

How people in our villages earned their livings from 1840 to 1910.

During the last few years over 50 local families have been researched and published on the Friends of St Matthew's Churchyard website as 'People of Interest'. In many of these, Dorothy Barker has collected the census returns over the period 1841 to 1911. The majority of these families lived in our area. From lower Shibden Valley, Hipperholme, Lightcliffe, Bailiffe Bridge, Norwood Green and Hove Edge. The amount of detail varies both in clarity and quantity as time passes. It looks as though each family could define its working roles for the purpose of the census.

I certainly couldn't do any statistical analysis on the information partly because the families were selected for several different reasons and partly because some occupational definitions change with time. One family in Norwood Green, for example, went from being described as a cow doctor in 1845 to university qualified veterinary surgeons in the next two generations. However this example is not included in what follows as Dorothy hasn't yet completed the research.

So the following is just a snapshot of what people living in our area were doing during this 70 year period. Old jobs, such as hand loom weaver have gone by 1861, and new ones, such as electrical engineer have arrived by 1901.

Many entries are for young children, often referred to as scholar or half time scholar. But, as we know, childhood didn't last long and very young children are listed by a job such as butcher's boy, stable lad, errand boy. Others in their teens had started in an occupation and you can see how they stayed in the same area of employment though their skill set widened.

We've only one soldier listed. That's probably because they weren't at home when the census took place. As we know from some of the families looked at, there were several professional soldiers from round here.

Some people, of course, were quite wealthy and are described as 'retired gent', 'of independent means', as holders of stocks in the canal system (these were of declining value as the railways grew in importance), several entries are as 'annuitant' so had a form of annuity and there were a few land or property owners. In some large houses servants were employed such as cooks, male and female servants, gardeners, children's nurses and those dealing with the coaches and horses such as coachman and stable boys. This group of both the wealthy and those who served them directly was relatively small in our sample.

There were a group of people which might be considered as the professional class. There was a range of teachers from headteacher of an elementary school, school masters and mistresses to pupil teachers reflecting a method of teaching for the period. There was also a governess. A real surprise for me was to find a doctor describing himself as a 'GP and apothecary', the surprise being that it was as early as 1841. I hadn't realised that the term GP was so old. We had a chemist & druggist, solicitors and a solicitor's clerk, an attorney at law, an Anglican clergyman, a priest

and a Wesley local preacher; there were also two publishers and booksellers. An auctioneer appears as do land surveyors, a land agent, a land steward and an architect.

From long before the census system was introduced, the land round here was managed and its products prepared and sold. As you'd expect we had several farmers. It is the description that they gave themselves which varies. To what extent that was determined by how the questions were asked, I don't know. Some appear just as 'farmer', for others it was determined by how many acres they worked or men they employed. The biggest farm had 72 acres and 3 labourers. We had one that, understandably, doubled up as a farmer & butcher. There was one farmer who specialised in horses and many farm labourers.

There were butchers, two butcher apprentices, a milk dealer, corn miller, breadmaker (and an oat bread maker) bakers and grocers. Though not to do with the land, far from it, there was a fish fryer and a fish merchant.

Helping to keep the population clean there were laundries run by a proprietor with a laundress, laundry man, van driver and carter.

Our population was well provided for clothing. Several tailors and dressmakers are recorded with some quite specialised trades as well. Straw bonnet maker, cordwainer, shoemaker (the difference is timing as far as I can see. The first term was in use throughout earlier periods - it might be derived from 'workers in Cordovan leather' - by the 1850s it was replaced by the latter term), milliner, bonnet maker, apron & pinafore maker and a stocking knitter. Allied trades included tanners, curriers and leather merchants. Presumably some of these worked at James Lees works on Halifax Road.

When we look to see what other shops or services might be available almost all are still available today. Though you might have a journey to buy your newly-made barometer. There is, even now, a chair maker and an upholsterer in Hipperholme. You could have your house decorated by a master painter or a house painter & paper hanger. We had a manager of tobacco & cigar business and a tobacco dealer & umbrella repairer. Other tradespeople included joiners, shopkeepers, blacksmiths, two cabinet makers, a wood turner, a photographer a silversmith and a plumber. In addition to these, in the area were hairdressers, florists, confectioners, a china & glass dealer and a fancy goods dealer.

