

INTRODUCTION

by John Golby

Volume 2 of this series looked at what we mean by community and how we go about investigating community history. It is true that community is by no means an easy concept to define, but one particularly helpful starting point has proved to be the indicators of community suggested by Dennis and Daniels in their article ‘“Community” and the social geography of Victorian cities’ (1981). They suggest that researchers into community and community history could usefully focus on the features of: residential stability; distance between residence and workplace; kinship and marriage links; and affiliation with local clubs, churches and other interest groups.

All of these have, to a greater or lesser extent, already been explored in the earlier volumes of this series. In this volume we pay special attention to the fourth feature, namely affiliation with local clubs, churches and other interest groups. The latter part of the volume, Chapters 6–9, concentrates in particular on local politics, religion and leisure activities. As well as providing some historical background and discussing recent research carried out in these areas, the aim of these chapters is to provide questions and suggest possible methods of approach that will enable you to carry out further research. Involvement in local politics, connections with local churches, and participation in leisure activities provide opportunities for people to meet together, worship together and play together, but politics, religion and opposing cultural values can also divide families and communities. Conflict as well as co-operation is an aspect which has to be investigated in any study of communities and families.

The second of Dennis and Daniels’ indicators of community is distance between residence and workplace. This aspect was discussed in Volume 2, but the role played by work itself has only been touched on in passing. Yet work can provide an essential link between communities and families. Most families have to work and most do so, not in isolation, but among others who live within the locality. The first half of this volume is devoted to discussing ways in which an examination of work and occupations can help us understand the behaviour of families in communities. As with other local activities, work has the potential for establishing ties within the community, with men and women working together with a community of interests; but work can also give rise to divisions resulting from different occupations, standards of living and lifestyles.

One of the ways in which we explore work and occupations is through a series of case studies. The first set of studies looks at a particular family, a factory worker, and a policeman. The second set examines particular occupations and roles – domestic service, married women and work, and entrepreneurship and business enterprise. Clearly, we are unable to cover all the occupations and roles in which you may have a particular interest, but one of our aims is to offer exemplars for your own projects. In the process we show the wide range of sources that can be used to explore different occupations in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and we focus on particular questions that can be asked of these sources. We also suggest a number of methods and approaches by which you can go about your research projects.

After the case studies we go on to look at a number of communities and the occupational structures and changes that occur within them. Finally, we investigate occupational hierarchies and consider why and how people rose or fell in the social scale. We do this by looking at some of the studies that have attempted to measure social mobility over the past one hundred and fifty years. In fact, a major theme of the volume is to make you aware of some of the theories and debates relating to work and community, so that you can set your local research projects in a wider context.

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Much of this volume is devoted to examining the kinds of activities and organizations that were and are available to families in various localities and to investigating what part, if any, these activities play in linking families to communities. Consequently, you will find that many of the case studies concentrate on particular localities and come within the category of local history. Your own research is also likely to be concerned with some aspect of local studies and, if conducted properly, may result in an original contribution towards the study of your community.

A well researched local study can be of immense value, especially if attempts are made to compare the findings with similar but larger-scale or national projects. We have adopted this approach throughout this series. Volume 1 started off by looking at a single family but then moved on to studying families in general. In other words, we attempted to ask, 'Is our particular family typical or not, and if not why not?' In this volume we ask similar questions, for example in relation to work. Were the particular work patterns and other activities in one particular locality similar to others in the region or in the country as a whole? In what ways did they differ, and why? These questions are repeated time and time again in this volume; they are also the questions you must keep asking in the course of your own local research.

REFERENCE

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PART I

WORK AND OCCUPATIONS



CHAPTER 1

IDEAS AND DEBATES ON WORK

by John Golby

Let me start this chapter by posing a question.

Why should we devote so much time to 'work' in a volume on family and the community?

Nowadays, for the vast majority of people, work is something we do away from home and family. It often means we spend some 35 to 48 hours of our lives each week in a factory, workshop, office, shop, school or some other place of employment. Few people today have occupations that can be carried out entirely from the home. Nevertheless, although there is a spatial gap between the home and work, there are a number of good reasons why work needs to be discussed.

