

Attempting Demographic Research on Man for the 17th to 19th centuries

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I had hoped to have more of the information about Andreas to share with you today than I actually have. The process of reconstitution is a long and drawn out one, and getting results depends upon completing the entire process, something I have not yet achieved. One historian estimates that to complete reconstitution for a parish of about one thousand people over 300 years would take about 1500 man-hours. That is about thirty hours a week for a year. I'm working with a larger parish over a shorter period of time, but only working part time. I do have some things to show you, towards the end, from the work I'm doing, but first I want to talk about demographic research more generally and the process of reconstitution specifically related to the Island..

Just to be clear, a dictionary defines "Demography: as the scientific study of human populations, esp. with reference to their size, structure and distribution." Those studying the demography of today's world have a wealth of information available to them. Every marriage, birth and death is recorded and interested parties can access these records. Additionally, every ten years a formal census provides an exact count of the entire population, in theory anyway, with details about family structure, occupations, and more. In two hundred years time if someone wants to know about infant mortality rates on the Island in 2006, he or she should be able to find out easily. Unfortunately, we don't have the same availability of records to allow us to look back two hundred years into the past.

Interested historians, looking at the 17th and 18th centuries, had to find other ways to arrive at that sort of information. Sources traditionally used for historical research, such as diaries, wills, or government papers, provide little information about the demographics of the time. The primary source available for demographic research in the 17th and 18th centuries, and to a lesser extent the 19th as well, are parish

registers. These registers, for those who might not be familiar with them, are lists of the events that took place within a given parish. So every baptism, burial and marriage is supposed to be listed within that parish's register. They were required to be kept by the church and over time the information that was to be included in each entry changed and evolved. Standard forms were introduced and then new standards replaced older ones. What historians are left with is, in theory, an account of the lives of the people in the parish. There are other miscellaneous documents with counts of inhabitants or lists of heads of households in England and the Isle of Man as well and these can be useful as demographic sources primarily to supplement information gathered from working with the registers.

On the Island, compulsory civil records of births, deaths and marriages were not kept until late into the 19th century. The earliest census still available in detail for the Island is 1841; earlier ones exist only in summary form. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever done any serious detailed analysis of the 1841 or 1851 Census data. Someone interested in the demography of the 19th century could do a great deal with the information contained in the census data.

Back to parish registers. There are a number of problems or issues that arise from trying to use them for demographic research. Most of these problems hold true for the Island and also further a field.

- The first thing to remember when working with registers is that they were never intended to be used as “demographic” records. These records were being kept by the church to help track the lives of the parishioners. What that means is that the clerk noted the facts of the event, but rarely bothered to record additional details. Events were duplicated and dates were sometimes confused. Some clerks were far more diligent than others, some even made interesting notes about things going on around the parish, rather than just listing events, but none were doing their job thinking that some day historians would be using their lists trying to determine the whole demographic structure of a parish.
- Standard formats for parish register entries were more commonplace in England at an earlier date. A standard for marriage registers was

adopted on Man in 1757 and for all events in 1832. But even a standard form didn't always improve the quality of the register data. For example, the standard forms after 1832 required ages to be given but on marriage forms, at least in Andreas, many were listed simply as "full age", meaning 21 or older. The standard burial form included age for the first time, but in adopting this form, the clerks stopped giving wives maiden names, which were actually more helpful in the reconstitution than age.

- Another issue to consider is that the registers are church records rather than civil ones; they record religious celebrations -- baptisms and burial rather than actual events -- birth and death. Some events were never recorded, for instance some babies died before they could be baptised. Traditionally, such children would also be missing from the burial records as only baptised souls could be buried in the churchyard.
- Rising nonconformity to the Anglican Church is also a concern, although non-conformists on the Island were required to marry in their parish church prior to 1849, they might chose not to have their children baptised there.
- I've mentioned that some clerks were better at the job than others. Even the most industrious clerk could do little to protect the registers from time and poor maintenance. Pages get torn and ink and paper wear out. Water, mice or insects can cause considerable damage. Until comparatively recently, no one realised that these documents had any particular value and there was little interest in where or how they were being kept. Many of the registers on Man are later copies and it must be assumed that occasional mistakes crept in during the copying process as well.

