
Railway villages in south east Monmouthshire 1850–1965: a community perspective

Robert Gant

Abstract

This study blends evidence from historical archives with findings from a household survey to explore differences in the impact of developments in the railway industry on the physical growth and changing social profiles of three neighbouring villages in south east Monmouthshire during the period 1850–1965. Within the framework of the community studies tradition, and conceptualisation of the railway village, this article differentiates local outcomes in employment and social profile generated by the construction of the Severn Tunnel and placement of associated infrastructure. The scene is set by examining phases in the local development of the railway industry, housing provision and related population trends. A critical overview of the principal data sources follows. This leads to an evaluation of the concept of ‘community’, aspects of which are illustrated from village case histories predicated on the selected themes of social segregation, assimilation, community anchorage and household persistence.

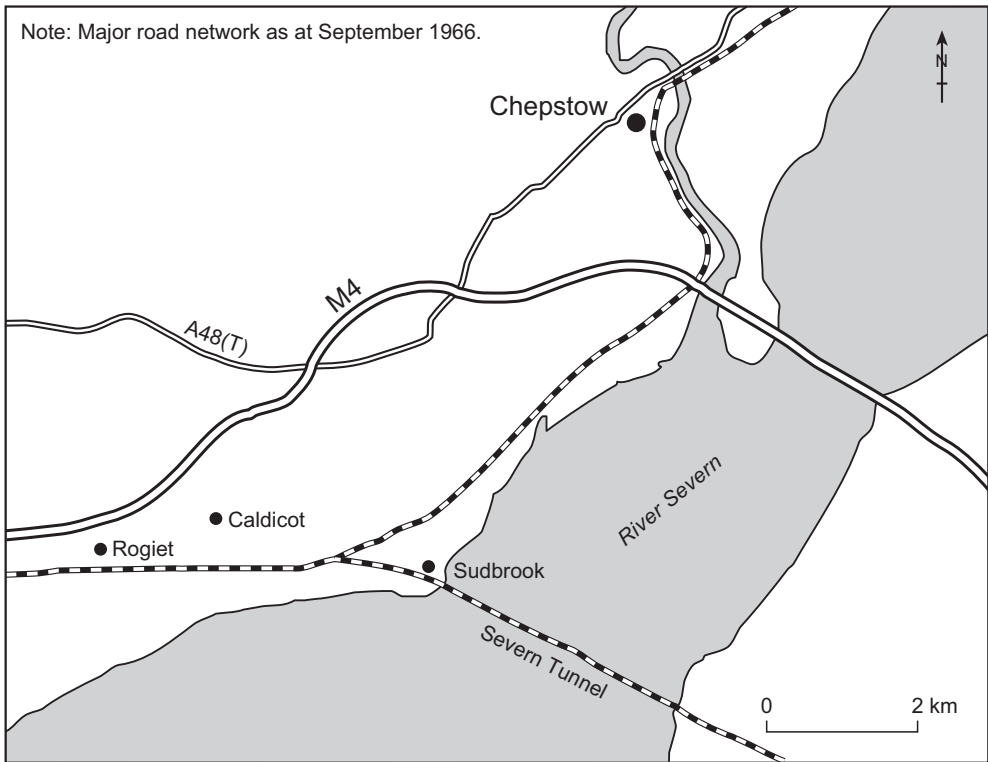
Introduction

In Victorian Britain railway construction had a major impact on the growth and internal geographies of industrial cities, provincial market towns, and coastal and spa resorts.¹ It also created a new and distinctive type of settlement, the railway town.² Some researchers have explored the power, decision-making and investment priorities of competitive joint-stock companies in extending the rail network.³ Others have documented patterns of change in urban land use and examined the associated processes of residential

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- 1 For illustration of the impact of the railways on cities, see J.R. Kellett, *The impact of railways on Victorian cities* (London, 1969), 83–8; and C. Bell and R. Bell, *City fathers: the early history of town planning in Britain* (London, 1969), 194–202. On provincial market towns, examples from Wales include: R. Gant, ‘Brecon in 1901: a census perspective on the county town’, *Brycheiniog*, 42 (2011), 43–70; and R. Gant, ‘Market town and railway centre: Abergavenny in 1901’, *Gwent Local History*, forthcoming. On coastal and spa resorts see E.W. Gilbert, ‘The growth of inland and seaside health resorts in England’, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 55 (1939), 16–35; H. Carter, ‘A decision-making approach to town plan analysis: a case study of Llandudno’, in H. Carter and W.K.D. Davies eds, *Urban essays* (Harlow, 1970).
 - 2 Representative studies include L.V. Grinsell, H.B. Wells, H.S. Tallamy, and J. Betjeman eds, *Studies in the history of Swindon* (Swindon, 1950); W. Chaloner, *The social and economic development of Crewe* (Manchester, 1951); B.J. Turton, ‘The railway town’, *Town Planning Review*, 32 (1961–1962), 97–115; and G. Revill ‘“Railway Derby”’: occupational community, paternalism and corporate culture 1850–1881, *Urban History*, 28 (2001), 378–404.
 - 3 Themes on investment and network growth are developed in G. Hawke, *Railways and economic growth in England and Wales 1840–1914* (Oxford, 1970); T.R. Gourvish, *Railways and the British economy 1830–1914* (London, 1980); and J. Langton and R.J. Morris eds, *Atlas of industrialising Britain 1780–1914* (London, 1986), 88–93.

development and spatial segregation.⁴ In parallel, in the countryside, the growing railway network left an imprint on the physical landscape, shaped the distribution of population, and influenced the pattern and density of the settlement system.⁵ This study in community history connects with such impacts and explores the socio-economic transformation of three ‘railway villages’ in south east Monmouthshire during the period 1850–1965. Within the framework of the community studies tradition, it blends evidence from historical archives with findings from household surveys to explore differences in the impact of the railway industry on the physical growth and changing social profiles of three neighbouring villages: Caldicot, Rogiet and Sudbrook (see Figure 1). An overview of phased

Figure 1 Village locations



- 4 On urban land use, see J.H. Appleton ‘Railways and the morphology of British towns’, in R.P. Beckinsale and J.M. Houston eds, *Urbanisation and its problems* (Oxford, 1968), 92–118; H. Carter and C.R. Lewis, *An urban geography of England and Wales in the nineteenth century* (London, 1990); R. Lawton and C.G. Pooley, *Britain 1740–1950: an historical geography* (London, 1992), 214–8. On residential development, see R. Dennis, *English industrial cities of the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1984); H.J. Dyos, ‘The speculative builders and developers of Victorian London’, *Victorian Studies*, 11 (1968), 641–90; and H.J. Dyos ‘Railways and housing in Victorian London’, *Journal of Transport History*, 2 (1955), 11–21, 90–100.
- 5 R. Lawton, ‘Population’ in Langton and Morris, *Atlas of industrialising Britain*, 10–33. Spacing and the size relationships of rural settlement in Britain are discussed in M. Hill, *Rural settlement and the urban impact on the countryside* (London, 2003), 4–16, 42–7, 58–9. For the historical importance of railway stations as nuclei in commuter settlement see G. Parker, ‘Settlement in Sussex 1840–1940’, *Geography*, 35 (1950), 9–20.

developments in the railway industry and related trends in population growth sets the scene. A consideration of the principal data sources follows. This leads to an evaluation of the concept of the railway village, mediated through the explanatory themes of workplace, community anchorage, household persistence, assimilation and social segregation.

Staged developments in the railway industry

In 1850 the Great Western Railway Company (GWR) constructed the main railway line between London and Cardiff. In south east Monmouthshire the track followed closely the 8 metre (25 foot) contour. That 'priming' action spawned a host of 'secondary' decisions by other agencies which, in turn, transformed the character of village settlement in the region.⁶ Although the passenger halts at Rogiet and Portskewett soon featured as nuclei in village development, the railway industry provided few opportunities for local employment.⁷ The 1851 census enumeration included seven railway employees in Caldicot and two in Portskewett; in 1861 there were five in Caldicot and two in Portskewett; in 1871, just before the construction of the Severn Tunnel, there were four in Caldicot and four in Portskewett.⁸ However, no railway workers can be identified in these three censuses in Rogiet (including the neighbouring parishes of Ifton and Llanfihangel-Rogiet). That situation changed following the Act of Parliament in June 1872 that authorised construction of the Severn Tunnel. In March 1873, the first pilot shaft was sunk at Sudbrook. The tunnel labour force peaked at 3,828 in 1884, 1,987 of whom were deployed from the Monmouthshire bank.⁹ On 1 September 1886, the first scheduled freight train passed through the tunnel, followed on 1 December by the first passenger train on the Bristol–Cardiff service. Extensive railway marshalling yards were then constructed at Llanfihangel Rogiet, 2 kilometres (1.3 miles) west of the tunnel mouth, on the margin of the Caldicot Levels.

