

## DEVON LOCATIVE SURNAMES IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY\*

Devon is the seventh county to be investigated by the English Surnames Survey.<sup>1</sup> It was chosen for study because it lies in a region as yet untouched by the Survey, the south-west, an area which, it was thought, lay far enough from the heart of England to have developed its own characteristic body of surnames. Furthermore, it was suspected that a study of Devon surnames might reveal something of the movements of population within a fairly restricted geographical area. The pattern of settlement in Devon, with its numerous small agriculturally-based communities, suggested that a large and diverse group of locative surnames might have arisen, providing valuable evidence for migration within the county.

This paper, which marks a very preliminary stage in work on the county, surveys Devon surnames in the fourteenth century alone, and its documentary basis is the 1332 Subsidy Roll.<sup>2</sup> Inevitably with such a restricted evidential base, the source imposes its own limitations. Many Devon inhabitants were too poor to fall under the eyes of the assessors.<sup>3</sup> Whole categories of people received special exemptions from time to time; after 1305, for example, all workers in the tin-mines of Devon and Cornwall were exempted from paying the tax. The 1332 roll is thus by no means a comprehensive list of householders in Devon, and consequently it cannot be claimed to provide a full catalogue of all Devon surnames at this period. However, it does list some 10,600 names taken from settlements throughout the county, and, as such, it is one of the few medieval sources for Devon to approach anything like a widespread coverage of the surnames of many ranks of society.

It is proposed to examine here one broad category of Devon surnames, those derived from place-names in and out of the county. Even at an early stage of research, it is clear that these locative surnames form the largest group of Devon surnames in the fourteenth century. This is hardly surprising, given the high proportion of small settlements in Devon and the relative scarcity of large towns in the area. As in the Yorkshire Dales and in parts of Lancashire,<sup>4</sup> many men took a surname or by-name from their place of origin, which might be a single farmstead in a remote valley. A rapid scan of sixteenth-century printed sources for Devon, such as the 1524 Subsidy Roll and those of 1543-45,<sup>5</sup> shows that many of these fourteenth-century locative surnames failed to survive. Perhaps only those originating from the larger settlements or else ramifying to a considerable extent after their creation stood a chance of survival beyond the medieval period. Some probably never became even briefly hereditary and so fell

quickly into disuse.

The sheer quantity of locative surnames in the 1332 Subsidy Roll forces some selectivity. Consequently, three areas have been chosen for detailed study, namely two hundreds, Wonford and South Molton, and one borough, Tavistock.

Wonford is a large hundred towards the south of the county, incorporating several medium-sized settlements as well as a number of scattered farms. It contains one borough, South Zeal near South Tawton.<sup>6</sup> It is an area of rich agricultural land in the broad Exe valley, rising gradually to the inhospitable foothills of Dartmoor. This hundred forms the immediate hinterland of the major town of the south-west, Exeter, and it is only to be expected that its inhabitants would have been greatly influenced and dominated in their trade and occupations by that city.

South Molton is a smaller, land-locked hundred in the northern part of Devon. It extends from Bishops Tawton in the west as far as the Ansteys on the Somerset borders and includes an area of low hills and river valleys rising to the foothills of Exmoor on the north. It contains one small borough, South Molton,<sup>7</sup> but was in all likelihood dominated economically and possibly socially by the larger town of Barnstaple that lay just beyond its boundaries.

Tavistock lies in the south-western corner of Devon, some twelve miles north of Plymouth and only three miles from the Cornish border. It is sited near an important bridging point over the Tamar, on a main route between Bodmin and Okehampton. In the early fourteenth century it was a small market town with a limited number of local industries, but two factors made it unusual. One was tin-mining in the locality, which brought the community a degree of wealth and prosperity and increasing numbers of immigrants. The other was the pre-Conquest foundation of Tavistock Abbey. The monks and their retainers and servants required services and produce from the town they inhabited. These two factors presumably affected the range of locative surnames within the borough by opening it up to outside influences.<sup>8</sup>

A comparison of locative surnames from these three areas has led to some interesting conclusions, although the evidence has its own frustrations. It has frequently proved impossible to identify precisely the place from which a surname originates, because of the existence of various places in and out of Devon with the same name. Where a locative surname has several alternative places of origin, it is considered most probably to derive from one within its own hundred or, failing that, within the county, in preference to any similarly named place

outside Devon. This method is open to criticism but, in the present state of knowledge about this county's surnames, it has seemed the most practical way of proceeding. These surnames are discussed under four classes: those deriving from places within the same hundred; from places in other Devon hundreds; from places in counties other than Devon; and from places outside England.

