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THE POPULATION OF VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN KENT

(I) GROWTH, MIGRATION, DISTRIBUTION

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Demographic trends do not respect reigns, nor do they accommodate themselves tidily within the conventional 'centuries' of historical discourse. In Kent, as in the nation at large, the population began to increase at unprecedented rates from about 1750 and growth was maintained at a brisk momentum into the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, there is a case for focusing on the Victorian and Edwardian years as a piece. The study of population between the mid-eighteenth century and the 1820s is hampered by well-known difficulties over sources, and in the case of Kent this period remains a largely unexplored territory. But the beginning of the Victorian era coincided with a marked improvement in the scope and quality of successive censuses and with the advent, in 1837, of an entirely new system of civil registration of marriages, births and deaths. A great deal of this material is available in published abstracts although these are not always readily accessible, which may help to explain why no previous attempt has been made to draw up a synthesis, with an interpretative commentary. This article falls into two parts. The present essay is concerned both with establishing the growth of aggregate numbers, the extent to which Kent as a whole gained or lost by migration, internal migratory flows, and the shifting balance of population within the county. Its successor will address the factors which governed rates of natural increase, that is, variations in marriages, births and deaths.

1. THE BOUNDARIES OF KENT

From the outset it is essential to clarify the various definitions of the county that were used in the nineteenth century. On any basis, Kent was

one of the most populous of English counties, but different conceptions, each legitimate in its way, give rise to varying aggregate numbers. We may distinguish,

- (i) The ancient or civil county. This was the most inclusive definition incorporating the Blackheath Hundred (including Charlton, Eltham, Kidbrook, Lee, Lewisham and Sydenham); the towns of Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich; the Hundred of Bromley and Beckenham; and various other parishes eventually affected by the suburban spread of London, such as Chislehurst and Orpington. Population figures for the ancient county, and for each of several hundred constituent parishes and townships were assembled some sixty years ago by Minchin.¹
- (ii) The registration county. This came into being with the organization of civil registration in 1837. Originally, 'registration Kent' comprised 28 superintendent registrars' districts, based on poor law unions. However, Greenwich and Lewisham were soon transferred to the registration county of London and thereafter Bromley and Dartford marked the western extremities of the county, so defined. Of the three definitions of Kent considered here, this is the most restricted in a geographical sense.² Nevertheless it is essential to work at least in part with this creation, since the abstracts of marriages, births and deaths were published only for registration counties and districts.
- (iii) The administrative county. This was created in 1889, and under this arrangement Kent ceded some territory and population to the new administrative county of London – most notably Lewisham, Greenwich and Deptford. Within the swathe of territory thereafter administered by Kent County Council two boroughs were distinguished, i.e. the City of Canterbury and the Municipal Borough of Gillingham although for our purposes they may be subsumed.

2. AGGREGATE GROWTH OF POPULATION

It was in the years after 1750 that the population of Kent began to grow at rapid, though fluctuating rates. The period of the French Wars

¹ (Ed.) W. Page, *The Victoria History of the County of Kent*, iii (1932), 356–70.

² In addition, parts of Lamberhurst and Broomhill parishes, were included in the registration county of Sussex, but the numbers involved were very small – 639 in 1851.

appears to have been propitious from this point of view, for in 1801–11 the growth of the ancient county (19.3 per cent) exceeded that of England and Wales (14.3 per cent), reflecting busy times in the dockyards and seaports, and troop movements. Thereafter, the winding down of these activities, coupled with an agricultural depression, probably combined to suppress the Kent rate somewhat, for the inter-censal increases of 1811–21 and 1821–31 were 15.6 and 12.2 per cent, not quite keeping pace with national population growth (18.1 and 15.8 per cent).³ Nonetheless, in 1831, just after the Swing riots and six years before the accession of Queen Victoria, the population of the ancient county reached 479,000 and had risen by some 160 per cent since 1758⁴; the corresponding increase over the same period for the national population was 117 per cent.⁵ Noting in passing that the dynamics of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Kentish population growth deserve and require much closer attention than they have received so far, we pass on to the aggregate population changes of the Victorian and Edwardian era, which are summed up in Table 1.

