

## **POPULATION AND ENCLOSURE IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE EXAMPLE OF EXMOOR**

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The nineteenth century Census enumerators' schedules, now available for 1841, 1851, 1861, and 1871,<sup>1</sup> make it possible to examine at micro-level the composition and to some extent the mobility of population over three decades during which considerable demographic change was taking place. Exmoor is a rewarding area for a study of this kind, enclosed as it was almost entirely from the waste in 1819. Roughly 1000 hectares were newly enclosed at this date; the only 'old enclosures' in existence being approximately 43 hectares around Simonsbath House in the centre of the parish.<sup>2</sup> The enclosure and reclamation of Exmoor are very well documented and little can be added to Orwin's work on the subject,<sup>3</sup> but scant attention has been paid to the population of the area during what must have been a period of revolutionary change on the Moor.

In 1819 Exmoor ceased to exist as a Royal Forest. Until that date it had been administered for the Crown by a warden, the last one being Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, who, when his lease as warden expired in 1814, suggested that the Crown might find it advantageous to dispose of the freehold of the Forest, hoping, in fact, to become its purchaser.<sup>4</sup> His hopes foundered, however, when he was outbid by John Knight, an ironmaster from Wolverley in Worcestershire, intent upon the aggrandisement of his estates and exhibiting the speculative flair so common in land transactions at the time. Knight was already a pioneer farmer with a real and lifelong interest in the revival of agricultural practice consequent upon the high prices being paid for farm produce in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His express aim was to reclaim Exmoor and use it for rotation farming under a demesne system.

His first schemes involved the building of roadways and a boundary wall, 46 kilometres long. This wall was completed in 1824, and he was able to turn his attention to breaking the ground at Cornham and Honeymead, both on south facing slopes in the Barle valley, and sheltered from the very worst of the weather. Here he carried out spading, burning, liming and 'halving'.<sup>5</sup> He attempted a four-course rotation which, according to family correspondence in the 1840s,<sup>6</sup> produced 'fine' crops of wheat, barley, oats and turnips, and began to stock the land with highly-bred Hereford and Highland cattle which he travelled considerable distances to obtain. His efforts and substantial success as a pioneer farmer do not concern us in detail here, however.

In one respect, Knight's enterprise fell short of the mark. He seemed to have little idea of how to set about colonising the Forest, and this proved, perhaps, his most serious shortcoming. He always favoured unmarried men as labourers, and the area, being extra-parochial, was, by the time he took over, already noted for its lawlessness, isolation and complete lack of social amenities.<sup>7</sup>

