
Is blood thicker than water? Farm servants and the family in nineteenth-century north Devon

Caroline Verney with Janet Few

Abstract

This paper describes a small part of wider research into family and community in the nineteenth century undertaken by the late Caroline Verney. Her study of the north Devon parishes of Bittadon, Braunton, Georgeham, Marwood, Morteohoe and West Down centred on the way in which Victorian farming communities functioned, with investigations into kinship stemming from that core theme. At the same time, Janet Few was researching the role of kinship and its impact on community cohesion in three other areas of north Devon: Bulkworthy, Bucks Mills and Hatherleigh. Few's work on the farming parish of Bulkworthy is particularly relevant and has been used to complement Verney's findings for Morteohoe, which form the focus of this article. Together they have been used to investigate the employment of farm servants and the basis upon which they might have been chosen.

Introduction

Ann Kussmaul, in her ground-breaking book *Servants in husbandry in early modern England*, rescued farm servants from their historical obscurity and highlighted their pivotal position in the English agricultural workforce.¹ She found that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, farm service had declined significantly in the south and east of England but was still a strong component of the agricultural labour force in the north and west.² Kussmaul's work has not gone unchallenged, specifically as regards the methodology she employed. A. J. Gritt pointed out the limitations of Kussmaul's use of the 1831 Census as the basis for estimating the size and composition of agricultural labour.³ He felt that these methodological problems produced errors that 'over-exaggerate the significance of servants in the north of England' and overestimate the decline of service in the south, where servants were younger.⁴

Alun Howkins has promulgated a tripartite model of service: classic farm service whereby sons or daughters of social equals lived with a different family to learn the trade in the hope of eventually taking over a farm; service that entailed the hiring of young men or

1 A. Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge, 1981).

2 Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry*, 19.

3 A.J. Gritt, 'The census and the servant: a reassessment of the decline and distribution of farm service in early nineteenth-century England' *Economic History Review*, 53 (2000), 84–106. Here at p. 84.

4 Gritt, 'Census and the servant', 105.

women into a farming household whose status would only be that of hired help with no prospect of ever being farmers themselves, and finally family hiring whereby the head of the household and his family would be hired to live and work on a particular farm (for example, hinds and their wives).⁵ Howkins suggests that it is the 'classic' form of service that Kussmaul investigated and it was this form that declined during the nineteenth century, whilst the other two forms continued. It seems, therefore, that the persistence of farm service in pastoral and also in some non-pastoral regions is related to factors such as farm size, settlement patterns, the availability of employment in local industries and the 'type' of person entering service (that is, those who were 'hired help' rather than farmers learning their trade). This range of factors meant that farm service could endure longer in some areas than others. Recently Howkins and Verdon found a correlation between the presence of farm servants and upland farming, the requirements of dairying and competition from nearby industrial areas. They acknowledge however, that 'there are places where none of these explanations fits and where only intensely local study might reveal the reasons for the use of farm servants'.⁶ Clearly more research needs to be undertaken to expose what was actually happening at the community level. Verney began such a study and her approach helps to counter Pooley and Turnbull's fear that 'the analysis of aggregate characteristics may mask the voices of individual people'.⁷

Verney's six contiguous parishes in north-east Devon were chosen because there was, at the time, a dearth of north Devon micro-studies. In addition, many generations of her own family farmed there and her personal knowledge of farming practices in that area was fundamental to her wider research. Bulkworthy was the subject of existing research by Janet Few and her results have been included here as a counterpoint to Verney's findings, illustrating that experiences may have differed even in places in close proximity to each other. These differences highlight the need for further micro-research to set against more wide-ranging studies. In terms of farming practices, these seven parishes are typical of north Devon as a whole and are similar to other areas where arable farming was secondary to animal husbandry. In some respects, however, they are very different, as the comparison of farm service in Mortohoe and Bulkworthy reveals.

Debate continues as to whether the servant formed part of the family or part of the larger household, which had less personal connotations.⁸ This may be due, in part, to the fact that

5 A. Howkins, 'Peasants, servants and labourers: the marginal workforce in British agriculture, c.1870-1914', *Agricultural History Review*, 42 (1994), 57-61; A. Howkins 'The English farm labourer in the nineteenth century: farm, family and community', in B. Short ed., *The English rural community: images and analyses* (Cambridge, 1992), 89-93.

6 A. Howkins and N. Verdon, 'Adaptable and sustainable? Male farm service and the agricultural labour force in midland and southern England, c.1850-1925', *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), 467-95. Here at p. 480.

7 C. G. Pooley and J. Turnbull, *Migration and mobility in Britain since the eighteenth century* (London, 1998), 37

8 S. Counce, 'Farm servants and the development of capitalism in English agriculture', *Agricultural History Review*, 45 (1997), 78-95.

servants' identities were submerged within the household, particularly if they did not share the surname of their employer.⁹ This defacement of identity may have originated with the historian because of the historian's lack of knowledge about the servant's own kin network. To address this, Verney investigated individual examples of the use of extended kin as farm servants. This paper sets out to establish the continuance of the use of farm servants in the study areas beyond the first half of the nineteenth century. The way in which extended kin might be used as a source of farm servants is examined through case studies from Mortehoe. Finally, there is an assessment of why practices might differ, even within the same region.

Farming in Victorian north Devon

The great majority of the population of Victorian north Devon were rural dwellers, reliant on agriculture for their income. The climate of north-west Devon is warmer and more equable than that of much of England but it is wet; the average annual rainfall being 59 inches.¹⁰ As a consequence of the climate, the soil in north Devon tends to become very soggy; which is exacerbated by the heavy clay, culm measures. The region's soil, along with its climate and relief, make it more suited to pastoral than to arable farming.

