

POPULATION MOVEMENT IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

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At some time about the middle of the seventeenth century London overtook Paris and Naples to become the largest city in Europe. In the 1690's the contemporary statistician Gregory King, working on information supplied to him by the Hearth Tax Office, estimated the population of the city at about 530,000,⁽¹⁾ and indeed the latest historian to work on the growth of London, Dr. E.A. Wrigley, of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, has estimated the population of London in 1700 as 575,000. Dr. Wrigley has estimated that the population of the city in 1600 was only 200,000.⁽²⁾ London, therefore, nearly trebled in size in the course of the century, and this despite the plagues which struck the city from time to time. In 1603, over 33,000 people died from the plague, in 1625 over 41,000 people died from it, and in the greatest plague year of all, 1665, nearly 69,000 people died from it, besides nearly 29,000 who died from other causes.⁽³⁾ Apart from these years of exceptional mortality, the crude death rate in London, was substantially higher than the crude birth rate, and is thought to have exceeded it by not less than 10 per 1000 per annum.⁽⁴⁾ Rapid growth under these circumstances could only come about by an enormous excess of immigrants to London over emigrants from it. The most significant single population movement in seventeenth century England was this enormous flow of people into London.

The growth in size of London affected many parts of England. Professor Fisher has written that by 1640 "The corn growers of Cambridgeshire, south-east Essex and north-east Kent, the dairy farmers of Suffolk, the graziers of the south Midlands all looked to the London market as the hub of their economic universe".⁽⁵⁾ Beyond this, London exerted an enormous influence all along the east coast of England, importing vast quantities of malt from Norfolk, butter from Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, through Boston and Whitby, and, of course, increasingly large quantities of "sea-coale" from Tyneside and Wearside. These had already reached 325,000 tons by 1650. By the end of the century the further growth of London meant that the demands of its people for food and fuel absorbed the products of an even wider area. Although research has been done on the

sources of food and fuel for London, little work has been done on the origins of the Londoners themselves.

It has been estimated that, on an average, about 8,000 more people came to London every year than left it in the period 1650-1700 to bring about the marked increase of population against the effects of the very high death rate.⁽⁶⁾ I would guess that the same average figure applied to the first half of the seventeenth century, because, although the rate of growth of the population of London was then much greater than in the second half of the century, the numbers normally required to counterbalance the deaths were of course smaller.⁽⁷⁾ There is some indication that, after plague had reduced the population of a city violently, there was often an extensive immigration of people in the immediately following years. This certainly seems to have been the case in seventeenth century London. John Graunt, writing in 1662, said of the plagues of 1603 and 1625 that in two years "The City hath been repeopled, let the mortality do what it will."⁽⁸⁾ We have as yet no means of telling even the scale of actual immigration to and emigration from London, only that the one exceeded the other by an average of about 8,000 a year. This could mean 10,000 in and 2,000 out, or it could mean 28,000 in and 20,000 out, or any other combination of figures with the same difference between them. This 8,000 a year, Dr. Wrigley suggests, was the natural increase in the provinces, at 5 per 1,000 per annum, or two and a half millions of England's five million people. Half the natural increase of the population of provincial England was absorbed by London.

Under these circumstances, it would be reasonable to assume that the immigrants must have come from every part of the country and not merely the south-east. There are, however, very few means of discovering whether this assumption is true. The possibilities of tracing individual newcomers to London to their places of origin are very few. When writing this paper I explored one such source, the wills of Londoners proved in the Commissary Court of the Bishops of London. I examined the first hundred wills in the register for 1679-82.⁽⁹⁾ Of these, only thirteen gave clues to an origin outside London. These clues are of three kinds, legacies to the poor of provincial parishes, legacies to named relatives in provincial England, and legacies of land in the provinces.

The will of Anne Pursloe, widow, is very explicit. She not only left forty shillings to the poor of the parish of Farndon in the county of Northampton but added "where I was borne". The will of Mary Beale, widow, is a trifle less explicit. She left money to the poor of

Steeple Bumpstead in Essex. It seems likely that this was her parish of origin, since she desired that her legacy "be distributed by my kinsman James Relynett". John Sharpe, Citizen and Leatherseller, was even less explicit. He merely left twenty shillings to the ringers of Wymondham in Norfolk without further explanation, but it would be surprising if he had not had some close connection with the place.

