

NEWS FROM THE CAMBRIDGE GROUP
FOR THE HISTORY OF POPULATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In addition to writing periodical reports on the progress of our research we shall be using our space in L.P.S. to communicate ideas and problems that have occurred to us in the course of our work. Our hope is that L.P.S. readers, who between them have a very wide experience of local conditions, will be able to help us by commenting on our ideas and suggesting answers to our problems in the light of their local knowledge.

In this issue Peter Laslett describes a new source of information for literacy studies and Dr. Wrigley discusses two problems: the possibility of a change in attitude towards marriage registration in the late seventeenth century, and the meaning of the description 'widow' in the parish registers.

Peter Laslett
R.S. Schofield
E.A. Wrigley

SCOTTISH WEAVERS, COBBLERS AND MINERS
WHO BOUGHT BOOKS IN THE 1750's

It was pointed out in The World We Have Lost (page 196) that something more than the ability to read or to sign the name was necessary in order to permit a man or a woman to play a part in social, political or intellectual life, perhaps a great deal more, even in the 17th or 18th centuries. Evidence of everyday familiarity with the written and printed word is necessary, it was suggested, to bring out fuller literacy of this kind. Books, in fact, must have been actually owned by anyone capable of exercising power or influence in a society where government and business were themselves tied to the printed word, as well as religion, the most important concern of everyone.

There is one obvious and relatively convenient source of information on book owners, in the inventories attached to wills. If a yeoman, or a husbandman, or a joiner left books behind him, it can be claimed with a certain confidence that he was fully free of the literate world. Given enough instances of this kind, proportions of will making persons in the various callings with this attribute could be worked out. Roger Schofield, and those who have volunteered to help him in the

study he is carrying out on literacy in the past for the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, are concerning themselves with inventories post mortem. They have found mentions of books to be very rare, even rarer than the one inventory in ten suggested as probable for the 17th century in The World We Have Lost. What is more, will making cannot be supposed to have covered the whole population, even though a surprisingly large number of very modest people seem to have had their goods inventoried after death. Any new source of records of book ownership would obviously be most welcome.

Just such a source has in fact been found during the last few weeks. Its value to the social structural historian depends to a large extent on the number of examples which can be located, hence this early notice to every reader of L.P.S. The source consists of lists of subscribers, which appear in some books published in the 18th century, if they should happen to specify in detail the occupation of each subscriber.

I have in front of me as I write a copy of a book with the following title: Prima Media, or First, Middle and Last Things. By Isaac Ambrose, Minister of the Gospel at Preston in Lancashire. The Seventh Edition, Glasgow, Printed by James Knox, for Mr. James Tweedie, Student of Divinity. M,DCC, LVII [i.e. 1757].

After the author's note to his readers there appears a list of 398 subscriber's names, twelve examples of which are given below:-

Rev. Mr. John Bisset, Minister at Culsalmond.
Robert Barr, Farmer in Gorbals.
Robert Donaldson, Weaver in Anderstoun.
James Fillan, Gardener in Keithhall.
James Greenlies, Weaver in Caltoun.
Mr. James Hay, Dyer at Fivie.
David Spense, Weaver in Glasgow.
Mr. Alexander Leslie, Merchant in Aberdeen.
James Baird, Coal-hewer at Lightburn.
Margaret Findlay in Pittlochrie.
Hugh Kerr, Weaver in Paisley
John Knox, Merchant in Bogbrae.

There are 61 descriptions in the list, covering 327 of the 398 persons names, that is 82%. As was inevitable at that time, none of the 12 women in the list is given an occupation, though one or two are

described as "Mrs.", the lowest title of quality. This leaves 386 persons who could have been expected to have occupations, and of these no less than 120 were weavers, that is 31%. A full list of persons by occupation is given below, and it will be seen that no other occupation approaches the weavers in numbers. The spread of occupations is remarkable, as well as the rough character of many of them. There were 2 coaliers, 2 coal hewers, 1 hillman (also a miner), 2 masons, 6 smiths, 8 shoemakers, a soapboiler, a blacksmith, 3 wrights, and a squarewright, whatever that may have been. Even more surprising, is the relative scarcity of educated persons in the list; only 28 parsons (7%), 31 merchants (8%, second to the weavers) and less than a dozen with any pretence to gentility.

Subscription lists are fairly common in classical or topographical books - or in dictionaries like that of Samuel Johnson - but the others I have seen are uninformative about the persons mentioned. They seem quite obviously to be clergy and the gentry of the kind usually reckoned to be likely bookowners. This subscription list of 1757 must therefore be regarded as something of a novelty, if only in the exactness of its description of persons.

