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**The Origins of Bristol Migrants in the Early Fourteenth Century:
the Surname Evidence**

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The Origins of Bristol Migrants in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Surname Evidence¹

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THE STUDY OF MIGRATION to medieval towns is still very much in its infancy. This is due largely to a lack of evidence. It may also be due to the fact that the period when such evidence as there is becomes more readily available – the 14th to the 16th centuries – is often seen as a time when people were moving away from towns. Consequently, emphasis has been laid upon emigration rather than immigration. Recently, however, historians have drawn attention to the impact of immigration in helping to maintain the balance of urban populations during this period. G.H. Martin and A.F. Butcher have shown how rural-urban migration to Ipswich and Romney respectively not only helped to maintain those towns' populations but also to cement extensive links with their rural hinterlands.² Immigration, it is suggested, not only provided a steady influx of new citizens to the towns but also established beneficial connections with their increasingly productive regions. However, such studies have tended to concentrate on the situation that existed after the Black Death. Little has been written on the extent of such migration during the first half of the 14th century, a time when most towns still retained their attraction to the rural migrant.

In this short paper I shall therefore investigate the evidence for migration into Bristol during the early 14th century as suggested by one particular source – that of place-name surnames. Clearly this evidence can only be used to indicate the situation that existed before about 1350. The unreliability of place-name surnames after this time leaves an unfortunate gap in our knowledge of migratory movement during the period regarded as that of most acute urban depression. However, an awareness of the origins of a town's immigrants during this earlier period is an essential prerequisite for understanding the changes that were to take place in rural-urban relations in the following years.

As far as immigration into early modern towns is concerned Bristol has not been neglected. J.R. Holman and Anne Yarbrough have both published recent studies on the social and geographical origins of Bristol apprentices in the 16th and 17th centuries, using the town's apprentice registers which provide a mine of information on various aspects of immigration into the town during that period.³ For the 14th century – indeed for only the first half of the century if

1. I would like to thank Professor Rodney Hilton for his criticism of this paper, and Peter McClure and Celia Parker for their help in identifying the place-name surnames. The article is based upon a paper delivered at a seminar in Birmingham in March 1982.
2. G.H. Martin, 'The Borough and the Merchant Community of Ipswich, 1317–1422' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1955); A.F. Butcher, 'The origins of Romney freemen, 1433–1523', *Econ. Hist. Review*, 2nd ser., XXVII (1974), 16–27.
3. J.R. Holman, 'Apprenticeship as a factor in migration: Bristol, 1675–1726', *Trans. B.G.A.S.* XCVII (1979), 85–92; A. Yarbrough, 'Geographical and social origins of Bristol apprentices, 1542–1565', *Trans. B.G.A.S.* XCVIII (1980), 113–130.