Hoskins comments on Devon that 'farms were generally small; large holdings were very rare. Often these farms had been rented by the same families for generations.'¹¹ This was, in the main, a corollary of the system of land tenure, which favoured smaller holdings. Vancouver, writing in 1808, reported no enclosures in north-west Devon.¹² This was to change as the nineteenth century progressed, with a wave of awards being granted. For the tenant, land was customarily held on a lease for three lives, giving security of tenure and encouraging occupants to improve their farms.¹³ By the early nineteenth century, there was a tendency towards shorter leases, of 14 or 21 years, accompanied by rack-renting. Yet, in 1992, Hoskins was still able to write,

As to the size of farms, there is little significant change in the past two or three generations. The average Devon farm is small, round about sixty-five acres, and scarcely any bigger than it was back in the 1860s. In 1944 more than half the farms of Devon were fifty acres or less and only one farm in a hundred exceeded 300 acres, as compared with five per hundred in England and Wales as a whole.¹⁴

9 L. Davidoff, M. Doolittle, J. Fink & K. Holden, *The family story: blood contract and intimacy, 1830–1960* (London, 1999), 95.

10 According to N. Hicks, *Farming in the West Country* (London, 1968), 7.

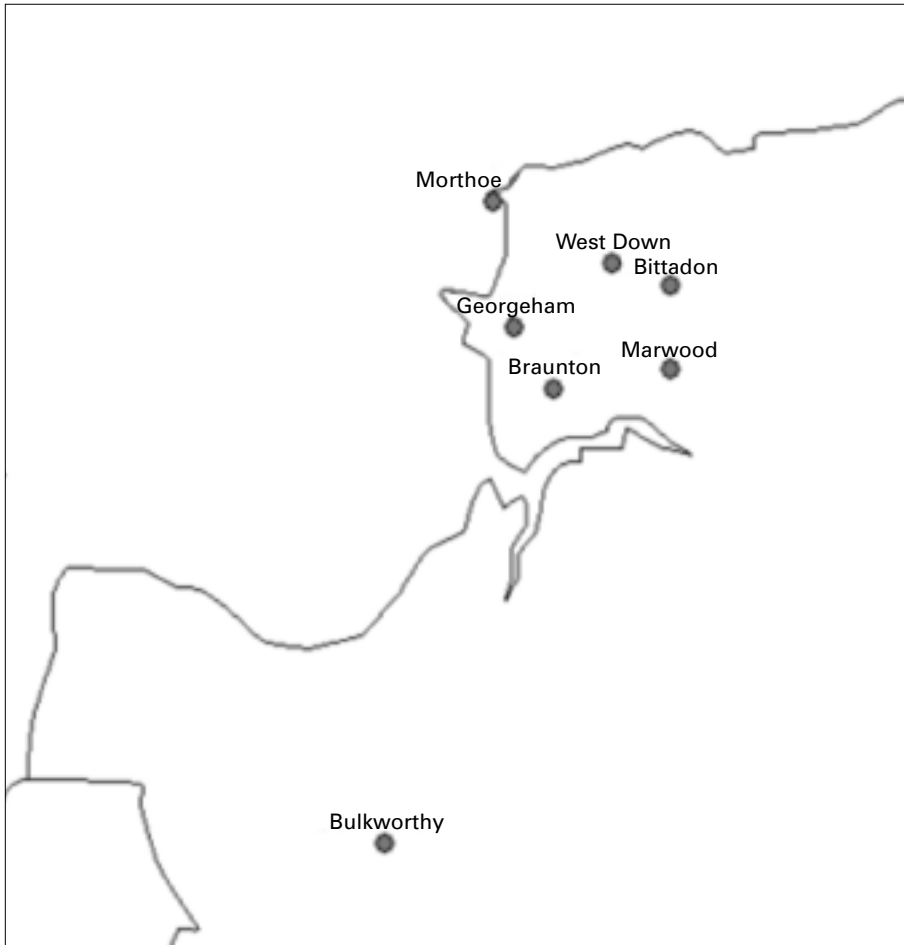
11 W.G. Hoskins, *Devon* (Tiverton, 1992), 101–102.

12 C. Vancouver, *General view of the agriculture of Devon: with observations on the means of its improvement, drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture* (1st edn 1808; Newton Abbott, 1969), 134.

