register as in the burials of "john Spencer appr wth William Hawkinnes" or "Mrs Carrington widowe late the wife of w^m Carrington barbar surgeon."^{liii} The principal variation in the parchment register of St James, Garlickhithe, meanwhile, is to eschew the tabular organisation of the paper original

to regulate the copying and ensure the three categories of entry are integrated into filled pages that present a coordinated representation of the paper parish in contrast to format of the original. This new arrangement gives a new prominence to the names of the parishioners obscured in the paper version (fig. 7). The re-copying of the registers is also a moment of active textual investigation of parish memory. Each page of the copies was to be signed off by parson and churchwardens - in the case of St Giles no less than four churchwardens in addition to the curate appear together, perhaps straying here into something of a textual performance of scrutiny. Nevertheless some London parishes presented their new registers as a reformation of recordkeeping practice such as the 1598 Register of St Michael Cornhill which notes the copies of entries have been “Collected and Transcribed out of the formr Registers w^{ch} hue beene <illfavoreddy> kepte in the *parishe*.^{liv} While the process of copying inevitably introduced some errors into the record as well as abbreviation in some examples, the extant parchment registers of the city parishes in general demonstrate consistent care in the design of their parish monuments.

The most prominent occasion of memorialisation across the parish registers concerns the representation of plague outbreaks. From a consultation of extant registers, the plague of 1563 looks to have been a shaping moment in the relationship between the parish community and its recordkeeping. The 1563 outbreak had a devastating impact upon the city and has rated been rated by some historians amongst the most serious to hit the city until 1665.^{lv} Empirical evaluations are fraught with difficulty but it is not unrelated that this was the first outbreak to be exhaustively delineated in the records and enumerated via the new information gathering systems of the city, becoming thereby a benchmark for urban suffering.^{lvi} Adam Smyth, in his study of seventeenth-century parish registers as a form of life-writing, finds an expansiveness in plague entries, noting that “plague encouraged narrative.”^{lvii} In the city registers of the sixteenth century plague is an occasion of collective consciousness. The paper

register of St Michael Cornhill includes a marginal note by a trio of burials in June 1563 marking out “The beginnige of the plague is this *parisshe*” while the parchment register of St Andrews, Holborn notes the first parish death in July 1563 with the list of parish burials for February 1564 is brought to a conclusion with a rare commentary “Here by godes mercy the plague did cease wherof dyed in this parrish this yeare tow the number of four hundred four score and ten.”^{lviii} In such instances the recopied parchment registers impose a shape on these ruptures in the parish community, producing a solemn ordered monument out of the experience of death.

Conclusion

Much has been learned, and has still to be learned, from the analysis of parish records in the study of how people lived and died in the early modern period. Yet focusing attention on the recordkeeping practices and the record keepers themselves, can offer us a window into the mental world of the early modern parish. Analyses of the material evidence suggests the diverse local investments in record making as an activity undertaken on behalf of communities accommodating to change, and the many parties with a hand in the parish register, from the parish clerk to the church warden and minister. Attending to the copying of registers from 1598 into the early years of James’ reign, reveals a memorial moment in which many London parishes looked to reshape the parish registers as a memorial of and for the parish. The copying of the registers in the late 1590s can be said to have stimulated a widening engagement with the memorial record of the parish, both in the refashioning of an image of community, and in the scrutinising of the documentary record. In this way the study of the parish register reveals the diverse forces at work in constructing and negotiating the paper parish.

-
- ⁱ Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene (1594) *A Looking Glasse for London and England*, sig. E3v.
- ⁱⁱ Susan E. Philips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p.157.
- ⁱⁱⁱ J Charles Cox, *The Parish Registers of England* (London: Methuen, 1910), p. ix.
- ^{iv} Cox, *Parish Registers*, p. 245.
- ^v Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/1978/2>
- ^{vi} Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), pp.148-9.
- ^{vii} Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost Further explored* (London: Routledge, 2000 [1st ed 1965]), p.283.
- ^{viii} E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 1989) and E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, ed, *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
- ^{ix} W. Bruce Bannerman, *The Registers of St Helens, Bishopsgate* (London: Harleain Society, 1904), Preface, p.v.
- ^x ‘The Second Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII, 1538’, in W.H. Frere, *Visitation Articles and Injunction of the Period of the Reformation* (London: Longmans, 1910), II, p.40.
- ^{xi} G.R. Elton, *England 1200-1600: The Sources of History: Studies in the Use of Historical Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976 [1st ed, 1969]), p. 111.