First, work provides a link between the family and the community. Most adult members of a family have to work in order to earn money to live, and very often the income from their work determines their lifestyle and, to some extent, as we shall see in Chapter 5 on social mobility, their position in a social hierarchy.

Second, work often influences demographic factors such as job mortality, age at marriage, seasonality of marriage, and levels of fertility. Work can also determine the location of the family home, so that migration and geographical mobility are often the result of families seeking work opportunities.

Third, from a historical viewpoint, work very often cannot be separated from the home. The idea that the workplace and home are almost inevitably distinct areas of activity is a comparatively recent one. Although there has been a trend towards a separation of workplace and home during the period of our studies, the 'domestic economy' cannot be ignored, for example in relation to married women and work, a subject we shall be looking at in some detail in Chapter 3, section 2 (see also Volume 1, Chapter 4).

Fourth, as I have mentioned in the introduction to this volume, we need to explore the extent to which work and the workplace impinge on the community as well as on the home. It is clear that different occupations and work regimes generate quite specific cultures and behaviour patterns, and we need to explore, for example, in what ways and why a nineteenth-century urban community which developed around a newly built mill or mine was different from a long-established rural community.

Fifth, there have been marked changes in attitudes to, and opportunities for, work during this period. There has been a shift from a situation where all members of a family contributed to its income, to a structure which depended primarily on one income, and then to the two-income family, with resulting changes in family power relationships and family household size and structure.

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The aim, therefore, of Part I of this volume is to provide you with another dimension to your investigations into families and communities. After a brief discussion of the major changes in the distribution of the labour force since 1800, this chapter will focus on four particular aspects of the history of work. All these aspects relate work to family and community experiences, and they should, by referring to particular debates and raising a range of questions, provide you with a framework in which you can fit your own investigations. They also provide a background for the various case studies which appear in Chapters 2 and 3 and which, in turn, are intended as exemplars from which you can develop your own case study on work.

1 A BRIEF LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF WORK IN THE BRITISH ISLES

Before we begin to suggest the kinds of questions you might ask in your own studies, we need to look at the development of work in a national context and discuss the structural changes that have taken place in the distribution of the labour force in Britain since the start of the nineteenth century (see Joyce, 1990, pp.131–9). This will enable you to relate the experiences of the families and communities you are investigating to these changes and to see how the development in work patterns links in with other themes discussed in the series, such as urbanization, migration, social mobility and class structures.

EXERCISE 1.1

Take a close look at Table 1.1 and then try to answer the following questions:

- 1 What happened to those employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing during this period?
- 2 Which occupations showed a marked increase in numbers between 1851 and 1901?
- 3 Which occupations showed a noticeable decline in the twentieth century?
- 4 What criticisms would you make of this sort of statistical table?

Now read my comments below.

Table 1.1 Estimated industrial distribution of the British labour force, 1801–1951 (millions of persons)

	Agriculture, forestry, fishing	Mining and quarrying	Manufactures ¹	Building	Trade ²	Transport	Public services and professional	Domestic and personal	Total occupied populations
1801	1.7		1.4		0.5		0.3	0.6	4.8
1811	1.8		1.7		0.6		0.4	0.7	5.5
1821	1.8		2.4		0.8		0.3	0.8	6.2
1831	1.8		3.0		0.9		0.3	0.9	7.2
1841	1.9	0.2	2.7	0.4	0.9	0.3	0.3	1.2	8.4
1851	2.1	0.4	3.2	0.5	1.0	0.5	0.5	1.3	9.7
1861	2.0	0.5	3.6	0.6	1.2	0.6	0.6	1.5	10.8
1871	1.8	0.6	3.9	0.8	1.6	0.7	0.7	1.8	12.0
1881	1.7	0.6	4.2	0.9	1.9	0.9	0.8	2.0	13.1
1891	1.6	0.8	4.8	0.9	2.3	1.1	1.0	2.3	14.7
1901	1.5	0.9	5.5	1.3	2.3	1.3	1.3	2.3	16.7
1911	1.6	1.2	6.2	1.2	2.5	1.5	1.5	2.6	18.6
1921	1.4	1.5	6.9	0.8	2.6	1.4	2.1	1.3	19.3
1931	1.3	1.2	7.2	1.1	3.3	1.4	2.3	1.6	21.1
1951	1.1	0.9	8.8	1.4	3.2	1.7	3.3	0.5	22.6

Source: Deane and Cole (1967) Table 31, p.143

¹ Manufactures 1801–1831 includes mining and quarrying, and building.

