Hawkshead (Lancs.) Mobility (geographical and occupational) as shown by the reconstitution of the parish from the registers, 1585–1840

The baptism and burial registers of Hawkshead give place of residence within the parish frequently from 1585–1699, consistently from 1700–1840; they give occupation occasionally between 1585–1699, increasingly from 1700 until the middle of the century and consistently from then onwards. The marriage registers give the place of residence of the groom if he came from outside the parish — occasionally between 1585–1699, frequently between 1700–1840.

In carrying out the manual reconstitution of the parish a total of 4,432 family reconstitution forms (FRFs) were filled in, 2,779 for marriages registered in the parish, 1,653 based on the baptism of children, that is, where the marriages took place outside the parish. Over the period 1585–1840, therefore, some 4,432 families were dealt with, a slight overstatement as a new FRF was filled in whenever the husband remarried. As the work proceeded it became clear that the head of the family frequently changed his place of residence and sometimes his occupation, for a different place of residence and a different occupation were given at the baptisms of successive children. It was thought, therefore, that an investigation into the geographical and occupational mobility of Hawkshead people might prove interesting.

Searching through the whole body of 4,432 FRFs would have been too lengthy an exercise and it was decided to take a 30% sample. About 1,500 FRFs were considered and of these about 900, 20% of the total number provided the requisite data. For this sample families with names starting with "S" to "Y" were used and to make up the number the "Ls" were added. Using these names gave an interesting range of families from large groups bearing the same surname (though not the two largest — Braithwaites and Riggles) to quite small groups, and including every variety of occupation from gentlemen and yeomen to the lowly labourers and slaters. For the purpose of the exercise the full span 1585–1840 was divided into two periods: 1585–1699, the years for which the registers gave little detail and 1700–1840, the years for which full detail of residence and occupation was given with reasonably consistency.

Let us look first at the bridegrooms who came from outside the parish to marry Hawkshead girls. In the period 1585–1699 three only were mentioned; they came from Langdale, Lowick Green and Patterdale to claim their brides. In the years 1700–1840 a total of seventy-eight grooms came from outside the parish; fifty-nine took their brides back to their own parish; nineteen would appear to have settled in Hawkshead as children of the marriage were baptised in the parish church, though in some instances only one child was baptised there. It would seem that it was the custom in some families to have the first child baptised in the mother's parish. The largest number of grooms — twenty-three — came from the nearby parish of Ulverston, about ten miles south of Hawkshead: seven were miners or slaters, six farmers or husbands, for five no occupation was given and the remaining five counted a carpenter, a cordwainer, a tailor, a sadler and a shopkeeper among their number. Next came Colton just south of Furness Fells with eight grooms: three occupations only were given, two husbandsmen and one tailor. After this came Grasmere, just north of Hawkshead with six grooms, one blacksmith, one husbandman, one miller and two unidentified, followed by Kendal (Kirkby Kendal) with five. Then we have three parishes each producing four bridgegrooms — Windermere, Cartmel and Crosthwaite followed by Kirkby Ireleth with three. The remaining twenty-two grooms came from twenty-two different parishes, some from as far away as Liverpool, Salford and Warrington, but mostly from places further afield in Westmorland, Cumberland and North Lancashire, such as Broughton, Millom, Cockermouth, Wigton and Bootle.
A number of strangers or sojourners had their children baptised in Hawkshead: two in the period 1585–1699, a Scotsman who settled in the parish and an Egyptian or gypsy; ten in the period 1700–1840: four soldiers (one a Captain in the Sixth Regiment of the Madras Cavalry), one mariner, two Scotsmen, a vagrant, a student and a surgeon. In addition excisemen or gagers are mentioned a number of times and it would seem that these officials stayed in the parish for a short period and then moved on.

We must now consider mobility within the parish itself and it should be pointed out that Hawkshead was a very large parish of lowlands and hills, fells and forests, lakes and tarns, bordered on the east and south by Lake Windermere and the river Leven, on the west by the Crake, Coniston Water and the Yewdale Beck and on the north by the Brathay flowing through Elterwater into Lake Windermere. According to the 1831 Census the whole parish which included the townships of Hawkshead, Claife, Monk Coniston with Skelwith and Satterthwaite Chapelry occupied 22,220 acres and had 2,060 inhabitants. Of these inhabitants there were first of all those who spent their whole married life in one place, that is, those for whom the register gives the same place of residence at marriage, at the baptisms of successive children and at burial: there were 103 of these immobile heads of families in the period 1585–1699, ninetytwo in the period 1700–1840. For the years 1585–1699 fiftythree heads of families had more than one place of residence within the parish, 155 in the years 1700–1840. These two sets of figures taken together suggest that mobility within the parish was considerably greater in the period 1700–1840 than in the earlier period.