13 Hoskins, *Devon*, 91.

14 Hoskins, *Devon*, 303.

Figure 1 The north Devon parishes researched

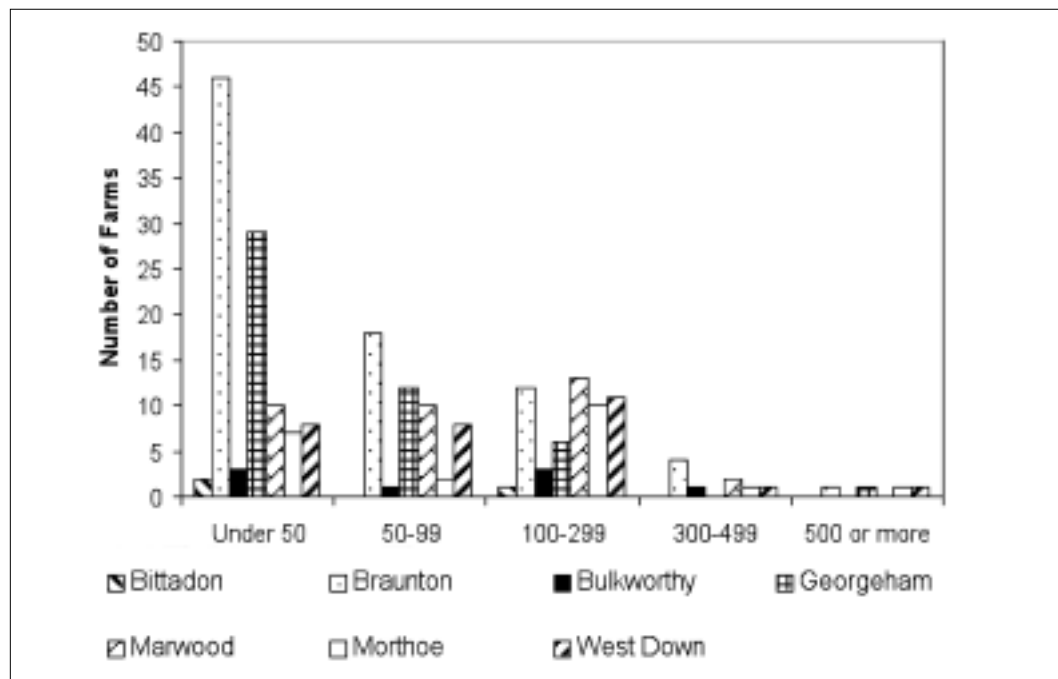


Charles Vancouver's 1808 survey stated that within the district in which Verney's six parishes are situated (see Figure 1), 'about one-eighth part of the enclosed cultivated lands ... are annually under corn crops, or in preparation for them. The remainder will always be found lying in permanent pasture, or subject to such a course of tillage as the caprice of the occupier may choose.'¹⁵ He also claimed that the countryside from Ashford, Prieford, Marwood, West Down and Bittadon had 'a large proportion of wastes [that] occupy the face of the country, and much confine the extent of the cultivated land' but the good staple soil to be found through Morthoe, Georgeham, Braunton and Heanton Punchardon afforded 'a tract of land as well calculated for a system of up and down husbandry, as for its more general appropriation of lying in grass.'¹⁶ It appears therefore, that cattle fattening

15 Vancouver, *General view*, 209.

16 Vancouver, *General view*, 15.

Figure 2 Acreages of farms in 1851



Source: 1851 census returns, HO 107 1895, folios 688–92.

with some dairying plus sheep rearing were the main agricultural concerns by the early nineteenth century. The diary of Aaron Phillip, written 50 years after Vancouver, corroborates this, with frequent mentions of the fattening and sale of lambs and sheep.¹⁷ Wheat, barley and oats were grown but were clearly a minor concern compared to stock rearing. Thus the six parishes may be considered to be a ‘mixed economy’ but with the focus on an ‘open pasture’ farming style.

The predominance of pastoral farming necessitated labour that would be available throughout the day and night and across the whole of the agricultural calendar. Stock, whether sheep, dairy cows or cattle for fattening, required attention every day and this could only be ensured by employing labour in such a way that would give the farmer the certainty of that. Farm service was a way of guaranteeing that certainty. As Dewey argues, ‘the need to supervise livestock on every day of the week (and at unsocial hours)’, alongside ‘the difficulties of assuring a supply of labour within daily walking distance (especially in winter snows), sufficiently explain the persistence of the institution’ of farm service.¹⁸

17 A. Phillips, *A tour in Devonshire for one month in June 1858*. Manuscript in private hands.

18 P. Dewey, ‘Farm Labour’, in E. J. T. Collins ed., *The Agrarian history of England and Wales, VII, part 1, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 2000), 810–62. Here at p. 813.

Bulkworthy, some 20 miles to the south-west of Verney's parishes, was exclusively rural, consisting of several scattered, outlying farms. The only semblance of a village was the group of cottages surrounding Town Farm, known collectively as 'Church Town' and a slightly larger hamlet at Haytown. Dwellings in Bulkworthy varied from the small labourers' cottages of Haytown, to sizable farms of up to 450 acres (see Figure 2).¹⁹

Bulkworthy contained four larger and four small land holdings and there appears to have been plenty of employment for agricultural labourers within the parish. There was a steady stream of young farm workers coming into the parish throughout the nineteenth century. Some of these lived-in as farm servants, others occupied cottages of their own in Church Town or Haytown. The soil in Bulkworthy was loam, overlying clay, which held moisture and was suitable for grain but less so for root crops such as mangolds and swedes, which were harvested in late autumn or early winter and thus susceptible to suffer damage in the damp sub-soil. The Tithe Schedule of 1843 shows that the farmland in Bulkworthy was primarily arable.²⁰

Farm service in north Devon

It is useful to provide a working definition of 'servants' and 'labourers' in order not to confuse these two disparate groups. The main distinction appears to be in the terms of hiring: yearly hiring for servants, daily hiring for labourers.²¹ Another main feature of servants' hiring was their domicile within the household of their employer.²² The census returns for 1841–1881 were used to identify the farmers and their farm servants in the chosen study parishes. The initial problem was to distinguish farm servants from those with a non-agricultural role. For males this was relatively easy as the description of 'farm servant, farm labourer, agricultural servant, shepherd', indicated that their occupation was indeed agricultural. Where the male was just listed as 'servant' and the head of the house was a farmer, these instances were also included as agricultural employment.²³

Difficulties arose regarding female servants and their agricultural status, a problem that has been recognised by other historians. Schwarz succinctly sums up the matter by arguing that in relation to women servants 'the term "domestic industry" combined rural

19 By 1881, Hankford, which contained 240 acres in the mid-nineteenth century, had gained land from Waldrons and Blakes and Squires so that it consisted of 450 acres.

20 The National Archives, London, IR29/9/87, Bulkworthy Tithe Schedule, 1843.

21 Although hiring for 12 months was the normal period of engagement, half yearly hiring or even shorter periods of hire were not uncommon.

