

# POPULATION CHANGE AND STABILITY IN A CHESHIRE PARISH DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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## Introduction

Migration and stability of population, which have been the subject of several studies,<sup>1</sup> are examined here principally through the study of surnames. Migration and stability are detected in three different ways: firstly, from changes in the local stock of surnames; secondly from the continuity of families through successive generations, and finally, through the provenance of marriage partners.

Nantwich, a parish in South Cheshire, has been chosen for this study. During the eighteenth century Nantwich was mainly an urban parish with an additional four rural townships. The population of the parish at the start of the century was estimated from the Hearth Tax Returns of 1674 for Nantwich Hundred, using Gregory King's multiplier of 4.4 for urban parishes.<sup>2</sup> The population figures at the end of the century were taken from the Census Returns of 1801.<sup>3</sup> During the period of investigation the population of Nantwich grew from around 2500 to nearly 4000.

## The local stock of surnames

In studying Nantwich parish in detail, one soon becomes aware that certain surnames predominate, and that others, although not quite so frequent, occur regularly. By ordering the surnames alphabetically, and assessing their degree of stability or otherwise, it may be possible to reach some conclusions about the migratory movements of the local population. Families in Nantwich parish during this period were reconstituted from the registers of marriages, baptisms and burials, by the method first perfected by Henry.<sup>4</sup> It is from these reconstituted families that the surnames of the parish were listed and counted. The surname was counted once only per reconstituted family, however many times members of that particular family appeared in the register. A marriage, or if there was not a marriage in the parish, a first baptism was used to initiate a family. An unrelated burial was not used because such an individual's time in the parish could have been very limited. The years 1680-9, 1740-9 and 1800-9 were selected for attention. These periods are at the beginning, middle, and end of the reconstitution period; and since they are sixty years apart, approximately two generations passed between each (see table 1).<sup>5</sup>

From this study, it cannot be said with any certainty that any of the surnames present were medieval local names, or that the people living in Nantwich at that time were descendants of those who lived there from 1500 or so. However, in his study of Nantwich, Hall gives the surnames of individuals or families who were living in the parish prior to 1300. The surnames of Wetenhale, Venables and Brereton known in Nantwich before 1300 were still represented there at the time under review.<sup>6</sup> Other names such as Mainwaring and Wickstead were present in the parish register more than one hundred years before 1680. The most frequent name in Nantwich during the study period, Wright, appeared in the parish register about one hundred years earlier than 1680.

In terms of their derivation most surnames can be divided into categories such as patronymic, occupational, topographical, or nicknames. The surnames most likely to be peculiar to an area are either topographical, or those not easily assigned to any of the categories mentioned above, for example, Hassall, the second most frequent name in Nantwich at this time. In fact, many of the surnames in the parish under study were common anywhere in England.<sup>7</sup>

It is unlikely that any new surnames came into existence in Cheshire after 1500. According to McKinley the formation of new surnames had virtually ceased in southern and midland England by the end of the fifteenth century,<sup>8</sup> although in Lancashire there were still a few individuals without surnames. Wales was late in adopting surnames, and some Welsh surnames did not become hereditary before the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> However, although this parish is within ten to fifteen miles of the Welsh border, the Nantwich register does not contain any name displaying Welsh prefixes, i.e. ap='son of' or verch='daughter of', although certain surnames such as Jones, Williams, Evans, Davies, Edwards and Roberts, suggest Welsh origin.<sup>10</sup>

