

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

OCCUPATIONAL DIVERSITY IN SEVEN RURAL PARISHES IN DORSET, 1851

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'Rural' was not always a synonym for 'agricultural', since many rural areas contained small industries whose workers significantly modified the agricultural mass of population. The seven rural parishes forming the subject of this research note exhibit such a diverse economic base. The study parishes can be split into two groups: three in the Isle of Purbeck in south-east Dorset; and four in the Vale of Blackmore in the north of the county. The work reported here is part of an exploratory phase in which the basic 'facts' of occupational and demographic structure are being identified for later study in greater depth.

The Vale extends for about 20 miles across north Dorset, and in the mid-nineteenth century was about two-thirds pastoral and one-third arable. Beef and dairy husbandry predominated, although few farms were wholly under grass. They were generally small and commonly held on lifeholds (leases granted for one or more lifetimes), although this form of tenure was in decline as expired lifeholds were increasingly being replaced with leases for a fixed term of years.¹

In contrast the Isle of Purbeck is strictly a peninsula, but as its landward end is delimited by watercourses, the effect is almost that of an island. Sheep rearing with some dairying was the main form of husbandry, with some arable in addition.²

Table 1 indicates that the seven parishes were of substantial acreage and contained populations large enough to sustain a relatively wide range of service occupations. They all shared in the general population growth of the first half of the nineteenth century, but to differing degrees. Only Worth Matravers (82.5 per cent) and Stourton Caundle (62.5 per cent) bettered the county's growth figure of 61.1 per cent between 1801 and 1851. By contrast, in the period 1851-1901 only Langton Matravers (8.5 per cent) displayed any population growth at all. The other six parishes all lost population over this period, whilst Dorset as a whole showed a 10 per cent increase. Decline was twice as pronounced in the Blackmore parishes (14.1 per cent) as in the Purbeck parishes (7.6 per cent) where the dependence on agriculture was less intense. Also there was a distinct tendency for smaller parishes to lose population at faster rates than their larger neighbours. Further work may reveal reasons for these apparent relationships.

Data from the census enumerators' books for the seven parishes in 1851 (hereafter CEBs) were processed via the rural suite of the Mills computer

Table 1 Summary table of population and acreage for seven Dorset parishes

	Area acres	Population		
		1801	1851	1901
Purbeck parishes				
Studland	4633	332	445	427
Worth Matravers	2712	217	396	227
Langton Matravers	2316	510	762	827
Blackmore parishes				
Hinton St Mary	1069	266	345	245
Stourton Caundle	2004	277	450	234
Okeford Fitzpaine	2663	476	643	600
Childe Okeford	2353(601)	509(11)	778(5)	772(56)
Totals	17750	2587	3819	3332

Source: VCH Dorset II, Population Table, 264-73. The figures in brackets are those for Hanford extra-parochial area, which was enumerated with Childe Okeford and is included in the parish total.

program.³ This classifies occupations according to a modification of Tillott's scheme, in which it is possible to keep track of special occupations of a locality, by separating them from the usual agricultural and service occupations. The latter have been further summarised for the purposes of this note, so that all those of whatever status (master, journeyman, etc) who followed the usual trade and craft occupations are presented together. (It might be noted that all masters are not identifiable in the CEBs and in the more detailed work to follow the distinction between masters and journeymen will depend partly on cross reference to contemporary directories where it may be thought that all significant masters will have been listed).

There were, of course, some problems of classification, the most interesting being the case of the dairymen. This stemmed from the unusual system of dairying practised in Dorset, where few farmers milked their own cows, instead renting them out to 'dairymen'. A farmer usually provided a specified number of cows at an agreed price, for one year from each Candlemas (2 February). With the cows he provided pasture, winter fodder, a house for the dairyman, and allowed him to keep as many pigs and poultry as he wished. The agreement could be terminated by notice before All Saints' Day (1 November).⁴ These dairymen could not be counted as farmers; nor, being independent workers, could they be classified as farm employees. Therefore, despite reservations, they were included with the trades/craftsmen.