When we come to look at occupations we find that we have to ignore the first period: occupations were given only in ten instances: a gentleman, two bailiffs, a parish clerk, two smiths, a horsecounder, two hatters, an husbandman and a carrier. From now on we shall therefore deal only with the years 1700–1840. For these years the registers assign one occupation only to 300 heads of families. Breaking down this number we have thirtyone instances of one occupation registered at more than one date linked to the same place of residence registered at more than one date. We thus have a small core of heads of families of whom we know with certainty that they were stable both in residence and occupation throughout their lives. Next we have thirtyeight heads of families who registered the same occupation but more than one place of residence throughout their lives, whilst only eighteen registered different occupations but the same place of residence. Finally there were fortyfive heads of families who registered both more than one occupation and more than one place of residence. It is this group which is of special interest.

Twentyeight of the fortyfive, more than half, gave their occupation variously as labourer, husbandman or farmer. It would appear that these terms were interchangeable. These labourers-husbandmen-farmers moved about a good deal, not just within their own quarter of the parish but from Satterthwaite to the Sawrey, to the Skelwith, to the Coniston district. Occasionally they were attached to the great houses and moved between Hawkshead and Graythwaite Hall. This applied also to the gardeners, sometimes called labourers or husbandmen, who seem to have been attached to the two Halls or to houses in Hawkshead Town. Miller's too changed their abode being either attached to Hawkshead Hall or working independently in the Town, Skinnerhow or Gallobarrow: one must have been a man of some substance for he died a "householder". They did not often change their occupation though one became a maltmaker, whilst John Taylor of Town turned from being a miller in 1823 to being a grocer in 1832, a shopkeeper in 1834, a Relieving Officer in 1839 and back to shopkeeper in 1841. The term "yeoman" does not often occur in the Registers, the supposedly typically Lakeland term "Statesman" never. However, Mathew Wilson of Hollinbank was a farmer in 1829, a
yeoman in 1835; George Watson of Hollinbank, an husbandman in 1800, a yeoman in 1811; William Towers of Sawrey changed from husbandman to farmer and was upgraded to yeoman between 1830–36; John Sawrey of Town was a butcher from 1752–65 but died a yeoman in 1799, and lastly, William Taylor was a yeoman of Briers in 1780 but a Gentleman of Colthouse in 1799. The last entry would seem to confirm the impression one gains from working through the registers that the more substantial farmers were often referred to as “Mr” and were considered to belong to the lesser gentry.

Sometimes there is a change from a farming to a non-agricultural occupation or vice-versa. Five labourers-husbandmen became colliers. One of these, Edward Walker was married, a husbandman of Hawkshead in 1797; he was a collier of Briers in Sawrey from 1798–1802; by 1808 he had moved to Town and between 1808–17 he was successively described as carrier, labourer and woodcutter. Robert Wallas of Colthouse was described in 1783 as farmer, and carrier. Edward Smith was married as a husbandman of Hawkshead parish in 1779, later that year he was a carrier of Colthouse and in 1781 he joined the army. There were two swillers who turned farmer and husbandman respectively, one husbandman became a slater, one a weaver and one a boatman. Two husbandmen were butchers for some years of their lives and one of them died a yeoman. More unusually, George Ullock of Fieldhead was an husbandman in 1821, a taylor in 1827 and William Towers of Near Sawrey was a hatmaker from 1785–93 but was registered a yeoman and gentleman in 1797 and as such was buried at Near Sawrey in 1836. Finally, James Sarjinson was married, an husbandman of Hawkshead parish in 1805 but the next year was a footman at Keenground and by 1811 had risen to be the butler at Hawkshead Hall.

