DEPOPULATION AND CHANGING HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE IN THE MINING COMMUNITIES OF WEST CORNWALL, 1851-71

Mark Brayshay

Dr. Brayshay is lecturer in Geography at Plymouth Polytechnic. His thesis was a study of the social and demographic effects of the collapse of the Cornish mining industry. He is currently working on nineteenth-century emigration from Britain.

In recent years much attention has been paid to the study of past household size and structure in this country. Few attempts have been made, however, to explore the relationship between the characteristics of the average nineteenth-century household and short-term changes in economic and social conditions at the local level. While most historical demographers would accept that, in general, household characteristics alter only very slowly, there will undoubtedly have been instances when major economic and social upheaval produced locally more rapid, measurable responses in the size and structure of the average domestic group.

By the second half of the nineteenth century the process of rural depopulation was well established in England and Wales and the gradual creaming-off of the younger and more enterprising elements in the population inevitably led, in the longer term, to important social and demographic changes in the countryside. In some parts of the country particular economic circumstances occasionally prompted a more cataclysmic exodus. Areas which depended heavily upon one form of employment such as the tin and copper districts of West Cornwall, the lead mining area of Devon and the slate quarry region in North Wales, were especially vulnerable to the vagaries of the market. Often, when a slump came, there was little alternative but to move away. Some workers might try to obtain similar work elsewhere in the country; rather more drifted towards the growing towns and cities. Many left the country altogether and joined the growing tide of emigration to the Colonies and the United States.

Collectively the casualties of local economic slumps represent a significant component in the demographic and social history of the country; yet surprisingly little is known about them. How did ordinary families react to a crisis? Did the average household shrink in size, as for example, husbands and sons boarded the emigrant ship? Was there a measurable reduction in the propensity to marry and establish new households? Were there any changes in the internal structure of households such as the incidence of co-residing relatives or servants? These questions, which concern the responses of ordinary households to localised, short-term problems in the nineteenth century are not easy
to answer; we cannot interview the men and women of history. Neverthe-
less, because it is often argued that the household is a sensitive bar-
ometer of social and economic change, some insight into the changes
taking place in domestic arrangements is crucial if the process of
depopulation is to be fully understood.  

The object of this paper is to present the findings of a study of changing
household structure in the three important Cornish mining parishes of
Camborne, Redruth and St Just (Fig. 1). In the middle of the nineteenth
century these parishes were at the heart of one of the most intensively
mined areas in the world. More than 45 per cent of the mining population
of Cornwall could be found there. Locally, the economy was completely
dominated by the mines which employed well over 9,000 workers. But
the industry was based upon a notoriously fragile financial system and,
although some mines could be spectacularly profitable, even a small
shortfall in demand or drop in price could have a rapid and serious
effect.

A peak of prosperity in copper mining was reached in the late 1850's
but the boom period was short and a little over a century ago a searing
recession hit the mining industry in the district. Although the closure
of mines and widespread unemployment were not new experiences, a
recession had never before lasted so long. Indeed, from this crisis, which
began with the dramatic collapse of the copper mining industry in 1866,
there was to be no recovery. This change in fortunes took place in a
remarkably short period: a few critical months during the summer of
1865 saw a relatively prosperous situation deteriorate to become one of
deep recession. Although there was no absolute decline in total popula-
tion until after 1871, newspaper reports were suggesting as early as 1866
that emigration had increased to a massive and unprecedented scale,
emptying the area of young adults. To make matters worse, the price of
some essential foodstuffs was rising and the stark choice thus facing
many ordinary mining families was either to emigrate or remain and
starve.

When the slump came the effects of unemployment were inevitably felt
more severely in communities which were most dependent upon the
mines. Thus Camborne, Redruth and St Just are an obvious choice for a
study of the social consequences of the decline of the mining industry
in West Cornwall.  

