

# **GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY IN A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTTISH RURAL COMMUNITY**

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In recent years research has been undertaken on many aspects of geographical mobility within English rural society during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> It has long been appreciated that substantial migration from the countryside to the towns occurred during this period. Given the high urban mortality rates which have been shown to have existed larger towns could only maintain their population and grow by means of a steady stream of migrants from the countryside.<sup>2</sup> However, it has also become clear from the study of a number of rural communities that high levels of mobility occurred in the countryside as well and that even in more remote areas the rural population was far from static.<sup>3</sup> Geographical mobility was an important dynamic element in early-modern England's economy and society. There has, however, been a lack of similar research on contemporary Scotland. Much less is known concerning the structure of rural society in early-modern Scotland than is the case with England and, with the exception of recent pioneering work by Houston,<sup>4</sup> little comparative work has been undertaken to determine the extent to which Scottish society mirrored or contrasted with that of England during these centuries.

In the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Scots were notably mobile both in terms of internal and overseas migration<sup>5</sup> leading to speculation as to whether there may have been inherent features in Scottish rural society at an earlier date which encouraged high levels of mobility. In the seventeenth century large-scale movements of population such as the plantation of Ulster, and the readiness of young Scotsmen to enter mercenary service abroad, certainly indicates a propensity to migrate by some sectors of the population under certain circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Was this underpinned by a substantial amount of mobility at home?

Certain features of rural society in lowland Scotland at this time may have encouraged population mobility. Landholding was characterised by the prevalence of large estates on which most of the land was worked by leasehold tenants. Most tenants held their lands by short leases, or tacks, and tenancies at will. It has been assumed that this caused widespread insecurity of tenure<sup>7</sup> and this has been linked implicitly to high rates of mobility among the tenantry. Labour on the tenants' holdings was provided in part by married cottars who sublet small portions of arable land in return. Clauses in the leases issued by some estates suggest that particular cottars were often attached to individual tenants and accompanied them when they quitted one farm and moved to another.<sup>8</sup> Labour was also supplied by unmarried male and female farm servants who negotiated annual contracts which provided opportunities for frequent moves from farm to farm. In later times Scottish farm servants were certainly highly mobile within restricted areas.<sup>9</sup> The continuation of major subsistence crises into the early eighteenth century may have maintained high levels of what Clark has termed 'subsistence migration'.<sup>10</sup> Movement of vagrants

may also have been encouraged by a system of parish poor relief which, while officially taking a strong line against "masterful" or able bodied beggars, and trying to restrict payments to resident poor, nevertheless often provided some relief to the travelling poor.<sup>11</sup> A dispersed settlement pattern, a lower population density than much of England and an economy with a strong overall pastoral element may all have encouraged mobility at regional and local scales.

In order to establish whether such influences did encourage geographical mobility detailed studies of particular rural communities are necessary. One drawback is the poorer quality of source material for this kind of research compared with England. For example, well-kept parish registers with few gaps are infrequent before the eighteenth century even in the lowlands and their general lack of information on burials makes full family reconstitution impossible. Nevertheless, a good deal of work can still be undertaken. The present introductory study examines some aspects of the mobility of different groups within rural society in part of the sheriffdom or county of Forfar during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Attention is concentrated on the estate of the Earls of Panmure. The estate was divided into baronies, units of legal jurisdiction which also served as units of agrarian administration. The main part of the estate, in the later seventeenth century, consisted of the five contiguous baronies of Carmyllie, Downie, Inverpeffer, Kelly and Panmure, located in the coastal lowlands between Dundee and Arbroath (Figure 1). The estate factors or stewards maintained particularly good sets of annual accounts and rentals at this period, most of which have survived, along with a substantial body of leases.<sup>12</sup> These sources provide information concerning the tenant farmers on the estate and can be used as a framework into which data from parish registers, inventories of possessions in the records of the local commissary court, and records of the kirk sessions, the bodies for maintaining church discipline and administering parish poor funds, can be fitted.

### **The mobility of tenants**

The annual rentals allow the mobility of tenant farmers within the estate to be examined. 698 tenants are recorded in the five baronies between 1660 and 1710. Only 111 or 16% of them can be traced as moving from one farm to another within the estate during this period. This figure clearly underestimates total mobility as it takes no account of movement into and out of the estate. However, figures for individual baronies allow us to come closer to the overall level of mobility. Kelly had the highest proportion of geographically mobile tenants with 27% of the 155 farmers moving internally or to and from other baronies. Kelly was located on the coast and was bounded by other Panmure baronies on over half its landward perimeter. Given the limited distances over which most migration to new farms took place (see below) it is probable that this figure is not a great underestimate of total mobility including moves into and out of the barony from beyond the estate. Overall it is probable that about a third of the tenants studied migrated from one farm to another during this period.

