MOBILITY AND REGISTRATION IN THE NORTH IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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The exceptional detail contained in some registers of the north of England in the later eighteenth century has often been noted by archivists, genealogists and historians. The problems involved in giving legal proof of identity did not escape the notice of contemporaries either, and one of the purposes of Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1754 was ‘to preserve the evidence of marriages, and to make the proof thereof more certain and easy’ whilst a bill for registration of births and deaths at the same time failed to pass the House of Lords. The limitations of the registers, however, were not only apparent to legal minds, but also to the antiquaries who often had recourse to search the registers in compiling their local histories. Ralph Thoresby, in Ducatus Leodiensis published as early as 1715, had provided an improved form of registration which included dates of both birth and baptism, father’s name and occupation, mother’s name, and place of residence for each entry. This was the direct inspiration for the registers of the parish of Husthwaite near Thirsk where an improved version adding the mother’s maiden name, was adopted from 1769 in order ‘to afford much clearer intelligence to the researches of posterity.’ Of course, in line with the interests of the antiquaries, the research in mind was largely genealogical. It was presumably a refinement of this sort of register which Dr. Wrigley was able to exploit recently for his study of the life-time mobility of married women at Colyton in this period. Thoresby was not alone in his concern and another northern antiquary, William Dade of Barmston, who had direct experience of the problems of registration during his time as a curate in the city of York from 1763, devised a form of registration with even fuller information than Thoresby.

A new parish register was purchased for St. Helen’s church in Stonegate, York, when Dade became curate in 1770 and on the first page was inscribed a note; ‘the following method of ascertaining the births and baptisms, deaths and burials in this parish of St. Helen’s, York was introduced in 1770 by William Dade... curate of this church. This scheme, if properly put into execution, will afford much clearer intelligence to the researches of posterity than the imperfect method hitherto generally adopted’. The register was divided into columns for the information given; that for baptisms included child’s name and surname, father’s name, profession, descent and place of residence, mother’s name and descent and dates of birth and baptism; the burial information included the deceased’s occupation, residence, dates of death and burial, age at death and cause of death. The extent of detail is perhaps best illustrated by the first two full entries in each category:

Daniel Corsican, late of London, a coach trimmer to Mr. Cochran and a married man, of Swinegate died 14 January, buried 16 January 1770 in the new burying ground. Aged 30 years, Consumption

and their value is obvious for studies of both migration and mortality. It is with the former that I am particularly concerned. The detail provided in these baptismal registers, giving information on occupational status and residence for both grandparents and parents, opens up the exciting possibility of linking migration to social mobility through reference to occupational status. Dade, who compiled materials for a history of his native Holderness and was later elected an F.S.A., shared his post at St. Helen’s with another curacy at St. Olave’s, Marygate where the same policy was also adopted in 1770. His example was followed by one or two of his clerical friends in the city, but what really makes Dade’s initiative important is the influence which his principles had on the new archbishop of York in 1777, William Markham. Markham was impressed with the legal difficulties arising from insufficient registration and so, at his primary visitation of 1777, ordered that Dade’s scheme be put into practice throughout the diocese ‘as great complaints have arisen of the registers of marriages, births, and burials belonging to several parishes, being inaccurately kept and drawn out, so as not to identify and ascertain the persons etc., whereby they have not their due weight in point of evidence’. This confirms D. J. Steel’s suggestion that the uniformity of entries could be attributed to episcopal recommendation, but his view that the order was ‘largely ineffective’, happily needs to be reconsidered. Markham’s order gave the new form of register official support which was endorsed in the following year by the Dean and Chapter at the visitation of the parishes within their jurisdiction. The result was that Dade’s initiative was copied elsewhere, making the information available of more than local value to both contemporaries and historians. It is as well to examine the effect it had within the area of the present archdeaconry of York which covers an area within a radius of approximately fifteen miles from the city. The parish records of this area are deposited at the Borthwick Institute and, of 161 registers deposited from the archdeaconry, 82 give all details under Dade’s scheme whilst others, such as those for Crayke, provide some information, mostly concerning maternal descent or maiden name. Indeed local printers began to print registers arranged in columns with headings necessary for the scheme. The very layout of the registers encouraged better registration and they were purchased by over half the parishes examined. Of course not all parochial officials continued to use the system for the same period of time; as the table below shows there were considerable variations but the figures are still impressive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>No. of parishes</th>
<th>Percentage of archdeaconry population (1801 census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years plus</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778-1812 complete</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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They are even more so if, as in column three of our table, they are plotted against the 1801 census figures. The total population of the parishes covered by the survey was 86,233 in 180116 and the figures in the above table refer to the percentage of that population living in the parishes in each category. Thus, within the archdeaconry, 58.7 per cent of the population were affected by the new order to some extent and we have information for a period of more than ten years from parishes containing 42.7 per cent of the total population of the region. There were of course geographical variations within the archdeaconry, the order being less effective in parishes to the east and north of the city than in those in the city itself and to the west, but the coverage for the whole area remains impressive. Only five parishes with populations greater than 1000 in 1801 failed completely to comply with the order.15 Individual studies of particular parishes have already been undertaken by students in extra-mural classes or pursuing the applied historical studies course for the Open University,17 but the material offers scope for that study of inter-generational migration and social mobility in ‘an entire, close-knit geographical region during the generation from 1778 to 1812’ suggested by Dr. Holderness. This is considerably earlier than similar work based upon Census material, and a start has been made on the project. For York and its hinterland we can thank William Dade and William Markham for providing this opportunity, but did they know of precedents elsewhere, and do similar opportunities exist? I would be grateful for any information.18