22 Some servants did not always reside with their employers, for example hinds.

23 In these particular parishes, there were few gentleman farmers and therefore male servants were very likely to be agricultural, rather than domestic, servants. In the very small number of large farming households, it is clear which males were domestic servants and which were not.

outworking, including a considerable element of sweated labour, with cooking and cleaning'.²⁴ Kitteringham similarly observed that 'there were indoor servants who would alternate between working in the house or the dairy and doing outdoor work'.²⁵ Kirby, using Anderson's criteria, increased his calculations of the number of females aged between 10 and 14 employed as farm servants, to allow for female general servants employed in farming households who were also thought to be engaged in agriculture.²⁶ Thus the nature of rural female service could possibly incorporate two elements: indoor domestic duties and/or outdoor agricultural tasks. It appeared that their normal tasks were the house and the dairy, but at times such as harvest when extra help was needed, female servants would then be required to work in the fields. Other research suggests that this practice continued in north Devon well into the twentieth century. Mary Bouquet uses the example of a young girl, Mary, working on a farm in Welcombe between 1913 and 1924, who was expected to milk the cows, wash the milking pails and separators and then return to the house to do the domestic cleaning.²⁷

Clearly there is evidence that female servants in farming households could be expected to undertake a variety of tasks that encompassed indoor and outdoor responsibilities and this could even include care of the sick. The problem lies in estimating how many rural female servants had this mixture of occupations and how many were purely employed as agricultural servants or domestic servants. It was certainly not a clear-cut case that that farm service employed males and domestic service, females.²⁸ This investigation started from the basis that if the census enumerator used the classification of 'Farm Servant', 'Agricultural Servant', 'General Servant (Farm)', 'Dairymaid' or 'Farm Labourer' (with servant relationship), then these females were farm servants. Where females were classified as 'General Servants', 'House Servants' or 'Servants', and they lived in a farming household, then these too were included as farm servants for the purpose of this research.²⁹

24 L. Schwarz 'English servants and their employers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Economic History Review*, 52 (1999), 236–56.

25 J. Kitteringham, 'Country work girls in nineteenth-century England', in R. Samuel ed., *Village life and labour* (London, 1975), 73–138.

26 P. Kirby, 'How many children were "unemployed" in eighteenth and nineteenth century England', *Past and Present*, 187 (2005), 187–202. Here at p. 200. Kirby cites as his basis for this as Michael Anderson 'Households, families and individuals: some preliminary results from the national sample from the 1851 Census of Great Britain', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988), 421–38.

27 M. Bouquet, *Family, servants and visitors: the farm household in nineteenth and twentieth-century Devon* (Norwich, 1985), 77–8.

28 P. R. A. Hinde 'Household structure, marriage and the institution of service in nineteenth-century rural England', *Local Population Studies*, 35 (1985), 45.

29 It is acknowledged that classifying female house servants etc., as farm servants may inflate the true numbers of females that were actually farm servants. However, in the evidence given previously regarding the dual nature of duties of females employed on farms, this would appear to indicate that such a classification has a sound basis. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it would appear that this would give a truer picture of the numbers of female farm servants than if they were discounted.

Farm servants and the family in nineteenth-century north Devon

Table 1 Number of servants in the 1851 Census, by agricultural/non-agricultural classification

	Male	Ag.	Non-ag.	% Ag.
Bittadon	10	10	0	100.00
Braunton	121	113	8	93.38
Georgeham	55	49	6	89.09
Marwood	74	66	8	89.18
Mortehoe	35	34	1	97.14
West Down	50	47	3	94.00
Bulkworthy	15	15	0	100.00
Total	360	334	26	92.78
	Female	Ag.	Non-ag.	% Ag.
Bittadon	4	2	2	50.00
Braunton	145	52	93	35.86
Georgeham	39	18	21	46.15
Marwood	61	34	27	55.73
Mortehoe	26	16	10	61.53
West Down	37	22	15	59.45
Bulkworthy	9	6	3	66.66
Total	321	150	171	46.73

In order to provide a context for the investigation into the employment of kin, it is necessary to look at some of the broader issues surrounding farm service in this area. As Table 1 shows, 93 per cent of all male servants in the seven parishes were engaged as farm servants, but only 47 per cent of females, even though the total numbers employed as servants were not dissimilar (360 males, 321 females). The percentage of male farm servants across the parishes was fairly even, ranging from 89 per cent (Georgeham) to 100 per cent (Bittadon and Bulkworthy), while females range from 36 per cent (Braunton) to 67 per cent (Bulkworthy), with the percentages in Bulkworthy being greater than that in the more easterly parishes. One of the reasons why female farm servants were less in evidence in Braunton may be because the opportunities for pure domestic service were greater. Braunton had a much larger and more affluent population than the other parishes and its sea-going connections meant that many residents were engaged in occupations other than farming. Thus, female servants appear more frequently in the households of Braunton's annuitants, mariners and tradesmen.

One of the major criticisms of Kussmaul's methodology was the exclusion of servants under the age of 20, even though she provides evidence of entry into service that started several years before this age, arguing 'The modal age of entry into farm service, taken from ninety-one settlement examinations, was thirteen to fourteen: 23 per cent of all servants entered service at that age. An additional 22 per cent entered when aged fifteen to sixteen'.³⁰ Farm service occupied a period between childhood and adulthood, it was 'a

³⁰ Kussmaul, *Servants*, 70.