Volumes of rail traffic increased significantly during World War I and World War II. Large and specialist contingents of personnel were directed to work at Severn Tunnel Junction from the industrial valleys of South Wales, the major GWR depot at Swindon, the counties of Devon, Cornwall and Gloucestershire, and the city of Bristol.¹⁰ The number of trains passing through Severn Tunnel Junction increased from 18,009 in 1913 to 24,027 in 1917.¹¹

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- 6 See F.S. Chapin, *Urban land use planning* (Illinois, 1965), 62–6, 75–9, for an explanatory model of social power relationships in changing land use.
 - 7 In 1932, a much-needed railway halt was opened at Caldicot: see P. Strong, *A large and growing district: Caldicot in the twentieth century* (Caldicot, 1999), 34.
 - 8 Census enumerators' books: The National Archives H.O.107/2490; R.G. 9/3975; R.G.10/ 5292.
 - 9 T.A. Walker, *The Severn Tunnel: its construction and difficulties* (London, 1891), 144. This total included labour at the on-site brickworks: see P.S. Brown and D.N. Brown, 'Operative brickmakers in Victorian brickyards', *Local Historian*, 38 (2008), 23–34.
 - 10 R.L. Gant, 'All change in the railway communities of south east Gwent', *Gwent Local History*, 77 (1994), 30–6.
 - 11 E.T. McDermott, *History of the Great Western Railway Vol. 2, 1863–1921* (revised by C.R. Clinker, London, 1964), 190.

'Admiralty' coal trains from the eastern valleys in the South Wales coalfield accounted for much of this traffic. These trains carried smokeless steam coal as bunker fuel for naval fleets in ports on the south coast of England. Two 'hump marshalling yards' were added in the 1930s to bolster the traffic management capabilities of Severn Tunnel Junction with its 67 kilometres (42 miles) of sidings. These facilities permitted the sorting of coal wagons and other freight by gravity, using tiered sets of track-points, into heavy trains for onward passage through the tunnel.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, 1,050 men were deployed at the engine maintenance sheds, marshalling yards and track maintenance facilities. This benchmark statistic was determined by a GWR clerical officer based at Severn Tunnel Junction in 1939. It relates to his distribution of 'cheese cards' (which permitted an additional weekly cheese ration) to 1,005 authorised shift-working railway staff taking meal breaks away from permanent catering facilities, but excludes the 45 centrally-located clerical and administrative staff. In 1939, the yard despatched large numbers of coal trains to augment vulnerable coastal shipments made to London's public utilities from the North East Coalfield.¹² Wartime demands subsequently led to the duplication of the existing track between Severn Tunnel Junction and Newport, and the construction of additional loops in Pilning at the Gloucestershire end of the tunnel. Immediately after the war, between 75 and 100 steam locomotives were deployed from Severn Tunnel Junction together with a team of 'banking engines' for piloting freight trains through the tunnel.¹³ Associated engine repair and maintenance workshops employed approximately 350 men, and an equivalent workforce was engaged in traffic management and despatch. However, this labour force contracted in the 1960s: the repair and maintenance section closed in June 1966 and the marshalling yards were decommissioned in October 1987.¹⁴

Headline statistics for rates of population change and gender balance reflect the growth of local villages in response to this industrial transformation.¹⁵ Table 1 captures the ingress of the tunnel workforce to the agricultural parishes of Portskewett and Caldicot and highlights the growth of Rogiet linked to wartime developments in the marshalling yards. It also pinpoints the impact on employment in Caldicot of the wireworks, commissioned in 1862, and the transfer of specialist metal workers from Tintern in the Wye Valley to company housing at Caldicot Pill. Males greatly outnumbered females in Portskewett during the era of tunnel construction and in Caldicot and Rogiet, in the decades following World War I. However, gender balance was restored post 1951 as the local dominance of the railway industry declined.

12 R. Bell, *History of the British railways during the war 1939–1945* (London, 1946), 138.

13 Anon., 'Freight train working through the Severn Tunnel', *Railway Magazine*, 74 (1934), 460.

14 W.C. Winter, 'Severn Tunnel Junction marshalling yards 1886–12th October 1987', *Gwent Local History*, 65 (1988), 13–16.

15 The Editor, 'Spotlight on Chepstow R.D.C.', *Rural District Review*, 25 (1969), 150–4.

Table 1 Population characteristics 1841–1961

Year	Caldicot				Portskewett				Rogiet (including Ifton and Llanfihangel Rogiet)			
	Male	Female	Total	Change Males/100 females %	Male	Female	Total	Change Males/100 females %	Male	Female	Total	Change Males/100 females %
1841	328	297	625	—	106	91	197	—	64	52	116	—
1851	338	323	661	5.8	100	87	187	-5.1	81	55	136	17.2
1861	287	292	579	-12.4	87	88	175	-6.4	47	45	92	-32.4
1871	529	433	962	66.1	130	114	244	39.4	47	44	91	-1.1
1881	746	655	1,401	45.6	291	195	486	99.2	65	57	122	34.1
1891	629	664	1,293	-7.7	619	571	1,190	144.9	117	91	208	70.5
1901	619	577	1,196	-7.5	423	445	868	-27.1	122	106	228	9.6
1911	784	729	1,513	26.5	474	484	958	10.4	110	101	211	-7.5
1921	936	834	1,770	17.0	562	546	1,108	15.7	117	102	219	3.8
1931	805	794	1,599	-9.7	549	523	1,072	-3.2	142	156	298	36.1
1951	874	896	1,770	10.7	602	626	1,228	14.6	622	575	1,197	301.7
1961	1,673	1,678	3,351	89.3	639	656	1,295	5.5	603	591	1,194	-0.3

Source: Population Censuses of England and Wales, 1841–1961.

Community study: an approach to local investigation

Two main challenges were negotiated in developing the methodology for this study: first, to justify working within the much-criticised community studies tradition; and, second, the use of the ill-defined concept of community to organise and interpret evidence drawn from historical archives and a field survey.

Community studies in rural Britain have a long and varied history.¹⁶ Though they remain a popular and informative genre of social scientific writing, they have been criticised for their narrative style, their subjectivity in data collection, a focus on rural *milieu*, non-standardised fieldwork practices and their failure to produce an agreed definition or theory of community.¹⁷ The sociologist Ruth Glass has described such work as ‘the poor sociologist’s substitute for the novel’.¹⁸ Margaret Stacey agrees, and presents a well-argued case for replacing ‘community study’ by ‘locality study’, based on studying interrelationships between social institutions and changing social relations.¹⁹ These criticisms rightly focus on substance and academic rigour. There is a counter argument, however, that interprets community study as a *method* of empirical investigation committed to the interdisciplinary examination of placed-based populations. The approach adopted in this paper to the study of villages in south east Monmouthshire conforms to this. It is aligned to Macfarlane’s view that ‘the method of studying small, delimited, sets of people ... is of fundamental interest to many different disciplines (and) that some advances could be made if we could find large quantities of data over long periods of time’.²⁰

A search of the literature confirms that ‘community’ remains a highly problematic, contested and confusing concept.²¹ Even Hillery’s path-breaking review of 94 definitions failed to find much common agreement.²² For Stacey, the term ‘embraces a motley assortment of concepts and qualitatively different phenomena’.²³ Such trenchant criticism, however, has not stifled academic interest in the concept. Neither does it invalidate the use

16 R. Frankenberg, *Communities in Britain* (London, 1966) summarises a selection of ethnographic studies from different regions in rural Britain.

17 Twenty-one approaches taken to community study are examined in G. Day, *Community and everyday life* (Abingdon, 2006), 26–7; and C. Bell and H. Newby, *The sociology of community* (London, 1974), xlvii–li. Criticisms of the community study method are presented by: C. Bell and H. Newby, *Community studies* (London, 1971), 13, 16–17; and M. Stacey, ‘The myth of community studies’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 20 (1969), 134–47.

18 R. Glass, *Conflict in cities* (London, 1966), 148.

19 Stacey, ‘Myth of community studies’.

20 A. Macfarlane, *Reconstructing historical communities* (Cambridge, 1977), 24.

21 See Stacey, ‘Myth of community studies’, 134; C. Bell and H. Newby, *Community Studies*, 22; and R. König (translated by E. Fitzgerald), *The community* (London, 1968), 25–6.

