

Caversham Working Paper, 1997-3
Registry Marriages 1893-1920

S. Ryan

This brief paper is designed to complement the Caversham Working Paper: Preliminary Analysis of Intention to Marriage Certificates 1893-1912. Here we will analyse actual marriages which were celebrated in the Registry office. The reason why actual marriages are considered separately is because the two time periods are not identical. We have data on the Intention to Marriage Certificates for the years 1893 until 1912 but for the actual marriages we have data for the years 1893 until 1920. The information contained on the marriage certificate is similar to the Intention of Marriage certificate, except that the marriage certificate contains extra information including the names of the bride and groom's parents; bride and groom's father's occupation; and the place of birth of both the bride and groom. Additional information is sometimes recorded including when a marriage was dissolved, ie. divorce, the witnesses to the ceremony and their relationship to the couple. Our intention is to analyse the marriage certificates in terms of information on date of marriage; divorce; place of birth; inter-denominational marriage; and father's occupation.

I.

There are 344 Registry marriages in our dataset. The majority of Registry Marriages (280 or 81.4 per cent) filed an Intention to Marry Certificate in the Dunedin office. Because the majority of Registry marriages already appear on our Intention to Marriage Database (314 of the 344 Registry Marriages) we have not duplicated the analysis in terms of age of marriage, place of residence, occupation or social class.

As shown by Table 1 below, Registry marriages increasingly became popular after 1900. A peak was reached in 1910 when 31 marriages (9.0 per cent of the total) was celebrated in the Registry. After 1914 the number of Registry marriages began to decline, but we should not read too much into this because after 1913 the Department of Courts increasingly recorded place of address as Dunedin, thus a number of people have been excluded. Those on the database after 1913 are predominantly from South Dunedin.¹ Most Registry marriages were celebrated during the months of February, April and June.

¹ ...

Table 1: Registry Office Marriages 1893-1920

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
1893	6	1.7
1894	5	1.5
1900	11	3.2
1901	18	5.2
1902	25	7.3
1903	25	7.3
1904	18	5.2
1905	11	3.2
1906	27	7.9
1907	20	5.8
1908	28	8.1
1909	29	8.4
1910	31	9.0
1911	20	5.8
1912	25	7.3
1913	12	3.5
1914	14	4.1
1915	9	2.6
1916	1	0.3
1917	6	1.7
1919	2	0.6
1920	1	0.3
Total	344	100

<i>Month</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Jan	27	7.9
Feb	36	10.5
Mar	31	9.0
Apr	38	11.1
May	24	7.0
Jun	36	10.5
Jul	29	8.4
Aug	18	5.2
Oct	23	6.7
Sep	31	9.0
Nov	18	5.2
Dec	33	9.6
Total	344	100.0

Table 2: Witnesses to Marriage Ceremony.

<i>Relation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Bride's aunt	1
Brother	16
Brother of bride	6
Daughter of bride	1
Father	7
Father of bride	13
Father of bridegroom	4
Mother	5
Mother of bride	14
Mother of bridegroom	4
Sister	13
Sister of bride	43
Sister of bridegroom	11
Sister-in-law	2
Total	140

Marriage certificates also contain the names of witnesses and their relation to the bride and groom (see Table 2 above). We have 140 relatives that were witness to the wedding (relatives witnessed 40.1 per cent of the 344 marriages).

It does seem logical that the witnesses, like they are often today, are part of the wedding party. Most brides seem to have preferred their sisters as bridesmaids (43 out of the 140 witnesses) and grooms their brother.

A small number of the Registry Marriage certificates contain information on when a marriage ended in divorce. Out of our dataset of 344 marriages, 20 ended in divorce for which we have reliable dates of divorce for 15. If we include the 20 as the total number of divorces this works out that 5.8 per cent of the 344 total marriages ended in divorce. Because of our wide time period we cannot compare this figure with any national average for any given year. However, as Roderick Phillips found in his study of divorce in nineteenth century Auckland, Registry Office and Anglican marriages were more likely to end in divorce, although we should be careful of reading anything in this. He found that mobility and age were more important factors in explaining the demise of a marriage.² From the 15 cases for which we have reliable dates, the average length of dissolved marriage was 26.5 years. Those whose marriage dissolved married between 1901 and 1915 and their marriage ended between 1922 and 1947. The average length of marriage from our small sample was much larger than the national New Zealand average. Between 1915 and 1949 12.2 to 15.8 per cent of dissolved marriages lasted 20-29 years. Most dissolved marriages in New Zealand lasted between five and nine years.³ The shortest dissolved Caversham Marriage lasted 17 years and the longest 40 years.

If we analyse the occupations of the males partner of dissolved marriages it is apparent that the majority of divorced men were from the manual classes. In his study of divorce in nineteenth century Auckland, Phillips found that 39 per cent of the 94 divorced men were manual workers (however, he included farmers and settlers as manual workers), or which 16 per cent were skilled workers.⁴

Table 3: Occupation of Divorced Grooms.

² Roderick Phillips, *Divorce in New Zealand: a social history*, Auckland, 1981, pp.103-4.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Basket maker	1
Bootmaker	1
Engineer	2
Butcher	1
Hairdresser	1
Labourer	3
Teacher	1
Carpenter	2
Electrician	1
Motorman	1
Commercial traveller	1
Total	15

II.