The Nantwich reconstitution produces 347 surnames in 1680-9, 422 in 1740-9 and 418 in 1800-9. Of the 1680-9 surnames, 175 were represented in 1740-9, and of the 1740-9 surnames 173 were represented in 1800-9. One hundred and two surnames were present in all three periods. If the continuity in surnames can be interpreted as genetic continuity it would seem that there was some population stability, but the appearance and disappearance of a proportion of surnames indicates an amount of migration. In-migration is represented by the introduction of new surnames, 247 in 1740-9 and 245 in 1800-9. Some of these surnames may be names of men who had moved in to marry wives already in Nantwich, as sometimes the baptism of the wife could be traced but not that of the husband.<sup>11</sup> In other instances whole families moved in. The reverse movement of out-migration is to some extent represented by the disappearance of surnames, but some surnames will have died out rather than have migrated out. This may have been an important factor since for most of the period under review the population was barely replacing itself. The average family size was only 4.33 children, and as infant and child mortality together was approaching 500 per thousand in each generation, it may be predicted that something like one quarter of all families would not have had sons of marriageable age to carry on the name. However, this event would not automatically mean the disappearance of a name as more than one family might have possessed it.

**Table 1. Common surnames in Nantwich, 1680-89: Total number and percentage of families sharing common surnames from reconstitution sample**

1680-9			1740-9			1800-9			1680-1809		
	n	%		n	%		n	%		n	%
Wright	14	2.7	Wright	17	3.2	Wright	14	2.4	Wright	108	3.0
Clowes	10	1.9	Jones	13	2.5	Walker	14	2.4	Hassall	72	2.0
Johnson	7	1.3	Hassall	10	1.9	Dutton	12	2.1	Smith	64	1.8
Robinson	7	1.3	Smith	10	1.9	Wilkinson	12	2.1	Jones	63	1.8
Brookes	6	1.2	Davies	8	1.5	Davies	11	1.9	Davies	58	1.6
Whittaker	6	1.2	Dutton	8	1.5	Jones	11	1.9	Cooper	50	1.4
Bolis	5	1.0	Johnson	8	1.5	Hassall	9	1.6	Jackson	49	1.4
Fleet	5	1.0	Barnett	7	1.3	Smith	9	1.6	Wilkinson	49	1.4
Harrison	5	1.0	Buckley	7	1.3	Williams	9	1.6	Brookes	48	1.3
Jackson	5	1.0	Wainwright	7	1.3	Bowker	8	1.4	Walker	48	1.3
Wilson	5	1.0	Wickstead	7	1.3	Edwards	8	1.4	Williams	48	1.3
						Johnson	8	1.4	Hall	47	1.3
						Nixon	8	1.4	Dutton	46	1.3
									Harding	46	1.3

Although certain names died out, for example Clowes, Brookes and Bolis (see table 1), some others multiplied. For example, Walker went from one occurrence in 1680-9, to five in 1740-9, to fourteen in 1800-9. Dutton went from three occurrences to eight and twelve; Wilkinson from one occurrence to six and twelve; Davies from one occurrence to eight and eleven; Bowker from one occurrence to four and eight. Watson has illustrated a similar situation of surname-expanding for Cambridgeshire.<sup>12</sup>

The stability of some names and the appearance or disappearance of others may represent a difference in behaviour between families in that certain families had greater residential stability than others. Of the 247 names first appearing in Nantwich in 1740-9, 169 had disappeared again by 1800-9. It is likely that those families with property, for instance yeomen, farmers and small land-holders, were more likely to have remained in the area than propertyless families, for example the landless labourer seeking employment. It has been suggested that those families with frequently occurring surnames within an area form a stable nucleus, and that on the other hand the individuals with rare surnames form a sub group which is unstable.<sup>13</sup> Migration may have been habitual for some families, while others together with their descendants may have remained in the same place for a very long time.

