

A NOTE ON THE LIFE-TIME MOBILITY OF MARRIED WOMEN IN A PARISH POPULATION IN THE LATER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Although few people still subscribe to the view that parishes in the past were largely closed communities so that most of their inhabitants were born, grew up, married, laboured and died all in the same place, precise knowledge of the frequency and distance of migratory movements is hard to come by. In this matter 1851 marks a great divide. Then for the first time the head of each household was required to record on the census schedule the place of birth of each person resident in his house on census night. With sufficient labour, therefore, the census enumerators books can be made to yield as full a picture as may be required of the patterns of movement from birth to census night of all those alive on that date.¹ Even this leaves much unclear since changes of residence occurring between birth and the census date go unrecorded. For some purposes it is essential to know the life-cycle pattern of migration and not just its end product, so to speak, but compared with what is available to be studied for any date before 1851, the wealth of data for 1851 is striking.

Before 1851 the census-like listings of inhabitants which survive never include information about place of birth, though a few exceptional listings do show place of residence of family members who were no longer living in their parish of birth.² Other sources give a comparative wealth of information — for example the apprenticeship records of London companies, or the biographical details included in depositions made in ecclesiastical courts — but in general they cover only select groups within the population. Moreover, they relate either exclusively or primarily to men rather than women.

The only major exception to the rule of partial coverage is to be found in the marriage registers of a small proportion of parishes which indicate the parish of current residence of the bride and groom. This may give an illuminating picture of the part played by marriage in re-shuffling populations.³ Both sexes are covered but marriage registers do not directly indicate the typical pattern of permanent settlement after marriage because couples often settled in a different parish from that in which the marriage took place.

Something can be done to reduce the uncertainty about the proportion of the adult population of a parish which was born locally by considering

the proportion of those married in the parish whose names can be traced in the baptism register. This statistic is a by-product of family reconstitution and serves to underline the absence of closed populations in the past. In the case of brides the percentage whose baptisms can be traced seems rarely to exceed forty and may fall as low as fifteen or twenty even in rural parishes (the comparable figures for men are commonly lower still). But this is a very clumsy measure, both because the problems of record linkage involved are such that the 'true' percentage would normally be higher than the apparent level, and because many brides leave the parish in which they were married soon after the wedding to settle elsewhere.

Occasionally there is more direct and complete evidence to be had from parish registers, and in such cases the female population may be better covered than the male. This is true of a short period in the register of Colyton, Devon. This note is intended to describe the nature of the information available and the evidence it affords about the pattern of life-time migration of married women in the later eighteenth century.

The information is drawn from the baptism register of the parish between 8 April 1765 and the end of 1777. During these dozen years it was normal practice to give the name, occupation and parish of the mother's father in addition to very full details about the father and mother themselves. The form of entry suggests that the incumbent had in mind the maternal grandfather's parish of habitual residence. The register therefore provides direct evidence about the wife's parish of origin.⁴ With sufficient labour it would be possible to check this by searching the registers of parishes named for the wife's baptism, but I have not done this. The following is a typical entry of the period:

'Mary daughter of James Drewe husbandman by Mary his wife daughter of Joseph Sydenham of the parish of Southleigh yeoman was born the 22^d of November 1770 and baptized the first of January following'.

Where the maternal grandfather's name and occupation are given but no parish of residence is mentioned I have assumed that the woman was a Colytonian. This is more easily checked and appears to be an accurate assumption.⁵

Table 1 shows the number of maternal grandfathers whose names appear in the baptism register and whose place of residence was a parish other than Colyton, together with the number of those presumed to be Colyton men. I assume that it gives a reliable indication of the place of birth of the mothers in question, and thus of the life-time mobility at the time of childbirth of the population of married women of childbearing age. This is a sweeping assumption. In a proportion of cases the maternal grandfather's parish of habitual residence may not have been the place where the daughter in question was born, because the parents did not stay in one parish throughout their early married life but probably the proportion of such cases was small. Reconstitution offers some supporting evidence for this view since a high proportion of all married couples were buried in the parish where they were married when their first child was also baptised there. It should be noted that the Colyton baptism register

always names the maternal grandfather and gives supporting detail even though in half or more cases he must have been dead at the time.

Table 1 Origin of Colyton wives from baptism register entries, 1765-1777.

