

RESEARCH NOTE

'THE FITNESS OF THE PERSON EMPLOYED': COMMENTS IN THE SCOTTISH CENSUS ENUMERATORS' BOOKS

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The Census Enumerators' Books (CEBs) for use in Scotland in 1851 were designed slightly differently from those for use in England and Wales that year. On page ii, to the right of the table of 'Summary of Totals in the Following Pages', was a space headed 'Remarks of the Minister of the Parish'. In the English and Welsh CEBs the tabulation was centred on the page. Although there was sufficient space in either margin for comments these were not specifically encouraged. In many of the Scottish CEBs the 'Remarks' space was left blank or the Minister merely certified the summary totals to be correct. However, in a few cases the Minister took the opportunity offered to express himself. In the urban districts the 'Summary of Totals' took up more of the page than in the rural districts, leaving less space for creative expression. Therefore most of the comments tend to come from rural parishes. The following is a selection culled from photocopies of the CEBs of the parishes included in the National Sample from the 1851 Census of Great Britain.¹ These comments, together with others that might be found in the Scottish CEBs not included in the sample, give us a rare glimpse into the life of the nineteenth-century census enumerator and therefore are of great interest to local population historians. The lack of space for comment on the forms used in England and Wales does not necessarily mean that the conditions under which the enumeration took place were very different.

H. McKenzie, Minister of Moy in Inverness, wrote, 'I have examined with care this Enumerator's Book and believe that all the various entries made therein are quite correct'; so much for the confidentiality of the census process. In contrast David Sutherland, Minister of Farr in Sutherland, makes it clear that he only examined the population totals and the description of the boundaries, while R. Williamson, Minister of Knockbain in Ross, merely certified that he had 'looked over certain portions of this Book and believe it to be correctly filled up'. M.C. MacKenzie, Minister of Laswade in Midlothian, after stating that he had 'examined this Book and believe it to be correct' added as a p.s., 'I have also seen the other Books and I have no doubt they are also correct'. The CEB which

he signed covered only the village of Laswade. Presumably the other CEBs he referred to covered the outlying hamlets and farms.

Robert Henderson, Minister of Newton-on-Ayr, claimed, 'from my knowledge of the person appointed to superintend the enumeration of the parish I have no doubt that the books are accurate.' William Lamb, Minister of Carmichael in Lanark, wrote of his personal knowledge of the parish and his 'confidence in the accuracy and fidelity of the Enumerator'. Page iv bears the signatures of John French as enumerator and John Lamb Jnr as the 'person appointed by the Sheriff or Provost to superintend the enumeration of the Parish'. The enumeration identifies John French at Blinkie School House as a 'Teacher of English and Arithmetic'. Unfortunately it does not show either William or John Lamb. A similar testimonial came from J. A. Allan, Minister of Loudoun in Ayr, who wrote, 'from my own inspection, as well as Mr Campbell's well known accuracy in such matters, in the fitness of the person employed by him as Enumerator, I am satisfied that the Census is accurately taken'. Page iv bears the signatures of Andrew Campbell as the superintendent and Andrew Campbell Jn. as the enumerator.

William Meresson, Minister of Crail in Fife, is fulsome in his praise, stating, 'Having examined the 19 pages of this book, I have much pleasure in stating that I believe it to be accurately and faithfully made up'; but had he spotted the entry at the bottom of page 2 for Charlotte Henderson whose 'Rank, Profession or Occupation' is described as 'Fatuous and Bed-rid'? Robert Sandey, Minister of Tudergarth in Dumfries, noted 'there are a few orthographical slips in the following pages but they do not affect the correctness of the account of the population'. Those who have struggled with the transcription of CEBs may have noted that 'orthographical slips' are rather common. George Gillespie, Minister of Cummertrees in Dumfries, having certified that he had examined the enumeration and considered it to be accurately taken, added that 'the condition and occupations of the inhabitants are also correct'.

Adam Corbet, Minister of Drumoak in Kincardine, evidently kept his own list of parishioners for pastoral purposes. He wrote, 'I have compared the principal statistics contained in this book with my own private list and have found them substantially correct'. William Dill, Minister of Colmonell in Ayr, similarly compared the enumeration of Gilbert Rawan with his 'own parish census, and found it very accurate'. Robert Stewart, Minister of Strontian, part of the parish of Ardnamurchan in Argyle, claimed he could 'discover no inaccuracies'. David Martin, Minister of Strachen in Kincardine, was less confident of the accuracy of the enumeration. He wrote that he found 'their contents to be as correct as possible'.

