

THE ISLE OF THANET AND THE 1642 PROTESTATION OATH

MARGARET BOLTON

During the series of political manoeuvrings by King and Commons during the eighteen months leading to the outbreak of the English Civil War, Members of Parliament on 3rd May 1641 swore:

... to maintain and defend ... the true reformed Protestant Religion ... as also the power and privileges of Parliaments ... and to ... oppose and by all good ways and means endeavour to bring to condign punishment all such as shall, either by force, practice, counsels, plots, conspiracies, or otherwise, do anything to the contrary

Two months later they proposed that all men aged eighteen and over throughout the country should take the oath.

In February 1642 the necessary paperwork reached the parishes and men started to take the oath. The parish returns are housed today in the Library of the House of Lords.¹ Across Kent, just eighty-five returns survive out of more than 400 parishes but, most fortunately, six of the seven parish returns for the Isle of Thanet survive.

Taking the Oath on Thanet

Table 1 shows the number taking the oath in each parish. Across the island the oath was taken on different dates. On Sunday 13 February, the men of Birchington took the oath in church following Morning Prayer. One hundred and seven signed but ten men were absent: the document notes that they took it the next day. In addition, thirty-six men took it from Wood, twenty-two on the Sunday and twelve the next day. On the same day, the men of St John's at Margate took the oath with an unspecified number of absentees taking it the following day. A total of three hundred and nineteen declarations were made. At St Peter's, Broadstairs, the oath was administered on Monday 14 February with two hundred and eighty taking it then and eleven more on the following Sunday. It was noted that one man had refused.² The parishes of Minster, St Laurence (which included Ramsgate) and St Nicholas at Wade all administered the oath on Sunday 20 February. One person refused at St Nicholas. No effort was made to secure the acceptance of anyone who was absent on that date. No returns exist for Monkton, the parish with the smallest population on the island, fewer than 200.³

The original returns were examined by the author. They do not contain any signatures or marks of those taking the oath except for the last page of the returns

TABLE 1. NUMBER TAKING THE PROTESTATION OATH IN THANET

Parish	Signatures
St John	319
St Laurence	302
St Peter	290
Birchington	153
Minster	144
St Nicholas at Wade	112
Monkton	n/a
	1,320

for St Peter's and for St John's which contain those of the officers who administered the oath and wrote out the lists of names. In each case, the process of administering the oath fell to the clergy and various parish officials.⁴

Identifying the Oathtakers

Using parish registers, wills, rate assessments, marriage licences, depositions and court records, the author has sought to trace what became of every single person born on the Isle of Thanet from 1559 to 1625 and to reconstitute their families. Thanks to this dataset it has been possible to identify all but fifty-eight of the 1,320 who gave their oath in 1642. Of those untraced, five could not be found because their names were illegible and twelve had surnames which were too common to permit accurate identification.⁵ More importantly, the list of oathtakers can be analysed to give a detailed picture of Thanet society on the eve of the Civil War and it is these results which are presented in this paper.

Age breakdown

Table 2 shows the age breakdown by parish. Fewer than one in fifty men were over seventy while just over a third were under thirty. There is little difference between the parishes although Minster has a higher proportion of men under thirty at forty-one per cent. This is perhaps not too unsurprising. Life expectancy in the parish was lower, most likely due to malaria from the marshes. Between 1560 and 1620, twenty-two per cent of infants died in their first year of life compared to twelve per cent at St Peter's and thirteen per cent at St Laurence. Looking at the ages of 2,151 adult men buried on the island between 1600 and 1660, men in Minster generally died five years younger than their compatriots in St Peter's and St Laurence.

Although the oath was only required of men aged eighteen and over, there is evidence of younger men taking it. Daniel Pamphlet junior was seventeen but he took it alongside his father and elder brother at Minster. Similarly, John Taylor took the oath at Birchington with his father when he was seventeen and three months and so did Richard Kemp with his father William at St Laurence as did Robert Terry at St John's.

