



Unit 7

OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS:

THE CENSUS RETURNS for ENGLAND and WALES

Occupational Classifications - an introduction

Economic and social historians use "nominal" data i.e. information based on names to a very considerable extent. Names are recorded in parish registers, property transactions, wills, shareholders' lists, crew lists, and so on. Names often provide the best basis to trace individuals. If you are lucky you can track someone from birth to death, through school, apprenticeship, church and trade union affiliation, marriage, poor relief, and so on. No doubt you can think of other types of *nominal* data. Most databases focus upon names as the basis on which to search out connections between individuals.

The census is perhaps the best known form of nominal data. Enumerators collected manuscript returns in their books, and these were then aggregated at the level of the Registration District before being further collated to give borough, county and national figures for population. But the enumerators were not interested simply in the number of people in the country. They increasingly sought other information eg. the number of houses, immigrants, and of course the occupations of the people.

Occupational information provides an important clue to the economic structure of the country. Bear in mind that in the absence of government statistical service of the kind we now know - only in 1907 was a Census of Production undertaken - the nature of production, its composition and distribution, were not easily established. Indeed, in the early modern period Hearth Taxes and probates (wills) were often the only source, and only an indirect one, to shed some light on the nature of local employment. In the nineteenth century, the census provided a more systematic collection of data, though as noted below, establishing just how many workers were in a particular industry was fraught with difficulty. Job definitions, technology, and enumerators' quirks meant consistency was hard to achieve.

Information on occupations can be found either from the printed censuses or from the census enumerators' books (manuscript returns).

The two main organising principles are: (a) by industrial grouping, and (b) by social ranking. As a general rule, occupation may be said to be important only insofar as it enables us to allocate individuals to groupings (a) and (b) above. For instance, an individual may be a clerk (occupation) as returned in the census, but could be employed in a number of manufacturing or service industries.

However, the fact that he/she is a clerk is an important aspect in helping to place him/her in a social class, for occupation is itself a key variable in social class.

What questions can be addressed by using occupational data in the census?

Most important is the changing overall size and distribution of the workforce over time, by sector - manufacturing, service, agriculture, dealing etc., and by its constituent parts eg. by cotton, woollen, jute, silk and other types of textile workers. Other refinements are also possible: were there differences in the age, sex, and marital status of workers in the different textile industries? With care, and for some, though not all of the censuses, the composition of the workforce may be revealed. It was census based data which revealed the decreasing percentage of those classified as working in the agricultural sector throughout the nineteenth-century (see Charles Booth's article, 'On the Occupations of the People of the United Kingdom, 1801-81') and occupational data has been used widely by social historians either on its own, or in conjunction with other sources, to address female employment patterns, the growth of retailing, and changes in the levels of skill required in particular industries.

A Brief History of the Nineteenth Century Census

The censuses have been produced at decennial intervals by various Government bodies from 1801 until the present day, providing a survey of Great Britain in terms of its population based upon the household. The information supplied in the censuses has become increasingly detailed, so that census manuscripts now provide a fairly clear enumeration of the population at every ten year interval.

Nineteenth-century census schedules simply asked for 'Rank, Profession or Occupation', without any distinction between personal occupation or industry of employment. Similarly, the printed abstracts were neither consistently prepared on the basis of personal occupations, nor on that of industrial groups, but contained elements of both. It is therefore extremely important to examine the basis of the census work carefully at the outset.

1801:-

In the first census only a very broad classification of occupations was attempted. Enumerators had to answer the question 'What number of persons in your parish, township or place are chiefly employed in agriculture, how many in trade manufactures or handicraft; and how many are not comprised in any of the preceding classes?' However, the results of the question were deemed a failure and so in 1811 its form was adjusted to relate to families.

1821 and 1831:-

The revised question was repeated in 1821 and 1831, but in 1831 the enumerators were also required to state the number of adult male persons (i.e. those aged 20 and over) falling into each of nine major categories.

These were:

1. agricultural occupiers employing labourers;
2. agricultural occupiers not employing labourers;
3. labourers in agriculture;
4. employed in manufacture or manufacturing machinery;
5. employed in retail trade or handicraft as masters or workmen;
6. capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men;
7. labourers, not agricultural;
8. servants;
9. others.

