NOTES AND QUERIES

THE BRITISH NINETEENTH CENTURY LABOUR MARKETS DATABASE
AT QUEEN MARY & WESTFIELD COLLEGE,
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

A note contributed by Humphrey Southall

A new project funded by the Leverhulme Trust is creating an important resource for economic, social, and demographic historians. We have two central concerns, the origins of the north-south divide in Britain and the historical geography of labour protest, and to study these we are constructing a large databank; however, much of the data will be at the level of individual towns or registration districts, and so of considerable interest to local historians. This note is partly an appeal for assistance in data collection, but also explains how the databank will, eventually, be a useful resource for historians.

One goal of our research is a reinterpretation of the ‘north-south divide’ in Britain\(^1\) which requires the assembly of a large body of data concerning all aspects of local labour markets in the years before 1914. A surprisingly wide variety of data is available; in particular, trade union reports provide unemployment and wage rates for individual towns, while the census gives us information about registration districts. Our research is being funded principally by the Leverhulme Trust, who are supporting a research fellow and a data entry assistant for two years. Limited additional funding from the Nuffield Foundation covers research on the history of strikes in Britain between 1750 and 1985, which will form the core of an Atlas of Industrial Protest on which we are collaborating with Andrew Charlesworth and Adrian Randall.\(^2\) This will be a sequel to Charlesworth’s Atlas of Rural Protest and develop some of the themes in an earlier study of the history of unionization.\(^3\)

Our resources for data entry work are limited, and we are concentrating initially on trade union sources. However, we are interested in a wide range of statistics to do with comparative local economic and social conditions in Britain before 1920. By local, we mean that we are not looking for data containing only national totals; by comparative, we mean that we are looking for data which permit the comparison of areas, not simply statistics for a single town; and areas can mean regions (census divisions), counties, Poor Law unions/census registration districts, or towns. ‘Britain’ here includes Ireland, while there is no precise start date for our period.

We are interested in any computer-readable sources which can assist us, and our definition of ‘computer-readable’ is fairly flexible: file transfer across JANET, any type of MS-DOS, Macintosh or BBC Micro disc, and even clearly printed tables, as we have an optical character recognition system (an Apple
scanner and OmniPage). We are obviously interested in labour market data, such as unemployment, wages, strikes, or numbers employed, but also need census statistics on population growth etc.. Any of the following would be particularly valuable:

- Population, by sex and age-group, for registration districts from any census from 1851 to 1911; data for any sizable part of the country would be of great help to us.

- Census occupational statistics by registration district or town, for the same period and areas.

- Poor law statistics, by union or county.

- Other measures of economic distress, e.g. bankruptcies, profitability, or output series.

- Wage rate data, for any occupation.

- Measures of the cost of living, or major components of this such as rents.

- Reports of strikes, from newspapers, the Board of Trade, Ministry of Labour, or any other source, so long as locations are given.

In return for assistance in collecting data, we intend to offer something in return. The databank is being constructed as a single, integrated database rather than just a collection of files, and will be based on the QMW Geography Department's VAX mini-computer, which is a node on the national JANET network (UK.AC.QMW.GEOG.VAX). We will therefore be able eventually to offer on-line access to other researchers. This will obviously be of interest to anyone interested in the development of British labour markets, or wishing to produce maps of strikes in particular periods. However, because the system will be a true database, it will also be able to locate rapidly, for example, all information concerning Bolton between 1890 and 1905, and therefore it should be of great interest to those doing local research, giving access to data from a wide range of national sources which would often not be worth consulting individually for research on a single town.

It may also be possible to supply such data on disk, and we are developing a system for user-friendly access to the database across JANET, using Apple's Hypercard program and special connectivity software. We should be very happy to hear from anyone with data to contribute, a long-term need for information from our period, or simply with an interest in this or similar projects. Please write to us at the Department of Geography, Queen Mary & Westfield College, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS.

Anyone with access to the JANET network can send electronic mail to H_SOUTHALL@UK.AC.QMW.GEOG.VAX
NOTES


An LPS Supplement

**POPULATION STUDIES**

FROM PARISH REGISTERS

A Selection of Readings from Local Population Studies
with an introduction by Michael Drake

A selection of contributions from LPS compiled around a series of topics: Marriage, Baptism, Burial, Migration and Area Studies. It brings together some of the most valuable items to have appeared in LPS during the last sixteen years.

Michael Drake's introduction outlines some of the basic procedures of parish register analysis and identifies the pitfalls and difficulties which can so easily trap the unwary.

252 pages including an index. Soft cover. ISBN 0 9503951 7X

Population Studies from Parish Registers can be obtained from booksellers or direct from Mrs M. Ballington, Tawney House, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3BT. Price £6.00 (plus 70p postage and packing).

Paid-up members of the Local Population Studies Society can purchase Population Studies from Parish Registers at the special price of £5.00 plus 70p postage and packing).