

A STUDY OF SURNAME DISTRIBUTION IN A GROUP OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE PARISHES, 1538-1840

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1. Introduction and methods

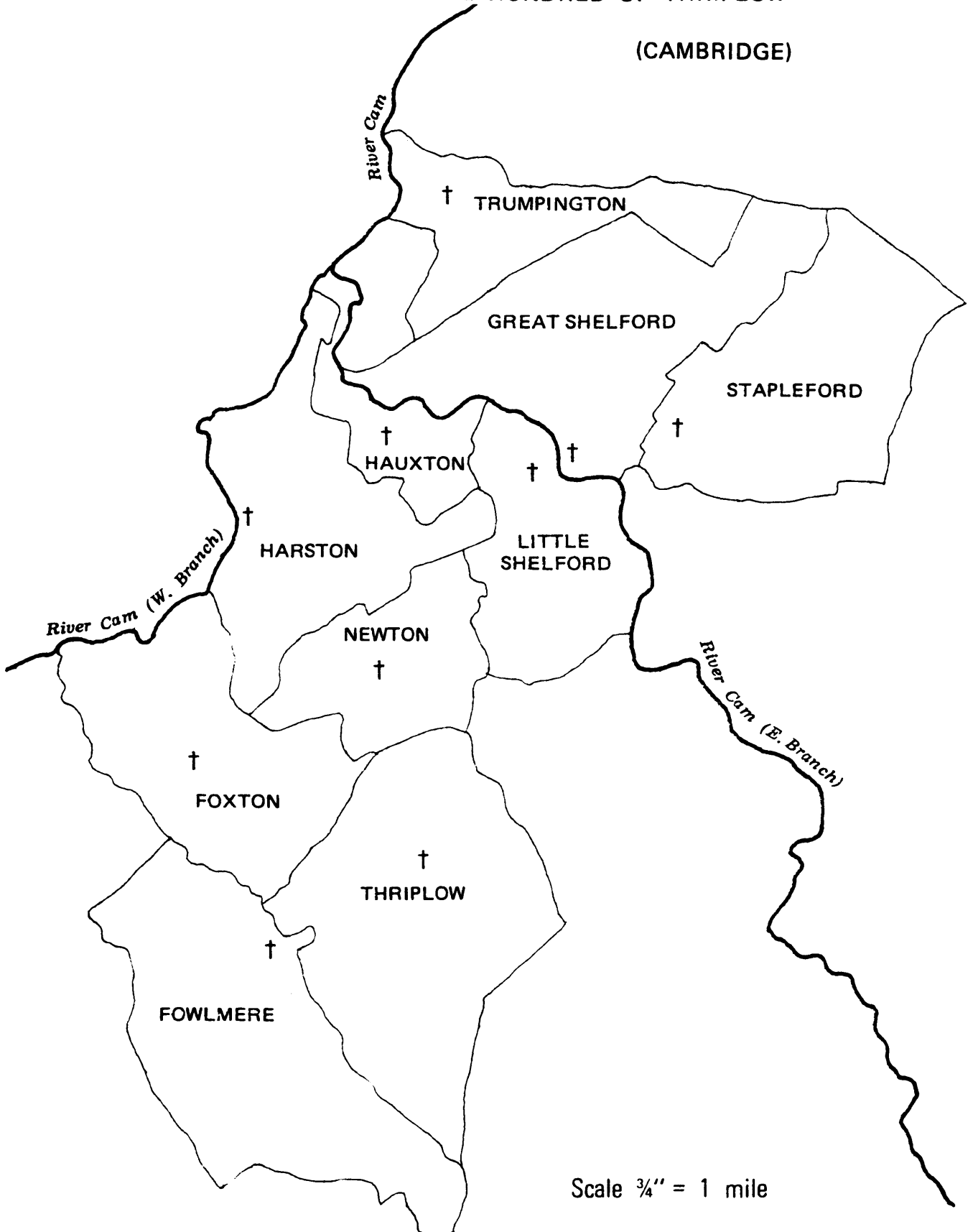
One of the first things to strike a newcomer to an area is that the surnames are different to those he has been used to: different in the sense that there are some he has not heard before, and different in the sense that some he has heard before seem much more common. For example, in South Cambridgeshire the author would put Challis and Dockerill into the former category, and Dean, Chapman and Butler into the latter. This is true despite the tremendous amount of movement of population that has occurred, particularly in this century, since surnames became hereditary some 500 to 700 years ago.