The fifth class was also returned in detail for counties and large boroughs by means of a form containing '...one hundred of the most usual denominations ... of retail trade and handicraft', but enumerators were allowed to extend the list to meet local conditions. Apart from the lack of strict definition for each group, the degree of local initiative caused lists to be drawn up without any uniformity of method. So once again, no attempt was made to compile a classified list of occupations, and the national abstract consisted only of an alphabetical summary of little use.

1841:-

From this date householders' schedules were in use, and at the census office an effort was made to group the occupations 'under definite rules and on uniform lines'. Yet the published figures for England and Wales still covered 877 occupations, presented in alphabetical order, with very little attempt at further arrangement.

1851:-

Finally some degree of categorisation was attempted. A system of orders and sub-orders of occupations was devised; 17 orders broken down into 91 sub-orders. Each occupation, found its place here, and apprentices, assistants, labourers, porters etc. were generally included under the appropriate order or sub-order with which their work was connected. The number of orders was raised to 18 in 1871 and to 24 in 1881.

These general principles, adopted in 1851, were followed with a few adjustments down to 1911. However, one major change took place in 1881 when the unemployed were placed with the 'unoccupied', whereas they had been included in their previous occupations upto and including the 1871 census.

1901:- there was a considerable revision of the occupational headings to correlate the census statistics with those of other government departments and so by 1911 the number of separate occupations mentioned under these headings now rose to 472 (from 382 in 1901 and 347 in 1891), to provide greater precision, and to include 'occupations of recent growth'.

Problems of Reliability and Comparability in the Census

An examination of the history of the nineteenth-century censuses raises questions about the reliability of the information in the returns, and the comparability of the data between censuses. As census organisation improved, and as the reasons for collecting the data changed, so did the instructions to householders and enumerators.

These changes affected the classification of occupations within the censuses over the period, and it would be foolish to embark on a study of incomes, employment and occupations without some knowledge of these.

Listed below are some of the main difficulties that exist with the census records available for the nineteenth-century:-

Male Occupations

Though the occupations of working men tended to be fairly accurately recorded throughout the nineteenth century there was a tendency in the returns to omit the branch of employment or the material being worked upon. With terms such as labourer, weaver, or spinner, these problems were overcome by either adding a vague heading or placing them under the most common industry of the area in which the return was made.

Multiple and Seasonal Occupations

These occupations also tended to be under estimated or not included in the censuses. From 1851 people could order their occupations in importance, however only the first two or three occupations tended to be included in the final returns. The seasonal cycle also tends to be missing. The census was usually taken in March or April at a time of year when the effects of increased summer employment would not be included.

Female Occupations

There are also problems with the records provided by the censuses on the work of women. Women often worked on a part-time basis, and this labour frequently does not appear to have found its way into the returns as an 'occupation'. The classification of women's work in the home also seems to have caused the enumerators problems. Was such work an 'occupation', or 'merely' housework? This is especially important when, as was common in the nineteenth century, the home was a place of production of articles or services for sale, such as lodging houses, inns, farms, shops etc... In fact the domestic work of women in the family home was either directly or implicitly excluded from consideration in the census. By 1901 there was no instruction on the work of women at all.

These considerations should be born in mind when studying the employment of domestic servants, the largest category of employment for women in the period. In Rochdale in 1871 only one-third of the women described as being in servant occupations in the occupational column of the census were also described as servant in relationship to the head of the household. The majority of the remainder lived in the homes of their relatives. Obviously large numbers of 'housekeepers' and 'nurses' must have been performing 'domestic duties' at home.

The Occupations of Children

The problems cited above with the enumeration of women can be extended to include that of the work of children. Children were expected to contribute to the family income, especially the working class family income. Their work tended to be casual or part-time, which as we have seen in the case of women, is difficult to interpret in the census. Children were also often designated as 'scholars', though this became increasingly vague over time. There were problems over how often or for what period of time a 'scholar' should attend a school to be so defined. Children also had to be receiving 'regular tuition' to be included - how was this to be defined? Regular tuition in what? The family business? This aspect of the returns became increasingly vague when the pressures on the working classes to conceal their children's labour was at its greatest - the Factory Acts and from 1870 the Education Acts were curtailing the legal rights of parents to dispose of their children's time. Many children were registered as 'scholars' but were in fact working to support the family income. These problems had less effect on the census material by the end of the century, as children's employment became increasingly marginalised for a number of reasons. For instance, as men's wages increased there was less need for a family contribution.

