MISCELLANY

THE INHABITANTS OF SUMMERTOWN, OXFORD, IN THE YEAR 1832

Contributed by Richard Wall

Censuses can be taken for a variety of reasons, for example, to count the population or to tax it, to ascertain the condition of the 'poor' or to measure the strength of various religions. Before the official national population counts of the nineteenth century (decennially from 1801 with the exception of 1941), many censuses were local, parish based affairs and only rarely did the enumerators leave an explicit record of their motives. The vicar of Ardleigh in Essex was an exception when he wrote in 1796, 'In consequence of the avowed intention of the French to make a descent upon the coast ... I have thought it my duty to number my parishioners, which I have done by domiciliary visitation, that in the event of an actual invasion, such a list may be useful either to assemble us in order to make a resistance or in case of dispersion to enable us, upon our return, to discover and ascertain our respective claims and settlements'.

Nevertheless the Ardleigh list is rather bare of detail: name, age, relationship to the head of the household and the latter's occupation is all that was noted, although even there details were rather more than enumerations taken in conjunction with the national censuses would provide prior to 1851. By then, however, a later generation of list makers was giving some indication of what people were like, as well as how old they were. Extracts from one of these lists, for Summertown in Oxford, are reproduced below.

This list was the work of one of the residents, J. Badcock, on behalf of the incumbent. As he makes clear, it was not intended for publication or general inspection. Perhaps for this reason he allowed himself a free hand in his comments on his neighbours and their shortcomings, as he saw them, which is what gives the list its particular charm. All the same, he begins with an apologia: 'Should any person have thought me too inquisitive in endeavouring to ascertain ages, it was merely to show the present state of poor families in particular, and the whole population as above, not from any rude improper curiosity.' Other information recorded, provided without obvious qualm, included possession of the bible, ability to read, occupation and place of work, parish of settlement and the date of the construction of houses built in recent years.

It is impossible in the space available here to do justice to the document, but those desirous of studying it can consult either the original in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms Top OXON e 240), or the copy in the library of the SSRC Cambridge Group. For the record, however, only about three families of 126 lacked a bible and only seventeen persons of 352 above the age of twelve could not read. The extracts have been chosen for the light they throw on various aspects of village life and are complete in themselves although the material has been slightly rearranged and punctuation modernised to facilitate reading. They must speak for them-
selves, but in reading through them it may be useful to bear the following in mind:

1. In the first place it is interesting that Badcock refers to Summertown as a village. We would rather term it a suburb, particularly with the advantage of hindsight. It is now incorporated into inner Oxford and already in 1832 many of the family heads were working in Oxford (see family 20), influencing sometimes certain social ties, such as church attendance (see family 123). Other families, however, still had ties, of a somewhat similar nature, with more rural parishes as, for example, did family 99.

2. Secondly, in writing about his neighbours Badcock tells us as much, if not more, about his own attitudes. These were conventional for the time, at least amongst certain sections of the middle class: against beer shops and unnecessary refinements of dress, for regularity in work and what he termed 'steadiness'. He does, however, consider carefully the merits of the individual case. The bastard bearer (family 78) is treated much more gently than the married couple of family 112.

3. There is also considerable interest in the amount of information he was able to find out about his neighbours. We do not, of course, know how he collected this. Ages he clearly often guessed but other information about bibles, for example, he presumably obtained by direct enquiry. But no enquiry would yield the sort of information contained in his character assessments, reflecting public knowledge of people's activities, which would be impossible in any large anonymous community. It is significant that Badcock could still make such judgements, (apart from a few blank spots about dissenters) when there were 126 families to know, many newly arrived, and a good number working outside the immediate neighbourhood.

