

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

POPULATION MOBILITY IN THE VILLAGE OF LEVISHAM, 1541-1900

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Introduction

This short note reports on progress on an investigation of population mobility in the moorland village of Levisham in north Yorkshire. The study arose out of the observation by the village local history group that during the nineteenth century few families seemed to stay in the village for longer than one generation. In contrast, the examination of wills from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries revealed the same names for generation after generation. The purpose of the study was to try to quantify this change in patterns of family mobility, and to discover if the increase in mobility was a continuous, gradual process, or whether it proceeded in 'fits and starts'. If the latter, could the periods of increased mobility be related to specific events?

The village

Levisham is situated on the edge of the North York Moors five miles north of Pickering, on the south-facing slopes of the Tabular Hills. Steep valleys on either side inhibit easy access to the village. The parish covers about 3,000 acres, two thirds of this being heather moorland. It has always been an agricultural community, practising mixed farming (with a strong emphasis on sheep). Iron was mined on the moors from prehistoric times, but an attempt to revive iron production in the nineteenth century proved not to be commercially viable.

Levisham has historically been a community of small farmers. The seventeenth century Hearth Tax returns show only two houses with more than one hearth, one of those being the Rectory. Of the 20 allotments of land made by the Enclosure Award of 1770 from the 511 acres of arable land on the three open fields, the two largest were each a little under 100 acres. Almost a century later, in 1848, at the time of the Tithe Award the largest holding was 251 acres. During the eighteenth century, the head of one family started to style

Table 1 Number of households and population, Levisham: 1662–1891

Year	Households	Population
1662	34	
1664	31	
1673	30	116
1801		123
1811		138
1821	28	152
1831	29	168
1841	28	163
1851	30	152
1861	30	152
1871	24	122
1881	24	105
1891	21	116

Sources: 1662 and 1664 figures based on Hearth Tax returns. 1673 estimate based on Compton Census figure of 70 adults, adding 37 per cent for children. Nineteenth century figures based on population censuses.

himself as a 'gentleman'. He had, indeed, acquired the lordship of the manor, but at the time of enclosure his holding of 48 acres was only the fourth largest in the parish. The coming of the railway in 1836 opened up more job opportunities for local families and brought in a few new people who were not dependent on the land. Nevertheless, agriculture remained the main occupation until the later years of the twentieth century.

The number of households in the village can be ascertained from the seventeenth century Hearth Tax returns, and both the number of households and the population are more accurately known after 1801 from censuses (Table 1). Between these two periods there was a small decrease in the number of households. The population appears to have peaked in 1831 at 168 persons. During the second half of the nineteenth century, both the number of households and the population declined.

The present study

The study is making use of a wide range of sources. First, there are the nineteenth century census returns. Second, we have used the parish registers. Bishops' Transcripts of these exist for the period 1600–1700 (with a gap from 1638–1661); the originals exist from 1700 onwards (with a gap from 1736–1753). These sources have been complemented by deeds from the North Riding Registry of Deeds; the Hearth Tax Returns for 1662, 1664 and 1673; an Enclosure Award from 1770; the Tithe Award from 1848; and Land Tax Assessment records which cover the period 1781–1832. Finally, about 100 wills of Levisham people survive, covering the period from 1541–1734. These wills are almost the only surviving source for the period before 1600.

The study began by compiling a list of the names that occurred in the 'continuous' sources (that is, the wills, parish registers and deeds). The period of investigation was divided into 50-year sub-periods, and the number of new names appearing in each 50-year sub-period tabulated. Table 2 summarizes this information, showing the number of new names that appear in each 50-year period and the length of time that these names were continuously present. Table 3 performs a similar analysis, using data for the nineteenth century census returns for the 1841–1891 censuses.

This approach to the analysis is, admittedly, rather crude. There is the assumption that one name means one family. Sometimes this is the case, but there are several different families with the same name. Clearly, a name that relates to more than one family is more likely to persist. Some names may appear as 'new names' but actually refer to the descendants of existing families by the female side. Some of the sources, for example wills, relate to people with property (even if only a very small amount). They are likely, therefore, to refer to the most settled families. Prior to the nineteenth century, there will have been many people, such as farm servants, who spent some time living in the village whose names never made it into any records. Even the nineteenth century records do not pick up people who came and went between censuses and did not have any family events to feature in the parish registers. Despite these limitations with the approach we have used, it is possible to identify long-term changes in the mobility of the population.

Core families

During the period 1541–1650, 15 names were continuously present in the village for six generations or more. All are names of farming families, of men described in their wills as 'yeomen' or 'husbandmen' (there being no apparent difference between the meanings of the two terms). In the mid sixteenth century, these men were typically leaving sums of money (a few pence) to the parish church, items of clothing to members of their immediate family, and farm animals (sheep, oxen, cows and horses) and equipment to their children. The will of the head of one of the foremost 'core' families, who died in 1562, mentions a total of seven shillings in cash, one ewe or lamb each to various children, three bullocks, two oxen, three horses and 'an oxgang of corn'.

Table 2 Names occurring in 'continuous' sources

Period	Number of new names	Number 'surviving' in village for at least the number of consecutive periods shown					
		2	3	4	5	6	7
1541–1600	17	12	11	9	7	6	3
1601–1650	17	11	9	5	3	1	
1651–1700	20	11	8	5	3		
1701–1750	24	8	6	3			
1751–1800	21	9	1				
1801–1850	45	17					

Notes: This table should be read as follows. In 1541–1600, 17 new names were recorded. Of these, 12 were also mentioned in the period 1601–1650 (that is, they remained in the village for two consecutive periods), 11 were mentioned both in 1601–1650 and 1651–1700 (that is, they remained for three consecutive periods), and so on. In the period 1701–1750, there was an unusually large number of marriages, leading to a number of new names which seemed abnormally high. When no indication was given in the register of the place of origin of either of the parties and when neither name was found elsewhere in the parish records, these names were excluded.