Agricultural Occupations

As with the previous problems with the census data cited above, the instructions for filling in agricultural occupations changed over time. In 1841 there were very few instructions, introducing vagueness in the returns. In 1851 the instructions became so detailed they were too complex for the enumerators to understand clearly. A happy medium was achieved by the late nineteenth century but the role of women working within agriculture was gradually excluded in the returns, a problem related to that of how to classify the occupational role of women in the census. [Refer to the section on the previous page on female occupations.]

There also seems to have been under-enumeration of seasonal and casual occupations in agriculture. The status of the female servants on farms is difficult to determine from the data, were they domestic or agricultural workers?

Furthermore, because of the vagueness of the instructions, the censuses have failed to define the term 'farmer', and there is confusion in the returns over what was returned under acreage and the number's employed.

Employer and Employee Occupational Classifications

This confusion over the entries in the returns also extends to the General Register Office's attempts to distinguish between employers and employees. The difficulties can be partly explained by firstly, the enumerators trying to classify the fluid nineteenth-century employment practices and secondly, by the instructions showing a gradual progression from a model of the economy based on old handicraft distinctions between 'master', 'apprentice', and 'journeyman', to one structured around the 'employer' and the 'worker'. Up to 1891 the instructions generally defined the employer as the 'master', but in this year there was a format change with three columns being given for employment status - 'employer', 'employed', and 'neither employer nor employed, but working on own account'.

These instructional changes created a number of problems. In the 1851-1861 censuses there was a failure to indicate the number of persons employed, and fewer people were describing themselves as journeymen or apprentices. In the 1891 census the use of three columns caused people to put crosses in more than one column, making it difficult to arrive at any useful assumptions about the numbers employed in the economy at this time, since some people regarded themselves as both employers and employees. [NB. some people would have more than one occupation ie. in the building industry where sub-contracting was widespread.] This particular problem was improved by 1901 when only one column was introduced, but it still does not mean that the data in that column in the census is anywhere nearer the economic realities of the time.

Retirement and Unemployment

These two factors are also difficult to distinguish in the census schedules with any real validity. The problems stem from the difficulties the enumerators faced in defining these terms in the nineteenth-century context, and once again in the changing instructions in the schedules.

For instance, information on unemployment is seldom given. Inmates of prisons, hospitals and workhouses are often listed with specific occupations against their names, when they should really be regarded as retired or unemployed. The problems also extend to the definition of being in employment and being retired or unemployed when the work was casual or stoppages were frequent. It is therefore difficult to estimate the proportion of the population which fell into these categories.

Occupational Data: Classification Methodologies

Classification by Social Class, by Industry and Life-cycle Stages

Even though there are inconsistencies which the economic and social historian must be aware of in the census data, the nineteenth-century occupational data available has been used to undertake various economic and social studies. To make the data available easier to work with methodologies have been formulated to classify the information in the censuses into groupings from which certain conclusions can be drawn.

1. Socio-economic Groupings (Classification by Social Class)

This basically involves using the occupational census data to construct various measurements of the status and welfare of households. Such groupings are useful for the aggregate analysis of census populations. These groupings are based upon the principle that nineteenth-century census households can be assigned to specific social strata or classes according to the occupation of the head. Although an attempt at classification was begun in the 1911 Census, the most frequently used schema is that drawn up by the General Register Office as used in the 1951 Census. This is the framework used by Armstrong in his classification of occupations in the 1841 and 1851 Census. (Details of which can be found in E.A. Wrigley, (ed.), 'Nineteenth-century society' p.203.)