Having said all of that, the registers do have a lot to offer as sources for demographic study for the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. So lets talk about what *can* be done with the parish registers.

One common use of the records is Family History. I'm sure some of you here today have used the Parish Registers on the Island to trace your own family history so

you know how useful, or otherwise, the registers here are for that sort of research. While each family tree is interesting to the family involved, on its own it can tell historians very little about life in the period that it covers. Taken in isolation, there is no way of knowing whether any given family was typical or unique. A group of Family Histories studied together, however, can be very useful, and this is the basis upon which the techniques of Family Reconstitution were established.

Before I get to Family Reconstitution, however, I do want to touch briefly on aggregate analysis. In its most basic form, the techniques are simple. Take a parish register and count up the numbers of each event in every month and year and then study the results. Using these techniques you can, for example, consider the rise and fall of burials over time and isolate periods of crisis mortality, or you can consider fluctuations in the numbers of marriages taking place and the possible impact on the numbers of baptisms in the same period.

Unfortunately, there are some problems with using the registers on the Island for this sort of work. The registers here start quite late, compared to the best English registers, and, in my experience, none are complete for the whole of the 17th and 18th centuries. Even those that appear fairly complete often have small gaps or inconsistencies with the way the records are kept.

The most important work of aggregate analysis that has been done is contained in *The Population History of England*, a volume that came out of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. It was first published in 1981. For this study volunteers from all over England were asked to count the events from their local parish registers. These tabulations were used to arrive at annual population estimates for England for the years from 1541 to 1871 and cover a range of demographic issues. I would argue that the registers on the Island are not of sufficient quality to attempt a similar exercise. However, because of the small size of the Island, a lot can be learned from aggregate analysis. I have done basic aggregate analysis of the 16th and 17th centuries for the Island, and hope to include that work along with the 18th if possible, in my finished dissertation.

When we look at Family Reconstitution, again the most important work in the field has come from Cambridge. The same people that pushed the boundaries for aggregate analysis then did the same thing with family reconstitution. This volume is titled “English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580 – 1837.” Their first work, the aggregate count used four hundred and four parishes around England as what they considered a reasonable sample for use in determining national statistics. This is from an estimated ten thousand parishes around the country. For this second volume, they worked with twenty-six parishes for which they were able to complete reconstitution work, again from the same ten thousand or so parishes. I am not trying to suggest that their sample size is too small, and having attempted reconstitution work myself, I can certainly understand the reasons why the sample is as small as it is, but it is worth noting that their national statistics are arrived at from a very small number of sample parishes.

Let me quickly explain what family reconstitution involves. As I said earlier, it began as an extension of family history. Before Cambridge published the two volumes I’ve already mentioned they produced “An Introduction to English Historical Demography” and a chapter in this book gives step-by-step instructions for the process of reconstitution. Family Reconstitution, simply put, is a process designed to attempt to recreate every household within a parish over long a period as possible. Those of you that have done family history will understand some of the challenges involved in attempting this sort of thing. I want to walk you through the basic steps of the process to give you an idea of the extent of the project.

First you must select a parish to work with and I’ll explain why I chose Andreas in a minute. The first step in the process is copying all of the details of each event onto individual slips of paper. So, every marriage, baptism and burial has to be recorded individually on its own slip. I actually chose to put all of the events into a database instead of keeping them on slips of paper.

To give you some idea of the numbers we are talking about here, Andreas had a population that ranged between one and two thousand over the years I am studying. From 1704 to 1852 there were over 7,000 baptisms; over 4,000 burials and nearly 1,700 marriages. You can imagine that the little slips of paper would have taken over

this step is straightforward, if only the father is named it gets more complicated, especially with the most common surnames. You do also get baptisms for which there is no corresponding marriage. In that case, the same form has to be filled out for those couples, but it won't of course have all of the marriage detail. After all the baptisms have been assigned to their parents, then all of the burials for that same surname are considered and, hopefully, matched to someone that you know was alive in the parish at the time.

