

Water Street, Todmorden and the Census

The national census taken in 1851 was only the second in the modern sequence of 10-yearly censuses, and the first to contain really useful amounts of detail. It was taken on the 30 March and each householder was required to complete a census schedule giving the address of the household, and the names, ages, sex, occupations and places of birth of each individual residing in his or her accommodation. In 1851 they were also asked for the first time to give more precise details of the places of birth, to state their relationship to the person, their marital status and the nature of any disabilities from which they may have suffered. An enumerator then collected the census schedules, helping to complete them where there was any illiteracy, and these were copied into the census enumerators' books from which overall statistical data was then abstracted. The Registration District was sub-divided into smaller districts, each the responsibility of a single enumerator who toured the assigned area house by house.

The first map below shows the centre of Todmorden in about 1850.



Note the many differences. There is no roundabout, of course, but also no Town Hall, no market building, no Central Methodists, no library. What we think of as the Halifax Road was York Street. Our Burnley Road starts as North Street (to the north) and becomes Church Street from the junction southwards, and was much narrower than it is now, with no cut-back into the graveyard of St. Mary's. The west sides of Water Street and Church Street are as yet completely undeveloped. However, the Queen's Hotel and the railway are in place, and an early version of the White Hart.

This second map shows Water Street itself in more detail.



The enumerator's walk in this case took him northwards (to the right) from the left edge of this map, along Water Street and round into York Street.

He started with the two conjoined buildings facing onto Church Street (opposite where the library would be now). The first of these was occupied by George Fairbourn, aged 35, a linen & woollen draper employing one apprentice. He lived here with his wife and two young children, along with his widowed sister Mary Tomlinson (54), who had been married to a farmer, and her two older children, a boy and a girl. The nephew (15) was in fact the "apprentice" to the business, presumably being run on the premises, while his sister (17) was employed as a "House Servant" (whether on the premises or elsewhere we cannot tell). There was also a live-in servant, Sarah Farrar (19) who had been born in Ripponden. George Fairbourn and his wife and sister (and her children) had all been born in Newton Kyme in North Yorkshire, a small village near Boston Spa. How and why he came to be running his business in Todmorden we are unlikely ever to discover, however George's 10 year-old daughter had been born in Langfield, meaning they had been established in the area for at least a decade by this time.

The second of the conjoined pair of buildings was occupied by Edward King (44) a Shoe Dealer, born and bred in Todmorden, along with his wife Elizabeth (49) and their two sons, one (16) was an assistant in the shop while his 11 year-old brother remained a scholar. They also housed a servant, the un-married Sarah Lord (27), born in Todmorden.

The first occupied building in Water Street itself was the residence of a Master Cabinetmaker, Abram Webster (43), who employed four men and three apprentices. Abram, his wife and two older children had all been born in Stansfield, but his seven year-old namesake, Abram, was noted as being born in "Lancashire", and his youngest (4) as born in Langfield. Presumably, however, the family had not wandered far.

There is a problem in identifying the building that Abram and his family occupied. In 1851 official house-numbers were very rare outside of major cities, and all we can do is try to compare the map we have with the sequence of the enumerator's walk. The enumerator's book records six occupied properties on Water Street. Looking at the map we can see there are potentially seven separate buildings. After his last visit in Water Street the enumerator listed one household on Meadow Lane and one house "uninhabited" before reaching York Street. The two building complexes at the southern (left hand) end of Water Street are clearly industrial buildings of some kind, but it is possible that one of them (but which?) represents the workshop of the cabinetmaker, which also included domestic accommodation.

The next occupied residence (and surely the first of the home-sized buildings) is that of Samuel Schofield, a bachelor at 30, who is described as a "Licentiate of Apothecaries Hall General Practitioner". He shares his home with two of his sisters. Susan, unmarried at 43, is his "Housekeeper", while the married Elizabeth Nash (36) is a "Servant", resident with three of her children aged 10 and under. All are Todmorden or Stansfield born.

The next household is that of John Wilson (44), a Carrier employing three men, who lives here with his wife and nine children. His 22 year-old son is a Carter, while his two unmarried daughters (24 and 19) are "Straw Bonnet Makers" (perhaps working from home). Lydia (16) is a "servant" and Samuel (17) is a Grocer's Apprentice, while the four under 10 are all "Scholars". The whole family is Langfield-born (and surely somewhat cramped for space).

The next property is less crowded; occupied by John Howarth, a draper aged 36, with his wife Sarah (35) and just two children, scholars aged 8 and 5. John and his children are Todmorden born, but Sarah was born in Bacup and has an occupation as a "Dressmaker" (presumably in combination with her husband's business, which might be on the premises).

The next household is likewise small, consisting of Edwin Eastwood (24), "Attorney at law", with his wife Martha (26), a baby daughter and a house-servant, Mary Ann Barker (14), a local girl. Edwin was born in Stansfield and Martha was born in Rochdale, but baby Mary Alice (0) was somehow born in Middlesex.

Next door - and in the last property listed on Water Street - lives Jeremiah Oliver (43) an un-married General Practitioner, Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, born in Leathley, North Yorkshire, near Harrogate. With him is his Housekeeper, Hannah Crossley (41) who was born in Doncaster.

From all this we can see that Water Street at the time was a suitable address for a professional or a small business-owner. Some of the original buildings still stand, while at least the foot-print of another has been preserved by a later structure. The two more industrial units have both been built over however, and the road layout behind Water Street considerably changed.

Many of the occupants were locally born and bred, but there are perhaps more "offcumdens", and more movement of population generally, than we might sometimes imagine as typical for the period. In terms of age, of the 46 individuals in this sample, 14 (just over 30%) were 11 or under, and just one was over 50, somewhat different ratios from what we experience today. In terms of gender there were 26 females and 20 males, with most of the adult females in caring roles.

Even from this brief exercise many possible avenues for further investigation offer themselves. We could try to track the residents of 1851 back and forth in time, attempting to find out how they became who they were and why they were in Water Street, and what happened to them and their descendants in the years to come; or we could look at the changing population of the street itself over succeeding censuses, to see what changes time brought to its demographic, and its geography.

However, one of the questions that was provoked we have found an answer for. Who were the enumerators? In this case it was one Henry Atkinson, identified by his certifying signature, who lived just round the corner, on York Street, which was also part of his walk that day. He was a Shoemaker, employing seven men, aged 49 and living with his wife and three young daughters - so a substantial man of business, literate and living locally and willing to take on a civic duty. He would also have received a payment for his efforts, based on the number of households in his district, and probably amounting to less than £1 in all.