

The Growth of Population in Victorian Colwall

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When we think of population change and migration in Victorian England our thoughts immediately turn to the rapid growth of London, the industrial cities of the northern and midland regions and our coalfield settlements. In contrast the period after 1851 is seen as one in which rural parishes were characterized by declining populations and net out-migration. Jobs in agriculture declined in the face of gradual mechanization and the rapid growth of food imports from the 'new world', while the low wages paid for farm work inevitably encouraged many to seek greater rewards for their labour in urban locations. The fall in the agricultural labour force also meant a decline in the demand for traditional village crafts, a sector already struggling in the face of competition from factory-produced goods.¹

Unlike Bosbury, Eastnor and many other Herefordshire parishes, however, Colwall increased its population by 73 per cent between 1851 and 1901; indeed the number of parishioners more than doubled between 1841 and 1911, before stabilizing at around 2000 for much of the twentieth century. Emma Mawby's article in the last newsletter provides an analysis of the changing employment trends that underlay this growth.² Farming jobs certainly seem to have fallen in number, but they may be underestimated due to the difficulty of classifying the many men whose occupation was simply recorded as 'labourer' in 1901. Nevertheless, whatever the loss of agricultural and related employment, it is clear that Colwall benefitted greatly from the existence of a railway station and the initiatives of a small number of local entrepreneurs. Foremost among the latter was Stephen Ballard, the contractor when the railway was built, who – with his sons - later provided jobs in a large vinegar brewery, a sawmill, a brickworks, a gas works, and an ice works.³ Schweppes later opened a mineral water works in 1892 after Ballard had demonstrated the purity of water from springs on his land.⁴ Another brewery and water bottling plant, named after the Royal Well, had been built in the far north of the parish in 1870.⁵ These sources of employment, were supplemented by the opening of the small Temperance Hotel built by Ballard close to the Stone, and the horse racing course opened by Roland Cave-Brown-Cave in an attempt to encourage tourism and improve the income of the Barton Court estate.⁶

Important though these initiatives were, other developments outside the manufacturing or hotel sectors were to become more significant in the twentieth century. Of particular note was the growth of private, preparatory schooling. The Elms School, for example, had 26 pupils in 1901 compared to the Grammar School's six in 1851. The newly-established Downs

¹ For a discussion of these points, see J. Saville *Rural Depopulation in England and Wales 1851-1951* (London, 1957)

² E Mawby 'Colwall census: times of change' *Herefordshire Past* Series 2, No.21 (Spring 2016) pp.8-9

³ S Ballard *Colwall Collection: Memories of a Herefordshire Village* (Malvern, 1999)

⁴ Ballard *Colwall Collection*, p.58; S W C Stringer *History of Colwall* (unpublished manuscript, 1954) p.43. Available at Malvern Library.

⁵ T B V Marsh *The Commercial Complex – now residential – on the West Malvern Road* (Colwall Village Society, Local Topics, 2002)

⁶ N Neve *National Hunt Racing at Colwall Park Racecourse 1900-1939* (Colwall Village Society, History Topics Booklet No. 2, 2002) pp.2-3

School had only 4 pupils in 1901 but, even then, the headmaster's family and servants raised the number of incomers to nine.

Yet the most significant growth sector was almost certainly that of domestic service. The figures arising from census returns need to be treated with care here because in some cases owners of large properties were staying in their other homes on census night leaving only a skeleton staff permanently resident in Colwall. Moreover, it is easy to underestimate the number of staff serving a particular household since staff recruited locally would often remain at their original place of residence, particularly gardeners. Notwithstanding these caveats, however, the numbers of recorded domestic servants and gardeners rose from 66 in 1851 to 211 in 1901, an increase of 220 per cent! In addition the total of laundresses and charwomen rose from 23 to 50, a rise of 117 per cent in the same period. Some of the gardeners and laundresses may have been self-employed because they were recorded as working on their 'own account' presumably for more than one customer.⁷

What lies behind these hefty increases? One major factor was the arrival of in migrants, wealthy and successful people who could build new houses or modernize others in a country environment away from, yet well connected by the railway to, their normal home or place(s) of business. Mawby's article mentioned the chocolate manufacturer George Cadbury in this context, although in this case his acquisition of Wynd's Point was driven in part by his admiration for its previous owner - Jenny Lind, 'the Swedish nightingale' - and his desire to preserve the house as it was left after her death in 1887.⁸ When the new owner was at home, as he was in 1901, there were ten family members plus five servants in the house and lodge. In 1851 the site had been occupied by an inn keeper, his son and daughter-in-law and one servant. Incidentally Cadbury retained his house in Northfield, Birmingham, close to his factory and garden suburb of Bournville.

In some respects a better example of a wealthy newcomer to Colwall is the manufacturing chemist John William Wilson, a resident of Edgbaston, Birmingham who worked for the family firm (Albright and Wilson in Oldbury) becoming Chairman before joining the Boards of the Great Western Railway and Bryant and May Ltd.⁹ The 1891 census records him and his wife in a shared villa in Hanley Castle, but soon after, in 1893, he bought land along Jubilee Drive and commissioned C F A Voysey to design a small country house later known as Perrycroft. Completed in 1895, the year Wilson was first elected to Parliament, it became his summer retreat.¹⁰ So, in 1901, the census records the new MP and his wife in their Westminster flat, while in Colwall seven servants remained in the house and its associated cottages along with a further 11 of their dependents.

Many more examples could be quoted of folk 'living on own means' who made Colwall their only home: Edward Conder, the building contractor who left London for New Court (7

⁷ Employment figures require checking and should be regarded as provisional at this stage.

⁸ Mawby, *Colwall census*, p.9

⁹ Stringer *History* p.57

¹⁰ M & G Archer 'Perrycroft House' <http://perrycroft.co.uk/welcome-to-perrycroft/perrycroft/> (accessed 31OCT2016)

servants and 7 dependents¹¹); Tamsin Williams, the widow of a colliery owner in Liverpool, who moved to Redlands Lodge (six servants and four dependents); and Stephen Ballard Senior, originally of Malvern, who bought the Winnings estate in 1837 before building a new houses for his wife and family from 1856 onwards.¹²

The sheer volume of upper middle class migration into Victorian Colwall, which continued during the interwar years and beyond, represents a form of counterurbanization akin to that noted in many advanced western economies since the 1960s. In Victorian times it would have appeared in most rural parishes as a minor trend against a backcloth of mass working class migration to the cities. But in a few particularly favoured parishes it was sufficient to lead to population growth. The same phenomenon has been observed in parts of Surrey and in three Berkshire parishes during the interwar years; all three were particularly attractive to incomers in terms of both landscape and access to nearby towns and/or railways.¹³ Colwall's magnificent scenery, its railway station and proximity to Malvern surely puts this Herefordshire parish in the same class.

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¹¹ The use of the term dependents in this paragraph includes family members of both the head of household and servants resident in nearby lodges or garden cottages next to the main house.

¹² Stringer *History* p.33

¹³ J. Connell *The End of Tradition: Country Life in Central Surrey* London, 1978; J Burchardt 'Housing counterurbanization: In migration and the reconstruction of rural space in Berkshire (UK), 1901-51' *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012) pp. 155-166