It is intended in this paper to trace the development, over 300 years, of the commonest names of an area of South Cambridgeshire, looking first at the persistence of names within a period and then at the number of names common to pairs of parishes. Indexes to parish register transcripts were used.¹ The parishes are shown on the map in Figure 1. They lie for the most part between the two main branches of the Cam south of Cambridge, the exceptions being Great Shelford and Stapleford, just north-east of the more easterly of the two branches. They are in fact eight of the ten parishes of the Hundred of Thriplow. The other two parishes of this Hundred, Foxton and Trumpington, do not have register transcripts (in any case Trumpington is very close to Cambridge itself and would probably therefore have a greater interaction with Cambridge than would the more distant parishes). Table 1 gives some indication of the sizes, both absolute and relative, of the eight parishes.

For the periods for which registers were kept to 1840, the only serious under-registration seems to be in Newton, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; as often the Civil War-Commonwealth period is sparse in entries, but this affects most of the eight parishes. (Non-conformity should also be borne in mind: Baptist chapels were founded at Harston in 1786 (a small graveyard dates from c. 1800) and at Great Shelford in 1825; Fowlmere and Thriplow have Congregational gatherings dating from 1780, Little Shelford from 1823; also in the large adjoining parish of Melbourn, south west of Fowlmere, a Baptist gathering dates from as early as 1675, and a Congregational one also from the late seventeenth century). As a simplification, then, we may regard Great Shelford as a large parish, Newton and Hauxton as small ones, and the other five as

THE PARISHES OF THE HUNDRED OF THRIFLOW

(CAMBRIDGE)



Scale $\frac{3}{4}$ " = 1 mile

TABLE 1

Parish	Population ² 1801	No. of persons ³ taxed 1664 Hearth Tax	Register ⁴ Entries to 1840	Date of first Register Entry
Fowlmere	420	44	4830	1561
Harston	412	55	4770	1599
Hauxton	144	28	2480	1560
Newton	114	29	1960 ⁵	1560
Gt. Shelford	570	72	8460	1557
Lt. Shelford	220	37	3940	1600
Stapleford	235	23	4410	1557
Thriplow	334	46	3930	1538

'average'-sized, relative descriptions which are still largely true today. The 1664 Hearth Tax figure for Stapleford does suggest that at that time it was only a 'small' parish. In this paper 'size' will normally refer to 'register-size', as indicated by the number of register entries.

The frequency of occurrence of each name was extracted from the indexes to the transcripts for three (somewhat arbitrary) periods: 1538-1640, 1641-1740, 1741-1840. Thus the start of the listing for Fowlmere is as follows:

	1538-1640	1641-1740	1741-1840
Adams	11	3	21
Aldred (Awdred)	46		
Allen	16		4

However, not all names were included in the analysis which was restricted to the commonest 50 names in each parish, in each period of 100 years.

2. Persistence of Names within a Parish

Table 2 shows for each parish the number of names in the top-fifty lists for (i) both first and second periods, (ii) both second and third periods, (iii) both first and third periods, (iv) all three periods, i.e. those in (iii) which are in the second period list also. The figures do not suggest any significant difference between 1538-1640/1641-1740 and 1641-1740/1741-1840. It might also be noted that the figures for the two 'small' parishes of Newton and Hauxton and for the 'large' parish of Great Shelford do not seem to be essentially any different from those of the other five parishes.

Two points may be of interest with regard to the last two columns of figures:

(a) the parish (Thriplow) with the largest figure in the third column, for 1538-1640/1741-1840 is, and was, arguably the most isolated of the eight parishes (Fowlmere, roughly equally distant from Cambridge, is on the old main route from Cambridge to London). Also, Thriplow's register dates from 1538, which in a sense pushes the first period back further than for other parishes.

