

**THE COVENTRY CENSUS**

**1520 & 1523.**

**Transcription**

**by P. Cobbett**

# THE COVENTRY CENSUS

## 1520/1523.

### History of this census and its transcription

Unfortunately the actual returns of the 1520 census are missing, however a similar census was taken again in June 1523 both of these are recorded in the Coventry Leet book as the Dearth (a census).

This second census was until 1965 also lost, when the newly appointed City archivist Mr A. A. Dibben came across three of the original schedules amongst a bundle of miscellanea (now given call number BA/HIM/7/1). Luckily his attention had been drawn to the fact of their existence by a passing reference to and brief extract from, an undated sixteenth century census covering Gosford, Much Park and Jordan Well wards in a number of note books deposited by Dr Levi Fox earlier that year.

However, not until December 1967 were the other seven schedules found by Mr David Smith, then assistant archivist from amongst a number of accessions received in 1957 from Dr Romana Bartelot of Trowbridge, (these are now referenced as call number 263/2).

With the exception of Spon St. and Gosford St. ward's, the census was made on sheets of paper 12" - 12.5" by 17" - 17.5" these had been folded lengthwise, the water mark being a common Glove and Flower type.

The following is a full transcription of this census. It has given many hours of enjoyable work to myself and the other transcribers Mrs Sheila Athersuch and Mr Antony Cooper, without who's help this transcript would never have reached a stage worthy of publication.

Each of us independently transcribed the census in full then from these three copies, a composite copy was made, this was then rechecked against the original and any problem words / names marked for future attention and then an additional opinion of these was given by the City archivist Mr Roger Vaughan. This often resulted in four different interpretations of the same name. A final decision was made by agreement of the 3 original transcribers as to the most likely possibilities of each word.

Whilst we feel that the following is as accurate as we could make, we would like to point out that due to the difficulty in reading this document, errors are bound to have occurred. For that reason, any words that we felt may have other interpretations have been put into square brackets as a pointer to 'problem areas' and any words or letters unreadable or missing have been underlined.

To help understand the reasons why this census came into existence I have made a small extract from a book 'The History of Coventry' by Mr Frederick Smith BA. FGS.

The earlier part of the Sixteenth Century was an era of rising prices for food stuffs, and in 1520 the mayor of Coventry, John Bond, took a step which throws a vivid light on the City and its people.

He caused a census to be taken of all the inhabitants, and of all the corn stocks in Coventry. The result is recorded in detail in the Leet Book, and Dr. G.G. Coulton Says that this is perhaps the only surviving early record of an exact census of any urban population in Britain, and adds that it admirably exemplifies the paternal solicitude of the government in a well-ordered and progressive municipality. The census shows that the population of Coventry in the autumn of 1520 was 6,601, distributed as follows among the ten wards:

Bayley Lane ward	459
Bishop Street ward	1,018
Broadgate ward	552
Cross Cheaping ward	884
Earl Street ward	707
Gosford Street ward	875
Jordan Well ward	354
Much Park Street ward	719
Smithford Street ward	406
Spon Street ward	<u>627</u>
	6,601

The stock of Grain, etc., in the city was 2,405 quarters of Malt; 100 quarters and 1 strikes of Rye and Maslin; 47 quarters of wheat; and 39 quarters 2 strikes of oats. There were 68 brewers, who used for their brewing 146 quarters 1 bushel of malt every week. There were 43 Bakers, who baked 132 quarters of wheat every week, besides peas and rye.

From the foregoing, and by comparing the Coventry figures with figures from other sources, Dr. Coulton works out the consumption of beer in Coventry each week in 1520 to be 12,118 gallons, or almost exactly a quart per diem per soul, man woman and child. As to the bread, he says that a good deal of the rye and beans doubtless went to horse-bread; but, taking the wheat only, a figure is reached of 9.3 lbs. per week per head; which (making allowance for all the coarser stuff used) would probably mean a consumption of 12 lbs. weekly, or even more. He adds, that of course our ancestors had far less of other foods.

The following transcript and index have been made primarily for family historians who know the names they are looking for, so that a possible ancestor can be found. If it should also be found to be of benefit to others, then this would be a bonus.

The spellings of names in this transcript are as they were written and not in their modern forms. It can be seen from the originals this document was produced by the hand of several different people all with their own ways of spelling names, but the main points to look for in finding a name are to make the letter i into a y and double letters become single.

For example the name Collins becomes Colyns.

I've found in 90% this works, but for the few that don't follow this, the main and overriding factor to be looking for is that the name sounds the same.

## EXAMPLES OF ABBREVIATIONS IN THE WRITTEN HAND FROM THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The biggest problem in deciphering old English documents, is identifying the many varied abbreviations, some made up by individuals at the time. The following are a few of the more common ones found

Abbreviation	Meaning	Example
ʒ ʒ ʒ	= er	pʒson = Person
h s s	= re	pʒentes = Presentes
Ⓒ Ⓔ Ⓕ Ⓖ Ⓗ	= and	
π π	= a	
ʒ ʒ	= con	
π ʒ	= (con)[tr](a)	
ʒ ʒ	= (e)s	Gybbʒ = Gybbes
ʒ ʒ ʒ	= P(er)	ʒauʒ = Pauper.
ʒ	= P(re)	ʒʒentes = Presentes
ʒ ʒ	= P(ro)	ʒʒenʒ = Proven.
ʒ	= us	ʒerʒʒ = Versus
ʒʒ	= et	
ʒ ʒ ʒ	= ur	

uuu = marks omission of letter M after a vowel    Su = Sum

ʒ ʒ + = Christ    ʒepʒoz = Christehor

**Spellings:** The main points to look for in reading a word are

- To make the letter i into a y
- Double letters often become single.
- The letter C sometimes becomes K.

For example the name Collins becomes Colyns.

I've found in 90% this works, but for the few that don't follow this the main and overriding factor to be looking for is that the word sounds the same.

**EXAMPLES OF COVENTRY WRITTEN HAND**  
**FROM THE 1523 CENSUS**

Capitals

Small letters

Aa

Aa

a d a d a d a d

Bb

Bb

e b b h b b

Cc

Cc

c e

Dd

Dd

d o o o y o y d

Ee

Ee

o o o o

Ff

Ff

f f f f

Gg

Gg

g g g y g

Hh

Hh

h h h y h h h h

Ii

Ii

i i

Jj

Jj

j

Kk

Kk

k k k

Ll

Ll

l l l l l l

Mm

Mm

m m m m

Nn

Nn

n n n v n n n <sup>x last letter</sup> y

Oo

Oo

o o o o b o o

Pp

Pp

p p p p p p

Qq

Qq

q

Rr

Rr

r z r z r z r z

Ss

Ss

s s s s s s s s <sup>x = (e)S</sup>

Tt

Tt

t t t

Uu

Uu

u u u

Vv

Vv

v v

Ww

Ww

w w w

Xx

Xx

x x x

Yy

Yy

y y y y y y

Zz

Zz

z