Once you have worked through all of the events for the entire parish, then the real work of reconstitution begins. I should mention that I chose to do the reconstitution forms by hand, using the data in the database but recording the actual families on paper forms. I've ended up with well over two thousand forms, spread out between six box files, but felt more comfortable doing this step on paper.

The next job is to try to work through matching the marriages that you have with the husband's baptisms sixteen to forty-nine years previously. Then you can try to find the wife's baptisms, fourteen to forty-nine years previously. And finally, you can calculate some of the statistics on the side and bottom of the form. This is when you can arrive at things like age at marriage, marital fertility rates, infant mortality rates, etc. If you have enough data and have managed to reconstitute a high enough percentage of the population of the parish, you can work out a great deal of the demography of the parish.

I chose to work with Andreas firstly because it was about the right size for reconstitution. If a parish is too small, you are unlikely to be able to reconstitute enough families to provide useful results and if the parish is too large the task becomes unmanageable. Secondly, there was a long enough period of continuous registration. The registers start earlier, but there are gaps up to 1704, but there didn't appear to be any obvious gaps after that date, allowing me to work from 1704 to 1852. The longer the period under consideration the better. It is impossible, for instance, to find any baptisms for the men and women marrying in the first twenty or more years of the reconstitution, as they would have been baptised before the registers began. Andreas was also unique in that an earlier "list of households" exists for the parish.

Without going too far off topic, Parochial Visitations were carried out at irregular intervals by the church three or four times during the 18th century. Each parish church was asked to provide written answers to a number of questions which would be discussed with the clergy and church wardens when the bishop and vicars general made a formal "Visitation". These visitation documents provide a fascinating look at the church at the time.

The clergy were asked about the actual physical property of the church and the furniture within it, as well as for a full list of all of the books held in the church library. Many of the questions are about how well the clergy are following various rules of the church and I do wonder, if they were bending the rules a bit, if they would actually admit to it! They are also asked how often they preached in Manx, which I thought was interesting, and within a series of questions about the parish schools are asked if the children are taught their prayers and catechism in Manx. The clergy were also asked for a count of the number of souls in their parish. Even better, from a demographic perspective, in 1757 at least, they were asked to break down the population into categories. Married couples, widowers, widows, single adult males and females and males and females under 16 were to be counted separately in every parish.

These counts still exist and provide a basic view of the population at the time. In Andreas, the vicar or clerk went one better and arrived at his totals by making a list of all of the households in the parish with a breakdown of the structure of each household. So he listed married couple "Daniel and Margaret Christian" with two males and one female under 16. This provides me with a list with which to compare my reconstitution work. As this list also comes from the church there are still a lot of problems with using it. It is by no means an absolute record of the population of parish, but it is a real help in confirming or questioning the results of the reconstitution. Incidentally, there are similar lists of inhabitants for other areas on the Island, such as one for Castletown, also from 1757. While they might prove useful for similar work, it is important to note that they represent only a part of the parish, such as Castletown rather than the whole parish of Malew. I have been unable to find any similar list that covers an entire parish. I chose 1852 as a stopping point to include everyone in the 1851 census plus one extra year.

There are some difficulties that arise from reconstitution work that are not an issue when just doing aggregate counts. An important consideration in reconstitution is the quality of the burial registers. Ideally you need the burials to give not only the name of the deceased but also explain their relationship to the head of their household, preferably also giving the head's name and where more than one household is headed by a man with the same name, some additional identifying feature such as the name of their farm or the head's occupation is also needed. So an entry reading "Daniel Radcliffe, son of Daniel Radcliffe, the shoemaker was buried on 3rd April 1715"; is really helpful, an entry stating "Daniel Radcliffe was buried on 3rd April 1715 is far less helpful. The burials for Andreas are not as complete in this area as I had hoped from my preliminary assessment. They are, however, better than some English registers, when it come to married women who are nearly always, at least prior to 1832, referred to by both their married and maiden name in the registers. Burials for married women can be found, therefore, even though the husband's name is rarely given.