22 G.A. Hillery, ‘Definitions of community: areas of agreement’, *Rural Sociology*, 20 (1955), 111–23.

23 Stacey, ‘Myth of community studies’, 136

of community as an organising framework for local historical studies.²⁴ Day defends the resilience and capacity of the concept in social enquiry: '[p]recisely because it is so elastic and various in its meanings, the idea of community continues to grip people's imaginations, and even grows in significance as it takes on new meanings'.²⁵ W.K.D. Davies and D.T. Herbert agree, and have re-focused this argument in geographical space, stressing the roles of behavioural interaction, conceptual identity and dynamic change in shaping the character and functions of place-based community.²⁶ Meanwhile, social scientists have unpacked additional and informative dimensions of community. These include imaginations of place-based sentiment and symbolism, practices of 'othering', recognitions of 'difference' and interpretations of 'conflict'.²⁷

From a more quantitative perspective, tools have been developed from graph theory to deconstruct networks of interpersonal relations (place-bounded or otherwise) and the dimensions of social interaction.²⁸

This brief review of literature demonstrates that, despite criticism, the concept of community is alive. For this study of Monmouthshire, as advised by Dennis Mills, the definition of community was carefully specified to guide the marriage between archive research and fieldwork practice.²⁹ It turned out that Graham Day's definition matched that working requirement: 'the term "community" signifies both an entity and a quality. A community is a place, or setting, displaying certain social characteristics that can be identified and described, but community is also something that is felt, and which has an emotional or affective impact. Often the two aspects are brought together, since it is commonly supposed that the features typical of a community will generate and sustain the appropriate attitudes and sentiments among those that belong to it: that is, the

24 From a historical perspective, issues connected with the definition and meaning of community are explored by R. Finnegan 'Community: what it is and how we can investigate it' in W.T.R. Pryce ed., *From family history to community history* (Cambridge, 1994), 209–14.

25 Day, *Community and everyday life*, 1.

26 W.K.D. Davies and D.T. Herbert, *Communities within cities: an urban social geography* (London, 1993); W.A. Sutton and J. Koloja, 'The concept of community', *Rural Sociology*, 25 (1960), 197. The relationship between place and sense of identity is developed by G. Rose, 'Place and identity: a sense of place' in D. Massey and P. Jess eds, *A place in the world?* (Oxford, 1995), 87–106.

27 Issues connected with sentiment and symbolism are reviewed by Davies and Herbert, *Communities within cities*, 101. Power relations through which the processes of constructing identity work, and the concept of 'the other' are examined by J. Rutherford, *Identity: community, culture, difference* (London, 1990), 22. On recognitions of 'difference', see B. Deacon and M. Donald, 'In search of community history' *Family and Community History*, 7 (2004), 17: '[c]ommunity historians should remain reflective about their use of the term "community", guarding against its implied cosy and harmonious social relations'. On conflict, see Bell and Newby, *Community studies*, 5, where they write that 'community conflict is a sadly neglected facet of most community studies'. Frankenberg, *Communities in Britain*, 270–5, examines the issue of conflict and cohesion in the wider context of social change.

28 H.F. Kaupfman, 'Towards an interactional conception of community', *Social Forces*, 38 (1959), 8–17.

29 D. Mills, 'Defining community: a critical review of "community" in family and community history', *Family and Community History*, 7 (2004), 5–12. In this paper, Mills pleads with authors of micro-scale community histories to state explicitly how they use the term community.

objective aspects will produce the corresponding “subjective” response.³⁰ Towards that end, and from an historical perspective, measurements were taken of key dimensions and characteristics of “community”. For practical and operational reasons, this longitudinal study focuses on themes of social segregation, assimilation, residential persistence, home-workplace relationships, kinship bonds, marriage linkages and defined common interests to determine, comparatively, the strength of (place-based) belonging, group identity and social cohesion in railway villages.³¹

Access to archives, church and civil registration records

Selection and evaluation of source materials is a critical stage in research design.³² This comparative village study faced two main challenges: first, that ‘primary data sources are not created to satisfy the curiosity of future historians’ and, second, that the categorisation of key statistical information is guided by national, and not local, considerations.³³ In response, evidence from point-related census profiles (1841–1901) and oral history exercises focused on electoral registers (1915, 1939 and 1965) was interwoven with more continuous streams of information from church and civil registrations of vital events.³⁴ This evidence was integrated with assorted place- and time-specific administrative and cartographic records.³⁵ It was fortunate in this context that, subject to an agreed protocol, the District Registrar at Chepstow had authorised (supervised) access to the registers of civil marriages and births retained in his vaults. Transcription was confined to counts of, and relationships between, dates of events, occupations and geographical locations. For key occupational groups, this agreement permitted the matching and adding of

30 Day, *Community and everyday life*, 31.

31 Operational practices for extracting community characteristics from historical records are examined by R. Dennis and S. Daniels, ‘Community and the social geography of Victorian cities’ in M. Drake ed., *Time, family and community. Perspectives on family and community history* (Oxford, 1994), 210–24.

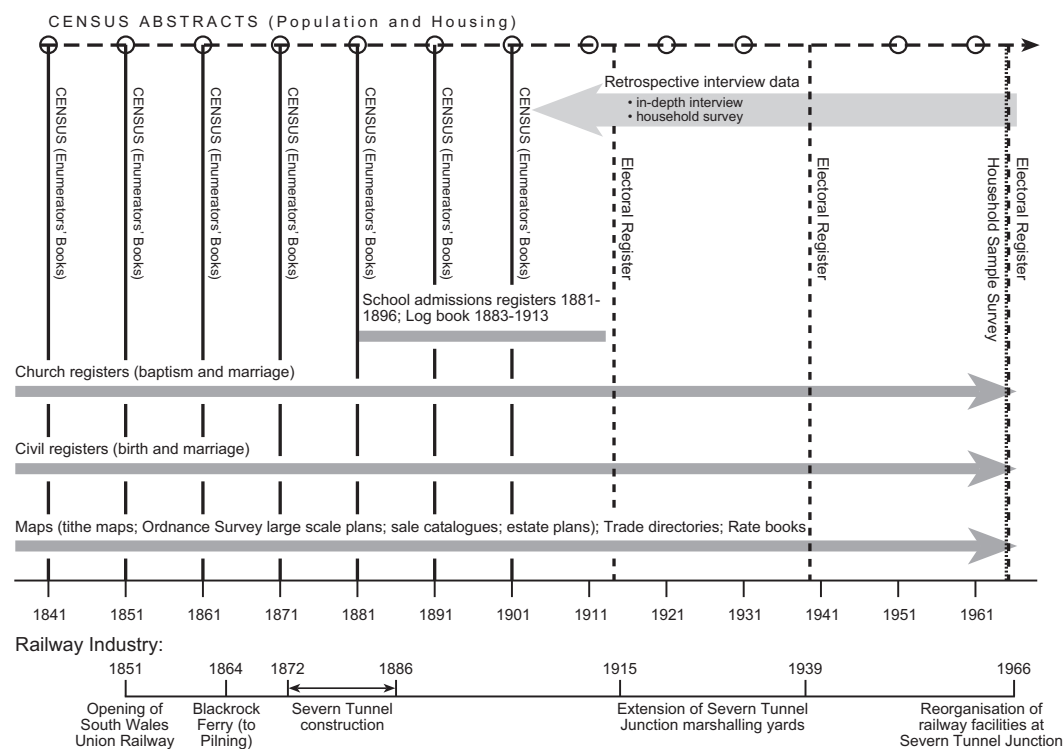
32 N. Blaikie, *Designing social research* (Cambridge, 2010), 21–5.

33 A.R.H. Baker, J.D. Hamshere and J. Langton, *Geographical interpretations of historical sources* (Newton Abbot, 1970), Chapter 1; M. Drake and R. Finnegan eds, *Sources and methods for family and community historians: a handbook* (Cambridge, 1994), 18.

34 D. Mills and K. Schürer eds, *Local communities in the late Victorian census enumerators’ books* (Oxford, 1996); E. Higgs, *Making sense of the census: the manuscript returns for England and Wales 1801–1901* (London, 2005). Field practices for retrospective interviewing are discussed in P. Thompson, *The voice of the past* (Oxford, 1978), Chapter 6. In the context of life-course analysis, S. Dex, *Life and work history analyses: qualitative and quantitative developments* (London, 1991) and R. Humphrey, ‘Life stories and social careers: ageing and social life in an ex-mining town’, *Sociology*, 27 (1993), 1,319–525, suggest a framework to invigorate local investigations. M. Drake, *An introduction to parish register demography* (Milton Keynes, 1982), 59, includes a sample page layout for recording marriage registration. Drake and Finnegan, *Sources and methods*, 73, present a sample page from a baptism register.

35 Effective triangulations of administrative and commercial materials are present in: W.K.D. Davies, J.A. Giggs and D.T. Herbert ‘Directories, rate books and the commercial structure of towns’, *Geography*, 53 (1968), 41–54; and R.S. Holmes ‘Ownership and migration from a study of rate books’, *Area*, 5 (1973), 242–51. On cartographic records, see R. Oliver, *Ordnance Survey maps: a concise guide for historians* (London, 1993); and C. Beech and R. Mitchell, *Maps for family and local history* (London, 2004).

