

A HISTORY of the SCOTTISH PEOPLE

PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT IN SCOTLAND 1840-1940

W W Knox



This is Chapter 2 of 10. The others are:

Summary of Economy & Society, Education, Health, Housing, Income, Leisure, Migration, Religion, Transport

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1. INTRODUCTION

The occupational structure of Scotland has undergone a number of significant changes in the 19th and 20th centuries. At the beginning of the 19th century agriculture and other traditional occupations dominated the employment structure. However, from 1850 onwards the economy was characterised by heavy industrial occupations such as coal mining and shipbuilding. But heavy industry's reign was relatively short-lived. It was displaced after 1950 by services and transport as the main employers of labour. The changes in the employment structure of the country were in line with those taking place in the rest of the UK and throughout western Europe and the USA. Scotland's experience, therefore, is far from unique. Nevertheless, the pace of change and its impact in terms of geography, gender and ethnicity does provide interesting comparisons with other parts of the UK and the rest of the industrialised world.

2. INDUSTRIALISATION

2.1 THE FIRST PHASE 1800-1850

Scotland in 1800 was largely an agricultural society, but its economy was from static. Agriculture itself had undergone profound changes in the Lowlands with fewer farms and less people working on the land than in the 18th century. By contrast, the Highlands, in spite of certain isolated improvements, remained less developed. The relative decline in the number of people living on the land was encouraged by the growth of the textile industry, particularly cotton weaving. There were estimated to be 25,000 handloom weavers in 1780, 58,000 in 1800 and 78,000 in the 1820s. In the 1830s seven out of ten workers in Scottish manufacturing were in textiles. This was in spite of continually falling wages. But by the late 1840s the numbers of handloom weavers had begun to fall dramatically due to the widespread introduction of power-loom weaving.

2.2 THE SECOND PHASE 1840-1914

The seeds of a revolution in the employment structure were sown in the two decades before the half century. Developments in the iron industry, which made Scottish pig iron the cheapest in the world, and the emergence of steam powered shipping signalled the growth of Clydeside as the power-house of Scotland and, indeed, the UK. In a relatively short period of time the Clyde became the centre of iron and, later, steel shipbuilding. The growth of that industry encouraged further growth in coal and iron production. The railway building boom was also a dynamic feature of economic the share of labour going to other industries increased. Heavy industry saw its share of labour increase from just over 8% in 1851 to 19% in 1911. However, more spectacular in terms of total employment was the growth of services. From around 380,000 workers in 1851, the numbers in this sector of the economy grew to 879,000 out of a total workforce of 1,902,000 in 1901.

By 1910 services claimed over 46% of the Scottish labour force - more than metals, textiles and agriculture put together. Domestic service had always been an important employer of labour, but the growth of middle class occupations such as teaching and nursing, and lower middle class jobs such as typing and clerical work, significantly added to the numbers. Transport employment also grew with Glasgow Corporation employing as many as 6,000 tram workers in 1901. Scotland differed somewhat from the rest of the UK, and the UK differed from other leading industrial countries. Even as late as 1911 Scotland employed more people in agriculture than the UK as a whole. Some 13% of employed people had agricultural jobs in Scotland whereas the figure for the UK as a whole was only 9%. However, it should be remembered that France still had 43% of its population working in agriculture, while in Germany and the USA the figures were 37% and 31% respectively.

Similarly, in spite of its growth, Scotland had a far lower proportion of workers in service industries than the UK in 1911, the comparable figures being 28% as against 35%. The smaller middle class in Scotland accounts for this difference with the rest of the country. Indeed, Scotland had only 944 civil servants in 1911.

On the manufacturing side there was no overall disparity in terms of employment between Scotland and the rest of the UK in 1911.

2.3 INDUSTRIAL DECLINE SINCE THE 1ST WORLD WAR

Apart from very short periods of boom in heavy industries, such as at the end of the Second World War, the 20th century has been characterised by the rise and rise of the services and transport sectors. Their share of the labour market increased largely at the expense of that in heavy industry. The collapse of employment in heavy industry and textiles in the inter-War period was halted with the re-armament drive of the late 1930s. The need to rebuild the world economy after 1945 also gave a brief respite to heavy industry as the demand for coal, ships and steel was high. However, this masked changes occurring within the economy which furthered strengthened the trend towards the services sector. The expansion of the Welfare State after 1945, the growth of local authority services and the rise in the number of private companies in the service sector created an unprecedented demand for white collar workers. At the same time foreign competition was putting Scottish heavy industry to the sword. As heavy industry declined so the shift towards service sector working increased. By 1971 services and transport accounted for over 50% of the employed population and this trend has intensified since then. These, of course, are national trends and as such they mask regional and other differences such as ethnicity or male/female employment opportunities.

3. REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

3.1 STRATHCLYDE

Geographically, the industrial core of 19th century Scotland was located in the Strathclyde area. It was centred on Glasgow and industrial satellite towns such as Coatbridge, Clydebank, and Paisley. In 1851 over 50% of textile and over 60% of heavy industrial employment was located here. By 1911, and in spite of the collapse of the cotton industry, Strathclyde retained 40% of textile employment and an astonishing 69% of heavy industrial employment. Glasgow was the skilled man's city with over 70% of male employees classed as "skilled" in 1901.

3.2 THE LOTHIAN

Moving east, the next urban/industrial conurbation of importance was the Lothians, with Edinburgh its major centre of population. As the home of the legal and financial establishment, Edinburgh not unsurprisingly had a large service sector. Indeed, it was much larger than in any other part of Scotland. In 1911 over 15% of men in Edinburgh were employed in the professional sector; 5% more than in Aberdeen or Glasgow. However, mining was still an important industry in the Lothians, and there were developments in consumer trades such as printing, brewing and rubber. Domestic service was a major employer of female labour reflecting the preponderance of the middle classes in the city, although it had declined in proportion to the growth of other employment opportunities.

