

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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Andrew Blaikie's stimulating and wide-ranging account of the demographic characteristics of fishing communities on the Moray Firth, published in *LPS* 69, suggests how their particular circumstances of economy, technology and society may have contributed towards a demographic regime distinct from that of agricultural and other communities in Scotland.¹ This note offered as a response to the questions posed by Blaikie in footnotes 46 and 47, in which he asks whether there is evidence about the demographic structure of fishing communities elsewhere, and whether other occupational groups might be demographically isolated in the same way as fishing communities appear to be. The case studies are taken from the North Yorkshire coast, the Ards Peninsula, County Down, and the Durham coalfield.

North Yorkshire coast

In the small coastal parish of Fylingdales, North Yorkshire, parish endogamy was estimated from the Anglican marriage registers at 80 per cent over the period 1654–1916.² There were nevertheless both spatial and occupational subdivisions within the parish, and the censuses from 1841–1881 showed a clear tendency toward a distinct and stable distribution of surnames among the families associated with the sea – fishermen, mariners and shipowners – compared to those who were engaged in agriculture and trade.³ We have no complete data on endogamy by occupation, but an analysis of the occupations of the grooms of all the women bearing the most distinctive (and providence-tempting) fisher surname in Robin Hood's Bay – Storm – shows that among the 44 Storm women married between 1789–1897, 37 married mariners or fishermen.⁴

A comparison of the birthplaces of fishermen and their children in settlements along the Yorkshire coast (Filey, Scarborough, Robin Hood's Bay, Whitby, Runswick and Staithes) at the censuses of 1851–1881, showed that with the exception of movement between Scarborough and Filey, there was negligible migration between neighbouring settlements and, as recorded by Blaikie for the Moray Firth, the surname distributions in nearby fishing communities differed markedly along the coast.⁵

There were, however, some important differences between the situation in Fylingdales and that described by Blaikie. The fishing industry in Fylingdales was in decline in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the fishermen

were an aging and diminishing population. At successive censuses the fishermen's mean ages to the nearest year were 44 (in 1841), 49 (1851), 56 (1861), 61 (1871) and 63 (1881) respectively, and during this period the number of fishermen declined from 41 to 17.⁶

The Ards Peninsula, County Down

In the post-Famine population of the Ards Peninsula, both the pattern of surname distributions and of marital migration were closely related to geographical distance and religious denomination, the latter itself largely a product of seventeenth century plantation of Scots Presbyterians in the north of the peninsula. The outstanding exception to this broad conformity was the fishing port of Portavogie (almost 100 per cent Presbyterian), whose surnames and marital links were not only strikingly different from the predominantly Roman Catholic parishes to the south, but also from its Presbyterian neighbours to the north and west.⁷

A contemporary newspaper report noted that:

Little or no emigration or immigration has taken place ... Surnames are scarce; Palmers can be counted by the score; Adairs, Mahoods, Cullys, Hughes, and Coffeys by the dozen: a fact to some extent accounted for by the tendency to intermarry. The young men seldom venture outside the limits of the village in their search for a wife; hence a strong family likeness prevails ...⁸

The Durham Coalfield

Blaikie raises the question of whether other occupational groups might also have a demographic structure isolating them from their neighbours. One group which acquired a reputation for such distinctiveness were the miners of the Great Northern Coalfield. Among many possible references, two quotations are enough to convey the general impression. Of the early nineteenth century MacKenzie and Ross (1834) observed:

they marry constantly with their own people from generation to generation, family has united with family till their population has become a dense mass of relationship.... The nature of the work contributed to their isolation...⁹

In the *Report of the Commissioners into the State of the Population in the Mining Districts* (1846), a colliery agent says of Haswell and Shotton collieries:

The lads allow their parents to receive their wages until within a year or two of their being married; during which time they are saving money to fit up their house. They marry at about 20 on average, and always colliers' daughters; they are very clannish.¹⁰

We have recently completed a study of occupational endogamy in four parishes of the Durham coalfield during the period 1837–1876 (when parish

registers record occupation), with a view to testing this received impression of the miners as 'a peculiar race'.¹¹ At first sight, the miners' level of occupational endogamy suggested them to be exceptional among all occupations sampled, with a marked disparity in endogamy levels between the miners (76 per cent) and the other groups – seamen recording 39 per cent endogamy, followed by agricultural labourers (32 per cent), general labourers (28 per cent) and professionals (22 per cent). However, an analysis by loglinear models and odds ratios, devised to take account of the relative sizes of the different occupational groups, showed that while all groups had a tendency toward the preference for a mate from the same occupational background, this was more pronounced among the professionals and agricultural labourers than among the mining community, despite the miners' higher rate of endogamy.

NOTES

1. A. Blaikie, 'Coastal communities in Victorian Scotland: what makes north-east fisher families distinctive?' *Local Population Studies*, **69** (2002), 15–31.
2. W.S. Pollitzer, M.T. Smith and W.R. Williams, 'A study of isonomic relationships in Fylingdales Parish from marriage records from 1654 through 1916', *Human Biology*, **60** (1988), 363–382.
3. M.T. Smith, B.L. Smith and W.R. Williams, 'Changing isonymic relationships in Fylingdales parish, North Yorkshire, 1841–1881', *Annals of Human Biology*, **11** (1984), 449–457. M.T. Smith, 'Isonymy analysis: the potential for application of quantitative analysis of surname distributions to problems in historical research', in M.T. Smith ed., *Human Biology and History* (London, 2002), 112–133.
4. M.T. Smith and B.L. Hudson 'Isonymic relationships in the parish of Fylingdales, North Yorkshire, in 1851', *Annals of Human Biology*, **11** (1984), 141–48.
5. M.T. Smith and S.J. Sherren 'The one-dimensional stepping stone model of migration: an application to British coastal populations', *Collegium Anthropologicum*, **13** (1989), 97–104.
6. M.T. Smith *et al.*, 'Changing isonymic relationships'.
7. M.T. Smith and A.H. Bittles, 'Genetic structure of the Ards Peninsula, Northern Ireland: evidence from civil registers of marriage 1840–1911', *Human Biology*, **74** (2002), 507–524.
8. *Belfast News*, Letter 26 October 1885, 'Portavogie and its Fishermen'.
9. E. Mackenzie and M. Ross, *An Historical, Topographical, and Descriptive View of the County Palatine of Durham* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1834), 114.
10. *Report of the Commissioners into the State of the Population in the Mining Districts*, Vol. XXIV (London: HMSO, 1846), 383, mf 50.219.
11. M.T. Smith and L.J. Fletcher-Jones "'Thus the Colliers and their wives ...' migration, mate choice and population structure of some County Durham parishes in the mid-nineteenth century', submitted for publication to *Annals of Human Biology*. 'Every observer of the colliery communities in the first half of the nineteenth century and well after, makes the immediate homage to the pitmen as "a peculiar race": R. Colls, *The Colliers Rant: Song and Culture in the Industrial Village* (London, 1977).