



2009 CONFERENCE

**IDENTIFYING THE PERSON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

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## **Abstract**

**Identity Registration in English Comparative History:  
Why Were the Parish Registers Created and How Did They Persist?**

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This paper presents comparative historical evidence to enable a critical evaluation to be made of competing historical accounts of the reasons for the first introduction of a national identity registration system in England, in the form of the Tudor parish registers of 1538. The paper then uses the comparative perspective to examine the question of persistence- why the system in England was able to continue in existence for over two and a half centuries. It is argued that this precocious success of an ID system in early modern England may illustrate the importance of certain principles about incentives to agents and trust in governments which may be necessary for efficient and accurate identity registration systems to persist over long periods.

**The Documentation of Individual Identity:  
Historical and Comparative Perspectives since 1500**

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