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TABLE 2 AGE BREAKDOWN OF THOSE TAKING THE OATH

Age	Birchington	Minster	St John	St Laurence	St Nicholas	St Peter	Total	%
<20	6	9	19	22	5	12	73	6.2
20s	36	41	82	84	28	64	335	28.3
30s	36	23	75	63	22	71	290	24.5
40s	29	27	56	42	18	62	234	19.8
50s	16	13	36	49	7	30	151	12.8
60s	9	7	15	21	6	21	79	6.7
70s	3	1	1	3	1	9	18	1.5
80s	1	1	1				3	0.3
	136	122	285	284	87	269	1,183	

Occupation

Data on occupation from the sources used is much less full. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is much greater variation amongst parishes, as might be expected (see **Table 3**). The three coastal parishes of St John, St Laurence and St Peter all have a high proportion of sailors. This category includes both fishermen and those working on trading vessels and ranging from sea captains to cabin boys. At both St Laurence and St Peter, over forty per cent of the men were sailors. The lower number of sailors at St John's is suspicious and discussed below. It is likely that the lone sailor at Minster was actually retired or sick given the distance from the sea. One of those at Birchington was well over eighty so also probably past work.⁶ Although the occupation is only known for a minority of the men, the data does give an impression of the nature of these working communities.

TABLE 3. OCCUPATIONAL BREAKDOWN OF THOSE TAKING THE OATH

	Birchington	Minster	St John	St Laurence	St Nicholas	St Peter	Grand Total	%
Craftsmen	16	12	35	18	6	26	113	22.2
Gentlemen	9	3	9	3	5	2	31	6.1
Husbandman	9	16	16	20	8	8	77	15.1
Labourers			2	1		1	4	0.8
Professionals	1	1	2	1	1	2	8	1.6
Sailors	2	1	28	54		45	130	25.5
Yeomen	15	19	34	28	15	25	136	26.7
Misc.*			6	2		2	10	2.0
Total	52	52	132	127	35	111	509	

* includes sextons, shepherds, innkeepers and vintners.

As occupational information mostly comes from wills and marriage licences, the number of labourers is under-represented. The poorest did not make wills and marriage licences were mostly used by the better off and those whose occupation made it difficult for them to guarantee their availability on a certain date, such as sailors. They would use a licence so they could get married when in port rather than book a wedding after banns in the hope that their ship was not delayed. Of 195 licences granted to Thanet men between 1595 and 1646 where an occupation was given, just over two-thirds went to these two groups.

Mobility

A key question in demography is mobility. In 1972 Peter Clark published a study of the populations of Canterbury, Faversham and Maidstone based on 858 depositions to the consistory court between 1585 and 1628.⁷ This found that fewer than a third of people were still living as adults in the place of their birth with just over a quarter having been born in other counties. This would suggest a high rate of mobility and Clark suggests that harvest failures of the 1590s were a contributory factor, especially since the landless were those most likely to move in search of work and food.⁸

The existence of place of birth data for a high proportion of the oath takers – almost ninety per cent – enables us to consider how many men across Thanet in 1642 were living in the parish of their birth and how far those who were not had travelled. The results show a very different picture to that found in Clark's study of the three towns. Only one in twenty-five of the oath-takers had been born outside the county and over two-thirds were native islanders (**Table 4**). This was particularly the case in the maritime parishes.

Of the forty-seven oath takers born outside the county, twenty came from London, three from Rye and Hastings, two from Durham and six from Devon and Cornwall, clearly suggesting the significance of maritime links.

When broken down by occupation and age, the data shows that over ninety per cent of sailors were either native islanders or from neighbouring Sandwich. This is not too surprising. An out of work farm labourer in the rural Weald would be unlikely to travel to the coast and even if he did, he would probably find it difficult to find work on a ship given there were plenty of trained seamen in the area. The fact that so many sailors stayed in the area suggests that there was little problem with fish stocks and that maritime trade was generally good.