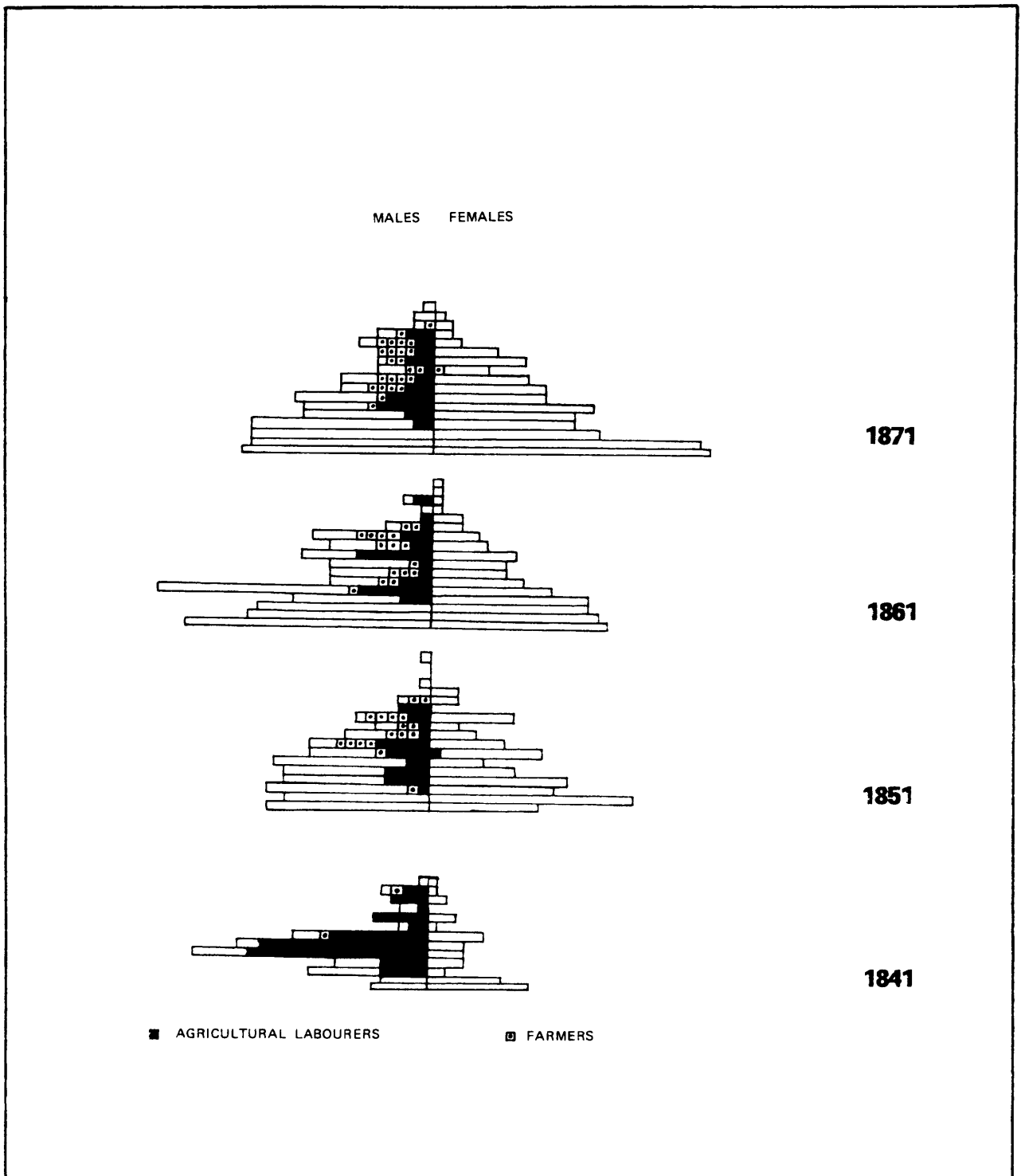
However, 1841, the year of the first available Census schedules, marked a turning point in the management of the Knight Exmoor estates, because John handed over to his son Frederic, a firm believer in the advantages of tenant farming and the importance of attracting families and not single men to the Moor. To family men he offered accommodation, high wages, and, in time, social amenities. Advertisements were placed in the press, both locally and further afield, offering 6d per day for boys, 2/- for men and 2/6d for craftsmen. He succeeded in attracting a number of tenants to the Moor, but they were more often than not short stayers, and there were considerable gaps during which the farms lay untenanted.

The 1841 Census<sup>8</sup> lists 163 persons, a dramatic increase of the order of 313% on the 1831 figure. In 1841 there were 116 males and only 47 females, but the imbalance in sex structure was even greater than this in actuality, since 100 labourers, presumably male, were absent on the evening of the Census, 'having left the parish on Saturday evening according to their custom, to sleep in the adjoining parishes and return on Monday morning.'

