

GLOUCESTERSHIRE VILLAGE POPULATIONS

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Most local population studies are based on the parish registers and are concerned with changes in the population through birth, marriage and death. Yet it is often valuable to know the size of a population, either in the context of local social or economic history, or as a basis for calculating vital rates. To discover this is usually a hopeless task before the national censuses began in 1801, unless one is lucky enough to find a local census. But there are a number of sources which enumerate a part of the population (for example communicants or heads of families or households) at several points in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Since it is usually uncertain what proportion of the total population is covered by those enumerated in these partial censuses, the numbers should perhaps be considered relatively to each other rather than absolutely. Yet if we are prepared to accept a rough figure of 1.65 for the multiplying of the communicants and of 4.5 (in rural areas and small towns) for households or families we can get some idea of the size of the population. (1). In Gloucestershire, a specific number of censuses of this kind are available to allow us to establish the village populations approximately every 50 years between the mid 16th century and the early 19th century. The towns of Gloucester and Bristol and the diocese of Bristol are not considered here at all.

It is worth noting what Sir James Frazer has called "the general aversion which many ignorant people feel to allowing themselves, their cattle or their possessions to be counted." In his chapter entitled "The Sin of a Census" (2) he gives examples of this curious superstition all over Africa, from the Indians of North America and the Arabs of Syria; he even quotes similar superstitions from Europe including the British Isles, current in the 19th century. Of course there is also the more sophisticated suspicion that enumeration will lead to some form of tax or other social evil, but the early reluctance, even in this country, to being numbered may well have been based just as much on this apparently innate and wide-spread fear of a census. It might have been rationalized in mediaeval times by the consideration that such a

procedure was scripturally condemned. The reference is to II Samuel XXIV, when the Israelites were numbered, and plague, representing the wrath of the Lord, broke out. The story is told more fully in I Chronicles XXI, 17ff. Here, King David who had ordered the enumeration of his people took the blame: "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? Even I, it is that have sinned and done evil indeed, but as for those sheep, what have they done?" However, a great ceremony was needed to remove the evil - and it was better not to provoke the Lord by such blasphemy.

The figures available for Gloucestershire were not obtained with population enumeration as the principal object of the enquiry but as an addendum to other information. In the 16th and 17th centuries there are extant the following ecclesiastical records for Gloucestershire:

Answers to:

Bishop Hooper's visitation,	1551
Archbishop Parker's enquiry,	1563
Archbishop Whitgift's enquiry,	1603
Parliamentary (Cromwellian) enquiry,	1650
Bishop Compton's Census	1676

All but the first refer to general surveys, i.e. throughout the Province of Canterbury or even the entire country. The survival of these records is extremely patchy, but the originals or copies of these, referring to Gloucestershire have fortunately all been preserved.

The purpose of these enquiries was to give information to the Church Authorities about dioceses and parishes, but the emphasis in the questions varied according to the occasion. Bishop Hooper in his visitation enquiry of 1551 was chiefly interested in the clergy's attitudes and state of knowledge - or lack of it. The most important answers consist of records of their examination and the sufficiency or otherwise with which each incumbent could answer basic questions on The Lord's Prayer, The Ten Commandments and The Articles of Faith (Creed). Besides the name of the parson and his answers, the record gives that of the Patron of the living and - casually at the end - the number of communicants. These numbers are preceded in almost every case by the word "about" and the figures have evidently been rounded off to tens or even hundreds.

The investigation of 1563, though like other ecclesiastical surveys it was carried out through the Bishops, seems to have originated with

the Privy Council whose letter to the Archbishop is quoted by Strype. (3)

After our very hearty commendations to your good Lordship, the Queen's Majesty, upon certain good consideration moving her to understand in some part the state of your diocese, hath commanded us to write unto your Lordship with all speed possible and thereby to require the same to make answer by writing distinctly to us of all the articles following

IV. How many Churches . . . Which be parochial. How many of them have Parsons, Vicars, Curates. And whereas the parishes are so large as they have divers chapels of ease which have or ought to have curates or ministers to certify how many there be . . . with the names of the towns or hamlets where the same churches and chapels are so situated.

V. How many households are within every parish, or within any such member of any parish that hath such Churches and Chapels of Ease.

This shows clearly that the enquiry was a directive from Queen Elizabeth I herself, who kept a close hand over all clergy from the Archbishop downwards. (Another example quoted by Strype (4) is "The Queen's brief to the Archbishop" to summon a Synod in 1562). Here Archbishop Parker (to whom the replies of the Bishops were to be addressed in the first place, for forwarding to the Privy Council) had been told exactly what questions to ask; most were concerned with diocesan administration and in particular with the interlocking of dioceses with one another and with the shires/counties. But as shown, the number of households was asked for, almost casually as No. V of six questions.

