

Socio-Economic Status and Social Class in Ipswich, 1872-1910.

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All social scientific work using socio-economic and social class categories faces the problem of how to construct a system of classification. Most historians have either used the method of classifying occupations into social class categories created by Armstrong in his work on nineteenth century York, or have utilised the scheme devised by the Registrar-General at the beginning of the twentieth century. Neither of these schemes is fully comprehensive, with many occupations not included in the classification lists.

Other difficulties are well-known: local and historical variations might make any general scheme of classification inappropriate, and the problem of interpreting the meaning of ambiguous occupational descriptions. For example, in the Ipswich vaccination birth registers two fathers were listed as builders, but one was returned in the census as a builder employing 112 men and 75 boys as well as two domestic servants, the other as a foreman builder without any employees. There is also the problem that the conventional Social Class 3 category normally includes over 50 per cent of all occupations, with only a small minority in Social Class 1 and 2, making statistical analysis difficult.

A scheme of classification was devised for research on the history of mortality and fertility in Ipswich which uses data included in the original source material. The vaccination birth register includes information on whether individual children were vaccinated by the public vaccinator, or were vaccinated by private family doctors. Private vaccination cost something of the order of five shillings per vaccination, a significant sum for most people at the end of the nineteenth century. The basis of the system of classification of occupations is to measure the number of private or public vaccinators used by particular occupational groups for the vaccination of their children, assuming that the ability to pay for private vaccination is a reflection of socio-economic status.

Father's occupations were classified into five categories: 1. Occupations where 0-20% of children's vaccinations were public. 2. 21-40% of public vaccinations. 3. 41-60%. 4. 61-80%. 5. 81-100%. To be meaningful, it was assumed that this classification of occupations required at least fifty individual birth entries. Where there is an overlap in the latter classification and that adopted by the Registrar-General, it is possible to compare social class categories as follows:

Table 1: The Comparison Of Social Class Categories Using The Number Of Public/Private Vaccinations In Ipswich 1871-1901 Versus The Registrar-General's 1911 Classification.

<i>Father's Occupation</i>	<i>Public Vaccinations</i>	<i>Private Vaccinations</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% Public Vaccinations</i>	<i>Vaccination Class Category</i>	<i>R.G.'s Classification</i>
Accountant	18	114	132	14%	1	1
Anglican Clergyman (Curate, Rector, Vicar)	8	52	60	13%	1	1
Baker	82	166	248	33%	2	2
Blacksmith	389	191	580	67%	4	3
Bootmaker	54	68	122	44%	3	3
Bricklayer	483	238	721	67%	4	3
Brickmaker	181	36	217	84%	5	5
Builder	7	75	82	9%	1	1
Butcher	61	103	164	37%	2	2
Cab Driver	93	34	127	73%	4	5
Carpenter	536	649	1185	45%	3	3
Chemist/Chymist	9	46	55	16%	1	1
Coachman (Domestic)	96	116	222	43%	3	4

Commercial Clerk	80	145	225	36%	2	1
Commercial Traveller	49	237	286	17%	1	1
Currier	44	27	71	62%	4	4
Draper's Assistant	6	50	56	11%	1	1
Engineer	17	40	57	30%	2	2
Fishmonger	33	48	81	41%	3	2
Gardener (Domestic)	135	141	276	49%	3	4
Gas Fitter	27	30	57	47%	3	3
Greengrocer	35	51	86	41%	3	2
Grocer	39	206	245	16%	1	2
Groom	49	35	84	58%	3	5
Hairdresser	15	67	82	18%	1	3
Hawker	42	8	50	84%	5	5
Innkeeper	11	60	71	15%	1	2
Labourer (Bricklayer's)	427	104	531	80%	5	5
Labourer (Builder's)	249	67	316	79%	4	5
Labourer (Docks)	73	19	90	81%	5	5
Labourer (Foundry)	1539	499	2038	76%	4	5
Labourer (General)	451	124	575	78%	4	5
Miller	38	41	79	48%	3	4
Painter	148	83	231	64%	4	3
Plumber	53	84	137	39%	2	3
Police Constable	86	135	221	39%	2	4
Postman	53	41	94	56%	3	4
Printer	37	61	98	37%	2	3
Private (Army)	56	35	91	62%	4	4
Railway Clerk	36	69	105	34%	2	1
Railway Engine Driver	31	51	82	38%	2	3
Railway Guard	78	90	168	46%	3	3
Railway Platelayer	33	17	50	66%	4	5
Railway Signaller	48	36	84	57%	3	3
Sawyer	67	31	98	68%	4	4
Schoolmaster	5	83	88	6%	1	1
Shipwright	93	57	150	62%	4	3
Solicitor	5	70	75	7%	1	1
Solicitor's Clerk	6	62	68	9%	1	1
Tailor	171	171	342	50%	3	3
Upholsterer	21	51	72	29%	2	3
Wheelwright	47	40	87	54%	3	3