It is surely rare to leave a legacy to a parent, but Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Wellings, did just that. She made a bequest to her father John Lovell, whom she describes as "of Great Alford, Essex". The widows' wills suggest the possible places of origin of their late husbands. Amy, widow of Stephen Faro, made a bequest to her husband's brother, Bennett Faro of Exeter, and Thomasin, widow of Edward Todd, to her "brother" Thomas Todd of Eye in Suffolk. This may suggest that Stephen Faro and Edward Todd came from Exeter and Eye respectively, but, in view of the high degree of population mobility in seventeenth century England, it may be that Bennett Faro and Thomas Todd moved to Exeter and Eye from yet other places when their respective brothers moved to London. Vaguer clues are provided by the legacies of John Barker, starchmaker, to poor relations at Peterborough, or of Ann, widow of William Basing, to "my cozen John Lathan of the county of Lancaster".

Legacies of land are more ambiguous. The land could have been purchased as well as inherited, but it seems unlikely that William Watton, who described himself as "servant", would have been in a position to purchase a house and land in Rosleston, Derbyshire. This must surely have been acquired by inheritance. There is a presumption of inheritance, although perhaps not so strong in the cases of Robert Jones who bequeathed copyhold land at Leytonstone in Essex, or John Kemble who left freehold land at Aldermaston in Berkshire, but the case of William Bright may turn out to be different. Bright described himself as "Dr. of Physikes" and had both freehold and copyhold lands at Barton and Tostock in Suffolk and further freehold lands at Cockfield in Suffolk. Was this a Suffolk man who had come to London to make good? Or was it a successful Londoner who had invested the rewards of his profession in the purchase of lands in Suffolk? It is impossible to say without going further into the particular case.

What is clear, even from my superficial reading of these hundred wills is that it is possible, from wills, to discover the probable origins of some of the many thousands of immigrants to London, and that these immigrants took their origin not only in counties which lie relatively

close to London like Hertfordshire or Berkshire, but also in those which lie rather farther afield, such as Norfolk, Northamptonshire or Derbyshire, and even in distant counties like Devon or Lancashire. This would tend to confirm the assumption that the immigrants came from every part of the country and not merely from the south-east, although, on the other hand, I must say that, in my very small sample, the clues provided by the wills point to three out of the thirteen testators having their origins in Essex on London's very doorstep.

Other clues to the birthplaces of selected Londoners are provided by the records of apprenticeships in the archives of City Companies. The great majority of these are deposited at Guildhall Library. They nearly always show the place of origin of the apprentice. However, I know of no systematic attempt to work on either wills or apprenticeship records to discuss the scale of migration into London from the various parts of provincial England, and, in the absence of such statistical research any impression must be purely subjective.

I myself feel that the frequency with which migrants to London came from a considerable distance was in distinct contrast to the normal pattern of population movement in seventeenth century England, which was over relatively short distances. Dr. Buckatzsch, from his study of the records of the Cutlers Company at Sheffield, has shown that nearly two-thirds of the migrants into Sheffield in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, who became cutlery workers, came from less than twenty miles away. In the last quarter of the century only one ninth of the migrants came from further away than twenty miles.⁽¹⁰⁾ This is rather different from London, some of whose migrants came from two hundred miles away or more.