(a). An analysis of locative surnames in Wonford hundred demonstrates that names originating from place-names within the hundred predominate over those from places outside it. A group of 134 locative surnames held by Wonford taxpayers in 1332 was surveyed.<sup>9</sup> Seventy-two names might be referred to places in the hundred (53.75%). Fourteen of these seventy-two represent common Devon place-names but might alternatively, however, have originated elsewhere. The surname Alre, for example, held by a taxpayer in Christow, may come from the Aller in Christow or from that in Tedburn St. Mary in Wonford hundred, or might alternatively be derived from one of twelve Allers in other Devon hundreds.<sup>10</sup>

Midderhull, a surname held by one taxpayer in South Tawton, may have originated from the Metherall in Chagford within Wonford hundred or from that in Bratton Clovelly, Lifton hundred, some twelve miles west of South Tawton; or, alternatively, it might have come from Metherall in Cornwall.<sup>11</sup>

Ignoring those fourteen common Devon locative surnames for the moment, and considering the remaining fifty-eight, it appears that few inhabitants of Wonford hundred had, by 1332, moved far from the places of their familial origins. The Trendelbears who were taxed in South Tawton derived their name from a settlement only half a mile to the east of that borough, while the man called Lappeflode taxed in Bridford derived his from a place one mile to the south-west.<sup>12</sup> It has been possible to identify the places of origin of forty-two out of this group of fifty-eight 'local' surnames. Thirteen remained in the places from which they were derived (almost 31%); four occurred less than one mile away (9.5%); sixteen between one and five miles away (38%); five between six and ten miles away (almost 12%); and two in each case were found eleven to fifteen miles and sixteen to twenty miles from their place of origin (each 4.75%).

An analysis of these movements shows South Tawton to have been the most popular destination for migrants from the rest of Wonford hundred. Sixteen locative surnames deriving from places within the hundred are found there, over twice as many as in any other settlement.<sup>13</sup> Why should South Tawton have taken the lion's share of migrants in the early fourteenth century? Perhaps this movement can be linked with the growth of a relatively new borough at South Zeal by South Tawton, where the overlord was encouraging new settlers by offering

trade incentives and the attraction of a market and two fairs. The local cloth industry might have been in a period of expansion and South Tawton might possibly have gained immigrant cloth-workers from the countryside. Alternatively, there might have been a boom in the tin industry, which seems to have had a small regional centre here.

The direction of movements within Wonford hundred seems to indicate a migration from small, upland settlements - for example, in the foothills of Dartmoor - down to ones on the edge of the moor, from the hills to the valleys. A man called Corndon, taxed in South Tawton, derived his surname from a place over six miles away on the edge of Dartmoor.<sup>14</sup> The surname Giddeleghe, held by a taxpayer in Polsloe just outside Exeter, came from a settlement on the edge of Dartmoor, seventeen miles to the east.<sup>15</sup> This evidence should be balanced against the conventional wisdom that the uplands of Devon were being colonized in the early Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps these downward movements were made by the younger sons of settlers who had found that the newly colonized upland was not sufficient to support the whole family.

Fifty-eight locative surnames have been collected from South Molton hundred.<sup>17</sup> As in Wonford hundred, 'local' locative surnames are in the majority; forty-five (or 77.5%) can be referred to places in South Molton hundred. Some of these names, like Aysshe and Furse, represent common Devon place-names and so might have originated from places outside the hundred, or they might, alternatively, have been 'topographical' surnames, not toponymic ones. It is the larger settlements within South Molton hundred that provide the majority of these locative surnames. Ten originate from Bishops Tawton or places within its tithing, nine from Swimbridge (including a form Swynbrug), seven from Chittlehampton, four from East Anstey, and three each from South Molton borough and from Landkey.

