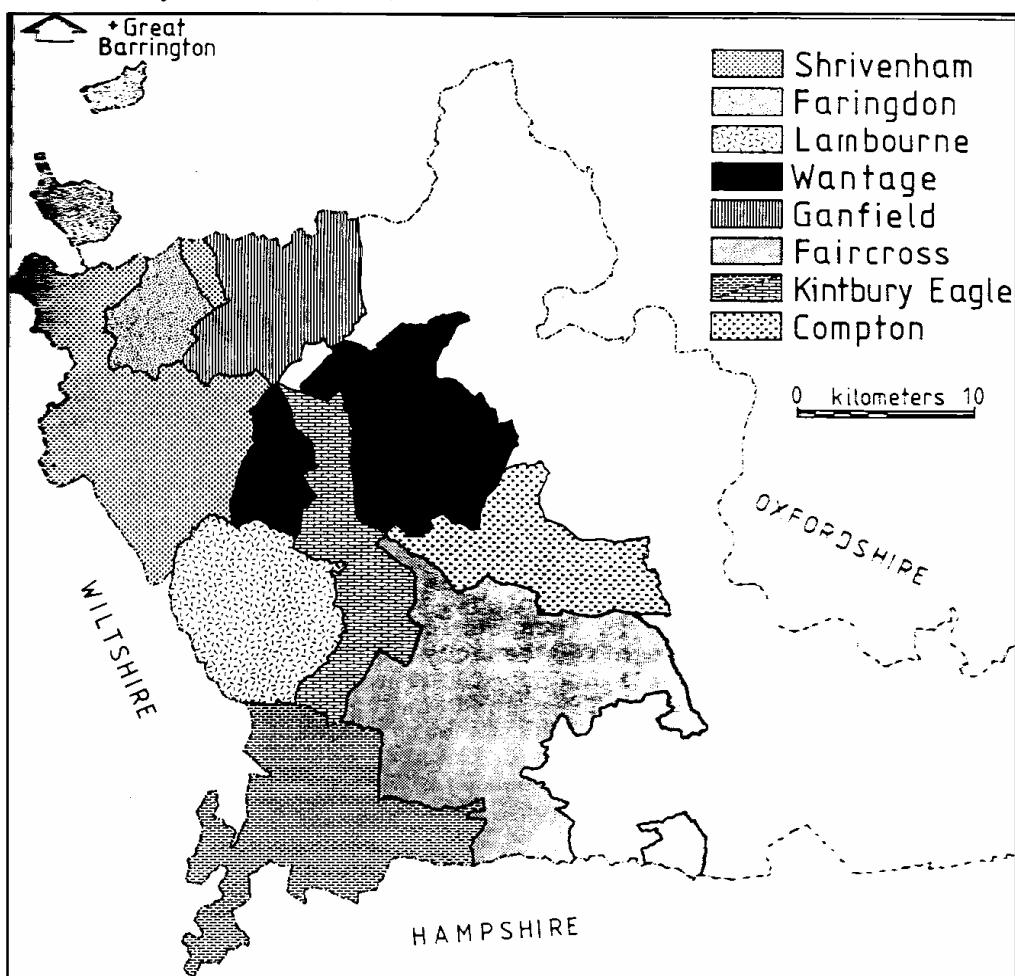


The 1522 Muster Role for West Berkshire (Part I)

by Lis Garnish

During the 16th century all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60 were liable for military service within their own counties and, in special circumstances, elsewhere. Early in the reign of Henry VIII fears of foreign invasion caused the government to try to improve the methods of raising, training and equipping these militia. Musters were held at irregular intervals and Muster Certificates, usually called Muster Rolls, were drawn up by the Commissioners and returned to the king's council. The earliest surviving returns date from 1522 when Wolsey caused a Muster to be held in a covert preparation for a forced loan. The Certificate for part of Berkshire survives amongst the papers of the Court of Augmentations (E.315) in the Public Record Office (1). It is a more comprehensive list than most Muster Certificates and closely resembles the returns for the 'Amicable Grant' or Great Subsidy of 1524-5 (E.179).