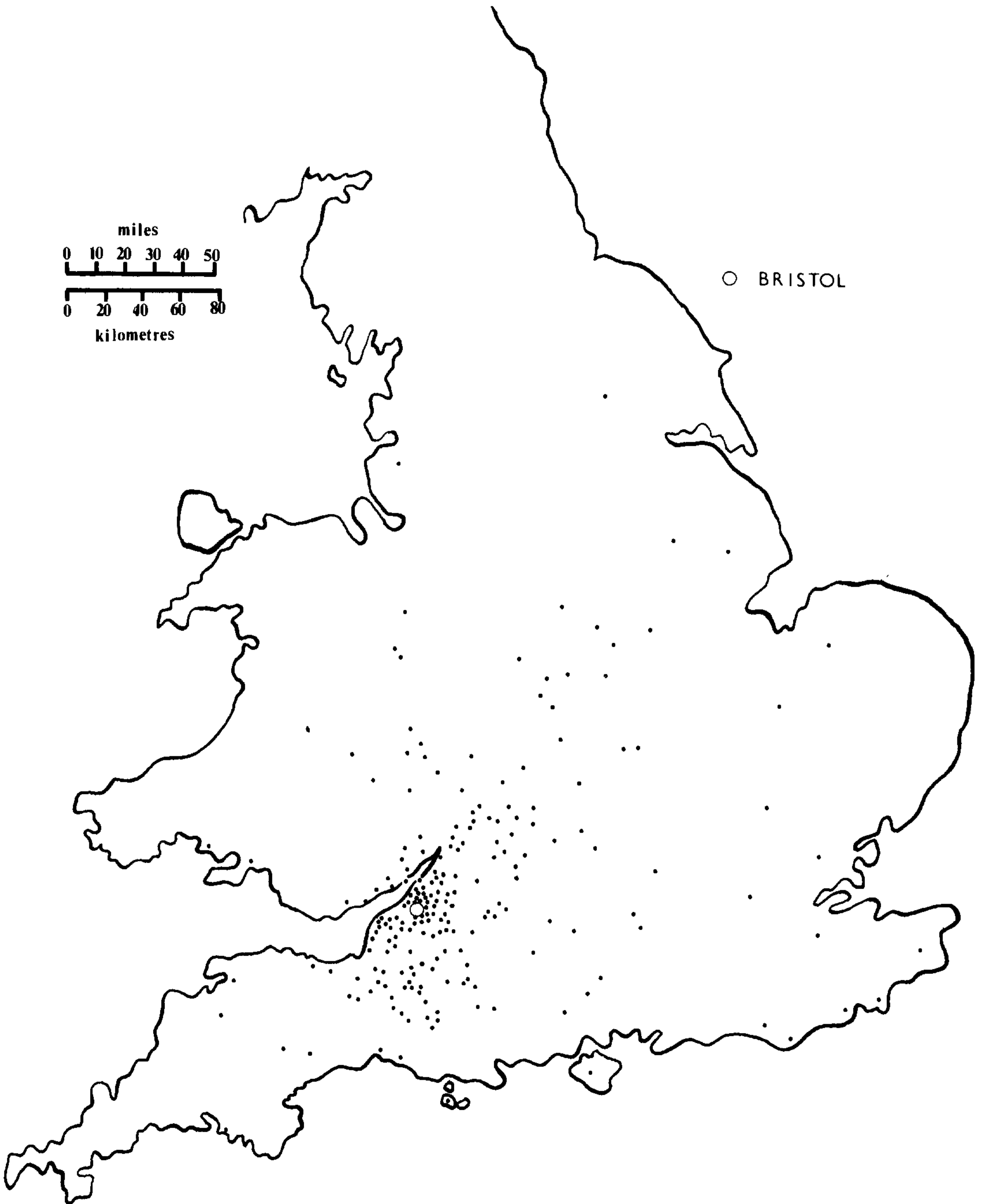


FIG. 1 Early-14th-century Bristol: immigration patterns (nearest-place analysis)

