

HISTORICAL RESEARCH NOTES

THE POPULATION SIZE OF ROMANO-BRITISH KENT: AN INITIAL ESTIMATE

Population estimates for *Britannia* as a whole have been offered by many authors on Roman Britain over the years, usefully summarised by Salway.¹ The trend has been for the headline figure to increase significantly as regional studies of rural settlement have revealed greater population densities. Thus from calculations as low as 500,000-1,000,000 in the 1930s the accepted level had reached 2 million by the 1960s – more recently totals in the 3-4 million range, and some even higher, have been published.

As far as the present writer is aware no estimate of the population of Romano-British Kent has been attempted and published by the various distinguished scholars writing of this period.² Their caution is understandable – clearly there are numerous pitfalls in the exercise (whatever its scale, national or otherwise) and various heroic assumptions need to be made. Nevertheless, the question of population size is an obvious one to pose by those with an interest in the Roman (or indeed any other) period.

Among recent national studies is that of Professor Millett who sets out detailed methodologies to calculate the scale of the urban and rural elements of the Romano-British population to produce an estimate for England and Wales, at its assumed peak in the first half of the fourth century.³ His total of 3,665,000 includes the separately assessed number of military personnel and their dependants (125,000); the urban element is 240,000. This note applies similar methods of calculation to the area of ancient Kent, although with a number of refinements, to produce a provisional estimate for the County.

Population in the urban settlements

A minimum estimate for the population of *Britannia* living in defended towns is calculated on the basis of their known intra-mural area, to which a density multiplier is applied.⁴ On this basis, Roman Canterbury, with an enclosed area of 140 acres, is calculated to have had a population of c.9,500.

Rochester's wall only enclosed 20 acres suggesting a total number of inhabitants of around 1,300. These two Kentish towns are some way down in the league of Britannia's urban centres. Canterbury is only the sixth largest – with London (population *c.*23,000), Cirencester, Wroxeter, St Albans and Winchester exceeding it – and Rochester is thirteenth in size.⁵

Although the national study is limited to walled towns, consideration is also given here to other substantial settlements in Roman Kent with at least some urban characteristics. There were significant populations – comprising military personnel, their dependants and other civilians – associated with the defences at Richborough, Reculver, Dover and Lympne. Other sizeable (civilian) settlements, at Springhead, *Durolevum*, Ashford (Westhawk Farm), Dartford and *Noviomagus*, had populations variously engaged in trading, industrial and service activities.

Generally there is insufficient data on the precise areas covered by these other 'urban-type' settlements to undertake even a rough calculation based on assumed population density. However, it is safe to say that no other place approached the size of Canterbury. One or two of the settlements associated with the coastal defence sites, e.g. Richborough, may well have been larger than Rochester but most of the rest probably had fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. These figures suggest a total urban (and military-related) population for Kent in the region of 18,000.

The Rural Population

In the national study by Millett the estimate of the numbers living in the countryside was based on the area of cultivable land, the density of occupation sites – numbers of villas, farmsteads, hamlets and villages per square unit of area (based on actual surveys undertaken in various parts of the country) – multiplied by a factor representing the assumed/expected size of the settlement group. The national estimate was based on a total figure of 44,000 square miles of available land,⁶ with an average of 2.1 agricultural settlements per square mile, rising to 3.4 in the best favoured areas, and inhabited by groups averaging between 20 and 50 in number. The total rural population figure thus calculated for England and Wales was 3,300,000.

Applying this basic methodology to Kent requires, firstly, to establish the total area believed to have been used for either arable farming or pasture in Roman times, bearing in mind the extensive areas of woodland which existed at the time.⁷ The total area of the Ancient County was 1,550 square miles of which perhaps 60 per cent was exploited agriculturally. It is readily apparent from published maps showing the distribution of Roman sites of all kinds,⁸ that certain areas were particularly well-favoured, notably the lower valleys of the Stour, Medway, Darent and Ravensbourne rivers, much of the strip of north Kent through which

Watling Street runs – and the Isle of Thanet. Here the rural population density would presumably have been at the higher end of the scale employed in the national estimate. It is calculated that these areas total c.300 square miles. Assuming that the high-end national figure of 3.4 settlements per square mile holds good, and applying the highest group size number (50), gives an estimated rural population in these most favoured regions of 51,000.