^{xii} Simon Sretzer, 'Registration of Identities in Early Modern English Parishes and amongst the English Overseas', In *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History* ed Keith Breckenridge and Simon Sretzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, British Academy, 2012), 67-92 (p.70); eadem 'The Parish Registers in Early Modern English History: Registration from Above and Below', in *Identification and Registration Processes in Transnational Perspective* ed Ilse About, James Brown and Gayle Lonergan (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2013), pp.113-31.

^{xiii} Will Coster, 'Popular religion and the parish register, 1538-1603', in *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1600*, ed. Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs and Beat A. Kumin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 94-111. (p. 97), Sretzer, 'Registration of Identities' 70-71.

^{xiv} Clive Burgess, 'Pre-Reformation Churchwardens' Accounts and Parish Government: Lessons from London and Bristol', *EHR* 117.471 (2002), 306-332; Eamon Duffy, *The Voice of Morebath: Reformation & Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2001) Ronald Hutton, 'The local impact of the Tudor Reformations', in *The English Reformation Revised*, ed. Christopher Haigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 114-138; Beat Kumin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise & Reformation of the English Parish, c.1400-1560* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

^{xv} Clive Burgess, 'The Churchwardens' Accounts of St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, and their Implications,' *London and Middlesex Archaeological Society Transactions* 50 (1999), 61-66; Clive Burgess, 'Shaping the Parish: St Mary at Hill, London, in the Fifteenth Century', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey* ed. John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp. 254-69.

^{xvi} Churchwardens Account Book, St Alphage, London Wall.-Guildhall MS 1432/1, fol. 5^r.

-
- ^{xvii} ‘The Second Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII, 1538’, p. 36. John Stow, *Annales of England* (1592), p.972.
- ^{xviii} Parish Register of St Martin Ludgate, Guildhall MS 10212.[flyleaf]
- ^{xix} Parish Register of St Stephen Coleman, Guildhall MS 4448, fol. 1r.
- ^{xx} Cox, *Parish Registers*, 13; W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest: A Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England*, 3rd ed(Cambridge, 1969) p.44.
- ^{xxi} Parish Register of St Michael Bassishaw, Guildhall MS 6986; *City of London Parish Registers: A handlist of parish register, register transcripts and related records at Guildhall Library* (Guildhall Library publications, 7th revised ed 1999); Gary G. Gibbs, ‘London Parish Records and Parish Studies’, in *Views from The Parish* ed (Newcastle: Scholars Press, 2015), 68-9.
- ^{xxii} Parish Register of St James Garlickhithe, Guildhall MS 9138.
- ^{xxiii} Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, p.19.
- ^{xxiv} Parish Register of St Botolphs Without Aldgate, Guildhall MS, 9221, flyleaf.
- ^{xxv} Parish Register of St Botolphs Without Aldgate, Guildhall MS, 9221, unpaginated, June 1581.
- ^{xxvi} Parish Register of St Botolphs Without Aldgate, Guildhall MS, 9221, unpaginated, October, 1593.
- ^{xxvii} Parish Register of St Stephen Coleman. Guildhall MS 4448, fol. 1r.
- ^{xxviii} St Botolphs without Aldgate, Parish Clerk’s Memoranda Book 1594, Guildhall MS, 9234/3, fol. 171r.
- ^{xxix} The Memoranda books have been the focus of a series of major collaborative investigations. See <http://www.history.ac.uk/projects/research/life-in-the-suburbs>
- ^{xxx} Parish Register of St Lawrence Jewry, Guildhall MS 6974, flyleaf.