Table 1. Population totals, 1841-1881

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1841</th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camborne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10061</td>
<td>12887</td>
<td>14056</td>
<td>14929</td>
<td>13601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>4827</td>
<td>6169</td>
<td>6568</td>
<td>6735</td>
<td>6004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>5234</td>
<td>6718</td>
<td>7488</td>
<td>8194</td>
<td>7597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redruth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9305</td>
<td>10571</td>
<td>11504</td>
<td>10683</td>
<td>9335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>4343</td>
<td>4965</td>
<td>5228</td>
<td>4646</td>
<td>3998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>4962</td>
<td>5606</td>
<td>6276</td>
<td>6037</td>
<td>5337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Just</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7147</td>
<td>8759</td>
<td>9290</td>
<td>9011</td>
<td>6409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3820</td>
<td>4466</td>
<td>4587</td>
<td>4426</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3327</td>
<td>4293</td>
<td>4703</td>
<td>4585</td>
<td>3409</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Depopulation and the Household

In Redruth and St Just the population had already registered a combined decline of more than 1,000 between 1861 and 1871 (Table 1). The reduction was largest in Redruth which had always been much more heavily dependent upon copper mining. In St Just there were tin as well as copper mines and some of the former remained in operation. The possibility of exploiting reserves of tin which lay deep beneath the exhausted copper lodes, staved off an absolute reduction in the population of Camborne until the 1870s. Indeed the population had actually increased by 1871, albeit at a markedly reduced rate. By 1881, however, neither deep-tin nor indeed the small manufacturing industries of the parish could prevent a reduction in the population of Camborne of 1,868 people or 12.5 per cent.

Far more important than any fall in absolute population size was the sharp change in the rate of increase which is clearly shown for the case of St. Just in Figure 2. The difference between the actual census totals of population and those which might have been expected, if the vigorous growth during the period 1801-1861 had been maintained, indicate the considerable loss of potential as the recession deepened. A similar pattern occurred in the other two parishes. Figure 2 also shows a comparison between the intercensal growth rates of St Just in the nineteenth century and those occurring in England and Wales as a whole. Before 1851 local growth rates consistently exceeded those of the country as a whole, but thereafter the position was very obviously reversed.

The recession had its most direct and damaging effect on miners and their families, and the census gives a clear indication of this. In 1851 there were 9,459 people employed at the mines in Camborne, Redruth and St. Just. Despite a 10 per cent increase in total population and a related increase in the number of households, by 1871, the census reveals that the mine workforce had actually been reduced by some 12 per cent or roughly 1,100 jobs. Moreover, this latter figure may underestimate the decline of mining since the census does not accurately record instances of unemployment. There were certainly cases when the enumerators' books specified that an individual was out of work. Thus, for example, the 1871 census of Redruth reveals that Nicholas Rogers of Trefula Moor was a 'Mine Agent (Unemployed)'; and that Thomas Verran of Vogue was a 'Miner — Copper — Unemployed'. Such cases represent an exception in the records rather than the rule. In fact, it is highly likely that a large number of people who stated an occupation in 1871, may not have had a job. Moreover, there is a possibility that former miners may have stated that they were labourers (the size of this category of workers in the study area had increased by almost 70 per cent between 1861-1871) whereas in reality they were attempting to earn their living by taking on any temporary manual work whenever it was available.

It is against this background of severe economic disruption that this paper will attempt to explore changes in the average household in Camborne, Redruth and St Just. Most of the information is derived from a 10 per cent sample of households drawn from the manuscript census
Figure 2
enumerators' books of 1851, 1861 and 1871. Every tenth household was included in the sample; its details were coded and the data were analysed by computer.

The census can, of course, only partially answer our questions about Cornish households during the crisis. Although the enumerators' books contain sophisticated information about every member of the population, they are nevertheless a simple decennial 'snap-shot' and not a continuous record. Moreover, the hundred-year secrecy rule prevents us from inspecting the manuscripts of later censuses which would chart population changes in the last decades of the century when tin mining underwent its slower, but no less important, decline. However, in spite of these limitations, an analysis of the census returns which are available to us can shed important new light on the processes of change which were taking place in areas of decline during these critical early years. The enumerators' books enable us to gauge the initial impact of an economic recession on ordinary men and women, and on the social units to which they belonged. Indeed, historians increasingly recognise that only through a microscale of this kind is it possible to glimpse the inner mechanics of important social changes which occurred in the past.