By use of occupational dictionaries, each occupation can be assigned to one of five classes:

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------------------|
| Class | I | Professional |
| Class | II | Intermediate Occupations |
| Class | III | Skilled Occupations |
| Class | IV | Partly Skilled Occupations |
| Class | V | Unskilled Occupations |

Armstrong modified the 1951 attribution lists in the following manner for use with the 1851 census data:

I ④ all employers of 25 or more persons were raised to Class I, whatever their classification in the registrar general's 1951 lists;

II ④ all 'dealers', 'merchants', except those distinctly described as brokers or agents (Class II) or hawkers (Class V), and all persons engaged in retail board, lodging and catering were initially classed as III, despite the fact that the registrar general's list placed them variously;

III ④ from Class III (or in a few cases IV), upon consideration of individual cases, those who employed at least one person, other than their own family, were then raised to Class II. In boarding, catering, etc., the employment of one or more servants was taken to count for this purpose;

IV ④ house and land proprietors, those 'living off interest' or 'of independent means', annuitants and paupers were placed in Classes I, I, I, II, and V respectively;

V ④ uninformative entries such as 'husband away', or 'spinster' were placed in a residual Class X, and retired persons were classified on the basis of their previous occupations.

Armstrong also modified his schema for the analysis of the 1841 census because at that date individuals were not asked to state whether or not they were employers, or their number of employees. He again used the 1951 format as a basis but with the following modifications:

- Class I - as in 1851, less unidentified large entrepreneurs;
- Class II - individuals who would have been assigned to Classes II and III according to the 1851 procedures provided they employed at least one servant;
- Class III - the same, where no servants were employed;
- Classes IV & V - according to the initial attribution list & V.

Example of Armstrong's Classification System (for 1851)

Occupied male and female population (000's)

| | England and Wales | London | England and Wales excluding London |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Agriculture | 1,776.5 | 24.5 | 1,752.0 |
| Mining | 335.2 | 4.3 | 330.9 |
| Building | 460.7 | 70.7 | 390.0 |
| Manufacture | 2,754.8 | 373.4 | 2,381.4 |
| Transport | 345.3 | 83.2 | 262.1 |
| Dealing | 546.7 | 132.8 | 413.9 |
| (Banking, insurance) | (44.8) | (18.2) | (26.6) |
| (General labour) | (331.8) | (50.6) | (281.2) |
| Industrial services total | 376.6 | 68.8 | 307.8 |
| (Central and local government | (51.9) | (13.5) | (38.4) |
| (Armed forces, police) | (102.1) | (25.4) | (76.7) |
| (Other services of professions) | (245.7) | (68.5) | (177.2) |
| Public service and professions total | 399.7 | 107.5 | 292.2 |
| Domestic service | 1,121.1 | 249.9 | 871.3 |
| Total | 8,116.7 | 1,115.0 | 7,001.7 |

These were the main occupational areas which Armstrong highlighted in his research. He then subdivided these areas into further more specific areas of employment related to each of the categories.

Below is an example of how Armstrong then sub-divided the occupational areas summarised previously into further more specific areas of employment ie. he divided 'Manufacturing' into 31 different occupational areas for classification:-