In 1603 another return was demanded on this occasion by Archbishop Whitgift on his own initiative. It was one of his last actions; he died the following year. He was preparing for a new battle in the long struggle between the Anglican Church and the Puritan opposition. The Puritan attack had been opened by the so-called "Millenary Petition", signed by some 700 persons and laid before King James almost as soon as he arrived in his new kingdom from Scotland. Whitgift wanted information about the clergy and their parishes to help him present an answer to the King. All the Bishops may have returned answers but if this was the case by no means all survive. The record from Gloucestershire not merely survives but is contained in a copy attested by the Regisarius and is in good clear condition.

Here the enumeration of communicants was considered important and was recorded in every case but one. One of the objects was to find out in what parishes there were "Recusants" (Roman Catholics) or non-communicants (Dissenters), and how many of each. The very low proportion of the numbers set down in the records as being either one or the other, suggests that as few cases as possible were mentioned. Time after time the explicit formula is used : "No recusants of any sort." Where more than one or two are mentioned, they clearly belong to one household or group, as at Seizincote (Roman Catholics) and Westbury-on-Severn (Puritans). Even more important, however, to the enquirer than these numbers were the figures concerning the values of the incumbency, the curate's stipend and the name or absence of the parson, with his qualifications (for example M.A.).

The Parliamentary Survey of 1650 had the clear purpose of discovering "how adequate were the parochial arrangements and how they might be improved" .(5) It dealt chiefly with the type of incumbent ("Minster", "Preaching Minister", "Able Preaching Minister", "Constant Preacher" etc.) in charge of each parish or chapelry, the value of the living and the number of families. Absence of minister was also recorded. Where two or more very small parishes or chapelries could be united or when hamlets or other units could be considered "fit to be joined" to an existing parish, this was indicated. Likewise when a chapelry should become a separate parish. Clearly, the size of populations was here of major importance in sorting out anomalies of parish boundaries but had these suggestions (often very sensible ones), been carried out it would have made comparisons with later censuses of the same village difficult to assess. In fact, though some changes were effected at the time, they were undone at the Restoration. When in the 19th century such revisions were made, they often followed the lines suggested in this survey.

The Compton Census of 1676 is likewise an ecclesiastical enquiry set on foot by an Archbishop in the last year of his life. The reason for it is clearly stated by Archbishop Sheldon who had been "the chief architect of the Anglican Settlement after the Restoration of 1660". (6) He wrote to Dr. Henry Compton, Bishop of London and Provincial Dean of Canterbury, directing him, and through him the rest of the Bishops, to obtain "most certain information on three points;

1. the "number of persons, or at least families" inhabiting each parish;

2. the number of "popish recusants, or such as are suspected for recusancy" among the inhabitants
- and 3. the number of "other dissenters...which either obstinately refuse or wholly absent themselves from the communion..."

The enquiry here consists of no other questions, which does make it look more like a census than any previous enquiry; however, the Archbishops alternative in the first question ("persons or at least families") would seem to make it less valuable as a census. Some authorities asked for guidance, or stated their own terms of reference, e.g. the Archdeacon of Canterbury and the Bishops of Bristol and Bath gave the number of inhabitants over the age of 16. This would bring the procedure more or less into line with the previous reports which referred to Communicants, as the age for coming to Communion was rising. (7)

The record is referred to throughout the Salt Ms., in which it is found, as the Compton Census, but Compton though a notable man ecclesiastically and politically was not Archbishop when it was taken nor at any other time. Nevertheless, the Bishops were directed to send to him the results of the enquiries sent to them by their "Archdeacons and Commissaries", who were to confer with ministers and churchwardens in each parish. It has been suggested that Sheldon wished to play down the number of dissenters and it should be noted that with regard to Papists he asked that not only recusants but "suspected" recusants should be numbered.

Besides these ecclesiastical surveys, there is information to be gained from the taxpayers' returns but as these are, locally less reliable and more difficult to equate with numbers of persons, they are not recorded here.

There exists also a survey in 1608 of the able-bodied men - the record known as Smith's Men and Armour. This was drawn up for the purpose of showing what men could be put into the field for military service. As R. H. Tawney (8) has shown, this is of particular social and economic interest in that it sets out the numbers of men in various trades. It is unsuitable for our present purpose because the population enumerated bears no relation to that included in the other surveys.

With the 18th century, we come to the two great Gloucestershire local historians, Sir Robert Atkyns and Samuel Rudder, the first of whom

put out his work in 1712 and the second, a revision of this, in 1779. Population estimates are given in both and these are set out in the civil districts, by Divisions and Hundreds, though the places and their hamlets are parochially named. Unfortunately, Atkyn's list of both persons and of houses is often rounded off, while Rudder usually notes only the total population with occasionally some more detailed figures relating to households and persons (as opposed to houses and persons). His revision is based on an attempt to study parochial figures of births and deaths and he occasionally makes a comment on his alteration of the figures, either questioning those of Atkyns or attempting to find a cause for the variation during the century.