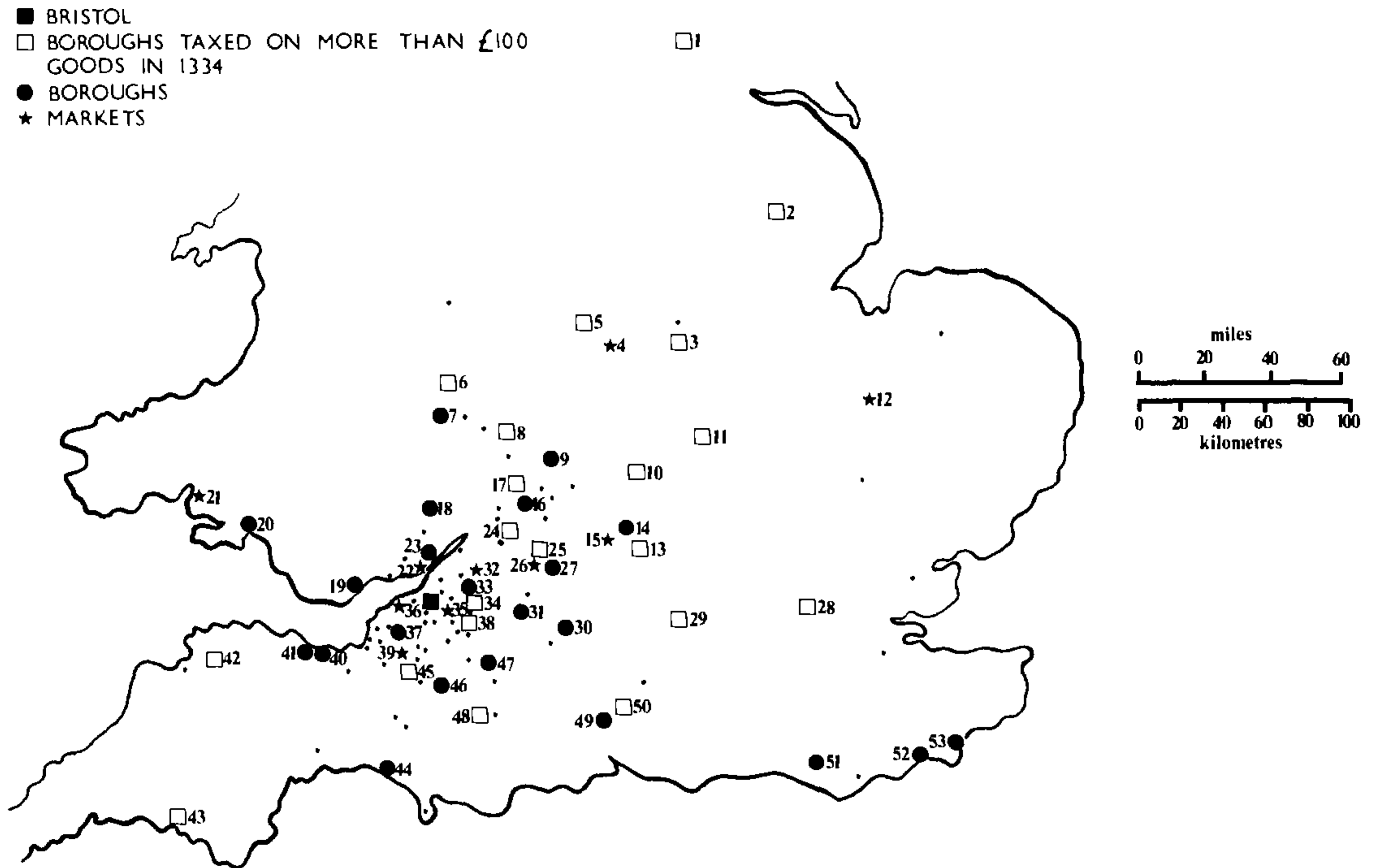
one is to avoid the pitfalls of hereditary surnaming – one is reliant on place-name surnames in indicating the geographical ‘pull’ of the town. Surname evidence was first used systematically as indicative of rural-urban migration by Eilert Ekwall in his study of the medieval London subsidy rolls, and more recently it has been used to suggest patterns of migration into various provincial towns of late-medieval England, notably Bury St. Edmunds and York.⁴

For Bristol, surname data has been gathered from three sources – the 1312 tallage, the 1327 subsidy return and three common council membership lists for 1344, 1349 and c. 1350.⁵ In analysing this material the method used has been similar to that adopted by Peter McClure in his recent analysis of migration patterns for late-medieval London, York, Norwich, Nottingham and Leicester.⁶ This has involved two complementary investigations. In the first analysis all the place-name surnames have been identified with the place of possible origin which lies nearest to Bristol and these names have been plotted in FIG. 1. Thus, ‘de Berkeleye’ has been identified with Berkeley in Gloucestershire and not Berkeley in Somerset, ‘de Stoke’ with Stoke Bishop in Gloucestershire and so on. Some of these identifications obviously instil more confidence than others. For example, ‘de Gloucester’ is far more likely to refer to Gloucester in Gloucestershire than to Gloucester in Northumberland, whereas ‘de Keynesham’, which has been identified as Keynesham in Somerset, could just as likely have derived from Keynesham in Gloucestershire. Clearly, although it is tempting to assume that the nearest of several identically named places is the correct one, this is far from being a safe assumption when one is considering migration into large towns. However, the adoption of such a method does at least provide a rough picture of minimum distances travelled.