The table bears witness to the continuation of considerable rates of population growth. This is true however the county is defined, but more particularly of the ancient county which came to embrace sizeable proportions of outer London and which grew faster than the national population in every inter-censal decade after 1841. However, even the registration county exceeded national growth rates in 1851–61, 1861–71, 1881–91, and 1891–1901. Overall, between 1831 and 1911 the population of Kent grew by 216 (ancient county), 162 (administrative county) and 156 per cent (registration county). This did not compare with the highest county population growth rates of the era (for example, Lancashire 256 per cent, Glamorgan 783 per cent), but it exceeded those of most other counties (e.g. Somerset 42 per cent, Norfolk 28, Devon 42 and neighbouring Sussex, 143) so that as a

³ It is not considered necessary to over-burden this paper with a myriad of detailed references to specific volumes and pages of the numerous census reports which have been consulted and compared. Readers unfamiliar with this source will find much practical help in (i) Interdepartmental Committee on Social and Economic Research, *Guides to Official Sources No. 2. Census Reports of Great Britain, 1801–31* (HMSO, 1951) or (ii) (Ed.) R. Lawton, *The Census and Social Structure* (1978). Exceptions have been made where continuous passages rely upon a particular census volume.

⁴ The 1758 figure is an approximation, based on Bishop Secker's Visitation, Kent Diocese of Canterbury and Parishes of Canterbury. I am indebted to Dr Mary Dobson for this estimate, which is fully discussed in her D. Phil. thesis, 'Population, Disease and Mortality in South East England, 1600–1800', University of Oxford, 1982.

⁵ In this case the national comparator is England only, the figures being drawn from E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871* (1981), 533, 535.

TABLE 1
POPULATION GROWTH IN KENT AND ENGLAND AND WALES, 1831-1911

	Ancient County		Administrative County		Registration County		England and Wales
	Population (000)	% increase since previous census	Population (000)	% increase since previous census	Population (000)	% increase since previous census	% increase since previous census
1831	479	—	399	—	398	12.5	—
1841	548	14.7	448	12.3	447	12.2	14.5
1851	616	12.3	486	8.5	485	8.5	12.7
1861	734	19.2	546	12.3	545	12.4	11.9
1871	848	15.6	631	15.6	629	15.4	13.2
1881	978	15.3	710	12.5	709	12.7	14.4
1891	1142	16.8	830	16.9	806	13.7	11.8
1901	1349	18.1	961	15.8	935	16.0	12.1
1911	1512	12.1	1046	8.8	1019	9.1	10.9
% increase 1831-1911:	216		162		156		160

Sources: For the ancient county, VCH *Kent*, iii (1932), 356-70; for the registration county, successive census volumes especially Parliamentary Paper 1852-3 lxxxviii (Pt. I) which gives data for the registration county and districts back to 1801; and for England and Wales, and the administrative county, B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (1962), 20-3.

consequence Kent maintained (or, depending on the definition chosen) increased its proportion of the national population: the administrative and registration counties upheld their shares (2.9 and 2.8 per cent), but that of the ancient county rose from 3.4 to 4.2 per cent.

3. MIGRATION TO AND FROM KENT

Throughout the period, migratory outflows decreased the population of Kent and inflows served to augment it. The next step in the analysis is to trace these flows and to determine the extent to which the net balances worked out in Kent's favour. Undoubtedly the most eye-catching outflows were associated with overseas emigration, a subject which is much better documented where assisted passages were involved. In the

era of the New Poor Law, the Commissioners were keen to promote emigration with a scheme that was particularly popular in the Weald. Recent research has shown that union or parish-subsidized emigrants between 1834 and 1870 amounted to well over 3,000, although the main impact came in 1836–47 when Kent accounted for as many as 2,451 of the 9,504 assisted passages from the whole of England and Wales, mainly to Australia and Canada.⁶ Other agencies were at work in the field, sometimes working in co-operation with the Poor Law authorities, sometimes not. These included the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, established in 1842 to aid the emigration of selected persons using funds raised from the sale of Crown Lands in the colonies. New Zealand attracted a few hundred with offers of free passages in 1839–50, while in 1858 the plight of the Deal boatmen, whose livelihood had been badly affected by the advent of steam shipping and the re-routing of mail ships via Southampton and Plymouth, was publicized in *The Times*. This resulted in the departure of at least a dozen men and their families to Timara and Lyttleton, New Zealand, where they engaged in similar lightering work.⁷ In the 1870s, with the support of the new agricultural trade unions, some 4,000 persons left Kent for New Zealand, including a party of 400 which enjoyed a farewell party at the Maidstone Assembly rooms before leaving: 'They wanted to "get on", these gentle, civil-spoken southern agriculturalists' said a *Daily News* reporter, commending their demeanour.⁸

