# Research notes

# Marriage horizons in Surrey and Nottinghamshire[1]

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According to the Eleventh Canon of the Synod of Westminster in 1200, no marriage could take place before banns had been read in the parish churches of the two parties, on three Sundays before the date of the wedding, except by permission of the church authorities. Such permission was achieved by means of a marriage licence, which consisted of two parts, a bond and an allegation. The objective of the present study is to determine the distances, often called 'marriage horizons', between the parishes of residence of the bride and groom, and the church in which the marriage took place.

The counties of Surrey and Nottinghamshire were chosen because they approximate to the Archdeaconry of Surrey within the Diocese of Winchester and the Archdeaconry of Nottingham within the Diocese of York. Furthermore, annotated lists of marriage licences for both areas have been transcribed and are available in printed form. The year 1748 was chosen because it was shortly before the introduction of the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 which tightened up procedure. An eighteenth century marriage allegation would normally contain the following information:

The date of the marriage licence.

The full name of the groom and his declared age.

The occupation and marital status of the groom.

The full name of the bride and her declared age.

The marital status of the bride.

The proposed parish for the wedding including alternatives.

In 1748 there were 227 applications for a marriage licence in Nottinghamshire against 191 in Surrey. At the time there were about 168 parishes in Nottinghamshire and 140 in Surrey.

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1 This publication forms part of a dissertation for a Diploma in the University of London. It is dedicated to the late Richard Wall whose patience and guidance enabled me to research the subject and write the thesis.

**Figure 1    Distances travelled by groom and bride in Nottinghamshire**
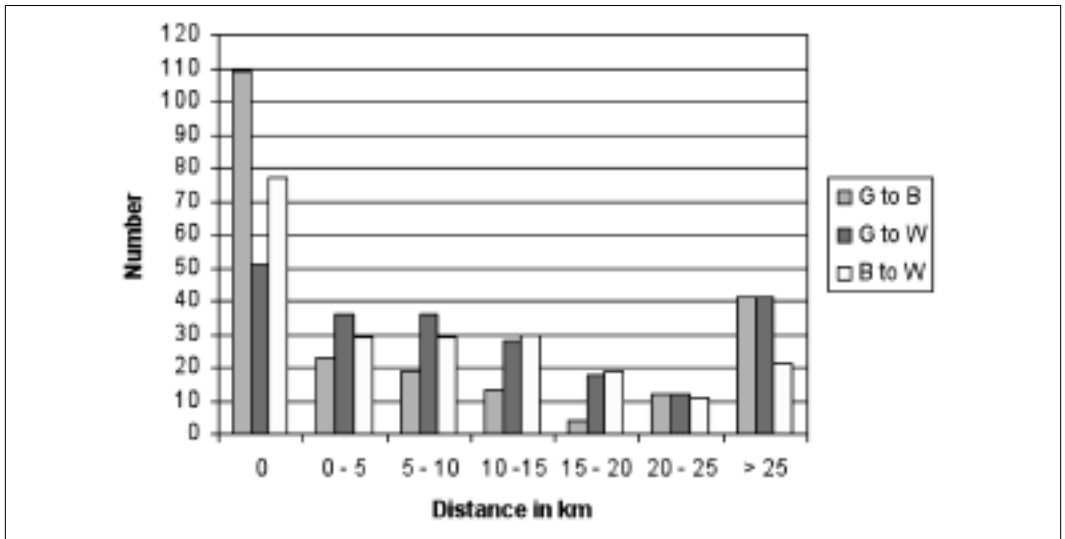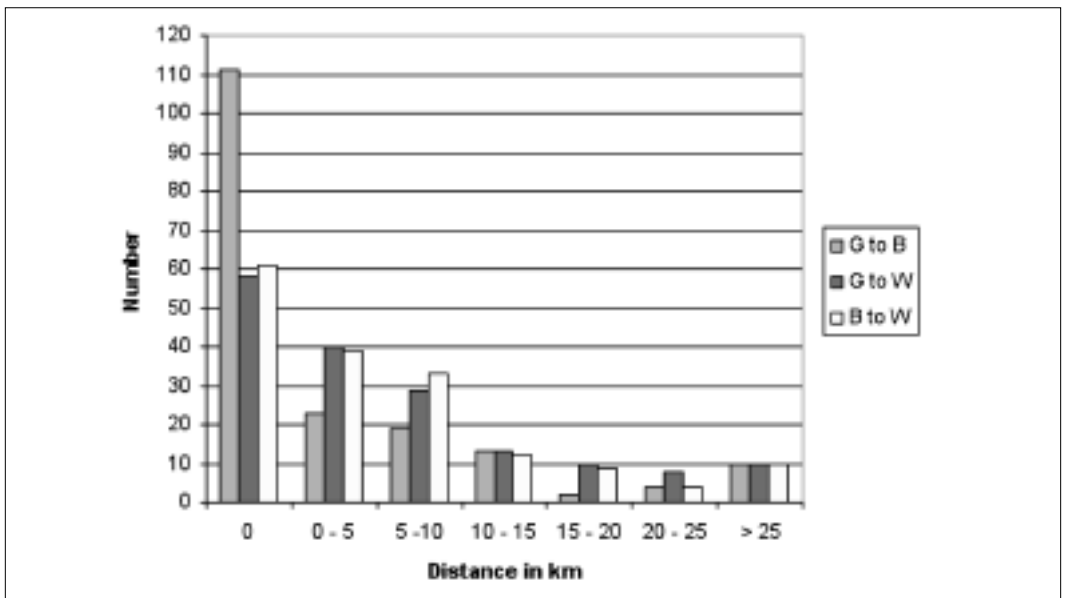