These figures suggest that tenant farmers were not as highly mobile as might have been expected. Although short leases of under seven years were normal on the estate for at least part of the period, renewal often seems to have been automatic. If short leases fostered insecurity of tenure it was not reflected in high rates of mobility from farm to farm. Only 21% of the tenants who did migrate within the estate moved more than once. One reason for the lack of movement was the ease with which many tenants were able to alter the amount of land which they worked without moving to another farm. About a third of the farms on the estate were in multiple tenancy so that it was often possible for tenants to enlarge or reduce their holdings by increasing or decreasing the share of the farm on which they worked. Multiple leasing, where tenants took over additional land on neighbouring, separately-named farms, was also widely practised. Migration within the estate accounted for only a third of all changes in holding size. Differences in farm structure between baronies caused some variations in the level of mobility. In baronies where multiple-tenant farms were fewer or a large mean holding size discouraged multiple leasing migratory moves were more important. In Downie, where both these circumstances applied, migration accounted for as much as 58% of all changes in holding size.

When tenants did move to other farms the distances involved were short. 76% of all moves within the estate were under five km, 54% under three km. 70% of moves occurred within, rather than between, baronies. Restricted horizons of mobility are also shown by the pattern of movement of new farmers into the estate. Surviving leases specify the origins of entering tenants. Out of 268 leases only 14% were granted to farmers coming in from outside the estate. 69% of these 'outsiders' came from farms on other estates but within the same parish as the Panmure farm to which they were moving.

### **The mobility of tenants and cottars**

How did the mobility of tenants compare with that of the other major group of married men, the cottars? It might be hypothesised that levels of mobility of cottars and tenants would have been similar if their movements from farm to farm were linked: a move to another farm by a tenant might have resulted in the displacement of several cottar families but the proportion of each group which was mobile should have been comparable. Alternatively, if cottars were free agents the large number of available cottarages, the flexibility given by the crafts and trades which they frequently practised, and the limited amount of livestock and farming equipment which they possessed, may have made movement comparatively easy. It is harder to study the mobility of cottars as they are poorly recorded. Tenants, as rent payers, figured prominently in estate records while cottars did not and in addition they are rarely designated as such in parish registers. However, the register for Monikie parish,<sup>13</sup> which included Downie barony (Figure 1), is not only well kept from the early seventeenth century but, in the first years of the eighteenth century it frequently listed the place of residence within the parish of fathers baptis-

