IN THE STAR AND GARTER AT STAMFORD AND THE 1851 CENSUS

BY MIKE KEY.

John Garfoot stood behind his bar in the Star and Garter in Scotgate watching the activity. As usual at the beginning of the Mid-Lent fair week the room was busy with friends meeting and strangers arriving for accommodation. The bar-room buzzed with conversation. Over in one corner William Smith from Sewston discussed the prices to be expected at tomorrow's beast market with fellow cattle dealer John Custon from Boston. At another table Robert Edwards, a cordwainer, sat relaxing after his journey from Nantwich in Cheshire, perhaps complimenting Elizabeth, the publican's wife on her cooking. It may be that John Adams, a Crowland potato merchant, was suggesting that it was his potatoes that gave the meal an extra something.

Around the room the noise of chatter rose and fell. Some talked about the weather, always a popular subject. Others perhaps argued over the forthcoming opening of the Great Exhibition in London's Hyde Park. Some doubtless agreed with Colonel Sibthorp, Lincoln's Tory Member of Parliament, that

' … It would be better for the promoters of this affair to encourage native industry, and support the industrious people of England, from whom they draw all they possess.'

A more immediate topic for argument was the census. Oh! Such questions!

'Why do they want to know?'
'Place of birth? Surely, it's where you live that's important.'
'Whose business is it anyway?'
'Ever since that Reform Bill nineteen years ago there has been increased Government Interference.'

And so on. The same arguments over the census had been going on for more than fifty years now, fears of misuse of the information gained by the State, or its enemies.

Over all the comings and goings publican John Garfoot presided, ensuring that all were looked after and catered to, joining in with this or that conversation. But Garfoot had something on his mind, that extra chore among all the others after closing the door for the last time that evening. That confounded schedule pushed under his door a few days previously had to be filled in. For this was Sunday, March 30th 1851, the night for the census to be taken.

Before considering how the census was taken in Stamford, it is worth taking a brief look at the history of the national census and the associated legislation.

The story of the national census is one of development through improved efficiency, care, and thoroughness. In 1753 proposals had been laid before Parliament to undertake a census of population and were met with violent opposition. Indeed, the passing of the Militia Act in 1757 which called for lists of eligible males, had met with severe rioting in some areas of the country. In 1753 fears were expressed that such knowledge that a census would provide could be used by our enemies to their advantage. Also, internal forces could bring political pressures to bear. The latter was probably more of a threat than the former, for the census, when eventually set up, paved the way for both political and economic reform.

By 1800 much of the old opposition had been overcome and the Population Act of that year provided for the taking of the national census in 1801. The aims of this first census were to discover not only how many inhabitants Great Britain contained, but also whether the population was increasing or decreasing. To uncover this information two major questions, to be answered by the Clergy, were included in the first schedule;

Star & Garter

'What was the number of Baptisms and Burials in your Parish, Township, or place in the several years 1700, 1710, 1720, 1730, 1740, 1750, 1760, 1770, 1780, and each subsequent year to the 31st December 1800, distinguishing Males from Females?'

And: - 'What was the number of marriages in your Parish, Township, or Place in each year, from year 1754 inclusive to the end of the year 1800?'

The results from these two questions, which were published in the Parish Register Abstracts, led to the 1812 Parish Register Act. Although the keeping of parish registers had been obligatory since 1538, inconsistencies had arisen due to the varied means of entry. This was partly overcome by the Marriage Act of 1753, whereby the officiating minister had to register each marriage and to have the entry witnessed by at least two persons. The 1812 Act sought to regularize the keeping of registers of both public and private baptisms, marriages, and burials. An important section of the Act required Ministers to send to their Diocesan Registrar a list of all registers in the parish showing dates of the beginning and end, as well as where they were to be deposited. Because the results were disappointing, a list of registers was required by the 1831 Population Act. All these various measures enabled Government to be informed on population trends.

In the four census years prior to 1841, census taking was a long and tortuous process, taking days, weeks in some areas, for the returns to be completed and sent to the Justices of the Peace. They were then passed to the High Constables for endorsement and submitted to the Town Clerks who then sent them to the office of the Principal Secretary of State of the Home Office for digestion.