Other emigrants were able to rely on their own resources, such as Robert Aveling, reputed a black sheep of the prominent engineering family at Rochester, and Thomas Ottway who gave up his butchery business at Tenterden: they left for Australia in 1850 and 1852, respectively.⁹ However, it is likely that most private departures were to the United States for which assisted passages were not available, though it should be borne in mind that an unsubsidized passage across the Atlantic might well be cheaper than an assisted one to Australia or New Zealand. Such privately funded moves leave traces only in ships' passenger lists, and occasionally in correspondence such as that of George Martin, a carpenter from Chevening whose letters from America gave news of other Kentish emigrants ('Didn't John catch a

⁶ R. Haines, 'Government-assisted Emigration from the United Kingdom to Australia, 1831–1860: Promotion, Recruitment and the Labouring Poor', Ph.D. thesis, Flinders University of South Australia, 1992, Statistical Appendix, tables VII: 47 and VII: 52.

⁷ B. Wojciechowska-Kibble, 'Migration and the Rural Labour Market: Kent 1841–71', Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent, 1984, 354, 391.

⁸ R. Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land* (Wellington, New Zealand, 1981), 183, 207–8.

⁹ Wojciechowska-Kibble, *op. cit.*, 380–1, 399–400.

tartar when he married Ann Bligh?').¹⁰ By the 1880s, despite the demise of most forms of assisted passages, the tide of emigration was running faster than ever before. It would diminish markedly in the 1890s but recovered early in the new century. From the Canterbury district alone it was reckoned that as many as 300 had gone abroad during 1912 and the same number in the first six months of 1913, chiefly to Canada and Australia.¹¹

Overseas migration was thus at times considerable and, since it was not balanced by equivalent inflows of immigrants (only a few thousand persons were recorded in successive censuses as born abroad but living in Kent), was undoubtedly a net drain on the population of the county. But its impact, at least in a quantitative sense, should not be exaggerated. Recently, Baines has shown that those who left the county to live abroad were considerably outnumbered by the less venturesome, those moving to other English and Welsh counties including London.¹²

Table 2 draws attention to two points of particular interest. In regard to overseas emigration, females were always outnumbered by males, whereas the opposite was true with respect to movements to other English and Welsh counties. Secondly, the outflow going overseas was invariably exceeded by internal out-migrants across county boundaries. In fact, these appear to have outnumbered the overseas migrants by 5.2:1 in the 1860s, 4.3:1 in the 1870s, 3.1:1 in the 1880s and 2.4:1 in the 1890s. The implication is clear. In assessing the net effects of migration, we should concentrate chiefly on the issue of how far Kent's losses to other counties were counter-balanced by gains from other English and Welsh counties, or elsewhere within the British Isles.

In principle, this should be a comparatively simple matter to determine, since successive censuses from 1851 gave details of the birthplaces of Kent residents, and the Kent-born can be traced in similar tabulations for other English and Welsh counties. In practice, some difficulties arise although they are not insuperable. In the case of Kent it is advisable, indeed essential when considering this particular topic to focus upon the registration county or extra-metropolitan Kent: to opt for the ancient county would simply conflate the markedly different migration patterns of Kentish London and the outlying parts of the county. Once this decision has been made, we run into

¹⁰ C. Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants* (1972), 291.

¹¹ Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Report on Migration from Rural Districts in England and Wales* (1913), 27.

¹² The Kent figures derive from a large-scale study of emigration and internal migration, D. Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy* (1985), 285. Details of the methods he used, simple in theory but highly complicated in detail, are given in chapter IV.