4. The list offers a number of important sidelines on the structure and unity of the family. Take for example the role of kin, (defined here as relatives other than spouse and unmarried offspring). It is well known that these were relatively infrequent in English households, that is, people rarely lived with kin. The list confirms this and when they were present this was often only a temporary arrangement (family 91) or with a specific purpose in mind, for example, guarding the children while the wife served in a beer shop (family 4). It was more usual to keep kin at a certain distance. Some lodged relatives in houses which they had built (families 10 and 11). There was even one widow in the workhouse who received weekly visits from her son (family 21). Nor should we undervalue contacts between neighbours, one woman even being accused of neglecting her own (nuclear) family to serve their interests (family 27).

5. In terms of church building the nineteenth century was a religious age, but church attendance was far from universal. Leaving aside the acknowledged dissenters a number of families were very irregular in their attendance at church (families 27, 119). Even more striking is the
large number of occasions on which married couples were divided on religious grounds, not so much in terms of actual religion, though there is at least one example of this (family 5 and see also family 19) but in terms of the frequency of public worship. The reasons for this are not clear. In one case it is clearly attributed to an interchange of duties between wife and female servant (family 19 where wife and servant attend on alternative days). However, since it is not invariably the wife who is the non-attender, (compare families 20 and 119) it seems reasonable to draw two conclusions: first, that church attendance was a matter of personal conviction and, secondly, that this conviction was maintained even on the part of the wife, despite the attitude of the partner. Indeed we might go further and argue, although there is no evidence on religious convictions prior to the marriage, that there was no consistent attempt to seek out a marriage partner on the basis of shared religious convictions.

6. Finally there is the question of retirement. This raises again the question of the special nature of the Summertown community, for it is clear that the retired constituted a small but important element within it (families 91, 100). Very little is known about retirement in England for those who had no pension to fall back on when they ceased working. The poor had the straightforward choice of the workhouse or seeking the support of their relatives. But it has sometimes been assumed that the more prosperous retained their property and business rights as long as they could and kept their heirs waiting in the process. Some families, however, would seem to have succeeded in adopting an alternative strategy of retiring early (late middle age), and one is specifically said to have made land over to the elder son in return for an annuity (family 100). It has to be emphasised, however, that in both cases retirement was effected without the formation of a complex household. The retired couple did not become dependent and co-reside with their offspring as would have been the case in certain other cultures at this time, in Austria for example. On the contrary, the couple on retirement moved into Summertown quitting not only their old home but their old community. It has its parallel today in the great trek to the south-west and south coasts, different only in the physical distance covered and the fact that families now have fewer children and have them earlier in life so that they do not take their younger offspring with them into retirement as did these families coming to Summertown in 1832.

Extracts from the list of inhabitants of Summertown, Oxford, compiled during the autumn of 1832 by J. Badcock

Family no. 1
Date of house: 1822-3. Number in family: 5.
Mrs Loder, widow. Her children by her former husband: Mary Lindsey, Martha L., John L., Ann L.
All read no doubt. Bible in family or not: Yes.
Mrs L. is a butcher and keeps Oxford market daily assisted by her son. The daughters appear industrious prudent young women. The second has been out as a teacher, and is now trying to establish a day school in the village.

**Family no. 4**

Number in family: 7.
Morris George, age about 26 years. Mary his wife about same. Their children: Maria born 9 August 1826, George born 28 September 1828, Elizabeth born 17 September 1830, Sarah born 11 October 1831. Martha the sister of M. about 16 years of age, was confirmed in June last.
Morris keeps a beer shop which his wife chiefly attends whilst he is variously employed for others where he can get a job, at day labour. Civil people — seldom at church — their house not always the most orderly. The sister is an industrious and well disposed girl. Takes care of the children.

**Family no. 5**

Date of house: 1823-4. Number in family: 2.
Camprino Angelo, Elizabeth his wife.
Both can read.
Camprino is an Italian and a maker of weather glasses. He is a Roman Catholic. She is not.

**Family no. 10**

Date of house: 1823. Number in family: 3.
Cooke Mr and Mrs his wife. Their servant maid.
Can read: Yes of course. Bible in family or no: Yes.
A printer in Oxford. Mrs C is a daughter of Mr Ivery who is the proprietor of this and the next two houses. A respectable couple, under 30 years of age probably. Regular at church.

