

POPULATION MOBILITY IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 1578-1583

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'The most important source for migration in England before 1640' is how one historian describes the ecclesiastical court deposition books, the reference being specifically to the biographical statements which witnesses in civil suits were normally required to make.¹ The one slim volume of depositions which is all that survives for the archdeaconry of Buckingham covers the period 1578-84.² The 143 witnesses divide into the following occupations:

Table 1 Occupations of Witnesses ³

Gentry	5
Yeomen	4
Husbandmen	56
Labourers	9
Servants (including one shepherd)	10
Tradesmen and dealers	18
Others (one apparitor, one scrivener)	2
Not stated	29
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	143

How much allowance should be made for bias in this sample is a question of some difficulty. In general there is likely to have been a preference for the mature, independent witness whose words would carry weight with the judge. The most usual means of discrediting hostile testimony is to impute poverty or some other form of dependence; in several instances individual witnesses are even called upon to declare the value of their assets as a measure of their trustworthiness. Lack of discretion is alleged against the testimony of one witness, a boy of eighteen, though, equally, the extreme age of another is objected to on the same count.⁴

The sort of person called as a witness also depended to some extent upon the type of case being heard. Although the range of ecclesiastical court actions was strictly limited, their incidence might well vary with time and place.⁵ About half the Buckinghamshire witnesses were involved in tithe cases in which there was a strong rural bias; witnesses to local customs form a fair proportion of this group, long residence being an obvious advantage; of the remainder, half were involved in defamation cases (the most random group), the rest being matrimonial (mostly breach of promise) and testamentary actions, and a solitary case of dilapidation to church property.

One other sort of bias which must also be mentioned is the geographical distribution of witnesses. The great majority are drawn from the northern, lowland, half of the county. The total number living in parishes lying wholly south of the Chiltern escarpment is under twenty, of which six are from the borough of High Wycombe. This discrepancy reflects an imbalance in the relative number of cases relating to the two areas and can hardly be chance but is not readily explicable.⁶

The general accuracy of the information given by witnesses about themselves has to be assumed,⁷ but is not necessarily complete in regard to moves made. Indeed, apart from those who state that they have lived in a particular place 'since birth', not many of the deponents unambiguously trace their movements back to their native parishes. Frequently only the length of present residence and place of birth are stated and this could imply one move or several. Once again the context is often important. Witnesses who had moved several times in their lifetime probably tended to mention only those moves which seemed relevant to the matter in hand.⁸ It is significant that the witness who declares the largest number of moves was involved in a case concerning events which had taken place some fifteen years previously.

Table 2 Number of parishes lived in

1 parish only	28	19.6%
1 parish 'nearly all life'	6	4.2%
2 parishes	2)	66.4%
2 parishes (at least)	93)	
3 parishes (at least)	12	8.3%
Over 3 parishes	2	1.3%
	<u>143</u>	<u>99.8%</u>

In the above table those persons who state that they have lived in a particular parish all their lives except for a specified number of years have been placed in line two if the number of years is three or less, otherwise in line four. Altogether there are fourteen people (9.8 per cent) in lines three — five who, at the time of deposing, are back in their native parishes. This gives a total of 33 per cent who can be said to have remained linked to one parish.

In terms of distances travelled from place of birth, reckoning from point to point and ignoring intermediate moves, the overall picture is as shown below.

Table 3 Distances travelled from birthplace

	Men	Percentages
Distance to next parish	12	15.2
1 – 5 miles	9	11.4
6 – 10 miles	19	24.1
11 – 15 miles	14	17.7
16 – 20 miles	4	5.1
21 – 30 miles	5	6.3
31 – 40 miles	2	2.5
Over 40 miles	14	17.7
	79	100

(Places not identified: 2)

It will be seen that distances of fifteen miles or under account for 68.4 per cent of the total. A striking feature is the high percentage of distances of over forty miles.

Of the 127 persons whose place of birth is recorded, forty-two were born outside the county border, including one resident of Steeple Claydon born in Calais. They are divided among thirteen counties, as below:⁹

Table 4 Counties of Origin of Witnesses born outside Bucks.