The Marriage Certificates contain useful information on where couples were born. As shown by the table below, the majority of couples were New Zealand born. More brides (265 or 77.0 per cent) were New Zealand born than grooms (236 or 68.6 per cent). The next most numerous places of birth were England, Australia, Scotland and Ireland. Scotland is of some interest because the number of grooms listing this country as their place of birth is disproportionately higher than brides (30 grooms as compared to 12 brides). Two people were born at sea, and there are a small number of people from Scandinavian countries and Continental Europe.

Table 4: Place of Birth - Bride and Groom 1893-1920

<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Groom</i>		<i>Bride</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Dunedin	151	43.9	148	43.0
Rest of New Zealand	85	24.7	117	34.0
Total NZ	236	68.6	265	77.0
Aust	24	7.0	21	6.1
Denmark	2	0.6	0	0.0
Eng	39	11.3	29	8.4
France	1	0.3	1	0.3
Germ	3	0.9	0	0.0
Ireland	7	2.0	10	2.9
Scot	30	8.7	12	3.5
Sweden	1	0.3	1	0.3
Sea	1	0.3	1	0.3
Wales	0	0.0	1	0.3
Isle of Wight	0	0.0	1	0.3
Unknown	0	0.0	2	0.6

Table 5: Ethnicity - Groom compared to Bride

GROOMBRIDE												
Place of Birth	Aust	Eng	Fra	Ire	NZ	Scot	At Sea	Swed	Wales	Wight	Unkn own	Total
At Sea		1										1
Aust	2	1			20	1						24
Den					2							2
Eng	4	10		2	20		1			1	1	40
Fra						1						1
Germ				1	2							3
Ire	1	1		1	5							8
NZ	9	12	1	1	205	4			1		1	234
Scot	4	4		5	10	7						30
Swed					1							1
Total	20	29	1	10	265	13	1	1	1	1	2	344

If we compare the origin of grooms to that of brides several interesting patterns emerge. Because the majority of brides and grooms were born in New Zealand we would expect them to marry New Zealand born partners as well. Table 3 above compares the place of birth of grooms (the vertical column) with that of brides (horizontal). As we expected, most grooms married New Zealand born brides (New Zealand born grooms married 205 New Zealand born brides, 56 per cent of all marriages). The next most numerous group that New Zealand born men married was English women (12 or 3.5 per cent). English born men preferred English or New Zealand brides; few Englishmen married Irish women. On the other hand, the Scots were less choosy in their choice of partner. Scottish men married women from Australia, England, New Zealand, Ireland and their own country.

III

Marriage certificates contain useful information on the occupations of the bride and groom's father which can be used to analyse the class origins of individuals. The occupations of the bride and groom's father's have been coded according to the standard Caversham occupational classification. There are some problems coding certain occupational classes such as petty-proprietors, because we do not have the address of parents, therefore we are unable to sort out the skilled from petty-proprietors. In those occupations for which I was unsure I coded the uncertain individual as skilled (eg. a blacksmith can be a skilled worker or a petty-proprietor).

Table 6: Occupational Class of Parents

<i>Occ Class</i>	<i>Groom's Father</i>		<i>Bride's Father</i>		
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Occ Class</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
1	8	2.3	1	3	0.9
2	4	1.2	2	9	2.6
3	6	1.7	3	4	1.2
4	67	19.5	4	78	22.7
5	9	2.6	5	10	2.9
6	17	4.9	6	20	5.8
7	141	41.0	7	136	39.5
8	12	3.5	8	9	2.6
9	71	20.6	9	69	20.1
10	4	1.2	10	1	0.3
99	5	1.5	99	5	1.5
Total	344	100.0	Total	344	100.0

If we compare the number of individuals within each class it is obvious that people tended to marry within the same occupational class except for the following exception. There are more groom's whose father was from the higher managerial and large employer class than bride's father. Apart from this one exception (and even here the numbers are small) the differences between parents in terms of the size of each occupational class is minimal.

Table 7 : Bride and Groom's Father's Occupation >10.

Groom's Father		
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Carpenter	13	3.8
Farmer	32	9.3
Gardener	15	4.4
Labourer	32	9.3
Miner	13	3.8
Total	105	30.5
Bride's Father		
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Blacksmith	12	3.5
Bootmaker	13	3.8
Carpenter	18	5.2
Farmer	44	12.8
Labourer	42	12.2
Miner	13	3.8
Total	142	41.3

The parents of the bride and groom were predominantly from the petty-proprietor and manual classes. As shown in the table above, apart from farmers, skilled and unskilled occupations predominated amongst parents. This has

implications for the process of social mobility, as most children (the bride and groom) follow the same occupations of their parents, but that is the basis for another study.

IV.

This paper has shown that the number of couples choosing to opt for a Registry wedding steadily increased after 1900. In a large number of cases the witnesses to the celebration were related to the couple celebrating their wedding. Couples who married in the Registry office also divorced and we have that a number choose to dissolve their marriage after some years. One interesting trend is that dissolved Registry office marriages in Dunedin endured longer than the New Zealand norm. The majority of couples choosing to marry in this subset were New Zealand born and tended to marry partners who were also New Zealand born. From the marriage certificates have been able to gather useful information on where couples were born and the occupations of their parents.