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MALE OCCUPATIONS IN A RURAL MIDDLESEX PARISH

(1574 - 92)

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The author of this article is a member of the Edmonton Hundred Historical Society, which has three research teams working on the population history of the parishes of Edmonton Hundred.

For the pre-census periods little work, if any at all, has been done on the occupation structure of this country or specific areas within it. The research now being undertaken by many local historians in the field of population studies provides opportunities both for throwing light on this important aspect of the history of their own communities and for contributing information that, in aggregate, will be of great importance to the economic historian working at a national level.

For example, an analysis of occupations in a parish or town at different periods will illustrate changes in the economy of the district and perhaps the area around; and a number of analyses will provide information on such matters as how many millers or blacksmiths or bakers etc. there were per head of the population as a whole. The local historian is uniquely placed to do this research, for he is normally able to provide, from his specialist knowledge of his locality, an interpretation of the statistics which is essential if they are not to be misused or misunderstood by others. This article is an attempt by a local historian to explain how he thinks this work can be attempted.

An essential requirement is the existence of a parish register that gives, as a matter of routine, the occupations of adult males who figure in its entries. Since most adult males will occur in a register on a number of occasions in the role of husband, and of father of children being baptised and buried, and also on the occasion of their own burial, it is not essential that the occupation be given in every entry, provided that a high percentage of men can be definitely identified from at least one entry as following a specific occupation.

The research can be done either as part of the family reconstitution work, which many local historians are doing in association with CAMPOP, or else simply by going through a register for a period of years sufficient to ensure that a large number of individuals are included, making a note of every adult male named and the occupation ascribed to him. Where males are recorded and no occupation can be allocated, they must be included in any final set of statistics so that the validity of the figures can be assessed. Normally it will be found easier to use simply a burial register rather than to wade through all three registers. Very few adult males could avoid a reference in a burial register in some capacity, whereas it was possible for a large number to escape marriage registers by marrying in the bride's parish if she was not a local girl, and even baptismal registers if a wife returned to her mother for the birth of her children, a practise of which there is specific evidence in the registers of at least one parish known to the author.

A point that has to be borne in mind when using a burial register in this way is that it will not give a good indication of the actual spread of occupations if it so happens that some jobs were more lethal or dangerous than others. This consideration does not seem to apply to the occupations considered in this article. In the cases of occupations where there was a greater chance of death, there would be over-representation in the figures obtained from the burials' registers, unless the years providing the information contained enough general mortality crises to swamp any normal mortality differential there may have been.

From 1574 to 1649 the entries in the burial registers of the Middlesex parish of Tottenham High Cross, corresponding with the modern civil parishes of Tottenham and Wood Green, five miles to the north of London, invariably give familial relationships of buried persons to adult males and in turn the latter are always described by their occupations and social statuses, save in the case of a very small proportion of strangers. Non-parishioners are also clearly differentiated from parishioners. It therefore seemed to the author of this essay that it should be possible to use these burial registers, which are now in the Greater London Record Office (Middlesex Records) and have been the subject of study by members of the Edmonton Hundred Historical Society, to make an analysis of male occupations for the parish that would be reasonably accurate.

For the purpose of this study the burial registers covering the years 1574 to 1592 were used. The choice of commencement date has

already been explained. The termination date of 1592 was selected simply because up to and including that year it is possible for the author to allocate persons described in the registers by status terms (knights, gentlemen and yeomen), to occupational categories in farming, commerce and the professions from his knowledge of local wills; and it seems more meaningful to describe, for example, the ten men described as knights or gentlemen as six farmers, two London merchants, a schoolmaster and a confectioner, than to lump them all together under the heading of gentry. Similarly with the term yeoman, which in the Tottenham area at least did not always signify a farmer.

In the two tables contained in this article, all non-parishioners have been excluded, leaving a total of 178 male heads of families recorded for the parish in the burial registers for the years 1574-92.

Table 1: Male occupations and trades

| | | | |
|--------------------|----|------------------|---|
| labourers | 76 | millers | 2 |
| husbandmen | 23 | London merchants | 2 |
| yeoman farmers | 14 | weaver | 1 |
| household servants | 12 | bricklayer | 1 |
| moniers | 9 | sawyer | 1 |
| tailors | 8 | inn-holder | 1 |
| blacksmiths | 6 | vicar | 1 |
| gentry farmers | 6 | schoolmaster | 1 |
| carpenters | 5 | sexton | 1 |
| shoemakers | 3 | confectioner | 1 |
| butchers | 3 | hundred bailiff | 1 |

These 178 males occur in 852 entries in the burial registers, most of them (115) being referred to three or more times within the 18 years covered by this study.

The servants were married heads of families living in their masters' houses. It is possible therefore that the total number of male servants in the parish is under-recorded, as this occupational group more than any other was likely to include unmarried males remaining in the parish for only a short time and thus escaping notice in the registers.

The figure of 178 heads of families in these years seems reasonable in the light of a manorial survey made in 1619, for which the field-book and the map show 119 houses in Tottenham Cross parish. (See note).

Both the London merchants, Robert Aske, goldsmith and John Etheridge, grocer, were from Tottenham families, and though they and their wives were buried in the parish none of their children specified in their wills was born, or rather baptised, there, which suggests that at the time of their deaths the merchants had returned from London to Tottenham to live in semi-retirement. One man classified as a miller in table 1 occurs in the registers as 'miller and basketmaker'. The 1619 survey shows that the lord of the manor's osier beds on the marshes next to the river Lea were let at that time to one of the parish's two millers.