Oxfordshire	9	Gloucestershire	1
Northants	8	Worcestershire	1
Herts.	4	Shropshire	1
Beds.	4	Notts.	1
Berks.	4	Staffs.	1
Warwicks.	4	Monmouthshire	1
		Denbighshire	1

There is a marked predominance of movement from the north and west, all the non-adjacent counties affected lying in these two directions. (For some of the natives of Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, and Bedfordshire emigration to Buckinghamshire meant a journey of only a few miles.)

Within the county, the examples are too dispersed for any clear local directional pattern to be apparent but it may be significant that there is only one example of a move from the southern, or Chiltern half of the county, which is not from a 'borderline' parish.

Of individual occupational groups, it is clear that the husbandmen, the largest group, were also proportionally the most stable; of the forty-two who can be analysed, nearly half (eighteen) did not move at all, while almost all the remainder recorded moves of fifteen miles or less. Tradesmen were proportionately the most mobile group, reckoning both by number of migrants and distance travelled. They account for five of the eleven migrants over forty miles whose occupations are known, the others comprising two gentlemen, two servants, a husbandman and a labourer.

The 'biographies' are silent about the reasons for the moves which they record, but occasionally a witness's evidence contains clues to his motives. More rarely, it is possible to bring to bear information from other surviving sources such as parish registers and wills to illuminate the circumstances of a particular case.

In the category of long-distance (forty miles plus) migrants, as we have seen, tradesmen predominated. Here one tiler, Nicholas Norman from Berkshire, for example, stated that he was employed by John (later Sir John) Fortescue who was then engaged in building his great manor at Salden.¹⁰ Numerous other less magnificent rural residences erected or improved in the period must have created a demand for skilled craftsmen.

Another long-distance migrant was John Ilove, husbandman, of Wolverton, aged 24, from Atherstone, Warwicks, and in his case we have the definite information that his wealth in goods amounted to a mere five shillings, deducting debts. In this instance it is also possible to piece together some of the circumstances surrounding the move. He had come to Wolverton three and a half years before, in or about the year 1580, at which time, as we discover from his evidence, he had been employed for a year as a shepherd by 'Mr. Longfield', otherwise, Sir Henry Longueville, lord of the manor. From other sources we know that Sir Henry was engaged in a violent dispute with his manorial tenants who accused him of seeking to deprive them of their common rights to certain pastures in the parish. In 1584, a chancery action was commenced on behalf of the tenants and prominent among the grievances recited in the formal bill of complaint was the allegation that Sir Henry had employed 'unknown or poor persons' to expel the animals of the townsfolk from the enclosed pastures.

It would seem, then, that Sir Henry had good reason for employing outsiders, and the circumstances were probably not unusual, for Buckinghamshire was among the counties most affected by enclosures in this period.¹² It is possibly not a coincidence that the Longuevilles also held estates in the same hundred of Warwickshire from which John Ilove came.¹³ The case is a reminder that the far flung operations of some of the gentry must have often affected the lives of people lower down in the social scale and that not all long-distance moves were as casual as they might appear on the surface.

Short distance migration was both more common than long distance and more complex, since factors such as marriage, kinship obligations, and inheritance customs were much more operative than was likely to be the case over longer distances, except perhaps where the wealthier gentry were concerned. The phenomenon of the returning migrant already mentioned is most readily accounted for in terms of kinship ties of one sort or another, though for only one case in our sample is corroborative evidence of this forthcoming (see the reference below to Angelo Martyn). In twelve instances the information given is precise enough to enable us to calculate the approximate age on return to the native parish. Two of the returns took place in childhood and so must be discounted; of the remainder, all but two, and in both cases special circumstances can be discerned, took place at varying ages between eighteen and thirty-four. The ages of leaving home seem to have been equally diverse. One returned migrant, William Stappe, husbandman, of Pitchcott, aged about forty in 1583, had previously been a servant. He specifies four moves lasting from one to eight years each, beginning at the age of eighteen or nineteen and ending with his return to Pitchcott when aged around thirty-four. At no time during the whole period was he living more than ten miles from his birthplace.¹⁴