Wife's father's parish of residence		No.
Colyton		164
Parishes wholly or partly within 5 miles of Colyton parish church		
Axminster	15	
Shute*	14	
Stockland	14	
Kilminster	12	
Northleigh*	10	
Southleigh*	10	
Widworthy*	8	
Seaton and Beer*	7	
Sidbury	7	
Combpyne	7	
Axmouth*	4	
Musbury*	4	
Offwell	4	
Honiton	3	
Farway*	2	
Dalwood	2	
Monkton	2	
		125
Other parishes wholly or partly within 10 miles of Colyton parish church		
Upottery	7	
Luppitt	6	
Chard, Som.	5	
Sidmouth	3	
Thorncombe, Som.	2	
Salcombe	2	
Yarcombe	2	
Combe Raleigh	2	
Buckerell	1	
Awliscombe	1	
Newton Popleford	1	
Dunkeswell	1	
Broadhembury	1	
Payhembury	1	
Whitchurch, Dorset	1	
		36
Other parishes		41
Not stated		4
Total		370

*parish contiguous with Colyton

Baptisms of illegitimate children or of children whose mothers were illegitimate are excluded from the table since there is no information relevant to the table in these cases. Where more than one child from the same family was baptised on the same day, as for example following the birth of twins, the entry has been treated like an entry referring to a single child. The table is based on 370 baptism entries. In four cases there is an incomplete entry in which the wife's father is not named and these appear in table 1 as 'not stated'. The remaining 366 entries either name a parish other than Colyton as the wife's father's residence, or, by

omitting reference to a parish of residence, leave it to be assumed that her father was a Colyton man. In 202 of the 366 cases, or 55 per cent, the wife was a 'foreigner'. Most of these wives came from close by. 125 of the 202, or 62 per cent, came from parishes within five miles, and a further 36 or 18 per cent came from an outer tier of parishes between five and ten miles from the Colyton parish church.⁶ The remaining forty-one (20 per cent) came from further afield. All these came from Devon, Dorset or Somerset parishes, except for one woman from the Isle of Wight. Almost all were from parishes within a radius of twenty-five miles from Colyton.

The table is not, of course, a reliable guide to the relative importance of **individual** parishes in the overall pattern of migration into Colyton both because the numbers are small and because one wife of high fecundity whose early married life fell within the twelve year period might easily appear half a dozen times in the baptism register, where another of lower fecundity or at a different point in her married life, might appear only once or twice. The relative importance of the successive concentric bands is, however, probably accurately captured by the table. There appear also to have been sectoral differences in the size of migration flows. A narrow belt of parishes immediately to the north of