More unfortunate is that the burials for Andreas seem to be underreported for the period. Underreporting is, of course, a problem for all aspects of demographic research. Over seven thousand baptisms took place over the years I considered and only just over four thousand were buried. The population of the parish was growing, but not at that fast a rate. It has become obvious as I've completed the reconstitution work that there are burials that are simply missing. Men and women remarry with no record of the burial of their first partner for instance, or children are given the same name as a previous child in the family with no record of the burial of that earlier child.

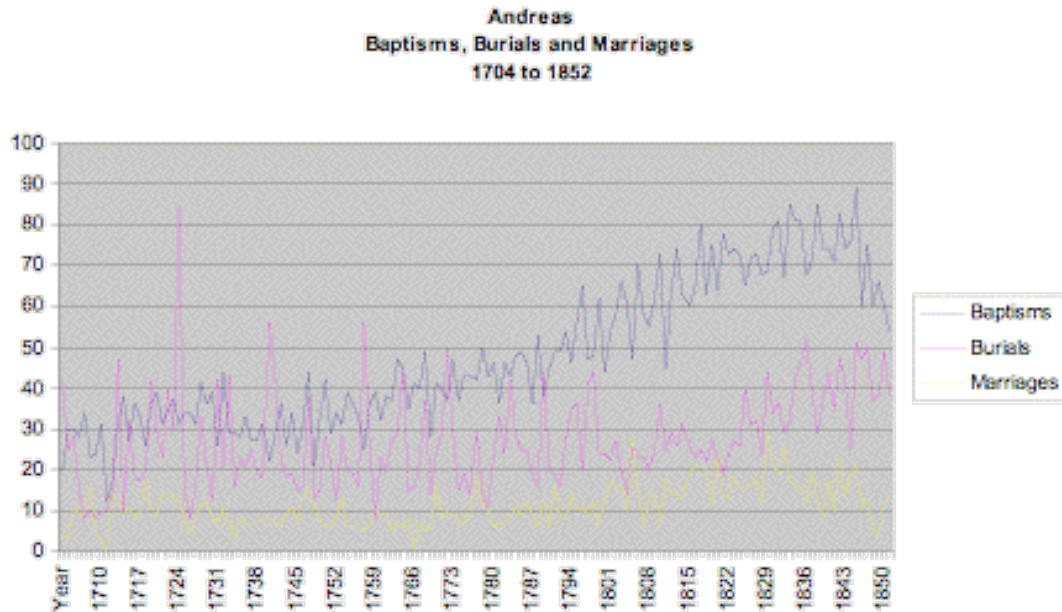
Of course there are a lot of possible explanations for burials not appearing in the register, and overall there seems to be a number that are missing. It won't be until I get further along in the process that I will be able to determine how significant the underreporting might be. I have concerns about the effect on infant and child mortality rates. If infant and children deaths are underreported then the rates will be meaningless. Having Cambridge's work on England as a standard for comparison should enable me to determine how likely my own rates are to be correct.

A large problem specific to reconstitution in Andreas, and I would think the Island generally, is the number of common surnames. Fifty percent of the people being baptised, married or buried in the parish over the years I considered shared the same ten surnames. (Brew, Cormode, Cowle, Corlett, Lace, Sayle, Kneale, Christian, Radcliffe and Teare) This means that there a LOT of households headed by men with the same name and it makes sorting out who is who very difficult indeed. It isn't helped by the fact that there wasn't a great deal of variety in forenames either, with certain forenames running in families as well.

The movement of people between parishes complicates things as well. One of the things I'm looking forward to doing is analysing the 1851 census and seeing what percentage of the population was actually born in Andreas! The families that tended to stay in Andreas were the large landowners and unfortunately they were the ones that had the most common surnames and largest families, most often naming their children after themselves making it difficult to sort out one from another.

