

The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London

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Ecclesiastical Licensing of Midwives

Licensing of midwives was the responsibility of the Church of England throughout the seventeenth century, with the exception of the years 1641–61 when the Church's authority collapsed along with the breakdown of the monarchical regime. Ecclesiastical licensing of midwives was reinstated with surprising alacrity less than nine months after the Book of Common Prayer was restored to usage, and at least six women from London and its suburbs were licensed by the Church in January 1661.¹ Although the ecclesiastical licensing process continued outside of London until the last decades of the eighteenth century, within the capital itself the system was obsolete by the end of the 1720s.²

The English system of ecclesiastical control of midwifery licensing set it apart from its counterparts on the continent. In France, where Henry III introduced legislation regulating the midwives of Paris and vicinity in 1560, midwives were subject to the composite authority of Church and State as well as local governing bodies.³ Italian midwives in the seventeenth century, while under ecclesiastical control by parish priests supported by synodal injunctions, were not issued formal licences on a national level.⁴ The majority of Spanish midwives were supervised by physicians throughout the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries⁵ while Germany favoured municipal control of mid-

1 GL MS 10,116/1; J. R. Tanner, *English Constitutional Conflicts of the Seventeenth Century 1603–1689* (Cambridge: University Press, 1928), 225. Consistory Court records for London housed at the GLRO indicate that they resumed their responsibilities in 1669.

2 Donnison, 22. Donnison notes that a midwifery licence was issued in Peterborough in 1818 (Donnison, 206, n.6). John Guy states that in theory, the bishops could have granted licences until 1873. John Guy, "The Episcopal Licensing of Physicians, Surgeons and Midwives," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56 (1982): 537.

3 Richard Petrelli, "The Regulation of French Midwifery during the *Ancien Regime*," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 26 (1971): 277.

4 Nadia Maria Filippini, "The Church, the State and childbirth: the midwife in Italy during the eighteenth century," Marland, ed., *The Art of Midwifery*, 159, 162. Filippini points out that in Venice as early as 1624, an official licence was issued to qualified midwives.

5 Teresa Ortiz, "From hegemony to subordination: midwives in early modern Spain," Marland, ed., *The Art of Midwifery*, 96–9. Ortiz points out that occasionally a priest, rather than a physician, controlled the midwives' work.

wives.⁶ The Netherlands also favoured town control with the instruction and regulation of midwives carried out at the local level by the middle of the seventeenth century.⁷ The Church of England, with thousands of parishes throughout the realm, possessed the necessary bureaucratic framework and was to be the sole licensing authority for the licensing of midwives for more than two hundred years.

ORIGINS OF LICENSING

Historians have generally theorized that the practice of licensing midwives by church authorities was legitimized by the legislation of Henry VIII in 1512, which regulated the practice of medicine and surgery.⁸ But midwives were not mentioned in the act and the date when the church first began to issue midwifery licences, and by what authority, remains uncertain.⁹ The frequently cited oath administered to Eleanor Pead by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1567, more than fifty years after Henry's first legislation for the regulation of practitioners, has generally been accepted by historians as the earliest proof of the licensing of midwives.¹⁰ Richard Fitzjames, Bishop of London, however, licensed at least three London midwives in the years 1506–22.¹¹ Evidence from the continent suggests that the Church's involvement with the licensing of midwives began long before Henry the VIII's legislation regulating the practice of medicine and surgery.¹² Whatever its date of inception, historians have speculated about a mounting interest in enforcing the licensing of midwives in the early Stuart period and have gone so far as to claim that licensing of midwives was most strictly enforced during the Laudian years of the 1630s. Archival sources, however, fail to support the latter view.¹³

Historians of early modern midwifery have traditionally posited five reasons for

- 6 Wiesner, "Early Modern Midwifery," 95–9; Merry E. Wiesner, "The midwives of south Germany and the public/private dichotomy," Marland, ed., *The Art of Midwifery*, 80–4; Petrelli, 277; Nina Gelbart, "Midwife to a nation: Mme du Coudray serves France," Marland, ed., *The Art of Midwifery*, 133.
- 7 Hilary Marland, "The 'burgerlike' midwife: the *stadsvroedvrouw* of eighteenth-century Holland," Marland, ed., *The Art of Midwifery*, 192; M. J. Van Lieburg and Hilary Marland, "Midwife Regulation, Education, and Practice in the Netherlands during the Nineteenth Century," *Medical History* 33 (1989): 298.
- 8 Gibson, *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici* 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1761), 1098, 1321; Wilson, "Childbirth," 44; Forbes "Regulation," 237; Donnison, 6.
- 9 John Guy points out that the bishops were not authorised by either canon or statute law to grant midwifery licences. "Episcopal Licensing," 537.
- 10 Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch*, 145; Donnison, 6; Towler and Bramall, 56.
- 11 J. Harvey Bloom and R. Rutson James, *Medical Practitioners in the Diocese of London, Licensed under the Act of 3 Henry VIII, C.11* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 84.
- 12 Guy, 538.
- 13 Wilson, "Childbirth," 62; Margaret Pelling, "Medicine and Sanitation," John F. Andrews, ed., *William Shakespeare: His World. His Work. His Influence* (New York: Scribner, 1985), 81.

the Church's interest in midwives: its concerns relating to the rite of baptism (a position suggested by ecclesiastical historians); its preoccupation with sorcery; its anxiety over the question of bastardy; the association of midwifery with medicine (which became the responsibility of the Church with regard to licensing in 1512); and, finally, its wish to ensure that midwives were competent to carry out their work in child delivery.¹⁴ In addition, recusancy has been blamed for the Church's desire to regulate midwives, the group which found itself in the best position to ensure that newborns were baptised into the "true faith" of the Church of England.¹⁵ The most widely accepted of the foregoing theories has been that the Church was primarily interested in the moral suitability and ability of midwives to carry out the ceremony of baptism.¹⁶ As recently as 1982, baptism was cited as the main reason for ecclesiastical licensing, and this view is shared by a number of historians of midwifery.¹⁷ Working against this argument, however, is evidence of post-Reformation changes in the medieval conviction that the soul of an unbaptised child was damned. As early as 1560, the catechism explained that baptism with water was only a seal or confirmation that the child of Christian parents had already been received by God.¹⁸ With that in mind, it seems unlikely that ecclesiastical licensing of midwives was undertaken primarily out of a concern with baptism of newborn infants who were unlikely to survive. This view receives support from David Cressy's exploration of the rite of baptism which traces the

14 Wilson, "Childbirth," 41–6. For discussions of bastardy and parish concerns, see W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest* (Cambridge: University Press, 1946), 213–20; Peter Laslett et al., eds., *Bastardy and its Comparative History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). On the penalty for women giving birth to a bastard see Robert H. Michel, "English Attitudes Towards Women, 1640–1700," *Canadian Journal of History* 13 (April 1978): 58. Ecclesiastical historians support the view that baptism was the primary reason for licensing, but have not ventured a date for its inception. Aveling, *Midwives*, 7.