TABLE 4. A COMPARISON OF MOBILITY SURVEY RESULTS BETWEEN THANET'S PROTESTATION RETURNS AND CLARK'S TOWN SURVEYS

Place of birth	Canterbury	%	Maidstone	%	Faversham	%	Thanet	%
Same parish	196	30.5	47	38.2	18	19.6	526	44.4
Within five miles	43	6.7	15	12.2	17	18.5	391	33.0
Elsewhere in Kent	221	34.4	39	31.7	39	42.4	222	18.7
Outside county	183	28.5	22	17.9	18	19.6	47	4.0
Total	643		123		92		1,186	

None of the professionals were natives but clergy – who comprised the majority of this group – were rarely appointed to parishes in their home area. Amongst husbandmen and craftsmen the picture was very similar with just under a fifth of each having been born within Kent, but over five miles away. Whether they moved more because they needed work unavailable in their home areas or because their skills gave them the option to try and better themselves elsewhere, is impossible to say. Blacksmiths and tailors were the most likely craftsmen to have been born on the Kentish mainland. Eighty-five per cent of the teenage men who took the oath had been born on the island which suggests that most young men did not find too much difficulty in finding apprenticeships or work locally,

An important question with regard to mobility is how many of those who moved into the area stayed there. Here, the answer is clear. Just over half of those who travelled furthest remained in the area until their death while three quarters of those born on the island would also die on it. In reality, the number of natives dying while still resident on the island would be higher than the actual figure for burials since many sailors died at sea and their demise can only be known through either wills or the remarriage of their wives who are suddenly listed in parish records as widows or the appearance of their family as recipients of poor relief due to the demise of the breadwinner.

The Protestation was a snapshot in time so it is worth comparing the results of this review of mobility with that of data taken from baptismal and marriage records over a period. Between 1560 and 1620, a total of 4,105 males were baptised across the island. Of these 1,149 died before they reached eighteen (28 per cent); the fate of 831 is unknown (20 per cent). Of the remaining 2,104 men, 1,459 (69 per cent) died on the island with 58 per cent of those who did so being buried in the parish of their birth. Again, it is important to note that the actual number of men who were resident on the island at the time of their death would have been higher. There are gaps in the records for Monkton and St Nicholas and at least one in twenty of those men who reached adulthood but who were not buried on the island, were mariners who died at sea.

Looking at marriages, 2,249 took place on the island between 1600 and 1649 inclusive. The birth details of 1,687 grooms have been traced. Of these 707 (42 per cent) married in the place of their birth and 538 (32 per cent) were native to the island but married in a different parish. 256 (15 per cent) grooms came from the east Kent mainland. Just 35 (2 per cent) came from other counties and the remaining 151 (9 per cent) were born elsewhere in Kent. Of the Thanet-born grooms, 85 per cent died on the island and almost three quarters of those born outside the county settled and died on the Isle of Thanet (74 per cent) but of those who had come from other parts of Kent, around two-thirds stayed (67 per cent). Again, deaths at sea would mean that the actual number living on the island when they died would have been higher. Thus, the Protestation, baptism and marriage data all agree that mobility was considerably lower on the Isle of Thanet than it was in the major towns on the mainland.

Why did people move to the Isle of Thanet? Good weather, a generally healthy environment (away from the marshes), good work prospects and a normally plentiful food supply. Even if the harvest failed, there was still plenty of fish which offered valuable nutrition. It is noteworthy that a number of those who migrated to

the island came as a family, either two brothers together or one following the other after the first had settled down. This pattern occurred with the Maxteds who came from Chartham to St Laurence, the Ambroses who moved from Sturry to Minster, the Witherdens from Devon and the Ambertons from Littlebourne. In other cases, whole families moved such as John Cranbrook who was born in Woodnesborough, married and had his children at Walmer, before moving to the island where they settled.

The Missing Men

There is a note on the last page of the return for St John's:

Some forty or fifty men there may be of this parish who have not as yet taken the protestation but they were at the spreading of it most of them at sea, others were gone out of warning and others so aged or ill that they could not come to tender themselves. But we know not of any in the parish whom we may justly suspect to refuse it when it shall be tendered unto them to take.⁹

No similar note exists for any of the other parishes and this has led to a general assumption that the lists are complete. The *Oxford Guide to Family History* describes the returns as 'remarkably comprehensive' and a 'major source of genealogical information' noting that they include the names of all men aged eighteen and over including 'the few individuals (determined recusants) who refused to take the oath'.¹⁰ However, is this the case? It is an important question. There are no census returns for the period so the returns represent the only listing of adult men in each parish. On the basis that approximately a third of the population were children and around half the adults were male, it should be possible to use the returns as a rough guide to population size by simply trebling the number of names.¹¹ Politically too, the question is vital. Returns show the names of those who refused the oath but if many men happened to absent themselves from church on the day it was administered, the impression of universal acceptance given would be highly misleading.