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TABLE 2
MIGRATION OF KENT NATIVES (NET OF RETURNS) INTO
OTHER COUNTIES (A) AND OVERSEAS (B), 1861-1900

(thousands and % of mean decadal population)

		(A)		(B)	
		(000)	(%)	(000)	(%)
1861-70	Male	24.0	8.4	7.1	2.5
	Female	29.0	9.7	3.0	1.0
	Total:	53.0		10.1	
1871-80	Male	30.7	9.6	8.3	1.5
	Female	33.2	9.7	6.4	1.4
	Total:	63.9		14.7	
1881-90	Male	30.4	8.5	17.1	1.6
	Female	35.8	9.3	4.5	1.7
	Total:	66.2		21.6	
1891-1900	Male	31.3	7.8	5.9	1.9
	Female	38.3	8.9	+3.0	+0.7
	Total:	69.6		2.9	

Source: D. Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy* (1985), 285.

Note that his figures relate to extra-metropolitan Kent, i.e. the registration county. The plus sign for females, 1891-1900 indicates net immigration; more females returned than left in that decade.

difficulties arising from the fact that in some censuses, birth places were given only for the ancient, or civil counties.

The census of 1851 presents no particular problems, however. In that year, those enumerated in registration (extra-metropolitan) Kent were, to an overwhelming extent, born there (81.2 per cent) while 77.8 per cent of all Kentish-born persons counted in England and Wales were still residing in their county of origin.¹³ This said, there were few English counties that did not contribute a few hundred to the population of Kent and *vice versa*. Links with neighbouring counties, as expected, loomed large, for example with Sussex 12,399 in, 11,216 out; or Essex (4,621 in, 2,260 out), though in view of the distance involved the

¹³ Parliamentary Papers, 1851-2 lxxxviii (Part I). *Census of Great Britain. Ages, Civil Condition, Occupations, Birthplaces*, III, 123.

interchange with Devon was exceptionally high (2,795 in, 1,767 out). This relationship has been traced to the sea-borne links between the two counties, especially the comings and goings associated with fishing.¹⁴ Overall, according to the evidence of this census, Kent was a net gainer from the English and Welsh counties other than London although not by any great margin: in-migrants to Kent (53,551) exceeded out-migrants (44,857) by fewer than 9,000. By contrast, there was a major net deficit with London. On the one hand, Kent and more especially its towns and resorts, was fully capable of attracting as residents people who wanted, for one reason or another, to shake the dust of London from their feet. There were 27,720 altogether, including some 6–700 at Canterbury where they seem to have fared above average in terms of respectability and income.¹⁵ But this inflow was heavily outnumbered by the 67,787 who were born in Kent and enumerated in London. At this point in time, the attractions of London for the Kent-born appear to have surpassed the appeal of Kent to Londoners, and the net drain to London considerably outweighed the small net advantage that Kent enjoyed vis-à-vis other English and Welsh counties.

Such was the position in the year of the Great Exhibition. It would be agreeable to continue the analysis on a census by census basis and trace in detail the changes that came about during the second half of the century. Unfortunately, the format of the published returns varied in a manner most unhelpful for this purpose. The censuses of 1861, 1871 and 1881 relied upon the civil counties as their primary unit of analysis of birth places, and the only consistent set of figures that can be wrung from them is that the proportion of the enumerated population of extra-metropolitan Kent which was born within these same limits was declining gradually – to 78.6 per cent in 1861, 75.4 per cent in 1871 and 72.0 per cent in 1881.¹⁶ The census of 1891 followed a more helpful arrangement: the data are presented in a form which distinguishes within extra-metropolitan (registration) Kent not only the

¹⁴ R.S. Holmes, 'Continuity and Change in a Mid-Victorian Resort: Ramsgate 1851–1871', Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent, 1977, 66–7, 192.

¹⁵ For a full analysis, see W.A. Armstrong, 'Some Counter-Currents of Migration: London and the South in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Southern History*, xii (1990), 93–100.