Table 2 Servants' ages in the 1851 Census, in seven north Devon parishes

Age	M Ag.	M non-ag.	Total M	F Ag.	F Non-ag.	Total F	Total
0–9	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
10–14	76	6	82	15	24	39	117
15–19	163	4	167	60	44	104	256
20–24	51	6	57	32	38	70	123
25–29	21	1	22	15	17	32	53
30–34	8	1	9	11	7	18	27
35–39	1	1	2	5	3	8	10
40+	14	7	21	12	37	39	70
Total	334	26	360	150	171	321	681

transitional occupation, specific to their transitional status ... no one was born a servant in husbandry and few expected to die as servants.³¹ As shown in Table 2, the age composition of servants, both agricultural and non-agricultural, indicates that a significant proportion of servants in Verney's six parishes, and in Bulkworthy, were under the age of 20.

From the 681 who made up the *total* servant population, 35 per cent were male farm servants under 20, and 11 per cent were female farm servants of the same age. This indicates that, particularly in regard to male farm servants, disregarding this age group as Kussmaul did can seriously underestimate the number of extant servants. If the total number of male servants is used (360), then those aged 20 and under represent 69 per cent of the male servant population. In addition, Kussmaul was working on an earlier period (the 1831 Census) and, although she claims that farm service declined significantly during the nineteenth century, her serious underestimates of the numbers employed in farm service appear to have distorted the timing of this decline.³² Reay found in Kent that whilst farm service accounted for only 8 per cent in total of male employment in 1851, 'farm servants were the most important occupation after agricultural labourer and labourer for unmarried males aged 15 to 24'.³³ In this age group, 28 per cent were employed in farm service. Hinde's analysis of Mitford, Norfolk and Atcham, Shropshire between 1851 and 1881 revealed that farm service was 'almost extinct' in Mitford but persisted in Atcham, at least until the 1860s. In 1851, 90 per cent of Atcham farm servants were under the age of 30; 53 per cent were aged 20 and under.³⁴

31 Kussmaul, *Servants*, 4.

32 Kussmaul and others have pointed out that farm service was still an important component of the agricultural labour force in Devon in the nineteenth century, but to ignore the under 20 age category for servants is a serious omission, as Gritt pointed out.

33 B. Reay, *Microhistories: demography, society and culture in rural England, 1800–1930* (Cambridge, 1996), 26.

34 Hinde 'Household structure', 45.

Table 2 also reveals that from the age of 20 onwards farm service became a much less important occupation. It would be expected that after the age of 29, farm service would be much less apparent because of the nature of farm service as being a prelude to marriage. The vast majority of male farm servants would become day labourers after marriage, which usually occurred in their mid to late twenties. Examination of the age at marriage in the six parishes under review reveals that the average age of male servants at marriage for the period 1835–1881 was 25 years 4 months and 23 years and 9 months for females.

Farmer-farm servant relationships

Laslett states that ‘servants were very unlikely to be agnates of their masters in traditional England ... it was felt inappropriate nevertheless that they should serve masters who were agnatic relatives. We do not know, and perhaps never will know, whether the same would hold of uterine relatives.’³⁵ Laslett sums up the position by saying that ‘it seems reasonable to suppose that servants were rarely kin in pre-industrial England’.³⁶ Snell supports this position, stating ‘the use of kin for support by agricultural families was not widespread.’³⁷ To Snell, kin were not a widespread crux of support in times of financial crisis, and kin networks were uncommon, the nuclear family being ‘usually isolated and insular, buttressed only by charity and the poor law.’³⁸

Plakans and Wetherell have also questioned the idea of kin as a supportive network. They propose that the ‘kinship group was an “imagined community”, kept in existence only insofar as people remembered or imagined themselves to be part of it ... genealogical reconstructions for the purpose of contextualisation constitute, in this view, a kind of optical illusion, which promises configurations and broad-based social support from kin ties that were never delivered in real life.’³⁹ Plakans and Wetherell acknowledge that Anderson found families who were making use of kin when readjusting to their new industrial lifestyle in Preston. They suggest, however, that there is a difference between knowing how *extensive* kinship was (family demography) and knowing how people *used* these kinship ties (family history).⁴⁰ Did people make a conscious choice to avail themselves of kin in preference to other people or even other agencies, or were they constrained by demography to live the way they did? Kinship does not necessarily mean kin ties and Plakans and Wetherell suggest that ‘ultimately, it was the kin cluster within the domestic group that was the main influence on people’s lives, not the relatively few

35 P. Laslett and R. Wall, *Household and family in past time* (Cambridge, 1972), 58.

36 Laslett and Wall, *Household*, 58.

37 Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), 364.

38 Snell, *Annals*, 365.

39 A. Plakans and C. Wetherell, ‘Households and kinship networks: the costs and benefits of contextualization’, *Continuity and Change*, 18 (2003), 49–76. Here at p. 62.

40 Plakans and Wetherell, *Households and kinship*, 55.

ties to outside relatives'.⁴¹ The existence of larger kinship groups, ready to provide 'a kind of rootedness' was not realistic 'at any given time'.⁴²

Other research tells a different story. Reay's oral testimonies from Hernhill in Kent indicate that kin played an important part in the successful functioning of individual families. Pigs were 'lodged' at nearby relative's sheds, illegitimate children were looked after by aunts, relatives were asked to look for job opportunities.⁴³ Kussmaul found that kin could be integral to service in certain respects and that the relationship between mobility and kin networks was common.⁴⁴ Bouquet cites an example of a boy, Tom, in service at Hartland, in north-west Devon, who was from a large family. He worked on his uncle's farm as a child, at the age of 11 worked for his aunt on another farm, and by the age of 14 left Hartland Council School on a Friday, and another uncle came to fetch him to work on his farm the following evening.⁴⁵ While this illustrates the importance of the kin network in gaining employment and the employer filling his labour requirements from the kin network, Bouquet points out that the inheritance system had caused this situation. Those sons that were not going to inherit the family farm, either had to become servants (or labourers) of relatives or leave the farming industry altogether. Tom's father had fallen into the category of a non-inheriting son, thus becoming an agricultural labourer himself and ensuring that his offspring would either do the same or embark on another entirely different occupation. Kinship therefore, had created the crisis, but kinship also sought to alleviate it. Thus it can be seen that support for relatives in the face of a possible crisis was averted by the opportunity to avail oneself of the kin network to obtain employment. This seems to throw a different light on Snell's view of families as 'buttressed only by charity and the poor law.'⁴⁶