An interesting feature of William Stappe's career is that his return to his native place is associated with his evolution from a servant living in other people's houses to the status of husbandman. How typical is he? While there is no evidence to indicate that more than a proportion of servants returned to their home parishes, there is sufficient to suggest that the progression from servant to husbandman was a familiar enough pattern for we have at least two other examples of the process.¹⁵ It is significant that all eight servants in our sample were under thirty; for most men, service was a period of youthful apprenticeship rather than a permanent condition. Servants in husbandry were hired by the year, a situation which encouraged mobility.

Marriage as a motive or occasion for a change of residence follows naturally from consideration of servants, for marriage must have played a crucial role in determining where and when a servant settled. Significantly, at least two of the nine actions for breach-of-promise to marry involved servants as principals, as in the case which involved the aptly named Thomas Trewlove. Or he might do better and in true storybook fashion marry his master's daughter. Joan Wheeler, daughter of 'Goodman' Wheeler of Radnage, was alleged to have promised to marry William Goodale, a servant in her father's house; her father had insisted on a year's delay, saying she was too young.¹⁶ Other men, besides servants, might change their abode as a result of marriage. The five years which Richard Ardres, gentleman, spent at Turvey and Harrold in Bedfordshire before returning to his native Sherington in or about the year 1578 are doubtless to be explained by his marriage to Margaret Arderne of Turvey.¹⁷

Death was another frequent cause of movement within the family network in an age of high mortality. Angelo Martyn's return to his native Brill where he had been staying for three-quarters of a year, in the house of Agnes Martyn, widow, his sister-in-law, is explained by the death, a few months before, of his brother, Gilbert, a husbandman. Gilbert's will names his brother as overseer and residuary trustee for his two infant children, George and Frideswith.¹⁸

Economic change, as distinct from perennial misfortunes such as bad harvests, was a possible cause of enforced migration. Such migration would, as often as not, be short distance in character. It would also tend to be uneven in incidence — like enclosure itself. Dr. Chibnall has shown how Sherington, a parish in which enclosure was successfully resisted in this period, was to be subject, a little later, to excessive immigration from surrounding parishes in which enclosure had taken place.¹⁹ Enclosure was not, however, the only economic movement tending to separate the husbandman from his holding. The engrossing of farms by landlords bent on taking advantage of the rising demand for agricultural produce could have a similar effect if in a less dramatic fashion. Two fairly clear examples of this sort of migration can be identified.

Both related to the open field parish of Marsh Gibbon near the Oxfordshire border. The first concerns Thomas Neale, husbandman, aged fifty-eight, living in 1584 in the adjoining parish of Pounden. Until two years before, he had lived at Marsh Gibbon for forty-six years and had been the occupier of a substantial holding of one and a quarter yardlands (about forty to fifty acres). His departure from the parish was, he tells, the result of his landlord's having taken the holding into his own hands. The same fate had befallen Thomas Butter twelve years previously. Now a labourer of sixty, living in the adjoining parish of Edgecott, he had then held one and a half yardlands. He had lived in Marsh for six years, so must have come there in about 1566; his birthplace was Burwick in Oxfordshire, approximately nineteen miles to the south-west. Both men had held their

lands from the Howell family, lords of the manor of Westbury, the smaller of the two manors in the parish. Both had been induced to testify in a case of disputed tithe. Their holding had been added to the desmesne, though it emerges from the evidence that neither was in fact within the manor of Westbury.²⁰

The individual cases we have looked at, while too few in number to afford a coherent picture, give some insight into the variety of motives for migration and in particular the part played in local migration by continuing social and economic patterns in relation to marriage, the family and service. The extent to which these structural factors favouring a degree of local migration were being modified or overlaid by other factors such as the overall growth in population or by prevailing economic conditions remains problematic. It should be remembered, too, that the degree of mobility suggested by our analysis of witnesses, while impressively high, is likely, for the reasons given, to be an understatement of the situation among the rural population at large, especially in regard to long-distance migration.