There is a disappointingly small stock of locative surnames in Tavistock borough in the 1332 roll, probably reflecting the absence of the tin-miners from the record. A total of twenty-three names has been abstracted, of which six could be identified with places in Tavistock hundred (about 26%).<sup>18</sup> This much smaller percentage of 'local' locative surnames than in either Wonford or South Molton hundreds can, perhaps, be explained by the more fluid composition of society in a borough. Of these six surnames, four probably derive from Tavistock hundred (Creubear, Kyleworthi, Milemete and Whitham),<sup>19</sup> although it is possible that Kyleworthi derives from Kilworth in Leicestershire.<sup>20</sup> The remaining two surnames, Boghedon and Wyke, represent place-names common throughout

Devon.

One interesting conclusion to emerge from a study of locative surnames in these three areas of Devon is that some surnames had already begun to ramify considerably by 1332. For example, in Wonford hundred, four taxpayers in South Tawton had the surname Sercheslond which originated from Sessland, a place two and a half miles away;<sup>21</sup> four other taxpayers there were called Trendelbear, a surname taken from Trundlebeer, a place about half a mile away.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, no family relationships in these cases can be established from the Subsidy Roll, although we may suspect that the taxpayers were related. It may be significant that in this hundred, as in South Molton hundred, it is the locative surnames derived from places within the same hundred that are ramifying markedly, not those from outside the county.

(b). An analysis of locative surnames deriving from places in the rest of the county shows them to be in a small minority in South Molton hundred but slightly more frequent, though still not dominant, in Wonford hundred and in Tavistock borough.

In Wonford hundred, thirty-five out of 134 locative surnames (over 28%) can be included in this category.<sup>23</sup> A review of these thirty-five names demonstrates that Teignbridge, Lifton, Black Torrington and Exminster hundreds exported most immigrants to Wonford. This is readily understandable in topographical terms, because these were hundreds which bordered the low-lying parts of Wonford hundred; whereas on its south-west side Dartmoor was a barrier to immigration. Most of the long-range immigrants originally bringing these names had travelled over twenty miles to settle in Wonford hundred.<sup>24</sup> Eight of the individuals bearing the names in question were taxed in Exe Island, in the suburbs of Exeter; Stokeinteignhead contained five; Heavitree, again part of the Exeter suburbs, contained three, as did South Tawton and Christow. South Tawton borough, attractive as it undoubtedly was for immigrants from within the hundred, was not such a magnet for long-distance migrants from elsewhere in the county. The lure of Exeter was greater.

In South Molton hundred, only six out of fifty-eight locative surnames (just over 10%) can be referred to places in other Devon hundreds.<sup>25</sup> This slender evidence shows that immigrants came to South Molton hundred from north and north-west Devon, which is as might be expected from the topography of the hundred with its natural outlet to the north at Barnstaple and the high mass of Exmoor cutting it off from the north-east.<sup>26</sup> The paucity of the evidence demonstrates in a negative way that there was little immigration into this hundred,



perhaps because the local cloth industry, centred on the borough of South Molton, was too small-scale to support much migrant labour. Migrants probably chose to settle in the larger town of the region, Barnstaple, which was outside this hundred, and where there would have been greater opportunities for trade.

In Tavistock borough, out of a total of twenty-three locative surnames, possibly eight derive from places elsewhere in Devon (over 34%).<sup>27</sup> Lifton, Roborough and Black Torrington hundreds were the homes of most of these surnames. Lifton and Roborough hundreds bordered on the Tavistock hundred. Black Torrington is more unexpected because it is rather remote from Tavistock, but the connection was that Tavistock Abbey held land there from the earliest days of its foundation.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps these Tavistock taxpayers were descended from the Abbey's servants or retainers in Black Torrington hundred.

(c). A small group of locative surnames deriving from counties other than Devon can be identified in each of the three areas studied.

In Wonford hundred, there are only eleven surnames in this category (8.8% of all locative surnames in the hundred), which is somewhat surprising in view of the attractions of nearby Exeter. The neighbouring counties are not well represented in this group; there are only three possibly derived from Cornish place-names: Prideaux, Scoriawall, and Midderhull;<sup>29</sup> Fodynton and Moredon may derive from Somerset place-names,<sup>30</sup> although the latter more likely originates from a place in Devon. There is also a scattering of surnames from elsewhere in England, like Olney and Royston.<sup>31</sup> However, these 'outsiders' were not concentrated in any one part of the hundred, and none of these surnames had ramified by the early fourteenth century.