TABLE 2

Parish	Number of Names Common to Lists for:			
	1538/1641 1640/1740	1641/1741 1740/1840	1538/1741 1640/1840	all 3 periods
Fowlmere	9	11	4	2
Harston	20	13	6	6
Hauxton	14	13	6	5
Newton	16	9	4	3
Gt. Shelford	14	15	6	5
Lt. Shelford	14	17	4	3
Stapleford	9	10	4	0
Thriplow	17	21	8	7
Averages	14.1	13.6	5.3	3.9

(b) the figure zero for Stapleford in the fourth column is a surprising one: not a single name ranks in the top fifty for all three periods; if we look in detail at the four names achieving top fifty status in both first and third periods, we see that the zero is no accident of chance. Their numbers of entries are:

	1538-1640	1641-1740	1741-1840
Barnes	44	—	42
Be(a)vis	35	4	28
Brown	9	1	24
Moore	18	—	20

Stapleford has no obvious under-registration. Perhaps the low 1664 Hearth Tax figure (Table 1) referred to in Section 1 gives a clue. Did Stapleford suffer some depopulation in say the fifty years or so before 1664, and regain its numbers, including at least some of the same families (e.g. Barnes, Moore) in the eighteenth century? Nonetheless the total number of entries in Stapleford's register for 1641-1740 is not unduly low (1,260, compared with for instance 1,400 for Little Shelford, 1,230 for Thriplow, 1,610 for Fowlmere). Moreover, no heavy mortality is apparent from the register. This would perhaps repay further study.

Lastly, for each parish, the names appearing in the third column of numbers of Table 2 were ranked according to their size in 1538-1640, to see if, as one might expect, the commonest names for 1538-1640 were the ones with the greatest chance of survival into the top-fifty for 1741-1840. The rankings are given in Table 3.

The 'halves' arise on account of 'tied' ranks: for instance in Stapleford, the name Brown ranks equal 36th, with five others, i.e. it ranks 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, jointly. $38\frac{1}{2}$ is the usual statistical compromise.

The average of the forty-two numbers in Table 3 is 21.80; if there were no tendency for the commonest names to be the surviving ones we should expect the average to be around the average of the numbers one to fifty, viz. 25.5. 21.80 as an average of

TABLE 3

Parish **Ranks in 1538-1640 of those surviving into 1741-1840 top fifty**

Fowlmere	32½, 32½, 41, 41
Harston	1½, 4, 5, 6½, 6½, 27½
Hauxton	2, 4, 16½, 21½, 29½, 46
Newton	3, 4, 21½, 33½
Gt. Shelford	22½, 27, 29½, 35½, 42, 46
Lt. Shelford	10½, 15½, 19½, 36
Stapleford	2, 4, 14½, 38½
Thriplow	1, 8, 13, 14, 28½, 32½, 48, 48

forty-two numbers each randomly in the range one to fifty is considerably less than 25.5.⁶ so we may be confident that the commoner names have a greater tendency to survive.

The six ranks above for the 'large' parish of Great Shelford are of special interest. Contrary to the general trend, Great Shelford's commonest names fail to survive, at least into the top fifty for 1741-1840. A similar comment may be made for Fowlmere, though here there are only four listed. One wonders if the size of Great Shelford made it act as a magnet for smaller parishes, with the result that its own earlier commonest names were superseded as 'leaders'. The proliferation of the name Dean there in the third period, referred to below in Section 3, suggests that the attraction of this large parish may have extended outside our area also.

If this was the situation in South Cambridgeshire it was not necessarily so in other parts of the country. Buckatzsch, for instance, found that surnames persisted to a much greater extent in Shap, Westmorland, than they did in Horringer, Suffolk. Accordingly it was decided to compare the Cambridgeshire villages with an area in North-west England and the chapelry of Colne in Lancashire was selected. The first register, covering the years 1599-1653 has been printed with an index, and the number of entries over this period is very similar to that for the 8 South Cambridgeshire parishes to 1640 from the start of their various registers.⁸ Table 4 shows what proportion of all entries in the register was taken up by common names of each area.