15 Guy, 539.

16 Although an older study of French midwifery adopted the view that the Roman Catholic Church in France similarly selected pious rather than experienced women to act as official midwives, Jacques Gélis' recent study of childbirth in early modern France indicates that childbearing women looked for other qualities in the women whom they (not the Church) chose as their midwives. Gélis describes a process where patience, skill, and dexterity were the qualities prized by women choosing prospective midwives. Gélis, 103. For the traditional argument regarding the moral but inept midwife, see Petrelli, 290.

17 See Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 41; Thomas R. Forbes, "The Regulation of London Midwives in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Medical History* 8 (1964): 235–44; and *The Midwife and The Witch*, 141; Graham, 175; Schnucker, 639–40; R. W. Johnstone, *William Smellie: The Master of British Midwifery* (Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1952), 30; E. H. Carter, *The Norwich Subscription Books* (London: Thos. Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1937), 134; Guy, 538–9. Although the licensing of midwives in seventeenth-century Nuremberg was a civic responsibility, the ability to baptise newborns was a concern of both City fathers and Church officials. See Wiesner, "The midwives of south Germany," 85–6, 106–7, for a discussion of their changing role in emergency baptisms. For examples from parish registers of midwives who baptised newborns, J. Charles Cox, *The Parish Registers of England* (Totawa, N.J.: E. P. Publishing, Ltd., 1974), 56–8.

18 Houlbrooke, 130.

ambivalent stance of the Church regarding emergency baptism as well as the declining role of the midwife in administering the rite, particularly by the post-Restoration period.¹⁹

Closely allied to the baptismal function, in the opinion of historians, was the concern that the midwife might engage in witchcraft and place in jeopardy the soul of the unbaptised infant.²⁰ The myth of the midwife as witch, however, has finally been demolished in a recent scholarly study by David Harley who argues that by accepting the evidence of demonologists instead of examining early modern sources, historians have erroneously perpetuated the “myth” linking midwifery and witchcraft.²¹ Despite a lack of evidence regarding the origins of their licensing, another major study of early modern midwifery has concluded that the legal licensing of midwives was instigated as an extension of the licensing of medical practitioners, as well as a concern for the competence of midwives.²² This present study, however, focuses on how the licensing system worked, rather than on its origins, and how it touched the lives of midwives residing in London, whose experience of licensing might differ from that of their sisters living in the provinces.

OATHS AND ARTICLES RELATING TO THE MIDWIFE’S OFFICE

Despite widespread acceptance that the Church’s concern focused narrowly on ecclesiastical concerns, it is noteworthy that the opening sentence of a sixteenth-century midwife’s oath emphasises the “cunning” (or intelligence, ability, and skill) as well as the knowledge which the midwife should bring to her task (see Appendix A).²³ This early midwifery oath also sets forth other demands: The midwife must make her services available without qualification to both rich and poor women;²⁴ she must report truthfully information involving suspected bastardy; she will never “switch” infants; she will not engage in sorcery; she will not use instruments or mutilate the fetus; she will use the correct form of baptism

19 Cressy, *Birth*, 122–3. Aveling, a nineteenth-century historian of childbirth, has asserted that baptism by midwives was practised only until the beginning of the seventeenth century, but Cressy gives an example for London from the year 1635. Aveling, *Midwives*, 6.

20 See Forbes, “Regulation,” 141 and “Midwifery and Witchcraft,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 16 (1962): 264–82; Keith Thomas, *Religion*, 308.

21 David Harley, “Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch,” *Social History of Medicine* 3 (April 1990): 1–27.

22 Wilson, “Childbirth,” 61.

23 SOED defines cunning in this way. See Appendix A for a copy of the oath administered to Eleanor Peard in 1567. For an example of the oath which seventeenth-century French midwives swore, see J. Gélis, M. Laget, and M. F. Morel, *Entrer dans la Vie: Naissances et enfances dans la France Traditionnelle* (Paris: G. Julliard, 1978), 78.

24 Although the oath does not explicitly require it, midwives also attended women who were suffering from contagious diseases. The testimonial of a midwife licensed in 1706 notes that she attended not only rich and poor, “or in what condition soever they were either the smallpox or any other lawfull distemper.” GL MS 10,116/16.

(including the use of clean water); and notify the curate of any baptisms she has performed.²⁵

Another midwife's oath dating from the middle of the seventeenth century appears to have been the oath administered to candidates who applied in a metropolitan court – probably that of the Bishop of London (see Appendix B).²⁶ It is a much more complex oath which reflects at least ten concerns of the licensing authorities, four of which are related to the midwives themselves rather than to the practice of midwifery. Interestingly, these ten concerns do not appear in the Canterbury oaths. To her promise not to aid in procuring abortions, nor to extort an unreasonable fee, she must add her promises to maintain patient confidentiality while carrying out her work openly and to ensure that any child who dies in childbirth is buried in a secure place. She must also make sure that she is not a party to any child being baptised as a recusant or in any faith outside of the Church of England.²⁷ But the portions of the oath which pertain to the midwife's relations with her peers are the features which are of the greatest significance for this study. The midwives are to report other midwives whose practices do not conform with the standards set forth (as above); they are to treat other licensed midwives with respect and cooperation; they are to report unlicensed midwives; they are to ensure that any women who act as their deputies should be competent in the practice of midwifery as well as being of good character; in difficult deliveries, as in the earlier oath, the midwife is forbidden to mutilate or kill the child to expedite delivery, but must instead call in "other midwives and expert women in that facultie and use their advice and counsell in that behalfe." The "secrets" of the birthing chamber are to be kept from men who are only to be admitted in case of emergency.²⁸ The final section of the oath mentions the rite of baptism, but only involves the midwife to the extent that she must report any child who was not baptised into the faith of the Church of England.²⁹ The Church appears by mid-century to be attempting not only to enforce licensing of midwifery practise;³⁰ it is also acknowledging the midwives' control and expertise in child delivery by granting them the sole responsibility for

25 The ambivalence of the Church with regard to the use of charms is illustrated by the fact that an eagle stone (a hollow stone supposedly found in an eagle's nest) was one of the prized possessions of Canterbury Cathedral in the 1670s. It was in frequent use, available to neighbourhood women, but in the care of Dean Bargrave's wife. Thomas Forbes, "Midwifery and Witchcraft," 273. Jane Sharp refers to their use in removing a dead fetus, but indicates that she has not used one herself, and that their efficacy is probably imaginary. Sharp, 190.

26 Forbes, *The Midwife*, 146–7. The oath requires the midwife to report misdemeanours to "me the said Bishop, or my Chancellour."

27 Aveling has also noted this change in emphasis. Aveling, *Midwives*, 7.

28 This would be a surgeon who would bring his instruments to deliveries where destruction of the fetus was required to save the life of the mother. It was with these men that the concept of the male midwife originated.

29 Aveling has found the primary change in the oath one which relates to preserving the exclusivity of the Church of England. Aveling, *Midwives*, 29.7.