¹⁶ Fuller details of the shifting coverage of these censuses may be found in D. Baines, 'Birthplace Statistics and the Analysis of Internal Migration' in Lawton, *op. cit.*, 146–64. In his work, culminating in *Migration in a Mature Economy*, *op. cit.*, Baines preferred to work with ancient counties in order to achieve as much cross-comparability as possible across successive censuses, but – fortunately – when dealing with Kent (and Surrey) he took as his unit of analysis the extra-metropolitan county.

number and proportion of the native born, but also interchanges with other registration counties including, critically, London, so making it possible to make a direct and detailed comparison with the 1851 figures given above.

By 1891 the proportion of the enumerated population of the registration county of Kent that was native-born had fallen again, to 69.5 per cent and likewise, since 1851, the proportion of the native born, so defined, enumerated in their county of birth had fallen from the 77.8 per cent of 1851 to 71.3 per cent. On the evidence of the 1891 census, registration or extra-metropolitan Kent was still losing on balance to London (102,150 out, 69,477 in), leaving a net deficit of 32,673. However, by comparison with 1851, the county came much closer to closing the gap by dint of its balance with the rest of England and Wales (123,026 out, 153,380 in).¹⁷

The last census before the Great War, that of 1911, offers a particularly good vantage point from which to assess the increasing tempo of migration insofar as it involved the crossing of the county boundary. On this occasion, the unit of analysis used to arrange the birth place data, in Kent and elsewhere, changed again, now becoming the administrative county which was not strictly comparable with the registration county but certainly corresponded much more closely with this than with the ancient or civil county (see table 1). Predictably, both the proportion of the population of Kent which was native-born, and that of the native born still residing in Kent were lower than ever before: the figures now stood at 63.7 and 69.2 per cent respectively.¹⁸ Looking at the array of figures over sixty years, it is clear that not only were the natives of Kent increasingly inclined to migrate across county boundaries, but the resident population of Kent was becoming more cosmopolitan, in some sense. The most striking feature of all is the hitherto undetected turn-round in Kent's relationship with London. In 1911, no fewer than 100,778 Kent-born persons resided in London which signified that the capital had drawn in one in 9.5 of all persons born in Kent. Yet, in its relationship with London, Kent had now become a net gainer, for there were 116,710 London-born persons residing in the administrative county of Kent. In addition, its ability to make modest net gains relative to the other counties of England and Wales continued: 195,486 Kent born persons were enumerated in these

¹⁷ Parliamentary Papers, 1893-4 cvi. *Census of England and Wales, 1891*, III, *Ages, Condition as to Marriage, Occupations, Birthplaces*, 75.

¹⁸ Parliamentary Papers, 1913 lxxix. *Census of England and Wales, 1911*, IX, *Birthplaces*. Conclusions based on table 2, pages 3-113.

other counties, but the county attracted 211,753 born elsewhere, other than Londoners. The birth place distribution of the enumerated population of Kent in 1911 is summarized in table 3.

TABLE 3
BIRTH PLACES OF THE ENUMERATED POPULATION OF KENT
(Administrative County), 1911

Birth place	Number	% of population of Kent in 1911
Kent and Canterbury	647,543	61.9
London	116,710	11.2
Middlesex, Surrey	28,499	2.7
Essex, Sussex	50,304	4.8
Rest of England and Wales (incl. Channel Is., Isle of Man)	160,531	15.4
Scotland	8,694	0.8
Ireland	9,447	0.9
British Colonies	9,369	0.9
Foreign Countries, at sea	990	0.1
Not stated	13,504	1.3
	1,045,591	100.0

Source: Census, 1911, *County of Kent*, Table 30

4. INTERNAL (INTRA-COUNTY) MIGRATION

The migratory flows discussed so far on the basis of the published census abstracts, though revealing in some respects, are subject to inherent limitations. For example, a comparatively short hop from (say) Wittersham to Iden, or from Hawkhurst to Hurst Green would traverse the county boundary with Sussex and, conversely, a much longer migratory move from Hythe to the Medway towns or Broadstairs to Bromley would make no impression on the figures. In fact, it is well known that most migratory moves involved relatively short distances.¹⁹ Furthermore, the use of the published returns permits only the study of 'lifetime' migration, in that the tables compare place of birth with place of enumeration, at the time of the census in question – they make no

¹⁹ The *locus classicus*, demonstrating this, is A. Redford, *Labour Migration in England, 1800–1850* (1926).

allowance for intervening moves. The aggregated birth place figures thus foster an exaggerated impression of stability: in the real world an individual might migrate several times during his life-time, each of the moves being short-distance, and yet remain within his county of birth.