**Family no. 11**

Date of house: 1822. Number in family: 1.
Jackson Mr
Can read: Yes. Bible in family or no: He has.
An aged person — lives quite alone — is scarcely ever seen beyond his flower garden. Never at church although he repeats the service at home I hear every day throughout the week or at least part of it. He is Ivery’s uncle.

**Family no. 18**

Number in family: 6.
Bates Thomas and Mary his wife: middle aged. Their children: David in his 9th year, Charles about 2½ years younger, Jane about 2½ years younger than C., William. Bates cannot read much, his wife a little better than he. They have a bible.
Belong to Wootton near Abingdon. 
Thomas is a very industrious, steady man. His wife is greatly afflicted with epillectic fits. Both attentive to church. Bate’s employment is in the fields or in gardening. David their son goes to a day school in Oxford, and also to Sunday School here when he can be spared from his poor afflicted mother.

Family no. 19
Date of house: 1823-4. Number in family: 5.
Wickens, Mr Joseph Lamb and Mrs W. his wife. Their children: Rhoda Charlotte b. 19 January 1829, Matilda Adelaide b. 7 April 1831. Jane Clay — servant maid.
A band box maker. They seem to be a very quiet respectable couple. Mrs W. is frequently at Church probably she well can be, alternatively with her servant. Mr W. I rather think was brought up a Dissenter but he attends Church occasionally. The children are also brought. I consider them to be a serious well disposed couple and kind parents. Jane, the servant, is attentive at Church and her daily conduct praiseworthy.

Family no. 20
Date of house: 1820-1. Number in family: 5.
Haines Mr Stephen and his wife — are advancing in life. Two or three grown up daughters are generally here with them.
Can read: Yes.
Haines has a shoe warehouse in Oxford. I know but little of him, I never saw him at Church. His wife and daughters have been some few times. Personal rather than mental adornment is I fear too much the object with the young people. I wish I may be mistaken.

Family no. 21
The lodging or work-house
Date of house: 1824. Number in family: 1.
Austin, widow, born 19 April Old Style 1746.
Can read: No. Bible in family or no: Yes.
Belongs to St Giles in which is Summertown.
Died after a few hours faintness while I have been writing this. Her son from Oxford used to come and read for her comfort the bible to her every Sunday.

Family no. 27
Number in family: 9.
Curtis, Thomas about 40 years of age. Ann his wife about 38. Their children: Ann the eldest in service at Peck’s Mitre Oxford, Sarah b. 6 March 1820, Maria b. 1 January 1822, William b. 14 October 1823, Elizabeth b. 13 November 1825, Mary Ann b. 5 November 1827, Eliza b. 28 September 1829, Harriet b. 4 July 1831. The four oldest still at home in the Sunday School.
Neither of the parents can read. No bible.
Curtis is seldom at Church and his wife not very frequently. She is kind and attentive to her neighbours in time of sickness, but pays no attention to cleanliness in her own family!

Family no. 73

Number in family: 1.
Lord, Jane aged years.
Read or not: Yes. Bible or not: Yes she has a bible and reads it. Her husband — a worthless fellow — an old soldier — a Pensioner. They have been long parted and the half of his pension is reserved and paid quarterly to her.
She is very deaf but often attends Church.

Family no. 78

Number in family: 3.
Hemings Elizabeth, about 37 years of age. A single woman. Emily — her living illegitimate child, was born 12 November 1829. (The father of this child is John Gulliver, a butcher’s man, now living at Yarnton.)
A woman named Stone is a lodger at Hemings.
Elizabeth can read well. Bible in family or not: Yes. Elizabeth has lost one leg and is now in declining health. She was a very pious young person but afterwards fell dreadfully and almost considered herself an unpardonable sinner. She had many good friends — all of whom forsook her of course. There now appear evident proofs of sincere contrition. She is also recovering some of her former kind friends and above all her former peace of mind we would charitably hope on scriptural grounds.