² Trade 1801–1831 includes transport.

1 Although numbers increased during the first half of the nineteenth century and did not fall below the 1801 level until 1891, the percentage of the total workforce associated with agriculture fell drastically from well over 1 in 3 of the working population in 1801 to under 1 in 10 in 1901 and under 1 in 20 by 1951. By 1971 this ratio had declined to 1 in 50.

2 All the other occupations listed show increases. However, if you compare each of them with the last column, which shows the total of those working, then you find that the *proportion* of those employed in manufactures did not increase markedly, while the major proportional increases were in mining, building, transport and public and professional services. The proportional increase in trade was smaller than in these other areas; nevertheless, there was a steady increase in the consumer market in the first part of the century, and this accelerated from the 1860s onwards with the development of large wholesalers, retail outlets and service industries. The growth of shops and the public sector provided new job opportunities for working women, although they were invariably paid lower wages than their male counterparts and they tended to remain in subordinate posts.

3 The numbers employed in domestic and personal service (which had increased proportionally in the nineteenth century) dropped markedly after the two world wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45. Between 1871 and 1901 approximately 1 in 7 of the working population was employed in domestic service (see Chapter 3, section 1), whereas by 1951 this had fallen to approximately 1 in 50. The mining and quarrying industries, after a considerable growth between 1881 and 1911, shrank in size after 1921. In fact, mining was not the only great staple industry that declined in the twentieth century. The column headed by the umbrella title ‘manufactures’ includes workers in other major industries such as shipbuilding and engineering; both of these grew rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century but also declined after the First World War. The same is true of the textile industries. The areas of expansion were the new industries of motor vehicle manufacture, electrical goods and chemicals.

4 Although the statistics relate to Britain as a whole, the population of England in relation to Scotland, Ireland and Wales is of such a size that the tables tend to reflect what was happening in England to the detriment of the other countries. A discussion of the changes in the Scottish labour force, together with full statistics, can be found in Treble (1990); for Ireland see Daly (1981). Compare Table 1.2 below, which provides a percentage breakdown of the industrial structure of Ireland (male and female), with Table 1.1.

Table 1.2 Estimated industrial distribution of the labour force, Ireland 1841 and 1891, and England and Wales 1881

	Ireland (%)		England & Wales (%)
	1841	1891	1881
Agriculture	51.3	44.4	16.6
Building	2.0	2.6	6.8
Manufacture	27.3	17.8	30.7
Transport	0.5	2.6	6.8
Dealing	2.6	5.4	7.8
Industrial service	1.2	6.6	6.7
Public service and professional	1.6	5.8	5.6
Domestic service	9.4	12.2	15.7
Others	4.1	2.6	4.4

Source: Daly (1981) p.104

A second criticism is that the headings are too broad: there is no information concerning particular occupations. However, as Raphael Samuel (1975, p.3) points out, it is extremely

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difficult to discover what an agricultural labourer actually did on the land during the course of the year, let alone what alternative sources of employment were open to him when not working on the land. The same goes for women employed in agriculture. Most often the census enumerators' books (CEBs) merely record 'field labour', but this hides a myriad of different work experiences. We need to remember too that unpaid voluntary work, which might in practice play a significant role within particular families and communities, does not appear in the figures. Furthermore, there is no break-down in the figures regarding occupation by gender. Again, these figures are available elsewhere. We know, for example, that of the 2.3 million employed in domestic and personal service in 1891, over 2 million were women and that this constituted over 40 per cent of the women who were gainfully employed in that year. Also, under the heading 'manufactures' approximately 50 per cent of those employed in cotton textile mills were women (although in the lower paid jobs). Finally, for women in general, it is not always easy to discover what paid work they undertook. It was often casual and very often went unrecorded in the CEBs (see the discussion in Chapter 3, section 2).