30 The same oath was administered in 1635 to a Berkshire midwife. See Appendix C.

regulating a network of mutual assistance and cooperation that upheld the principles to which they had subscribed by oath. In other words, the Church not only wanted the best possible care for mother and infant, but it readily accepted that women were still the perceived “experts” in child delivery. Church authorities remained unconvinced by the claims of male practitioners (male midwives) such as the Chamberlens who had been proselytising for several generations in an attempt to gain control over the training and licensing of midwives.³¹

It is instructive to compare the Tudor oath, administered to Eleanor Pead in 1567, to the 1713 oath sworn by Mary Cooke, a widow formerly of Leire in Leicestershire (Appendix C). For the most part, it is almost identical to the oath administered in the same archdiocesan jurisdiction to Eleanor Pead almost 150 years earlier.³² The requirements regarding the baptism of the infant, however, are gone. Instead the final statement reads:

Moreover if I shall know any woman exercising the Office of a Midwife or doing anything contrary to the tenor of this mine Oath I will notifie and disclose the same to the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury for the time being or to his Vicar Generall or Chancellor or the ordinary of the place, soe far as I can conveniently.

The rather remarkable change in the oath argues for an increased interest on the part of the Church in the practical rather than the spiritual qualifications of the midwife over the course of the Tudor-Stuart period. The omission of the baptism requirement may merely reflect the Church’s moderated attitude toward the rite. Licensed midwives, however, remain central to the child delivery process both in a consultive and regulatory sense – by assisting one another in difficult deliveries and by reporting unlicensed midwives.³³

There is no question that midwives regarded the process of oath-taking as an extremely serious matter. For example, in 1664, Mary Franck, midwife of St Anne Blackfriars, refused to cooperate in the unorthodox baptism of an infant without godparents since “shee Could not admitt ye child to bee baptised after that way it being contrary to her Oath.”³⁴ Sarah Fish, an elderly gentlewoman of Enfield, was well aware of the implications of the midwife’s oath when her vicar, Joseph Gasgoine, sought to have her excused from taking the oath in 1697. Noting that Mistress Fish, the wife of gentleman Robert Fish, did not need to practise midwifery for profit, he wrote in part:

31 The history of the Chamberlen family has been well documented by other historians. See Forbes, *The Midwife*, 152; Towler and Bramall, 77–81; Donnison, 13–15; as well as the source from which most of their information has been culled, J. H. Aveling, *The Chamberlens and the Midwifery Forceps* (London, J. & A. Churchill, 1882).

32 LPL MS VX 1A/11/80.

33 Similarly, the main thrust of a French midwife’s oath of 1754 lies in the stress it places on the midwife’s responsibility for ensuring not only the spiritual, but physical well-being of mother and child. Like her English counterpart, the French midwife promises to obtain expert assistance from other experienced midwives should the need arise. Gélis, *Entrer dans la Vie*, 78.

34 Brian Burch, “The Parish of St Anne Blackfriars, London, to 1665,” *The Guildhall Miscellany* 3 (October, 1969): 36.

. . . she is therefore willing to take out a Licence for that purpose but being aged is loth to be hurried in ye night and in bad weather [for deliveries] to ye prejudice of her health, therefore, dos humbly desire she may be excused being sworn into that office, which she scruples not out of any singularity in her principles (being a very good churchwoman) but having never before taken any oath which if she could be dispensed with, would be a great benefit to ye Neighbourhood, especially ye poorer sort of people to whom she is very usefull upon many occasions.³⁵

Sara Fish was reluctant to take the oath because her conscience would then oblige her to answer every call for assistance, regardless of time or weather. It appears from Surrogate Cooke's entry that midwife Fish was not excused from taking the oath. Archival evidence relating to hundreds of midwifery candidates of the period indicates that these women took the issue of oath-taking before the chancellor seriously, and it should not be assumed that it was a meaningless exercise.

Although not part of the midwife's oath, the visitation articles issued by Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, in 1554 included two other duties which the midwife was expected to carry out:

Item, Whether any midwife, or any other woman denieth or letteth, so much as lieth in her, that the child being new born shall not be brought to the church, there to be decently, reverently and orderly baptized, and the mother thereof after a convenient time likewise purified, according to the old ancient and godly ceremonies and customs of the catholic church . . .³⁶

In the first instance, the article is referring to the midwife's responsibility in encouraging the early baptism of the infant to signify its acceptance into the Christian community. More than a hundred years later, in 1663, the rector and churchwardens of St Paul's Covent Garden testified that Beatrix Pattison, a long-time resident of their parish, had not only acquired the skills of a midwife through some years as a deputy midwife, but that she "doth orderly bringe the children she is concerned with to the church."³⁷ Similarly, in 1679, the vicar and churchwardens of St Leonard Shoreditch noted that Hanna Mason not only went to church herself, but went "also in the afternoon with children to be baptised." Rector Duckeson and churchwardens of St Clement Danes testified in 1677 that Phillipa Sampson brought her children "to the font to be baptised."³⁸ Because of the geographical diversity of a London midwife's practice (see Chapter 3), it is unlikely that a midwife attended the baptisms of all the infants she delivered. At those she attended, she not only played a prominent role preparing the infant and

35 GL MS 10,116/14. The reference to her unwillingness to take the oath being based on reasons of health and not on religious grounds is a reference to the fact that Quakers would not take oaths. Evidently Mistress Fish was not excused from taking the oath.

36 Edward Cardwell, *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church of England* (Oxford: University Press, 1844), 165.

37 GL MS 10,116/3. 38 GL MS 10,116/10.

passing it to the various participants, she would hold a place of high esteem as the one responsible for the safe arrival of a new member of the parish community.³⁹ In the London parish of St Ann Blackfriars in the early seventeenth century, midwives played a particularly central role in baptisms, many of which were not attended by mothers who were confined to their lying-in beds.⁴⁰ Baptisms could also swell the midwife's income as various godparents and guests made gifts of money to the midwife. An anonymous London midwife noted that she had received £1 at a christening in 1695, while gifts of 10s. from various guests were not uncommon.⁴¹

MIDWIVES AND THE CHURCHING RITUAL

In the preceding quotation, Bonner also included the ancient ritual of "churching," a ceremony taken seriously in this period by church and laity alike.⁴² The ceremony of churching sprang from the ancient belief that postpartum women were "unclean" and must undergo a special rite of purification to be held at the beginning of the first church service they attended after giving birth.⁴³ Cressy has persuasively argued, however, that by the last decades of the seventeenth century, churching was more about conformity than pollution with "multiple meanings" for different actors.⁴⁴

Occasionally, a mother's churching was clouded by sadness. Tiny Marmaduke, son of citizen and draper Marmaduke Spycht of St Botolph Aldgate was buried October 28, 1597, the same day that his mother was churched, at a total cost of 4s.8d. for both services.⁴⁵ In the early eighteenth century, candidates for churching

39 David Cressy notes the central role of the midwife in the baptismal ceremony. Cressy, *Birth*, 150, 171. For a description of the key role of the midwife in baptisms in eighteenth-century Italy, see Filippini, 158. Filippini sees the midwife's participation in the baptismal ceremony as a vital element in the Church's control of female sexuality.