**Household size and structure in 1851**

In 1851, when the mining economy of West Cornwall was still relatively prosperous, the average household encountered in Camborne, Redruth and St. Just was not very different from those described by other writers in different parts of nineteenth-century England. However, inasmuch as the Cornish mining communities were industrial, but in a predominantly rural setting, it is significant that the household size characteristics revealed by this study so closely paralleled those of rural Lancashire and the industrial town of Preston described by Anderson.

Ranging between 5.2 and 5.5 persons in 1851, average household size in Camborne, Redruth and St Just was fairly large, particularly in comparison to pre-industrial households. (Table 2). The incidence of 'extended families' (those containing co-resident kin and servants or lodgers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10+</th>
<th>Mean Household Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camborne</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redruth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Just</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>— Data published for other areas —</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York¹</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston²</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Lancashire³</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham⁴</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No Information —</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 from Armstrong, W. A. (1967)
2 from Anderson, M. (1971)
3 from Anderson, M. (1971)
4 from Smith, R. J. (1968)
Table 3. Household composition in 1851: comparative data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Relatives</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Lodgers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Servants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camborne</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redruth</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Just</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Cornish Data</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Lancashire</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 from Armstrong, W. A. (1967)
2 from Anderson, M. (1971)
3 from Anderson, M. (1971)
4 from Smith, R. J. (1988)
5 from Drake, M. & Pearce, C. G. — quoted by W. A. Armstrong (1972)

was, moreover, slightly lower than in other areas. (Table 3). Indeed by far the largest proportion of households in West Cornwall contained no servants or kin and consisted of only a ‘primary family group’ (man, wife and children) and the large mean size of households, therefore directly reflected the high level of fertility in this population.

The birth-rate in Camborne and Redruth exceeded 37 per thousand in 1851, while in St. Just it was more than 42 per thousand. With death-rates of around 24-23 per thousand, there was clearly a considerable margin of natural increase. High levels of population growth were, of course, both a cause and an effect of the markedly youthful age structure of the population in 1851.

The fact that the co-residence of kin and the incidence of lodgers was slightly less common in West Cornwall than appears to have been the case in other areas may be attributed to a number of local characteristics. First, the average cottage in the mining districts was a very modest affair. Most measured only twelve feet by ten and often comprised only one or two rooms. Unless there was some exceptional crisis, accommodation may simply have been too cramped for many families to be willing to share their homes with co-residents. Certainly most of the households which did contain lodgers were concentrated in the towns of Redruth and Camborne where larger, two-storey dwellings were more common and some small lodging houses existed.

In 1851 there was no shortage of cottages in the mining districts and new households could be established in a separate dwelling more easily than appears to have been the case in many Victorian towns where housing was difficult to find. The ‘three-life lease’ system whereby landowners permitted the enclosure of marginal land and the building of cottages continued to operate and, in some districts, working miners could even obtain building materials at reduced cost.

Some 9 per cent of households contained servants in the West Cornwall study area. While this comparatively low percentage in part reflects the absence of any middle class in these parishes, it may also reflect the
availability of employment at the mines for females who, in other areas, would have worked in service. In fact many of the servants enumerated in the Cornish returns were very young children. This indicates the common practice in nineteenth-century England whereby surplus children were often lodged in other households where spare room could be found. Many of them were actually related to the head of the household in which they served and often they were employed as ‘child-minders’ for parents who had jobs at the mines.  

Changing household size and structure, 1851-1871
Thus at the beginning of the study period, households in Camborne, Redruth and St Just were fairly large and most consisted of only a primary family group. The population was youthful and natural increase was at a prodigiously high level. Indeed, household characteristics in this area were not unlike those of other primarily industrial areas of England.