There are two further important structural changes in employment over this period that should be mentioned. First, there was a marked reduction in the number of married women in paid employment during the nineteenth century, a trend which was only reversed from the 1930s onwards (see Chapter 3, section 2). Second, attitudes changed towards the employment of children. In 1851 it was estimated that 28 per cent of children aged between 10 and 15 worked, but it is very likely that these figures underestimate the actual numbers, especially if casual or seasonal work is included. By the time of the 1911 census, when compulsory education was in force, the percentage of children in work had halved from that of 1851 (Hunt, 1981, pp.9–17).

The following points summarize this discussion of changes in the structure of employment in Britain since 1800:

- There was a decline in the proportion of the population working in agriculture, although this was not so evident in Ireland as it was in England and Wales.
- The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a marked shift towards mining and manufactures, much of which was centred around the cotton industry in the north-west of England and in Scotland.
- In the second half of the nineteenth century this manufacturing base was widened with the mechanization of other textile industries and the growth in shipbuilding, engineering, transport and building.
- The last quarter of the century witnessed the rapid development of a mass consumer market, with more people occupied in the food, drink and tobacco industries.
- In this same period there was a growth in the numbers of people working in the public sector.
- During the twentieth century, and especially in the years following the First World War, there was a decline in the old major staple industries, with many old, well-established firms collapsing, and a reduction in the numbers employed in domestic service.
- At the same time there was a further growth in the public sector and in service industries as well as major developments in the metal, machinery, vehicle, electrical and chemical industries. These new industries provided job opportunities for many, including – especially after the Second World War – refugees from eastern Europe and immigrants from the Commonwealth. (For further discussion of the role of outsiders in the working community see Chapter 3, section 3.)
- Finally – although this has not been mentioned in the discussion so far – as Britain was transformed from a primarily rural to an urban dominated country, so there were changes in

working-class consciousness. There was a marked growth in the development of trade unionism from the 1880s, and by the early 1960s some ten million men and women were members of trade unions (Pelling, 1963, p.263).

Consider any examples of families you have investigated and ask yourself whether these generalizations fit in with their experiences. Does your own research echo these changes? If they do not, perhaps the next section will throw further light on your research.

2 FOUR ISSUES IN THE HISTORY OF WORK IN THE BRITISH ISLES

You will want, where possible, to link your own research to that of other researchers. The following discussion – based on that by Patrick Joyce (1990) – suggests some key issues to enable you to do so, and to link these continuing debates with the case studies in Chapters 2 and 3.

2.1 IRREGULARITY OF WORK AND MULTI-OCCUPATIONS

As we have already seen, an 1851 CEB which shows Joe Bloggs to be an ‘agricultural labourer’, while giving us a good idea of his position in the social hierarchy of the village or area in which he worked, does not necessarily tell us much about what Joe Bloggs actually did during the course of a year. For some parts of the year he may well have been unemployed, while for other periods he may have gone out of the area to seek work. Samuel (1975, p.4) cites the case of Suffolk, where many farm labourers travelled after harvest time to Burton-on-Trent to work in the ‘maltings’.

Irregularity of work and diversity of occupations was not confined to rural areas in the nineteenth century. Many town trades were casual, and nearly all trades were subject to seasonal fluctuations and periods of over-production.

The evidence of irregularity of work, the wide variety of ‘moonlighting’ jobs, and changes in occupation, all in a sense call into question some of the ideas of the nineteenth century as being one of the growth of working-class solidarity, for as Joyce states, ‘Occupational exclusiveness and concentration are integral to our understanding of the formation of “traditional” working-class culture and consciousness’ (Joyce, 1990, p.147).

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL VARIATIONS

W.L. Burn (1964), writing of Britain in the mid nineteenth century, emphasized the vast differences in the quality of life and experiences of men and women working in different occupations in different parts of the country. He pointed out that the wages of an agricultural labourer in Dorset were meagre compared with those of a skilled worker in a factory in Lancashire. The labourer would also have found the daily diet of the factory worker ‘sumptuous beyond his wildest dreams, although he would have been astonished at the punctuality required of him in the mills’ (Burn, 1964, pp.96–7).

There was also great regional diversity within the same occupations. For example, during the nineteenth century the system of living-in – whereby the farm labourer was boarded by the farmer – survived longer in pastoral districts where there was a real shortage of labour than it did in the south and east of England, where outside labourers were paid weekly wages or by the task. Again, there were marked regional differences in agricultural earnings. Where alternative employment opportunities were plentiful, such as in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, wages were higher than in parts of the south and south-west of England which were remote from industrial or large urban areas.