There is an overall similarity in the two systems of classification, although there are a number of anomalies. The majority of discrepancies in classification are of the magnitude of a single category and are the result of marginal differences in the proportions of public/private vaccinations – coachmen, fishmongers, greengrocers, labourers (builder's, foundry, general), plumbers, railway engine driver and shipwrights – and many are probably linked to small sample sizes. The only occupations with a discrepancy of two categories – grooms, hairdressers and police constables – also have relatively small sample sizes, and are on the margins of category classification.

The advantage of the dataset on individual families is that it allows detailed exploration of potential anomalies. For example, the Registrar-General classified all clerks as social class 1, yet there were variations in public/private categorisation depending on the type of clerk: Commercial Clerks – Class 2; Iron-founders' Clerks – Class 1; Merchants' Clerks

– Class 1; Post Office Clerks – Class 2; Railway Clerks – Class 2; Solicitors’ Clerks – Class 1. The overall classification of all clerks using the number of public/private vaccinations is Social Class 1, the same as that adopted by the Registrar-General in 1911, although clerks were subsequently relegated to Social Class 2 and Social Class 3 in later censuses.

In order to further clarify the classification of occupations, information was collected on the presence of domestic servants – a measure of socio-economic status used by contemporaries such as Seebohm Rowntree – in Social Class 1 families enumerated in the 1881 Ipswich census. Although the numbers are small, the following table gives some indication of the relative prosperity of the most important occupational groups in social class 1, as measured by their ability to employ domestic servants:

Table 2: Proportions of Families Employing Domestic Servants by Social Class, Ipswich 1871-1881.

<i>Occupation Of Household Head</i>	<i>Proportion Of Families With Domestic Servants</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>
Professionals (Clergymen, Doctors, Solicitors, Architects, Surveyors & Navy Officers)	95%	38
Merchants & Bankers	90%	29
Accountants	70%	23
Drapers	69%	32
Clerks	58%	91
Grocers	52%	50
Innkeepers/Publicans	46%	35
Commercial Travellers	26%	31

The large percentage of professional and merchant families employing domestic servants is not surprising, but the high proportion amongst drapers, clerks and grocers is less expected. Many clerks were described in the vaccination registers and census schedules as accountants, perhaps in part explaining their relatively high socio-economic status.

Ideally we would want to explore the relationship between all occupations and employment of domestic servants, particularly in Social Class 2. Limited data is available for a sample of children born in Ipswich in the 1870s. Of 404 Social Class 1 families found in the 1881 census, 224 – 55% – had domestic servants, compared to 2% – 3 out of 125 – in the non-Social Class 1 families. A special study was also carried out on the families of bakers and butchers who might be expected to have had a measure of prosperity, but the percentage of bakers’ families employing servants was only 19% – 11 out of 59 – and butchers 18% – 8 of 45. The difference in the employment of domestic servants by commercial travellers in Social Class 1 (26%) and bakers in Social Class 2 (19%) and butchers in Social Class 3 (18%) was therefore very marginal, but to some extent this is what we would expect with some occupational groups on the margins of social class classification.

Further clarification of the categorisation of social classes can be established through data on rateable value of birth addresses.

Table 3: Social Class and Rateable Value Of Birth Addresses, Ipswich 1871-1881.

<i>Vaccination Social Class</i>	<i>Mean Rateable Value (£)</i>	<i>Number</i>
1	22.2	141
2	14.0	172
3	9.0	255
4	6.7	223
5	5.9	140

There is a linear trend of decreasing rateable values by social class, reducing from £22.2 in social class 1 to £5.9 in social class 5, confirming the general validity of the class classification. The mean rateable value of houses lived in by Social Class 1 families employing domestic servants was £30.6, compared to £14.1 for Social Class 1 families not employing servants, suggesting that a further sub-division of the social class gradient is valid.

There is a similar linear gradient between rateable value and the percentage of private doctors used by families for purposes of vaccination: 16.2% of £2.75-£3.75 rateable value families used private doctors, compared to 86.6% of those living at addresses with rateable values in the £40-£175 band, and the percentages of private doctors ran evenly between these two extremes as rateable values increased. It therefore appears that there is an interlocking relationship between rateable value, the use of private/ public doctors, the employment of domestic servants, and occupations of head of household, providing the basis for a comprehensive system of classification of socio-economic status.