Table 4. Changing household size, 1851-71. Combined Cornish sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Total 1851</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total 1861</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total 1871</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>12.35</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>13.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>14.84</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>16.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15.63</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>13.85</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>15.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>15.50</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>12.19</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>9.60</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (and over)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 640  
N = 729  
N = 772

Mean Household Size:  
5.31  
5.12  
4.88

Total Sample:  
Population = 10,828  
Total households = 2,141

NOTE: There were more very large households (eleven or more people) in 1851 than in 1871. See Figure 3.

However, between 1851 and 1871, the situation began to change. Mean household size fell from 5.31 to only 4.88 persons. (Table 4). There was of course a national trend towards smaller households but the decline in Camborne, Redruth and St Just was larger. Indeed the reduction in St Just was twice that occurring in the country as a whole. However, it may be more important to note that there was a shift in emphasis towards smaller groupings and by 1871 more than half the households in the sample contained less than four people. (Fig. 3). The factors which produced these small changes in household size as well as the distribution of households across the range of sizes in so short a period of time were undoubtedly linked to the decline in the mining industry. Thus even as early as 1871 it is possible to point to a small but measurable change.
in the household size characteristics of the study area. Much more significant however were the marked changes in the internal structure of the domestic group after the recession.

One of the most striking changes which had occurred by 1871 was the large increase in the number of households headed by women. The largest change had occurred in St Just where they increased from 15 per cent in 1851 to more than 26 per cent in 1871. (Fig. 4). These changes were partly the result of a growth in the number of households headed by widows, but more important, there were also many more married female household heads in 1871. The census frequently recorded that a man had emigrated. Entries such as 'husband abroad', or 'husband in Australia' were common in the returns. Such information was not elicited by the census authorities and the fact that it was recorded at all is an additional indication that emigration had become a serious problem by 1871. Thus for example, Jane Bray of Trefula Moor (Redruth) had become head of the household when her husband emigrated to Peru. Mrs. Bray had five daughters — the eldest was only eight years old — but the record reveals that this family received an 'annuity' from her husband. Many others made no mention of monies sent home by emigrant spouses and were clearly having to support themselves as charwomen or washerwomen.
Birth-rates and natural increase

Apart from producing this marked increase in the number of female-headed households, the exodus of miners after the collapse of the copper industry in 1866 inevitably affected fertility. In Redruth, for example, the birth-rate fell from 38 per thousand in 1851 to only 29 per thousand in 1871. There was a similar downward trend in St Just where the reduction was from 42 to 37 per thousand\textsuperscript{16}. The propensity to have children seems to have declined even among those couples who managed to remain together in Cornwall during the recession years. The evidence suggests that the census family declined from an average of four children to less than three\textsuperscript{4}.

An awareness that an extra child would, at least during the early years of its life, add another burden to an already stretched family budget must have deterred many couples from having more children. There was certainly growing concern about the increase in abortions and infanticide in the district by the 1870's. The trial and conviction of a Redruth woman, charged with murdering her infant, aroused considerable local interest. In reporting a sentence of ten years penal servitude a contemporary newspaper noted that this punishment had been "calculated to exercise a very decided influence upon crimes of this nature", Redruth having become "somewhat notorious for the destruction of newly-born infants"\textsuperscript{17}. Catherine Bray, aged twenty years, was tried in April, 1867 and sentenced to seven years hard labour for "concealing the birth of a male child"\textsuperscript{18}.

One of the most startling cases was that of a servant girl, Jane May, who had apparently become pregnant early in 1866, but, although challenged by her employer and others, she had constantly denied the fact. In October that year, while driving home from market with a fellow servant, she asked him to stop the cart. Getting out and going behind a roadside hedge, Jane May delivered her baby, abandoned it, returned to the cart and thence home to resume her duties without betraying her secret to anyone. The child, however, did not immediately die. Its cries were heard and Jane May's crime was discovered\textsuperscript{19}.