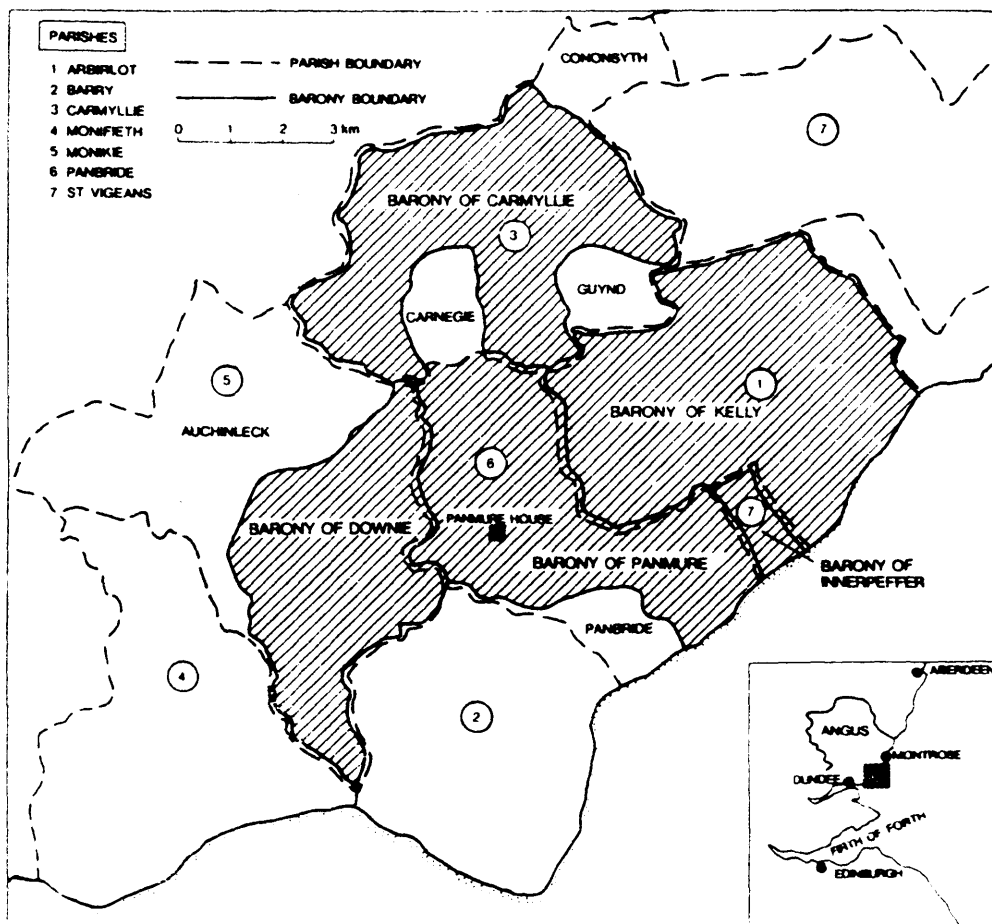


Figure 1.

ing children. When this is given as the 'cottoun' or cottar settlement of a farm rather than the farm itself, the person concerned was almost certainly a cottar. This allows some aspects of the mobility of cottars to be examined. From 1703, when references to place of residence begin, until 1714 when the run of estate records ceases eight out of thirty three Downie cottars made a move to other farms within Downie barony compared with seven out of forty eight Downie tenants. A chi square test did not indicate a significant difference between these two groups and the hypothesis requires further testing though there is some suggestion that cottars may have been more mobile than tenants. Insufficient data were available to determine the extent to which the movements of particular tenants and cottars were related.

The cottars were not a uniform group in terms of mobility though. When the marriages and runs of baptisms of cottars are examined there seem to have been two distinct groups of mobile and stable cottars. Out of sixty cottars who first appear in the register of baptisms in Monkie parish between 1703 and 1714 twenty two, or 37% had not been married in the parish, indicating that they had moved into the parish after marriage. Of this group sixteen out of twenty two, or 73%, are recorded as having baptised only one or two children before disappearing from the parish records. Of the cottars who had been married in the parish only ten out of

thirty eight, or 26%, subsequently had only one or two children baptised while many of them had six, seven, eight or more. A chi square test indicated that the difference between the two groups was highly significant. As the parish register does not list burials it is impossible to determine how many of the runs of baptisms in each group were terminated by the death of one of the parents rather than movement out of the parish but there is no apparent reason why the proportion should have differed between the two groups. In the case of the cottars who had not been married in the parish it is probable that most of them had moved out of the parish again after only a year or two. There are interesting parallels with the tenantry here for tenants who were married in Monikie tended to remain in the parish significantly longer than those who had been married elsewhere. If cottars were accustomed to move with particular tenants it is probable that the two migratory groups were linked but again this requires further research.

### **Marriage mobility**

One might also expect there to have been some differences in marriage patterns between tenants and cottars. Between baptism and marriage a high proportion of future cottars are likely to have spent part of their adolescence working as farm servants possibly on several farms. This is likely to have been less common for future tenants. There are indications that social mobility into the tenant group from the ranks of the cottars was mostly confined to the lowest levels and that, given the substantial amount of capital needed to stock the larger holdings, recruitment into the tenantry was mainly internal with many farmers being the sons of tenants.<sup>11</sup> One would therefore expect that many tenants would have worked on their fathers' holdings until they were ready to take them over or their fathers could afford to set them up on holdings of their own. On this basis it could be hypothesised that between baptism and marriage cottars would have been more geographically mobile than tenants.

The Monikie parish register indicates that thirty four of the thirty eight cottars listed in the early eighteenth century who were married in the parish had not been baptised there. This compares with only twenty three of the forty small tenants in Downie barony, leasing holdings of only an acre or two, and twenty one of the forty four larger tenants. A chi square test indicates that the difference between the cottars and the other two groups was highly significant and the hypothesis appears to be confirmed.

It might also be expected that there would have been some difference in the choice of marriage partners between tenants and cottars. Because it required much more capital to set up as a tenant farmer than a cottar it may have been desirable for prospective tenants to marry girls whose families could provide useful marriage portions. Tenants might also have chosen the daughters of tenants as wives as they would have received some training and experience in the management of the household and dairy which would have been important in the farm economy, while, given the evidence that the different levels of tenant farmers were mainly self-

recruiting, the social status of a wife would have been important too. Tenants are thus likely to have married mainly within their own group.