In South Molton hundred, six surnames might be placed in this category (10% of the locative surnames), although three of these, Horton, Pidekwille and Stapildon, more likely originated from places in Devon itself. None seems to derive from a place in any neighbouring county. Two others are: Huyton, from Huyton in Lancashire or Hyton in Cumberland; Whiteby, perhaps from Whitby in Cheshire, but more likely from the port of Whitby in North Yorkshire, which might have had trading links with Barnstaple.<sup>32</sup> Finally, there was James Audelegh, paying tax in South Molton and in a number of other Devon places; this was a Devon 'immigrant' of a different order, a great landowner with estates principally in Shropshire and Staffordshire, who had acquired land in Devon by inheritance.<sup>33</sup>

Six surnames in Tavistock borough might have originated from places outside

Devon (26% of the total), although two of these, Durneford and Strode, are more likely to be Devon names.<sup>34</sup> Tavistock's situation, almost on the western boundary of Devon, might lead one to expect a large number of Cornish place-names among its locative surnames, but there is only one name that in any way alludes to Cornwall: the adjectival Corneys. However, the exemption of tin-miners from the Subsidy undoubtedly prejudices any analysis of this category of locative name. The remaining five surnames derive from more distant parts of England; they include Alwork, perhaps from the Aldwark in Derbyshire or that in Yorkshire, and Corbrugg, from Corbridge in Northumberland.<sup>35</sup> It may be that some of those so named had connections with Tavistock Abbey. However, it is more than likely that, as in Wonford and South Molton hundreds, the range of locative surnames deriving from other English counties shows nothing more than a random scattering of immigrants from the rest of England, a scatter comparable with ones noticed by Mr. McKinley in his work on other counties.<sup>36</sup>

(d). More taxpayers in Wonford hundred had surnames originating outside England than had ones derived from places in other English counties. Of twenty surnames identified as belonging in the former category (15% of all locative surnames),<sup>37</sup> sixteen had French connections, including three derived from ethnic adjectives: Peytevyn, Fraunceys and Frensh. Some were well-known names of great landowners in and out of the county such as Bonevyle, Brus, Courtenay and Daubernon, names belonging to families who were not new to England but who had come over with the Conqueror or soon after.<sup>38</sup> The remaining 'foreign' surnames include two meaning 'Welsh', that is, those of the Walter Galeys taxed in Teignharvey and of the Alexander Waleys taxed in Christow and in Exe Island; and Palmerdon, which might have originated either from a place in Glamorgan or from one in Ireland.<sup>39</sup> The two instances of Scot, one in South Tawton and the other in Exe Island, are ambiguous, in so far as this name might represent either the ethnic adjective or else a patronymic use of the OE personal name Scot(t).<sup>40</sup> The distribution of these surnames is interesting: they were found either in the suburbs of Exeter and in the bigger settlements in the hundred, such as South Tawton and Topsham, or else in places near the coast, like Combeinteignhead and East Oggwell. It looks as if trading opportunities or easy access to ports were the chief factors governing the presence and the location of foreigners in Wonford hundred in 1332.

There were few locative surnames in the 'foreign' category in either South Molton hundred or in Tavistock borough. The three in South Molton were Walshe, Scot Rese (a Welsh Scot?) and Regny. The Regny family, probably originating from Regny (dép. Loire), were found in Devon as early as 1157 and they were

living at Ashreigney, a place relatively close to South Molton, by 1219.<sup>41</sup> The three 'foreign' locative surnames in Tavistock were all of French origin. As in Wonford, two out of the three, Beaumont and Secheville, were not recent introductions to the area.<sup>42</sup> The third 'foreign' name in Tavistock in 1332 was Fraunceys, and the taxpayer bearing it paid the relatively large sum of 3s. in the borough. It is noticeable that many of the taxpayers with surnames derived from foreign place-names were assessed highly in this Subsidy, perhaps a mark of their success in trade or, as in the case of the French group, of inherited landed wealth.