40 Cressy, *Birth*, 153

41 BL Rawlinson D1141, fol. 29; the famous diarist and London gadfly Samuel Pepys mentions gifts of 10s. each to midwives attending christenings at which he was present. Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 109, 216.

42 For the ancient Hebrew roots of the custom, see Shay D. Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred," Sarah B. Pomeroy, ed., *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991), 274.

43 For the best discussion of churching, see Cressy, *Birth*, 197–229. See also Wilson, "Ceremony," 78–80, 88–93. Nor was the rite unique to England. Gélis has noted the church's attitude toward new mothers as objects in need of purification, well into the nineteenth century, as well as the custom of taking two rolls or pieces of bread to the churching ceremony to be blessed, one of which could serve, subsequently, to promote fertility among other women. Gélis, 107, 171–2. Natalie Zemon Davis has described how the new fathers in early modern French urban centres took their newborns to be baptised, while the mother stayed at home until her *relevailles* or purification period was over and she could go to be churched. Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 74.

44 Cressy, *Birth*, 200, 228–9. 45 GL MS 9234/7/6.

in the parish of St James Westminster, their heads decently covered or veiled, awaited their ritual purification in two specially constructed seats or small pews built on each side of the chancel communion table.⁴⁶ After the ceremony they were restored to full membership in the Church, with all its attendant privileges.⁴⁷ In many cases, the religious significance was buried, if not lost amid the flurry of festivities and it became an important female social occasion.⁴⁸

David Cressy has examined a whole complex of factors, involving issues of religion, authority, and gender.⁴⁹ Churching was included in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), and Cressy was the first to seriously investigate the practice. In a study of Southwark, however, figures on churching were used in an attempt to measure popular religious conformity in the years 1619–25. It was found that almost 92 % of women who had their infants baptised also partook in the churching rite.⁵⁰ The majority of these women were churched two to four weeks after they were delivered.

There are mixed views of how churching was perceived by seventeenth-century parishioners. The Southwark study presents evidence of its unpopularity with some segments of the population, especially radical Protestants who felt it smacked of popery.⁵¹ In addition, opposition to the rite arose, in some cases, because of a customary offering as high as ten pence to the clergyman.⁵² At the end of the sixteenth century, parishioners of St Botolph Aldgate paid two pence for being churched while nonresidents paid four pence.⁵³ The fee for churching in St Saviour's, Southwark, early in the seventeenth century, was four pence for residents (one pence if the child died), and ten pence for nonresidents.⁵⁴ Cressy has noted the welcome contribution made by churching fees to parish incomes and with that in mind, speculated on the relative roles of clergy and laity in perpetuating (or abandoning) the ritual.⁵⁵ Visitation articles for Canterbury for the year 1605 specifically require the parish officials to name or present any married women who have refused to come for their churching, indicating that there was some resistance to the ritual.⁵⁶ Judging also by the tone of midwives' testimonials describing their bearers' responsibilities toward clients' churching, women needed encouragement to conform to the Church's teachings on the ceremony. But aside

46 VL MS D 1758/234–5, St James Westminster Vestry Minutes for 1710. Evidently, part of the ceremony included the correct positioning of the woman in the church. David Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England," *Past and Present*, 141 (1993): 143. Cressy has expanded this pioneering article in his recent book *Birth, Marriage and Death*.

47 Donnison, 4, 13. 48 This is very much as Cressy sees it. Cressy, "Purification," 111–14.

49 Cressy, "Purification," 107–8. 50 Boulton, 278. 51 *Ibid.*, 276–7.

52 *Phillimore's Ecclesiastical Law* vol.1 (London, 2nd ed., 1895), 645–47. In France, as recently as the nineteenth century, gifts of money collected by the new mother during her lying-in period were used to meet the expenses of the churching ceremony. Gélis, *Childbirth*, 190.

53 GL MSS 9234/7/6, 9234/8/177. 54 Boulton, 277. 55 Cressy "Purification," 126–7.

56 *Visitation Articles, Canterbury, 1605* (London: 1605; reprint ed., Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1975), 19.

from this there is scant evidence from London records which permits generalisation about how women felt about churching.

Historians have been divided in their opinions as to how churching was perceived by postpartum women. One view, focusing on women's perceptions of the ritual, argues that women disliked it but, for the most part, meekly submitted.⁵⁷ Gail Paster has suggested that churching's popularity could be a reflection of women's internalized "shame and embarrassment" which resulted from the birthing process.⁵⁸ On the other hand, a more positive assessment of churching as part of the rituals surrounding childbirth concluded that women looked forward to the opportunity of giving thanks for their recovery, particularly women intimidated by the idea that death through childbirth carried particular dangers for the soul.⁵⁹ Similarly, Cressy believes that the social and celebratory nature of the occasion led to festivities which women welcomed and thoroughly enjoyed.⁶⁰

The language of the testimonials, in the few cases where churching is mentioned, suggests that midwives played an active role in accompanying the new mothers to the ceremony and that this was viewed in a positive light by the Church. Edward Pelling, rector of St Martin Ludgate, commended widow Mary Garret in 1681 because she "doth bring children to the church to be baptiz'd and women to be churched," while in 1679, vicar Ambrose Atich of St Leonard Shoreditch vouched for Hanna Mason's diligence in going to "Divine service with women to be churched."⁶¹ Dr. Littleton, rector of Chelsea, stated in his testimonial certificate of 1690 that parishioner and midwife Elizabeth Forrest not only came to church herself but "doth constantly bring her women whom she delivers to the church to pay their thanks in publick and their children to receive publick baptism."⁶² These testimonies demonstrate the continuing concern of the Church for this aspect of a midwife's function, which it saw as a reflection of her sound character and good citizenship in the "godly commonwealth" that was England. Midwives often received generous monetary gifts during baptisms, but apparently were not tangibly rewarded for their zeal in encouraging their clients to be churched, although attendance with a healthy client proclaimed their skill and competence before prospective parish mothers.⁶³ While absence of compensation possibly contributed to churching's eventual decline, many Stuart midwives

57 Patricia Crawford, "The Construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England," Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Preindustrial England*, 25.

58 Paster, 186, 195.

59 Wilson, "Ceremony," 89; Dorothy P. Ludlow, "'Arise and be Doing' English Preaching Women, 1640-1660," (Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1978), 42.

60 Cressy, *Birth*, 199. 61 GL MS 10,116/10,11.

62 GL MS 10,116/13. Perhaps by the late seventeenth century, the purpose of churching was seen in its more modern aspect as a service of thanksgiving. In the prayer book, it is entitled "The Thanksgiving of Women after Childbirth Commonly called the Churching of Women." Donnison, 205, n.54.