Watson suggests that the stability of the population can be measured by the number of different surnames within the population. Drawing on the parish registers of Colne in Lancashire, 1599-1653 and a group of parishes in south Cambridgeshire, 1539-1640, he has used the frequency of the ten most popular surnames as an index to measure stability.<sup>14</sup> The top ten surnames account for 34 per cent of the entries in Colne and 12 per cent in south Cambridgeshire (see table 2). Watson suggests that because Colne is more remote from London than Cambridgeshire, migration in Colne would have been less marked than in

**Table 2. The ten most common surnames in Colne, Lancashire and South Cambridgeshire**

Rank	Colne, Lancashire 1599-1653		South Cambridgeshire 1539-1640	
	name	%	name	%
1.	Hartley	9.9	Prime	1.6
2.	Hargreaves	4.2	Taylor	1.3
3.	Smith	3.9	Fuller	1.3
4.	Emmott	3.5	Rayment	1.2
5.	Robinson	2.7	Newman	1.1
6.	Blakey	2.5	Beavis	1.1
7.	Baldwin	2.1	Rogers	1.1
8.	Walton	1.9	Gillson	1.0
9.	Holgate	1.7	Collis	1.0
10.	Wilson	1.7	Barnes	1.0

**Source:** R. Watson, 'A study of surname distribution, in a group of Cambridgeshire parishes, 1538-1840, *Local Population Studies*, 15, 1975, pp.23-32.

Cambridgeshire. However, as he only compares one chapelry in one region to several parishes in another region, his conclusion may not accord with findings elsewhere.

### Generational stability of surnames

Persistent families can be traced through the male line by following the surnames. In Nantwich it has been possible to trace six families through five generations, covering most of the time from 1680 to 1819. The Basfords started with Ralph, continued with son Daniel, grandson Daniel to great-grandsons Richard, Thomas and Ralph to great-great-grandsons John and William. Thomas Colley had a son, grandson, great-grandson and great-great-grandson all named Samuel. The Dutton family, in five generations were Gilbert, John and Gilbert, Thomas, John and William. The Mosse family started with John, son Robert to grandson, great-grandson and great-great-grandson Peter. William Nixon was followed by John and three Thomas's. Equally, Jno. Penkethman was succeeded by four Samuels. There were twenty-four families who lived through four generations and seventy-two families who survived in the parish for three generations. About 350 families lived in the parish for two generations. More than four thousand families came and went within one generation. Consequently, while there was some stability with some families persisting for several generations, others came and went quickly over a very few years.

Of the six names above, not one appears among the most frequent names for the whole period. Dutton, with forty-six families of that name, appears in the 1740-9 period as a top name, whereas Nixon appears in 1800-9. There were twenty-one families of Nixons over the whole period. The Basfords comprised seventeen families, the Colleys twenty families, the Mosses thirty-nine families

and the Penkethmans twelve families. It has been suggested above that a person with a surname which is common in their area is less likely to migrate than one with an uncommon surname.<sup>15</sup> The implication is that strong kinship links inhibit out-migration supposedly because families support individuals.