Family no. 91

Number in family: 2.
Freeman Mr William and Mrs Freeman his wife.
A daughter of Mrs F by a former husband is sometimes with them.
Read or not: Yes. Bible or not: Yes.
Freeman has I believe been a farmer and now passed the meridian altitude of his day and declining towards the evening of life he has left off business.
His wife appears to be some years younger than himself.

Family no. 99

Number in family: 9.
Read or not: Yes. Bible or not in family: Yes they have. Belong to Eynsham. Green is best team carter at Mr Gregory’s, a sober honest man. Has his children around him (his boys particularly) of an evening and
reads to them and instructs them. Sometimes plays on his clarionet and regularly attends Church on Sundays. His wife is also an industrious and creditable person. The females generally, however, rather too fond of dress. Harriet was confirmed in June last. James at plough for Mr Gregory and goes to Sunday school at Woolvercot. C. goes to Sunday School at Summertown. H. ploughboy at Mr Gregory’s and goes to Sunday school at Woolvercot. John. Sunday school at Woolvercot. W. does not know quite all his letters.

**Family no. 100**

Number in family: 6.

Fulbrook, Edward and Maria his wife, passed middle age.


Read or not: Yes. Bible in family or not: They have. Belong to Woodcote. Fulbrook had some land at Woodcote or Checkendon which I believe he has made over to his eldest son securing to himself an annuity. Until lately he was a careless liver. Now both himself and his wife are enthusiastically attached to the preaching of Mr Bulted (at Oxford). The three eldest children were baptised at Checkendon Church. Louisa at Woolvercot.

**Family no. 112**

The tenement close adjoining the above [Simmons, Richard] I can ill describe, it is a sink of iniquity! **Who**, upon entering into wedlock would choose an unchaste, impure woman for a companion and bosom friend? And were I a female I should be **equally** scrupulous in avoiding any matrimonial connexion with, or honouring with intimate acquaintance, the man who had **ever** frequented a home like this. May my fair country women, so justly esteemed and distinguished for personal virtue and delicacy, properly consider and duly exercise their power in bettering the age! Female influence will never fail to effect much on the manners and morals of society by the smile of approbation and the chill of marked neglect. In proportion as their influence is exerted will virtue and purity be encouraged and exalted, and vice and licentiousness sink more and more into universal contempt and banishment. But I blush at a subject which surely ought not, even by way of caution ‘to be named among Christians’, and must apologise for dwelling on it. Yet, alas, how often, in one way or another, are ‘the sins of the fathers visited upon their children’ in temporal sufferings, even ‘unto the third and fourth generation’!

Our village will soon, we trust, become cleansed. Until then what can we think of the proprietors of such houses! My near neighbour Mr Trash as exerted himself long and much to rid the village of such nuisances, and has in some measure succeeded. Our excellent and respected minister (with proper exertion on our part) will now complete the work.

**Family no. 119** At Hunt’s farm.

Number in family: 2.

**Illis** — about 41 he says — his appearance, however, would say older. His wife somewhat older.
Read or not: Yes. Bible or not: Yes.
A hard working couple — have seen better days. Hollis attends Church.
His wife does not. Neither had either, I believe, from their own report,
been within the walls of any church for seven years before our own was
built.

Family no. 123

Date of house: 1797. 4th tenement. Number in family: 4.
Cross Robert about 50 years of age, Mary his wife about 35. Their child-
ren: Elizabeth born 12 February 1823, Thomas born 12 March 1826.
All read. They have a Bible. Belong to St Giles.
Cross seldom at our Church but attends Church in Oxford, his employ-
ment making it more convenient to attend there. His wife frequents our
Church and has been accustomed regularly to receive the Holy Sacrament
of the Lord’s Supper. Children in Sunday School.