

## **FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD IN A NINETEENTH CENTURY DEVON VILLAGE**

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The primary source of data about individuals and communities in the nineteenth century are the Census Enumerators' Books. They are, however, subject to limitations which can only be overcome by reference to additional sources. First, in common with all structured data collection methods, the census relies upon categorisation to achieve simplicity and limit ambiguity. This can only succeed where the categorisations used correspond with those understood by the persons filling in the forms. An example of this is the use of the terms 'boarder', 'lodger' or 'visitor', or in the specification of relationships to the head of the household. A second problem which arises from the use of census data without any supplementation is that they portray the household at a single moment in time. Where there is much temporary absence this can present a misleading picture of the nature of households. We hope to demonstrate the relevance of these points by presenting a case study of the village of Appledore in North Devon, based on a sample of 410 households out of a total of 463 enumerated in 1851, and of 488 households out of the 568 enumerated in 1871. Information obtained from the census was amplified by a study of the parish registers, more particularly as to relationships between household members.

Appledore is situated at the confluence of the Taw and Torridge estuaries. In the nineteenth century building or sailing ships provided practically the whole village with employment, and certainly half of all heads of households. Men working in sailing ships obviously could not avoid prolonged periods of absence from Appledore while they were at sea. To a lesser extent shipwrights were also periodically absent. Ship carpenters from Appledore sailed out to Prince Edward Island in the St Lawrence estuary early in the year, where they took advantage of plentiful supplies of timber to build small vessels on the beach. Before the St Lawrence froze up these would be jerry-rigged and sailed back across the North Atlantic to be fitted out in one of Appledore's dry docks.<sup>1</sup>

In 1871 10.8 per cent of the population of Appledore was resident in households with relatives other than their spouses and unmarried children, and 29.7 per cent of households contained such relatives.<sup>2</sup> That this co-residence was a response to problems confronting these people or the

**Table 1. Types of co-resident kin outside nuclear family by marital status of household head.**

	Unmarried	Married, both spouses present	Married husband Absent	widowed	N	Total %
<b>Appledore 1851</b>						
Father	—	3	—	2	5	4.3
Mother	1	6	5	3	15	13.0
Brother	2	1	—	—	3	2.6
Sister	6	—	4	4	14	12.0
Nephew	3	3	1	1	8	6.9
Niece	1	3	4	13	21	18.3
Son-in-law	—	1	—	—	1	0.9
Daughter-in-law	—	1	—	1	2	1.7
Grandchild	—	13	—	22	35	30.4
Other kin	—	3	6	2	11	9.6
					<hr/>	<hr/>
					115	99.7
Married daughters without husbands		8		6	14	
<b>Appledore 1871</b>						
Father	1	5	5	1	12	5.6
Mother	—	12	4	6	22	10.2
Brother	2	1	—	2	5	2.3
Sister	7	—	2	5	14	6.5
Nephew	3	—	3	7	13	6.0
Niece	3	5	2	6	16	7.4
Son-in-law	—	2	—	2	4	1.9
Daughter-in-law	—	5	2	7	14	6.5
Grandchild	2	47	1	41	91	42.3
Other kin	3	7	5	9	24	11.2
					<hr/>	<hr/>
					215	99.9
Married daughters without husbands		5		5	10	
<b>Preston 1851</b>						
Father					17	3.3
Mother					29	5.7
Brother					97	18.9
Sister						
Nephew					99	19.3
Niece						
Son-in-law					120	23.4
Daughter-in-law						
Grandchild					138	27.0
Other kin					13	2.6
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					513	100.2

Sources: Preston 1851 from M. Anderson, *Family structure in nineteenth century Lancashire*, 1971, table 9, p. 45.

families they were living with, can be shown by a more detailed analysis of the relationships between them. It seems people were living together in extended and multiple family households not because this was the ideal household structure which they sought, but because by living together they could mutually overcome the problems which faced all families and individuals. The ways in which they combined reflected the different problems which faced them.

In Table 1 the presence of various types of relative is considered according to marital status of the household head and the household position of all widowed persons is considered in Table 2.

**Table 2. Household situation of widowed people: Appledore and English parishes**

	Appledore 1851		Appledore 1871		61 places in England before 1821							
	Widowers N	Widows %	Widowers N	Widows %	Widowers N	Widows %	Widowers N	Widows %				
Heading households containing:												
Unmarried offspring	4	24	43	44	12	44	52	48	120	57	243	47
Married or widowed son	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	9	4	7	1
Married or widowed daughter	2	12	6	6	0	0	5	5	5	2	5	1
No offspring	0	0	8	8	0	0	3	3	24	11	50	10
Subtotal	6	36	58	59	12	44	62	58	158	74	305	61
In households containing:												
Son or daughter	7	48	15	15	10	39	18	17	12	6	48	10
Son or daughter-in-law	1	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	17	3
Other kin	0	0	3	3	1	4	2	2	9	4	19	4
Other persons	1	7	7	7	1	4	6	6	18	9	41	8
Solitary	2	14	14	14	3	11	18	17	12	6	65	13
Institutions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1
Grand total	17	100	98	99	27	100	106	100	211	100	501	100

