

## **THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 1851 CENSUS IN THE COUNTY OF EAST LoTHIAN**

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Michael Anderson and Brenda Collins have been working for five years on the 1851 Census project. Brenda Collins is also currently completing a thesis on mid-nineteenth century Irish immigration in Dundee and Michael Anderson is continuing his work on the history of the western family since the sixteenth century.

This article arises out of the research project 'The preparation and analysis of a machine readable national sample from the 1851 Census of Great Britain', financed by the Social Science Research Council and undertaken in the Department of Sociology, Edinburgh University.

Our interest in the organisation of the 1851 census at the local level was first aroused in 1973 during the sampling of the Scottish enumeration books. It became obvious that many of these books had been written, revised or inspected by men with deep local knowledge. Comments and amendments which were additional to the enumerators' work were frequently noted in the books. After looking at many examples we decided to retain all the variations recorded against a particular attribute, noting the enumerator's one as the original, and attempting, by matching the handwriting with the signatures at the beginning of the books, to assign the variations to their correct authors. Meanwhile we had little knowledge of the authority we could place in the amendments. Nor did we know what additions and corrections took place during the transcription from household schedules to enumeration books. How many correction-free books were the product of diligent inspection and revision on the part of the local census officials, and how many were the product of disregard? While the printed census volumes, notably **Accounts and Papers 1851 Vol. XLIII**, give information on the procedures to be carried out by the different census officials, nothing was known of the way in which these instructions were interpreted locally. We were encouraged by the knowledge that in at least two parishes in Scotland copies of the enumeration books had been kept in local hands after the enumeration books and household schedules had been sent to London for aggregate tabulation. This seemed to indicate that in these parishes the census enumeration was not treated as a routine exercise with little local implication. We therefore decided to try and locate any information about the census in local administrative records.

An extensive search of the indexes to the Sheriff Court Records held in the Scottish Record Office revealed two references to census returns which were examined, one for West Lothian and one for East Lothian (Haddingtonshire). The material on East Lothian was by far the most relevant for our purposes, referring entirely to the census of 1851 whereas the lesser amount of material on West Lothian gave information on each of the censuses 1851-1901.

The East Lothian material falls into three main categories: (1) detailed accounts of daily time and expenditure on the local census organisation, (2) copies of (seemingly all) the printed communications from Horace Mann in London, regarding the census organisation, (3) a population census abstract at enumeration district level of the entire county. The author of this material was Henry Davidson, who, as Sheriff Clerk for the county, was the local organiser. Because there was no system of civil registration in Scotland before 1855 the local administration of the Census fell on the Sheriffs of the counties and the Provosts of the burghs. They, in turn, delegated the running of the event to their Sheriff Clerks and Town Clerks. These were salaried officials but in the mid-nineteenth century they were also men of some private income perhaps from a farm, business or profession. Mr. Davidson at any rate was expected to finance all the census organisation in East Lothian, including the payments to the enumerators, and only to submit his claim for expenses in July 1851, four months after the event.

Again, because there was no civil registration in Scotland, very much more autonomy was given to the Sheriff/Town Clerks than to the superintendent registrars in England and Wales. Not only had they to organise the census within their area but they had to do so without an established framework of local officials such as the registrars were in England and Wales. It is therefore not surprising that the middle tier of local census organisation consisted mostly of parish schoolmasters, as tradition has it that they were a long established feature of Scottish parochial life. Certainly parish schools had been in existence since the seventeenth century and while in urban areas their influence had dismally failed to keep up with the growth of population, the schoolmasters were certainly literate. More importantly, by their position in local life, they could claim to have extensive knowledge of the families in their parishes, at least in a county like East Lothian with a well developed village structure and the largest town, Haddington, of only 3883 people. This local knowledge was obviously felt to be of considerable importance because throughout Scotland the Church of Scotland ministers of each parish were asked to check the enumeration books and vouch for their correctness. Not all the superintendents were schoolmasters but it was clearly expected that a large number of them would be, as the instructions to the superintendents from Horace Mann were entitled 'Instructions to schoolmasters etc.' All the local census organisation in Scotland was thus based on direct communication between Horace Mann in London and the Sheriffs in the counties and Provosts in the burghs.

The first communication received in Haddington from Horace Mann regarding the forthcoming census had been sent out on 25 January only

eight weeks before the census day. Nor, if East Lothian is typical of Scotland, had any earlier attempt been made to prepare for the event. Indeed work was not actually started until 5 February when Sheriff Riddell met with Mr Davidson and delegated the letter writing and document signing to him. Riddell's only involvement in the census appears to have been in authorising the names of the superintendents and the enumerators, one day spent looking at the completed census enumeration books and schedules, and countersigning the allowances paid for the work. Otherwise everything was left to Henry Davidson.