The Hundreds of West Berkshire covered in this Muster Roll

The Certificate was compiled by Sir William Essex, William Fetyplace Esquire, Thomas Apporie and John Latton, gentlemen, and it covers the Hundreds of Shrivenham, Faringdon, Lambourne, Wantage, Ganfield, Faircross, Kintbury-Eagle, and Compton. This is a large part of the western end of the old county, as can be seen in the accompanying map. The Certificate also includes one or two parishes which now lie in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. The complete document is 131 folios, written on both sides, making 262 pages in all. The first five Hundreds are written in an elegant Court Hand, but the last three are in a more cursive script, and have the air of a draft rather than a final copy. Each Hundred is sub-divided by parish and township and, in some cases, by manor or tithing.

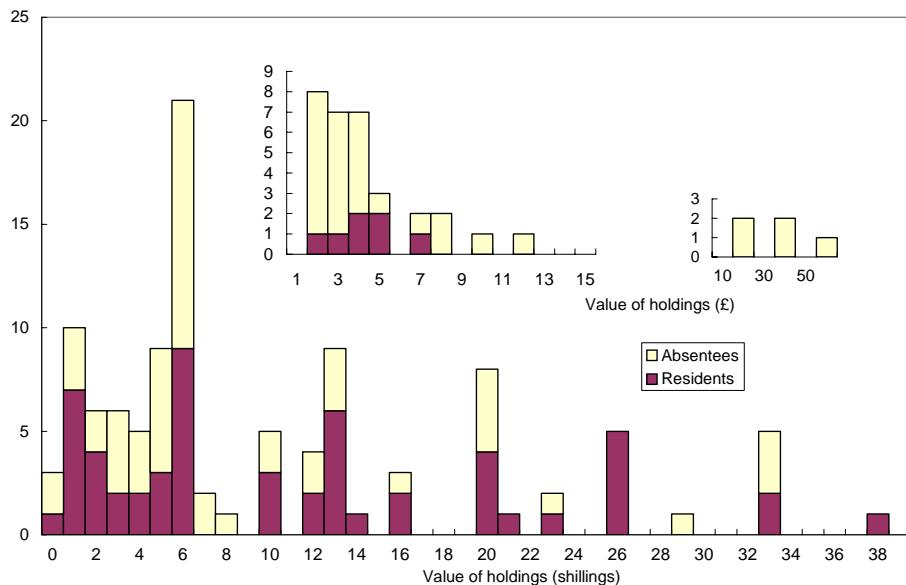
'Location Records' such as Census Returns, Lay Subsidies, the Hearth Tax Returns and the Protestation Oath Returns are of use to both the genealogist and the local historian. Families can be traced as they move from parish to parish and the economic ebb and flow of a district can be charted from the size and financial strength of the various settlements at different points in time. Muster Rolls are used less frequently as they offer only a partial listing of a community - the able bodied men liable for military service. However, the Muster Roll for 1522 is an unusually complete one with much additional information. After studying a number of Lay Subsidy Rolls for Wantage Parish, the 1522 Muster Roll was drawn to my attention by a staff member of the Public Record Office at a Day-School lecture. Clearly it would be of interest to many other local historians in western Berkshire so I requested Xerox copies of the whole Roll, in order to make a complete transcript for deposit in the various Record Offices.

The amount of information given for each person varies from parish to parish, but some elements are always given. The entries are divided into three sections within each parish -lands, goods and harness. People are listed by christian name and surname, and frequently the same persons occur in more than one section. Sometimes status is defined - knight, clerk, servant, son - but the most frequent term is 'householder', which may denote a resident occupying a recognised tenancy with rights in the common fields and answerable for a household of family and servants. The estimates of annual income from land and taxable goods are given in pounds, shillings and pence or in marks. Weapons are noted as 'bill' or 'bow' or the person is defined as 'billman' or 'archer'. Harness is sometimes listed separately, as complete suits of armour or individual pieces, but in other cases it is mentioned next to the entry for 'goods'. In the case of tenants the landlord is usually named.

My particular interest is in Wantage Parish, which covers the Manors of Wantage and Priorhold, the townships of Charlton and Grove, and the village of West Lockinge. There are 358 separate entries for the parish and a BBC Micro computer was used to speed the sorting and searching. After initial sorting, the entries could be reduced to 307 records by combining duplicate entries for goods and harness, or for listings under both lands and goods. Some duplicate entries still remain for persons who held land in more than one township or manor.