In the second analysis, therefore, only those names, a total of 112, which refer to uniquely named places have been used. These are shown in FIG. 2, which distinguishes those which were boroughs or small market towns. This sample of 112 non-ambiguous place-names has also formed the basis for the mileage analyses shown in the table printed below, where the places have been grouped into 5-mile categories according to their distance from Bristol. Obviously, in the absence of any reliable information on lines of communication and travel during this period, the distances have been estimated merely as the crow flies, to and from the centre of the places concerned as represented on a map. However, by measuring the distances between these places and Bristol it is possible to build up a useful picture of the sort of area from which the town was attracting migrants in the early 14th century.

Throughout the analyses each surname has been counted once only, irrespective of the number of times it appears. All that is being aimed to show are the places from which Bristol was drawing migrants, not the actual number of immigrants from any one particular place. Foreign names, together with names derived from rivers, counties or particular districts have been omitted. However, as in the case of surnames such as ‘Dene’ or ‘Chew’, they can be used to substantiate the patterns arising from the detailed analyses. It is clear that in this type of analysis the term ‘migration’ is being used in a very broad sense. Many of the movements suggested by the names may have been temporary and not all will have necessitated moving home, since property may

4. E. Ekwall, ed., *Two Early London Subsidy Rolls* (1951); R.S. Gottfried, ‘Bury St Edmunds and the populations of late medieval English towns, 1270–1530’, *Jnl. of British Studies* XX (1980), 1–31; J.N. Bartlett, ‘Some Aspects of the Economy of York in the later Middle Ages, 1300–1500’ (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1958), 207–243.
5. E.A. Fuller, ‘The tallage of 6 Edward II and the Bristol rebellion’, *Trans. B.G.A.S.* XIX (1894–5), 171–278; *Gloucestershire Subsidy Roll, I Edward III, 1327* (Middle Hill Press, n.d.); F.B. Bickley, ed., *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, I (Bristol, 1900), 20–1, 25–6.
6. P. McClure, ‘Patterns of Migration in the late Middle Ages: the evidence of English place-name surnames’, *Econ. Hist. Review*, 2nd ser., XXXII (1979), 167–182.



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|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. York | 19. Cardiff | 37. Axbridge |
| 2. Lincoln | 20. Swansea | 38. Bath |
| 3. Leicester | 21. Kidwelly | 39. Wedmore |
| 4. Polesworth | 22. Beachley | 40. Watchet |
| 5. Lichfield | 23. Chepstow | 41. Dunster |
| 6. Ludlow | 24. Painswick | 42. Barnstaple |
| 7. Leominster | 25. Cirencester | 43. Plymouth |
| 8. Worcester | 26. Minety | 44. Bridport |
| 9. Evesham | 27. Cricklade | 45. Glastonbury |
| 10. Banbury | 28. London | 46. Bruton |
| 11. Northampton | 29. Reading | 47. Warminster |
| 12. Ely | 30. Tisbury | 48. Shaftesbury |
| 13. Oxford | 31. Calne | 49. Romsey |
| 14. Woodstock | 32. Hawkesbury | 50. Winchester |
| 15. Cogges | 33. Chipping Sodbury | 51. Lewes |
| 16. Cheltenham | 34. Marshfield | 52. Winchelsea |
| 17. Tewkesbury | 35. Bitton | 53. Romney |
| 18. Monmouth | 36. Wroughton | |