There are various suggested investigations to which the information given in these tables might lead, for example:-

1. A comparison between villages, or groups of villages, in different parts of the county showing for instance, evidence of "conurbation".
2. A search for the reason for the rise, stability or fall of the population of individual places.
 - (a) Economic factors may have been at work, for example Northleach was an important centre in the wool trade but became comparatively unimportant in the age of cloth making. Here the contrast with Witney (Oxon), a comparable town some 40 miles off, with a still-flourishing blanket manufacture, points to the need for water-power at a critical period.
 - (b) Where figures for an individual village deviate from the average experience, this might stimulate investigation into its fortunes. Rudder mentions the incipience of "ague" at Fretherne which reduced its population during the 18th century from 125 to 96: how far were other riverside villages affected by the same type of illness? and what precisely was it?
 - (c) Investigation might indeed throw doubt on a particular figure, e.g. that of Tewkesbury in 1551. Was it an error or had it to do with the suppression of the Abbey? Or it might lead a local historian to scrutinize more closely alterations in parish boundaries. Mr. Machin in the Victoria County History of Gloucestershire points out that the Registrar General admits not to have been able to trace the alterations "in detail", when defining units for the 19th century censuses.

3. Assessment of the figures for calculating the population from numbers of "households" and "families" may be considered against the evidence of Atkyns and Rudder who (sometimes tentatively) give both "persons" and "houses" or "households" respectively.

Any of these investigations would add to our understanding of the past in Gloucestershire, and similarly of other counties for which such information may become available. All are beyond the scope of this article, the purpose of which is merely to make readily available the figures which have at various times over four centuries been regarded as representing the population of Gloucestershire towns and villages.

NOTES

1. For hearth tax multipliers see LPS No. 1, Autumn 1968, pp.30-4; multipliers for censuses of particular age-groups (e.g. communicants) are discussed in the correspondence section of this issue. (editor's note).
2. Sir James Fraser, Folk-lore in the Old Testament, Abridged version, Part III, pp. 308-13.
3. J. Strype, Life and acts of Matthew Parker, Oxford, 1821, p. 255.
4. Strype, *op.cit.*, p. 245.
5. C.R. Elrington, 'A survey of church livings in Gloucestershire 1650', Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Transactions, 63, 1964, p. 90.
6. T. Richards 'The religious census of 1676... mainly in reference to Wales', Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1925-6, Supplement, quoting Cardwell, Documentary Annals, ii, 1839, pp. 339-42.
7. L. Bradley, 'A Glossary for Local Population Studies', L.P.S., Supplement, January 1971, p. 61.
"The Compton Census ... lists the returns, parish by parish (with a small number of omissions) under the heads Conformists, Papists and Non-conformists. The precise interpretation of these figures and hence the values of the multipliers needed to convert the parish totals into parish populations is controversial."

8. R.H. Tawney, 'An occupational census of the seventeenth century', Economic History Review, V, 1934, pp. 25-64.

AUTHORITIES

- (1) The 1551 Visitation of Bishop Hooper was edited and abbreviated by Geirdner and printed in the English Historical Review, XIX, 1904. The original ms. seems to have disappeared but there is an 18th century transcript in Dr. Williams' Library. (Roger Morrice Collection, Vol. L.) The numbers of communicants given are identical in the two texts.
- (2) The Ecclesiastical Return of 1563 is to be found at Oxford University among the Bodleian mss (Rawl. c. 790) and in the Bristol and Gloucestershire Library (Furney ms. B) from which the numbers of households were extracted by Mr. F.D. Price. The Rawlinson ms. is the more complete, and the relevant figures from this have kindly been supplied by Mr. Julian Cornwall.
- (3) The Ecclesiastical Returns of 1603 are to be found in the British Museum (Harleian ms. 594 ff 225-255). They have not so far been published in full but a transcription by the author of the Gloucestershire returns is expected to become available shortly in a publication of the Bristol & Glos. Archaeological Record Series (in a Religious Miscellany).
- (4). The Cromwellian or Parliamentary Survey, as it affected Gloucestershire was taken from the Lambeth Palace Library ms. 910, by Mr. C.R. Elrington, F.S.A. and is available in Bristol & Glos. Archaeological Transactions, 63, 1964, pp. 85-98.
- (5) The Compton Census returns have not all survived in contemporary ms, but there is an 18th century copy of the whole in the William Salt Library, Stafford. The history of the ms., so far as was known, was given in an article by Thomas Richards in the Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1925-6, Supplement. Other sections have been published by various Record Societies. However, an edition of the complete census is being prepared by Dr. Ann Whiteman for publication shortly.
- (6) Sir Robert Atkyns, The ancient and present state of Gloucestershire, London, 1712.

- (7) Samuel Rudder, A New History of Gloucestershire, Cirencester, 1779.
- (8) The figures of censuses since 1801 are published in Victoria County History of Gloucestershire, II.

Editors Note

The table of Gloucestershire Population figures referred to in this article was too long to be included in the text and is to be found in the pocket attached to the back cover.