To keep businesses running, there were several clerks, bookkeepers but no accountants nor auditors. In the office was a shorthand typist, office boys and a teller. Banks are represented by two bank clerks. Out selling products (in addition to those mentioned later) we had commercial travellers, a boiler insurance rep (representative), a paper merchant agent and an oil hawker.

Coal was vital both for steam powering the mills and domestically for cooking and heating. Some coal could be found locally at mines in the Walterclough Valley,

Norwood Green and under land that would become Lightcliffe Golf Club. There were 2 proprietors (one served as a magistrate) and a coal merchant. However most who had 'coal' as part of their job description were working at or near the coal face itself. A miner, a hewer of coal, several banksmen, a hurrier in the mine, one who filled carts and drove them and the oddly named 'coal pit hanger on'. A banksmen was a person who worked at the mouth of a mine shaft or pit, supervising the loading of coal and the lowering and raising of the cage. One man certainly multi-tasked as coal merchant, baker and confectioner; an interesting combination.

In an area such as ours, especially as the population grew, there was a large demand for the principal building material, stone. As we know we had stone quarries from Hove Edge, through Lightcliffe to Norwood Green as well of those in Northowram and Southowram. Like many industries the jobs given in the Census had very specific titles. In this category we had a managing director stone mine (there was a difference between mining stone - driving tunnels and shafts into the rock - and stone quarries where the stone was taken from the surface working downwards.) Some of the jobs were based on the extraction of the raw material such as delvers, quarry hewer, quarryman; some were servicing the industry such as the quarry blacksmith, the quarry horse driver and the quarry engine tender. 'Tenters' occur in different industries and describes someone looking after the machinery, basically tending the engine.

Once the stone was out of the ground it needed cutting and shaping done by masons, a sculpter [sic], stone dressers, trimmers and polishers. We even had someone described as a 'lady nipper stone quarry'. For those readers who remember one of the first TV game where the panellists had to guess a contestant's occupation, here would be a mine of unusual tasks. Late in the period are two men who work in the brick trade. As we know there was little demand round here for bricks when stone was still cheap. The balance changed after WW1 as a skilled labour force had been hard hit by deaths and injuries and bricks were easily mass produced with much less skill required.

Most people during this period walked to work. There were woollen mills in Hipperholme, silk and cotton in Brighouse including along the Bradford Road from Bailiffe Bridge and Firth's Carpets. Also there was a brewery, maltings and a large tannery close to Lane Ends in Hipperholme. Between the 1901 and 1911 trams services arrived and people could travel further to work.

Though there is no record in this sample of anyone working on the trams, the railway is represented with a railway goods inspector, a plate layer, a porter and a station cleaner. In an associated trade, there is a railway carriage cloth weaver.

All of the work would have been created a thirst and the alcoholic drinks industry is well represented with a common brewer, a maltster, a brewer's driver and a number of publicans and innkeepers. In this sample there are several local pubs named; The Horse Shoes (now The Poplars on Wakefield Road, The Sun Inn, The White Bear (note the spelling), The White Horse, The Travellers, The Whitehall, The Malt Shovel -

next to Coley church, Joiner's Arms at Hove Edge and the Coley Mill. Naturally these had staff as barmaids and barmen. One man was a licenced victualler.

By far and away most people worked in textiles. Many of the roles had similar titles, perhaps only the raw material differed. So we have weavers, drawers, spreaders, winders, reelers and creelers (this one, as I know from a very brief experience, could involve tying on wool from bobbins feeding the looms so that there was a continuous supply and the looms could keep going. Absolutely vital as the weaver was probably paid by the length produced, pieces for piece work.), doffers - often young boys looking after bobbins - and many others. There were a couple of millwrights and one wheelwright.

There were silk mills in Brighthouse from 1843 and by 1870 there were 7 mills. Cotton came earlier by 1792 and again, by 1870 there were 16 cotton companies in the Brighthouse area. Wool was processed from very early times and was a very important part of our local economy during this period.

From the time of the 1861 census, the manufacture of carpets becomes a major source of employment. Possibly because it was a complex process, the number of different jobs is extensive.