Sources: 61 places in England before 1821, P. Laslett, **Family life and illicit love in earlier generations**, 1977, table 5.9

First, it is clear that not all widowed people remained heads of their own households. Secondly, where they could not they normally lived as subordinate members of their children's households, where they could also be child minders. However, the difference between widowed people living in households headed by their children and the widowed heading households containing their married children is one of definition, not of function. In both cases domestic and child-minding duties could be shared. The efficacy of kin-links and their primacy over other types of social interaction for widowed people can be seen from Table 2. In both 1851 and 1871 79 per cent of widowed people were resident with kin, including those in households headed by married offspring; of those who were not living with kin two-thirds were living alone. Most of the 21 per cent of those who were not living with kin probably had no surviving kin with whom they could live.

There is a structural similarity between unmarried and widowed household heads. Both were without a partner of their own generation within the household and were generally old. The probability of widowhood increased with age and young unmarried people were unlikely to be heads of households for economic reasons. Old age was not normally expected to be attained, and the position of old people was anomalous. Although theoretically they held great social power by virtue of their experience, their effective power in the simple matters of looking after themselves was limited. They normally had to combine with other people to form a household, but the people with whom they combined differed. By definition unmarried people had fewer kinds of relatives with whom they could combine, and most formed households with siblings. Widowed people too combined with siblings, but they also had a larger number and wider variety of other kin whose households they could join. Table 2 also shows that the proportion of widows heading such households was much higher than the proportion of widowers. One possible interpretation is that men, in the absence of their spouses, were much less capable of managing a household than women, who were domestic managers, and who could also obtain domestic employment which allowed them to supplement their income without leaving home. Of those widowed people who did head their own households most lived with their children, both married and unmarried. This was the simplest combination. However, a very large number of widowed persons had their grand-children, nephews and nieces living with them. Unmarried nephews and nieces could contribute much the same economic and domestic help that children could, but grand-children, many of whom were very young, could not. What these households represent is a more extensive use of the traditional practice of grand-parents caring for young children while their parents worked. It was common for young wives to accompany their husbands on vessels employed in trade in the Bristol Channel. This prolonged 'baby sitting' could last for months if the parents were at sea, and was most easily operated by taking the children into the household as residents.

Households where the head was absent were effectively in a state of widowhood, which in most cases was only temporary, and was probably perceived to be so. This suggests that, although the functions of co-residents were the same in these households as in the household where the head was single, the perspective differed. Some types of kin were only resident in denuded households, that is, those in which one spouse was absent, through death or employment. This applies especially to young unmarried women, whose contribution to domestic management needs no elaboration. Their absence in complete households suggests that they were temporary residents, moving in only when the head was at sea, (see Table 1). Another example of temporary residence is found in the category of married daughters resident with their parents, together with their children but not with their husbands. Although it was not uncommon for newly wed couples to reside with the brides' parents in the first years of marriage, these women, with children, were obviously not newly wed.<sup>3</sup>

These households were not true multiple family households, but another

type of temporary solution to the difficulties raised by the absence of the husband at sea. Instead of grand-parents moving into the denuded household, the children moved to their grand-parents to function as a household. That co-residence was only temporary is supported by the fact that only a relatively small number of fully nuclear families were co-resident with parents. The data cannot provide conclusive evidence of this interpretation, but there are two arguments which strongly support it. The first is the value of the strategy noted above. The second is the evidence that inhabitants of Appledore were not averse to leaving their normal residences. Mariners, when at sea, obviously always had to do so, and their wives also when they accompanied their husbands. Further evidence bearing on this comes from the fact that there were a large number of empty houses recorded in the census books, forty in 1851, fifty in 1871, about one tenth of all the houses in the sample. Because of the nature of the recording not all can be accurately located. It is perhaps significant that of the thirty eight which can be located for 1871, a half were in the three streets which had a proportion of mariners to all employed persons which exceeded the mean for the whole village by more than one standard deviation.

In 1851 there were 135 and in 1871 ninety six people resident in households within which they had no kin relationships.<sup>4</sup> Some of these were lodgers and domestic servants as normally understood. However, as I hope to show by identifying the relationships between these non-kin residents and the households in which they resided, many of them were performing the same functions as the co-resident kin discussed above.

This is not surprising. Not all people who needed aid may have had surviving kin who were able to give assistance. One may assume that the abilities and the requirements of individuals are related to their social position as defined by their sex and the stage in their life cycle. On this basis a typology was created which could be used to sort these resident non-kin from the information given about them in the censuses.

The first category comprised children below the age of fifteen years, of both sexes. There were thirty two of these in 1851 and ten in 1871, all recorded as 'scholars'. Of these thirteen in 1851 and only one in 1871 are known to have had relatives in Appledore.<sup>5</sup> It seems likely that these children were taking advantage of Appledore's very good charity schools. Several were actually living with schoolteachers, and most came from other villages round the estuary, which suggests that they may have been children of sea-faring parents.