63 Cressy, "Purification," 114.

were obviously not simply interested in the pecuniary aspects of their vocation.⁶⁴ Even so, the festivities that accompanied many churchings were enjoyable social occasions for participating midwives.⁶⁵

In summary, although a firm date for the inception of licensing of London midwives has never been established, it is certain that the process was in place by the early sixteenth century and that it was originally intended to address a number of concerns including (among others), the ability of midwives to carry out their work competently and to ensure that the soul of the newborn was not placed in jeopardy. By the middle of the seventeenth century, more emphasis was placed on the role of the midwife in ensuring conformity to licensing regulations. In addition, experienced midwives were to cooperate in the instruction of fledgling midwives and in the management of difficult deliveries. The close of the century saw the Church encouraging midwives to participate in (and thus help to enforce) baptisms and churchings, but the main purpose of licensing was to ensure that practising midwives met certain standards with regard to practical knowledge and hands-on experience.

There was, therefore, no single purpose for ecclesiastical licensing. It was the expression of multiple concerns whose relative emphases varied over time. An examination of testimonial certificates and episcopal registers will shed light on how the licensing process functioned for seventeenth-century midwives.

ACQUIRING A LICENCE

The first task facing the aspiring licensee in midwifery was the procurement of testimonial certificates (Appendix D). These were generally endorsed by parish clergy or ward officials, and in some cases, neighbours, medical practitioners, and female clients.⁶⁶ The testimonials were presented to the archbishop's or bishop's chancellor (or his representative) who administered an oath of office to the midwife. Six women, including clients, who had personal knowledge of the candidate's ability also attended and were sworn before the chancellor who duly noted the same (in Latin) on the testimonial certificate.⁶⁷ This requirement in itself was a distinct departure from the requirements imposed on candidates seeking a licence to practise surgery and physick. The latter two groups were required

64 For examples of gifts to midwives at christenings, see John Loftis, ed., *The Memoirs of Ann, Lady Halkett and Ann Lady Fanshawe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 62; *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts Rutland MSS.*, vol. 4, 466, 522, 540.; Frances P. Verney and M. M. Verney, *The Verney Memoirs* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1925), vol. 2, 21.

65 Cressy, *Birth*, 202–3.

66 For the clergy's statement, see Richard Burn, *The Ecclesiastical Law* vol. 2 (London, 1842), 513.

67 Bloom and James, in dealing with evidence about several sixteenth-century midwives, have stated that "four or more other women, experienced in midwifery, gave evidence" about the experience and skill of the midwife. They have missed the point that some of the women were, in fact, clients, and not other midwives. I am grateful to the late John Clinard for his assistance in translating these documents in Bloom and James, 11, 84–5.

to present recommendations from practising peers regarding their ability, not from patients.⁶⁸ Testimonial certificates presented at the Archbishop of Canterbury's courts usually noted that the successful midwifery candidate was licensed to practise throughout the province of Canterbury. Several, however, were licensed to practise in specific locations such as London, Winchester, Lincoln, Rochester, and Canterbury while two midwives were authorised to work in London and Winchester.⁶⁹ Those licensed by the bishop of London could practise anywhere within the diocese of London.

Once the midwife was successful in her application, she was issued a licence. It was this document that she was expected to exhibit at parish visitations. An example of a midwife's licence has been preserved in the Lambeth Palace archives. Written in a fine hand on a small piece of parchment (approximately 7 inches × 6 inches) it was originally issued to Eyton Broughton of Lambeth, Surrey, by the Bishop of Winchester in 1686 and authorised her to practise in the Diocese of Winchester. It reads in part:

Whereas we understand by good Testimony and Credible Certificate that you the said Eyton Broughton . . . are apt, and able, cunning and expert to use and exercise the office, business and function of a midwife. Wee therefore as much as in us is, do admitt and give you power to use and exercise the said office, business and function of a midwife in and through our whole Diocese of Winchester aforesaid with the best diligence you may or can in this behalfe to poore and rich indifferently, and also to performe and accomplish all things about the same according to your oath . . .⁷⁰

Eyton subsequently displayed the document at a visitation in 1691. By 1700, she sought and was granted an extension of her licence to the larger jurisdiction of Canterbury.⁷¹

68 This difference is important if midwives were licensed under regulations other than the statute of Henry VIII. The requirements regarding testimonial certification were much more demanding for midwives than for physicians licensed by the church. See, for example, the testimonial for James Cleverley, licensed in physick in 1669 on the recommendation of the rector, two churchwardens, one man whose occupation was unspecified, a "gentleman," and J. Astell M.D. GL MS 10,116/6. For an example of the minimal theoretical knowledge required to become a surgeon licensed out of Surgeon's Hall in 1789, see George C. Peachey, ed., *The Life of William Savory* (London: J. J. Kelihher & Co. Ltd., 1903), 17–18. A handful of females were licensed in surgery by the Church in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Like that of midwives, their testimonial documentation was much more exhaustive than their male counterparts'. The inescapable conclusion is that gender was a factor in setting the prerequisites for supporting documents for ecclesiastical licences. Doreen A. Evenden, "Gender Differences in the Training and Practice of Female and Male Surgeons in Early Modern England," *Medical History* 42 (April, 1998): 194–216.

69 Most of the midwives who were given permission to practise in other geographical areas were women who resided in London; one was married to a gentleman. LPL MS vx 1A/11, 5, 44, 46, 52, 61.

70 LPL MS vx 1A/11, 61. While licences may have varied from place to place, this one was a very modest document.

71 The midwife may have died or been issued a new document to cover the larger area, including Winchester. The original licence, which noted that the extension was granted, remained unclaimed.

The registers of both the Archbishops of Canterbury and the Bishops of London survive intact for the seventeenth century. They contain records of licences granted to a great many, although not all, of the women who were licensed in the respective jurisdictions in the seventeenth century.⁷² There had been sporadic licensing of London midwives in the early sixteenth century. However, the consistency and exactness of the format implemented by the clerks who recorded information in the bishop's registers in the early seventeenth century regarding the midwife's testimonial certification (and also the information on the extant testimonials themselves) suggest that while regulations governing the requirements for women seeking a midwifery licence in London may have been written earlier in the sixteenth century, they were not promulgated until the second half of the century.⁷³ This process required, as stated above, that *sex mulieres*, or six women, appear before the archbishop, the bishop, or their representatives and give testimony under oath of personal knowledge about the expertise of the applicant.⁷⁴ Under Henry VIII's statute of 1511, practising surgeons and physicians were to examine and approve aspiring candidates in surgery and medicine for licensing by the archbishop or bishop, but since the legislation made no mention of midwives, no comparable measures were established for deciding how midwives' licences should be awarded.⁷⁵ In 1547, an observer urged that "honest women of great gravitie" (who may or may not have been midwives) should testify to the "Bishop," on the midwife's behalf. But who decided that it should be six women, the number which appears with such regularity in the Vicar General's registers as early as 1608, and how did the responsibility for assessing competence move from practising peer to patient?⁷⁶ The register of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, recorded the licensing of Anne Greenewelle of Sevenoaks in Kent in 1636, and included the fact that six women testified on her behalf. The entry is unusual

72 For example, the Vicar General's records for London have failed to record the names of dozens of women who were licensed between January 1664 and 1669. GLRO MS. DL/C 345 fols. 21–50v. We have evidence from the testimonials themselves about the women who were licensed during these years. In some instances, the registers list the names of the individuals (both clergy and clients) who gave testimonials or sworn evidence for the midwife, but in many cases the clerk has recorded only such minimum details as the midwife's name, parish, and date of licensing. Other variations of the recording formula provide random information about the midwife's marital status, her spouse's name, and perhaps his occupation. The most obvious gap in the recording process was in the civil war years 1641–61, but there are other omissions both major and minor in nature.