If all the locative surnames in these three areas that were derived from place-names outside Devon, whether in England or abroad, are considered together, it can be seen that they do not indicate any substantial movement of names into the county from outside by the early fourteenth century. There was a far greater number of short-distance movements of surnames mainly derived from place-names within the same Devon hundred or from neighbouring hundreds. The indications are that, with a few notable exceptions, Devon people had not moved far from their places of origin by 1332. These movements were from upland areas to lowlands and from small settlements to larger communities offering a greater variety of work and the possibility of wealth. However, we should be cautious about drawing too many conclusions from a small sample of evidence in such a limited geographical area. Undoubtedly a study of Exeter locative surnames, or indeed of those found in a large port such as Plymouth or Barnstaple, would lead to very different conclusions. But for the Devon countryside in general, with its numerous small communities, this surname evidence probably reflects fairly reliably the patterns of migration in the county and the great diversity of locative surnames at this period, a diversity which was to be lost by the sixteenth century.

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#### NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

\*This is a revised version of the paper given on 5th April 1986 at the XVIIIth Annual Conference of the Council for Name Studies held at the University of Exeter.

The following abbreviations have been used:

Bartholomew	<u>Gazetteer of the British Isles</u> (Edinburgh, 1966).
DBS	P. H. Reaney, <u>A Dictionary of British Surnames</u> , 2nd edn (London, 1976).
DEPN	E. Ekwall, <u>The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names</u> , 4th edn (Oxford, 1960).

Ek.Lancs. E. Ekwall, The Place-Names of Lancashire, Chetham Society, n.s. LXXXI (Manchester, 1928).

PN + County Abbreviation The English Place-Name Society's survey of the county specified, esp. PN Devon = J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, eds, The Place-Names of Devon, 2 vols, EPNS VIII and IX (Cambridge, 1931-2).

1. Volumes so far published in this series are: I = G. Redmonds, Yorkshire: West Riding (London and Chichester, 1973); II = R. McKinley, Norfolk and Suffolk Surnames in the Middle Ages (London and Chichester, 1975); III = idem, The Surnames of Oxfordshire (London, 1977); IV = idem, The Surnames of Lancashire (London, 1981); and V = idem, The Surnames of Sussex (forthcoming).
2. A. M. Erskine, ed., The Devonshire Lay Subsidy of 1332, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, n.s. XIV (1969).
3. The base limit of the tax in 1332 was set at 6s. in the boroughs and 10s. in the countryside.
4. See, for example, McKinley, Lancashire, 80-1.
5. T. L. Stoaate, ed., Devon Subsidy Rolls 1524-27 (privately published, 1979/80); Devon Subsidy Rolls 1543-45 (privately published, 1986).
6. South Zeal had gained the grant of a market and two fairs by 1299 and may have had borough status by 1264: M. Beresford and H. P. R. Finberg, English Medieval Boroughs: A Handlist (Newton Abbot, 1973), 98.
7. South Molton was a much older borough than South Zeal. Burgage tenure was introduced by its overlord, Gilbert de Turberville, between 1150 and 1170: Beresford and Finberg, English Medieval Boroughs, 99.
8. See H. P. R. Finberg, Tavistock Abbey (Cambridge, 1951); H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Borough of Tavistock', in W. G. Hoskins and H. P. R. Finberg, Devonshire Studies (London, 1952), 172-97; W. G. Hoskins, Devon (Newton Abbot, 1954), 485-9.
9. Five are, as yet, unidentified.
10. PN Devon, II, 431, 452.
11. Ibidem, II, 427; I, 175. Bartholomew, 471.
12. PN Devon, II, 450 (Trundlebeer) and 423 (Laployd Barton).
13. These are: Beridon, Colleford, Corndon, Cortesbear, Dysheliscumb, Herpath, Lyvaton, Midderhull, Northwyk, Oxenham, Polisland, Scoriawall, Sercheslond, Treffebele, Trendelbear and Wytoun.
14. PN Devon, II, 426.
15. Ibidem, II, 438.
16. See, for example, Hoskins, Devon, 58, and esp. 'The making of the agrarian landscape', in Hoskins and Finberg, Devonshire Studies, 315-24.