The rural population in the apparently more sparsely populated rural areas, mainly in the Downs and Chartland regions, totalling some 650 square miles, with more scattered, and generally smaller, settlements (1.8 settlements per square mile, averaging perhaps only 30 souls in each), is 35,000. The total rural population was thus in the region of 86,000; thus with an average density of 90 per square mile.

Marginal settlements

The area of the County not covered by the above estimates – 600 square miles, around 40 per cent, including substantial parts of the Low and High Weald, the marshlands to north and south and long stretches of the coastline – need also to be considered. Generally, these marginal places were very sparsely inhabited. There were small, well-scattered settlements in the Wealden area devoted to the exploitation of its iron and timber resources; some limited cultivation was probably also carried out. Population clusters along the coast were engaged in fishing, pottery and salt production and the exploitation of marine resources generally.⁹ Putting a total figure on these widely spaced groups in the marginal locations is problematic but if we assume 10 persons per square mile this gives an overall figure of 6,000.

Collating the estimates made above provides the following total for Roman Kent:

Towns and other large settlements	18,000
Rural population in best favoured areas	51,000
Rural population in other areas	35,000
Other	6,000
Total	110,000

Future archaeological work in Kent on Roman urban areas (such as Richborough) and on rural settlement patterns and densities will hopefully allow further refinements of the exercise leading to a greater or smaller final tally.

The total of 110,000 for Roman Kent is higher than that estimated for the late eleventh century based on Domesday Book data (c.75,000),¹⁰ in line with national estimates. Part of the explanation is the general

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reduction in the number of urban dwellers. Clearly, some other remarkable demographic events must also have occurred to account for the decline. It seems that the Romano-British rural population levels were not reached again until the thirteenth/early fourteenth centuries.

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¹ P. Salway, 1997, *A History of Roman Britain*, OUP.

² E.g., Detsicas, *The Cantiaci* (1980) and Professor Millett's chapter on 'Roman Kent' in *Archaeology of Kent to AD 800* (ed. J. H. Williams), 2007.

³ Millett, M., 1992, *The Romanisation of Britain: an Essay in Archaeological Interpretation*, CUP.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

⁶ Millett's data in square kilometres has been converted to square miles.

⁷ See Lawson, T. and Killingray, D. (eds), 2004, *An Historical Atlas of Kent*, p. 6.

⁸ OS Map of Roman Britain 2001; *Historical Atlas*, p. 24.

⁹ See, for example, Parfitt, 2000, 'A Roman Occupation Site at Dickson's Corner, Worth', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxx, 107-148.

¹⁰ See *Historical Atlas*, p. 36.

A DOCUMENTARY STUDY RELATING TO BUCKLAND IN THE MEDIEVAL BORGH OF WESTREE IN MAIDSTONE

Buckland is situated in the north-western part of Maidstone, to the south of Allington. Historically, Buckland was amongst the possessions of the archbishops of Canterbury as part of their manor of Maidstone. That it actually lay within both the manor and parish is indicated by seventeenth-century manorial surveys and rentals: the boundary of the manor in 1608 'beyond' Little Buckland is defined within a 64-folio book (TNA: PRO LR 2/219 fo. 63); and various lands and features recorded in 1650 (CKS U1644 M18, M28) can be correlated with those depicted on later maps of Great and Little Buckland Farms, dated 1804, which accompany nineteenth-century estate reports (CKS U234 E21). Buckland was presumably once a notable part of Maidstone, featuring in Philipott's *Villare Cantianum*, published in 1659, and warranting several pages in Hasted's topography of the county over a hundred years later (Philipott, 227-8; Hasted 1798, 303-306). Beale Poste expanded on Hasted's account in a detailed section in his usefully referenced *History of the College of All Saints, Maidstone* (1847); Russell's *History of Maidstone* (1881), also covered the history of Buckland, in which he cited further documentary sources (Poste, 110-114; Russell, 337-339).