NOTES

1. See for example, D. J. Steel, National Index of Parish Registers, i, 1968, p.44, he says that very full details are given ‘from about 1765’ in some Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Durham registers, though the examples he gives are taken from the period after 1778. A valuable article by B. A. Holderness, ‘Personal mobility in some rural parishes of Yorkshire,’ Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, vol. 42, 1970 pp. 444-54, exploits this detail using printed registers.


3. R. Thoresby, Ducatus Leodiensis, 1715, p.163, he gave examples and attributed the method to Thomas Kirke, esquire.


6. D.N.B.


8. Ibid. PR.Y/OL.5.

9. In 1773 at St Mary, Castlegate and St Cuthbert, see The Parish Register of St Mary Castlegate, York, ed. M. F. M. Mulgrew (Yorkshire Arch. Soc. Parish Register Section, vol. cxxxvi, 1972) and B.I. PR.Y/CUT.3.

10. See Ibid. PR.ALN.4; and the note in PR.K/W.4, which mentions the visitation.

11. Steel, p.44.

12. York Minster Library, C/3a, Printed visitation articles of Dean Fountaine, 1778.
13. Some were in fact purchased by parishes which did not comply with the full details of the order. Several parishes did give additional information on descent than had previously been the case, even if they did not always include occupation and place of origin.

14. This table includes only those parishes giving details of both occupation and residence for both sets of grandparents for the period given, some continued to give partial details for considerably longer but this is not shown. A few places such as Sherburn in Elmet even operated an index system for descents to avoid writing out repetitive details at length. Six rural parishes within the archdeaconry are excluded from the survey as their records have not yet been deposited.

15. Census, 1801

16. New Malton, St Leonard; New Malton, St Michael; Coxwold; Sheriff Hutton and Babworth.

17. Mr. B. Pace has worked on St Mary Bishopshill Senior, York; Miss E. Barton on St Mary Castlegate, York; and Mr. R. Moore on Easingwold. See also the work on marriage registers at Easingwold by Mrs. B. Maltby, 'Easingwold marriage horizons,' LPS 2, pp. 36-9 and her 'Marriage registers and the problems of mobility,' LPS 6, pp.32-42.

18. Holderness, p.454; see the note in Wrigley p.29 n.4, which suggests that Durham followed York’s example.

Anyone with any information please contact me at the Borthwick Institute, St Anthony’s Hall, York.

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