It is noticeable that a careful distinction is made, for example, between a tradesman who was reckoned to have some claim to gentility ("Mr. Hay", the Dyer above) and an ordinary one with no right to a prefix. It may well be that this volume is quite exceptional in all these respects. No other copy has been traced since this one turned up at David's, the well known Cambridge antiquarian Bookshop, on 16th September, 1969. But it transpires that the document itself contains the evidence for the existence of another book published under precisely similar circumstances by the same Mr. James Tweedie, Master of Arts, from "his house at the foot of the Grammar School Wynd" in Glasgow.

There is an Advertisement on the back of the title page of 1757 which reads thus, in part:

The Publisher of this book has published proposals for printing by subscription a neat and correct edition of WATSON'S Body of Divinity Which will be published on a larger and finer paper. The price to subscribers will be only six shillings sterling; one shilling to be paid at subscribing, and the remainder at the delivery of the book, neatly bound and lettered on the back.

A copy of Thomas Watson, A Body of Practical Divinity, the Fifth

Edition, Glasgow 1759 does exist in the British Museum (press number 3557 f 16), and it is likewise, at the present time, the only one known to survive. The Rev. Tweedie's name appears as publisher, and this time his address is given too, though the printer is John Hall. The new subscription list is much longer, for it contains 606 names, and of these only 35 are given without indication of occupation, apart from the 11 women. There is some loss in fineness of social distinction; there are very few craftsmen called "Mr." here.

Apart from its greater completeness and length, there is one slight difference between this second list and the first. Shoemakers, so often thought to have been the best read and the most independent in outlook of the craftsmen of earlier times, are outnumbered by merchants in the first list, and equalled by gardeners and tailors. But in the second they move into second place in that group of occupations. But they are a very bad second indeed to the weavers. Little can be learnt from either list about the relative position of crafts as to book buying. It is a noteworthy fact that only ten or a dozen people appear in both lists, which means that between them these two books contain some 850 names of men of known occupation living in the Glasgow region, and elsewhere in Lowland Scotland in the later 1750's, everyone of whom was certainly a bookbuyer.

These two documents now make up the whole content of this fresh source of evidence on book-ownership in the 18th century. It is very much to be hoped that volumes other than Mr. Tweedie's can be located through the good offices of those who read this journal. But care must be taken not to exaggerate the usefulness of information of this kind. It cannot be used to tell us what proportion of land workers and craftsmen in the area reached by Mr. Tweedie's operations were book-owning at the time, nor can it tell us how many weavers, for example, belonged to this category. All that it does demonstrate with certainty is that miners, wrights, blacksmiths and weavers did acquire books at that time, quite expensive books, and went to some trouble to get hold of them. As far as I know this is all new information.

There are no less than 242 weavers in the second list, and when reckoned in the same way as above they make up 41% of the total subscribers. It is nevertheless possible that book-owning weavers formed only a small minority indeed of all those carrying on the trade in the Glasgow area, for these may have been in total tens of thousands of men. It does seem likely from this evidence that weaving was far and away the commonest occupation of the area at the

time, and this may be no surprise to the economic historian of Scotland. But even this inference is insecure, for it leaves out the possibility that being a weaver particularly disposed working men towards fuller literacy. We can at least be sure that weavers living in Lowland Scotland in the sixth decade of the 18th century could be persuaded in large numbers to acquire books containing reprints of 17th century English Calvinist divines, provided always that they were within reach of some such proseletysing entrepreneur as the Rev. James Tweedie.

There is a hint here at an even more difficult issue, which is that some of the subscribers, and especially the more ignorant, may have bought their books not to read, because perhaps after all they could not read, or read with any ease, but as possessions to be proud of and show off, or even to venerate for religious reasons. We all know that there are sets of the works of Charles Dickens, or of Shakespeare, which occupy very similar positions in the glass-fronted bookcases of innumerable households in both Scotland and England at the present day.

But even when this is recognised, and surely it cannot modify to any great degree the inference that most of the men on these two subscription lists must in fact be counted as fully literate, it raises the presumption that this particular habit had already appeared, which is itself something of a discovery. In order to gain prestige in your own eyes or in those of your neighbours by being able to show off your books, it must first be true that books are prestigious objects. Now this certainly does not seem to be so for the men who made the inventories post mortem in England in the previous century. There is some sort of confirmation that a mechanism of this kind was at work in the fact that Tweedie's Advertisement for his Watson mentions that "A few copies will be thrown off on a finer paper at eight shillings each". Most of the fine copies of Watson indicated as such in the subscription list seem to have been bought by weavers.

So far, we have had to confine our discussion to Scotland, and the most urgent need is to find a source of this kind which is English. It is a well-known fact that Scottish elementary education was already very much in advance of that of England by the 1750's, and there may be those who would say that this is precisely what should be expected of Scottish weavers, shoemakers, barbers, miners and even land labourers, of whom there is one in the second list. Nevertheless there are subscribers named by Mr. Tweedie from England and, especially for the first publication, from Lancashire, where no doubt the memory of Isaac Ambrose was still warm amongst the nonconformists in the 1750's. Manchester appears in the second list as well.