| | Number | | % of National Total | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Manufacturing | | | | |
| 1. Machinery | 8,321 | | 13.46 | |
| 2. Tools | 2,557 | | 7.48 | |
| 3. Shipbuilding, shipwrights | 5,069 | 4 | 18.91 | |
| 4. Iron, Steel Blacksmiths | 11,679 | 153 | 5.69 | 0.91 |
| 5. Non-ferrous metals | 11,274 | 292 | 19.88 | 4.49 |
| 6. Gold, silver, jewellery | 5,706 | 144 | 80.37 | 16.00 |
| 7. Earthenware | 1,372 | 160 | 3.94 | 1.37 |
| 8. Coal and gas | 1,702 | | 21.54 | |
| 9. Chemicals(see no. 22) | 2,630 | 376 | 30.94 | 47.00 |
| 10. Furs and leather | 6,263 | 1,600 | 25.88 | 84.21 |
| 11. Glue, tallow | 4,311 | 332 | 65.32 | |
| 12. Hair, brushes, etc. | 3,055 | 1,721 | 22.30 | 39.81 |
| 13. Wood workers | 14,202 | 27 | 19.14 | 1.00 |
| 14. Furniture | 18,658 | 2,431 | 40.12 | 45.87 |
| 15. Carriage and harness | 9,605 | 175 | 16.14 | 19.44 |
| Carriagemakers | 4,948 | 81 | 32.10 | 40.50 |
| 16. Paper | 2,648 | 1,267 | 24.52 | 18.36 |
| 17. Floorcloth | | | | |
| 18-21. Textiles | 21,625 | 16,894 | 4.96 | 3.59 |
| 22. Dyeing | 1,735 | | 6.65 | |
| 23. Dress(incl. footwear) | 59,181 | 103,835 | 15.17 | 22.33 |
| Boot and shoemakers | 30,855 | 7,158 | 14.62 | 24.40 |
| 'Shoemakers wife' | | 12,616 | | |
| Hatters | 2,494 | 2,434 | 9.44 | 36.33 |
| Bonnet and capmakers | | 3,046 | | 6.55 |
| Milliners | | 43,928 | | 17.42 |
| Seamstresses | | 21,210 | | 35.71 |
| Staymakers | | 2,466 | | |
| Tailors | 22,479 | 8,292 | 18.47 | 47.80 |
| 24. Sundries connected with dress | 841 | 1,221 | 11.52 | 20.02 |
| 25. Food preparation | 1,200 | 3 | 3.44 | 0.60 |
| 26. Baking | 13,762 | 1,150 | 25.77 | 10.85 |
| Bakers | 11,580 | 543 | 25.39 | 8.90 |
| Confectioners | 2,182 | 607 | 27.97 | 13.49 |
| 27. Drink preparation | 7,604 | | 27.65 | |
| Brewers | 2,617 | | 15.3 | |
| 28. Smoking | 901 | 193 | 17.67 | 14.85 |
| 29. Watches, instruments, toys | 9,354 | 517 | 39.80 | 39.77 |
| Watch and clock makers | 4,847 | | 28.35 | |
| Musical instrument makers | 2,929 | | 83.69 | |
| Scientific instrument makers | 1,578 | 93 | 54.40 | 18.60 |
| 30. Printing, bookbinding | 14,002 | | 46.06 | |
| Printers | 10,365 | | 46.69 | |
| Bookbinders | 2,850 | | 50.00 | |
| 31. Unspecified | 1,662 | | 13.19 | |
| Total | 240,919 | 132,486 | 13.94 | 12.91 |

2. Occupational Classification by Industry

In 1911 the first conscious attempt at industrial classification took place in the census. On the printed schedules householders were to enter personal occupations of inmates and the 'Industry or service with which worker is connected'. It was thus possible to produce tables showing which occupational groups were subsumed under each of twenty-two 'industrial groups', and for the first time it was found appropriate to publish a detailed list of occupations with code numbers. The 1911 attempt to distinguish between personal occupation and industry of employment was refined in 1921, through modifications in the census questionnaire. Since that date the production of an industrial as well as an occupational classification, has been a regular census procedure. Finally, in 1948 a Standard Industrial Classification was approved by the principal government departments, which consists of the following industrial groups or orders:-

| | |
|---|---|
| (1) agriculture, forestry, fishing; | (13) food, drink, and tobacco manufacture; |
| (2) mining and quarrying; | (14) manufactures of wood and cork; |
| (3) non-metalliferous mining products; | (15) paper and printing; |
| (4) chemicals etc.; | (16) other manufacturing industries; |
| (5) metal manufacture; | (17) building and contracting; |
| (6) engineering, shipbuilding, electrical goods; | (18) public utilities (gas, electricity, water); |
| (7) vehicles; | (19) transport and communications; |
| (8) sundry metal products; | (20) distributive trades (wholesale and retail); |
| (9) precision instruments, jewellery; | (21) insurance, banking and finance; |
| (10) textiles; | (22) public administration and defence; |
| (11) leather and fur goods; | (23) professional services; |
| (12) clothing manufacture; | (24) miscellaneous services. |

Each major group is divided into subdivisions, and the published lists containing above 10,000 separate designations permit researchers to place their studies on the same basis. Some however, have condensed the orders into broader groups i.e., Carr-Saunders, Jones and Moser refer to eleven groups in comparing the industrial distributions of 1931 and 1951. [Refer to Carr-Saunders, Jones and Moser, 'Survey of social conditions' and C. Booth, 'Occupations of the people of the United Kingdom, 1801-1881', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 49, 1886, pp 314-444.]