The occupied population of the seven parishes, which in all cases includes females, comprised 41.7 per cent of the total. The Purbeck parishes averaged 38.7 per cent, but in the Blackmore parishes the comparable figures was 43.9, owing mainly to the presence of a large number of females employed in gloving. Domestic industries generally appear to have raised activity rates, in particular among females. Thus in the Purbeck parishes only 16 per cent of those occupied were female, but in Blackmore the figure was nearly twice as much at 28 per cent. Overall, females made up 23 per cent of the working

Table 2 Proportions in the farm workforce, seven Dorset parishes, 1851

Parish/area	No. of persons working full time on the land (of which females)	% of occupied popn working full time on the land (of which females %)	Farmers and farmworkers per 1,000 acres	Number of dairymen
Purbeck parishes	234 (16)	38.2 (6.8)	24.2	5
Studland	88 (5)	55.1 (5.7)	19.0	0
Worth Matravers	65 (6)	45.5 (9.2)	24.0	2
Langton Matravers	81 (5)	26.2 (6.2)	35.0	3
Blackmore parishes	470 (63)	49.0 (13.4)	58.1	5
Hinton St Mary	87 (12)	54.4 (13.8)	81.4	0
Stourton Caundle	99 (12)	48.1 (12.1)	49.4	1
Okeford Fitzpaine	140 (22)	52.6 (15.7)	52.6	1
Childe Okeford	144 (17)	43.9 (11.8)	61.2	3
Both areas	704 (79)	44.8 (11.2)	39.7	10

Source: Database extracted from census enumerators' books, 1851; PRO, HO 107/1852 for the Blackmore parishes and PRO, HO 107/1856 for the Purbeck parishes.

population of the seven parishes.⁵

In common with most rural areas there was a preponderance of males in the seven parishes, but at 50.2 per cent it was only just discernible. It varied only slightly between parishes, which is surprising in view of the wide variations in female employment, another point demanding investigation at a later stage.

Some 45 per cent of the occupied population were working on the land (Table 2), compared with 52 per cent in a 'national' rural database and only 20.9 per cent in England and Wales as a whole. Females accounted for a little over one-tenth of the agricultural workforce in the seven parishes, compared with 11.9 per cent in Britain.⁶ Farming was clearly more important in the Vale of Blackmore, with 49 per cent working on the land, against 38 per cent in Purbeck. The structure of the farming population also varied between the two areas and individual parishes. In the Blackmore parishes there was an average of 58.1 farmers and farmworkers per 1,000 acres, but only 24.2 in the Purbeck parishes.⁷

The much wider variations between individual parishes may be partly the result of labourers living in one parish and working in another, but the differences between the two areas might be related to broader structural factors in the types of husbandry followed, as well as competition for labour from alternative occupations. (The ten dairymen classified as non-agricultural were not a big enough number to have influenced these broad observations. Another problem is the apparent disparity between the small numbers observed in the CEBs and the prominent place dairymen are given in Dorset literature⁸).

Differences in the proportional size of the farm workforce are, of course, the obverse of those in the non-agricultural population, to which attention is now turned (Table 3). Trades and crafts were a vital part of the rural economy, and in these seven parishes those so occupied, 18 per cent of whom were female,

Table 3 Summary of occupational categories in seven Dorset parishes compared with a 'national' rural database, 1851 (percentages)

Occupational category, (of which % female)	Seven Dorset parishes	Isle of Purbeck	Vale of Blackmore	'National' rural database
Farmers	5.2 (9.9)	3.4 (0.0)	6.4 (13.3)	5.6 (5.4)
Farmworkers	39.6 (11.4)	34.8 (7.5)	42.7 (13.4)	46.6 (3.1)
Trades/craftsmen	20.7 (18.2)	12.8 (21.8)	25.8 (17.0)	18.6 (15.7)
Servants	8.7 (74.5)	9.3 (78.9)	8.3 (71.3)	14.1 (78.8)
Special occupations*	18.9 (24.6)	34.2 (0.0)	9.2 (83.0)	8.8 (57.8)
Others	7.0 (46.8)	5.6 (52.9)	7.8 (44.0)	6.5 (38.5)
Total	100.1(23.2)	100.1(15.7)	100.2(27.9)	100.2(23.3)

Notes: * These figures include all occupations related to the sea except RN officers, namely coastguards, fishermen, and boatmen.

Source: Database extracted from census enumerators' books as for Table 2; and right hand column ex info, Dennis Mills, as in footnote 5.

constituted about one fifth of the persons in employment. The range of variation between parishes, however, from 7.5 to 29 per cent, was wide. There was also a clear difference between the two areas, with the Blackmore parishes at 26 per cent showing proportions twice as big as the Isle of Purbeck.