FIG. 2 Early-14th-century Bristol: immigration patterns (non-ambiguous names)

have been bought merely for income. This last point is of particular significance in this case, as the tallage roll tends to lay more emphasis on real property owners, some of whom might have been non-resident, than do tax returns.⁷ Furthermore, it must be remembered that the names with which we are dealing refer to only those people rich enough to appear in subsidy listings or, in the case of the common council membership lists, members of Bristol's civic élite. In other words, what we are probably observing is the 14th-century equivalent of betterment migration.⁸

Despite these reservations, and considering the scarcity of evidence for population mobility in the late-medieval period, a critical use of this material can prove invaluable in suggesting local patterns of mobility. From the evidence presented in FIG. 1 it is possible to discern certain broad patterns of migratory movement. The most obvious feature of this map is that many of the places from which Bristol was drawing immigrants lay very close to the town (no more than 15 miles away), giving the impression of a very localised impact similar to that observed for late-16th-century Canterbury.⁹ Too much significance should not be attributed to this, however, as the names concerned have after all been identified with those places nearest to Bristol. More important are the two general patterns of migration which tend to emerge. Firstly, a strong pattern of immigrant recruitment can be traced northwards from both banks of the Severn estuary and along the Severn Valley as far as Worcestershire and Shropshire, together with notable patterns of migration from along the course of the River Wye in Herefordshire and from the Cotswolds. Perhaps even more marked, however, is the number of places south of Bristol, embracing virtually the whole extent of the county of Somerset, that were providing the town with immigrants at this time. Even considering the fact that this is a nearest-place analysis, this latter pattern is indeed striking.

Turning in more detail to FIG. 2 and the analysis of uniquely-named places, it can be seen that the trends already noted were not solely a result of the particular method adopted in compiling FIG. 1. Thus, immigration into the town from places lying near the Severn estuary, such as Brean, Locking, Uphill and Banwell in Somerset and from Caerwent and Goldcliff in Monmouthshire is a marked feature, together, once again, with immigration from along the Severn Valley itself. Also noticeable is that fairly localised migratory movement from villages and towns in south Gloucestershire and north Somerset, such as Hawkesbury, Mangotsfield, Bitton, Bedminster and the Wells Chapter manor of Cheddar. However, although one third of the places from which the town was drawing immigrants were situated less than 20 miles away, it is clear from the map that many immigrants travelled much further and that this longer-range movement tended to involve migration from the boroughs and, to a lesser extent, the market towns. Just under 60 per cent of those places further than 30 miles from Bristol were boroughs or small towns. As new towns were created local exchanges flourished and increasingly it would appear that this expanding urban network drew traders and settlers from many of these towns to Bristol. Thus, many places which obtained their market charters during the 13th and 14th centuries, for example Polesworth in Warwickshire, Wedmore and Wrington in Somerset and Tockington, Bitton and Hawkesbury in Gloucestershire, were providing the town with immigrants during this period. Also of interest is the appearance of south coast towns such as Plymouth, Bridport, and Romney as reservoirs of Bristol migrants, as well as London and the leading provincial centres of York and Lincoln. This pattern is in stark contrast to a smaller town like Stratford-on-Avon, where 90 per cent of its immigrants were drawn from the surrounding

7. R.H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society* (Cambridge, 1983), 184.

8. For a discussion of 'betterment migration' see, P. Clark, 'The migrant in Kentish towns, 1580-1640', in P. Clark and P. Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (1972), 117-163.

9. *Ibid.*, 126.

villages and hamlets.¹⁰ Immigration from such towns helped to establish important long-range migratory traits which found an important parallel in the trade of Bristol during this period.

Indeed, Bristol is here exhibiting very much a large-town pattern of immigration. A comparison with McClure's results obtained from his analyses of two comparable towns, Norwich and York, reveals an even greater regional dominance in the case of Bristol (see table).