Perhaps we may hope to find similar publications from the sects of Northern England, rather than from the South. Some of the facts cited in this brief discussion of this new source could be used to show that the descriptions contained in these volumes were self-descriptions rather than appraisals by such outsiders as visiting Ministers and travelling pedlars. This is an important point for the student of social structure and of literacy, but it is one we can pursue no further here. Along with the light which these publications throw on the process of publication by subscription itself, which clearly bears upon the question of who could and did read and own books, these matters must be left for more detailed discussion elsewhere.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number of Subscribers</u>	
	<u>1757 List</u>	<u>1759 List</u>
Minister of the Gospel	24	
Minister		7
Preacher of the Gospel	4	4
Schoolmaster	8	3
Schoolmaster and Merchant		1
Teacher	1	
Writing Master		1
Writer		1
Justice of the Peace		1
Advocate	1	
Baillie	2	1
Clerk	1	
Officer of Excise	6	
Collector of Excise	1	
Factor	2	
Overseer	1	
Student at Divinity	7	
Servant to the Univ. Glasgow		1
Operator to the Chymistry Class Univ. Glasgow		1
Reader	1	
Bookseller	1	1
Bookbinder	2	1
Printer	3	3
Merchant	31	19
Merchant and Overseer	1	
Merchant Weaver		2
Chapman		1
Travelling Chapman		8
Farmer	24	41

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number of Subscribers</u>	
	<u>1757 List</u>	<u>1759 List</u>
Gardener	8	2
Deacon of the Gardeners in Glas.		1
Portioner	2	3
Tenant		1
Land Labourer		1
Maltman	11	7
Maltman and Distiller	1	
Brewer	1	3
Vintner	1	
Mealman	1	
Miller	1	3
Baker	1	5
Flesher		2
Soapboiler	1	1
Coalier	2	
Collier		1
Coalgrive		1
Coalheaver	2	
Hillman	1	
Tanner	1	
Shoemaker	8	34
Cordener		1
Currier		1
Weaver	120	242
Weavers, present Deacon of N. Quarter Journeymen, Glasgow		1
Weavers, Deacon of Red Club, Glasgow		1
Jurniman Weavers, Late Collector		1
Journiman Weavers, Deacon of		1
Inkleweaver		2
Foreman to the Inkle Factory Glas.		1
Woolcomber	1	1
Bleacher	2	1
Dyer	1	1
Flaxdresser		2
Treed Twiner		1
Linen Manufacturer	1	
Stocking Maker	1	4
Taylor	8	23
Hatter (Hatmaker)	5	3
Combmaker		1

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number of Subscribers</u>	
	<u>1757 List</u>	<u>1759 List</u>
Cooper	3	6
Glazier		1
Mason	3	2
Smith	6	14
Blacksmith	1	
Hammerman	2	2
Present Deacon of the Hammermen		1
Wright	3	17
Late Deacon of the Wrights		1
Squarewright	1	
Turner		1
Slater		6
Ropemaker		3
Watchmaker	1	
Upholsterer	1	
Tobacospinner	1	
Fitter		1
Dytter (?)		1
Innkeeper	4	9
Barber	1	10
Cook		1
Sailor		4
Servant	3	5
Carrier	1	
Workman		1
Customer	1	
Indweller - men	1	23
Indweller - women	2	3
<u>No Occupation</u>		
Esq.	2	
Mr. (M.A.)		1
Mr.	5	
Males	66	35
Females	12	8
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TOTAL	398	606
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Note: on List of Occupations

No comment is offered here on these occupational names, some of which like inkleweaver and coalgrive are new to the Cambridge Group, though doubtless well known to Scottish social historians, and those of Northern England. One of them (Dytter) is unintelligible to us and may be a misprint. Some of the descriptions, such as Present Deacon of the North Quarter Journeymen in Glasgow, or Deacon of the Red Club in Glasgow, both men being weavers, have an obvious interest for the development of friendly societies or even trade union organisations.

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Peter Laslett

BAPTISM/MARRIAGE RATIOS IN
LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

Baptism/marriage ratios are sometimes used as a rough measure of fertility in a parish or group of parishes. They may be calculated either in a straightforward manner by relating, say, the number of baptisms 1680-9 to the number of marriages in the same period, or the periods chosen may be staggered to reflect the fact that marriages in any one year contribute to baptism totals over a period of years (e.g. baptisms of 1685-94 and marriages 1680-89). In general the value to be expected for the ratio lies between 3 and 5, but in particular parishes, because of special local circumstances, the value may be well outside this range (e.g. because the church was unusually popular and attracted couples to marry there though neither partner lived in the parish). Even where there is no reason to suspect distorting circumstances of a special kind, the ratio is to be used with the greatest caution, since it may be affected by such things as