Sources: See text.

Table 3 Names appearing in nineteenth century census returns

Census	Number of new names	Number 'surviving' in village for at least the number of consecutive censuses shown				
		2	3	4	5	6
1841	43	24	22	19	16	12
1851	21	6	4	1	1	
1861	11	3	2	2		
1871	20	5	3			
1881	15	1				

Notes: This table should be read as follows. In the 1841 census, 43 names were recorded. Of these, 24 were also mentioned in the 1851 census (that is, they remained in the village for two consecutive censuses), 22 were mentioned in both the 1851 and 1861 censuses (that is, they remained for three consecutive censuses), and so on. In the 1851 census, 21 new names appeared. Of these, only six were mentioned in the next census, and only four in both the next two censuses, etc.

Sources: Census enumerators' books, Levisham

The picture that can be built up from these wills is of a small, tightly-knit, largely self-sufficient community centred on the church, very much inter-related, and carefully managing and bequeathing its frugal resources.

After 1582, a new feature appears in many wills: the first item is the bequest to the eldest son of 'my title and term of years ...' in tenements, house, land, closes and common pasture. Sometimes this is spelt out more precisely as 'all my rights under the lease of Sir Henry Gates ...'. It appears that Sir Henry Gates of Scarborough, an important political figure in the area, had acquired the title to lands in Levisham which he passed on to various local husbandmen in the form of 2,000-year leases. These small farmers thereby became virtual freeholders. From this time there are also increasingly frequent mentions of 'closes' and 'intacks' in addition to a share of arable land in the three open fields and common pasture. These 'intacks' were enclosures taken from land which had been part of the Royal forest of Pickering where previous generations had suffered regular fines for poaching, taking wood, or making encroachments. By the seventeenth century, the lists of bequests are generally longer, with larger sums of money, more livestock, and more furniture and household goods. The 'yeomen' or 'husbandmen' of this period were by no means wealthy, but they held the title to land which provided adequately for themselves and their families, and they passed this on to the next generation.

The years from 1701 to 1750 show a higher proportion of names present for only one or two generations, and five of the 'core' families disappeared. Only three of the original 15 'core names' are mentioned in the 1770 Enclosure Award (though there are two other names connected by marriage with one of the 'core names'). While having a stake in the community in the form of a title to agricultural land seems to have been a primary condition for long settlement of a family in the village, by the eighteenth century this seems no longer to have been enough on its own. A clue as to the reason for this can be found in an observation by John Tuke: 'It is observable that in those families that have succeeded from generation to generation in the same farm, the strongest attachment to old customs prevails; such have the most confined ideas ...'.¹ In other words, the 'core families' tended to be slow to adopt new farming practices, which reduced the productivity of their farms. In the years following Enclosure, there is evidence from the Register of Deeds that land in the village was being bought as an investment. Various 'gentlemen' from Pickering, Scarborough and the surrounding area, a 'dealer in hardware' from a nearby town, a clockmaker, a corn factor, a surgeon and two spinsters all figure in land transactions. Seven names disappear from the village in the generation following Enclosure, and two of the 'core names' that had remained, both having represented yeoman families in the sixteenth century, appear in the list of paupers receiving poor relief early in the nineteenth century. Of the 21 new names that appeared between 1751 and 1800, more than half do not appear after 1800 (Table 2). The same pattern is true of the period 1801–1850 (Table 3).

Trades and professions

The occupations represented in the village in the nineteenth century include clergyman, schoolteacher, iron ore proprietor, innkeeper, miller, station master,

gamekeeper, tailor/dressmaker and cordwainer. There were also labourers (both 'general' and agricultural) and servants. The servants, mainly hired for a year at a time, are naturally the most transitory. The labouring families are diverse, some remained for only one census, others appear in as many as five censuses. Among those in trades and crafts, no family was present for more than four consecutive censuses. The commitment of those following trades or professions is not, like that of farmers, tied up with land. These people have a marketable skill, and can be expected to move in response to job opportunities.

All six of the families present in the parish in every census from 1841 to 1891 were farmers. However, many 'farming' names stayed only for one or two generations, and it appears that from the eighteenth century onwards, farming in Levisham came to have more of the characteristics of a trade or a profession, rather than those of a way of life tied to a particular location. By 1848, at the time of the Tithe Award, there were 13 tenant farmers and only three owner-occupiers. The names of the three owner-occupiers are among the persisting names. Among tenant farmers, movement from one farm to another within the area seems to have been the norm.

Conclusion

Throughout the whole of the 350-year period studied, the nature of the village remained the same: it was a community of small farms. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a traditional type of subsistence farming was practised based on the use of three arable open fields and shared common pasture. The 'yeoman' farmers operated on a small scale, but held a virtual freehold of their land, which was passed down from father to son over many generations. By the early eighteenth century, this traditional way of life was becoming less economically viable. Land, including shares in the open fields, was being bought and sold; and long-established families disappeared from the village. The 1770 Enclosure Award rationalized and endorsed changes that had already taken place. Following enclosure, a new style of farming developed which required both new capital and new ideas, and this attracted new men who were not rooted in the village in the way their predecessors had been. In the nineteenth century the farmers (who still provided the stable core of the community) were supported by a more mobile population of professions and trades, and a still more mobile pool of labourers.

NOTES

1. J. Tuke, *General view of the agriculture of the North Riding of Yorkshire*, (London, 1800), 48. The same point is also made by Marshall in his *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, published in 1788.