It is clearly impossible to say with certainty whether family limitation of one kind or another was more frequently practised in West Cornwall during the recession years. Certainly abortions and infanticide occurred in Camborne, Redruth and St Just at this time and it is probable that the mining collapse created additional problems to which such drastic action was seen as the only solution. It is hard to imagine the degree of destitution which then prevailed. The local newspapers reported "unprecedented numbers seeking alms" at Redruth Christmas market in 1867. Widows, both young and old, as well as other needy persons, were said to have "gone about in troops" literally begging for assistance\textsuperscript{20}. Many victims of the recession had no alternative but to seek accommodation in the workhouse. In one afternoon alone, in August 1867, some fifteen women were seen on the road from St Just making their way to Penzance Workhouse\textsuperscript{21}. The poor law and indeed other relief organisations set up to meet the crisis were simply not able to cope with the sheer scale of the problem.
Figure 4

multiple family household refers to cases where two or more nuclear families shared the same dwelling.
Household collapse

In the past the assistance of kin was of much greater importance than it is today. During the nineteenth century there was no state pension scheme, no family allowance and no unemployment benefit. Most of those in real need would — wherever possible — turn to their relatives for help. It is therefore significant to note that the census evidence suggests that the number of households containing co-resident kin had increased by 1871. (Table 5). Increases in co-residence of kin took place in all three parishes but were most marked in Camborne and Redruth where it could be argued that the opportunity, albeit strictly limited, to work in other industries when mines closed tended to encourage this process.

Relatives aged less than twenty-five years — especially females — accounted for the largest share of these increases. The majority were grandchildren of household heads. In fact grandchildren represented more than one third of the co-resident relative group in 1871. Growing numbers of ‘parentless’ children were left behind in Cornwall as victims of the recession emigrated to escape its effects.

The importance of this growth in the co-residence of relatives becomes clear when it is noted that there had been an increase in the number of cases which qualified as ‘multiple family households’ (they contained two or more separate nuclear families) (Fig. 4). This ‘huddling’ or ‘collapsing’ of households has been recognised by other writers as a common response to economic difficulties. It had certainly become fairly widespread in West Cornwall by 1871 and it is suggested that collapsed households represented a significant and recognisable response to the mining recession of the 1860’s and 1870’s.

Most of the collapsed households contained women whose husbands had emigrated without them. Unable to afford their own accommodation without his support, they had moved to live with their parents or other close relatives. Thus for example the census of St Just hints at the difficulties experienced by Mary Wall and her four children. Living in the cottage of her husband’s parents, Mary was not described as a widow in the returns, but as a married woman. The record does not tell us her husband’s whereabouts but we do know that the whole family had spent some time in Australia where three of the four children were born. It could be that their father had been forced to emigrate a second time during this latest mining recession.

Co-resident lodgers and servants

While the incidence of co-resident kin had increased by 1871, the number of lodgers in Camborne, Redruth and St Just had decreased by almost 30 per cent. Lodgers represented a highly fluid element in the population. Turnover was rapid as those unsuccessful in obtaining work moved away and the more fortunate ones established separate households. A report in the West Briton in 1862 gives an indication of the reasons behind the earlier growth in the lodging element and its subsequent decline:
It was formerly the practice of great numbers of our miners who came from other districts in search of employment to reside here (Redruth) as lodgers, leaving their families at their own houses in other parishes.24

Indeed, the majority of lodgers were employed in mining and there was a tendency for them to reside with the families of fellow miners. In 1861 well over 60 per cent of the lodgers employed in the mining industry in Camborne and Redruth were accommodated in the houses of fellow miners.25

When the recession began the in-flow of lodgers, who had been arriving as a steady stream while the mines remained prosperous, quickly dried up, and those already in the study area were amongst the first to leave. The result was that the number of lodgers in Camborne, Redruth and St Just fell quite sharply from a peak of 1,139 in 1861 to only 745 in 1871: a reduction of more than 34 per cent. (Table 5). Moreover the percentage of households sharing accommodation with a lodger had fallen from 12.2 per cent in 1861 to only 6.6 per cent. (Table 5).