It is possible to sort and search the information in a great number of ways but only a few can be mentioned here. The incomes from freehold land seem to vary widely, from the smallest holdings, worth 8d, 9d, and 1/- per annum, to the largest at £44, £45 and £67. However, as the histogram shows, the majority of holdings were worth less than £10 p.a. The total income from lands in the parish was just over £406, of which resident freeholders held £64. The largest estates were all held by absentee landlords, such as John Bowsar with £44 and the Dean of Windsor with £67. No resident held more than £8 worth of land. The smaller land holdings (less than £10) were distributed fairly evenly between resident and absentee landlords, but in these cases 41 out of the 51 absentee landlords came from surrounding parishes within a 12 mile radius. This seems to reflect a continuing pattern in the development of the parish, in which much land was held by absentee landlords, there was no resident land-owning noble family and a number of

prosperous 'middling' families held a moderate amount of free-hold land and had business interests in the town. There are noticeable peaks on the histogram caused by repeated values of 6s 8d, 13s 4d, 20s, 26s 8d and 33s 4d, which may represent holdings of 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25 acres respectively.



The distribution of individual land holdings between resident and absentee landlords in Wantage Parish

An entry for 'goods' indicates a person's parish of residence. For instance there are seven entries for Ellen Croker in the whole roll, scattered through various parishes in the Vale, but in only one place, Faringdon, is she entered for 'goods', and in the Wantage entries she is referred to as 'Elyn Crocker of Farrendon'. The Wantage section has 183 people entered for goods, with nearly £1,000 value between them. The smallest entries are for 10s, and about half of those are for people described as 'servant'. In fact all but five of the servants are entered for £2 or less and the figures probably represent their annual salaries. Four of the remaining five servants worked for substantial householders, with annual incomes of £40 plus, and they may have been senior servants acting as their masters' bailiffs or stewards. Sixteen of the "householders" had an annual income of less than £1; one was a widow. and two more, who had some free-hold land, may have been retired, but the rest must have been the poorest families in the parish, struggling to survive on inadequate incomes.

At the other end of the scale sixteen 'householders' had annual incomes of £20 plus, and the highest was £80. Several of these prosperous men had small areas of free-hold land and were probably farming, as were their families a generation later. For example Nicholas Anger had £60 in goods and one shillings worth of free-hold land, and in 1549 John Anger, his son, left "the shephouse and the shephouse acre" and other lands, beasts and farming implements, to his son Nicholas (2). In turn Nicholas junior left "the shephewse acre and the howse that standeth therupon" to his nephew William (3). However, nine of the wealthier men had no freehold land and may have been well-to-do craftsmen and tradesmen, particularly in the tanning industry and in butchery. Two such were John Aldworth of Priorshold, who had £50 in goods, and Robert Aldworth of Priorshold, who had £80 in goods, whose descendants ran a tannery in Priory Road.

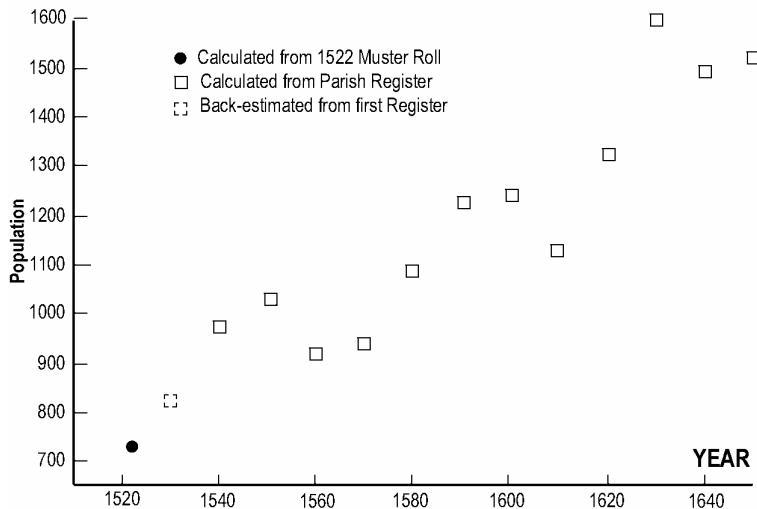
In addition to persons with land or goods there were ten people with no visible income. Three are listed as 'labourer' and may have been casual workers without a regular income which could be assessed for tax. Three others are described as 'servant' and may have been apprentices still in training, while a fourth seems to have been a lodger. The other

three were "alien strangers", born in the Low Countries, and the wool and cloth trade might explain their presence.