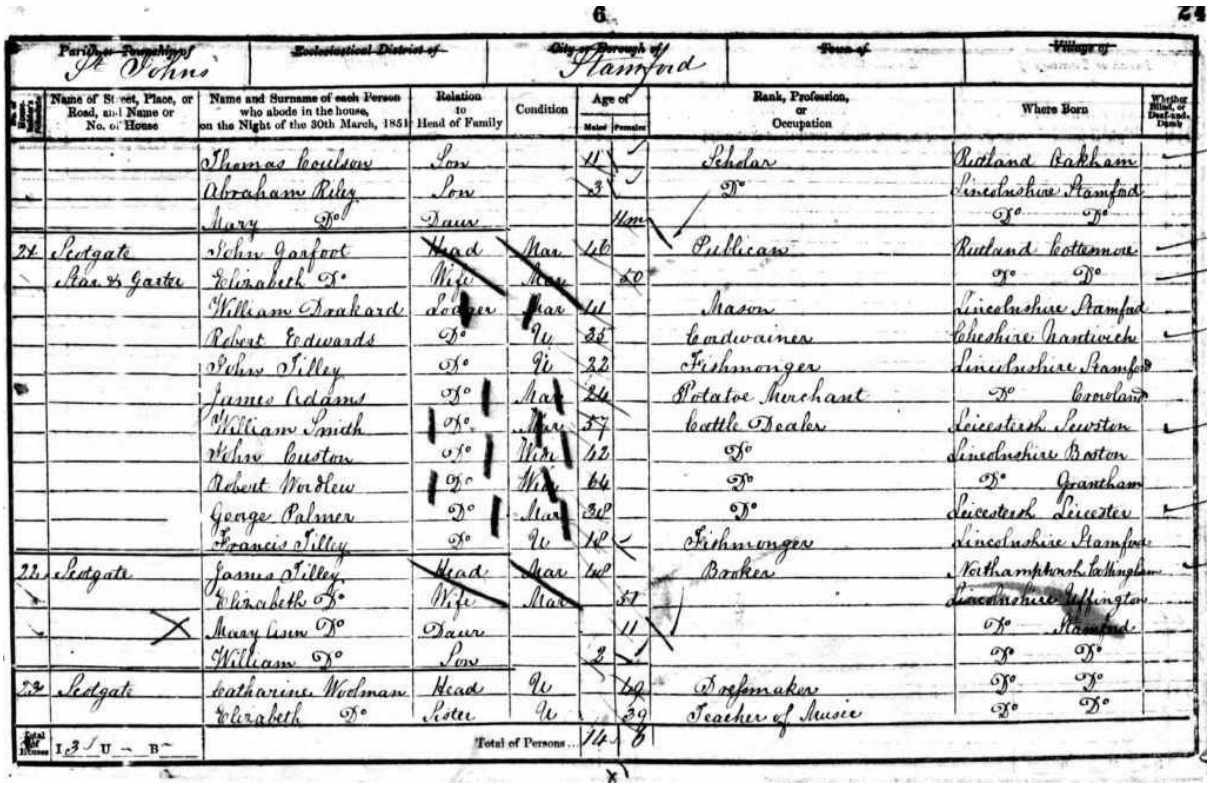
With the Population Act of 1840 the task of taking the census passed to the Registrar General. Using the organisation set up in 1837 for the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths, the Registrar General aimed to take a complete and accurate count in one day.

In 1837 England and Wales was divided into 2,193 Registration Districts under the 1836 Act, these for purposes of the census were further divided into Enumeration Districts. Additionally, the country was divided into County Divisions made up of several counties. Because of varying circumstances, Enumeration Districts were limited to between 25 to 200 inhabited houses, and this led, because of many sparsely populated areas, to about 35,000 enumerators being employed. For 1851 the enumerators were equally numerous.

Until 1841 the householder had but two or three questions to answer, age (to nearest five years), sex, and occupation. The Clergy and the Overseers of the Poor had the responsibility of providing information regarding housing, baptisms, etc. The scope of questions was extended in 1841 requiring the householder to furnish information on birthplace, nationality (if Irish or Scots), and whether he or she was an employer or an employee.

The range of questions was further extended in 1851: the exact age of each person; their relationship to the head of the household; and condition as to marriage, birthplace, and nationality, (not just Irish or Scots). There was an additional section to be answered on a voluntary basis regarding religion and education which a minority refused to answer.

In order to avoid omission and duplications, each householder was directed to complete the schedule himself in respect of each person sleeping in his house on the designated night. To ensure this was done, any 'person refusing or neglecting to fill up the schedule without excuse or refusing to answer questions or making a false return is liable to a penalty of £1 to £5. Allowance was made for the illiterate, 'If no person in the house is able to fill up the schedule properly, it will be done by the enumerator.'



Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of Males	Age of Females	Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, or Deaf-and-Dumb
	Thomas Coulson	Son		11		Scholar	Rutland Oakham	
	Abraham Riley	Son		9		Do	Lincolnshire Stamford	
	Mary Do	Daur			11m		Do Do	
21 Sedgate	John Garfoot	Head	Mar	40		Publican	Rutland Cottesmore	
Rose & Garter	Elizabeth Do	Wife	Mar		40		Do Do	
	William Bankard	Lodger	Mar	41		Mason	Lincolnshire Stamford	
	Robert Edwards	Do	U	28		Cordwainer	Cheshire Nantwich	
	John Tilley	Do	U	22		Fishmonger	Lincolnshire Stamford	
	James Adams	Do	Mar	24		Potatoe Merchant	Do Crowland	
	William Smith	Do	Mar	37		Cattle Dealer	Leicestersh. Sewston	
	John Custon	Do	Wid	62		Do	Lincolnshire Boston	
	Robert Wardlow	Do	Wid	64		Do	Do Grantham	
	George Palmer	Do	Mar	30		Do	Leicestersh. Leicester	
	Francis Tilley	Do	U	18		Fishmonger	Lincolnshire Stamford	
22 Sedgate	James Tilley	Head	Mar	40		Banker	Northamptonsh. Lathingdon	
	Elizabeth Do	Wife	Mar		37		Lincolnshire Uffington	
	Mary Ann Do	Daur			11		Do Stamford	
	William Do	Son		2			Do Do	
23 Sedgate	Catharine Woodman	Head	U		69	Dressmaker	Do Do	
	Elizabeth Do	Sister	U		39	Teacher of Music	Do Do	
	1 3 U — B		Total of Persons	14	8			

1851 Census for St John's Parish

The decennial returns called for in the 1801 census set the pattern for future legislation. Every tenth year until 1920 an Act of Parliament was necessary for a national population census to be taken. The 1920 Population Act provided for the census to be carried out every tenth year without further legislation.