73 Bloom and James have included records of midwives licensed in 1528. In one case, the midwife presented a document attesting to her competence, but in several other cases, the midwife called on one or two women for support. Still later, in 1557, a midwife and three clients appeared before the Registrar of the Vicar General, who subsequently granted the licence to practise midwifery in Essex. The foregoing records do not suggest any standardization of requirements or recording procedures. See Bloom and James, 84–5.

74 It is the persistent recurrence of the Latin term itself which is indicative of a set of "official" requirements regarding the licensing process.

75 Guy, 531.

76 Andrew Boorde in Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch*, 143; Guy, 537. For examples of licensing requirements in 1608 see GLRO MS DL/C 339/30, 32, 49.

in that it also embodies the following statement, apparently taken directly from the precedent regulations governing the licensing of midwives:

The oath to be administered to these six women who shall be produced and witnessed, they being such as have been delivered of child by the within named Anne Greenewell, who are first to take their oaths laying their hands upon the bible or new Testament you shall swear that through the experience and skill of Anne Greenewelle in the Art or faculty of midwifery which you & every of you have had seene or sworne you . . .⁷⁷

Although the quality of testimony given by the midwife's clients has been devalued by historians who have assumed that the women testifying under oath had not necessarily been delivered by the midwife-applicant, the foregoing evidence from the archbishop's records and other primary sources from later in the century supports the view that the women in question had been delivered by the midwife.⁷⁸ In the Restoration period, women testifying on behalf of the midwife continued to comply with the requirement that they attend *personally* before the bishop or his chancellor. There is every reason to believe that when the midwife and her clients appeared before the ecclesiastical courts and took their oath on the Bible or testament, they were fully cognizant of the importance of giving truthful sworn evidence and honouring their vows.⁷⁹

Since the midwife in some cases sought the support of women who had been recently delivered, it was not an easy task to arrange court attendance for the oath-taking process of six clients, and, as we shall see below, applicants for a midwifery licence did not always have their full complement of six female testators.⁸⁰ An indication of the often complex arrangements involved in assembling the various components (not to mention individuals) can be found in several of the testimonial certificates.

Elizabeth Syrette's directions to meet "at ye Crost Dagger near Doctors Commons at Eleven @ cloke for John Bonner" were relatively straightforward.⁸¹ But when Susan Kempton of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, travelled to London in her quest for a midwife's licence, her instructions involved contacting "My Lord Compton Bishop of Lond. living att Fullsom" and "Sir George Bramstone Chancellor att Doctors Commons," as well as seeking the assistance of a Mr. Rupert Brewer "to be found at the prerogative office." Kempton and three clients (two from St Bridget in London) managed to find their way to the right place and were sworn before Chancellor Bramston himself on August 16, 1694.⁸² In one instance,

⁷⁷ LPL *Registers of the Archbishop of Canterbury*, William Laud 1633–1645 fol.244 (1636). Thomas Forbes had apparently overlooked the archbishops' and bishops' registers when he noted that he had not found the text of any licences from the first half of the century. Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch*, 155.

⁷⁸ Wilson, "Childbirth," 79; Donnison, 6.

⁷⁹ Keith Thomas has concluded that the importance of oath-taking declined in the seventeenth century, and that the sanctity of the oath was no longer respected by many. Thomas, *Religion*, 76–8.

⁸⁰ Other variations included testimony by senior midwives or male medical practitioners.

⁸¹ GL MS 10,116/13. Bonner was probably a notary public. ⁸² GL MS 10,116/13.

six women appeared to swear to midwife Laywood's competence in delivering their twenty-three children, but the midwife herself (a busy senior midwife) was prevented from attending because of the demands of her practice.⁸³

The Cost of a Midwifery Licence

The actual cost of obtaining a midwife's licence was very high, roughly £1–£2.⁸⁴ By charging a substantial fee, church officials helped ensure that only dependable and economically viable women were licensed to practise midwifery. Evidence of what midwives paid for licences is found in testimonial certificates presented in the diocese of London, which survive only for the years after the Restoration. As in Norwich, the fee was made up of a number of smaller sums charged for different services and paid to more than one individual. In some cases, it appears that the fee may have been predicated on the number of women who were "sworn" by the church official, but in other cases the number of women giving sworn testimony was apparently unrelated to the fee charged. The earliest evidence of a London fee is found on the outside of the testimonial certificate of Ann Atkinson of High Holborn in the parish of St Andrew Holborn, licensed in 1662. Surrogate Henry Smith swore six women as well as the midwife. Two sums have been recorded – 6s.8d. and 1s.9d., for a total of 8s.5d. It is unlikely, however, that this is the full fee since it has been noted that the midwife had promised to add certification from "Dr. Winter and Dr. Bowden."⁸⁵

In the years 1673–4, the fee at licensing was recorded for six women, but this fee did not take into account, for instance, what the women paid to have testimonial certificates drafted in the first place. As a general observation on the testimonial certificates, it is possible to ascertain from the handwriting that, in many cases, parish clergy drafted testimonial statements, which were signed by churchwardens and other individuals. In other cases, the women had the statements prepared by a professional scribe (at added expense) and then took them to be signed by the various officials as required.⁸⁶ When Elizabeth Beranger of St Peter the Poor was licensed in 1674 and paid £1.7s.8d. to the court, she had possibly already paid a substantial sum to Dr. Hugh Chamberlen, who addressed his testimonial statement to his "honored friend Dr. Exton at his chamber in the Commons."⁸⁷ Of the remaining five women, one paid the same fee as Beranger,

83 GL MS 10,116/2.

84 This point was made in both Harley's and Wilson's studies of provincial midwives. Harley, "Provincial midwives," 30; Wilson, "Childbirth," 80.

85 GL MS 10,116/2.

86 There is a strong likelihood that parish clergy charged some women for drafting their letter of reference. See Ludlow, 105.