-
- ^{xxx} St Botolphs without Aldgate, Parish Clerk's Memoranda Book 1594, Guildhall MS, 9234/3.
- ^{xxxii} Parish Register of St Giles Cripplegate, 1561. Guildhall MS 6418, titlepage.
- ^{xxxiii} *The Clerk's Book of 1549*, ed J. Whickham Legg (London: n.p., 1903).
- ^{xxxiv} Se Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, pp.54-5
- ^{xxxv} *A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550–1563*, by Henry Machyn ed Richard W. Bailey, Marilyn Miller, and Colette Moore, fol. 2v. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/machyn/>
- ^{xxxvi} *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St Nicholas*, ed. NW and VA James (London: London Record Society, 2004), 2 vols.
- ^{xxxvii} Reginald H. Adams, *The Parish Clerks of London* (London: Phillimore, 1971), p.32.
- ^{xxxviii} *The Clerk's Book of 1549*, p. 91.
- ^{xxxix} London Metropolitan Archive 047 – LR/ 02/04/004 Book of Oaths, pp.162-3. Andrew Gordon, *Writing Early Modern London: Memory, Text and Community* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 72-3; P H Ditchfield, *The Parish Clerk* (1907), pp.122-4. Inside the back cover of the St Olave Jewry register we find the draft of one such report recording “their hath not any died in this ovr parishe nor any sicke that we can understand.” Parish Register of St Olave Jewry, Guildhall MS 4399.
- ^{xl} Parish Register of St George, Botolph Lane, Guildhall MS 4791, unpaginated. On attitudes to ringing for the dead see Peter Marshal, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.161-6
- ^{xli} Parish Register of St George, Botolph Lane Guildhall MS 4791, unpagianted, It is possible this note was partially self-interested since in his will Clint specifies the site of his burial in the churchyard “over against the Chauncell dore”. The National Archive, Prob/11/107, fol. 25r.

^{xlii} Parish Register of St George, Botolph Lane Guildhall MS 4791, burial section (separately paginated), fol 1^r.

^{xliii} On new modes of memorialisation see Ian Archer, ‘The Arts and Acts of Memorialisation in Early Modern London, in *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype* ed. Julia Merritt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.89-116; *The Arts of Remembrance in Early Modern England: Memorial Cultures of the Post-Reformation*, ed. Andrew Gordon and Thomas Rist (Farnham: Ashgate 2013)

^{xliv} Tate, *Parish Chest*, 44-45; Coster, ‘Parish Registers’, 97-99.

^{xlv} Parish Register of St Michael Bassishaw, Guildhall MS 6987

^{xlvi} Parish Register of St Antholin, Budge Row, Guildhall MS 9016, frontispiece.

^{xlvii} Parish Register of St Lawrence Jewry, Guildhall MS 6975

^{xlviii} Parish Register of St Giles Cripplegate. parchment copy, Guildhall MS 6419/1:.

^{xlix} Parish Register of St Michael Bassishaw, Guildhall MS 6986, fol. 155r; Parish Register of St Michael Bassishaw, Guildhall MS 6987 [unpaginated].

¹ Cox, *Parish Registers*, p.17; Coster, ‘Parish Registers’, p.102.

^{li} After 1600, the paper register contains repeated scribal notes “all thes are entred in ye transcript” that could refer either to the parchment copy or the compilation of the Bishops Transcripts. Parish Register of St Michael, Bassishaw, Guildhall MS 6986, fols 55v, 56v, 97v, 98v, 100v, 102v.

^{lii} Parish Register of St George Botolph Lane, Guildhall MS 4792, fol 1r.

^{liii} Parish Register of St Olave Jewry, Guildhall MS 4400/1, pp. 10, 14.

^{liv} St Michael Cornhill Parish Register LMA Guildhall MS 4602.

^{lv} Ian Sutherland, 'When was the Great Plague? Mortality in London, 1563 to 1665' in *Population and Social Change*, ed. D. V. Glass and Roger Revelle (London, 1972), pp. 287-320.

^{lvi} Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart London* (London: Rotledge, 1985); Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.23-24; Erin Sullivan, 'Physical and Spiritual Illness: Narrative Appropriations of the Bills of Mortality', in *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England* ed. Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B Gilman (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.76-94 (p.78).

^{lvii} Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p.177.

^{lviii} Parish register of St Michael Cornhill Guildhall ms 4061(unpaginated); Parish register of St Andrews, Holborn Guildhall MS 6673/1fol. 17v