The larger figure in the Vale is probably due, in part at least, to a shortage of agricultural work relative to population, so that men and women turned to crafts and trades instead. Barbara Kerr has commented on the enormous increase in carpenters in Dorset villages because there was a shortage of work on the land and because out-migration did not start in earnest until after 1851.⁹ The CEBs also tend to support this view. Many trades/craftsmen were enumerated as 'employing no men'. The frequency of this description suggests that many of these men had turned to trades and crafts due to a shortage of agricultural work and were relatively poor 'one-man bands'. (However, the relationship between agricultural and non-agricultural employment was very complicated and demands much further attention).

Other, more local, factors were also acting on the figures, especially in Blackmore parishes. In Stourton Caundle there were nine 'plasterers' who appear to have been engaged in building work of some kind, perhaps the construction of the traditional mud and cob cottages. At Childe Okeford there were 11 men working for a brick, tile and pottery manufacturer, a substantial enterprise for a village of its size.

The trades/craftsmen group in the Purbeck parishes seems to reflect more closely the level of provision realistically required to serve the local economy, as they constituted only 13 per cent of the employed population here, compared with 26 per cent in the Vale. Studland was basically an agricultural parish with no industry, having only 7.5 per cent in this category, whereas in Langton Matravers the figure was 16 per cent, partly because of the demand for tools and other equipment for workers in the Purbeck stone industry.

Overall, at about 9 per cent, domestic service, including both males and females, was not a great employer of labour.¹⁰ The comparable figure ranged from 2 per cent at Hinton St Mary to 14 per cent at Childe Okeford. The former parish was a wholly-owned part of the much larger Pitt-Rivers estate, where the main residence with many servants was in a different parish. The higher proportions of servants at Childe Okeford is largely due to the number of gardeners and other workers at Hanford House. One further point is that although servant-keeping was often significant among master trades/craftsmen, this was not so in the Vale, thus lending support to the view that they were relatively poor.

At Hinton St Mary and Stourton Caundle over half (56 per cent) of all females employed, amounting to 18 per cent of the occupied population, were involved in gloving. Undertaken as a cottage industry, gloving was an entirely female occupation, employing teenage girls, single women or widows (and occasionally married women), for two to six shillings per week. It appears that the glovers of the study parishes were sewing together unfinished gloves, probably sent out from Milborne Port or Yeovil (Somerset) or possibly Sherborne (Dorset). Okeford Fitzpaine also had gloving as a special occupation, but the numbers were small, perhaps due to distance from the centres of the gloving trade.¹¹ (The contribution of gloving to household budgets deserves further investigation. It is possible that it was large enough to have a bearing on rates of out-migration).

At Childe Okeford there were enough sawyers to suggest that this was a local speciality which should be counted separately from the main trades/crafts category. They made up 4.6 per cent of the employed population and were engaged mainly in coppicing for hurdle-making, although some oak was cut in the area. There is some evidence to suggest that such work occupied only nine months of the year, the other three months of the year being spent hoeing turnips, although this was not noted in the CEBs.¹² In general, there was a propensity for secondary occupations to be under-recorded. Among those self-employed, cross reference to directories has revealed a number of secondary occupations unrecorded by these men on their census schedules.

In Purbeck, stoneworking, the special occupation of the Isle, accounted for 26.5 per cent of the employed population, although this figure varied widely between the three parishes, with no one assigned to this category in Studland. The description 'stoneworker' encompasses both quarriers and masons engaged in working Purbeck stone, the latter being by far the most numerous. Although the Purbeck stone industry was centred on the neighbouring town of Swanage, many of the quarries were in Langton Matravers, where stoneworkers made up 42 per cent of the occupied population. At Worth Matravers, where there were only masons, the figure was 22 per cent.

The quarries in Purbeck were not quarries in the usual sense of open pits. The best stone lay very deep and the method of working was to sink an inclined shaft up to 100 feet or more in depth and then tunnel among the seams of stone. These 'stone mines' were worked 'by one, two or three men underground, who are in many cases the owners as well as the occupiers. Their

work is often most irregular; if the men can find work as stonemasons they abandon their quarries for a time, and do not return to them till other work is slack'.¹³ The quarriers worked for stone merchants based in Swanage. Children were commonly employed as both masons and quarriers, probably within family units. It is noticeable that although many quarriers were owner-occupiers, and therefore presumably self-employed, there is no hint of this either in the CEBs or the directories.