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These are only a few examples of the sort of regional variations that existed in the nineteenth century. Much more local research is needed into nineteenth- and twentieth-century work and practices in order to provide a fuller picture of this particular aspect of the history of work.

2.3 THE CONTINUITY AND VITALITY OF SMALL-SCALE PRODUCTION UNITS

Joyce writes that, 'The industrial worlds of 1820 and 1920 were very different: in the latter, workplaces were bigger, machinery more prevalent and sophisticated, the direct wage form had spread widely, and these imperatives involved in turn a more direct managerial involvement in the execution and organisation of work' (Joyce, 1990, p.157). Nevertheless, it is easy to exaggerate the scale of industrial development in the nineteenth century. True, machinery and factories brought changes, but production units remained comparatively small. For example, even within the textile industry, between 1850 and 1890 the average number of people working in spinning mills rose only from 108 to 165, and in weaving mills from 100 to 188 (Joyce, 1990, p.158). The small workshop continued throughout the century and so, consequently, did the master-workman relationship.

As the size of workforces increased, so important structural changes occurred in the workplace. Generally speaking, the small employer or entrepreneur would have less of a division of labour within his workforce than the larger employer. Of course, the division of labour is primarily a device to improve the efficiency of production, but in the process of division the workforce tends to be divided into a series of hierarchies separated by skill or job and income (see the experience of Alfred Williams in Chapter 2, section 2). This separation was becoming increasingly apparent in the nineteenth century and has been a major aspect of industrial production in the twentieth century. Its effects on the family and community, as you will see in Chapter 5 on social mobility, have been far-reaching.



Figure 1.1 The composing room of the *Witney Gazette* in Oxfordshire, c.1900 (Source: Oxfordshire County Libraries, Local History Collection)



Figure 1.2 Employees at the Britannia Works, Banbury, Oxfordshire, c.1900. The largest firm in Banbury in the nineteenth century, this agricultural engineering business employed some 380 people in 1861 (Source: Oxfordshire County Libraries, Local History Collection)

2.4 THE DIFFERING EXPERIENCES OF WORK

In reviewing recent developments in research on work in this country, Joyce concludes that,

We now know much more than we did about work processes ... something too about workplace life and its relation to life beyond work, but what may be termed the interior life of the workplace is still largely opaque to us, the everyday arrangements of production and the customs and attitudes shaped in work.

(Joyce, 1990, p.172)

Historians and social scientists recognize the importance of investigating the various experiences of work and are asking questions such as: What was it like to work in a particular occupation? What exactly was involved? How was the day broken up? What were working conditions like? What were the varying attitudes towards work? What were the attitudes towards the foreman, factory boss, etc.? What time was there for other activities apart from work, and what were these activities? These qualitative questions are difficult to answer, but they are extremely important if we are to capture the *flavour* of what working life was like and if we are to explore the connections between work and the family and work and the community. True, it is difficult to investigate work experience, but there are sources available (e.g. letters, diaries, memoirs, literary and oral sources), some of which are used extensively in the case studies in Chapters 2 and 3.

EXERCISE 1.2

Much of what follows in this volume will, we hope, illustrate the methods and sources that can be used to respond to some of the problems that we have raised so far and shed further light on the links between work, communities and families. Before you go any further, try to compile a list of the questions you should be asking and the sources you could use when you start tracing the activities of families in particular communities.

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3 CONCLUSION

You should use the questions I raised in Exercise 1.2 as the basis for your study in relating work to the community and the family. Remember, nearly all of the questions relate to the four major themes outlined in section 2; these are summarized for easy reference in Schema A.

Schema A: Issues to investigate in the history of work

- o Irregularity of work and multi-occupations.
- o Regional variations.
- o The continuity and vitality of small-scale production units.
- o The different experiences of work.

These various aspects of work will be referred to again in Chapters 2 and 3, which present a series of contrasting case studies on work using a wide variety of source material. The case studies are intended to test and amplify these themes and, at the same time, suggest areas of study which you can develop.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Note: suggestions for further reading are indicated by an asterisk.

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