On the whole wallers seem to have stuck to their craft; occasionally they were called stonemasons or plasterers, but one waller turned slater and one took up weaving. They certainly seem to have moved all over the parish to build their cunningly contrived drystone walls. Slaters and miners also mostly stayed in their occupations with the exception of those husbandmen and labourers who temporarily took up mining or slate-getting. They mostly came from the Coniston district though quite a few came from Ulverston and then settled in the Satterthwaite part of the parish. Then there were the colliers who burnt the charcoal which formed the basis of the iron smelting industry mostly in the wooded southern part of the parish. Colliers sometimes turned to the allied occupations of cooper and swiller for all these trades were connected with the different uses of the widespread coppice which was so important a feature of the surrounding landscape. Finally there were such oddities as the cooper who turned collier and then became a potter; the slater who finished his life as a shoemaker in the Sandground poor-house and a stonemason from Colthouse who became an innkeeper in the town.

It remains to look at the village crafts and at the merchandising occupations. These too usually stayed the same throughout the man’s life, though there are exceptions: a candlemaker of Town combined the business of tallow chandler and seedsman, another of the same family and also of Town was within a ten year period a tallow chandler, a draper and a postmaster; one taylor was also a staymaker and another a cordwainer; a swiller became a cooper and a fiddler a weaver.

Finally, the burial register sometimes describes the deceased as “householder”, indicating, it would seem, that he owned or at least occupied a house. There were thirty-nine householders between 1700–1840. For a number of these no occupation was given, but those for whom occupations were given were men of some standing and substance for they included two
mercers (also described as Mr), a taylor, a tanner, two joiners (of the same family), a carrier, two weavers or websters, a shoemaker and a miller. At the opposite end of the scale were the poor or paupers, twenty-nine in all, and these included labourers, husbandmen, slaters, a farmer, a butcher, two shoemakers and a joiner; one pauper was also a householder. Then there was a little group of five old men who were boarders at the time of their death, among them Mr. Samuel Sands, Gentleman, who at his death in 1684 was a boarder at Graythwaite Hall. The Sands were the armigerous family, but Ullocks, Whinfields, Vernons, Thompsons, Tatham's, Smiths, Setons, Sadlers and Sticklands counted gentry among their number. In all thirty-two men were described as Gentleman, Esquire or Mr. over the whole period 1585–1840.

To conclude: it would appear that during the years 1585–1840 most of the people of Hawkshead lived in the same place throughout their lives, though the method of registration has only allowed us to establish this with certainty for a much smaller number. What is more, the reconstitution indicates that families continued to live in the same place from generation to generation and members of large family groups tended to congregate in the same district. But there was a small minority who were footloose and wandered all over the parish and their number increased as the years went by and was greater by some 10% in the period 1700–1840 than in the earlier period. The great majority of Hawkshead men did not change their occupation during their lifetime but lack of registration in the early period only allows us to make this assertion for the later period. And most of those who continued in the same occupation also remained in the same place, though a small number moved about the parish. Of those who had more than one occupation the majority also had more than one place of residence and most of these were to do with the land, either as labourers-husbandmen-farmers or as wallers-slaters-colliers.

The intriguing question to which the registers unfortunately give no answer, is whether this mobility was one of inclination or of economic necessity. On balance it would seem that labourer, husbandman and to a certain extent farmer were synonymous and that these men moved to where their services were required. But the term farmer was sometimes associated with the ownership or at any rate the tenure of land and the farmer might become a yeoman or even a gentleman. The wallers too moved to where the work was and the same applied to slaters and miners. The boundary between all these occupations was very indistinct and was crossed by all the workers as necessity and/or inclination demanded. It is less easy to determine or even to guess at the reason for changing from an agricultural to a craft or merchandising occupation, though almost certainly the inability to make a living must have reinforced ambition or the desire for change, as witnessed in the history of the man who progressed from husbandman to footman to butler. Even the change from husbandman to carrier to soldier may not have been entirely due to a roving disposition.

Karla Oosterveen

Notes
1. See also Mrs. Kathleen Leonard’s analysis of grooms from other parishes: p.58 Transcription of the Register of Marriages in the parish of Hawkshead (Lancashire) 1754–1837.

2. ‘Baptised 2-12-1829 George Arthur, son of Captain George Sandys and Sarah Teresa, his wife, of Graythwaite Hall and the Sixth Regiment H.C. Madras Cavalry. Born 15-6-1826, privately baptised at Jaubrah on 27 July 1826 by Lt. Col. C. Deacon, there being no ordained Minister at the station according to the certificate of William Roy, Senior Chaplain for Fort St. George, transmitted to me, Robert Bell, officiating Minister.’ (Hawkshead Baptism Register).

3. I am indebted to Mrs. Kathleen Leonard for this information.