Table 4 serves to confirm and quantify a casual observation which one makes on looking at the names in registers in each of the two areas: put simply, there are many more names in the Cambridgeshire registers; indeed the comment is probably still valid with regard to present-day inhabitants of the two areas. In South Cambridgeshire the top fifty names account for only about 35 per cent of the entries, whereas those for Colne account for about two-thirds.

The periods are slightly different (various dates to 1640 for south Cambs. compared with 1599 to 1653 for Colne), and the approximate methods used at most stages of the numerical work suggest that all figures quoted as results must be viewed as having some possible error. However, the conclusion is inescapable that a name of the Lancashire area was on the whole likely to be possessed by more people than was the case in Cambridgeshire. If we agree that the more holders of a name there are, the more likely it is to survive (established for the individual parishes in the Cambridgeshire area from first to third periods), then we may have a partial explanation of the results of

TABLE 4

Rank	Name	Colne 1599-1653 percentage of total entries	Name	South Cambs. 1539-1640 percentage of total entries
1	Hartley	9.9	Prime	1.6
2	Hargreaves	4.2	Taylor	1.3
3	Smith	3.9	Fuller	1.3
4	Emmott	3.5	Rayment	1.2
5	Robinson	2.7	Newman	1.1
6	Blakey	2.5	Beavis	1.1
7	Baldwin	2.1	Rogers	1.1
8	Walton	1.9	(Gillson	1.0
9	Holgate	1.7	(Collis	1.0
10	Wilson	1.7	Barnes	0.95
20		1.1		0.67
30		0.71		0.53
40		0.56		0.41
50		0.48		0.38

Buckatzsch, quoted earlier, for Shap and Horringer, if Horringer were not unlike the Cambridgeshire parishes, and Shap not unlike Colne.

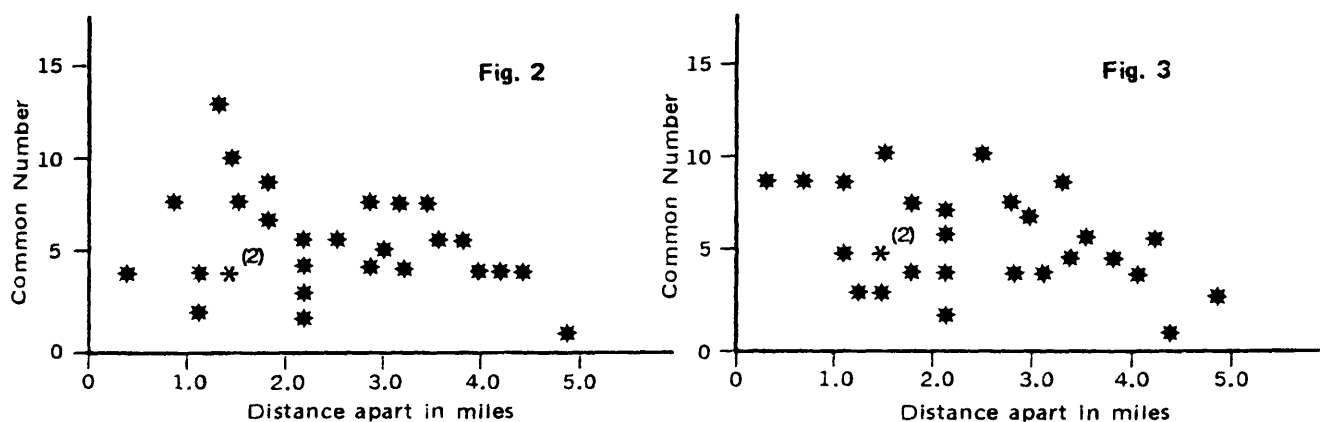
One may wonder why the Lancashire area should in the first place have its leading names so large numerically compared with Cambridgeshire: one might hazard the guess that the relative isolation of the northern area, in the Pennines (compared with south Cambridgeshire not more than fifty miles from London, and in the 'lowlands') would render the introduction of a new name (or the emigration of an inhabitant) a comparatively rare event: of course here we would be looking back into the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the isolation would be more pronounced.