**Figure 2    Distances travelled by groom and bride in Surrey**



Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate three aspects regarding the distances couples travelled. They illustrate the apparent distance between the parishes of the groom and bride (G to B), the distance the groom travelled to the church wedding (G to W) and the corresponding distance by the bride (B to W). A major proportion of the couples met each other in the same village, or at least they were resident in the same parish when the application for a licence was made. In both counties there were fewer men in each category as the distance

between the parishes increased up to the group 15–20 km, shown by the extreme left-hand bar. At this point both counties exhibit a reversal in this trend, shown by the 20–25 km group. In Nottinghamshire men did not seem to mind travelling over 25 km but this was much less popular in Surrey.

Millard[2] in his publication on marriage horizons discusses the interaction between places, a phenomenon which he calls the distance effect. He concludes that as the distance between parishes increases, so there is less interaction but he did not report any discontinuity in the effect at any point. He did however note that in north Buckinghamshire, this decay was evident up to 20 km, which he regarded as the maximum walking distance. Over 20 km he noted a strong directional effect, which he reasoned was due to easier travel along Watling Street. In the present study, it may be that men who had access to a horse could easily travel over 25 km. Why this effect is greater in the northern county than in the south is a matter of conjecture. It is not possible to test directional effects in this study as it involves villages scattered throughout the county.

The second and third bar charts in Figures 1 and 2 (G to W) and (B to W) represent the distance travelled by the groom and bride respectively to the place of the wedding. In Nottinghamshire 23 per cent of the grooms and 34 per cent of the brides were married in the parish church of the village where they were resident. The corresponding values for Surrey were 33 per cent and 35 per cent. Once again the distance effect is in operation, though the figures suggest that both grooms and brides were less willing to travel over 25 km in Surrey than in Nottinghamshire. In Nottinghamshire, 18 per cent of all grooms travelled more than 25 km to the wedding, whereas only 6 per cent in Surrey travelled this distance. In Nottinghamshire and Surrey the corresponding figures for brides were 9 per cent and 6 per cent.

Millard[3] uses the term 'distance bands' to illustrate the distance between two events. These consist of concentric circles, resulting in a series of rings each 5 km apart. This method has also been used to study migration between parishes. In the present study, men and women meeting a marriage partner can be considered as a type of migration. The ratio of the areas of successive rings, or distance bands, is 1:3:5:7:9. The number of people found in each band is divided by the appropriate ratio to give what Millard calls the 'standardised marriage contact'. The results for the two counties are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Millard plotted the logarithm of the marriage distances in north Buckinghamshire against the logarithm of the standardised marriage contacts. Using figures for four time periods at Stony Stratford, he obtained gradients of –2.19, –2.39, –2.03 and –1.87, observing 'If the distance effect decreases over time, we would expect the value of "a" [the gradient] also to decrease.'[4] The average marriage distances quoted by Millard increased from 29.8 km

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2   J. Millard, 'A new approach to the study of marriage horizons', *Local Population Studies*, 28 (1982), 24.

3   Millard, 'A new approach', .25.

4   Millard, 'A new approach', 25.

**Table 1    Number of marriage contacts by distance band for Nottinghamshire**

| Standardised Band Order | Standardised Number of Marriage Contacts |
|---|---|
| 1 | 25 |
| 3 | 6 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 7 | 1 |
| 9 | 2 |

**Table 2    Number of marriage contacts by distance band for Surrey**

| Standardised Band Order | Standardised Number of Marriage Contacts |
|---|---|
| 1 | 25 |
| 3 | 6 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 7 | 0.3 |
| 9 | 0.4 |

to 49 km, which is what one might expect as people travelled further by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Millard's terms this means that the distance effect decreases, that is, –1.87 is less negative than –2.39. Figures 3 and 4 show the double log graphs with computer-generated best-fit trend lines for the two counties giving gradients of –1.48 and –2.04 respectively. This may suggest that people were willing to travel further in Nottinghamshire than in Surrey in the mid-eighteenth century, similar distances to people in Stony Stratford in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

The use of marriage licences has not been widely used to study marriage horizons. It might be instructive to use these sources to research other counties with different populations over different periods. It may be argued that marriage licences are not typical of all marriages, favouring men in professional occupations, who could afford the cost of the licence. However, the original dissertation for the diploma[5] also included an evaluation of occupations, in which 32 per cent of the grooms in both counties were agricultural workers and 7 per cent of all applicants in both counties were labourers, excluding servants. Lauricella[6] in her doctoral thesis, states that the cost of a licence in

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5   M.J. Saxby, 'A study of marriage licences in Nottingham and Surrey in the year 1748' (unpublished thesis, Diploma in Genealogy and History of the Family, University of London).