A closer look at the schedules for 1841 reveals that the policy of letting farms adopted by Frederic Knight was not yet affecting the population structure of the Moor; indeed, John Knight's demesne farming experiment is reflected in the large number of single men living in communities. Of a total of 80 labourers and male servants, only 10 have wives and families with them on the Moor: these in cottages at Simonsbath, Cornham, Honeymead, Limecombe and Ferny Ball. The remaining 70 lived either in all-male households – there were 10 of these, ranging in size from 9 at Bale Water to 3 at Simonsbath – or with nuclear families as at Warren cottage, later re-named Warren Farm, where a 20 year old unmarried labourer lived with another labourer and his family. Only 22 of the labourers were Somerset men, and this situation reflects closely that revealed in the total population, where of a total of 163, only 50 were born in Somerset. Twenty two labourers were Irish, living chiefly in all-male establishments at Clovenrocks, Hoar oak and Limecombe. The Knights had family connections in Ireland, and labourers for Exmoor may well have been recruited in County Kerry at this time. The position as regards habitation in 1841 is summarized in Table 1., while the population pyramid for 1841 in Fig. 1 reveals very clearly the unusual age and sex structure of Exmoor's population at the time.

Almost all the 1841 population falls into what Vince<sup>9</sup> calls the 'primary rural' category. In fact, there are only two publicans and two masons among males of working age who do not. Only six females are listed as servants. There are no amenities save two public houses in 1841, and there is no adventitious population. Exmoor has all the appearance of a 'pioneer frontier' in terms of its population composition and this is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in its sex ratio of only 42 females per 100 males.

Table 1a attempts to give the constitution of nuclear families in 1841. It would appear that in general families with large numbers of children did not take lodgers. There is however one instance, at Limecombe, where a family with three children boarded eleven (male) lodgers. All-male households are analysed in Table 1b. There is little evidence to suggest that people in all-male households were related – if surname is used as the criterion there exist four Huxtables, two Courts and two Goughs. Otherwise all surnames are different. The Huxtable family is interesting, though, in its long association with the Moor.



**Fig.1. - Population pyramids for Exmoor**

By 1842, however, Frederic Knight's policy of attracting tenants was well under way, and he aimed at farmers from afar rather than from local Devon and Somerset parishes. His reasons were sound: the locals saw Exmoor as summer grazing and not as potential farmland; furthermore the local farms were traditionally small, family-run affairs.<sup>10</sup> The appointment of a Lincolnshire man as agent was no accident, and Knight hoped that he might attract through him farmers from areas where large-scale, improved farming was already flourishing.

Judging by the returns for 1851,<sup>11</sup> the agent, Robert Smith, must have been successful especially in the east midlands. All farms over 120 hectares were, by 1851, being farmed by men from Dorset, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire or Lincolnshire, with the one exception of Cornham, where a Somerset man was tenant.<sup>12</sup> Of the smaller farms, 6 were farmed by Somerset men, one of whom, at Tom's Hill, confessed to the enumerator to being 'out of business', and the remaining 6 by Devonians. Undoubtedly some run-down farmers were attracted by Knight's low rents, but were unable to survive, as frequent changes of tenancy testify. Larkbarrow, for example, built in 1846 and let in the same year, quickly changed hands, once in 1849 and again twice in 1852.

**Table 1 – Habitation on Exmoor in 1841**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Simonsbath village	5	2	2	3	11
Gallon House	1	1	0	0	1
Slate Rock	1	1	0	0	1
Warren Cottage	1	1	1	0	2
Cornham	3	2	0	1	8
Honeymead	3	1	0	2	11
Bale Water	2	0	0	2	12
Limecombe	3	3	11	0	14
Hoarook	1	0	0	1	4
Clovenrocks	1	0	0	1	7
Moles Chamber	1	1	3	0	3
Ferny Ball	2	2	1	0	1
Holes Allotment	1	1	3	0	3
Burcombe	1	1	1	0	1
Green Barrow	1	1	0	0	1

Column 1 – Name of settlement

Column 2 – Number of buildings

Column 3 – Number of nuclear families (See also Table 1a)

Column 4 – Number of labourers lodging with families

Column 5 – Number of all-male communities (See also Table 1a)