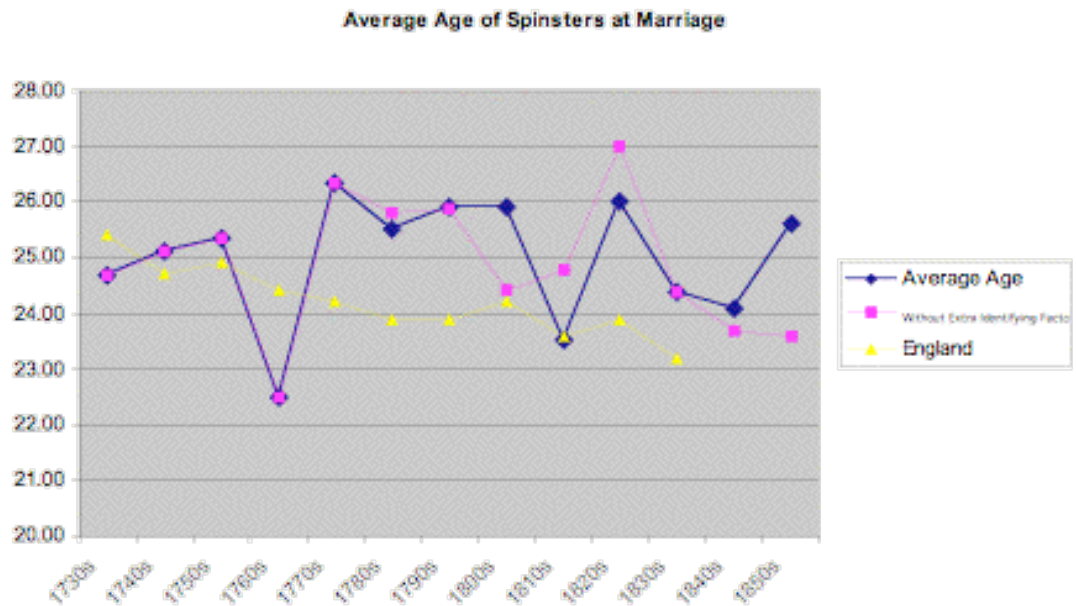
So what have I found? To date my reconstitution has about 2,300 households, where about 1,700 of the marriages took place in Andreas. The other 600 "households" are headed by couples that did not marry in Andreas, and represent families that moved into the parish some time after their marriage. A few could be illegitimate children where the clerk failed to note that information. The households range from those with only a single event recorded in the Andreas register, such as the marriage or the baptism of a single child to those households for which there is a full list of children, with burials for one or both of the couple and also, perhaps a corresponding baptism for one or both of them.

I have a few things to show you, from the work I've been doing. As the reconstitution is not yet finished, I've brought along the aggregate data for Andreas for the period.



Each of the data series is showing a trend upwards, baptisms most obviously going up the fastest, so the parish was evidently growing throughout the period. The large peak in burials in 1725 is an outbreak of smallpox, and some of the other, smaller peaks can be attributed to that as well. The increasing gap between baptisms and burials that starts around the 1790s concerns me and I suspect it is here that there is the worst of the underreporting of burials. (Population was growing from 1790 to 1821 then it more or less stopped and remained steady through 1851.)

Now I'll show you one thing from the reconstitution work, even though it is incomplete. At the moment I'm working through identifying baptisms for the women who married in Andreas. I've just completed through the letter "C", which means about 35% of the total. From that 35%, I've been able to associate about 20% of the wives with their baptism. These are first marriages, and I've run up a chart of the average age of first time brides throughout the period from this very limited amount of data.