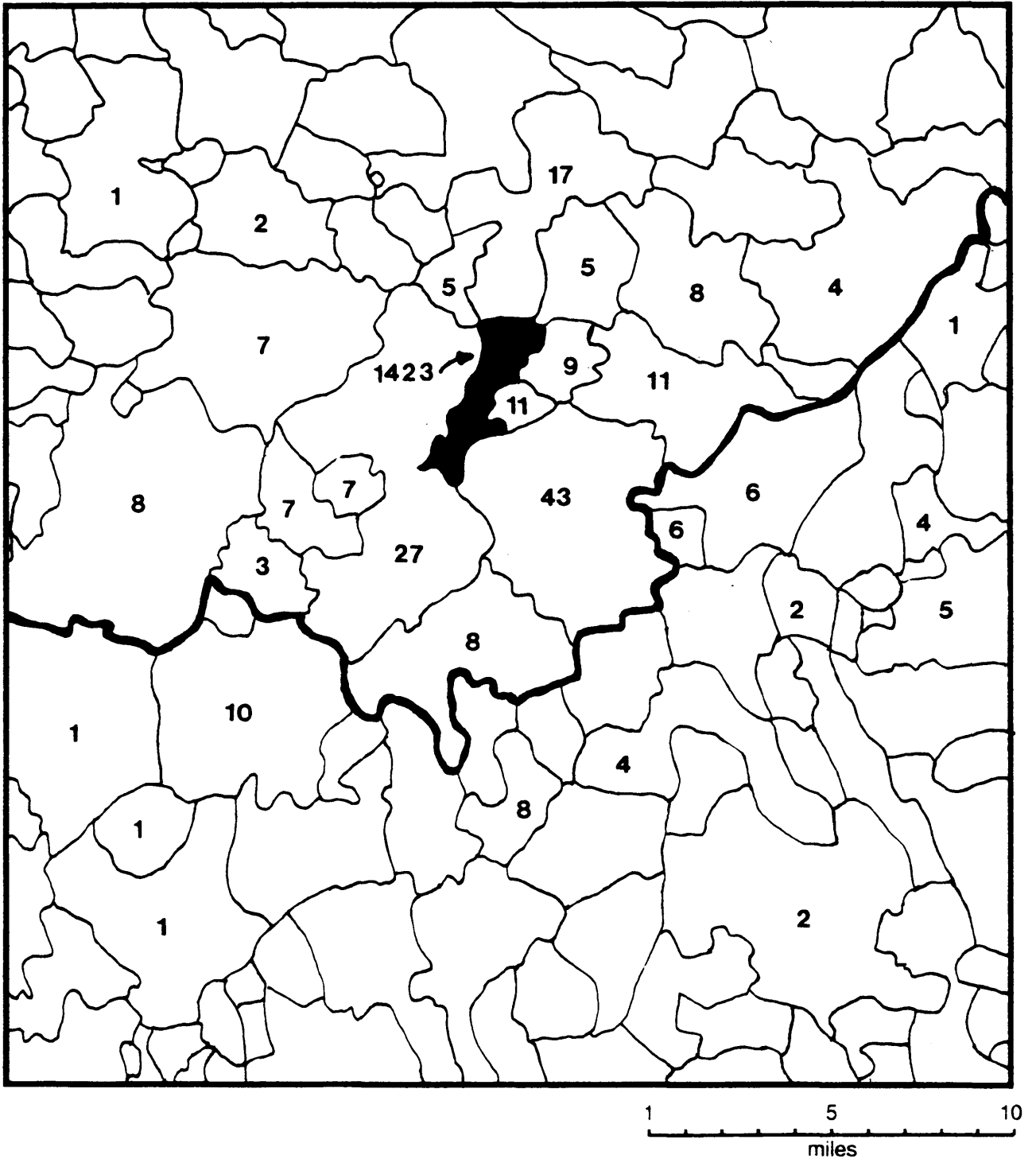
In some families the male line failed, and the family continued only through the female line, with of course a change of surname. Thereafter the family line might continue in the male line, or wholly daughter to daughter. The Nantwich data were examined to see if there were instances of strong continuation through the female line.<sup>16</sup> Only one family could be connected with certainty through the female line alone. Mary Goodwin married Richard Walker in 1693, their daughter Margaret married John Fox, their daughter Elizabeth Fox married Peter Moss, their daughter, Catherine Moss married Charles Higginson in 1792. The last couple had no children baptised in the parish. The Walkers had other children and descendants in the male line with the name Walker who were still in the parish in 1820. Margaret Fox had nine children, five dying in infancy, and although there were Foxes in the parish until 1820, they could not be connected with this particular family. Three families could be traced through three generations of the female line, and several through two generations. From the evidence of this parish the females were not as stable in residence as males.

From the evidence discussed so far, it is clear that many individuals and families did migrate from one locality to another. As the family reconstitution provides us with information at key points in the life-cycle it can be seen that some individuals went with their families not many years after baptism, others went for work or to get married elsewhere and some went after marriage. But a minority stayed put and it is these families or some of them that we were able to examine above. In some instances, continuity of a lineage could not be established, but it may be that there was kinship between individuals through connecting links in surrounding parishes. Without a more detailed study of these parishes it cannot be said whether or not this is the case. Where the out-migrants went to is open to conjecture, but at this time much migration would probably have been short-distance.<sup>17</sup> Hence many individuals might well be found within a distance of fifteen miles or so after their movement away from Nantwich.