It is a fallacy to suppose that villagers were virtually immobile in distant times, for if the migratory horizons of most people were fairly narrow, every serious enquiry so far conducted points to a high level of movement. This would appear to be universally true of early modern England and Kent was no exception to the rule. Between 1660 and 1730, according to Clark, physical mobility was widespread in that about three-quarters of town-dwellers and country people experienced some form of migration over their lifetimes, in search of either 'betterment' or 'subsistence'.²⁰

In the case of Kent, the nineteenth century has received less attention, but the probability is that the rate of turnover of local populations was at least maintained, if not enhanced. The coming of the railways, although clearly not responsible for inaugurating migratory movements as was once assumed,²¹ may well have extended for some the perception of what was merely a short-distance move; and if, as has recently been suggested, the effect of the New Poor Law was such as to tie down men and women more effectively to their respective parishes of settlement, thereby reducing their mobility,²² there appear to be few signs of any such inhibiting factor at work in Kent. To pursue these questions it is necessary to go behind the aggregated birth place returns published in the printed census volumes and to approach the census enumerators' books which give details about individuals. So far, very little work of that kind appears to have been carried out on Kent, but two examples may be cited. In a study carried out at the Open University, Grimette provides a snapshot of Shorne, a rural parish running down to the Thames, east of Gravesend. Here, in 1851, only 53.3 per cent of the population were native-born (even though this figure includes children), while among the married couples, in only 10 per cent of cases were both partners born in the village, and in over half, neither were.²³ When data on individuals in successive censuses

²⁰ P. Clark, 'Migration in England during the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries', *Past and Present*, lxxxiii (1979), 66. See also P. Clark and P. Slack, *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (1972), ch. iv.

²¹ E.g. by R. Baxter, 'Railway Extension and its Results', *J. Statistical Society*, xxix (1866), reprinted in (Ed.) E.M. Carus-Wilson, *Essays in Economic History*, III (1962), 44.

²² As argued by K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor. Social Change and Agrarian England* (1985), 123, 334, 338-9. For a refutation of this view, see G. Boyer, *An Economic History of the English Poor Law, 1750-1850* (1990), ch. VII.

²³ W. Grimette, 'Shorne, Kent, 1851-61. Age and Sex-related Migration' in (Ed.) D. Mills *Victorians on the Move*, (1984).

are compared – a very time-consuming task, it has to be said – the figures are even more revealing of a lively rate of turnover. At Brenchley in the Weald, Wojciechowska-Kibble has found, only 32 per cent of agricultural labourers were ‘persisters’, i.e. were present at successive censuses in 1851–61, and 33 per cent in 1861–71. For farmers, the respective figures were 35 and 31 per cent, for craftsmen and tradesmen 32 and 24 per cent, professional persons 22 and 6 per cent, and domestic servants, a mere 9 and 8 per cent.²⁴ Much more work along similar lines is needed, but it is unlikely to overturn the impression that in Victorian and Edwardian Kent, a person born, living and dying in the same parish, though not unheard of, must have been something of a statistical rarity.

5. DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION

Despite the impression of a restless churning of population given in the preceding section, clear patterns of drift in the distribution of the Kentish population can be discerned: towns were growing at the expense of rural villages, and there was a marked shift in the balance of the population towards the north and west of the county. In-migrants drawn from other counties tended to cluster in locations determined less by their salubrity than by the availability of work, and local moves made by the Kent-born, were likewise by no means random in character, and responded to the same incentives.

Whereas in 1831, 41.1 per cent of the population of Kent lived in settlements of 5,000 and over, and 34.3 per cent in those ranging from 1,001–5,000 in size, by 1911 the comparable figures were 79.7 and 13.0 per cent. By contrast, the proportion living in the smaller villages diminished from 24.6 to 7.3 per cent.²⁵ This raises the issue of rural depopulation, a topic of increasing concern to the late Victorians and Edwardians. Figures drawn up by Bowley from the censuses of 1861–1911 show that no fewer than 41 out of 52 English and Welsh registration counties experienced declines in the aggregate populations of their respective rural districts.²⁶ It is interesting to note that Kent was not among these, for the rural parts of the county experienced a 10 per cent increase. On the face of things, it might be wondered whether

²⁴ B. Wojciechowska-Kibble, ‘Brenchley: A Study of Migratory Movements in a Mid-Nineteenth Century Kent Parish’, *Local Population Studies*, xli (1988), 34.