The ostensible purpose of the Muster was to check the number of able-bodied men and of weapons, though throughout the Roll one has the impression that this was of secondary importance. However, the gesture was made by noting weapons and armour. Bills and bows were the standard weapons, with an occasional halbard, poleaxe or glaive. Only one sword is noted in the whole roll. In Wantage parish seventy people had weapons, some with armour, and a further six had armour alone. There were forty two bills and twenty two bows, with six assorted halbards and poleaxes, and this ratio of approximately two billmen to each Bowman is the same throughout the Roll. For those with goods below the annual value of £10 it seems to have been a matter of chance inheritance or family status if a person possessed armour. For example, Sir Thomas Odams the chantry priest had "harnes for ij men" although his goods were only assessed at £7. However it is likely that a chantry priest might be a younger son of a gentry family and, therefore, his status would call for him to have armour. For those with goods between £10 and £20 a weapon and a helmet seem to have been required, whilst those above £20 in goods had some body armour. Full armour seems to have been owned by those in the £30 to £40 range and above £40 two sets of armour are fairly usual, though often made up of an odd assortment of brigandines, splints and sallets. Amongst the seventy three freeholders only twelve had weapons, but thirty nine out of the forty one tenants had weapons; the two tenants without weapons each had an armed servant. It would seem likely that one of the conditions of a tenancy was that the tenant should supply a weapon.

Information from the Muster Roll can be combined with information from other sources, such as entries in the parish register (4). At the time of the Muster in 1522, 143 different surnames are found for people resident in Wantage Parish. By the decade beginning 1540 only 84 of these surnames are still found in the Parish Register. In the decade beginning 1620 the number is reduced to 42, and by 1650, the end of the first register, only 33 original surnames remain. The best Hearth Tax Return, for 1664, gives 27 original names. From 1540 to 1664 the loss is approximately 8% per decade, but the initial fall, from 1522 to 1540, is much sharper. A proportion of this fall can be eliminated by removing the surnames of servants and single people from, the 1522 total. Servants and single people were more likely to move and less likely to establish family groups in the parish, whilst the Parish Registers tend to record the presence of settled families in which births, marriages and deaths occurred. Thus the 1522 total can be reduced to 110 separate family surnames, but this still leaves a loss rate of 12% for each of the first two decades. This would suggest that there was either a high mortality rate between 1520 and 1540, or marked migration.

Finally, since the Muster seems to give such a complete coverage of the households in the parish, we can use it to estimate the population of Wantage in 1522. Two types of residents can be counted, householders and single people. The single people include servants, widows, labourers, people who seem to be lodgers and adult sons or daughters. It is assumed that those named as 'householders' are responsible for a number of dependants - wife, children and under-age apprentices and servants. In fact the 'householders' have check marks by their names which seem to indicate 'answering' (for a group?). Hoskins (5) suggests that for Muster Rolls a multiplier of six or seven may be needed. In view of the size of family groups found a little later, in wills for Wantage, six was felt to be the more likely number. With 110 householders and 83 single people this gives $110 \times 6 + 83 = 743$. Work with the first parish register suggests an average population for the decade 1530 to 1540 of 820, for the decade 1540 to 1550 of 975 and for the decade 1550 to 1560 of 1,025. Therefore, a figure of approximately 750 for 1520 to 1530 seems plausible. In view of this steady increase in the population (11% per decade) the decline in surnames is more likely to be due to migration rather than high mortality.



Population growth in Wantage calculated from the Muster Roll and from the Parish Register

Much work remains to be done on the material available from the 1522 Muster Roll, both on the Wantage section, which I will be analysing in detail, and on the complete Roll, which should be transcribed and indexed soon. I hope that other local historians will find the material both interesting and profitable.

REFERENCES

1. Muster Roll for part of Berkshire, 1522; Public Record Office, Exchequer, Augmentations Office Miscellaneous Books, E315/464
2. Will of John Anger of Wantage, 1550; Public Record Office, PCC Wills, 11 Coode
3. Will of Nicholas Anger of Wantage, 1571; Wiltshire Record Office, Dean of Sarum's Register of Wills, Reg.2, p.100
4. Wantage Parish Register 1538-1653; Berkshire Record Office, Wantage Parish records D/P 143/1/1 An indexed transcript was prepared by the author and deposited with the Record Office in 1984.
5. W G Hoskins, Local History in England; Longman (1959), p 203

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