Between 1693 and 1698, William Lloyd Bishop of Lichfield compiled a survey of the parish of Eccleshall in Staffordshire, in which his favourite official residence, Eccleshall Castle, was situated. In this he commented at length on the individual inhabitants of the parish, giving details of their private lives, including in many cases notes on their places of origin, places in which they had previously lived, and places in which members of their families now lived. This is a document which has not been available to historians until now since Bishop Lloyd and his chaplain compiled it in shorthand. The shorthand has recently been extended by Mr. Norman Tildesley and I have been privileged to be allowed to work from the typescript of the text which he is preparing for publication.⁽¹¹⁾ This reveals an immense amount of movement of people, a great deal of it within the parish from one hamlet to another. Eccleshall parish extended over twenty thousand

acres and some parts of it were seven miles away from the small market town of Eccleshall at its centre. Much of this movement, which at Eccleshall appears as internal migration within the parish, would appear in other parts of the country as movement to neighbouring parishes. Beyond this internal movement I have gathered sixty-eight references from the survey to specific places outside the parish from which Eccleshall men came or to which Eccleshall men went. For these purposes I have ignored the migration of women, on marriage. (12) No less than ten of these sixty-eight references are to London, a hundred and forty miles away, far more than to any other place, even the neighbouring market town of Stone, six miles away. Apart from London, the only other references to places more than twenty miles from Eccleshall are to Limerick in Ireland, where two sons of Thomas Henn were to be found; to Stoke Prior, nearly forty miles away in Worcestershire, where Skrimsher, the Eccleshall plumber, was born; and to Cleobury Mortimer, some thirty miles away in Shropshire, where Henry Wetmore, an Eccleshall labourer, was born. Beyond the sixty-eight references to specific places there are four vaguer references to "Cheshire" and "Shropshire" which may or may not indicate migrations of more than twenty miles, and two references to "Worcestershire" and "Essex" which certainly do so.

Taken together, these references from the Eccleshall survey confirm both Dr. Buckatzsch's statistics from Sheffield which showed extensive migration, largely within a distance of twenty miles, and my own previous impression that migration to London was the startling exception to this general rule of short distance migration. Evidence of this sort about the distance that people moved is very scanty, but something on the distance travelled could be discovered for the late seventeenth century from settlement papers.

The evidence of the scale of population movement is much better known. Peter Laslett and John Harrison, working on listings of inhabitants at Clayworth in Nottinghamshire and Cogenhoe in Northamptonshire, were able to show the extent of population movement very clearly. At Clayworth, in the twelve years from 1676 to 1688, 60% of the population changed, and at Cogenhoe, from 1618 to 1628, 50% of the population changed. Of this change, only about a third was accounted for by births and deaths and the remainder by migration. (13) The evidence then from these two places alone might suggest that as much as a third of the population moved in any ten year period in the seventeenth century. How typical or atypical were they?

Much cruder as a method of assessment than the comparison of

individuals in full lists of inhabitants is the comparison of surnames over a period of time. In 1951, Dr. Buckatzsch gathered together a number of examples of comparisons which had been made. (14) One of these showed that in Nottinghamshire it was normal for only between 10% and 20% of the surnames in the tax assessments of 1544 to survive in the same place to 1641, just under a hundred years later. Another showed that in Bedfordshire it was normal for half the surnames to survive for the period of forty-four years from 1627 to 1671, but that it was not normal for as many as half the surnames to survive for a longer period. This is approximately the same rate of survival as in Nottinghamshire. Analysis of surnames in the parish registers at Horringer in Suffolk and Shap in Westmorland produced totally different results. At Horringer, of sixty-three surnames found in the period 1600-1624 only two were to be found in the period 1700-1724. At Shap, of eighty-four surnames found in the period 1600-1624 as many as twenty-eight were to be found a century later. The families who formed the population of Horringer almost totally changed in the course of the seventeenth century. At Shap, a third of the population at the beginning of the eighteenth century was made up of members of families which had been there a century before. People were moving in and out of seventeenth century Horringer rather more rapidly than was normal in Bedfordshire and Nottinghamshire, but were moving in and out of Shap rather more slowly.