²⁵ Based on the table of population in VCH, iii (1932), *op. cit.*

²⁶ A.L. Bowley, ‘Rural Depopulation in England and Wales. A Study of the Changes of Density, Occupations and Ages’, *J. Royal Statistical Soc.*, lxxvii (1914), table III.

there was some exaggeration in the fears of men such as Charles Whitehead ('Men are wondering in all parts of the county where the next generation of farmers in Kent will obtain workmen'); or Rider Haggard ('No wages that employers will pay seem to be sufficient to induce the young men of Kent to stop upon the land').²⁷ In fact, a disaggregation of the rural population figures suggests that there was some basis for their worries. Among approximately four hundred Kentish settlements in the ancient county, considerable numbers showed population declines at one point or another, in successive inter-censal periods.

TABLE 4
NUMBERS OF KENTISH SETTLEMENTS SHOWING
POPULATION DECLINES BY DECADE, 1831-1911

1831-41	1841-51	1851-61	1861-71	1871-81	1881-91	1891-1901	1901-11
95	139	149	130	141	170	202	152

Source: Based on population table in VCH Kent, iii (1932), 356-70

From one decade to another, individual communities moved into and out of the lists upon which Table 4 is based. Nevertheless, by 1911 no fewer than 126 were smaller, in terms of population, than in 1831. These included a minority of sizeable villages, such as Barham, Ash, Sutton Valence, Charing, Smarden, Biddenden, Elham and Wye. But most - 86 per cent - were smaller places, 80 of them with populations of fewer than 500 in 1831. The flight from the land was certainly a reality in Kent, despite a modest aggregate growth in the rural population.

The focal points of attraction to the younger generation leaving the villages might still include places such as Canterbury. Although the population here was slow-growing by nineteenth-century standards, it has been shown that only 39.8 per cent of the inhabitants of three parishes in 1871 were born in Canterbury (this figure includes children) while nearly half of the remainder were born within a 20-mile radius of the cathedral.²⁸ Traditional resorts, both coastal and inland, such as the Thanet towns,

²⁷ C. Whitehead, 'A Sketch of the Agriculture of Kent', *J. Royal Agricultural Soc.*, 3rd ser., x (1899), 445; H.R. Haggard, *Rural England*, new edn. (1906), I, 174.

²⁸ (Ed. J. Whyman) 'Living in Victorian Canterbury as Portrayed in Historical Sources', Course S214 Group Research Project, University of Kent, 1979, 79. Figures prepared by A. Wrigglesworth.

Herne Bay and Tunbridge Wells displayed a particularly voracious appetite for female domestic servants, to such an extent that they displayed some very distorted sex-ratios (e.g., in 1911, Broadstairs 1,465 females per 1,000 males, Herne Bay 1,449, Tunbridge Wells 1,453).²⁹

However, more than anything else it was the expansion of industry in towns and industrialized villages, and the increasing numbers living within commuting range of London that contributed most to altering the population geography of Kent. Here and there, east Kent was the beneficiary of expansion, the most noteworthy case being perhaps the growth of Ashford as a railway town. However, for the most part industrial activities flourished most strongly in the north of the county along a swathe extending from Dartford and Gravesend through the lower Medway valley and – intermittently – as far east as Sittingbourne and Faversham. And for obvious reasons, it was the west of the county that was affected by the suburbanization of London, notably at Beckenham, Bexley and Bromley which in 1911 were peopled by 31,692, 15,895 and 33,646 souls respectively.³⁰