Lastly with regard to Table 4, it may be remarked that Hartley (especially) and Hargreaves to this day present problems of identification in school class lists, bank accounts, sports teams, and the like, in N.E. Lancs. Attempts to work out genealogies for Hartley meet with tremendous difficulties. Most of the names in the top fifty list for Colne are still common in the area today, including such locally characteristic names as Bannister, Bulcock, Crossley, Foulds, Greenwood, Hanson, Kippax, Ridihalgh, Sagar, Tillotson and Whitaker as well as most of the top ten (Table 4). Two names however which ranked twentieth (C.110 entries) and twenty-ninth (C.70 entries) respectively, Acornley and Mancknolls, have either become rare or extinct. It is more difficult to gauge to what extent the Cambridgeshire names survive today as substantial as they were about 350 years ago, simply because as Table 4 shows, even the top name then only accounted for 1.6 per cent of the total entries. Incidentally, Rogers is a one-parish name (Gt. Shelford), 1538-1640, underlining the dangers in assuming the commonest names for the block of eight parishes are always to be found in the parish-pair lists of Section 3. (See below.)

Only two names achieve top-fifty status in both areas, namely Brown and Smith, the former being only the fiftieth in Colne. The only other names from the Colne top-fifty achieving top-fifty status for the first period in any single parish in the Cambridgeshire area are Parker (Stapleford), Robinson (Thriplow) and Watson (Fowlmere).

3. Names common to pairs of parishes at different periods, and the effect of distance apart

In our final section we turn to the question of surnames which were common to more than one parish in the sense that they were amongst the fifty most common names in each place. Figures 2-4 plot for each period (1538-1640, 1641-1740, 1741-1840) the number of such names for pairs of parishes according to distance apart.



Graphs of common number of surnames against distance apart for parish-pairs 1538-1640 and 1641-1740 using the top 50 names in each parish.

In each case the Figures indicate, as one would expect, that the number of common names tends to decrease as distance apart increases, and a statistical test confirms this.⁹

However, for a fixed (or roughly fixed) distance apart there is a considerable scatter of points: thus prediction of common number of names, given distance apart, in an area agreed to be similar to this one in its surname distribution characteristics (e.g. other rural areas nearby), could take place only within fairly broad limits.

Another interesting conclusion, reached by comparing one Figure with another, is that the number of common names increases over time, particularly between the second and third periods. A number of factors need to be considered in attempting to explain this. On the one hand some names die out, at least in the eight parishes, for instance the name Aldred already alluded to (in the first three Fowlmere names). On the other hand other names come into the area from outside: a striking example of this is Dean(s),

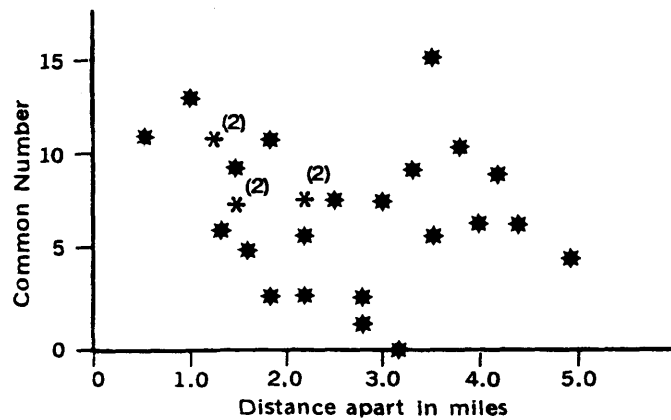


Fig. 4
Graph of Common Number of Surnames against
Distance apart for parish-paires, 1741-1840
(Using top 50 names in each parish).