Changes after 1861 in the proportion of households which contained domestic servants represent a rather more complicated process. On the face of it there seems to have been very little change in the number of households with servants. (Table 5). Furthermore, the absolute number of people engaged in domestic service actually increased between 1861 and 1871 by more than 27 per cent. (Table 5). However, these figures mask a shift away from residential servants to unspecified, non-residential servants. Indeed the number of co-resident servants had fallen by 30 per cent by 1871 and this may reflect the fact that households were no longer able to afford the luxury of a ‘living-in’ staff.26 Many traders and businessmen who had hitherto employed servants had been hit by the decline of mining. Some even faced bankruptcy.27 It was inevitable that savings would be sought by reducing expenditure on domestic servants and this is clearly reflected in the census evidence.

Table 5. Changing household composition, 1851-71. Combined Cornish sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lodger</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7.81%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>19.38%</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9.38%</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of lodgers, relatives and servants in the study area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1851</th>
<th>1861</th>
<th>1871</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lodgers</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>1,139</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>1,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servants2</td>
<td>1,619</td>
<td>2,193</td>
<td>2,790</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 See Table 3
2 These totals include all those people recorded as 'servants' in the census. Because some were related to the head of the household in which they were enumerated as servants, and were regarded as 'extra' domestic servants, they are not recorded in the percentages of households with servants shown in the upper table.
By 1871 more servants were enumerated in their own families than had been the case at the two previous censuses. It may be that rather than living-in with the household which they served they attended there for work on a daily basis. It could, of course, be argued that such people worked for their own family in a servant capacity and there were a handful of cases where the record was specific: Elizabeth Trevethan of St Just, for example, was described as 'servant to her aunt'\textsuperscript{38}. In the majority of cases, however, it is suggested that the term 'servant' implied a formal relationship with an outside household. The problem of imperfect information on unemployment is also involved here inasmuch as many jobless female mine workers may have stated their occupation as 'servant' in the returns rather than unemployed. This remains an unknowable in a study of this type.

Added to the larger number of non-residential servants was an increase in 'extra' domestic servants. This category included a large number of deserted female household heads whose occupation was recorded as 'charwoman', 'washerwoman' or 'laundress'. This group had become overwhelmingly dominant in the domestic service sector as a whole by 1871 and it seems reasonable to infer that its growth reflects the attempts of hard pressed parents to earn an income to keep the family together in the face of the mining crisis.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Although the most obvious demographic effect of the recession in the mining industry of West Cornwall, which began in 1866, was growing emigration and an associated decline in total population (apparent in some cases as early as the census of 1871) more hidden and probably more significant were the changes which seem to have taken place in the detailed structure of households. As a response to the process of emigration particularly of young adults and household heads, mean household size registered a slight decline. An even larger reduction may well be masked by a significant structural change in households produced by the tendency for deserted wives and their families to move to share the accommodation of parents, grandparents or other close relatives. This process of household collapse or huddling as a means of deriving mutual benefit has been observed in other areas of nineteenth-century England but in the Cornish case it is not easy to see the advantages which might be afforded to the welcoming household\textsuperscript{39}. The willingness of the Cornish to take in their needy relatives during this crisis is certainly remarkable but it may have been seen as only a temporary expedient which, because the slump persisted, unexpectedly became permanent.

In time the trend towards a declining population must have become self-sustaining. The absence of husbands depressed the birth-rate and so fewer children were introduced into the population. This in turn further reduced the future potential for growth in the population. Moreover, the inflow of lodgers quickly dried up as job opportunities declined. The sex ratio decreased as young males left the area in increasing numbers. Depopulation was highly selective. Indeed, this selectivity, above all else, produced the changes in the structure of the household which this study has attempted to define.
The effects of an economic upheaval at local level in the nineteenth-century were therefore probably more complicated than a cursory glance at population totals might suggest. Although a good deal more work on this subject needs to be done before any firm conclusions can be drawn, the Cornish example does appear to indicate that marked changes in the pattern of households could arise which had implications for population change in the future. Laslett has suggested that over the long-term the household operated as an intricate adaptive mechanism but the evidence of this study seems to show that under certain circumstances the domestic group failed to adapt and registered marked structural changes.