Detailed family reconstructions were undertaken for the farm servants of Morthoe and Bulkworthy in 1851, in order to identify paternal and maternal kin and to discover any relationships between the servants and their employers. Case studies provided further evidence of kin networks and how they functioned. They show that relatives from the extended family played an important role in the composition of some of the farming family households. That for one family, the Hartnolls, is outlined below. These family reconstructions revealed that in 1851 15 per cent of Morthoe farm servants and just under 10 per cent of those in Bulkworthy were related to the farmer with whom they were living, or to his wife. Whilst these levels remained constant in Morthoe until the 1880s, in Bulkworthy there is less evidence of the employment of kin than in the parishes further

41 Plakans and Wetherell, *Household and kinship*, 63.

42 Plakans and Wetherell, *Household and kinship*, 58.

43 Reay, *Microhistories*, 168–9.

44 Kussmaul, *Servants*, 59.

45 Bouquet, *Family, servants and visitors*, 58. She cites as her source the Log Books from Hartland School for 1864 onwards.

46 Snell, *Annals*, 365.

east. A study of the farm servants employed by the four largest holdings in Bulkworthy between 1841 and 1881 reveals very little evidence of the employment of relatives as farm servants.⁴⁷ Joseph Avery employed William Heale, the illegitimate son of his first cousin, in 1851 and another first cousin in 1861. At Blakes, Henry H. Newcombe also employed a first cousin in 1881. Some farmers, such as William Newcombe at Hanford, had sons working on their farms but they also employed servants who were unrelated. The smaller holdings employed farm servants but only one instance of the employment of kin has been found, that of John Tucker, who employed his nephew in 1851. Tucker, however, was unmarried, and was therefore perhaps cultivating a potential heir.

The Hartnoll family: a case study from Morteohoe

This case study concerns the Hartnoll family of Easewell. They were large scale farmers who made use of their wider kin relations. The dynasty at Morteohoe appears to start with James Hartnoll as their earliest mention was on the 1801 Census where James was recorded as head of a household comprising 11 people (six male, five female). Unfortunately it has not been possible to locate exactly where he was living at this time, but by 1808 the Land Tax Assessment indicated that he was renting Easewell from John Cutcliffe.⁴⁸ James, who was born in Braunton in 1758, was a bachelor until the age of 47 when he married a widow aged 40 from Georgeham called Anne Butler. She had two daughters, Ann and Charlotte, who formed part of the new household at Easewell. At some point James had taken his nephew (James) into the household. Nephew James was certainly at Easewell by 1816 as he married Charlotte Butler on the 3 September at Morteohoe Church, some six months after the death of Charlotte's mother, Ann. Uncle James referred to his nephew in his will dated 15 December 1824 as 'James Hartnoll that here lives with me'.⁴⁹ Nephew James was born and baptised in Braunton in 1792, while his elder brother John was baptised in Braunton in 1781. John is also referred to in his uncle James' will as 'my nephew' but no mention is made of his residence. This uncle died on the 10 April 1834. It seems likely that uncle James, having no heir, had taken his nephew into his household and effectively made him his heir. This was cemented by nephew James' marriage to uncle James' step-daughter. It is almost certain that nephew James took over Easewell on the death of his uncle as the 1841 Morteohoe census firmly places him as a farmer at Easewell, a farm he remained at until about 1870 when his son, James, took it over. James junior died in 1875 and the Hartnoll dynasty came to an end in Morteohoe.

Between 1841 and 1871, James (and James junior) employed a total 14 servants, six labourers, five boys and three females. Seven of the servants came from Morteohoe, but

47 According to the 1851 census Waldrons covered 240 acres, Hankford 240 acres, Stowford 300 acres and Blakes 180 acres.

48 North Devon Record Office [N.D.R.O], Eng10280A, Roll No: 56, item 11, *Land Tax Assessment 1780–1832*.

49 N.D.R.O, H398, Will of James Hartnoll dated 15 December 1824.

William Gard, born in West Down also had close connections with the parish; his mother had been born and married in Morteheo and his brother John was baptised there. Two of the servants were born in Hartnoll's original parish of Braunton, thus their families may have been known to the Hartnolls. Detailed family reconstructions revealed that five of the Morteheo born servants were related in some way to James Hartnoll.⁵⁰ None of these servants were named Hartnoll thus, without investigating maternal kin, it would not be apparent that a relationship existed. Cooper and Donald found in their four case studies of Exeter that kin relationships occurred between servants and employers, but were 'hidden' because surnames were different.⁵¹ Historians have not helped to redress the matter having 'for the most part not previously looked for kin bearing a different name from the head of the house.'⁵² The case of the Hartnoll family provides evidence that 'hidden' kin were present and formed over a third of all the servants they employed from 1841 to 1871.

In the 1851 Morteheo census, Richard Pincombe, aged 14, is listed as a servant at Easewell. Richard Pincombe was baptised on 24 July 1836, the son of Richard and Mary Pincombe. Mary's maiden name was Hartnoll and one of witnesses to the marriage was John Hartnoll. Unfortunately it has not been possible to trace Mary's baptism, but evidence suggests that Richard Pincombe junior was great nephew to James Hartnoll. In the 1861 Morteheo census, Richard junior's brother, John Pincombe, was employed as a servant to James Hartnoll; thus James was employing another of his great nephews.