87 GL MS 10,116/8. Chamberlen's statement appears to have been the only documentation which Beranger presented to the court and therefore we are reasonably certain that the amount recorded was the charge for the licensing process at the ecclesiastical court level, exclusive of any charges incurred by the applicant prior to this.

two paid £1.8s.8d., one paid £1.11s.2d., and one, Elizabeth Withers, paid the lowest fee of the six, at 17s.10d., to be sworn along with her six female clients. In one instance, Dr. Exton the Chancellor received 7s.6d. as his portion of the fee, while in another, the fee of £1.7s.8d. was divided between clerk Moses Jones of Doctor's Commons who received £1, and Exton who got 7s.8d.⁸⁸

Four more testimonials from the years 1677–8 bear evidence of fees; on that of Ursula Stokes, the widow of John Stokes of Stepney, surrogate William Oldys recorded tersely: “Reced. 20 [s] @ noe more by order for this lycense, for seal @ other fees.” Midwife Stokes’ testimonial certificate was signed by her minister, a churchwarden, and an overseer of the poor. It is possible that the parish had secured a reduced fee or that it was paying for the licence of widow Stokes (described as “altogether expert and every way able to follow the calling of a midwife”) not only to meet the needs of parish women, but to enable Stokes to be self-sufficient and avoid becoming a parish charge.⁸⁹

Examples of change in the testimonial documents themselves can be found in the year 1695. The usual practice with regard to the women giving sworn testimony in the court was to record their names as a group. In some cases, the names appeared on the bottom or back of the clerical testimonial; occasionally they were written on a separate piece of paper. But when Ann Day of St Alphage was sworn by George Bramston in 1695, the testimonial documents which have been preserved consisted of a statement by her curate, Edward Lilly, and four separate sheets of good quality paper, each with an embossed seal stamped with the sum of six pence as well as the motto “honi soit qui mal y pense.”⁹⁰ Information about what midwives paid for their licences in the last five years of the century continues to support the view that fees were set with a fair degree of flexibility for a variety of reasons, most of which are beyond the ken of a twentieth-century researcher. Of the four midwives whose fees for licensing were recorded in 1697, one woman paid £1.2d., the second paid £1.15s., and a third £1.19s.⁹¹ The fourth woman,

88 GL MS 10,116/8.

89 GL MS 10,116/10. In addition to Stokes, fees were recorded for Isobel Leigh, Anne Hide, and Anne Goal.

90 This is the motto of the knights of the garter, the order to which the chancellor belonged. GL MS 10,116/13. In two cases, the women signed with their own signatures. Two further examples of this type of document survive in the records for the City of London for the years 1698–9, GL MS 10,116/14. Four examples can be found in the Lambeth Palace archives, all from the last five years of the century. LPL VX 1A/11, 54–7. On each page appeared the name of one female client, with her parish, spouse’s name, and occupation, and the woman’s signature or mark. Practises like this must have resulted in increased cost to midwives seeking a licence, but unfortunately no fee has been recorded for the six or seven examples of this format which survive. With the greatly increased public expenditure, as a result of waging a war against France, a number of duties were introduced in the 1690s. In 1698, a “long term” duty on vellum, parchment, and paper was imposed which may have been introduced temporarily a few years earlier and been reflected in these midwives’ testimonial certificates. See P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1967), 46–9.

91 GL MS 10,116/14. The three women were Mary Russell, widow of Tottenham High Cross, Elizabeth Wynn of Hampton parish, and Martha Tidmarsh of St James in the Fields.

Barbara Collop of St James in the Fields, appeared on September 30 and was given until Christmas to pay the total cost of £2.5s. She left a partial payment of five shillings and was to receive her licence when the balance was paid.⁹² It should be borne in mind that in this period, when midwives were generally paying sums of £1 to £1.8s. for a licence, those costs represented the equivalent of eight to ten days' wages for a London building craftsman, or approximately fourteen to eighteen days' wages for a London labourer.⁹³

It is apparent that in a few cases midwives found it difficult to pay for a licence or were unaware of the costs which were involved, since in a number of cases, the court was willing to accept a partial payment with the promise of further payment at a future date. Sara Wilkins of St Martin Ludgate and Rebecca Smith of St Giles in the Fields were both licensed in 1682 under Canterbury's jurisdiction. In both cases, a partial payment of 10 shillings was accepted.⁹⁴ In another instance, the licence was not surrendered without payment; on the outside of Elizabeth Pennyell's certificate is written: "... Mr. Cooke desired me to keepe this by me till ye party did come for her Lyc: but left no money."⁹⁵ There is no indication of why Hannah Mason of St Leonard Shoreditch was exempted from paying for her licence in 1679; only the word *gratis* was written on her testimonial.⁹⁶ In Katherine Howell's case, however, Richard Butler (who acted as a surrogate for the chancellor in some cases) had personally assumed the responsibility of paying for Howell's licence when she and her clients were sworn before surrogate William Oldys in 1678. Butler wrote: "I shall be accomptable unto Mr. Newcourt for Mrs. Howell's License." He added a memorandum: "I payd the Seele out of pocket."⁹⁷ Perhaps the midwife, a deputy midwife of long standing, or her husband, Peter, was an acquaintance of the court official.

Personal friendships or social ties were probably the reason why Elizabeth Dean, wife of gentleman Richard Dean of St James Weston, was excused from paying for her licence in 1688. In this case, Richard Newcourt (notary public and court surrogate) requested that "this license passe without fees." Thomas Pinfold administered the oath to midwife Deane and four women, and duly noted on the outside of the testimonial that it had been issued "*gratio*."⁹⁸ Not only did the clients of Sarah Ticer of Laughton sign a statement asking that she be "favourably considered, for her estate being smale," but the vicar of Chigwell added his request that she be used "as favourably as possibly you can in reference to the

92 GL MS 10,116/14. Two of the women were from the same parish. Three women had three supporting clients. Collop was probably charged more because she did not have enough cash at the time of her appearance at the court. There is the possibility, moreover, that Collop never did receive her licence since her name does not appear in the Vicar General's register.

93 John Chartres, "Food Consumption and Internal Trade," Beier and Finlay, *London*, 171.

94 LPL VX 1A/11, 21, 22. In Sara's case, it would be unlikely that she could not afford the full payment, married as she was to a citizen and clockmaker. In Rebecca's case, we know that the total fee was £1.4.6.

95 LPL VX 1A11/42. 96 GL MS 10,116/10. 97 GL MS 10,116/10.

98 GL MS 10,116/12.

taking out of her Licence for the office of midwifery for I believe she is a very poore woman.”⁹⁹ Evidently the intercessions were effective and Ticer’s fee was remitted. In 1664, Temperance Pratt of St Botolph Aldgate submitted her testimonial certificate from her clergyman. It was accompanied by another beautifully written “petition” addressed to “Humphrey Lord Bishop of London” which explained that midwife Pratt was born in Stepney and was sent overseas as a child where she grew up and began her practice of midwifery. She wanted to put her practical experience in child delivery to use now:

but your Petitioner knowing she cannot soe freely exercise the same without approbation and licence to which she is ready and willing to yield unto, But by reason of her Travelle and great charge of children (not havinge any provision or maintenance for herself and children but through her owne labour and Industry) is reduced to great poverty and soe not able to raise any monies for obtaining a licence.¹⁰⁰

Although Pratt pleaded poverty, her petition was the work of a professional who asked that the licence be granted “*in forma pauperis*.” Pratt’s personal petition (the validity of which was certified by her minister, churchwardens, a constable, and a Member of Parliament) conveys the sense of control which the Church exercised in the licensing of midwives. It proved successful and Humphrey Henchman, Bishop of London, personally instructed the court official to administer the midwife’s oath to Pratt and grant her a licence without charge.