### **Provenance of marriage partners**

The movements of individuals at marriage can give an important indication of migratory movements. For the parish of Nantwich, the declared residential locations before marriage of extra-parochial partners have been noted and are shown in figure 1.<sup>18</sup> It is apparent that most brides and grooms found their partner from close at hand. The majority married partners who on the eve of their marriage were from the same parish (see table 3). This is not evidence for couples being born in the parish in which they married, as it has been found in registers with more comprehensive information that many who claimed to be 'of this parish' were not born there but presumably had migrated to and lived in the parish sometime before they were married.<sup>19</sup> Some may have been servants in other people's households, and some may have come as farm workers, or as industrial or trade workers.

Figure 1 Marriage partners from the surrounding parishes to Nantwich, 1754-1819



**Notes:** The map displays the parishes surrounding the parish of Nantwich, the outline of which is shaded in black. The Cheshire county border runs east-west across the map, separating Cheshire in the north from Staffordshire, Shropshire and Flintshire in the south. The figures printed within the parish boundaries indicate the number of marriage partners marrying in Nantwich yet originating from outside the parish. In addition, 102 marriage partners came from parishes located outside the area covered by the map.

The parish boundaries were plotted using the **Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies** county maps of Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and North Wales.

**Table 3. Distance travelled to Nantwich for marriage, 1750-1819**

Distance	Number of partners	%
Same parish	1423	80.3
0-5 miles	124	7.0
6-10 miles	61	3.4
11-15 miles	45	2.5
over 15 miles	17	1.0
Outside area covered by figure 1.	102	5.8

Most of the marriage partners who were not residing in the same parish were from nearby, mainly adjacent parishes. The numbers of individuals coming to marry from any particular place decreased progressively as the distance increased from the parish of destination. The individuals from outside the area came from all over England, one or two from as far away as London, and a few from Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham and intervening distances from these places. However, the majority of marriage partners were living in the parish on the eve of their marriage, 80.3 per cent in Nantwich in the years 1750-1819 (see table 3). These figures are not unlike those offered by Hunter who found 32.7 per cent of marriages to be extra-parochial in the parish of Haynes, Bedfordshire 1774 to 1813,<sup>20</sup> and by Millard who found 29.2 per cent extra-parochial marriages in Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire in 1754-1793 and 32.2 per cent in the period 1794-1833.<sup>21</sup>

Returning to the question of the birthplace of marriage partners, as stated previously, although it may appear from the marriage register that a high proportion of brides and grooms married a partner from the same parish, it does not follow that all of them were born there. According to the Nantwich reconstitution analysis for 1750-1819, only 314 grooms and 480 brides could be traced back from marriage in Nantwich to baptism in Nantwich, representing only about one quarter of those who were married there. The other three-quarters must have migrated to the parish sometime before marriage, if baptismal registration was complete, which I have argued elsewhere was the case.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Analyses of population stability and change in Nantwich have revealed a number of features. The study of surnames has shown that while there is a great deal of change among surnames over time, some surnames persist over long periods. There is some evidence relating to the minority of families who stayed put over several or many generations, that persistence in the male line was more likely than persistence in the female line. Even though more brides than grooms are baptised and married in the parish, the females do not continue through the generations to the same extent. Migration at marriage

occurred for about 20 per cent of the couples marrying, and although this gives some indication of the trend and direction of migration, it underestimated that total flow since migration clearly occurred at other times in the life cycle. Finally, it can be concluded that the population of this parish which constituted a stable element, persisting in the same parish over several generations, was not very large, however, such a stable core to the community can still be detected.

#### NOTES

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