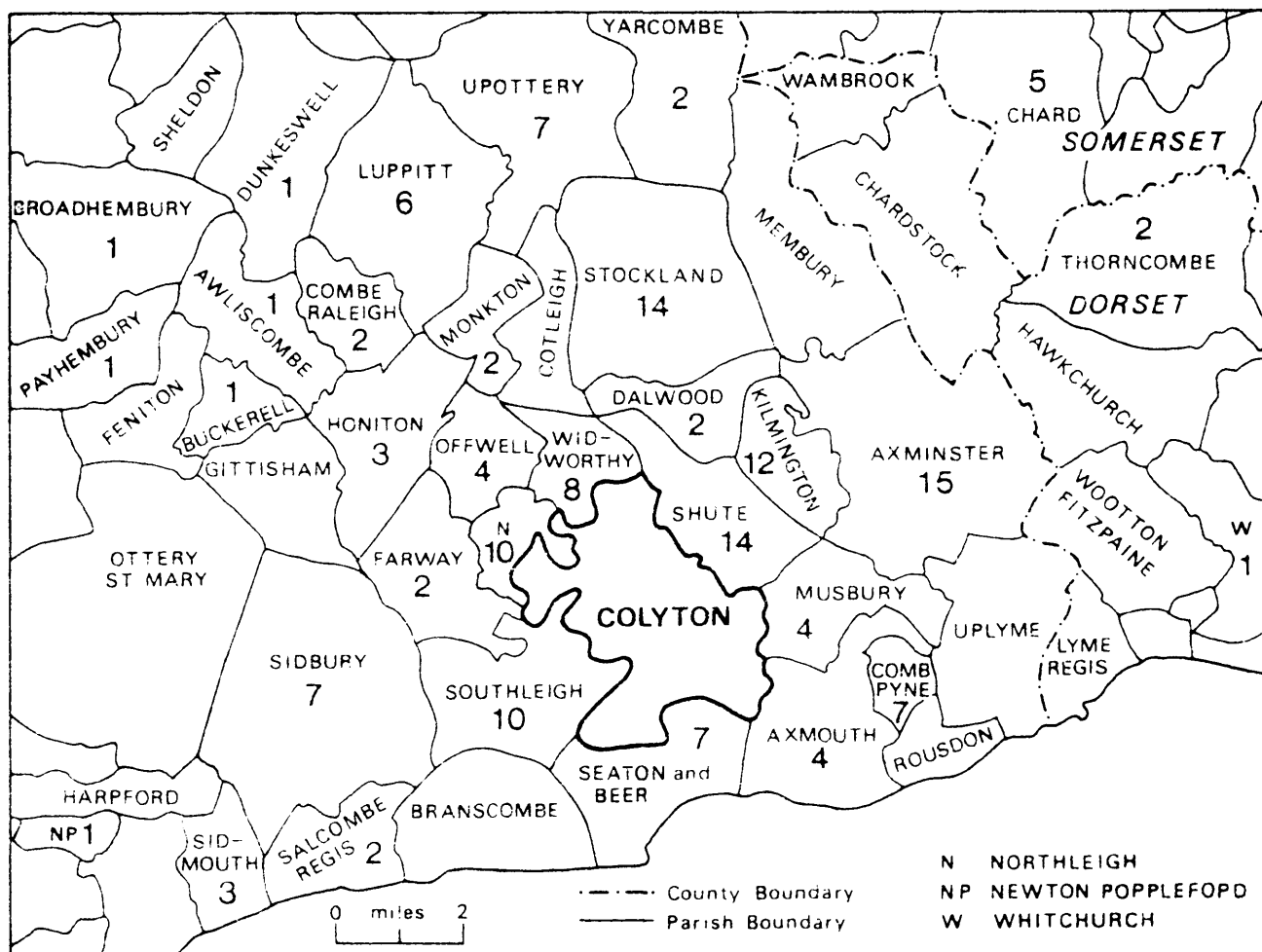


Fig 1 — Origin of Colyton wives from parishes within 10 miles of Colyton parish church (see Table 1).

Colyton (Northleigh, Offwell, Widworthy, Shute, Dalwood, Kilmington, Stockland, Monkton, Luppitt and Upottery) contributed seventy-nine of the 202 baptisms to 'foreign' wives, a much larger number than were to be found in other sectors centred on Colyton.

In about a tenth of the entries used for table 1 the father of the child baptised is recorded as living in a parish other than Colyton and in these cases there is a rather greater likelihood that his wife is also from another parish. The details are set out in table 2. It will be seen that even when such cases are excluded the percentage of 'foreign' wives is not greatly changed.

Table 2 Origin of Colyton wives in mid-eighteenth century

	All entries	Husband's residence not Colyton		Husband's residence Colyton	
		%	%	%	%
Colyton	164	45	11	34	46
Other	202	55	21	66	54

That a significant number of baptism entries related to couples who were not resident in Colyton is an interesting point in its own right. Over the same period covered by table 1, 8.9 per cent of all entries (thirty-three out of 370) concerned a child whose parents lived outside Colyton. I have shown elsewhere that in the early nineteenth century many people had their children baptised in a 'foreign' parish.⁷ That study does not yield a directly comparable figure but it suggests, for example, that about 5 per cent of all children born in Colyton at this period were baptised in neighbouring parishes. The baptism register of Colyton in the 1760s and 1770s contains clear evidence that this habit was as widespread in the middle decades of the eighteenth century as it was two generations later. It would be interesting to know whether this is true of the whole parish register period, and therefore any register which was kept in a way which enables the issue to be examined for the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries would be a valuable 'find'.

The mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries can also be compared in regard to the mobility of married women in the parish population. The 1851 census enumerators' books show marital status and place of birth so that the information exists to permit the birthplaces of all married women of child-bearing age to be tabulated. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the birthplaces of married women in Colyton who were under forty-five years of age — the group within the married population in the years of child-bearing. This is closely similar in coverage to the mothers appearing in table 1. Comparison of tables 1 and 3 shows how little the pattern of life-cycle mobility of married women had changed over the 80 years before 1851. The relative importance of individual parishes of origin varied somewhat in the two lists though the numbers are too small for any significance to be attached to these changes. The northern sector no longer contributed disproportionately to the migration flow into Colyton, and in the residual list of 'other parishes' there was a larger number of women from a considerable distance (Middlesex 1, Kent 1, Cornwall 1, Ireland 2). But the overall lack of change is much more striking than such minor differences from the earlier pattern. Table 4 may serve to summarise this point. Even the slight fall in the

Table 3 Origin of Colyton wives under 45 from 1851 census enumerator's book

Parish of origin		Colyton		91	
Within 5 miles ¹				Within 10 miles ²	
Shute*	13	Ottery St. Mary	5		
Seaton and Beer*	11	Gittisham	3		
Axmouth*	9	Broadhembury	3		
Musbury*	9	Sidmouth	2		
Axminster	8	Chardstock, Dorset	2		
Southleigh*	5	Lyme Regis, Dorset	1		
Farway*	5	Chard, Som.	1		
Sidbury	4	Salcombe	1		
Northleigh*	3	Upottery	1		
Branscombe	3	Hawkchurch	1		
Offwell*	2	Whitchurch, Dorset	1		
Stockland	2	Awliscombe	1		
Membury	2	Luppitt	1		
Kilmington	1	Yarcombe	1	24	
Honiton	1	Other parishes	26		
Combyne	1	Total	221		
Uplyme	1			80	