His first task was to send letters to the parish schoolmasters, appointing them as superintendents. He enclosed 'Instructions for the Division of the Parish' into districts 'none of which shall include a larger extent of the County than an ablebodied active Man, visiting every house therein and making the inquiries prescribed by the Act, can go over in a day.' This was necessary in order to discover the number of schedules etc. required. Helpfully, he added to each letter the number of districts the parish had comprised in the 1841 census. Another of the preliminaries to be established was the allocation of the enumeration of marginal areas within the parliamentary boundaries of the three royal (municipal) burghs of Haddington town, North Berwick and Dunbar. On 5 February Mr Davidson sent letters to the Town Clerk of each burgh concerning the town boundaries. This action is also recorded at the receiving end, in the Dunbar Town Clerk's letter book: letter to Provost Kelly, Dunbar 'I send you an official — [illegible] received last night from the Serriff (sic) Clerk regarding the Census which please take care of as it should be put up among the Burgh papers. I wish you would send me a reading of the instructions that the Clerks may see their official duties as it is tedious reading through an Act of Parliament.'

By 15 February the superintendents had each notified him regarding the number of books and schedules required and he was then able to order them from Horace Mann. The supply was received and the inventory taken on 5 March of: '10,000 Householders' Schedules of the usual size and adapted for ordinary families [allowing 15 per cent or 20 per cent reserve]; 100 of a larger size for schools, hotels etc.; 150 enumeration books of the various sizes; '4 books for Public Institutions, 35 forms for the signature of Enumerators; 210 forms of places of worship . . .; 275 forms for schools; 130 Enumerators' lists of churches, chapels and schools; 40 copies of instructions to Superintendents and 130 copies of instructions to Enumerators'. Two days later, he and two clerks spent the day arranging the schedules and books for the different districts. They were delivered to each superintendent, rather than to each enumerator, by three Sheriff Officers. This obviously required the use of a horse and wagon or similar conveyance and so it is not surprising that two of the men chosen were partners in an auctioneering and appraising business based in Haddington and would presumably have maintained similar conveyances for that. The county was divided into three with one Officer delivering to each. They were paid at the rate of 2s. 6d. each per parish and their conveyances were hired at a cost of £1-2-6.

It was not until 17 March, only two weeks before census day that Mr Davidson made up the list of proposed enumerators, 'submitted the same

to Mr Sheriff Riddell and got the same approved.' The names had been previously suggested by the superintendents and there seems to have been only one query regarding an enumerator, one Peter Cathie, about whom Mr Davidson wrote to the superintendent of Tranent on 24 March. The answer was obviously satisfactory for Cathie's names appears in the parish enumeration abstract.

Of the 112 enumerators appointed, the occupations of seventy-seven are known (see Appendix). The reliance on artisans and skilled craftsmen agrees with our knowledge of the enumerators' backgrounds in other parts of Britain. However, these enumerators were perhaps drawn from a much wider social spectrum than has been previously suspected. The farming interest (these were farms of several hundred acres) and the university trained men were equal as enumerators with the agricultural labourers and molecatchers. Two aspects affecting the particular development of East Lothian were the appointments of gardeners and of the county police. Professional gardeners were more common and probably of higher status than elsewhere in Scotland because of the number of resident aristocratic landlords and other wealthy proprietors. A county police force had been established in 1832 when it was the first in Scotland and when rural police forces in England and Wales had still to be set up. Its requirements of character, literacy and physique meant that its officers were well suited to be census enumerators.

Of the twenty-five superintendents, six are definitely known to have been schoolmasters. Only five of the superintendents took the opportunity to nominate themselves as enumerators which they had been encouraged to do, but in six other parishes superintendents recommended one of their family.

At no point were the enumerators personally instructed by Mr Davidson. All their information and materials were supplied through the superintendents, as also were their payments at the end. The superintendents contacted Mr Davidson about any problems the enumerators had in interpreting instructions; on 26 March he replied to the superintendent of Ormiston parish 'in answers as to a Tenant holding different farms'. On 5 April he wrote asking the superintendents 'to send in the Books and Schedules by the 12th current and to attend at Haddington on the 19th to verify the same'. From the notes made respecting the Books, they were very carefully examined in the interim. At the meeting on 19 April, some of the books were returned for corrections. Of the five Books of the parish of Gladsmuir, two were to be recopied and one had spelling mistakes to be altered. Mr Davidson noted that the superintendent of Athelstaneford parish had made a copy of all the books (presumably for parish use — this is not the only instance of this we have found although it went considerably against the Census Commissioners' avowal of confidentiality). Other more specific notes include a reference to Haddington District No. 1 Book where the place of birth instead of parish was noted: 'Several of the Annisfield Grooms who are Englishmen ought to have been entered as born in "England" only and not the place of birth.' Mr Davidson was so anxious to be correct on this point that he wrote to Horace Mann about it on 16 April.