More recently, Du Boulay relates a holding of one twentieth of a knight's fee to Little Buckland in Maidstone (Du Boulay, 357-8). According to the survey of Archbishop Pecham's manor of Maidstone of 1283-85, several

personal names including the appellation 'de' or 'at(t)e' Buckland (and its variant spellings) were associated with inhabitants or landholders of Maidstone (Witney, 101-104).

The history of Buckland as given by these historians provides an essential foundation for further documentary study. Many of the documentary sources cited have survived and have been supplemented by others now accessible in local or national repositories.

Tax assessments in The National Archives (TNA: PRO E 179) for various years throughout the fourteenth century provide lists of individuals and amounts due for each in the Hundred of Maidstone (TNA: PRO E 179/123/10-12, 14, 20, 22-24, 29, 48, 59). Some documents specify Westree and other Maidstone borghs (or tithings) (TNA: PRO E 179/123/10, 48, 59), and in others, a list of names in a section with a subtotal can be inferred to relate to Westree. Various individuals within these assessments can be associated with Buckland either by name, or through correlation with deed or other documentary evidence. Seemingly Geoffrey, James, and Alexander 'de', or 'at', Buckland were Maidstone inhabitants of some means in the first half of the fourteenth century: amounts shown against their names in the assessments are amongst the highest. Furthermore, a foot of fine of the seventeenth year of Edward II (1323-1324) records a settlement between Alexander and Geoffrey de Buckland concerning a holding of substantial property (a messuage, rent, and lands totalling 118 acres) which by implication may have been at Buckland, although this can not be certain as the location is given no more precisely than 'in Maydenstan' (Greenstreet, 282). Further names evidently with Buckland connections are de Wandlesworth (or Wendelsworthe), appearing in assessments of the first half of the fourteenth century, and the surname Barry, which appears in those of the second half; others shown by deeds to have been Buckland property-holders are the le Peks (or Peaks), Barthelots, and Wynkers (all with spelling variants).

Unfortunately, most surviving tax assessments covering the fifteenth century do not provide such evidence of identity. They only contain total sums for each area, as opposed to listing separate amounts due for each assessed individual.

However, the number of estate documents in Lambeth Palace Library surviving from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century relating to the archbishops' manor of Maidstone provides a valuable extra resource for tracing inhabitants in this period; the court rolls, in particular.

There is no continuous date-sequence of court rolls, and only a few court rolls contain references to any payment of relief by new tenants taking possession of property acquired within the manor of Maidstone. Nevertheless, the distinct sections relating to the borgh of Westree in the surviving rolls do include references to elected manorial officials, fines of manorial tenants for non-attendance, and payments relating to trading

activities such as brewing and baking (recorded at views of frankpledge). Thus they provide a useful list of relevant tenants' names throughout the period. The occasional jury list, and the lists of tenants' essoins (excuses for non-attendance), together with those paying suit of court, and individual amounts specified for each, at both halemote (or hallmoot, referring usually to a manorial court) and portmote (or portmoot, usually concerning administration of a town), allow tracing of particular manorial tenants and their successors. These include individuals who are confirmed by other documents to have held property at Buckland.