And so, in future years, we shall be called upon to fill in our schedules 'according to the instructions' as our forebears have done. No doubt some of us will be raising the old objections regarding misuse of information and the invasion of privacy.

Now let us return to the 1851 Stamford to the Enumeration District of St John's parish.

On the morning of Monday, March 31st, Mr Pheasant John Freeman, one of the seventeen enumerators appointed to the Stamford District, began his rounds to collect his completed forms. It would be a long day. He had already been over the ground the previous week delivering the schedule and explaining to householders what was needed. Today he would still have forms to fill in for the illiterate and the infirm.

Having collected the completed forms, next day Mr Freeman would begin to transfer the answers to his own schedule. This was a time-consuming job. Many of the forms would be difficult to read because there was a high rate of illiteracy in the parish. Also, this year, the forms were more complicated than before. No doubt he cursed the authorities' decision to hold the census in Mid-Lent Fair week. There were so many strangers in town. Nevertheless, he finished his part of the task by April 8th, and together with the householders' form he passed his completed schedule to Henry Whittome, the District Registrar. Whittome in turn examined the documents and, having verified the account and corrected any mistakes, sent them on to the Town Hall and the Superintendent Registrar, Jeremiah Clapton. After Clapton's examination they were forwarded to the Registrar General's Office in London on April 25th.

This sequence of events was taking place all over the country, and the success of this method is evident by its continued use today, all be it with the inclusion of computers. The efficiency and speediness of the process was not, however, appreciated by the local newspaper. In the April 18th issue, the Stamford Mercury complained that,

'We are unable to give the numbers of the existing population as the officers being unwilling to furnish the account.'

At this time Henry Whittome was still working his way through the enumerators' schedules. The Mercury went on to say that the return for Slingsby was 866 and that for Sibsey near Boston was

3.387, overlooking the fact that the population of Stamford was about three times that of Sibsey. The Mercury also got its arithmetic wrong, increasing Sibsey's population by 90, something even the village blacksmith would have found difficult. His family had increased in size by six since 1841, accounting for half the total population increase of the village.

According to the Mercury a real increase in the town's population was not to be expected: 'Although several new houses have been built upon the Brownlow property at the east end of the town, there are several large houses in the other parts of the borough untenanted.'

When the figures were published the population was found to be 9,066 an increase of 1,306 over the 1841 total. This of course included those who came to the town for the fair.

But the census is not just about growth or decline of population, it is about people. Who they were, and how they lived, and how they earned a living. The census is a valuable research tool for the local historian, provided its limitations are realised. George North wrote;

'The essential picture of the sort of people we are is built up from two main sources, the periodic Census of population, which gives a national snapshot at the particular moment of time, and the regular flow of statistical information based on statutory registration of births, marriages and death.'

It is the concept of a particular moment of time that gives the clue to the limits of usefulness of the census. Just as the census is about people so is history, but it is not static. It is also about change, social, economic, and political. 'Time change' is the saying. It is often difficult to project ourselves back in time because definitions also change.

An example of this may be seen in the modern definition of 'pauper' as one without means of livelihood, a beggar perhaps in receipt of poor relief. An American observer writing on the English scene in 1830 defined paupers as, 'that numerous class of society who depend for subsistence solely upon the labour of their hands.' Not quite the same thing.

None of this entered John Garfoot's head as he sat quietly in his now deserted bar-room on that Sunday evening so long ago. He looked over the census form yet again. It seemed straight forward enough. Names, age, birthplaces, relations to head of household. Yes, easy enough.

> Wait though, relation to head of house …. mm!
> What about William Smith and John Custon and the others?
> Are they lodgers or visitors?
> They are here for the Fair, that makes them visitors, or does it?
> When does a visitor become a lodger?
> What's the difference anyway? Who'll care a hundred years from now?

Publican Garfoot would have been amazed to learn that his customers' worries about the census would echo down through the years, and that his place in history was assured by his entry on the census return.

Who'll care a hundred years from now? A group of Stamford history students a century and more cared enough to put John Garfoot and his contempories in their historical and social place by a study of the 1851 population census.

Notes

This article was first published in 1980 in; Class and Occupation in Stamford in 1851. A Report by the Stamford Survey Group. A copy of the full report is available for study in the Local Reference Section of Stamford Library. The pub, sited at No. 10 Scotgate, closed in 1967, and was shortly demolished along with the adjacent Fire Station which had previously been Hayes' Carriage Works showroom to make room for the Scotgate Car Park.