After the superintendents and enumerators had made the required corrections, the books were again examined and finally an abstract of all the population figures was made. A thorough job was done as it took Mr Davidson and his two clerks another five days. Three more tasks remained. On 23 May he and Sheriff Riddell fixed the allowances to be paid to the superintendents and enumerators. The scales of payment were quite different from that stipulated for England and Wales and appear to have been agreed at a meeting of several of the County Sheriffs at Linlithgow. They had of course to take into account the greater geographical distances involved. Also the smooth running of the census' enumeration depended much more on the goodwill of the superintendents in Scotland than it did on the salaried registrars in England and Wales. Mr Davidson organised the printing of forms of payments to the enumerators and superintendents. Money orders were prepared which could be exchanged for cash at the office of John Ferme, the Land Tax Collector, in Haddington. The order forms were sent to the superintendents for distribution. Finally on 28 May the books and schedules were sent to London and on 29 May Mr Davidson wrote to Horace Mann telling him that the census papers had been transmitted by post.

Apart from this day by day account of the census organisation, the material also contains, for each enumeration district of each parish, the number of houses, the number of separate occupiers, the number of persons born in Scotland, England, Ireland, foreigners, and the numbers of males and females. The Provosts of each of the burghs of Haddington, Dunbar and North Berwick also supplied similar information to Mr Davidson on their enumerations and so there is in the file a complete population abstract of the whole of the county of Haddington.

It seems Mr Davidson had only one serious problem to deal with although the situation from which it arose was not uncommon throughout the country. This was the enumeration of the parish of Oldhamstocks, lying partly in East Lothian and partly in Berwickshire. The schoolmaster of Oldhamstocks, Mr Boyd, was appointed by Mr Davidson to take the census, while thirty miles away in Duns the Sheriff Clerk of Berwickshire, believing that the Sheriff Clerk in one county had no authority to organise the enumeration in another, appointed one of his schoolmasters in an adjoining parish to the task of enumerating the part of Oldhamstocks in Berwickshire. Both schoolmasters, it appears, left schedules at each house. On 31 March, Mr Boyd deputed another person to collect his schedules and the other schoolmaster encountered the 'most bitter opposition' from him. 'Every person was made to believe that as Boyd was schoolmaster of Oldhamstocks, no person had a right to interfere with his parish. Therefore his Schedules were cheerfully filled up and mine presented me blank as I had delivered them.' Eventually, after 'struggling on from 9AM to 1PM' he filled up the schedules himself and got the householders to sign them. Although there is nothing in the correspondence to say so, the work of Boyd's deputy was eventually disregarded, although he was paid £1 for his trouble. Mr Davidson's notes on the books state that Oldhamstocks Book 3 from page 4 to the end was to be struck out and the rest recopied. In the published census

tables the enumeration of Oldhamstocks is split between the two counties with no footnote of the acrimony involved.

A picture thus emerges of a very careful supervision of the 1851 census enumeration at the local level. This may perhaps be a consequence of the level of social integration and control in mid-nineteenth century Scottish communities outside the major cities. On the other hand the conscientiousness exhibited by all the tiers of census officials in East Lothian may have been typical of all the local organisation throughout Britain. Only the study of local census administration in other areas will enable us to assess the typicality of Mr Davidson's notions.

### SOURCES

Haddingtonshire census correspondence in West Register House, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, SC 40.70.1 and 2.

West Lothian census correspondence in West Register House, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, SC 41.81.107.

Dunbar Town Clerk's Letter Book in Scottish Record Office, HM General Register House, Edinburgh, B.18.15.3.

Other information: Dunbar B.18.15.4; North Berwick B.56.7.7; Haddington B.30.12.27; all Scottish Record Office, HM General Register House, Edinburgh.

### APPENDIX

Occupations of men who acted as enumerators in the county of East Lothian during the 1851 census of Great Britain.

Schoolmaster	17	Builder	1
County Police <sup>2</sup>	8	Carpenter	1
Grocer	5	Clothier	1
Farmer	4	Coal Grieve	1
Clerk (bank etc.)	3	Cooper	1
Gardener	3	Draper	1
Post Master	3	Forester	1
Shoemaker	3	Inspector of Poor	1
Tailor	3	Joiner	1
Agricultural Labourer	2	Lawyer (WS)	1
Auctioneer	2	Manager Gasworks	1
Baker	2	Meal Dealer	1
Clergy	2	Overseer of Roads	1
Merchant and Clothier	2	Rope Maker	1
Molecatcher	2	Surgeon	1
Painter	2		