There are a number of sources which allow us to establish our own lists of men who were resident in each parish at the time in question. Rate assessments for St Laurence and Birchington show the names of ratepayers in the years 1640, 1641 and 1642 and where they lived. Parish registers show the names of couples having children at this time. Wills show places of residence as do court records for those accused of a crime. Of course, such evidence is not absolute.

The following examples indicate some of the men who might reasonably have been expected to have been present to take the oath but whose names do not appear:

Roger Wright, born at St John's in 1602, he had stood in the church with his wife having their fifth child baptised just a week before the oath was taken. He died in the parish in 1659. A sailor, he may have been at sea.

John Caper (St John's) had a child baptised after Morning Prayer on the very day that the oath was administered but he then went home with his wife without taking it. This was in contrast to Samuel Tabbott of Minster who attended Morning Prayer, then had his son baptised and finally took the oath. Tabbott died two months later.

The Reverend William Dunkin, vicar of St Laurence parish since 1629, already had four children and his wife was carrying their fifth. He was a man favoured by Archbishop Laud who appointed him Chancellor of Canterbury Cathedral in 1638¹² and a Six Preacher in 1639. Although Richard Culmer saw Dunkin as politically 'neuter'¹³ it might be wondered if his extraordinary decision to leave administering the oath to his churchwardens was deliberate. There was no curate to take the service so either the vicar declined to sign or he cancelled the service. In 1644, the parishioners would successfully petition Parliament for Dunkin's removal on grounds that he was, in the words of an eye-witness, 'a drunken, scandalous, railing Priest'.¹⁴

The Reverend Meric Casaubon, vicar of Minster, was also missing from the lists but he was a known pluralist and an academic who did not live in the parish.

The Reverend Josiah Coppin, vicar of St Nicholas at Wade, failed to take the oath.

Robert Underdown was a pensioner at St Peter's when he died in November 1643. Born in 1581 and married in 1618, he had had children in the parish and the fact that he was granted a pension there would support the assumption that he was a long standing resident fallen on hard times and not a newcomer.

Benedict Bennett, born in 1571 at St Laurence, was buried there on 8 June 1642 less than four months after the oath was taken. He may have been ill.

John Barber at Birchington, a yeoman in his sixties, also probably ill, who was buried on 24 February, eleven days after the oath was taken.

John Sprackling who was aged fifty-six, had been born at St Laurence, married at St John's in 1621 and had children there. He died six weeks after the oath was taken. Four other Spracklings appear to be missing which could indicate they were at his bedside, or that they were using his illness as an excuse to avoid taking the oath.

Samuel Burgess had married at St Laurence in 1622. His wife died there in 1637 and he re-married in the same church. He had six children with his second wife, the baptisms taking place on 28 April 1639, 11 April 1641, 18 September 1642, 29th September 1644, 16 October 1646 and 8 April 1649. Samuel died and was buried in the parish in 1666. He never paid rates so was not presumably a landowner but rather a labouring man or maybe a sailor.

Thomas Barber, born at St Laurence and married at St John's on 1 June 1641. The marriage licence records him as a sailor. The couple were still living in Margate when their first child was baptised on 15 January 1643.

John Tiffin, a husbandman whose address according to the marriage licence issued in March 1641 was Minster and whose wife was possibly giving birth at the time the oath was being administered in church. The child was baptised on February 23 three days after.

Edward Violet, a doctor at St John's and gentleman. He had four children in the parish baptised on 12 October 1634, 11 November 1638, 15 August 1641 and 28 January 1644. He was buried there on 12 February 1650.

John Goodwin, chirurgeon of Birchington. Married in October 1642, he was paying rates in the parish and continued to do so until his death there in 1652.

Vincent Underdown, a yeoman farmer, was another ratepayer who failed to take the oath at Birchington.

Richard Dadd, born at St Laurence in 1610, married there in 1636 and had children baptised in the church on 6 August 1637, 18 August 1639 and 26 September 1641. The rate books show he held 3 acres at Northwood in 1641 and 1642.