The second category is of unmarried women aged between fifteen and thirty years. There were sixty one of these in 1851 and fifty in 1871, nearly all recorded as 'domestic servants'. This is a complex category, and the role of individuals within it can only be understood in the context of the households in which they resided. Women whose occupation was given as 'domestic servant' were not necessarily financially rewarded. Within their own families daughters were frequently so recorded. Domestic servants in the understood sense resided in the various houses for an extended

period and received wages. Most of these will be found in households headed by members of socio-economic groups 1 and 2, (professional and white collar occupations). These households, although they did not comprise more than one quarter of all households, included more than 60 per cent of domestic servants both in 1851 and 1871.

In other cases, however, the relationship would seem not to have been so simple. Many domestic servants were recorded in households which would have had great difficulty in paying for their services. In many of these it is possible to identify special reasons why the household would have benefitted from additional help. Examples are, the infirmity through disease or old age of the household head,<sup>6</sup> or the presence of a child less than a year old. In many cases the family of origin of the young woman servant was found to have been resident in the same street, which suggests that these young women may have been acting out of affective rather than out of pecuniary interest. These young women were acting as kin for households who did not have kin, and many of them were possibly only temporary residents. In 1851 seven were present in households with children under a year old, in five of which the male head of the household was absent.

The next category consists of unmarried or widowed women over the age of thirty: nine in 1851 and ten in 1871. Some were older women who, either had never married, or were widowed before they had children and were forced to return to domestic service to support themselves. Others were probably only temporary residents in a particular household, giving their occupations as 'nurse' or 'midwife'. The distinction between permanent and temporary residents does not correspond with that between paid and unpaid servants. Midwives were temporary residents and were paid, as were dressmakers, of whom there were four in 1851 and two in 1871.

The fourth category includes all people, of both sexes, over the age of sixty five; there were eight in 1851 and sixteen in 1871. All were unmarried or widowed, with the exception of one couple who were living together. These persons were in the same position as co-resident grandparents, but were living with people who were not their kin, presumably because they had none with whom they could reside. In return for their keep they probably offered child minding services and in some cases payment out of income from annuities.

The final category is of men in employment over the age of fifteen, of which there are remarkably few, only sixteen in 1851 and seventeen in 1871. This seems surprising at first, in view of the transient nature of maritime employment. However, although Appledore was quite an important port, most of its shipping needs were provided by indigenous enterprise, vessels sailed by Appledore men who had families with whom they could stay. There was also a tendency for mariners to sleep on their vessels when moored in a 'foreign' port. Of those men who were resident with non-kin it is possible to identify two types. The first of these, five men in 1851 and two in 1871, had occupations related to that of the head of the household in which they were resident; they were presumably assistants

or apprentices. The second type is made up of lodgers in the strict sense, and includes two itinerant musicians from London who were mostly resident in public houses and lodging houses.

Although this study is necessarily limited in its scope, it demonstrates in the specific context of a Devon fishing village how evidence on household composition may be used to infer how relatives and non-relatives combined in households, and may have helped each other over the difficulties which they encountered in the course of their lives. It also shows to what extent the roles of individuals within the household can be identified, simply from information on the age, sex and marital status of its members. Such an analysis must be the foundation for any research into the life of people in historical communities.

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### NOTES

1. The full story of this remarkable enterprise can be found in B. Greenhill and A. Giffard, *Westcountrymen in Prince Edward's Isle*, 1967.
2. The equivalent figures for 1851, 6.9 per cent and 23.4 per cent are lower. However, this difference is accounted for by the larger number of kinship relationships unspecified in the census which can be reconstructed from the vital registers in the 1871 sample. Very few such relationships can be reconstructed from the eight years of vital records which precede the 1851 sample.
3. In an analysis of the residence patterns of married couples from the census it was found that of 28 couples married less than two years who could be traced, twelve were living in the households of the brides' parents. Of these, five 'couples' actually comprised only the wife without her husband. Analysis of couples married between five and seven years showed that of thirty one which could be traced, only three were living with the brides' parents, and all of these 'couples' were women without their husbands. These results strongly suggest that true multiple families were the consequence of the inability of newly married couples to set up their own households.
4. The difference in the proportions of the total population is a consequence of the number of persons who can be identified as kin in 1871, and who have therefore been assigned to the category of resident kin (see above, note 2).
5. This conclusion is based on a reconstruction of the kin linkages between households in Appledore in 1851 and 1871, using information on relationships derived from references to the same families in the parish registers. Of the thirteen children in 1851 with kin in Appledore, twelve were actually living with these kin. They were all living with their mothers, in five families, without their fathers, in households headed by other women with their children absent. Because of clarifying instructions issued by the Director General of the Census such cases were classified as separate households in later censuses. The one case in 1871 of a child with relatives in Appledore living with non-kin is of a two year old girl living in the household of a medical practitioner, presumably under treatment.
6. Cases of illness were based on the last column in the census (relating to disability, mental or physical) and to manuscript notes added to the census schedules by the local Registrar, also the village medical practitioner.