L. Grant, Minister of Boyndie in Banff, in addition to being satisfied that the enumeration was correct, wrote, 'There seems to be an increase in the population of the village of Whitehills, which may be accounted for by houses being built since the date of last census, and also from every house being at present occupied'. A Cushing, Minister of Rayne in Aberdeen, wrote, 'The number of Inhabitants in this district is little different from that in 1841:- But the number of vagrants and beggars in it, lodged with the farmers, is

remarkable – being 17:- an oppressive burden on the parish’. The total number of people enumerated in this district was 330 in 59 houses.

Some ministers would have had a more arduous task than others. Donald McConnochie, Minister of Urquhart and Glenmoriston in Inverness, wrote, ‘I have examined the fifteen enumeration Books of this Parish and have every reason to believe in the accuracy of the details therein set forth’. While parishes were extensive in area they were often sparsely populated and the CEB from this parish drawn in the sample contained only 60 records. Some enumerators had more arduous tasks than others. The Minister of Contin, Wester Ross, wrote, ‘In this district a large majority of the residents being unable to fill up the Schedules, the schoolmaster found himself unable to undertake the execution of them until 1st April’. In addition to the settled inhabitants the enumerator found 20 persons ‘engaged in planting and enclosing a plantation’.

In the parish of Kirkmichael in Banff one extra male was temporarily present to attend the Sheriff’s Court. In other parishes males and some females were temporarily absent engaged in fishing. Two females and 14 males were absent from Aberdour in Aberdeen. In the parish of Kirkcolm in Wigtown John Wright, the enumerator, noted two males temporarily absent from the district and commented, ‘Two young men who went to seek births [sic] in ships but not finding them have since returned to their native place.’ In the parish of Roskeen, Ross W. Tallack, the enumerator, noted 104 males and 9 females who were temporary residents and attributed them to the ‘improvements of Land and Public Works carried out at Ardross’. However, the Superintendent, Alexander Ray, remarked that, ‘for the 4 or 5 years past during which the Ardross improvements have been going on, the number of men employed there has been much more than that’. James McFarlan, Minister of Muiravonside, Stirling, stated he had ‘reason to believe that the population of Linlithgow Bridge and of the parish eastward of the canal is nearly doubled by the number of persons employed in making the railway’. George Ritch, the enumerator, recorded 72 temporary residents (64 male and 8 female) engaged in the construction of the railway.

John Matteson, who supervised the enumeration of the parish of Kilmuir on Skye, added a comment to that of the Minister, which is difficult to decipher, but is an attempt to explain the use of the term ‘agricultural labourer’. They were cottars holding no land as tenants but getting occasional employment from the little arable land to produce crops for their neighbours. He also wrote that the number of arable acres that farmers held had been inserted in the CEB but that the number of acres of pasture land could not be accurately ascertained.

James Gardiner, Minister of Rathven in Banff, wrote, ‘The population is chiefly composed of wealthy farmers and small crofters, active and persevering, and well educated, and regular in their attendance on divine ordinances. The whole district is a short distance from the parish church, and accommodates an excellent school and a zealous and able teacher’. On page 21 of the CEB the parish schoolmaster appears as John Russell, aged 23, with his elder sister and two younger brothers.

Neilston in Renfrew was a densely populated area. The Minister wrote cautiously, 'I have examined the returns of this Book and find they are likely to be accurate. The number of inhabited houses has decreased by 8 since last Census while the population has increased by 450. The increase of population ascribed to the enlargement of former works in the neighbourhood and also to a small degree to the building of new ones. The return shows 22 inhabitants as the average of each house. Majority of the houses consist of several flats'.

Roderick McLean, Minister of South Uist wrote, 'In this District there is an increase of 50 since the year 1841. Few or none of the Inhabitants emigrated since 1841, and a family of Cottars being located among them since that period'. This was despite the enumerator's comment that the district 'contains about 532 acres of arable land, the soil is mostly arable and under cultivation. It is partly sandy, partly moss, but chiefly a mixture of both, but frequently very thin and rocky'.

John Cameron, enumerator of Morven in Argyle, sounds somewhat aggrieved by the terrain of his district. He wrote, 'The inhabitation is chiefly on the Lochaline side, but there are 4 families, two resident in the interior and 2 of them on the sea coast, so far apart as to render this, specially from the rugged character of it, one of the most difficult districts of the Parish to overtake in the time prescribed'.