In order to illustrate the analytical possibilities of the Ipswich data, a detailed analysis was carried out on the two samples drawn from the 1871 and 1891 censuses, one employing domestic servants – which we have termed elite families – with those headed by labourers, a well-defined group known to have been one of the poorest and least educated in late nineteenth century England. The elite group were sub-divided into two categories: 1. Families with two or more resident domestic servants (SEG1). 2. Families with only one domestic servant (SEG2). To give some idea of the nature of these categories, we list below the main occupations followed by the elite male heads of household enumerated in the two censuses combined.

Table 4: Occupations Of Head Of Households In SEG1 And SEG2 Families, 1871 and 1891 Ipswich Samples.

<i>SEG1 Occupations</i>	<i>Number Of Cases</i>
Attorney & Solicitor	10
Doctors & Surgeons	13
Hotel/ Innkeepers	13
Manufacturers	8
Merchants	23
Others	62
Total	132
<i>SEG2 Occupations</i>	<i>Number Of Cases</i>
Attorney & Solicitor	5
Baker & Confectioner	8
Builders	6
Butchers	16
Clerks	31
Commercial Travellers	19
Drapers & Tailors	19
Grocers	10
Independent/ Property Owners	6
Manufacturers	17
Merchants	16
Musicians/Piano Tuners	5
Printers	6
Others	180
Total	344

Socio-Economic Group 1 (SEG1) was mainly made up of professionals and business occupations, whereas although Group 2 (SEG2) included some of these occupations, it was mainly made up of clerks, commercial travellers, artisans and tradesmen. SEG1 appears to have been significantly more stable in its status characteristics than SEG2, as revealed in the following table.

Table 5: Continuities in the Employment of Servants in Families, Ipswich 1871 And 1891 Samples.

<i>SEG 1 Families 1871</i>				<i>SEG 2 Families 1871</i>			
No Servants In 1881	1 Servant In 1881	2+ Servants In 1881	Total	No Servants In 1881	1 Servant In 1881	2+ Servants In 1881	Total
5 (7%)	13 (17%)	57 (76%)	75	73 (42%)	80 (47%)	19 (11%)	172
<i>SEG 1 Families In 1891</i>				<i>SEG 2 Families In 1891</i>			
No Servants In 1901	1 Servant In 1901	2+ Servants In 1901	Total	No Servants In 1901	1 Servant In 1901	2+ Servants In 1901	Total
6 (11%)	16 (28%)	35 (61%)	57	96 (56%)	61 (36%)	15 (9%)	172

Only between 7 and 11 per cent of SEG1 families had no servants ten years after they were initially enumerated, whereas the equivalent figure for SEG2 families was 42 to 56 per cent. Many of the SEG2 families without servants in subsequent censuses appear to have been artisans and tradesmen rather than professional or business people, suggesting that a more refined classification of socio-economic status will be possible in future by combining information on servants at different stages in the life cycle.

Although there were differences in the continuity of employment of servants between SEG1 and SEG2, they appear to have shared rather than differed in other socio-economic characteristics. It was seen earlier that employment of public/ private vaccinators was linked to social class, as well as other measures such as rateable value. The following table analyses the use of public/private vaccinators in elite compared to labourers' families in the 1871 sample, with the latter divided between non-agricultural labourers (SEG3) and agricultural labourers (SEG4).

Table 7: Private/ Public Vaccinators Used By Families 1871-81 Analysed By Socio-Economic Group

Socio-Economic Group	All Vaccinations Private	Mixed Private/ Public Vaccinations	All Vaccinations Public	Total Number Of Families
SEG1	21 (78%)	2 (7%)	4(15%)	27
SEG2	58 (78%)	8 (11%)	8 (11%)	74
SEG3	6 (8%)	9 (12%)	62 (81%)	77
SEG4	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	14 (88%)	16
SEG1 & 2	79 (78%)	10 (10%)	12 (12%)	103
SEG3 & 4	7 (8%)	10 (11%)	76 (85%)	89

Although the numbers are small, the table indicates that SEG1 and SEG2 both employed the same number of private doctors for the vaccination of their children – 78 per cent – compared to the 8 to 6 per cent used by SEG 3 and SEG4.

Finally, a fragment of evidence on living in the local workhouse ten years after first census enumeration, illustrates the poverty of labourers' families compared to those employing domestic servants: none of the latter group finished up as paupers, whereas six husbands and wives of labourers from the 1871 sample suffered that fate, and four from the 1891 sample experienced a similar fall into absolute poverty.