Column 6 – Number of labourers in total

**Table 1a – Nuclear Families \* on Exmoor, 1841**

Settlement	Parent(s) present	Child(ren) present	Lodgers	Lodgers (Male)	(Female)
Simonsbath Village	1	1	5	2	3
	2	2	0	0	0
Slate Rock	2	1	1	0	1
Warren Cottage	2	5	1	1	0
Cornham	2	4	0	0	0
	2	3	0	0	0
Honeymead	2	1	1	1	0
Limecombe	2	5	0	0	0
	2	2	1	0	1
	2	3	11	11	0
Moies Chamber	2	0	5	4	1
Ferry Ball	2	2	1	1	0
	1	1	0	0	0
Holes Allotment	2	2	5	4	1
Burcombe	2	1	4	3	1
Green Barrow	2	0	4	2	2

\* Nuclear families are here defined as households in which parent(s) and child(ren) live either alone, or with lodgers, distinguishing them from all-male households.

**Table 1b – All-male households on Exmoor, 1841**

Settlement	Total male popn.	With same surname	Age under 20	20–30	30+	Born Somerset
Simonsbath	3	0	1	2	0	0
	5	0	1	4	0	2
	3	0	0	2	1	0
Cornham	8	2 (Gough)	3	2	3	3
Honeymead	4	0	0	4	0	3
	7	2 (Court)	3	4	0	6
Bale Water	4	0	0	3	1	1
	9	4 (Huxtable)	1	5	3	3
Hoar oak	4	0	0	3	4	0
Clovenrocks	7	0	0	6	1	0

The 1851 Census shows that the number of houses inhabited had doubled in the intercensal period since 1841 and the total population had risen from 163 to 275. Males did not out-number females to the same extent though, the 'pioneer fringe' character of the area having been modified to one of family settlement. This is clearly borne out by the 1851 population pyramid (Fig. 1). Occupational structure also points up a contrast: in 1851 agricultural labourers make up only 15% of the population as against 49% in 1841, and occupations overall among working males are not so utterly dominated by the 'primary rural' category. Sixteen persons fall into the 'secondary rural' group, though there is still no adventitious population. Thirteen labourers had established their families on the Moor, and a school, founded in 1845, had 28 pupils in 1851. The all-male household had almost disappeared, with only 4 remaining, and 3 of these containing only 1 or 2 men. Only 3 of the 42 men listed as labourers had been on the Moor ten years earlier. Two of them already had families with them then, while the third, Anthony Huxtable, is seen to have married and had 4 children since 1841, the two youngest being Exmoor born. Turnover in the labouring force appears therefore considerable, most of the newcomers being drawn from nearby Devon and Somerset parishes. In 1851 not one Irish-born man remains, according to the Census. The obvious, however, should perhaps be pointed out, that place of birth is not necessarily that of habitation immediately prior to settlement on Exmoor, and this is one of the limitations of using the Census schedules in this way.

Between the Census years of 1851 and 1861 Exmoor became a parish, and the 1861 population was 323,<sup>13</sup> with the number of inhabited buildings rising from 54 to 62. It is striking that only two farms are being tenanted by non-local farmers, and that of the remaining holdings only 3 are farmed by Somerset men, the vast majority being tenanted by north Devonians from parishes adjoining the Moor. This Devon bias is perhaps attributable to the fact that the cold clays of north Devon, on the windward side of the Moor presented much more similar farming conditions than did the parishes on the mellower, Somerset side. It was from the farming stock of Devon that most of Exmoor's farmers finally came.

Labourers and farm servants in 1861 make up 15% of the total population, numbering 49. Twenty two males fall into the 'secondary rural' category, and there is no dramatic contrast with 1851; instead the 1861 figures show a small increase in both primary and secondary occupations, with the establishment of more amenities and the steady growth of Simonsbath village where, by 1861, most of the secondary group is to be found. Among female workers there are 8 servants, 5 housekeepers, a cook, a teacher and a dressmaker, occupations here too beginning to diversify.

Among 49 labourers, 24 now have established their wives and families, a substantially higher proportion than in 1851. It is of interest to note that Anthony Huxtable, a labourer in 1851, has now moved into the category of farmer and his children number two more, both born on the Moor. Apart from Huxtable, however, evidence can be found for only 2 other labourers remaining from 1851 to 1861, and none save him had remained over the 20 year period.