Since Buckatzsch gathered these examples together in 1951, Professor Chambers has made a study of sixty parishes in the vale of Trent in which he found that between forty and fifty per cent of names in the baptism registers did not recur in the burial registers. (15) This is equivalent to the figures for population mobility previously derived from Bedfordshire and Nottinghamshire, but expressed in a rather different and more human form. Nearly half the people died in a different parish from that in which they were born. More recently, a research student of mine, Mrs. Lorna Weatherill, working on the early history of the north Staffordshire potteries, has shown that in Burslem sixty-two out of a hundred and nine surnames survived in the parish registers for three quarters of a century from 1660-84 to 1735-59. (16) This shows an even greater lack of mobility in population than Shap. My wife's work on the rural parish of Willingham in Cambridgeshire has shown that among the tenants who were named in a survey of the 1720's only 22 out of 90, or 24%, bore the same surnames as those who had been named in a survey of 1575. This also shows a greater lack of mobility in population than Shap, although not so much so as in Burslem. (17)

How do the results from Clayworth and Cogenhoe look against this background? They suggest a degree of mobility even greater than that to be deduced from the parish registers of Horringer. Were they then atypical? Or do they contain an element which does not appear in lists of tenants or taxpayers and which hardly features in parish registers? It would seem that they did. In 1695 Gregory King estimated that there were 560,000 in-servants among the population. In other words, at the end of the seventeenth century one person in ten was a servant, a single person living in the household of someone else. This category of course contains not only domestic servants, but also servants in husbandry, or, as we would call them, farm labourers. The lists of inhabitants at Clayworth and Cogenhoe contain such people whilst the other evidence for population mobility does not. Closer inspection of the Clayworth and Cogenhoe lists revealed that servants were the most mobile section of the community. Of the sixty-seven servants at Clayworth in 1688 only one had been a servant there in 1676 and had then been in a different household. Of the twenty-six servants at Cogenhoe in 1628, only one had been among the thirty-one servants there in 1618, and a listing of inhabitants in 1621 reveals that even this one individual had gone away and later returned to Cogenhoe. Of the remainder, almost all had moved elsewhere after one or two years service in the place, but a handful, like Ralph Meers at Clayworth, had married and settled down on the spot as more permanent inhabitants. (18)

Bishop Lloyd's survey of Eccleshall does not include servants, but it does mention quite a large number of ex-servants who had settled there. The Bishop sometimes went into considerable, although not always very clear, detail about their background movements. When Bishop Lloyd made his notes, Richard Wood, a dyer, and his wife had been living, as yet without children, in a cottage at Great Sugnall in Eccleshall parish for about four years. He was born in Stoke-on-Trent, some dozen miles away and at the earliest stage of his career known to the bishop spent half a year at Newport in Shropshire, followed by one year at Eccleshall, followed by two years at Aston in Shropshire where he was hired for one year and served for two years. He then moved back to Bucknall in the parish of Stoke and then finally back to Eccleshall where he served John Addison at the fulling mill for one year. He then settled down. Perhaps significantly his wife, Bridget, is described as the daughter of Widow Addison. Without the bishop's notes one could have no idea that this man did anything more than move once from Stoke to Eccleshall. The bishop records no less than five moves, all within a limited area, before he settled.

John Shelley, a labourer of about thirty years old when the bishop made his notes, was living in a cottage at Podmore in Eccleshall with his wife and two daughters, the elder of whom was seven years old. Before settling, he had been in service for five years at Standon, Chorlton, Standon again, Sandon and Swinnerton, all places within ten miles. By birth he came from Podmore itself, where his father John Shelley senior is to be found in the bishop's list as "a poor honest harmless man working at Bromley Hall". Perhaps no other document would reveal that John Shelley junior had ever lived away from Eccleshall.

James Tag appears in the bishop's list at another Eccleshall hamlet, Coldmeece, with his wife and two year old daughter. He was born at Sandon, about eight miles away, and had come to the parish seven or eight years earlier, and served four different masters within Eccleshall parish for a year before settling down. The bishop noted that his father William Tag had been a copyholder at Coldmeece and had sold his copy and moved to Sandon. Comparison of surnames in a list of tax-payers or tenants might have shown the Tags as static, but in fact the bishop reveals that they had spent a generation elsewhere. In the light of this sort of information it is not surprising that the listings of inhabitants at Clayworth and Cogenhoe show a much greater degree of mobility than the other evidence on population movement.