Figure 2 Data sources: characteristics and relationships



information from civil records to lists of names abstracted from church marriage and baptism registers.

Figure 2 illustrates time connections between these complementary data sets. It identifies, too, the importance of retrospective interviews with elderly residents. Oral evidence provided both a platform for documentary research and a stimulus for further reflection. In addition, Figure 2 highlights the positioning of the author’s household survey completed during the summer in 1965.³⁶ This was executed according to a code of ethical practice and covered a stratified random sample of 20 per cent of the households in Caldicot (sample size = 342 households), Rogiet (75) and Portskewett (73, including 26 in Sudbrook). The survey findings provided a basis for exploring, at first hand, the processes of community development concealed by the primary historical record.

Church and civil records contribute important evidence for the study of community change. The Civil Registration Act 1836 produced an equivalent content in civil and church marriage registers.³⁷ These date-related records specify the name and occupation

36 M. Bulmer ‘The ethics of social research’ in N.Gilbert ed., *Researching social life* (London, 2008), 145–61.

37 For a tabulated comparison of the variables recorded in civil registers of births and marriages, refer to Drake and Finnegan, *Sources and methods*, Figure 5.1.

of the bride and bridegroom and their respective fathers, their age at marriage, and the parish in which they usually lived. For the period 1861–1965, a total of 2,214 marriage records (28 per cent of which were civil) were examined. Civil marriages constituted an increasing proportion of the total, as follows: 1866–1885 (10 per cent civil marriages); 1886–1906 (21 per cent); 1906–1925 (18 per cent); 1926–1945 (28 per cent); and 1946–1965 (41 per cent). There were, however, time-series differences in the proportions of church and civil marriages registered in each parish: for example, since 1921 civil marriages accounted for 35 per cent of all marriages at Caldicot and this proportion reached 48 per cent by 1961–1965.

In parallel, church baptism registers and the civil registers of births provide date-related information on named parties and, normally, give the address and occupation of the child's father. Civil registration of birth is compulsory and provides a more comprehensive coverage of families than does church registration. There are, however, local departures from this norm. In Caldicot, for instance, five-year totals for baptisms exceeded those for registered births in the following periods: 1861–1875; 1886–1895; 1896–1920; and 1956–1960. This situation is explained by the general increase in nonconformity in south east Wales, the practice of a newly-inducted and zealous incumbent in baptising several siblings at one ceremony, and, coincidentally, the immigration of large families (with unbaptised children) to employment at Caldicot Wireworks and, later, to the Severn Tunnel worksite. Overall, a total of 5,539 civil registrations of birth were examined for the three study parishes in Chepstow Registration District.

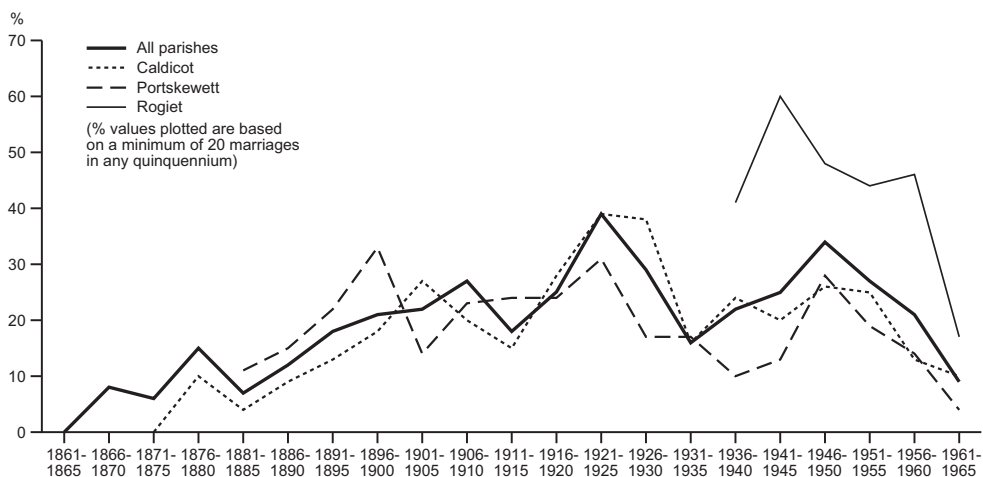
Emergence and development of the railway community

Quantitative trends in vital registration, intermarriage and inward migration

Informants readily distinguished the railway villages of Caldicot, Rogiet and Sudbrook from neighbouring agricultural settlements in south east Monmouthshire. Cited frequently were: the dominant role of the GWR as an industrial employer and social catalyst; a shared (and mainly) shift-working lifestyle fostering mutual dependence; and collective community engagement in railway-orientated social activities. Physical growth associated with the transformation from agricultural to railway villages raised issues connected with the assimilation of incoming population. This process has two important dimensions. The first is *structural*, and measures the social incorporation, or otherwise, of newcomers into class and occupation groupings in the host society. Whilst the host society might not be homogeneous, it always contains a 'charter group' that represents the dominant matrix into which new minority groups are inserted. The second is *behavioural*, whereby incomers adopt and blend the wider social and cultural values of the charter group.³⁸

38 P. Knox and S. Pinch, *Urban social geography* (Harlow, 2010), 166–9.

Figure 3 Marriages of railwaymen as a percentage of total marriages 1861 to 1965



Total Marriages

All parishes	20	37	36	33	99	51	78	62	81	96	68	101	109	99	97	151	194	197	184	187	234
Caldicot	10	25	30	21	48	23	48	38	51	49	34	57	59	42	44	63	84	69	84	89	119
Portskewett	5	12	4	7	47	27	27	21	22	35	25	33	36	42	42	59	75	68	59	57	74
Rogiet	5	0	2	5	4	1	3	3	8	12	9	11	14	15	11	29	35	60	41	41	41

Source: Church Marriage Register and Civil Marriage Registers, Chepstow Registration District, Portskewett and Rogiet

From a structural and quantitative perspective, marriage and birth registrations constitute ‘hard’ indicators of local occupation change. In aggregate, during the period 1861–1965, railway employees accounted for 24 per cent of all marriages, and 33 per cent of the births registered. Figure 3 shows a persistent overall increase in the quinquennial totals for marriages from 20 (1861–1865) to 234 (1961–1965). It also depicts a steady increase in totals between 1861 and 1925 succeeded by a further peak centred on 1946–1950. Individual parish totals reflect, in measure, increased employment in the railway industry and access to housing. Figure 4, based on the numbers and proportions of births registered by railwaymen, replicates the trend of marriages. The combined quinquennial totals of births registered increased from 140 (1861–1865) to a spike of 436 (1881–1885); these totals exceeded 300 until 1911–1915, from whence they declined to around 250 until 1926–1930; before steadying at around 220 events. Local peculiarities in the demographic profile are addressed, separately and below, in the village case studies. Witnesses attest that railwaymen’s children formed a distinctive cohort in the classes at each village school.

Intermarriage between railway workers and other occupational sectors presents a diagnostic measure of community bonding. Field evidence confirms the importance of marriage bonds between locally-resident families in strengthening a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘togetherness’. This measure of community cohesion is now explored in two ways: first by comparing the occupational backgrounds of the bridegroom, his father and the

Figure 4 Railwaymen’s children: registrations of birth as a percentage of all registrations 1861–1965



Total registrations of birth

All parishes	140	190	189	190	436	340	417	308	329	356	285	274	272	258	203	219	283	249	176	207	218
Caldicot	90	126	145	148	297	205	260	178	158	197	164	146	141	122	88	82	133	101	92	132	147
Portskewett	32	35	31	42	139	116	118	106	135	125	97	96	92	105	73	92	90	81	49	43	38
Rogiet	18	29	13	0	0	19	39	34	36	34	24	32	39	31	42	45	60	67	35	32	33

