RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

STUDYING URBAN MOBILITY: THE POSSIBILITIES FOR FAMILY RECONSTITUTION

Contributed by F. Lewis

Investigation into the incidence and nature of population movement in a historical context has produced a wide range of studies. In particular, rural to urban movement has tended to attract much attention, often to the neglect of movement within urban areas themselves. Much of what is known about intra-urban mobility is drawn from the study of nineteenth century towns and cities with only a few notable exceptions for earlier periods. One possible reason behind this relatively limited view lies in the availability and suitability of sources that contain information on place of residence and change of residence over a known time period. For the nineteenth century, researchers have tended to follow the well-trodden path of the census enumerators, linking census to census and occasionally adding further enrichment through directories and similar nominal lists. Although utilising such standard sources allows comparison across communities, a major flaw is encountered due to the cross-sectional nature and frequency of the census data. As an alternative, biographical accounts, such as diaries and family histories, have been employed to reconstruct the residential history of individuals. Whilst these provide valuable longitudinal portraits of personal movement and extend beyond the confines of the census their survival is erratic and their interpretation problematic.

However, it may be possible to explore issues of mobility and persistence within urban areas by adapting material otherwise intended for a different research purpose. Employing a family reconstitution study for a large urban centre and using the place of residence information recorded in the parish registers it has proved possible to track the location and re-location of families. As such, the technique can be seen as a variant of that used by Souden to examine comparative migration flows across a variety of settlement types.

The town examined in this article is the port of Liverpool between the years 1660 to 1750. During this period, Liverpool experienced rapid and substantial population increase, in part a result of the port's prosperity in the Anglo-American sugar and tobacco trades. From a hearth tax estimate of approximately 1,400 in the 1660s, population total was to rise to almost 6,000 by the late seventeenth century, to double in the first twenty years of the eighteenth century, and then nearly double again to reach almost 20-22,000 by the 1750s. In the hierarchy of English provincial towns, from almost total obscurity in the 1670s, Liverpool ranked within the top twenty by 1700 and was placed sixth by the middle of the eighteenth century. Aggregate analysis
suggests that excess of baptisms over burials was small in most years and almost negligible between the mid 1720s and 1740s, accounting for barely 20 per cent of Liverpool's population growth. Consequently, the vast majority of growth must have been fuelled by in-migration. Although the origin and character of these migrants has been well-researched, considerably less is known of the movements of individuals and families within the town of Liverpool. What follows is an example of how family reconstitution might be used to study such intra-urban migration.

As readers of this journal will be aware, family reconstitution involves the linking of parish register baptism, burial and marriage records into family units according to formalised rules. Availability of information on place of residence can vary considerably between parish registers. In the case of Liverpool such information is relatively forthcoming for the late seventeenth century onwards. As a result it theoretically becomes possible to trace residential moves from one vital event to another. To illustrate, consider the stylized family reconstitution history produced as Figure 1. Marriage was celebrated in 1660, with place of residence given as Dale Street. The first birth was also registered with place of residence given as Dale Street, indicating persistence in that location for at least a year. With the birth of the second child, residence is given as Water Street, thus indicating a change of address. Continuing to chart place of residence in this manner, over the five year period that the family was in observation, three distinct places of residence can be identified, indicating three separate moves, although the reconstitution history began and ended in Dale Street.
Table 1  Number of residential moves by length of observation: Liverpool family reconstitution, 1660-1750

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years in Observation</th>
<th>n. of moves</th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>21+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By adopting this means of analysis, from a selection of reconstituted families with marriage record and at least two further events recorded, frequency of movement was assessed. Allowing for the probability that with increasing time, it would become more likely for a family to contemplate a move, comparisons in family mobility habits can be compared by considering the number of families completing a particular number of moves against years in observation.

Eighty families were selected as a sub-sample of the complete reconstitution. Of these, 50 per cent recorded no movement, while nearly a third of families moved once. Movement two or more times was limited: only eight families moved twice, and just six families three or more times. Of course, in interpreting these figures it must be realised that propensity to move is influenced by the period over which a family is in observation within the reconstitution. Table 1 clearly shows that families in observation for less than five years recorded little or no movement; although just over a fifth experienced one change of address; no families completed two or more moves. As the period in which families are in observation is extended, the likelihood of residential change increases. For those families in observation for more than twenty years, just under a fifth moved three or more times. Indeed, the relationship between number of residential moves and period in observation closely resembles the positive correlations shown for persistence at the same address over time witnessed in the case of nineteenth-century Liverpool using census material.10

Though difficult to quantify, it is also possible to make some general comments upon the nature and direction of this movement. Throughout the 90 year period, distance moved by households was generally small, often only between neighbouring streets and mostly within the same area of the town, either the north or south end. It is only by the very late 1740s that a handful of families contemplated re-location to the periphery of the town, the areas centred around Derby Square and beyond St George's church. Such movement was intimately bound up with the changing work practices of certain economic sectors, and the beginnings of home and workplace separation, in this case, by the relatively wealthier merchant classes.

64
Although useful, this alternative use of family reconstitution data has certain limitations. First, the analysis of movement is necessarily based upon only those families with large numbers of associated parish register records, and thus, by implication, the more stable members of the community. Therefore, in common with Souden’s approach, and family reconstitution itself, it does not accommodate those that did not marry and produce children, single adults, many of whom formed the bulk of the migrant population, and transients.\textsuperscript{11} Second, the success of such an exercise is heavily reliant upon the availability of an uninterrupted parish register series of high quality. The influence of under-registration and poor administration will not only cast doubt upon the reliability of the reconstitution study itself, but any analysis of movement characteristics stemming from it. Irrespective of these methodological shortcomings, in the absence of other source material this method may provide a useful tool for the analysis of comparative intra-urban movement.

NOTES