The carpets were designed by designers assisted by a colour mixer manage, a colour mixer tapestry carpet and a carpet colourer. There were two factory managers, overlookers and, of course, a time keeper. There were setters (I don't know what they did) for both Axminster and tapestry carpets. I don't know if these two terms were for the same style of carpet manufacture. Other skills included loom turners, winders (including one for jute) and dyers.

There was a different style of carpets compared with the standard Axminster woven. This was a Brussels carpet and occupations were designated that way - a Brussell weaver, Brussell winder, Brussel designer, creeler in Brussels carpet factory.

After the carpets had been made several additional processes were involved including cropper, presser, carpet sewer, menders and a sewer of dregs of carpets. Once complete the carpets were stored in warehouses overseen by clerks and warehousemen and were sold by salesmen and fitted by carpet fitters.

The silk trade is represented from 1861 though there appeared to be few working in this. I think the nearest silk mill would have been on the way into Brighthouse near to Wellholme Park.

Our first entry for a cotton worker came in 1871. Again many of the trades are in common with silk and wool, just with cotton added. There are references to the dying of the cotton together with a cotton merchant. At least one of the card makers was producing for both cotton and wool.

There were far more entries for those working in the wool trade and these began in 1841. The manufacturers included those for wool and burler worsted. There were, of course, wool merchants, some of considerable substance and listed as landowner as well. Woolcombers, wool sorters, staplers, overlookers, rovers, wool spinners and a woollen stuff weaver. Entries are specific, so we have worsted added to the standard description. The number of these suggests that the manufacture of worsted cloth was very important round here. (Worsted is defined as a smooth compact yarn from long wool fibres used especially for firm napless fabrics. The name comes from a village in Norfolk.) All levels of worker are included from skilled weavers to labourers and millhands.

There were many other jobs in the textile trade but without a specific material mentioned. Weavers and millhands could have been working in any of these areas but there was no evidence that, for example, a weaver in wool would ever change to working with silk or cotton. Several entries refer to stuff goods - defined as a finished textile suitable for clothing - including a stuff weaver, stuff finisher and stuff presser who placed the cloth within sheets of special stiff press paper and passed it into a hot-pressing machine which gave the finish to the cloth. There was even a stuff manufacturer who was out of work at the time of the census. There was one shalloon weaver; this was a lightweight twilled fabric of wool or worsted. Other materials mentioned included linen and jute.

A master cardmaker employed 2 men and 12 hands; other card related jobs included a card setter and a tenter for the card machine. There were leather belt makers, these could have been items of clothing but, more likely, refers to the belts used to drive the machines in the mills. Other jobs included a weaver of blankets, a tapestry fringer, an apprentice spindle maker and a thimble maker.

Other associated trades included dyeing of materials and wire working. In our area dyers themselves, finishers, pressers, a joiner and labourers together with a representative and commercial salesman. Wire had an important part to play within all aspects of the textile trade primarily in the carding process. Cardmakers were dying out by mid-century as the process became more mechanised but still totally reliant on short pieces of wire. We had a wire drawer, a die cutter and, even, a thick wire drawer.

Putting the metal trades, often associated with the textile industries, together with engineers of various types we have an iron planer, labourer in iron and brass works, iron moulder, brass finisher, brass moulder, teamer in the Low Moor Iron works, iron master and an iron merchant.

The first appearance of an electrical engineer is in 1901 and, similarly, for a telegraph engineer as early as 1881. We had a chemical student and an analytical chemist, a boiler maker, a steam valve fitter, mechanics and mechanical engineers.

In any census there are jobs which aren't easy to categorise so here are a few; a tin trunk worker, labourer pleasure gardens, packer labourer sanitary department,

soap making, in journalism both a reporter and a sub editor, telegraph messenger, tin trunk painter, road scavenger, parish relief labourer, inmate workhouse, sexton & verger, stick drier for printing, printer drum filler and a printer.

If we were able to look at the 2011 census returns, we would see a great deal of change in the previous century. In a similar way, the period from 1841 to 1911 would have shown a growth not only in population but in what people of our villages did for a living.

It will be clear that I don't know what some of the jobs entailed. If you do, please contact me through the Friends of St Matthew's Churchyard website - thank you. As always, grateful thanks to Dorothy for her hours of detailed research.

Ian Philp, December 2021