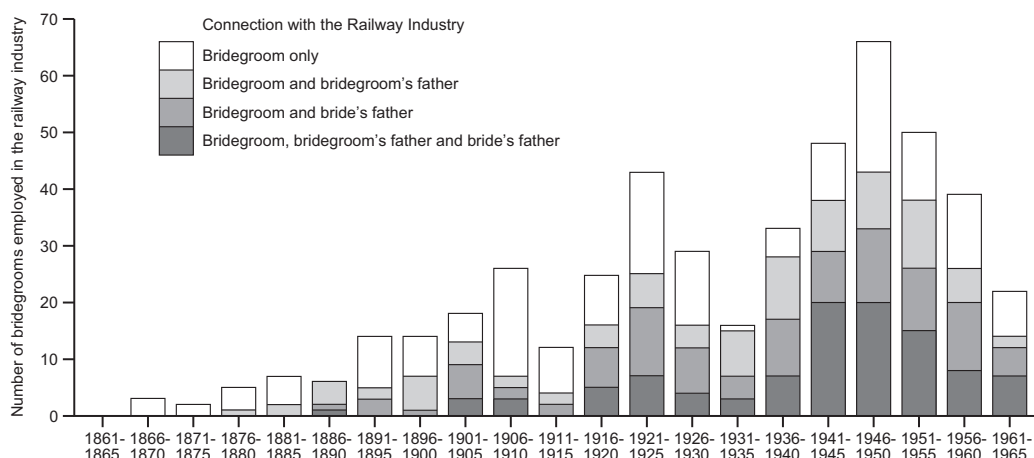
Source: Church Baptism Registers and Civil Registration of Birth

bride’s father; and, second, by investigating the overall level of intermarriage between different occupational groups. Figure 5 sets the context by overviewing the marriage relationships of railway workers during the period 1861–1965.³⁹ It shows that 65 per cent of railway bridegrooms had followed their fathers into the industry; 70 per cent had married the daughters of railway workers; and in 35 per cent of cases both the father of the bridegroom and the father of the bride had worked for the GWR. Moreover, interviews confirm that many fathers identified in the marriage registers since 1945 had previously been recruited as single men to employment at Severn Tunnel Junction, and had subsequently married brides from local families.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, there is insufficient detail in the marriage registers on occupational grades to support a focused investigation into inter-generational social mobility in railway families.

³⁹ Railway families are under-represented in these statistics. During World War I (1914–1919), 14 per cent of local grooms served in the military (12 from a total of 88 marriages); all had married a bride whose father was in railway employment. During World War II (1939–1945), 21 per cent of local grooms were in the armed forces (36 from a total of 170): 4 were the sons of serving railwaymen; 20 married into a family headed by a railway worker; and in 12 cases both the father of the groom and bride were railway workers.

⁴⁰ In Rogiet, during the period 1946–1965, the vicar recorded 17 of the 85 bridegrooms as residents at the Railway Hostel.

Figure 5 Continuity in employment in the railway industry 1861–1965



Source: Church Marriage Register sfor Caldicot, Portskwett and Rogiet; Civil Marriage Registers for Shirenewton and Chepstow Registration Districts

This enquiry is now directed towards the extent to which railway workers and other occupational groups became integrated through marriage or, conversely, maintained a parallel existence in the villages. It considers a theme of employment-based social and physical isolation addressed elsewhere in the British countryside.⁴¹ In south east Monmouthshire, a number of factors influenced the level of intermarriage with the host community, including the volume and time scale of inward migration, levels of within-family recruitment to the railway workplace, the extent of residential segregation and opportunities for social interaction. Intermarriage stands as a hallmark indicator of commitment and social integration. The data in Table 2 support this line of argument. It covers 1,757 first marriages where both partners had specified one of the study parishes as their place of usual abode. Overall, 55 per cent of marriages were celebrated between non-railway families. In contrast, both partners in 16 per cent of marriages belonged to local railway families. A further 18 per cent involved bridegrooms from railway families and brides from non-railway families. Finally, in 11 per cent of cases the daughters of railwaymen had married bridegrooms employed in non-railway occupations. Statistical analysis confirms a highly significant difference in the profile of intermarriage based on occupation (chi-square = 167; d.f. = 1; $p < 0.001$).⁴² This attests to a strong measure of social cohesion between railway families, a feature widely reinforced by residential segregation and held to be true by long-standing local residents.

In the context of structural assimilation, the volume and phasing of inward migration impact directly on the capacity of the charter community to absorb newcomers into

41 M. Edgar and A. Hinde, 'The stone workers of Purbeck', *Rural History* 10 (1999), 75–90.

42 S. Siegel, *Non-parametric statistics for the behavioural sciences* (New York, 1956), 104–11.

Table 2 Family connection through intermarriage

Father of groom or groom himself	Father of bride		Total
	Railway worker	Other occupation	
Railway worker	273	323	596
Other occupation	198	963	1,161
Total	471	1,286	1,757

Note: This table includes bridegrooms recording Caldicot, Portskewett or Rogiet as the parish of usual abode in the marriage register. Chi-squared statistic = 167.5, d.f. 1, $p < 0.001$.

Source: Marriage registers, three railway villages.

existing networks of social interaction. Marriage contact fields for railway workers, derived from entries on parish of usual abode, indicate that 67 per cent of bridegrooms lived in the same parish as the bride, 9 per cent came from neighbouring parishes, 11 per cent came from other districts in Monmouthshire and 13 per cent came from farther afield.⁴³ Significantly, the proportion from more distant origins increased from 12 per cent in 1886–1905 to 24 per cent in 1946–1965. Recruitment from the mining villages and towns in the heart of the South Wales coalfield and the major coastal centres, Swansea, Cardiff and Newport, contributed a steady stream of railway workers. In addition, smaller numbers originated in Bristol and counties in the South West, industrial villages in the Forest of Dean and the London region. Recruitment from within the GWR operating region persisted throughout World War II. Thereafter, in each parish, the proportion of locally-resident bridegrooms increased; administrative records and personal interviews confirm that a significant proportion of these bridegrooms were second generation railwaymen, the sons of wartime migrants.

Reflections on 'social difference' within village communities

The household surveys completed in 1965 provide qualitative evidence on the processes and outcomes of behavioural assimilation. This enquiry, directed at long-established residents, focused on waves of incomers drawn by major developments in the railway infrastructure, and more gradual inflows regulated by staff turnover at railway worksites. From memory and personal experience, informants claimed that the process of integrating newcomers into village life had been achieved without too much difficulty. They reported that housing demand—one possible area of contention—had been effectively managed by local authority and private sector provision. Informants could not recall explicit instances of 'othering', and attempted domination in village life. Respondents in each village, however, remarked on four prominent differences in lifestyle and aspiration between railway and non-railway households.

43 J. Millard, 'A new approach to the study of marriage horizons' in M. Drake ed., *Population studies from parish registers* (Milton Keynes, 1982), 142–63.

First, the phased growth of Caldicot and Rogiet had created districts in each village populated mainly by households of railway employees (see below). Here, workplace affinity, reinforced by neighbourly interaction and intermarriage, had engendered a strong sense of local unity, extending to a sense of being different from non-railway localities. Elsewhere in each village, long-established non-railway families likewise claimed multiple links with village life underpinned, for many, by shared school experiences, kinship and networks of mutual support and recognition. In contrast, rapid industrial change at Sudbrook had reproduced a flexible labour market and intermingling of occupational groups in the fixed stock of housing.

Second, the railway industry offered job security, career prospects and relatively higher wage levels than other occupations. Established villagers acknowledged local wage differentials, particularly with regard to disposable income and housing choice. Indeed, one (quarryman) informant claimed that in the Cross Inn ‘Railway men drink in the bar parlour; we drink in the public bar’. However, several respondents had claimed, from a social class perspective, that unskilled work in parts of the railway industry was no different from that in the local quarries, agriculture or haulage.⁴⁴

Third, in contrast to most rural occupations, the railway industry was characterised by a shift working culture (with different shift routines applicable to job title, grade and responsibility). This reinforced workplace identity and set the railway workforce apart from others in the village, restricting regular access to formally-organised community activity.

Fourth, respondents commented on the separateness engendered by privileged membership of licensed Railwaymen’s Clubs and Staff Associations in Caldicot and Rogiet, and the railway-dominated Working Men’s Club at Sudbrook. Moreover, branches of the railway trade unions (the National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen) and their affiliated women’s groups provided a focus for social exclusivity. Indeed, some long-standing residents viewed railwaymen as political activists in support of the local Labour Party. In contrast, and connected to community cohesion, senior and long-established informants claimed that participation in sports clubs, uniformed youth organisations and church- and chapel-based activities had forged wider bonds of community, irrespective of locality, occupational background and duration of residence. More recently, associations based around the primary and secondary schools had enabled parents from different economic sectors to interact as leaders and members within a supportive family context.

44 Annotations to the electoral registers for 1915 and 1939 in Caldicot show that four quarrymen, two general labourers and one labourer at the village gasworks had transferred to railway employment.

Differentiation of railway communities: case studies

Each village has followed a distinctive pathway towards becoming a place-based railway community. Differences in community profile are now exemplified using the themes of residential segregation in Caldicot, community anchorage at Rogiet and family persistence in Sudbrook.

Caldicot: residential segregation of railway households, 1915 and 1939

Social scientists have used family life course analysis to interpret behavioural patterns of residential segregation in housing markets.⁴⁵ This approach was applied to the growing stock of housing in Caldicot to determine levels of segregation between railway and non-railway households. Two panels of informants were convened to garner evidence: each had three well-informed and long-established members with lifetime service in railway trade unions and local social organisations. In turn, each panel member studied a photocopy of the electoral registers compiled, respectively, in 1915 and 1939, and marked the addresses of households headed by railwaymen. The results were cross-checked and the few inconsistencies arising from lapses of memory were corrected.