Only one other case of a licence being granted *in forma pauperis* was found among the more than 500 testimonial certificates. Sara Bent was described as a “poor widow” who had lived in St Giles in the Fields for more than sixteen years and was well experienced in midwifery according to her clergyman, churchwardens, and six female clients. She was licensed by the chancellor Richard Chaworth in 1663.¹⁰¹ It is apparent that these two women who pleaded poverty were competent and experienced midwives, and their licences were not granted solely on grounds of economic need.

Even though our evidence has not revealed a single fixed fee for a midwifery licence, fees in seventeenth-century London compare reasonably well with those charged in Norwich in 1735, where the fee is estimated to have been nearly £2, and in Chester, where a fee of 18s. 8d. was charged.¹⁰² By charging a substantial sum to obtain a licence to practise midwifery, ecclesiastical authorities, in effect, excluded fly-by-night practitioners and ensured that responsible and stable women of good standing in their respective parishes carried on this important service to women of all ranks. In some cases, where a woman of proven ability but modest means applied, the Church moderated the fee or licensed her without charge.

99 GL MS 10,116/3. Although Ticer was described as “very poore,” her four clients were described as being of the “best ranck and qualitie in the parish of Laughton.”

100 GL MS 10,116/3. 101 GL MS 10,116/3.

102 Wilson, “Childbirth,” 80, 11; Harley, “Provincial midwives in England: Lancashire and Cheshire, 1660–1760,” Marland, ed., *The Art of Midwifery*, 30.

There is no question, however, that the sizeable outlay of money, time, and energy expended in the mechanics of obtaining a licence were deterrents to a number of midwives whose midwifery skills were on a par with those of licensed practitioners.

MIDWIVES AT VISITATIONS

The responsibility of the Church did not end with the issuing of a licence to the midwife nor did the midwife's expenses end with the cost of the licence. Midwives were expected to attend the periodic parochial visitations, which the bishop or his representative carried out in his diocese. At these visitations, all midwives who had been issued licences were required to exhibit them.¹⁰³ Midwives were traditionally charged a fee when their licences were inspected at ecclesiastical "visitations."¹⁰⁴ Not only do fees charged at visitations need to be considered as part of the long-term cost of a midwifery licence, they should be regarded as part of the midwife's and the Church's ongoing commitment to licensing as a meaningful recognition of the midwife's skill. An additional task of the ecclesiastical official conducting the visitation was to ascertain whether there were midwives in the parishes carrying on unlicensed practice. Bishop Bonner's articles for the Diocese of London in 1554 state that one of the aims of the visitation was to establish:

Whether there be any woman that doth occupy or exercise the office and room of a midwife, before she be examined and admitted by the bishop, or ordinary of this diocese, or his chancellor or commissary, having sufficient authority, except in time of extreme necessity when the presence of the midwife cannot be had?¹⁰⁵

Visitations were, in effect, the main avenue whereby the Church attempted to enforce its control of the licensing process. Midwives practising without licences were summoned to appear and ordered to take the necessary steps toward acquiring a licence. In some cases, licences were issued at the visitation. The visitation

103 J. S. Purvis, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastical Records* (London: St Anthony's Press, 1953), 47.

104 GL MS 9537/19. In the back of the Bishop's visitation register for London in the year 1669, there is a list of fees. It is apparently what the authorities charged to inspect the licences and register the names of physicians, surgeons, school teachers, church lecturers, and midwives during visitations. In each case, except for lecturers, the fee was £0.1.4. The fee for church lecturer was £0.1.6. Wilson has estimated that the fee to exhibit in Norwich in 1735 was about £0.2.6. Wilson "Childbirth," 81.

105 See Bonner's "Articles of Visitation" (1554), Edward Cardwell, *Documentary Annals*, 164. For other examples of bishop's injunctions to midwives from this early period, W. H. Frere and W. M. Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, vol. 2, 1536-58 (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1910), 23, 49, 292, 385; vol. 3, 383. Of the foregoing, one of the most interesting was that of Bishop Hooper (1551-52), which indicated that some midwives had been reluctant to deliver the wives of former Roman Catholic priests who had now married (vol. 2, 292). For more about these unfortunate women, Mary Prior, "Reviled and crucified marriage: the position of Tudor bishops' wives," Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London: Methuen, 1985), 118-48.

process illustrates not only the Church's ongoing concern that midwives obtain a licence, but also the difficulties which faced church officials who were in many cases unsuccessful in enforcing the requirement that midwives be licensed.

Visitation records for the diocese of London in the seventeenth century have survived for the years 1636, 1637, 1664, 1669, and 1680. For the Peculiar of the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's, records are extant for the years 1667–70. The visitation of 1636 was a metropolitan visitation under the agency of the Archbishop of Canterbury covering the entire province. As far as we can ascertain, for 1636, only thirteen parishes lying within the wall and four suburban parishes were visited.¹⁰⁶

At the 1636 visitation, for six of the parishes that were visited, no midwives were listed. St Clement Danes, which lay outside the walls, noted the greatest number of midwives but, of its nine midwives, four failed to appear. The parish of St Martin Ludgate showed the greatest number of intramural midwives, with all five women marked present at the visitation.¹⁰⁷

The bishop's visitation of 1637 appears to have benefitted from better organisation and reduced scope. The visitation began in Essex on September 5, 1637 and arrived at the City of London three weeks later.¹⁰⁸ The visitation of City parishes began in the parish of St Augustine on September 26th. It moved in a westerly direction to the parish of St Michael Cornhill on September 27th. The next day, the remaining parishes attended the visitation proceedings held in the parish church of Allhallows Barking which lies in the northeast corner of the City. A much greater number of parishes were visited than at the visitation of a year earlier: eighty intramural parishes, ten extramural parishes, and seven suburban parishes are listed in the records. Forty-two, or more than half, of the intramural parishes reported no midwives while four of the extramural parishes, or 40%, reported no midwives.¹⁰⁹ Of the intramural parishes that were visited, St Martin Ludgate again reported the greatest number at six. Of the suburban parishes, St Clement Danes listed its nine midwives once more (the greatest number for any parish outside of the walls).¹¹⁰

Almost thirty years later, on October 6, 1664, the first visitation of Humphrey Henchman, Bishop of London, opened its initial London segment in the parish

106 We are using the customary division of parishes with 97 parishes within the walls and 13 parishes considered as "extramural." See Tai Liu, 17–21. The seven suburban parishes were St Mary Islington, St James Clerkenwell, St Leonard Shoreditch, St Clement Danes, St Martin in the Fields, St Giles in the Fields, and St Mary Matfellow: GL MS 9537/15 fols. 51–68 *passim*.

107 GL MS 9537/14/35–8.

108 The suburban parishes such as St Clement Danes were visited before the parishes within the walls.

109 It is difficult to give a total number of midwives who were listed on the visitation records of intramural and extramural parishes at this visitation because for thirty odd parishes, two lists have been preserved which, in some cases, contain different names for the same parish. For example, on one list, St Sepulchre has reported nine midwives and on the other, only seven. If we use the list containing the greatest number of parishes, there were at least 105 midwives listed.

110 GL MS 9537/15 fols. 51v, 59.