As they formed a comparatively small proportion of the population tenants are likely to have tended to look further afield for their brides than cottars. When the origins of marriage partners for cottars, small tenants and larger tenants are examined only eight out of thirty eight cottars chose brides from outside Monikie parish. This compares with eleven out of forty small tenants, who were only engaged in agriculture part time and whose level of wealth was only marginally greater than most cottars. By contrast thirty one out of forty four tenants of larger holdings chose partners from outside the parish. A chi square test showed a significant difference between the larger tenants and the other two groups but not between small tenants and cottars. Despite the greater level of mobility of cottars before, and possibly after, marriage tenants had wider horizons when it came to choosing their brides.

### **Mobility of farm servants**

It is harder to come to any firm conclusions regarding the mobility of farm servants. Farm service was a life cycle phase for young, unmarried men and women, most of whom subsequently became cottars and tenants, or their brides. They were probably less likely to be recorded in any documentary source at this stage of their lives than any other. Nevertheless, some glimpses of them can be obtained from kirk session records.<sup>15</sup> A high proportion of the cases of fornication brought before rural kirk sessions probably involved farm servants. In the case of the Monikie kirk session register the status of persons involved in such cases is only occasionally specified. However, it is interesting to note that in half the cases where people are identified as farm servants, one or both partners had removed to farms in other parishes at the previous Martinmas hiring. In some instances one may suspect that the move represented a deliberate attempt to avoid responsibilities and the censure of the kirk session, as in the case of Thomas Songster, a farm servant, who got one of the female servants on his farm pregnant and had joined the army by the time the case came before the elders. However, it was probably difficult to avoid the discipline of a church whose arm, at a regional level at least was long, and it is probable that most of the moves to adjacent parishes were made in the normal course of the farm servants' careers. Given the large sizes of the parishes concerned this suggests that there was an even higher incidence of internal moves, but more detailed research is required to confirm this.

### **Mobility of vagrants**

The kirk session register of Monikie also provides some insights into the composition and movements of the vagrant poor. Between 1600 and 1710 520 payments are listed and while their recording is variable in occurrence and detail they probably provide a reasonable picture of the make

up of the vagrant poor in this district. Despite Acts of Parliament which tried to prevent begging by gangs of able-bodied men and women<sup>16</sup> 20% of all payments in Monikie were made to groups of vagrants, sometimes referred to as 'randy beggers' or merely 'strangers'. While the judgement can only be qualitative at the moment one gets the impression that such groups were more common in Scotland at this time than in England.<sup>17</sup> There are no indications of size and composition of these groups. Another 25% of payments were made to individual 'supplicants' and 'strangers' without any additional information.

For the remaining 285 payments some details are available. 73% of them were made to men and only 27% to women, the proportion being comparable with that for English vagrants studied by Slack.<sup>18</sup> The entries made by the session clerk sometimes hint at the reasons behind people's vagrant condition. The most common was blindness or physical deformity accounting for 40% of payments to individuals where specific details were given, with sickness amounting to another 5%. The next largest group was people whose houses and possessions had been destroyed by fire, accounting for some 11%. Some payments were made to people whose distress was clearly only temporary, including two shipwrecked seamen, two discharged soldiers and a man who had been robbed. Such people may only have required assistance in order to return to their home parish. Bankrupt tenants were, perhaps surprisingly, only mentioned twice.

The remainder of the payments were to people whose designations indicate that they had formerly held a social position of some status. People designated as gentlemen, gentlewomen, or with the title 'Mr.' made up 19% of the specific payments, former schoolmasters, doctors, ministers and burgesses another 9%.

Clark and Slack have characterised the movement of vagrants in England as having been predominantly long distance and though Slack has indicated that some vagrants seem to have had regular itineraries the overall impression is that their movements were very much random ones.<sup>19</sup> Some of the vagrants recorded in Monikie were definitely moving more purposefully, possibly through a regular circuit of parishes. For example, William Bouack, sometime schoolmaster at Forfar, appeared as a supplicant in Monikie for several consecutive years but always at the same season, payments to him being grouped within a period of five weeks during September and early October. Likewise, William Lyell, variously described as a 'poor man' and a 'stranger' appeared once every summer for many years, generally in July. Other vagrants made less regular appearances but from the frequency of their visits must have been operating within a comparatively restricted area. This contrasts with Slack's findings for England.<sup>20</sup> The smaller Scottish burghs, less anonymous than larger English provincial towns, may have held less attraction for vagrants who could be comparatively easily supervised by burgh councils. It is possible that in Scotland at this time the movements of vagrants were tied more to the countryside where food of various kinds could probably have been obtained more easily than in the towns. The patterns discernible in Monikie parish may have been linked to seasonal rhythms in the market for

casual labour. Where kirk session records are well kept for a group of contiguous parishes it may be possible to examine these ideas in more detail.