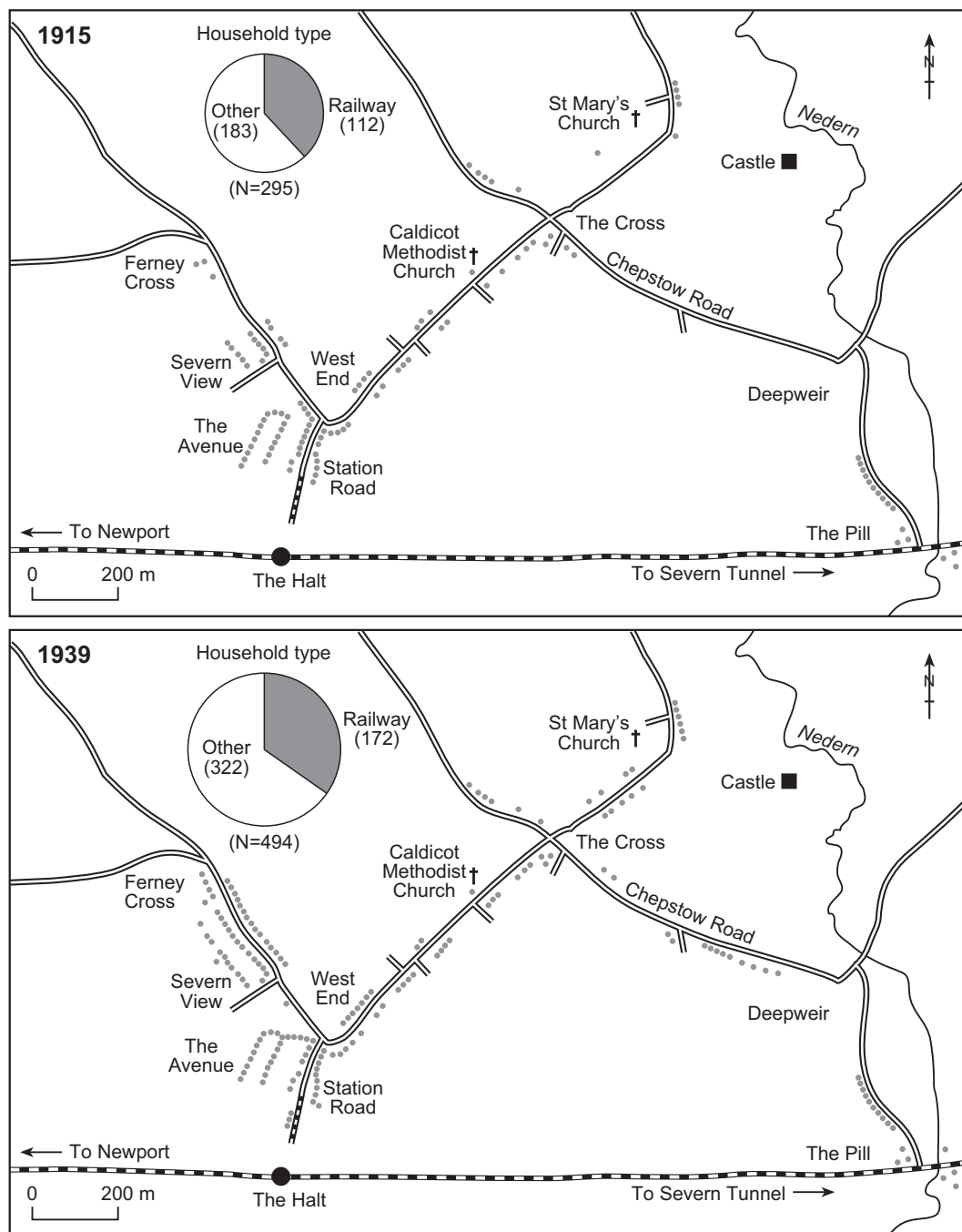
Distribution maps of railway households in Caldicot were drawn using this evidence. Figure 6 indicates that in 1915 38 per cent of the village housing stock was occupied by railwaymen who worked either at Severn Tunnel Junction or the Tunnel Pumping Station at Sudbrook. This proportion had increased to 43 per cent of a larger housing stock in 1939. In 1915 almost 70 per cent of railway households were clustered in the West End. Here they occupied 90 per cent of the housing built during the period 1895–1910. The remainder were scattered throughout the sprawling village, with a small group near the Severn shore at Caldicot Pill.

Panel members claimed that, relative to other workers, railwaymen benefited from superior wage rates, career prospects and higher status accommodation. Bagwell confirms that view: he reports that in 1914 a porter was paid weekly 15 shillings, a permanent way worker 20 shillings, a guard 40 shillings, and an express driver 48 shillings.⁴⁶ Table 3, based on rateable valuation as a surrogate measure of housing quality, confirms that in 1925 railway employees were over-represented in the higher rate bands. In addition, Table 4 uses evidence provided for 1915 on occupational grades (and, by implication, relative wage rates) to spotlight the concentration of locomotive drivers and express guards in the West End; it also draws attention to the disproportionate spread of lower-paid operatives living elsewhere in the village.

45 This process is discussed in M. Pacione, *Urban geography* (London, 2001), 50–3; and Knox and Pinch, *Urban social geography*, 252–70.

46 P.S. Bagwell, *The history of the National Union of Railwaymen* (London, 1963), 349.

Figure 6 Caldicot: railwaymen's households



Source: Retrospective interviews focused on Electoral Registers 1915 and 1939

Table 3 Caldicot: gross rateable valuation of housing stock 1925

Household economy	Rateable valuation 1925			Total
	<£5	£5–£9	>£9	
Railway employee	4	66	56	126
Other employment	82	40	19	141
Overall	86	106	75	267

Note: Chi-squared statistic = 81.8, d.f. 2, $p < 0.001$.

Source: Rateable valuation registers, Chepstow Rating District, 1925.

Table 4 Caldicot 1915: occupational grades and homes of railway staff

Grade	Residential area in village		Total
	West End	Elsewhere	
Engine driver	26	3	29
Permanent way staff	4	12	16
Goods guard	9	6	15
Pumping Station	7	7	14
Traffic organisation:			
manual	7	2	9
supervisory	3	1	4
Signalman	9	3	12
Engineer/fitter	7	2	9
Other capacities	3	1	4
Overall	75	37	112

Note: Chi-squared statistic = 4.23, d.f. 1, $p < 0.05$, when comparing railway guards and drivers with other railway grades.

Source: Database for three railway villages.

The core distribution of railway households identified in 1915 reappears in the residential pattern recreated for 1939. In the interwar years, better-paid railwaymen (many of whom married young) had purchased from speculative builders 74 per cent of the newly-built semi-detached houses on the Chepstow Road, at Ferney Cross and in the West End. Unfortunately, comprehensive data were not available on occupational grades for railway employees in 1939. Field survey in 1965, however, confirmed that locomotive drivers and goods guards were still strongly represented among railway employees in the West End, with lesser numbers in new properties on the Chepstow Road and at Ferney Cross.

Grounded in fieldwork, this exercise in oral history has awakened fresh insights into patterns of social segregation and the grade-status characteristics of the railway workforce. It invites consideration of the importance of the geographical scale of village plan in determining the physical bounds of community. Equally as important, it highlights the role of household persistence in providing the foundations for, and strengthening the

bonds of, a place-based railway community underpinned by resilient networks of family and neighbourly relations.

Rogiet: community anchorage and the Severn Tunnel Garden Village Society

Gilroy argues that ‘We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept theoretically and as a contested fact of contemporary political life.’⁴⁷ Rogiet clearly exemplifies these requirements: within the broader structures of railway employment and related phases in housing provision, there is convincing evidence that human agency had worked to build and strengthen a sense of shared (place-based) identity and social cohesion.⁴⁸ This distinction has been recognised from within by inhabitants and from the outside by people living in non-railway villages.

In the final stage of tunnel construction, ‘...the western end of the Tunnel was lengthened by 276 yards to provide material for making sidings at the new station near Rogiet, afterwards designated as Severn Tunnel Junction’.⁴⁹ This station acted as a catalyst for village growth. Three short, red brick, slate-roofed terraces—Ifton Terrace, Railway Terrace and Seaview Terrace—were soon added. Lord Tredegar financed the Rogiet Hotel close to the cattle market; and the village school was sited near St. Mary’s Church (Figure 7). In 1891 the post office opened in the terrace adjoining the Rogiet Hotel.

