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*Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture* 19

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ENGLAND 1750–1914

DAVID VINCENT

*University of Keele*



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For Charlotte

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## PREFACE

This book is based on the premise that the consequences of the coming of mass literacy in England must be sought in the diverse areas of activity in which the skills of reading and writing were practised. It is argued that the often discrete categories of education, family, work, popular beliefs, the imagination and politics must be studied together, and that statistical data should be integrated with the many forms of literary evidence. As is ever the case, such objectives are easier to prescribe than implement. The research has taken me into unfamiliar areas of material and analysis, and for this reason I have been more than usually dependent on the advice and assistance of colleagues and friends at Keele and elsewhere.

I was helped in the construction of the sample of marriage registers and the use of computer facilities at Keele and the University of Manchester Regional Computer Centre by Alan Branthwaite, Paul Collis and David Sherwood. Alice Belcher, Peter Belcher, Nesta Evans and Charlotte Vincent shared with me the often agreeable task of visiting record offices and parish vestries in different parts of the country to abstract entries from the registers. The coding of over 30,000 occupations was undertaken by Michael Pearson Smith. This section of the research was supported by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation.

I greatly benefited from discussions of various aspects of the work with John Briggs, Bob Bushaway, Marjorie Cruikshank, Patrick Joyce, Miles Kitchener, Andrew Miles, David Mitch, Robert Poole, Roger Schofield, John Sloboda, Charles Swann, Joan Vincent, Richard Wall, Bob Woods and Chris Wrigley. I am particularly grateful to Gill Sutherland for the care with which she read the complete text. Margaret and Peter Spufford once more provided hospitality and encouragement. Johanna Reilly relieved the burden of typing the chapters. My wife began this book with me as we went out in search of signatures and marks, and at the end was there to correct my own illiteracy as I wrote up the findings. And finally my best thanks to Anna, Rebecca and Michael Vincent, whose first encounters with reading and writing have taught me more about this subject than all the reading and writing I have done myself.