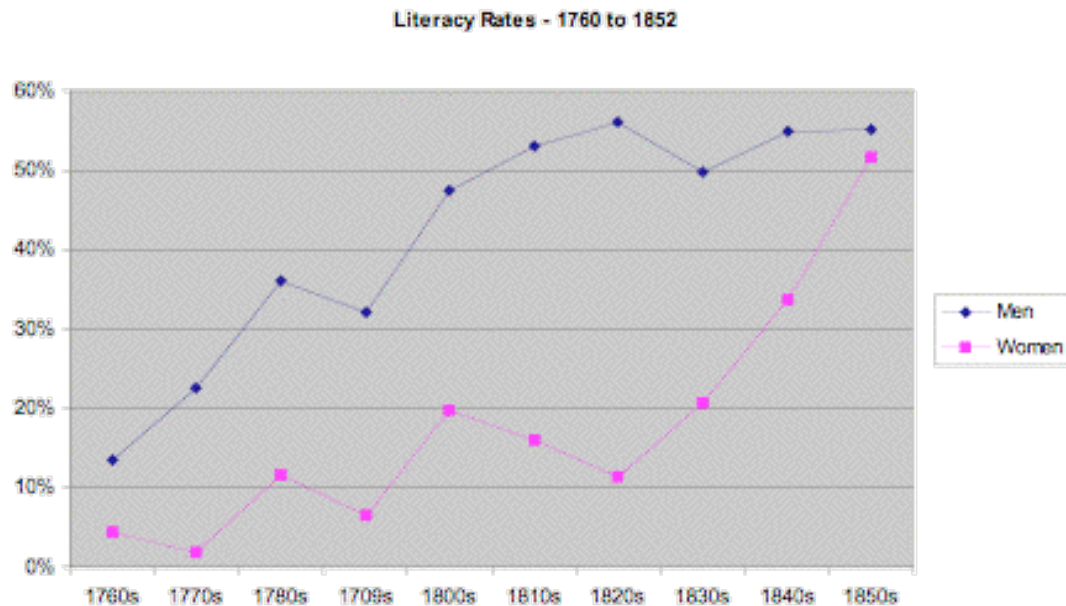
As yet, because of the limited amount of data, there doesn't seem to be any clear pattern developing. You can see from the yellow line that the results in England are less variable, with the results from twenty-six parishes. By the way average age, in blue, is identical to the pink line for the first five data points, which is why you can only see the pink line. The reason for having two separate lines, gives me a chance to explain some of the complications of reconstitution. Some marriages give more information than others and the more information you have the more likely you are to be able to trace the husbands or wives baptisms. The marriages that have the most identifying information are those where someone marrying is underage, which at the time meant under 21. In those cases, consent was required and the register records who gave the consent and their relationship to the bride or groom. It was most often his or her father. And that makes finding their baptism quite simple. You know the father's name and also their approximate age and can easily locate them. It is when analysing the information that you need to be really careful.

Having been able to locate more baptisms for women underage than for those of the population generally, the average age at first marriage will appear younger than it actually was. This isn't actually always the case on the chart here, however, because there are other identifying factors that help locate baptisms, such as age at burial, that also have to be considered. I've graphed both averages, then, the blue line

shows average age for every marriage for which I've found the corresponding baptism where the pink line shows only those where the baptism has been determined without any extra identifying features. The pink line, then, should give a more accurate picture of the average age at marriage, but it, obviously, includes fewer marriages in its numbers.

Just one last thing for you to see. Reconstitution can provide lots of interesting information but it also can provide some notable "by-products" that can be arrived at because of the nature of the data gathering done for reconstitution. I just quickly ran up one of these to show you, as it is not dependent on the reconstitution work being completed.

What I've pulled out is literacy rates as determined by whether or not the husband and wife could sign the marriage register. Signatures on the register became part of the standard form of entry after 1757 on the Island and while creating the marriage slips for reconstitution, it is simple to note whether the couple actually signed or only made a mark on the register. Obviously, you need to work from the original registers and it is not an absolute measure of literacy, some people would learn to sign their names without being able to read or write anything else, but it is a good approximation. You would expect that literacy would be rising throughout the period and that is indeed the case.



I think it is great to see the women catching up rather quickly to the men, though it is possibly a bit misleading as the last data point only represents three years of data rather than ten. I suspect the rate would be lower if the whole ten-year period were considered. I had to leave it in though because it looks so good for the women! I was actually a bit surprised to find literacy as high as this in a rural parish, though those of you who know more about education on the Island might be better placed to talk about that. This gives you an idea of the sorts of things that can be found out while working with data gathered for reconstitution.

Obviously there is still a great deal that I need to do, and I am hopeful that next year at this time the work will be done and the results will be available. I still don't know how far I will be able to take the reconstitution but even if I can't get at everything that reconstitution can achieve, there is a great deal of information that should come out of the research. I hope I've given you an idea, not just of what reconstitution involves and can accomplish but also of the many other aspects of demographic research. I'm happy to answer any questions anyone might have.