Amongst The National Archives collection of Ancient Deeds, Series B (TNA: PRO E 326) there are over forty medieval deeds dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries relating to property in the borgh of Westree in Maidstone. Property involved includes a quarry at Buckland in 1471 (TNA: PRO E 326/2557), together, from 1500-1534, with 'le voydyng', or 'voiding' (TNA: PRO E 326/2553, 5698, 8728, 11333, 11340, 11341), an enigmatic term whose precise meaning is now obscure, but which may imply a formerly quarried area. In one deed, dated 1534 (TNA: PRO E 326/11340), the transfer of interest to Sir Henry Wyatt and others of a stone quarry is specified, presumably Kentish Ragstone, which is known to have been worked in the immediate area for centuries. Further deeds covering the period 1322-1532 relate specifically to Buckland in the parish of Maidstone (TNA: PRO E 326/2552, 2555, 2558, 2560, 5639, 5697, 7102, 8218, 8730-3, 8742-4, 8747-9, 10353-6, 11327, 11332). The deeds indicate that various parcels of lands and several messuages (most with gardens) in the borgh of Westre(e) were in the freehold possession of local manorial tenants of the archbishop before acquisition by the Wyatt family: many of the names of parties (and witnesses) to the later deeds occur in the Lambeth Palace Library Estate Documents, especially in the rental of c.1509-10 (LPL MS 1025 [1]), and the series of court rolls (LPL ED 619-655), covering the period 1382-1522.

Account rolls in Lambeth Palace Library relating to the manor of Maidstone survive covering an earlier period, 1279-1447 (LPL ED 656-680, and 878), but usually have less content of relevance to Buckland than the court rolls. While they contribute names of manorial officials, they deal principally with specific categories of income and expenditure (often in great detail), and so generally offer less information regarding individuals, although some include references to those employed in the maintenance of manorial property. The main exceptions to this occur in a partially faded rental, hardly legible in places, attributed to the time of Richard II (LPL ED 669) giving details of manorial tenants and their property holdings (including references to Alan 'de bokelonde'), and two early account rolls which have lists of names attached. The latter relate to Maidstone portmoots between 1296 and 1300, in the Reeve's accounts of 1296-1297 (LPL ED 657), and Serjeant accounts of 1299-1300 (LPL ED

658), both with attached estreats of courts (lists of fines and amercements due to be collected from individual tenants), which rarely survive. Included in each of these lists is one Geoffrey ‘ate’, or ‘de’, Boclond.

An account roll of 1424-25 of the College of All Saints in the Centre for Kentish Studies (CKS Md Uncat Bdle 19) is useful for cross-referencing with the Lambeth Palace estate documents, and shows that one Nicholas Barry held property at North Buckland. Nicholas appears in the Maidstone court rolls of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, as does a Richard Barry, and his wife. Then William and Walter Barry appear in the 1470s, with subsequent references to heirs of each, and also to heirs of John and William Barry. Edmund Barry is also identified, elected ‘*Borughus*’ of Westree in 1482-3 (LPL ED 642) – probably similar to the *Borgesalder*, the individual responsible for the *borga*, or tithing, in the thirteenth-century survey of Maidstone (Witney, 104, n.1). References to two further individual Richard Barrys, one described as senior, and the other as junior, occur at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. The elder Richard was ‘mason’, and the younger ‘laborar’, according to details in the rental of Maidstone manor c.1509-10, and evidence in the Ancient Deeds. The deeds prove that Barrys held property at Buckland between 1361 and 1523, subsequently acquired by Sir Henry Wyatt. Interestingly, the College account roll reveals that amongst those holding lands of the College there are several masons evident in the Buckland area, at a date when there were likely to have been local building works in progress in Maidstone, whether at the College itself, or in association with other medieval stone buildings in the area.

This analysis demonstrates how the court rolls and rentals might assist in tracing a particular medieval landholding family, especially when used in conjunction with surviving deeds, accounts, and tax assessments. These medieval documents offer a valuable supplement to the list of medieval inhabitants of Maidstone given in the previously published histories.

Additionally, the court records and accounts amongst the Lambeth Palace Library Estate Documents offer a valuable insight into the duties and financial obligations of Maidstone inhabitants as manorial tenants, the actual administration of the town and manor, and the categories of revenue accruing to the archbishop as manorial lord with local jurisdiction. Their accessibility on microfilm at the CKS increases the opportunity for further study. Further microfilm copies of additional Kentish estate documents held at Lambeth Palace Library being added to the CKS collections will similarly extend research opportunities in the future.

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For contents and details of individual documents, see:
TNA: PRO Online Catalogue: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue
TNA: PRO E 179 Database: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179

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