These early stages in development are matched by increased population growth in Rogiet and its constituent daughter parishes, Llanfihangel Rogiet and Ifton from 122 in 1881 to 208 in 1891 (see Table 1). Then, during the inter-war period the village housing stock increased threefold to a total in 1939 of 275 units. Local speculative builders and Chepstow Rural District Council (RDC) provided half this total. The balance was commissioned in four stages by the Severn Tunnel Garden Village Association, constituted in 1924. Membership of this association was restricted to railwaymen and an elected committee of nine was appointed to administer the end stock of 94 semi-detached houses. The final planned phase of development in 1937 included a community hall. The population of Rogiet increased from 219 in 1921 to 298 in 1931.

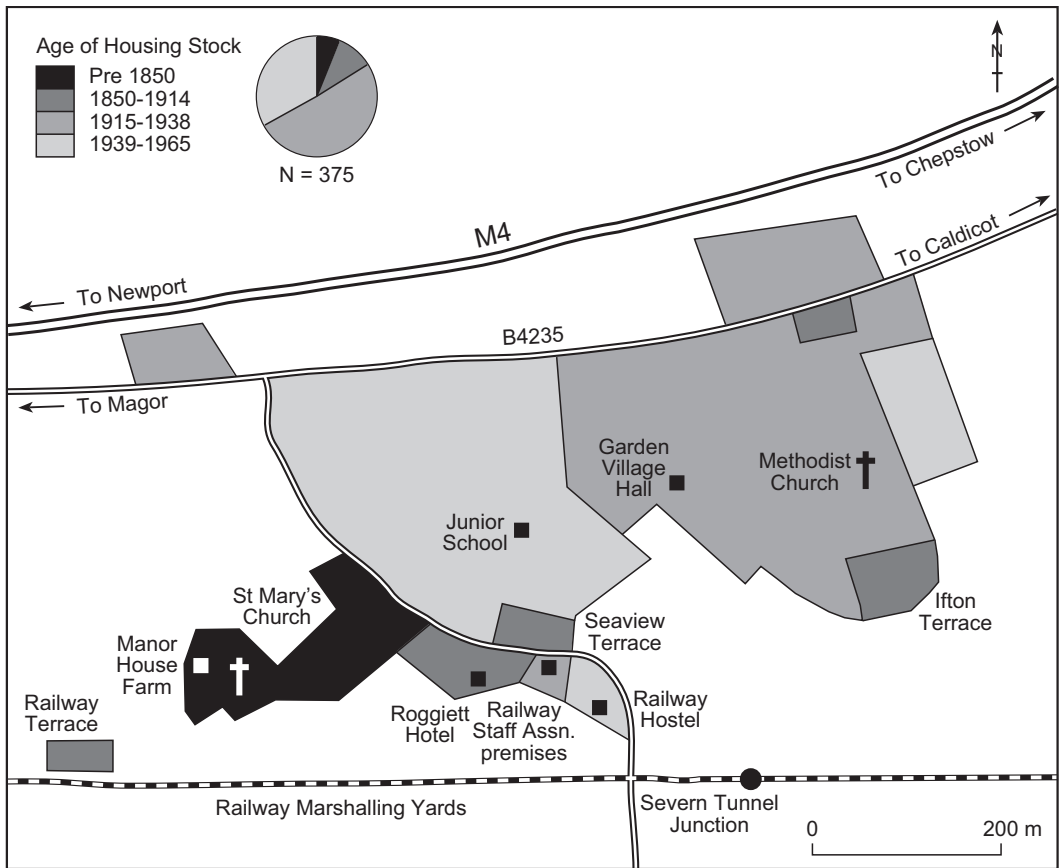
Although the newly-built railway hostel had accommodated a steady throughput of unmarried railwaymen during World War II, the pressure on local housing soon became acute. In 1943 the British Transport Commission built 50 temporary concrete bungalows adjoining the Garden Village. Chepstow RDC replaced these on site in 1955 with permanent housing and, subsequently, built a further 50 semi-detached units, the majority of which were first tenanted by railwaymen. Postwar additions included a small housing

47 P. Gilroy, ‘Diaspora and the detours of identity’, in K. Woodward ed., *Identity and difference* (London, 2003), 301.

48 K. Woodward, *Social sciences: the big issues* (London, 2003), 20–2.

49 McDermott, *History of the Great Western Railway*.

Figure 7 Rogiet: phases in growth



estate on the site of the defunct cattle market and three clusters of senior citizens' bungalows. These housing increments are reflected in peaks of marriages and registered births (see Figures 3 and 4). Thereafter, the total population increased to 1,197 in 1951; and 1,347 in 1971.

The 1965 household survey identified a distinctive and demographically-ageing population. Only 25 per cent (most of whom lived in local authority houses) of the 375 households had children of school-age or younger; 45 per cent of houses accommodated only two persons, and a further 8 per cent just one person. The advanced age structure and related issues of under-occupancy in the housing stock resulted from the 'persistence' of railway employees who had benefited from structured career settings and secure housing tenure. One quarter of households had occupied their homes for over 30 years. The special protection afforded by the Severn Tunnel Garden Village Association had created stability and a sense of cohesion. By 1965, it had resulted in under-occupation of the housing stock at a time of acute demand from second generation railway families. Official records

confirmed that railway pensioners occupied 26 houses, and the widows of railwaymen a further 22.⁵⁰

Rogiet had become a classic railway village. The 1965 survey confirmed that 40 per cent of the male household heads had retired from railway service; whilst 80 per cent of the balance still worked for British Rail. Decades of coexistence and a common basis for (mainly) shift-based employment had fostered a resilient sense of community. These bonds were reinforced by kinship. One quarter of households identified married siblings living elsewhere in the village. In addition, many claimed married offspring living in the nearby villages of Caldicot, Portskewett and Undy. Community life was further rivetted on to this scene by active participation in organised social activities. These included a full (daytime) social programme sponsored by the retired section of the Railway Staff Association; membership of the local allotment garden association; church- and chapel-based organisations geared especially to the interests of women; and family activities scheduled in the Community Hall.

Sudbrook: household 'persistence' and the re-structured village economy

Physical isolation and a common workplace have engendered a strong sense of community in Sudbrook, a planned village situated on the Severn shore, 1 kilometre (0.6 mile) from the parish settlement of Portskewett. Construction work on the Severn Tunnel spanned the period 1872–1886. T.A. Walker, the Severn Tunnel engineer, built the coastal village comprising 130 houses and community buildings to accommodate specialist tunnel miners, surface tradesmen and unskilled labourers. Part of the housing stock was designed specifically to accommodate unmarried and unaccompanied tunnel workers. As early as December 1880, Walker records that '[o]n the first plot of leased land six large houses had been built, which were each capable of holding two married couples and about twelve lodgers. Six smaller houses to accommodate a married couple and six or eight lodgers had been erected, as well as small houses for a married couple and two or three lodgers or children.'⁵¹ At census-tide in 1881, only the cottages in Camp Road and Old Row were inhabited; the remaining terraces were occupied soon afterwards. At the peak of tunnel construction, late in 1881, the post office opened next to the village stores; and 'The Severn Tunnel Works' became, officially, the village of Sudbrook. The primary school which opened in the same year reinforced community identity and stimulated social cohesion. Finally, in 1882 a large mission hall and fully-staffed free hospital opened to serve the needs of tunnel workers and their dependants.⁵²

50 Interview with the Honorary Secretary to the Severn Tunnel Garden Village Association, June 1965.

51 Walker, *Severn Tunnel*, 47.

52 R.L. Gant, 'Portskewett 1881: a community profile', *Gwent Local History*, 55 (1983), 9–16

Table 5 Census-derived employment totals in Sudbrook 1891-1901

Category of employment	Male head and son(s)			Lodger			Total		
	1881	1891	1901	1881	1891	1901	1881	1891	1901
Tunnel construction	26	0	0	50	0	0	76	0	0
Tunnel Pumping Station	0	41	30	8	0	0	8	41	30
Railway operations/maintenance	18	14	16	0	8	1	18	22	17
Sudbrook shipyard	0	151	46	0	66	13	0	217	59
Other occupations	48	85	93	31	15	9	79	100	102
Total economically-active males	92	291	185	89	89	23	181	380	208
Railway employment as % of total	47.8	18.9	24.9	65.2	9.0	4.3	56.4	16.6	22.6
Shipyard employment as % of total	0.0	51.9	24.9	0.0	74.2	56.5	0.0	57.1	28.4

Source: Census enumerators' books: 1881, 1891 and 1901.