17. Nine are, as yet, unidentified.
18. Two remain unidentified.
19. Crebor (PN Devon, I, 218); Kilworthy (*ibidem*, I, 221); Milemead (*ibidem*, I, 219); and Whitham (*ibidem*, I, 220).
20. DEPN, 276.
21. PN Devon, II, 450.
22. Ibidem.
23. Some of these surnames have alternative derivations from outside Devon, as, for example, Mordon, a surname occurring in Christow: this may originate from Mordon in Teignbridge hundred, only two miles from Christow, or, alternatively, from one of the Mordens in Dorset and in Surrey or from one of the Moredons in Wiltshire or Somerset: Bartholomew, 485.
24. When surnames with alternative origins are excluded, two names come from places less than five miles from Wonford hundred; three from six to ten miles away; seven from eleven to fifteen miles away; one from sixteen to twenty miles away; ten from twenty-one to twenty-five miles away; and one from over thirty miles away.
25. These are: Bradenech, Charles, Horton, Pidekwille, Ralegh and Stapildon. Horton, Pidekwille and Stapildon could alternatively have originated from places outside the county.
26. There is too little evidence to show which hundreds were exporting most migrants to South Molton.
27. These are: Bircomb, Brenta, Durneford, Ekkeworthi, Hyndeford, Strode, Waghefenne and Whitston, although the last form could also be referred to various places outside Devon.
28. See, for example, Finberg, Tavistock Abbey, 2, 7.
29. Prideaux, Scorrier and Metherall: Bartholomew 558, 605, 471.
30. DEPN, 183 (Foddington); Bartholomew, 485 (cf. above, n.23).
31. Olney, the name of a taxpayer in Whitestone, may have originated either from the Olney in Northants. or from that in Bucks.: DEPN, 349. Royston, the name of a taxpayer in Wonford, may have originated either from the Royston in Herts. or from that in W. Riding, Yorks.: DEPN, 395.
32. Ek.Lancs., 113; PN Cumb., II, 346; PN Chesh., IV, 198; DEPN, 513.
33. In 1326 he had inherited, as co-heir, the vast estates of his maternal uncle, William Martin, which included land in Devon: Complete Peerage, I, 336.
34. It is possible that they originated, respectively, from Durnford in Wiltshire or from one of the Stroods or Strouds in Kent, Gos. or Middlesex.
35. PN Derbys., II, 339; DEPN, 5-6, 122.

36. See, for example, McKinley, Lancashire, 82-6.
37. One, Chartray, might possibly be referred to the Cambs. place-name Chatteris: PN Cambs., 247-8, cf. DBS, s.n. Charteris; but the final consonant of that name, although affected by an unusual type of dissimilation, is not normally dropped. A more likely base for the surname may therefore be found in Chartres, dép. Eure-et-Loire.
38. The Courtenays took their name from Courtenay, dép. Loiret, and reputedly came to England with Eleanor of Aquitaine: Complete Peerage, III, 465, note c; VCH Devon, I, 555; and J. L. Vivian, Visitations of the County of Devon (Exeter, 1895), 243. Reginald de Courtenay married the heiress of the barony and honour of Okehampton, the largest in Devon: Hoskins, Devon, 75.
39. Bartholomew, 531.
40. See DBS, s.n. Scott; for the OE personal-name Scot(t), see O. von Feilitzen, in M. Biddle et alii, eds, Winchester in the Early Middle Ages (Oxford, 1976), 171 and n.8.
41. Anstey Reigny, part of West Anstey, was held for a quarter of a knight's fee in 1285 by Richard de Reigny from Ralph de Esse. De Esse held his land from Hugh de Courtenay, and thus the Reigny family holdings were part of the great honour of Okehampton: O. J. Reichel, 'The Devon Hundreds' (Devonshire Assoc., 1928-38), 85; DBS, s.n. Rainey.
42. The Sechevilles were possibly connected with the Sackvilles who held other land in Devon including Heanton Satchville. Ralph de Sachevill had represented the borough in Parliament in 1295 as one of the leading burgesses: DBS, s.n. Sackville, Setchfield, and H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Borough of Tavistock', in Hoskins and Finberg, Devonshire Studies, 190.