Early-14th-Century Bristol: Immigration Patterns
(non-ambiguous names)

<i>Distance in miles</i>	<i>percentage of 112 names</i>				
1-5	4.5	}	14.3	}	32.1
6-10	9.8				
11-15	9.8	}	17.8		
16-20	8.0				
21-5	7.1	}	16.9	}	25.8
26-30	9.8				
31-5	2.7	}	8.9		
36-40	6.2				
41-5	3.6	}	6.3	}	16.1
46-50	2.7				
51-5	6.2	}	9.8		
55-60	3.6				
61-5	4.5	}	6.3	}	9.0
66-70	1.8				
71-5	2.7	}	2.7		
76-80	0.0				
81-100	5.3	}	8.0	}	15.2
101-20	2.7				
121-40	4.5	}	7.2		
141-60	2.7				
161+	1.8				

Taking as the primary catchment area a combination of, firstly, the point at which the percentage of names declines significantly and, secondly, the mileage from which about 50 per cent of the names derive, McClure found that Norwich had a radius of between 15 and 20 miles and York one of 20 miles.¹¹ Applying the same criteria to the mileage lists for Bristol on the other hand gives a primary radius of between 20 and 25 miles. Moreover, whereas just over 30 per cent of the York names, and only just over 10 per cent of the Norwich names, refer to places over 40 miles away, it can be seen from the above table that over 42 per cent of the place-names derived from the Bristol evidence can be identified with places at a distance of 40 miles or more from the town, with no less than 17 per cent of the total referring to places more than 80 miles away. Indeed, so far as the migrant attraction of 40 miles or more is concerned, Bristol is nearer to the London

10. E.M. Carus-Wilson, 'The first half-century of the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon', *Econ. Hist. Review*, 2nd ser., XVIII (1965), 54.

11. McClure, 'Patterns of Migration', 177.

pattern observed by McClure than to that of York.¹² Thus, whereas Norwich, for example, seemed to suffer a 'sharp reduction of market and immigrational resources at distances beyond 20 miles',¹³ Bristol's localised 'pull' on immigrants was paralleled by equally extensive links with far more distant places, many of which were amongst the most important of the country's ports and boroughs.

Despite the crudity of the information on 14th-century mobility provided by an analysis of place-name surnames, it is clear that if used critically they can provide a useful basis for a comparison of rural-urban migration patterns. The evidence discussed above points convincingly to early-14th-century Bristol as a town of pulling power second only to London and superior to that of both York and Norwich. This striking ability to attract migrants from such a widespread area may have been a significant factor in the relative buoyancy of the town during the 14th and 15th centuries. Without actual figures for migratory movement this of course remains conjecture. However, place-name surnames do at least promote an awareness of the nature and extent of migration during this period. If, as in the case of Bristol, one can supplement this evidence with information contained in wills, deeds and other records, then they also provide a useful guideline for more thorough analyses of the relationship between a town and its hinterland. Why was it, for example, that people were apparently leaving the market towns and villages of north Somerset to settle in Bristol? This link between an urban centre and its region is a topic which has received little attention from historians and may have been a fundamental factor in determining the fortunes of individual towns during the late-medieval period.

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APPENDIX

Place-Name Surnames in Early-14th-Century Bristol

Sources: (a) = 1312–13 Tallage Roll
 (b) = 1327 Subsidy Roll
 (c) = 1344, 1349 and *c.* 1350 common council membership lists

1–5 miles: Bedminster, Som. (a); Bishopsworth, Som. (a); Dundry, Som. (a); Mangotsfield, Glos. (a); Publow, Som. (a,b).

6–10 miles: Bitton, Glos. (a); Cameley, Som. (b); Chipping Sodbury, Glos. (a); Combe Hay, Som. (b); Henfield, Glos. (a); Lansdown, Som. (a); Portbury, Som. (a); Siston, Glos. (a); Tickenham, Som. (a); Timsbury, Som. (a,b); Tockington, Glos. (a,b).