Notes

1. Peter Clark, 'The Migrant in the Kentish Towns, 1580-1640' in *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700*, ed. P. Clark and P. Slack, 1972, p. 118. This study makes use of a large quantity of surviving Kentish biographies. An analysis of a smaller group of Sussex biographies is to be found in Julian Cornwall, 'Evidence of Population Mobility in the Seventeenth Century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Vol. XL, 1967, pp. 143-152.
2. Buckinghamshire Record Office (hereinafter given as BRO) D/A/C/23, commissary court of the archdeaconry of Buckingham, depositions, 1578-84. The archdeaconry was virtually coterminous with the county but several parishes, including the town of Aylesbury and the borough of Buckingham, were peculiars and three parishes were in the archdeaconry of St. Albans. It should be noted that not all the witnesses were resident in Bucks at the same time; ten were living just outside the county boundary at the time of deposing.
3. In a few cases the occupation, although not given in the 'biography', is clear from the evidence and has been supplied. Occasionally, too, one or other piece of standard biographical information (usually occupation or birthplace) is missing, so that the number usable for any specific analysis varies.
4. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.11.46.
5. For a consideration of general trends in church court business after 1560, see R. A. Marchant, *The Church Under the Law: Justice, Administration and Discipline in the Diocese of York, 1560-1640*, 1969, pp. 61-63. Among the more striking developments was the enormous expansion of tithe and defamation cases; the former appear to have reached a peak in the first decade of the seventeenth century.
6. To some extent it reflects the actual distribution of the population which was still heavily in favour of the north in spite of evidence of considerable migration into the Chilterns during the period between 1377 and 1522. See J. Cornwall, 'English Population in the Early Sixteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, Vol. XXIII, 1970, p. 43. Urban dwellers are also likely to be under-represented (see note 2 above).
7. Ages are frequently given in round numbers, often with the addition of 'or thereabouts' (*vel circiter*). In the few cases where it has been possible to check ages against the appropriate parish register they have been found to correspond fairly closely. For example, John Nelson gave his age in 1581 as thirty while the entry of baptism in the register of his native Wolverton is dated April 1549, which makes him thirty two. A similar two-year understatement was found for two others in this age group — William Shepherd of Stewkley and Thomas Rigall of Mentmore, (born at Wing).
8. Richard Ardress, makes no mention of the period which we know from other sources he spent at University in Cambridge in his youth. On the other hand, the claim of the eighty-year-old immigrant to the county, Thomas Paxon of Ludgershall, to a sixty year residence is confirmed by the muster roll of 1522, A. C. Chibnall (ed.) *The Certificate of Musters for Buckinghamshire in 1522*, 1973, p. 148. (He had neither lands nor goods so was probably a servant).
9. Two places, Thorpe and Wyggle, both stated to be in Hertfordshire could not be identified and have been omitted from table 3; the possibility of scribal error cannot be excluded. 'Farningho', Oxfordshire, has been taken to mean Farthingho, Northants, which is not far from the Oxfordshire border.

10. BRO, D/A/C/23 fol.68; DNB; Sir Frank Markham, *A History of Milton Keynes and District*, vol. 1, 1973, p. 175.
11. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.110; Markham, p. 156.
12. See W. E. Tate, *A Handlist of Buckinghamshire Enclosure Acts and Awards*, 1946, p. 20.
13. *The Victorian History of the County of Warwick*, vol. IV, 1947, p. 249.
14. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.114v.
15. One is John Ilove already mentioned; the other is John Nelson, husbandman of Ravenstone, formerly a servant in the house of John Escall in the same parish. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.55v-56v.
16. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.55v., 33v. Trewlove and Goodale were both parties to actions, as distinct from witnesses.
17. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.95v; A. C. Chibnall, *Sherrington: Fiefs and Fields of a Buckinghamshire Village*, 1965, pp. 184-185.
18. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.89v-90v; BRO, D/A/Wf/9/135.
19. Chibnall, *Sherrington*, p. 200ff.
20. BRO, D/A/C/23, fol.126-128, 131v-137v.