From the Hartnoll case study, it can be seen that individuals obtained their kinship to James Hartnoll through their mothers and thus were uterine kin. Richard and John Pincombe were blood related to James Hartnoll through their mother, Mary. Cooper and Donald stated that 'previous statistical studies of household formation almost certainly do not approach the true complexity of household composition, and that further family reconstruction is necessary to confirm or challenge the accepted picture of the dominance of the simple family household in pre-industrial and early industrial England'.⁵³ Their four case studies showed what was happening in the urban location of Exeter. The Morteheo investigation has produced further case studies that illustrate that the same was happening in the rural hinterland of north Devon, albeit at a later period.

A postscript is needed to complete the story of the reign of the Hartnolls in Morteheo. It may have been noted that in the servants where kinship was established, these came from John Hartnoll's side of the family and that they all obtained employment through John's brother, James. Their period of employment also congregated around 1861. The timing is

50 Richard Pincombe, John Pincombe, George Parker, Thomas Robbins and Henry Watts.

51 D. Cooper and M. Donald, 'Households and "hidden" kin in early nineteenth-century England: four case studies in suburban Exeter, 1821-1861', *Continuity and Change*, 10 (1995), 257-78. Here at p. 262.

52 Cooper and Donald, 'Households', 259.

53 Cooper and Donald, 'Households', 376.

significant because it is mainly at this period that offspring (and their various relatives) of John Hartnoll were old enough to take employment. Effectively it was third generation kin that James Hartnoll employed in 1861. It may be significant that as these kin were now of an age to be employed, James Hartnoll chose them in preference to anyone else. Other young men were available in the parish (and surrounding parishes) to be hired, but it appears that James Hartnoll makes a deliberate choice to hire from his own kinship network and to exclude the use of non-kin.

The use of his brother's kin may also be explained by James' own offspring's lack of children. Only one of James' four children appears to have had any offspring. His daughter, Ann Hartnoll, married Thomas Gammon in 1842 and produced at least seven children, three of which were sons. They are listed as farming 200 acres at Oakridge, Ilfracombe in 1851 and 60 acres at Lidford, Ilfracombe. In 1861 they employed one male farm servant, but it seems likely that their three children listed in the household were assisting in the family farm. Thus there was no 'spare' labour for their grandfather to recruit.

The marriage of Prudence Hartnoll, another of James' children, has not been traced; she was housekeeper to her brother James at Aylescott farm in West Down in 1851 and 1861. Her nephew, Thomas Gammon, was recorded as a visitor on both the 1851 and 1861 censuses and he was listed in James junior's household at Easewell in 1871, but no occupation was recorded for him. It may be that Thomas was helping his uncle on the farm in 1861 and 1871, but it seems odd that he was listed at census time 10 years earlier as part of his uncle's household when he was only four years old. It appears that Thomas Gammon, James junior's nephew, lived as a permanent member of the household from at least 1851 to 1871 and may have been a kind of 'adopted' son. Thomas' mother, Ann, had several children and may have been glad for her brother to permanently look after one of her offspring. Whether James junior sought to compensate for his lack of an heir by taking his nephew Thomas Gammon into his household is not clear but parallels can be drawn between James junior's actions and those of his uncle James earlier in the century. It seems that the Hartnolls were resourceful in trying to ensure that their dynasty continued by appropriating an heir when it could not be obtained naturally. Unfortunately Thomas Gammon cannot be traced on the 1881 census and there is only an uncertain sighting of him on the 1891 census. What does appear likely is that on the death of James junior in August 1875 and with agricultural depression beginning to bite in Mortehoe, Thomas Gammon either could not or would not take over Easewell. The result was the end of the Hartnoll dynasty.

Family ties or religious ties?

More research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn about the typicality of family service in Verney's parishes but it is pertinent to consider why the employment of kin

should have been such a feature on the farms she studied. Her findings support the view of Howkins and Verdon that farm service was able to adapt to 'local, regional, and sub-regional farming systems and [was] capable of being sustained, even in counties where it appears to have vanished.'⁵⁴ It is also necessary to consider why farm service remained viable in north Devon. Snell gave reasons for the continuance of farm service in pastoral farming areas such as Morteheo, by claiming that in these regions 'smaller farms survived longer, with family-based and more seasonally constant labour requirements making farm-servants still a serious option.'⁵⁵ He calculated from the 1851 Census that those farms with small ratios of labour to farmer had correspondingly higher proportions of farm-servants and that this was indicative of smaller farm sizes. Farm servants in Devon amounted to 31.5 per cent as a proportion of total male labour, which was comparable to the northern counties.⁵⁶ This is not wholly satisfactory as an explanation, however, for the region under discussion as here it was the farms that were large by north Devon standards—those with more than 200 acres—that were more likely to be the employers of farm servants. It is also important to note that the majority of the acreage in Bulkworthy was given over to arable farming and farm service was still a feature there.

Other historians, such as Nigel Goose, have noted the competing forms of industrial by-employment as a reason for the retention of farm service in the pastoral regions of the country while—interestingly—finding a correspondence between more economically advanced areas and the retention of farm service.⁵⁷ Howkins also pointed out the correlation between service and rival sources of employment but he made the connection 'between remoteness from villages and the need to house a workforce' as a factor in the survival of service.⁵⁸ There was little in Victorian north Devon that constituted competing employment but there was an identified shortage of farm labour that was attributed to large-scale emigration. Although agricultural wages were still low, by the early 1850s the north Devon farm labourer was in demand. As the *North Devon Journal* outlined in 1853, 'throughout all those districts where emigration has thinned the agricultural population labourers are not to be had for money. Everywhere in fact we hear of wages being advanced and the labour market never before looked up so well.'⁵⁹ The link between the continuation of farm service and levels of emigration is a topic that remains to be

54 Howkins and Verdon, 'Adaptable and sustainable', 468.

55 Snell, *Annals*, 94.

56 For example Derby recorded farm servants at 30.5 per cent of total male labour, Durham, 27.2 per cent and Nottinghamshire, 24.5 per cent. Snell, *Annals*, 96.