Stone has been quarried commercially in Purbeck since the twelfth century. In 1851 the main product was stone for paving, roofing tiles, sinks, steps and so on, much of it destined for London. Large construction projects also boosted demand, for example, the Thames Embankment, where most of the stone used between 1840 and 1890 came from Purbeck quarries.¹⁴

Another occupational category in the Isle of Purbeck comprised all those who were connected with the sea. Excluding Royal Naval officers, it accounted for about 19 per cent of the occupied population in Studland and 12 per cent in Worth Matravers. Most of the men in this group were coastguards, there being one station at Worth Matravers and two in Studland (one on the mainland, the other on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour). Although not a conventional industry, the coastguards were a significant element, with their families, in the economies of the two parishes concerned, and provide a further illustration of how diverse a rural economy could be. They were also all long-distance migrants, since no coastguard was allowed to serve on a station within 20 miles of his previous home or birthplace, in order to minimise collusion with smugglers.

This research note has shown that the economy of a rural area could be made up of very diverse elements. Agriculture predominated, even in Purbeck, but it did so in the context of a multi-occupational society. Small industries such as gloving or stone-quarrying imparted great richness to the life of the countryside, and should not be overlooked. In the further work to be undertaken, one issue will be the extent to which occupational differences were related to differences in demographic structure.

NOTES

1. Louis H. Ruegg, 'Farming of Dorsetshire', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 15 (1854), 417-20.
2. Ruegg, 'Farming', 394, 417, 423. Also G.E. Fussell, 'Four centuries of farming systems in Dorset, 1500-1900', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 73 (1951), 132.
3. Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), HO 107/1852, Census Enumerators' Books 1851 for Hinton St Mary, Stourton Caundle, Okeford Fitzpaine, Childe Okeford; and HO 107/1856 for Studland, Worth Matravers, Langton Matravers. I am grateful to the Home Office and the LPS Research Fund for funding for this project and to Mrs Shirley Wickham (of the Dorset County Library) and Drs Kevin Schürer and Dennis Mills for academic assistance. The program package is called Analysis of Nineteenth Century Censuses and runs on BBC-B and Acorn computers, with three alternative means of classifying occupations. See D. and J. Mills, 'Rural mobility in the Victorian censuses: experience with a micro-computer program', *Local Historian*, 18 (1988), 69-75 also, 'Occupation and social stratification revisited: the census enumerators' books of Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1989), 63-77.
4. Fussell, 'Farming systems', 128.

5. In a 'national' rural database of about 18,500 persons in 1851 the mean activity rate was 43.4 per cent, with proportions of females economically active ranging from 16 to 30 per cent, the highest being in the lacemaking districts of Buckinghamshire. The main input for this database has come from Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Buckinghamshire, Dorset, and the Cambridgeshire/Hertfordshire border. Ex info. Dennis Mills.
6. See previous note; and G. Routh, **Occupations of the people of Great Britain, 1801-1981**, (London, 1987), 4 and 10.
7. Other useful summary figures are the ratios of trades and crafts workers to agricultural workers of all kinds, but excluding dairymen from the calculation. In the Blackmore parishes the ratio was 1:2.2., only 1:3.2. in the Purbeck parishes. The larger villages had disproportionately more trades/craftsmen than the smaller ones, as was usual.
8. B. Kerr, **Bound to the soil: a social history of Dorset, 1750-1918**, (London, 1968), 132-3, and L.H. Ruegg, 'On the production of butter', **Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England**, 14 (1853), 74-5.
9. Kerr, **Bound to the soil**, 132-3.
10. Servants were defined as including identifiable estate workers, such as grooms, gardeners and gamekeepers, usually living in their own households, as well as female domestic servants, mostly residing with their employers.
11. The information on gloving appears to be very slight, but see **Victoria History of the County of Dorset**, II, (1908), 'Industries', 328-9. Wage data are from R. Rowe, **The Dorsetshire drudge in the 1860s**, reprinted by Toucan Press (nd) from **How our working people live**, (1870).
12. Ruegg, 'Farming', 414, 421.
13. **VCH Dorset**, II, 338.
14. For histories of the Purbeck stone industry see **VCH Dorset** II, 331-8; and E.O. Cockburn, **The stone quarries of Dorset**, (London, 1971).