Robert Fagga, enumerator of St Madoes in Perth, wrote additional comments on the page for the description and boundary of the enumeration district and on the pages of enumeration: 'Of the 71 male adults (reckoning from the age of 14) of this District, the distribution is as follows: 31 employed in purely agricultural operations; 20 as General Labourers; the Fishers being occasionally Spademen, and Weaving being only the resource of both the classes when outdoor employment cannot be had. Of the remaining 10, there are only 4 who have nothing to do with land. The District is therefore to be accounted strictly agricultural. The entire population of the parish land including Squire Men and Schoolmaster have (one or two trifling exceptions) no other recognized source of income than the production of the territory on which they live.' But what about the unrecognised sources of income? Pitfour Orchard was a croft of 9 acres occupied by 3 spinster sisters aged 46 to 58. The enumerator commented, 'This croft is entirely cultivated and managed by the Occupants – an admirable specimen of our Countrywomen. Constrained by situation to exercise masculine employments, they have always maintained in an eminent degree of delicacy and propriety becoming their sex.'

The photocopy of the CEB for part of the parish of Old Luce, Wigtown, includes attached to page v a statement signed by the JP that, 'the following enumerators appeared before me this day and produced their Enumeration Books and Household Schedules belonging to their respective districts of the parish and village of Old Luce and declared the same to be correct to the best of their knowledge'. The list includes name, residence and also occupation. They were a farmer, a farmer's son, a merchant's clerk, a fisherman, an assistant teacher, a smith and two masons. There is a similar statement attached to the photocopy of the CEB for the parish of Sorbie, Wigtown. The enumerators were

the inspector of the poor for the parish, the parish schoolmaster and another teacher, an innkeeper and three farmers. All, it is stated, 'being solemnly sworn and interrogated deponed that they have faithfully and to the best of their knowledge and belief discharged the duties devolving on them as Enumerators ... and that the Books handed in by them are true Copies of the Returns furnished them by the Householders. All which is truth as the deponents shall answer to God.' Two of the farmers were surnamed Broadfoot, as was the Justice of the Peace.

The longest comment is that by the Minister of the parish of Delting, the northernmost part of the main island of Shetland. John McIntyre wrote, 'Many of the people of this district [Quam] are 3 to 4 miles distant from the parish church at Olnafirth; they are a little nearer the School at Susister [sic] endowed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and have no other School or church accommodation nearer at hand. The potatoe [sic] disease a blessing to Fetlar (?) [Fetlar is an island beyond the island of Yell from Delting]. At the time that this disease began to commit its ravages the people were sunk almost as deeply in misery as possible. They had been completely overlooked in their remote and dreary wilderness by the British legislature who like the Gods of Greece and Rome were too exalted to regard the appearance of a people so low in the social scale or who perhaps were too much occupied in the laudable endeavour to rival in the Senate the matchless eloquence of the Ancients, or it might be were too busy in rearing by means of liberal endowments a numerous race of sturdy Paupers and of bold Papists Providence in its wrath or in its mercy sent this potatoe [sic] disease which would have made speedy work in its destructive progress had not the Christian liberality of the people of Scotland been stirred up to help. The consequence has been that goods roads to a considerable extent have been made through the impassable north of Zetland and the people have been enabled by the charity of strangers to attain the first step of civilization and comfort'.

The comments by the Minister of the parish of Linlithgow were written in CEB 6, which was not drawn in the sample. However, in CEB 7 there is a lengthy response from William Shiells, the superintendent: 'In reference to the Remarks of the Clergyman of the Parish as given in Enumeration Book 6 of the Burgh I beg to state:

1. That he uses Royal Burgh instead of Parliamentary Burgh.
2. That he stated in explanation that his strictures applied chiefly to the landward part of the Parish beyond the Parliamentary boundary and not within my superintendence.
3. That I minutely scrutinized the information as to every house, occupier, male and female and that I believe the results as contained in the summaries of the 7 books to be perfect as to these particulars.
4. That I believe the miscellaneous information as to "pauper, occupation, etc" approaches as nearly as possible to perfect accuracy.

The same day John Hardy, the Provost, signed the declaration that the enumeration of the Burgh had been duly performed and that 'no inaccuracies have been discovered therein which have not been duly corrected, as far as has been possible'.

These comments illustrate the diligence of enumerators, superintendents and clergy in carrying out the enumeration process. They show that in many cases the clergy knew their parishioners well and respected the local enumerators. They also show some of the difficulties of enumeration in both densely and sparsely populated districts and the added problems of difficult terrain and illiterate householders. Finally, they reveal too that at times there were tensions between the clergy and both local and national governments.

NOTE

1. Anderson, M. et al., *National Sample from the 1851 Census of Great Britain* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], 1979. SN: 1316. The comments described in this research note are not included in the dataset or in its documentation.