

England's Immigrants 1330-1550 and the question of resident Irish immigrants

A summary by Margot Miller of a talk given by Dr Jessica Lutkins at the 2014 Spring Conference. Dr Lutkin is research assistant and impact officer on the *England's Immigrants 1330-1550 Project* at the University of York, which is led by Professor Mark Ormrod. She completed her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London in 2008 on 'Goldsmiths and the English Royal Court, 1360-1413'. Since then, she has worked on a number of research projects based at The National Archives, Kew and has been an associate lecturer at the University of Winchester.

In her talk to the MHS May Conference, Jessica Lutkin gave a comprehensive description of the medieval immigrant project database, and the source rolls and documents. Data on Irish immigrants has come mainly from records of the *Alien Subsidies*. These were taxes raised for a short time and extant records date from the mid-1400's. These records contain 60,000 names and the taxes attempted to control *aliens* engaged in trade and employment. So-called *aliens* had to register and then each household had to pay 16p and each individual 6p each year. After 1442, more and more *foreigners* demanded exemption, including the Irish. Ireland was said to be under the King's rule, so it was hardly possible to class the Irish as foreigners. By 1487 the Flemish were having to pay this tax, and by Tudor times the tax was changed to a poll tax of all wealthy people including foreigners. Previous studies have looked at particular groups such as the Flemish and Jewish immigrants, but this York University project attempts to provide information on a wider range including Italian and Irish.

Despite many difficulties, the Project has attempted to gather data on as many classes of people as it can: women as well as men; all parts of England, not just the ports of entry; all kinds of trades and employment. The researchers are reliant on extant records and the conscientiousness of medieval record keepers. Records on Irish immigrants have come from Wiltshire 370, Northamptonshire 200, Gloucestershire 120, Devon 110, Buckinghamshire 95, Warwickshire 88 and Cornwall 78. There are records from the ports of Bristol and Cornwall and from Oxford and Cambridge, but none from Cheshire and Liverpool.

The occupations of those Irish immigrants recorded showed that these men were clerics and artisans, not just country farm labourers. The occupations recorded in 1394 were chaplains 99, tailors 22, parsons 12, clerks 11, vicars 10. In 1440 there were: servants 224, labourers 32, tailors 27, chaplains 26, and 5 husbandmen but it is possible that the stated occupations of many of these may have been downgraded to evade taxes.

Dr Lutkin described all the difficulties in compiling this database, and using it to figure out the position of Irish medieval immigrants. There are no records to show how many itinerant workers returned to Ireland. The overall population of aliens across medieval England is not known – possibly 1–2 % of the population; but even the figure of the overall population of medieval England is not known exactly.

The talk ended with a sample use of the database, which produced a record of 23 Irish immigrants in Herefordshire, 3 in Leominster, and one Irishman John Biggs working as a glazier in Leominster.