

Lee Shaw-Taylor

“The Occupational Structure of England c.1650-1871: Work in progress”

Abstract

This paper summarises work that has been undertaken over the last seven years on *The Occupational Structure of Britain c.1379-1911* project by a team of historians led by L. Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley with generous funding from the ESRC, the Leverhulme Trust and the British Academy. Prior to this project we had no reliable estimates of the occupational structure of the economy before the mid-nineteenth century. Existing estimates, by Lindert and Williamson, were fragile and unreliable. One key finding of the new work is that the secondary sector was perhaps twice as large, in terms of male employment, at the beginning of the eighteenth century as Lindert and Williamson had suggested. One implication of this is that most of the growth in the relative importance of secondary sector employment, normally associated with the post 1750 period, in fact preceded the eighteenth century. A further implication is that the increase in the productivity of the secondary sector (and hence the impact of new technology) was much larger than has been argued in the national accounts literature. A second key finding is that from the very beginning of the nineteenth century the basic feature of structural change was a relative shift from agricultural to service sector employment not, a shift from agriculture to the secondary sector. Moreover, striking tertiary sector growth was a feature of all regions of England and Wales, suggesting that the Industrial Revolution affected all parts of the country and cannot be viewed merely as a regional phenomenon, as has sometimes been argued.

The seminar paper will summarise work described in more detail in two papers which can be found online at:

<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/occupations/abstracts/> as papers 22 and 23.