Paul Wastell held 3 acres in Ramsgate. Born at neighbouring St Peter's in 1570, he had lived in St Laurence since his marriage in 1592 and remained paying rates there until his death in 1650. He was a sea captain. Whether he was at sea when the oath was taken or was infirm due to age cannot be known. Both his sons took the oath.

John Russell aged fifty-one and his son of the same name were both fishermen at St Peter's. Neither signed.

Robert Spratt, born at Charing, married at Birchington in 1640 where he settled and had ten children prior to his death there in 1668. They include infants baptised on 21 August 1641 and 31 December 1642. He took the Solemn Vow at Birchington in 1643.

Less certainty can be expressed over the whereabouts of some of the younger men who were born on the island, subsequently married and died on the island, but who could have been working on the mainland in February 1642. They include: Richard Omer, a yeoman's son aged nineteen; Robert Todd, also nineteen and a sailor; Nathaniel Martin and George Long, both eighteen and sons of sailors; Richard Kennett, aged eighteen, and a tailor's apprentice; Roger Chapman, a twenty-year old farm labourer at St Nicholas. Men who never married and were not landowners or criminals inevitably left little trace so it cannot be said where they were in February 1642. For example, Richard Taylor was born at St Laurence in 1603 and died a bachelor at St John's in 1648. Similarly, Job Pearce was born at St John's in 1604 and also died unmarried at St Laurence in 1648 and Robert Sackett was born at St Peter's in 1587 and died there in 1662 without having wed and John Gridier at Minster in 1599 died St John's 1665.

In three cases, it is impossible to know where someone was resident. John Giles had been living at St John's since 1627 and had his children there but in July 1643 he took the Solemn Vow as a resident of Birchington. In October 1643, just three months later, he was buried at St John's where the register recorded him as a householder in the parish. His occupation is unknown so it is possible that he was simply working in Birchington at the time the Vow was taken.

The question of missing men is significant because of the numbers involved. In **Table 5** they are shown in two categories – (A) those who might reasonably be assumed to have been resident at the time; (B) those who may have been. [table 5]

It is clear that St John's was not the only parish to have men who failed to take the oath although they were the only parish to report the fact. Some of the men would have been ill and some would have been away but the numbers do seem to suggest

TABLE 5. NUMBERS TAKING THE OATH AND MISSING IT

	Took the oath	Refusing	Category A	Category B	Potentially missing
Birchington	153	0	13	7	7.8 to 11.6%
Minster	144	0	14	6	8.9 to 12.2%
St John	319	0	62	17	16.3 to 19.8%
St Laurence	302	0	53	21	14.9 to 19.7%
St Nicholas	112	1	6	3	5 to 7.4%
St Peter	290	1	24	7	7.6 to 9.6%
Unknown			3	5	
	1,320	2*	175	66	11.7 to 15.4%

*The two men who refused were Simon Croft of St Peter's, a yeoman farmer aged 39, and Thomas Paramor of St Nicholas, gentleman, aged 26.

at best a lack of enthusiasm in some quarters to take the oath. Around one in eight men probably claimed sudden illness or urgent business elsewhere on the day. The law required – on penalty of fines – everyone to be in church unless prevented by sickness and none of those missing was a known recusant: apparently many simply voted with their feet. Sailors on merchant vessels might be travelling but local fishermen had no need to go out on the Sabbath and why would shoemakers have to be away from home? The number of oathtakers whose occupation is known is shown in **Table 6**, together with estimated absences.

The age structure of the men believed missing shows an increase over those who signed in terms of those aged seventy or more but is pretty comparable in Category A though Category B includes significantly more young people whose whereabouts are less easy to determine. Once a man married and started having children or he bought or rented property and started paying taxes, he appeared in records but before that stage, he was generally hidden from the researches of later historians.