We may conclude, therefore, not only that nearly half the people in seventeenth century England died in different parishes from those in which they were born, but also that a very large proportion of them, including many who died in the same parish in which they were born, lived for parts of their lives in yet other parishes. At Clayworth and Cogenhoe a third of the whole population moved within a decade. In the longer run, we can see that it was rare for any family to live in one place for more than three generations or a hundred years. On the other hand, all the evidence so far accumulated seems to suggest that apart from the great flow of people to London, all this intense movement was restricted to a very limited distance.

Some nuances ought perhaps to be brought into these generalizations. There is some indication that mobility was greater in the earlier part of the century than in the later part, when the settlement laws were beginning to have an effect. There is also some indication that mobility may have been less in particular places in the country, as the instances of Shap in Westmorland, Willingham in Cambridgeshire and Burslem in Staffordshire suggest, although why this should be so is not clear. Even in such places as these, two thirds of the families

changed in the course of a century. There is also the obvious point that the ownership or long tenancy of land tended to have a stabilizing effect on certain families. The disappearance of many of the class of husbandmen from the category of tenant farmers in the earlier part of the century meant that by the end of it only the yeomanry and the gentry were kept in one place by their land. Finally, it now appears that the years in an ordinary man's life in which he was most mobile were those from fifteen or so onwards until marriage, when he was hired annually as a living-in servant, often in a different place each year. Gregory King suggested that at any one time one person in ten was such an in-servant, but it is apparent that a far higher proportion of the population spent a part of their lives as such. My present guess is that probably between a quarter and a half of the population were servants at one time or another.

NOTES

1. F.P. Wilson, The Plague in Shakespeare's London (Oxford, 1927), p. 213.
2. E.A. Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750", Past and Present, XXVII (July, 1967), 44.
3. Charles Creighton, A History of Epidemics in Britain (Cambridge, 1894, reprinted with additional material, London, 1965), Vol.1, p.660.
4. Wrigley, art.cit., p. 46.
5. F.J. Fisher, "The Development of the London Food Market 1540-1640", Economic History Review, v (1934-5), 57.
6. E.A. Wrigley, art.cit., p.46.
7. Between 1600 and 1650 London's population rose from approximately 200,000 to approximately 400,000. To counter the normal excess of deaths over births of 10 per 1000 a net immigration was needed of 2,000 a year rising to 4,000 a year to maintain the population. The plagues of 1603 and 1625 demanded a net immigration of 75,000 people to restore the population. Finally, a new immigration of 200,000 over the half century was also needed to account for the growth in population. Altogether this suggests that there was an average net annual immigration in the region of 8,500 between 1600 and 1625.

8. N.G. Brett James, The Growth of Stuart London (London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1935), p. 498.
9. Guildhall Library MS 9171/37.
10. E.J. Buckatzsch, "Places of Origin of a Group of Immigrants into Sheffield 1624-1799", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., ii (1950) 303-6.
11. A Survey of the Parish of Eccleshall compiled by William Lloyd Bishop of Lichfield between 1693 and 1698 now in the Lichfield Joint Record Office, transcribed by Norman W. Tildesley (Typescript, 1969).
12. Migration on Marriage is discussed in Bessie Maltby, 'Easingwold marriage horizons', L.P.S. No. 2, 36-9. In Easingwold about 90% of marriage partners, who came from outside the parish, came from less than 20 miles away.
13. Peter Laslett and John Harrison, "Clayworth and Cogenhoe", Historical Essays 1600-1750 presented to David Ogg, ed. H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard (London, 1963), pp. 156-184.
14. E.J. Buckatzsch, "The Constancy of Local Populations and Migration in England before 1800", Population Studies, v (1951), 62-69.
15. J.D. Chambers, The Vale of Trent 1670-1800 (Economic History Review Supplements no. 3, 1957), p. 22.
16. Lorna Weatherill, The Pottery Trade and North Staffordshire 1660-1760 (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Keele, 1968.) This thesis is to be published shortly by the Manchester University Press.
17. Margaret Spufford, forthcoming book on rural Cambridgeshire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
18. Laslett and Harrison, art.cit., pp. 178-9.