

Trades and handy labour: occupations in London's growing Eastern suburb, 1580-1650

London's population is estimated to have doubled between 1550 and 1600, and doubled again from 1600 and 1650, a growth that was fuelled almost entirely by in-migration to the suburbs. Long before the industrial revolution was fully underway, London's suburbs, initially attractive because of their ready accessibility and lack of guild restrictions, were gearing up to become industrial powerhouses of manufacture and trade. Alongside this, we may suppose that the food and fuel-selling, construction and the apparel trades continued to supply Londoners with the necessities for everyday life. Nonetheless, we know relatively little about what suburban Londoners *en masse* were actually doing to earn a living in this important period of intense growth, and how this may have affected their propensity to marry or bear children. This paper aims to redress that using parish records from St Botolph without Aldgate and its environs. To the east of the walled city, the parish of St Botolph Aldgate and its enclave Holy Trinity Minories extended into East Smithfield, the original East End. With river frontage and docks, this was a favoured settling place of international migrants as well as the native born English immigrant, adding to the pooling of human capital.

The portion of St Botolph Aldgate closest to the city saw a doubling in the number of its households between 1602 and 1618, and there was rapid growth throughout the parish thereafter, the number of baptisms per year rising from 300 to 525 in the following 25 years. The tensions that growth and the emergence of new industry created were expressed anecdotally by the parish clerk, Francis Parke, following a 1618 survey of inhabitants. He noted the arrival of a large new and potentially burdensome class of inhabitants, who had "neither trades nor meanes to live on, but by their handy labour", and large families to support besides.¹ Parke goes on to list occupations typical of this group, contrasting them with a second group of incomers with more stable employment (but still troublesome because they could not or would not pay the poor rate). The employees and owner of a silk mill recently established in the parish are among his targets. In these perceived threats to the established order of parish affairs a transition from skilled trades to wage labour is clearly implied.

From 1586 to 1644 most baptisms in the parish registers give the father's occupation, and occupations are also given intermittently in the burial register. A family reconstitution of the parish will allow the investigation of not only the occupational makeup of the area, but also the demographic characteristics of its inhabitants by occupation.

¹ BOD MS RAWL D796B lib: B fol. 12.a