Church records, census enumerations, civil registrations for marriage and birth and the village school admissions register confirm the origins of tunnel workers in nearby parishes, the mining districts in South Wales, Devon, Cornwall and other parts of England.⁵³

The Tunnel was completed in 1886 and the workforce dispersed.⁵⁴ The prospect of unemployment faced many Sudbrook families and their lodgers. Fortunately, the GWR recruited some tunnel builders to permanent way gangs, tunnel maintenance crews and the Tunnel Pumping Station; in parallel, blacksmiths, boiler-smiths and fitters transferred to the newly-commissioned Sudbrook Shipyard, situated on the shoreline close to the Tunnel Pumping Station. Here, as G.E. Farr reports, slipways extended into the narrow deepwater channel and derelict workshops on the foreshore were adapted for marine engineering.⁵⁵ Sudbrook Shipyard specialised in small iron vessels and barges. The first, the *Sophia* (344 tons), was launched in 1889. A total of 19 iron-hulled screw steamers had been launched by the time of T.A. Walker's death in 1891. His executors then specialised in small craft, barges and nautical engineering until the shipyard closed in the economic recession of the 1920s.

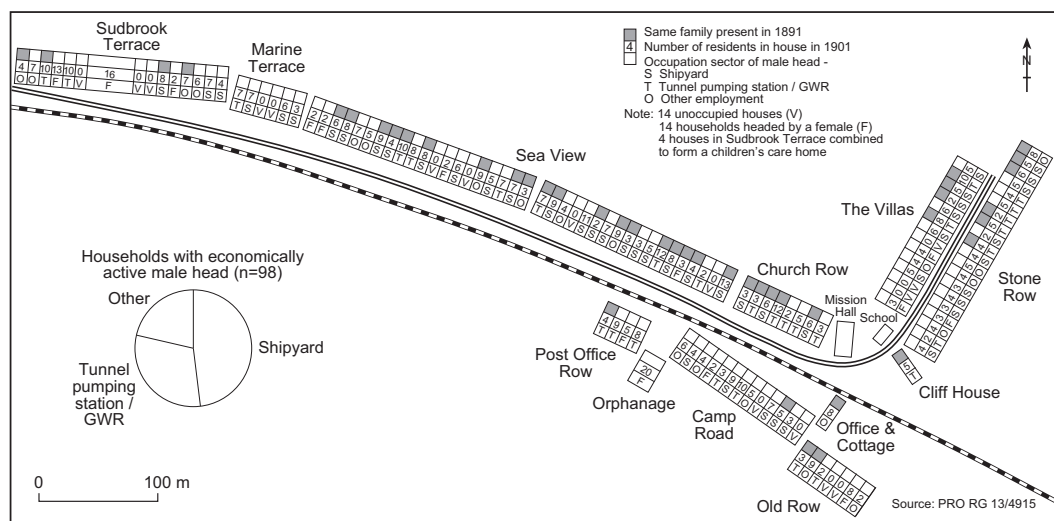
Evidence from the 1891 census underscores the importance of the shipyard in the local labour market: 217 men from the village worked in various capacities in shipbuilding; a further 63

53 R.L. Gant 'Industrial change in Caldicot and Portskewett: an analysis of marriage registers'. *Gwent Local History*, 62 (1987), 35-9; R.L. Gant, 'Employment and migration: a study from civil registration records', *Local Population Studies*, 18 (1977), 43-7; R.L. Gant, 'Portskewett 1891: a census geography', *Gwent Local History*, 79 (1995), 29-36. R.L. Gant, 'School records, family migration and community history: insights from Sudbrook and the construction of the Severn Tunnel', *Family and Community History*, 11 (2008), 27-44.

54 D. Brooke, 'The railway navy of the 1881 census', *Quarterly Journal of Social Affairs*, 2 (1986), 370.

55 G.E. Farr, *Chepstow ships* (Chepstow, 1954), 24.

Figure 8 Sudbrook: house repopulation 1901



were employed in the railway industry (see Table 5). Likewise, and notwithstanding the challenge of maintaining a full order book for ship construction and nautical engineering, the 1901 census identifies 59 local men working at the shipyard and 47 railway employees (see Figure 8).⁵⁶ At this census point, house repopulation captures features of the village community and its social transformation.⁵⁷ It also images: the level of household ‘persistence’ since the previous census in 1891; variations in household size; clustering of households from key employment sectors; the numerical significance of female heads of household; and proportion of vacant properties in the housing stock at a time of economic uncertainty.⁵⁸

Overview and conclusion

This study of railway villages in south east Monmouthshire has blended historical evidence with findings from a household survey and explored local differences in the impact of the railway industry on the community profiles of three neighbouring villages. An analysis of the selected data sources, phased developments in railway infrastructure and inward migration of railway workers set the scene. Case studies then showcased the spatial segregation of railway households in Caldicot; illustrated the role of the Severn Tunnel Garden Village

56 R.L. Gant, ‘Continuity and change in Portskewett: an interpretation of the 1901 census returns’, *Gwent Local History*, 101 (2006), 41–54.

57 House repopulation, based on census information, is explained in E. Higgs, *Making sense of the census revisited*, (London, 2005), 141–2; and R.J.P. Kain and H.C. Prince, *Tithe surveys for historians* (Chichester, 2000), 123–5.

58 ‘Persistence’ is a critical concept for the interpretation of community stability. See, for instance, C. French, ‘Who lived in suburbia? Surbiton in the second half of the nineteenth century’, *Family and Community History*, 7 (2007), 93–109.

Association in generating a strong place-based identity in Rogiet; and measured the resilience of a work-based railway community confronted by industrial change in Sudbrook. It now remains to examine the achievements and shortcomings of this project.

At a minimum, the database had the capacity to support the measurement of key social and economic indicators connected to village life. Inevitably, the depth and precision of the investigation was constrained by the patchy survival, content and mix of historical records. Key census files and church registers, however, provided a firm platform; this was extended and enriched by core measurements from civil registers on employment and household formation. Moreover, the opportunity to use, retrospectively, evidence from household survey and bespoke enquiries in oral history added essential ingredients to this proven mix. In the mid-1960s the database was successfully extended and deepened by the inclusion of this evidence. This provided an essential insight into aspects of community formation, and levels of cohesion not discernible from the historical record.

The research methodology was conceptualised in the community studies tradition. This approach proved to be flexible and accommodated parallel lines of enquiry. It sought to develop a sound quantitative foundation for the interpretation of long-term community change. Throughout, the concept of community was treated with respect: it was acknowledged that it remains a highly problematic and contested concept, subject to different interpretations. The study, nevertheless, exemplifies the role of 'community' in providing an overarching framework that encompasses indicative measures of physical proximity, place-based sentiments, and work and leisure-based relationships amongst local people. Moreover, it supports the investigation of real and perceived differences in locally-organised society by an examination of 'difference', recognition of conflict and appreciation of 'othering'. From an operational perspective, the study dwells on place-based measurements of social assimilation, household persistence, occupation-group cohesion and spatial segregation. Here, long-standing residents added an important qualitative dimension to the analysis. They registered the operation of community building processes both at the scale of the village and, internally, in local areas of housing. Moreover, from a village-wide perspective, informants confirmed a process of social consolidation following each major wave of in-migration and reported a progressive blurring of within-village differences between the charter community and newcomers with the passage of time.

From the perspective of the local historian, the success of micro-level investigation must be judged against its contribution to the wider debate on historical change in the British countryside. In the study period, it is evident that in south east Monmouthshire the railway industry had a significant impact on village growth and community profiles. However, economic transformation was manifested in different ways in each village. Case studies affirm that local circumstances interacted with economic processes to produce locally-unique social outcomes. The 'railway village', a generic term, conceals marked local differences with regard to pattern of development, social profile and recognised

identity. Each village is perceived by residents and outsiders alike as being distinct from other villages in the region. Rogiet and Sudbrook, as smaller settlements, retain a sense of individual identity. In contrast, while outsiders perceived Caldicot to be a single entity, long-standing villagers claimed the existence of internal divisions produced by sorting mechanisms in local housing markets. Here, the heritage of the West End is firmly attached to housing development for railwaymen; and Caldicot Pill, bordering Portskewett parish, is associated with the Severn Tunnel construction and, later, an active metal-working community.

Finally, the study has demonstrated that geographical scale has a bearing on sense of place and the creation of village identity. Areas first dominated by railway households developed intricate networks of neighbour interaction and mutual dependence, strengthened by a common industrial culture and lifestyle. Inter-marriage within the railway community served to reinforce existing bonds of unity. This contributed to a heightened sense of industry-based cohesion. Moreover, it established strong place-based feelings of difference between railway and non-railway groups, especially in Caldicot and to a lesser extent in Rogiet. In contrast, at Sudbrook, there is evidence of village-wide social cohesion rather than occupation-based local distinctions. Respondents in neighbouring villages commented on this situation. This viewpoint was supported by the relatively small size of Sudbrook, its industrial heritage and its mainly undifferentiated housing stock.