Using these modern industrial classifications it has been possible to devise a scheme to analyse the vague 'occupational classes or orders' in the nineteenth-century printed census data [as opposed to classifications based upon the enumerators' books].

This method of grouping was pioneered by Charles Booth in the late nineteenth-century. Basically, his schema states that the industry in which a person is classified into is determined by reference to the business or economic activity in which, or for the purpose of which his/her occupation is followed. He divided the occupations classified in the censuses into 3 general industrial headings:

- ❶ The production of raw materials i.e. agriculture, fishing and mining;
- ❷ The preparation of these goods for use i.e. manufacture and building;
- ❸ The distribution of finished and unfinished products i.e. transport and dealing.

Booth also devised a fourth division - Industrial Service i.e. banking, insurance and accounts [included in this category was all general labour not allocated to a particular trade.]

Booth then devised his own conclusions on the industrial development of Britain using the percentage changes in the proportion of people working in occupations listed under each of his classifications and published his findings in the *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* in 1886.

3. Life-cycle Stages

Anderson pioneered this method for analysing the nineteenth-century census data. In this schema the households listed in the censuses are grouped into life-cycle stages according to the relative number of children in and out of employment. Therefore, a working class household with a large number of children not at work is assumed to be in more difficult financial circumstances than one without children, or with children at work [See M. Anderson, *Family structure in nineteenth century Lancashire*, p 202].

Anderson distinguished, for married couples only, the following stages:

- 1** **Wife under 45yrs, no children at home**
- 2** **Wife under 45yrs, one child under one year old at home**
- 3** **Children at home, but none in employment**
- 4** **Children at home, and some, but under half, in employment**
- 5** **Children at home, and half, or over half, in employment**
- 6** **Wife 45yrs and over, no children, or one only over 20yrs, at home**

A Final Note

These techniques of classification are not perfect but they have shed some light on the information available in the censuses, allowing some useful studies to be completed. It is important for you to realise that the methods devised above are simply examples of classification techniques. You can develop your own classification system to work with the census material. How you would design your system would depend on the amount of material you would be using ie. national/regional or based within specific industries ie. iron and steel manufacturing.

Assignment

You have now had a brief introduction to census occupation material and classification systems devised to make more sense of the data. You will also now be aware of some of the pitfalls you have to negotiate when working with such data.

A useful exercise for you to gain some first-hand knowledge of using occupational classification material is listed below:

1. Go to the reference collection on the second floor of the library and find the Census material available;
2. Compare two census returns. One from the nineteenth century and the other from the twentieth century. What differences can you discover in the two returns occupational information? Familiarise yourself with the methods of classification used on the nineteenth-century census material.

Assignment

**Type a couple of paragraphs on what you have discovered into *Word 6*.
This is your next assignment.**

Reading List:-

- P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley *'Towns in Societies'. Essays in Economic History and Historical Sociology*
Ref: D20.9
- A. Armstrong *Stability and Change in an English Country Town. A Social Study of York 1801-1851*
Ref: Local Hist. 942 YOR/YOR/ARM
- M. Anderson *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire.* pp 202
Ref: SRC JN.AND
- C. Booth 'Occupations of the people of the United Kingdom, 1801-1881', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 49, 1886, pp 314-444
Ref: D42.6 ROU
- E. Higgs 'Making sense of the Census: the manuscript returns for England and Wales, 1801-1901'
Ref: 942.01 Pub/23 SRC GM.HIG
- R. Rodger 'Employment, wages and poverty in the Scottish cities 1891-1914,' in G. Gordon, ed., *Perspectives of the Scottish City*, reprinted in R.J. Morris and R. Rodger, eds., *The Victorian City 1820-1914*.
Ref: D42.9 VIC
- E. A. Wrigley (ed.) *Nineteenth-Century Society. Essays in the use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data.*
Ref: D42.8 NIN
- M. Anderson 'The 1851 Census: a national sample of the enumerators' returns' (1987)
'Classification of Occupations' 1950. Ref: Off Pubs UK/OFF
- 'Guide to the Census Reports of Great Britain' 1801-1831
'1851 Census' II. Vol. I
'1951 Census' Occupational and Industrial Tables