Two men recorded as labourers in table 1 were noted as such at the time of their deaths, but had earlier been recorded as husbandmen:

Erasmus Moise, husbandman in 1582/85/87, labourer in 1592; Thomas Holmes, husbandman in 1584 and labourer in 1589. One man, John Bever, moved in the opposite direction from labourer (1583/85) to husbandman (1588/91) and is entered under the latter category in table 1.

The trade of blacksmith had a tendency to run in families, partly perhaps because it required some capital outlay. Thus Henry Henwa recorded in this occupation five times between 1574 and 1591, and his son Thomas in the same job in 1576 and 1590. Hugh Embricke, with four entries between 1579 and 1590, was followed as blacksmith by his son Hugh in 1592. There was work in the parish for no fewer than four blacksmiths at one time: apart from the Hens and the Embrickes others in the same trade were John Segrave (1574/75/78), Nicholas Maynard (1578/85/92) and Henry Peake (1587).

The trade of carpenter passed from father to son in one family: William Blundell carpenter, the subject of five entries between 1564-87, who had followed the trade of his father John Blundell (died 1560), had a son William in the same occupation between 1582 and 1590.

The large number of moniers poses a problem. These men were mainly from local families with fathers or brothers recorded as labourers, though in one case a man described in earlier entries in the registers as a yeoman ended his life as monier and bequeathed his house for the parish school. In the case of these men the word monier would seem to have two possible interpretations: either moneylender or else token or coin maker. It is hard to believe that 5% of the adult male population (see table 2) were engaged in money-lending as their principal occupation, unless they were providing loans to Londoners and operating in Tottenham because this was the nearest

they could get to the city without coming under the control of the London authorities, who by their charters were entitled to restrict such activities within a limit of five miles of the city. Even then the social origins of the majority of the Tottenham moniers would seem to indicate they were unlikely to acquire the capital necessary to begin such operations.

Equally it is hard to believe that these men were coin makers at the London mint which was just too far away to make daily travel a practical proposition, and in any case such a concentration of mint employees in one parish would itself be difficult of explanation.

The possibility that these men were token makers working in the parish seems more probable, especially since in the neighbouring parish of Edmonton, to the north, the evidence of the parish registers and wills shows that there were a number of bell makers. A light metal industry in one country parish suggests the possibility of a similar industry in other rural parishes. On the other hand there are apparently no known Tottenham tokens for this period, which may be an argument against this interpretation. Whatever the solution may be, and further research will probably suggest an answer, the problem itself is a good example of the kind that the local historian is likely to encounter, which is of interest outside his own area of activity, and the solution to which he is probably best placed to provide.

In the burial statistics the markedly agricultural character of the parish emerges, as is to be expected for the date. But an arrangement of the various occupation into trade categories (table 2) shows a surprisingly large number of non-agricultural workers.

Under farming in table 2 are included labourers, husbandmen and the gentry and yeomen farmers who seem to have derived their income directly and principally from crop cultivation, market gardening or the rearing of livestock. There is evidence in the Tottenham manor rolls that seven persons, included in categories other than farming in table 2, had small holdings as tenants of the manor, but since they described themselves as following specific trades (e.g. butcher, monier, inn-keeper) they have been allocated to non-farming categories.

In the clothing trade category are the tailors and the shoemakers. Rural trades consists of the millers, the blacksmiths and the sawyer. Industrial/money lending covers the moniers on the assumption that they were coin or token makers or moneylenders. The buildings trade category consists of the carpenters and the bricklayers. At

Table 2: Trade categories

| | | % (+ 0.5) |
|------------------------------|-----|---------------|
| farming | 119 | 67 |
| household service | 12 | 7 |
| clothing trade | 11 | 6 |
| rural trades | 9 | 5 |
| industrial/ money lending | 9 | 5 |
| building trades | 6 | 5 |
| food and drink trades | 4 | 2 |
| professional men | 3 | 2 |
| London traders | 3 | 2 |
| textile trade | 1 | 1 |
| sexton | 1 | 1 |

this time carpenters, though they would have made furniture, were still largely occupied in building, which at that time in Tottenham was still mainly done by the traditional method of erecting wooden timbers infilled with mud and plaster. Food and drink trades include the butchers and the inn-holder. Professional men consists of the vicar, the schoolmaster and the hundred bailiff. The solitary weaver is classified under the textile trade. The London merchants are the goldsmith and the grocer, plus Balthazar Zanches, the comfit-maker of Philip the second of Spain who came to England when Philip married Queen Mary the first, and stayed on under Elizabeth the first and established the first English confectionery business. The sexton has been classified separately.

While table 2 indicates that farming still provided most of the work to be found in the parish in Queen Elizabeth's time, it also suggests that there was a larger commercial and possibly industrial element in the parish than local historians of the area had previously realised, and which undoubtedly reflects the extent to which the local economy was based on the provision of services to the metropolis.

The occupational statistics derived from the Tottenham burial registers, interesting though they are to the local historian of that parish, would be more interesting still if they could be set against those of parishes in other parts of England.

Note: The field book for the 1619 survey of the manors of Tottenham is in the Greater London Record Office (Middlesex Records), ref: 695/9. The map of the survey is printed in W. Robinson, History and Antiquities of Tottenham, 1840. The manor coincided with the parish, save for six tenements lying in the neighbouring parish of Edmonton which have been excluded from the calculation of houses in the parish.