¹ Parishes wholly or partly within 5 miles of Colyton parish church

² Other parishes wholly or partly within 10 miles of Colyton parish church

* Parish contiguous with Colyton

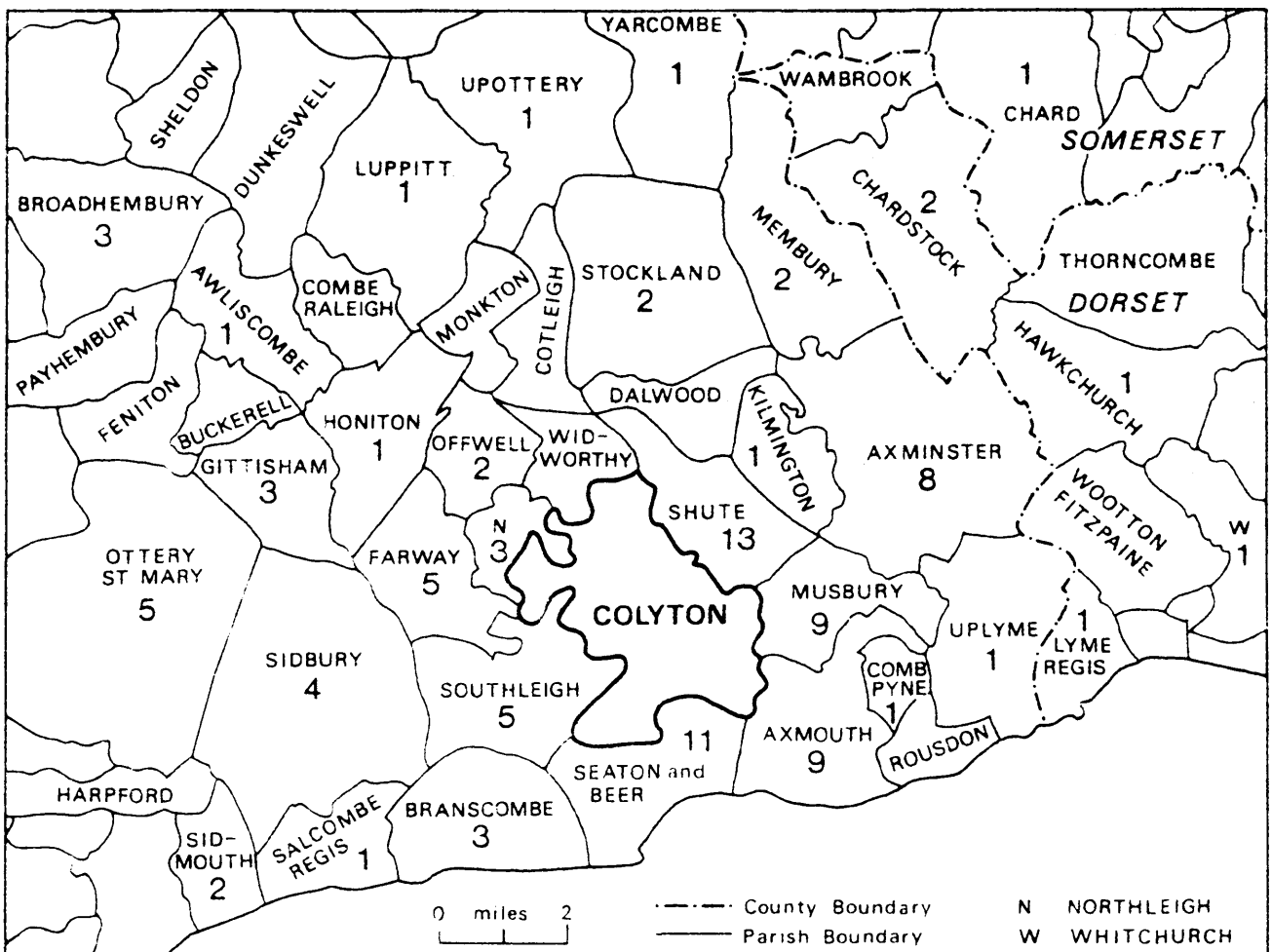


Fig 2 — Origin of Colyton wives under 45 in 1851 from parishes within 10 miles of Colyton parish church (see Table 2).

Table 4 Comparison of origins of Colyton wives between mid-eighteenth century and 1851.

	Baptism register 1765-77		Census 1851	
	No.	%	No.	%
All wives				
Colyton	164	45	91	41
Parishes within 5 miles	125	34	80	36
Parishes within 10 miles	36	10	24	11
Other parishes	41	11	26	12
Total	366	100	221	100
'Foreign' wives				
Parishes within 5 miles	125	62	80	62
Parishes within 10 miles	36	18	24	18
Other parishes	41	20	26	20
Total	202	100	130	100

percentage of local-born wives in the 1851 census may be more apparent than real in that a larger proportion of the children of 'foreign' wives may have been baptised outside the parish, which would have had the effect of inflating the apparent importance of Colyton-born wives in 1765-78.

Within the group of 'foreign' wives the percentage share of parishes within five miles, within ten miles, and at a greater distance, did not change at all.

If in the course of time studies similar to this brief examination of the mobility of married women in Colyton were to be carried out for a substantial number of English parishes, particularly during the early decades of the industrial revolution, we should become much better informed about the degree of stability in local population movements which may have obtained even in periods of great upheaval in some aspects of social, political and economic life. Any great change in the proportion of 'foreign' mothers in a community seems likely to involve major changes in the quality of local life in other respects. Absence of change, on the other hand, given the part played by mothers in the socialisation of their children, may have wider implications for the ways in which the community adapts to the stresses of changing times.

NOTES

1. Far more will be known about these patterns of movement as revealed in the 1851 census when the major study directed by Dr. Michael Anderson of the University of Edinburgh and financed by the SSRC is completed.
2. See R. S. Schofield, 'Age-specific mobility in an eighteenth century rural English parish,' **Annales de démographie historique** (1970), pp. 261-74.
3. For an excellent review of existing knowledge about pre-industrial migration in England see Peter Spufford, 'Population mobility in pre-industrial England,' **Genealogists' Magazine** 17, No. 8 (1973), pp. 420-429; 17, No. 9 (1974), pp. 475-481; and 17, No. 10 (1974), pp. 537-43. See also C. F. Küchemann, A. J. Boyce and G. A. Harrison, 'A demographic and genetic study of a group of Oxfordshire villages' **Human Biology** 39, pp. 251-76, reprinted in M. Drake (ed), **Applied historical studies** (London, 1973), and B. Maltby, 'Parish registers and the problem of mobility,' **LPS** 6 (1971), pp. 32-42.
4. This type of information but covering **both** grandfathers was widely recorded in the 1790s and 1800s in parishes in the Durham diocese. I am indebted to Mrs. W. J. Hodgkiss for this information which suggests that a great opportunity awaits students of social and geographical mobility in this area and period.
5. An earlier exercise designed to check the accuracy of linkages made during family reconstitution provided indirect evidence on this point. I have not made further direct checks.
6. Drawing circles in this fashion is arbitrary and one or two parishes fall partly within each successive concentric circle whose main population centre may be outside the radius of the circle.
7. E. A. Wrigley, 'Baptism coverage in early nineteenth-century England: the Colyton area,' **Population Studies** 29, No. 2 (1975), pp. 299-316.