Novelists like to portray the Civil War as an event which divided families but there is little sign of that in Thanet. Where a son took the oath and his elderly

TABLE 6. OCCUPATIONAL REPRESENTATION AMONGST OATH TAKERS

	Took the Oath	Missing	% Absent
Craftsmen	113	5	4.2
Gentlemen	31	9	22.5
Husbandman	77	9	10.5
Professional	8	2	20.0
Sailors	130	55	29.7
Yeomen	136	20	12.8
Total	495	100	16.8

father did not, it is perhaps more likely that this was because the parent was infirm than a sign that the son was taking a different political stance. Indeed, there seems to be some evidence of family agreement. Not one of the four members of the Prince family of brewers took the oath and nor did the maltster Richard Norwood whose sister had married Thomas Prince. Thomas Lacey of Birchington and John Sprackling of St John's who were also brothers-in-law, both failed to take the oath too. Of course, they may have been together for a family event elsewhere and the fact that many people worked with their kinsmen – especially on boats and farms – should not be forgotten either, but it does suggest that they may have discussed the Protestation and decided collectively to absent themselves from church on that particular Sunday.

CONCLUSION

The returns of the Protestation Oath are fascinating documents. They are not just a list of names but a means by which we can get an impression of the age structure of each community and the available employment opportunities. Although the listing of missing men is an estimate, it suggests that just prior to the outbreak of the civil war, there was some politicisation, amongst landowners in particular. The maritime parishes were all limbs of the Cinque Ports so would have been especially hit by ship money. It would seem probable that a similar analysis in other areas would yield comparable results.

ENDNOTES

¹ HL/PO/JO/10/1/92/50-55.

² The date of the 14th is clear on the original but it might be wondered if this was an error on the part of the clerk since it would seem more likely that the oath was taken in church after the service on Sunday 13 rather than on a day when men would be at work.

³ At the time of the Compton Census in 1676, an exact count revealed 154 inhabitants including children. Anne Whiteman and Mary Clapinson, 1986, *The Compton Census of 1676: a critical edition* (Oxford), 35. In 1588, just 100 communicants had been recorded. At the time of the 1667 Hearth Tax, there were 32 houses, E179/129/746.

⁴ The following officials are named for each parish:

St John: The Reverend John Banks (vicar); Edmund Catton, John Laming (churchwardens); William Coppin (deputy); John Smith (sub deputy); Thomas Robins (overseer); Henry Culmer (registrar).

St Peter: The Reverend Thomas Stevens (vicar); Guildford Culmer, Nicholas Sampson (churchwardens); Gabriel Wastell (constable); John Russell, Edward Emptage, William Curling, Henry Sampson (overseers).

St Laurence: churchwarden: Richard Langley (churchwarden); John Curling (constable); Edward Troward, Daniel Emptage (overseers).

St Nicholas: John Emptage, Thomas Culling (churchwardens); Valentine Marlow (constable); George Culmer, George Skinner (overseers).

Birchington: The Reverend George Stancombe (minister); Thomas Parker (overseer).

Minster: The Reverend John Picard (curate); Robert Noble, Edward Taddy (churchwardens).

⁵ In some cases, it is evident that men are missing but unclear which. For example, William Chambers and his son of the same name both lived at St Nicholas but only one was listed as taking the oath. St Laurence had two householders named William Saunder but only one took the oath. There were nine men named John Curling alive of whom six only were listed: it is clearly impossible to identify which did and which did not take the oath. Other common names were John Wild of whom six were alive and four appeared.

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⁶ Ralph Lynch who married in the village in 1596 had been listed as an adult sailor in 1584 in a list of mariners prepared for the Privy Council, SP12/175/86.

⁷ Peter Clark, 1972, 'The Migrant in Kentish towns, 1580-1640', in Peter Clark and Paul Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (London), 117-163.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 129.

⁹ HL/PO/JO/10/1/92/52 f4.

¹⁰ David Hey, 2002, *The Oxford Guide to Family History* (Oxford), 225. There is not a shred of evidence that either of the two men who refused the oath on Thanet were recusants.

¹¹ E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, 1981, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (Cambridge), 569; they estimated that 35% of the early modern population were sixteen or under based on surveys of communicants.

¹² Joyce M. Horn (ed.), 1974, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857*, vol. 3 (London), 21-22. The appointment is listed as William Dunlyn, M.A. but this is likely to have been a transcription error since no such person named Dunlyn has ever been traced.

¹³ Richard Culmer, 1657, *A Parish Looking Glasse* (London), 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.