57 N. Goose, 'Farm service in southern England in the mid-nineteenth century', *Local Population Studies*, 72, (2004), 81. Goose used the 1851 census as the basis for his research on parishes in Hertfordshire. See also N. Goose, 'Farm service, seasonal unemployment and casual labour in mid nineteenth-century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 54 (2006), 274–303.

58 Howkins, 'The English farm labourer', 89.

59 *North Devon Journal*, March 31, 1853, p. 5 column b.

investigated. Does the labour shortage mean not only that farm servants, as opposed to farm labourers, were more likely to be hired but that these farm servants were more likely to be kin? Certainly, relatives might be a more reliable, loyal source of labour. This is, however, too simplistic. Bulkworthy, with far fewer examples of the employment of kin, experienced very high levels of emigration. Is it then, that, further west, the desire to emigrate outweighed family loyalty, making it necessary for Bulkworthy's farmers to draw on non-kin for their workforce?

The density of the kinship networks in the two parts of north Devon has relevance here. Largely due to emigration, Bulkworthy's total population changed significantly during the period under investigation. The population was 110 in 1801 but, in line with the national population, this doubled over the next half century. This was followed by a sharp decline, most notably in the 1850s, when Bulkworthy lost nearly 30 per cent of its inhabitants. Victorian Bulkworthy had a much more fluid population than that of Verney's parishes, a phenomenon that led to a dislocation of community cohesion in the parish and a weakening of kinship links. In 1871 36.4 per cent of Bulkworthy households had a family link with at least one other; a notable decline compared to the 52.6 per cent of 30 years previously. As the century progressed, the Bulkworthy kinship web weakened; by 1901 only two of the occupied households were linked by family ties.⁶⁰

To seek a possible reason for the higher levels of emigration in Bulkworthy, it is necessary to examine relative levels of nonconformity. It has been shown that there was a strong correlation between emigration from north Devon, in the period, and adherence to the Bible Christian Church.⁶¹ As Table 3 shows, the 1851 religious census reveals very different levels of attendance at Bible Christian Chapels in Verney's parishes and in Bulkworthy and surrounding parishes.⁶² The Bible Christian movement actively encouraged emigration, notably to Canada. In the area of which Bulkworthy was a part, this opportunity to evangelise and to strengthen congregations overseas proved an impetus for movement that outweighed family ties and the need for a labour force at home. How then were farm servants chosen in Bulkworthy? Research has shown that, in Bulkworthy, the religious family that was the Bible Christian Church, and not genetic links, provided the community cohesion.⁶³ This may mean that, for farmers in this area, the employment

60 Janet Few, 'Faith, fish, farm or family? The impact of kinship links and communities on migration choices and residential persistence in North Devon, 1841–1901' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2009).

61 A movement that broke away from mainstream Methodism in 1815 and was particularly strong in the West Country.

62 It is acknowledged that individuals may have attended more than one service on March 31, 1851 (hence 103 per cent attendance in Bulkworthy), therefore these figures cannot be taken as an exact measure of Bible Christian adherence. They are, however, relevant as a comparative measure of the strength of Bible Christianity in these parishes. The parishes adjacent to Bulkworthy are Abbotts Bickington, Buckland Brewer, East Putford, Milton Damerel, Newton St. Petrock, Shebbear and West Putford.

63 Few, 'Faith, fish, farm or family'.

Table 3 Bible Christian attendances in the 1851 religious census

Parish	Population in 1851	Number of Bible Christian attendances	% of Bible Christian attendances per head of population
Bittadon	67	0	0
Braunton	2364	0	0
Georgeham	574	60	10
Marwood	1054	0	0
Morthoe	387	120	31
West Down	587	0	0
Abbotts Bickington	80	0	0
Buckland Brewer	977	293	30
Bulkworthy	176	182	103
East Putford	194	0	0
Milton Damarel	488	295	60
Newton St. Petrock	272	34	13
Shebbear	1151	625	54
West Putford	424	204	48
Morthoe and district	5033	180	4
Bulkworthy and district	3762	1633	43

of farm servants was from within the religious community rather than from within the orbit of the extended family.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of Howkins and Verdon, farm service was a tradition that continued in north Devon for longer than previously thought. Service remained an important source of employment for young, unmarried workers of both sexes well into the second half of the nineteenth century. In Verney's parishes, kin were employed as farm servants in preference to other available male labour. Thus, it appears that the nuclear family's fortunes were intertwined with that of members of the extended family and that the values displayed in this behaviour reflect, in some respects, a continuing land-family bond. In this, those in a lesser position within the family 'bound' themselves to the family's leaders. This relationship between family members, however, was not necessarily one of master and servant (although farm service included these titles); it also contained elements of a relationship of mutual convenience and mutual advantage, which improved the lives on both sides and importantly, contributed to the stability and continuity of the family on the land. The Morteheo case study illustrates the particular character of farm service in parts of north Devon; that character being one of *family* service. The situation was, however, very different in Bulkworthy, where blood ties and obligations were superseded by responsibilities to one's chapel. In a dislocated community, with few kinship links, farm servants were, of necessity, not genetic kin; instead they were likely to be fellow members of the Bible Christian family.