Many tantalising questions of course require further investigation. For instance, this paper has said nothing about the important differences between the changes observed amongst households in various occupation groups. There were also some differences between the responses of households in remote, rural parts of the parish compared with those located in the towns of Camborne and Redruth. Above all, it remains to be seen, when the data are made public, whether the changes which have been observed over the relatively short period 1851-1871 were still evident at the censuses of 1881 and 1891.

NOTES


4. This article discusses part of a larger study carried out while the author was in receipt of an SSRC Studentship. See: W. M. Brayshay The Demography of Three West Cornwall Mining Communities: A Society in Decline', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Exeter, 1977.

5. The conventions established by social historians for analysing manuscript census data were employed in this study. See E. A. Wrigley (ed.) Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the use of quantitative methods for the Study of Social History, C.U.P., 1972. It could be argued that a 10 per cent sample might underestimate the extent of the mining crisis given that occupation types were unevenly distributed over the parishes. In fact the mining population was fairly well represented throughout the study area. Specific jobs within the mining industry as well as jobs in other employment sectors, were rather more concentrated in certain areas, however, and in these cases larger samples were drawn for some parts of the analysis in my thesis (see Brayshay, 1977).


10. PRO RG10 2315-8 (Census Enumerators' Books, Redruth 1871).

11. Weaver, p. 29.

12. PRO RG10 2315-45 (Census Enumerators' Books, Camborne, Redruth and St. Just, 1871). The coding scheme employed in this study allowed for the recording of domestic servants' relationships to the household head.
13. The Census Authorities published an estimated average household size for England and Wales as a whole. It is difficult to assess the reliability of this estimate.

14. PRO RG10 2316 (Census Enumerators’ Books, Redruth 1871).

15. Registrar General, Annual Reports 1851 and 1871.

16. Census family. The marriage rate indicated by the returns of marriages to the Registrar General was also falling. This reflects in part a growing imbalance in the sex ratio as adult males moved away. It is also likely that the propensity to marry was in any case diminished during the uncertainties of the economic recession.

17. West Briton 3rd August 1871.

18. Royal Cornwall Gazette, 2nd May 1867.

19. Royal Cornwal Gazette, 9th May 1867.

20. Royal Cornwall Gazette, 28th December, 1867.

21. West Briton, 23rd August 1867.


23. PRO RG10 2343 (Census Enumerators’ Books, St. Just 1871).

24. West Briton, 15th July 1862.

25. A computer program was specially written to examine the extent to which the occupations of various types of co-residents were the same as those of the household head. The assistance of Dr. John Buckett, University of Exeter, is gratefully acknowledged.


27. See for example: Royal Cornwall Gazette, 16th November 1865 and 20th January, 1866; West Briton, 23rd December, 1867.

28. PRO HO 107 (Census Enumerators’ Books, St. Just 1851).

29. See Anderson, pp. 144-61.


---

Why not join

THE LPS SOCIETY

Membership gives you the opportunity to buy books on historical demography, local history and related topics at reduced prices as well as receiving the journal Local Population Studies twice a year. You can also join in Society activities and meet other people interested in local history, family history and genealogy.

For further details contact the Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Helen Forde, 10 Holmbush Road, London SW15 3LE.

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR MEMBERS OF THE LPS SOCIETY

In future Book Club orders and correspondence should be sent to:—

Geoffrey Stevenson,
Department of Education,
The Lady Spencer-Churchill College,
Oxford Polytechnic,
Wheatley,
Oxford

Correspondence addressed to the Treasurer should go to:—

Mrs. Beatrice Shearer,
Flat 6, Flaxman House,
1/3 Colehurn Road,
London SW10.