Male migrants of Kentish origin, were particularly likely to gravitate towards the industrial districts of Thameside, the lower Medway valley and the dockyard installations. Preston has drawn attention to the dynamic growth even of the villages that lay within this belt, noting a 189 per cent increase in the ‘cement villages’ (Aylesford, Burham, Snodland, Wouldham, Halling, Frindsbury) between 1851 and 1901, and a corresponding 129 per cent increase in ‘brick-making villages’ (Lower Halstow, Newington, Upchurch, Rainham, Hoo St. Werburgh),³¹ where the likelihood is that these places drew in local migrants attracted by the offer of relatively high wages for predominantly unskilled work. However, where more skill was involved, as in engineering and many branches of dockyard work, local migrants were likely to come into contact with the longer-distance migrants discussed in section 3 above, who were by no means evenly spread across Kent but who tended to cluster in the districts of heavy labour demand. At Ashford, for instance, the coming of the South Eastern Railway and its associated workshops drew numerous ‘foreigners’: of 268 railway employees in 1851, 53 per cent were born outside Kent, including as many as 32 from as far afield as Northumberland.³² The same admixture has been noted

²⁹ Parliamentary Papers, 1912–13 cvi. *Census of England and Wales, 1911, I, Area and Population, Administrative Areas*, table 10. Kent data on pages 162–72.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 162.

³¹ J.M. Preston, *Industrial Medway: an Historical Survey*, (Rochester, 1977), 65, 66.

³² G. Turner, *Ashford. The Coming of the Railway* (Maidstone, 1984), 173.

at the Sheerness naval dockyard where the proportion of Kent-born workers was comparatively low at all three censuses, 1851-71. Many of the labourers were drawn from Sheppey and other parts of Kent, but the more skilled grades included a high proportion of long-distance movers, chiefly from places which had occupational links with Sheerness or industries featuring similar types of workers. These included other dockyard towns (Portsmouth, Pembroke and particularly Devonport) and ship-building towns such as Sunderland which alone contributed 26 shipwrights in 1861.³³ The predominantly masculine nature of much of the work available tended to produce sex-ratios that contrasted very markedly with such places as Thanet or Tunbridge Wells: in 1911 Gillingham borough showed a ratio of only 830 females per 1,000 males while there were 817 in the Sheerness Urban District, and 694 and 894 in the civil parishes constituting the Sheppey and Strood Rural Districts, etc.

In these ways the migratory flows of the Kent-born, and in-migrants from other counties, tended to reinforce one another in the spatial re-ordering of the Kent population, which is summarized at the registration district level in Table 5.

TABLE 5
POPULATION CHANGES IN THE KENTISH REGISTRATION
DISTRICTS 1831-1911 (%)

Districts showing decreases in Population (2) Tenterden (-10); Hollingbourne (-4)
Districts with increases below the 156% increase of Kent registration county (15) Hoo (51); Malling (73); Sevenoaks (66); Maidstone (77); Cranbrook (7); West Ashford (101); East Ashford (27); Bridge (7); Canterbury (86); Blean (110); Faversham (66); Sheppey (145); Eastry (37); Dover (152); Romney Marsh (44)
Districts with increases above that of Kent registration county (9) Bromley (625); Dartford (409); Gravesend (198); North Aylsford - later renamed Strood - (247); Medway (240); Thanet (201); Elham (305)

Source: Census, 1911, *County of Kent*

³³ N.H. Buck, 'An Admiralty Dockyard in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Aspects of the Social and Economic History of Sheerness', Urban and Regional Studies Unit, University of Kent, 1981, 25-31.

The nine registration districts with increases above the average for Kent accounted between them for 75.4 per cent of the aggregate increase in population (621,715). All, other than Thanet and Elham, were situated in the north and west of the county, and the latter owed its place in this category entirely to the fact that it happened to embrace Folkestone, which was one of the later developed Kentish resorts and by 1911 was a municipal borough with a population of 33,502, thus accounting for 58 per cent of the population of the Elham registration district.

To sum up, although it lacked great cities on the scale of Manchester or Birmingham, Kent by 1911 was the fifteenth most densely populated among the sixty-two administrative counties and its forty-two urban districts accounted for 70 per cent of the population. It was also considerably more industrialized than its 'garden of England' image might lead one to expect. The implications of these changes for patterns of natural increase – that is, variations in marriages, births and deaths – will be taken up in the second instalment of this article.