## **Conclusion**

This introductory survey has indicated some of the potential of Scottish sources for studying population mobility in early-modern times. The documents which have been examined have allowed the testing of a number of hypotheses and the results of these tests have to some extent modified existing views on the level and nature of geographical mobility in rural society in lowland Scotland at this time. Tenant farmers were less mobile than expected, partly due to the influence of farm structures and holding sizes which facilitated non-migratory adjustments in the amount of land which they worked. When tenants did move from farm to farm their migration fields were limited. The tenantry thus appears to have formed a comparatively stable sector within society on the Panmure estates despite leasing systems which, superficially, might have been expected to have caused insecurity and a high level of turnover.

Cottars appear to have been somewhat more mobile than tenants during their adult working lives and also more markedly so between baptism and marriage, although the extent to which movements of cottars and tenants were related has yet to be established. However, there were clear contrasts in mobility among the cottars just as there were within the tenantry. On the other hand, when it came to choosing a bride, tenants tended to look further afield than cottars, perhaps because of the need for greater care in choosing a partner from the right background.

It has not been possible to discover much about the movements of farm servants although the few available indications suggest that they were highly mobile. However, it must be remembered that male and female farm servants were in a temporary life and labour cycle stage from which most of them went on to become cottars or their brides, and some to acquire tenancies. Kirk session records bring out some aspects of the vagrant poor. This group was far from being homogeneous. Travellers receiving charity ranged from groups of beggars who may have formed a near-professional element within the vagrant population, to distressed gentlefolk and former professional men. The movements of some individuals at least were not random as they seem to have returned repeatedly to the parish studied at the same season for several successive years.

This study has emphasised some of the variations in the levels of mobility which existed within rural society in lowland Scotland during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: It has also underlined the importance of considering mobility in relation to life cycle stages. It is hoped that further detailed work on other communities will be able to clarify the picture presented here and shed more light on the causes, as well as the patterns of mobility.



## NOTES

1. An effective recent summary of this work is contained in: **Patterns and processes of internal migration**, Open University D.301 Historical sources and the social scientist. 1982.
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3. K. Wrightson, **English society 1580-1680**, 1982. D. G. Hey, **An English rural society: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts**, 1974.
4. R. A. Houston, 'Parish listings and social structure: Penninghame and Whithorn (Wigtownshire) in perspective', **Local Population Studies**, Vol. 23, 1979, pp. 24-32; 'The literacy myth?: illiteracy in Scotland 1630-1760', **Past and Present**, No. 96, 1982, pp. 81-102. See also R. A. Houston, Aspects of society in Scotland and north-east England. c1550-c1750. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1981.
5. M. Gray, 'Scottish emigration: the social impact of agrarian change in the rural Lowlands 1775-1875', **Perspectives in American History**, Vol. 7, 1973, pp. 95-174.
6. G. Donaldson, **The Scots Overseas**, 1966, pp. 23-32. J. C. Beckett, **The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923**, 1966, pp. 45-8.
7. J. E. Handley, **Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century**, 1953, p. 120, 201.
8. For a published example see: C. S. Romanes (ed.), **Melrose Regality Records**, Vol. 1, p. 133, Scottish History Society, 1914.
9. I. Carter, **Farm Life in North East Scotland 1840-1914**, 1979.
10. P. Slack, The migrant in Kentish towns 1580-1640, in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), **Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700**, 1972, pp. 117-63.
11. A. A. Cormack, **Poor Relief in Scotland**, 1923, pp. 36-40 R. Mitchison, 'The making of the Old Scottish Poor Law', **Past and Present**, Vol. 63, 1974, pp. 58-93.
12. Scottish Record Office, Dalhousie muniments. GD 45 18, series of rentals and accounts commencing no. 1 and leases no. 148.
13. Scottish Record Office, Old Parish Registers, Monikie parish. O.P.R. 311 1-3.
14. I. D. & K. A. Whyte, 'Continuity and change in a seventeenth century Scottish farming community', **Agricultural History Review**, Forthcoming.
15. The kirk session material is interleaved with the parish register referred to above.
16. A. A. Cormack, 1923, **op. cit.**, pp. 36-50.
17. P. A. Slack, 'Vagrants and vagrancy in England 1598-1664', **Economic History Review**, Vol. 27, 1974, p. 364.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
19. P. A. Slack, 1974, **op. cit.**, p. 368; P. Clark, 1972, **op. cit.**, pp. 142-9.
20. P. A. Slack, 1974, **op. cit.**, pp. 368-74.