6   S. Lauricella, 'The economic and social influences on marriage in Banbury, 1730–1841' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1997), 147.

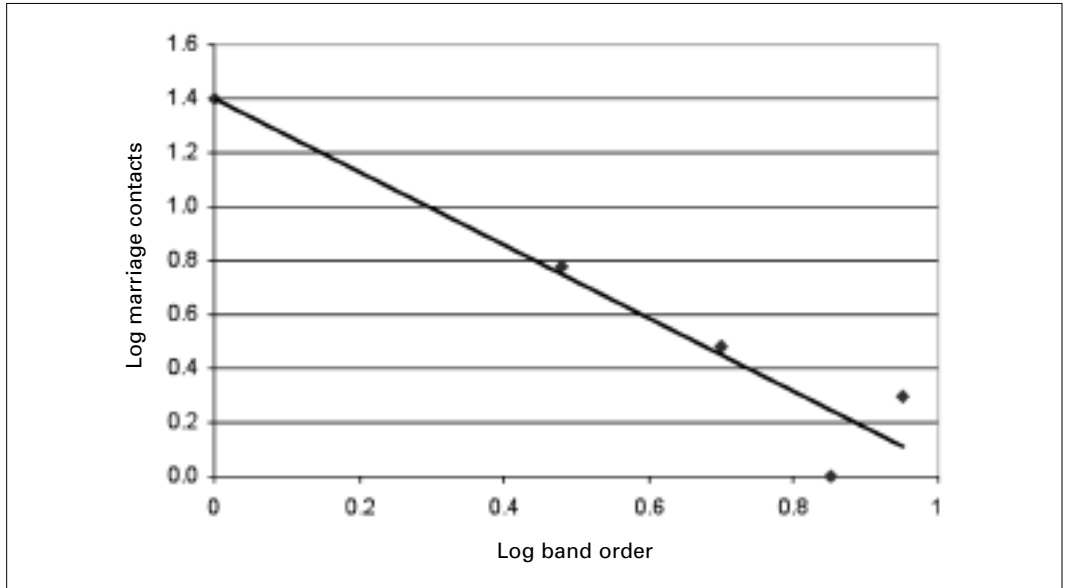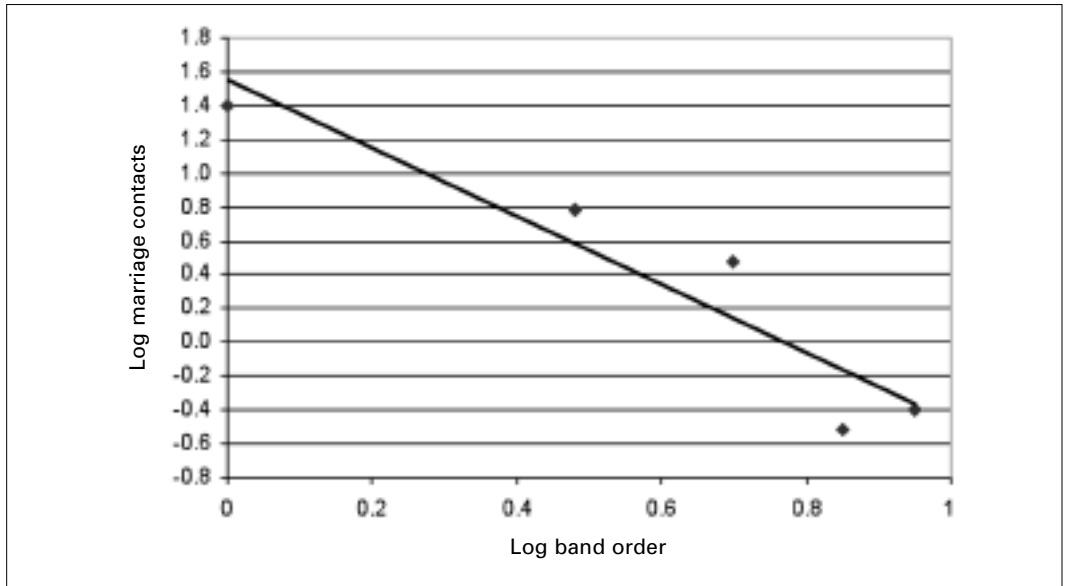**Figure 3    Double log graph for Nottinghamshire**



**Figure 4    Double log graph for Surrey**



1742 was £1 3s. 6d., equivalent to three times the weekly wage of a labourer. Marriage licences may therefore be a valuable source of data on marriage horizons, seasonality and the mean age of spouses, together with data on the occupations of grooms.