3.3 CENTRAL SCOTLAND AND FIFE

Central Scotland and Fife contained a mixture of employers - large coalfields, a thriving textile industry based on linen and linoleum, as well rich agricultural farms and an important fishing industry. The main industrial development took place in the coalfields, where exploitation of reserves was intensified around the turn of the century.

3.4 THE SOUTH AND THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND

There were parts of Scotland where industrialisation hardly made any impression on the structure of employment. In Dumfries, Galloway and the Borders agriculture was still the most important employer of labour in 1911, a figure only bettered by the Highlands. It was only with the mechanisation of the woollen industry of the Borders, around 1890-1900, that the South felt the impact of a process which had begun in Strathclyde a hundred years before.

3.5 TAYSIDE AND THE NORTH-EAST

Further north, Tayside and the north-east of Scotland enjoyed a varied pattern of employment. After 1851 Tayside, with Dundee at its core, was the most important textile region in Scotland, boasting a thriving jute and linen industry. In Dundee over 50% of the workforce was employed in the jute industry just before the First World War. Even so, agriculture employment remained significant until the 1970s. Aberdeen dominated the north-east, but in spite of the granite industry and a growing fishing industry, agriculture remained the most important employer of labour in that area too. This was even more the case in the Highlands and Islands, which was the most persistently agricultural region of Scotland with 41% of the population engaged in the industry as late as 1911.

3.6 OVERVIEW

Despite regional variations, the employment pattern of these areas all followed broadly national trends. There was, at the beginning of the 19th century, a concentration of workers employed in agriculture and textiles. Over the course of the century there was a dramatic decline in the numbers working in agriculture and a less spectacular fall in those in textiles. All regions, with the exception of the Highlands and Islands, experienced a sharp rise in the number of industrial workers, although none so much as Strathclyde. From 1911 through to the present day the service sector has employed an increasing amount of labour at the expense of heavy industry. By 1971 the most heavily industrialised region - Strathclyde - had over 50% of its workforce in the service sector.

4. THE IMPACT OF ETHNICITY & GENDER ON THE LABOUR MARKET

These shifts in the pattern of occupations have also had implications for the way that employment is distributed on an ethnic and gender basis.

4.1 ETHNICITY

The Irish, coming at first to work at the harvest and other important times in the farming calendar, increasingly settled in Scotland as the 19th century wore on. They found their way into occupations such as handloom weaving and any jobs which required muscle and strength, such as navvying on the railways, working in the docks, and other labouring occupations. Occupying the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder, the Irish were confined to low paid and unskilled work. Indeed, the employment pattern of the Catholic Irish hardly changed until after the Second World War. It was only then that the barrier of sectarianism, which had been used to police the boundaries of skill, began to break down and religion ceased to determine to any great degree a person's career prospects.

4.2 GENDER

Women have endured for much longer a form of sexual discrimination in the workforce. In the 19th century the educational system prepared girls for lives as wives and mothers. Work was only seen as an interlude between leaving school and getting married. Prevailing attitudes such as these meant that employers saw no point in training females to do skilled work, and where they did, such as in the printing industry, trade union opposition stopped the process in its tracks. Thus women were confined to low paid, unskilled work in jobs which were usually an extension of their domestic duties, such as cleaning, caring, sewing.

The four major employers of women in the 19th century were agriculture, domestic service, textiles and clothing. Indeed, before 1871 over 90% of female employment in Scotland was concentrated in these four sectors. But the balance of employment was to swing away from agriculture and service to industrial work as the century came to a close. In Dundee most of the employed female population over the period 1871-1911 worked in textiles. Even in Edinburgh there was a shift from domestic service to industrial work, such as bookbinding and food processing. By 1914, 45% of Edinburgh's female workers were in industry, whereas in 1841 it had only been 25%. Correspondingly, there was a fall in employment in domestic service from 70% of all female workers in Edinburgh in 1841 to 40% in 1914. On getting married women were expected to leave employment and only take it up in emergencies. Indeed, some occupations such as teaching operated a marriage bar. On getting married female teachers had to give up their posts, a policy which remained in force until the 1950s. However, there were exceptions. In Dundee, the dominance of the jute industry in the city's employment structure meant that there was a great demand for the labour of females. Hence, married women featured more prominently in the employment statistics here than in any other town or city in Scotland. Elsewhere the dominant masculine culture judged a man by his ability to keep a wife and family, and this more than anything kept married women out of the labour market.

The demand for labour during the 1st World War altered the picture for women. Female workers found themselves swept up in the great drive to produce armaments, working in engineering workshops and shipyards in great numbers. They were also employed as conductors on buses and trams. All of this proved short lived. When the War was over women were persuaded by society into

giving up employment and returning to the home in order to accommodate the returning soldiers. Incredibly domestic service saw an increase of 13.4% in employees during the period 1921-31, as women found it increasingly difficult to find work. Toeholds were also established in engineering and transport, and major inroads were made into the area of office work. This trend intensified after 1945 with the expansion of the service sector.

The introduction of time saving machinery in the home, such as washing machines and, in the 1960s, the introduction of the contraceptive pill saw married women especially enter the jobs market. By the mid-1970s 75% of female workers in Scotland were concentrated in the service sector, whereas in 1901 it had only been 20%. There were also more married women workers than single women, reflecting an earlier age of marriage and other impacts of social change. Thus over the course of the 20th century as the employment structure has shifted from industry to services institutional barriers to employment have broken down. Religion and gender no longer influence the labour market to the extent that they once did, although it is still the case that women are less likely to be found in positions of authority in the workplace.

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