11–15 miles: Banwell, Som. (a); Bath, Som. (a,c); Beachley, Glos. (a,c); Caerwent, Mon. (a); Cheddar, Som. (a,c); Chepstow, Mon. (a); Cromhall, Glos. (a); Hawkesbury, Glos. (a,b); Marshfield, Glos. (a,b); Priddy, Som. (a,b); Wrington, Som. (a,b,c).

16–20 miles: Axbridge, Som. (a,b); Cheltenham, Glos. (a,c); Goldcliff, Mon. (a); Locking, Som. (a); Selwood, Som. (a); Southway, Som. (a); Uphill, Som. (a,b); Wedmore, Som. (a); Wanswell, Glos. (a).

21–25 miles: Brean, Som. (a); Bruton, Som. (a); Baltonsborough, Som. (c); Calne, Wilts. (a); Chapmanslade, Wilts. (a); Glastonbury, Som. (a); Trelleck, Mon. (a,b); Warminster, Wilts. (a).

26–30 miles: Babcary, Som. (a,c); Bidcombe, Wilts. (a); Boyfield, Glos. (b); Bradenstoke, Wilts. (a); Cardiff,

12. *Ibid.*, 178. McClure's evidence for London reveals 53.4 per cent of the names to be derived from places further than 40 miles from the city and 26.2 per cent from places further than 80 miles away.

13. *Ibid.*, 179.

- Glam. (a,b,c); Fiswere, Glos. (b); Crandon, Som. (a); Minety, Glos. (a,b); Monmouth (a); Painswick, Glos. (c); Upper Framilode, Glos. (a).
- 31-35 miles: Cirencester, Glos. (a); Cricklade, Wilts. (a); Spaxton, Som. (b).
- 36-40 miles: Chinnock, Som. (a); Chiselborough, Som. (b); Haxton, Wilts. (c); Ludwell, Wilts. (a); Shaftesbury, Dorset (a,b); Watchet, Som. (a); Withington, Glos. (a).
- 41-45 miles: Chisbury, Wilts. (b); Dunster, Som. (a,b); Hailes, Glos. (a); Tewkesbury, Glos. (a).
- 46-50 miles: Longborough, Glos. (b); Malvern, Worcs. (a); Pinnock, Glos. (a).
- 51-55 miles: Bridport, Dorset (a); Cogges, Oxon. (a); Collington, Herts. (c); Evesham, Worcs. (a); Leominster, Herefs. (a); Whitbourne, Herefs. (a); Worcester (b).
- 56-60 miles: Pinhoe, Devon (a); Romsey, Hants. (b); Swansea, Glam. (a); Woodstock, Oxon. (a).
- 61-65 miles: Ludlow, Salop (a); Oxford (b); Popham, Hants. (a); Portland, Dorset (a); Winchester, Hants. (a,b).
- 66-70 miles: Banbury, Oxon (a); Barnstaple, Devon (a).
- 71-75 miles: Kidwelly, Glam. (a); Reading, Berks. (a); Torrington, Devon (a,c).
- 76-80 miles: nil
- 81-100 miles: Leicester (a); Lichfield, Staffs. (a); Northampton (a); Onslow, Salop (b); Plymouth, Devon (a); Polesworth, Warwicks. (a);
- 101-20 miles: London (a,b); Pelham, Herts. (a); Seagrave, Leics. (a).
- 121-40 miles: Ely, Cambs. (a,b); Hanningfield, Essex (b); Kemsing, Kent (a); Lewes, Sussex (a); Willingdon, Sussex (b).
- 141-60 miles: Lincoln (a); Romney, Kent (a,b); Winchelsea, Sussex (a).
- 161+ miles: Castle Acre, Norf. (c); York (a).
- (Total 112 place-names)