Among the men working on the land, turnover is again considerable and the vast majority are local born. Only 2 non-locals appear, in fact, both from Dorset, and the last vestiges of Exmoor as a pioneer community have disappeared. The growth of the village of Simonsbath, now with its parish church and school, as a focal point for the Moorland surrounding it, is again noticeable as far as the distribution of people engaged in secondary occupations is concerned.

By the late 1860s, earlier attempts to cultivate stretches of the Moor under a four-course rotation were to some extent modified by the introduction of rape-seed in place of turnips. This innovation turned out to be an important one, for rape takes only 6 weeks to mature and provides excellent winter feed for sheep. The rape-seed/sheep combination proved to be a good one and in fact remained established on Exmoor for many decades. Production of lamb and mutton increased with wool prices gradually giving ground as meat prices went up. The animals were either butchered in Simonsbath or sent to the railhead at South Molton on the hoof. Land was systematically improved, with dressings of lime and natural ashes being used on soil which had already undergone paring, burning and ploughing in order to break up the intractable clay-iron hard-pan. By the late 1870s, over 10,000 ewes and lambs were counted on Exmoor, most of them Scottish blackface and Cheviots, which could be over-wintered on the Moor more successfully than the local Exmoor Horn.

The 1871 Census<sup>14</sup> enumerates a total population of 339, only a slight overall increase on 1861. On this occasion the labouring force makes up 17% of the total population, numbering 58. Only 18 males fall into the 'secondary' group, but among females the number has risen considerably to 38, including 24 servants, 8 housekeepers, 3 nurses, a teacher, a governess and a cook. The fertility ratio is 102, whereas in 1861 it had been only 79. All farm workers except 4 Dorset men and one Scottish shepherd were local born, with, for the first time, a group of Exmoor born men, numbering 8 in all. In both 1851 and 1861 only one labourer had been born on the Moor. Ten of the 1871 labourers had been on Exmoor already in 1861, giving the lowest turnover to date, but still nevertheless a considerable one.

Of the 26 farmers listed in 1871, 19 were Devonians, and it is of interest to find two Ridds from the parish of Charles and three Frys from Kentisbury, both cold upland parishes on the windward side of the Moor. Six farmers come from Somerset, including, for the first time, an Exmoor born man and two Comers from the parish of Withypool. Huxtable is not, this time, listed as a farmer, but he is still on Exmoor as a labourer. Perhaps his 8 hectare holding proved too small to be profitable and to support a growing family. An attempt to summarize the position with regard to turnover among farmers, a far less mobile group than labourers, is made in Tables 2 and 2a.

As far as the parish of Exmoor is concerned, the Census enumerators' schedules covering the mid-nineteenth century clearly reflect the enclosure of 1819 and the changing policies of subsequent managers of the Knight estates. The vast area enclosed and the size of many of the holdings thus formed – Honeymead, for example, covered 840 hectares, and there were several more over 400 hectares – make Exmoor an exception to most other areas of waste enclosure in south-west England, and the establishment of so many new farms in the 1840s and subsequently makes it an ideal area in which to examine population composition and change *ab initio* in the light of the extremely detailed available data. The general thesis on the growth and structure of population as a result of the colonization of a new frontier is borne out by the example of Exmoor. As settlement becomes more permanently established the effects of enclosure on population composition are noticeably diminished. Local labour and local farm tenantry become more common and the ratio of females to males and the numbers engaged in secondary occupations rise.

Though there are limitations to be considered by anyone using the enumerators' schedules as a major source, their usefulness remains unquestioned; indeed, they offer such a variety and sophistication of information that they demand sophisticated techniques of analysis if they are to be used over a wide area.