which features in the top fifty for 1741-1840 in three parishes, including a massive 117 in Gt. Shelford, but has no entries at all, at least in these three parishes, in the first two periods. If these were the only two factors at work, we could probably argue plausibly that the extinction one was stronger than the incoming one. However, a third factor, possibly the most important, will also be at work, namely the spread within the area itself of names, from, for instance, one parish's top fifty in 1538-1640, to three in 1641-1740, to four in 1741-1840. This precisely happens with the name Cooper, for example. In other words, it may be that in earlier times names were rather more likely to be concentrated in and so identified with just one parish. Possibly this is due to the fact that as the years went by movement from parish to parish became easier, literally in terms of better roads, etc., 'legally', in terms of less strict Poor Law regulations regarding settlement, and economically with a generally increasing real wealth.

There are one or two interesting counter-examples to the general trend in the numbers of common names, notably Fowlmere/Harston (1538-1640: 7; 1641-1740: 4; 1741-1840: 0), Harston/Thriplow (7, 8, 2 respectively) and perhaps Harston/Hauxton (12, 3, 6 respectively). The figure of zero for Fowlmere/Harston, 1741-1840, is most remarkable. Did Harston gradually over the years lessen its links with, at least, Fowlmere and Thriplow? The set of three figures for Fowlmere/Thriplow (10, 3, 9 respectively) is also rather puzzling, although this is a reaction provoked by the small middle number. Incidentally, with regard to this pair it should be remarked that the parish boundary between the two passes within one or two hundred yards of Fowlmere's church: a part of 'Fowlmere' is appropriately named 'Little Thriplow'.

Finally, it may be of interest to Cambridgeshire readers and others to peruse a list of the common names appearing in four or more parishes:

1538-1640: 4 Brown, Newman, Prime, Taylor.

5 Adams, Collis.

1641-1740: 4 Brown, Cock(s), Green, Nor(th)field, Prime, Smith, Whitby, Wright.

5 Clarke, Saunders.

1741-1840: 4 Andrews, Cock(s), Cooper, Hagger, Nor(th)field, Rayner, Scott, Turner, Wallis, Wright.

5 King, Smith.

6 Clarke.

There are other variations in spelling than those given.

Of course these names are not necessarily the overall most frequent ones in the area in the periods.

4. *Summary*

The main conclusions reached in Sections 2 and 3 are the following:

(a) in general, the commonest names of a parish have the greatest tendency to persist, but in the case of the only 'large' parish this does not apply;

(b) differences with regard to persistence of names in different areas of the country may be due to some extent to the fact that the proportion of the population bearing the commonest names varies from area to area;

(c) the number of names common to pairs of parishes tends to decrease as distance apart increases, though there is considerable variation in common number for a given distance apart;

(d) the number of names common to a specific pair of parishes tends to increase with time, though there are some striking exceptions.

One would welcome investigations on similar lines for comparably-sized areas in different parts of the country: one of the features of this sort of work is that the worker, particularly perhaps if he is only an enthusiastic amateur, as the present author, tends to work in isolation, and hence evolve his own methods. This has of course advantages, but it may be a drawback that the results of two such workers may not easily be comparable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Notes

1. Transcriptions and Indexes by Mr. T. P. R. Layng, deposited in the Cambridgeshire Record Office.
2. *Victoria County History, Cambridgeshire, Vol. 2*, p. 138.
3. PRO E.179/84/437. (Hearth Tax). This is actually the Michaelmas 1662 Assessment, as revised Michaelmas 1664.
4. The figures are estimates based on counting pages of the transcript.
5. Newton's registers are only transcribed to 1829.
6. The standard error of the mean is 2.22.
7. E. J. Buckatzsch, 'The Constancy of Local Populations and Migration in England before 1800', *Population Studies*, July 1951.
8. The original register, in excellent condition, is with the incumbent at Colne. The transcript was made for the Lancashire Parish Register Society, 1904.
3. The Kendall rank correlation coefficients for common number of names against distance are -0.14 , -0.20 , -0.21 for the periods in chronological order. Although none of these three coefficients are individually significantly different from zero at the 5% level (the latter two are close), taken as a set of three the coefficients are different from zero at a high level of significance.

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