**Table 2 – Turnover of Exmoor farmers in the mid-nineteenth century**

1851	1861	1871
Hannam		
Chapple		
Hedditch		
Harold		
Meadows		
Biggin		
Searson		
Coombes		
Balmond		
Sebley		
Collins		
Buckingham		
Williams		
Smith (Robt.)	Smith (Robt.)	
Poole	Poole	Poole
Skinner	Skinner	Skinner
Blake	Blake	Blake
Gillard	Gillard	Gillard
	Norman	
	Vellacott	
	Baker	
	Gould	
	Creek	
	Dixon	
	Mills	
	Comer	Comer
	Carter	Carter
	Carter	Carter
	Shapland	Shapland
	Richards	Richards
	Huxtable	Huxtable (lab.)
	Holcombe	Holcombe
	Fry	Fry
	Steer	Steer
	Elworthy	Elworthy
	Rudd	Rudd
		Fry
		Comer



**Table 2 Continued – Turnover of Exmoor farmers in the mid-nineteenth century**

1851	1861	1871
		Scott
		Reed
		Fry
		Smyth
		Fry
		Tucker
		Buckingham
		Baker
		Rudd
	Thorne (lab.)	Thorne

**Table 2a – Succession to farms on Exmoor, 1851 to 1871**

Name of farmer in 1851	Name of farmer in 1861	Name of farmer in 1871
George Gillard	(George Gillard) Son	(George Gillard) Son
John Blake	John Blake	John Blake
Wm. Poole	Wm. Poole	Wm. Poole
Jas. Skinner	Jas. Skinner	(Grace Skinner) Widow
	Fred Comer *	(Francis Comer) Father
	John Carter	John Carter
	Wm. Carter	Wm. Carter
	Sam Shapland	Sam Shapland
	George Richards	George Richards
	Ant. Huxtable	Ant. Huxtable (lab.)
	Robt. Holcombe	Robt. Holcombe
	Wm. Fry	Wm. Fry
	Joseph Steer	Joseph Steer
	Thos. Elworthy	Thos. Elworthy
	Wm. Rudd *	(George Rudd) Brother

\* In both these cases, although the farms had changed hands, the 1861 farmers are still on Exmoor, in charge of other holdings.

## Notes

- 1 In the Public Record Office (Census Room, Portugal Street, London W.C.2).
- 2 The old enclosures surrounded Simonsbath House, built in about 1654 by James Boevy and occupied until 1819 by the Deputy Forester.
- 3 C. S. Orwin and R. J. Sellick, 'The Reclamation of Exmoor Forest', David and Charles, Newton Abbott, 1970. (This book brings up to date an earlier work of the same title by C. S. Orwin, published in 1928, in the light of freshly available source material).
- 4 A.H.D. Acland, (Ed.) 'Memoir and letters of Sir Thomas Dyke Acland', London, 1902.
- 5 'Halving'; the first ploughing, in which bullock teams ploughed every alternate furrow-width, the furrow-slice being turned over onto the unploughed strip beside it.
- 6 Knight Manuscript, Kidderminster Public Library.
- 7 Exmoor became a parish in 1856. The first application for parochialization was made in 1845 by tenants of Knight's farms. Knight himself opposed it, however, as he hoped that the absence of rates would attract more settlers. He felt able to support a new application in 1852. The Knight connection continued until 1963 when the British Museum Act abolished family trustees, the last of whom was Richard Ayshford Knight.
- 8 P.R.O. HO/107/965 was Richard Ayshford Knight.
- 9 S.W.E. Vince, 'The rural population of England and Wales, 1801 – 1951', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London. Vince defined 'primary rural' as that part of the rural population depending directly on the land, including foresters but excluding miners; 'secondary rural' as that part of the population serving the needs of the primary, and 'adventitious' as those not dependent on the land or serving those who are so dependent.
- 10 G. Fussell, 'Four centuries of farming systems in Devon', Transactions of the Devonshire Association, no. 33.
- 11 P.R.O. HO/107/1890
- 12 C. S. Orwin and R. J. Sellick, (op. cit.) contains an interesting account of Hannam's first-hand description of life on the Moor.
- 13 P.R.O. RG9/1606/1607
- 14 P.R.O. RG9/2180