

LIFE AND TIMES IN SANDHURST, GLOUCESTERSHIRE: 1830-1860

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Sandhurst is a parish of 2100 acres situated in a curve of the river Severn immediately north of Gloucester. In the middle of the nineteenth century the village was a loosely assembled agricultural settlement with three manors, a small number of large farms and many small agricultural holdings. The Gloucester-Tewkesbury turnpike road skirted the village to the east and the river formed the boundary to the west and north-west. Sandhurst Hill (280 ft.) formed the boundary to the north.

The influence of the industrial revolution had not been felt at the beginning of the period under consideration but employment opportunities widened somewhat with the opening of the brickworks along the banks of the Severn. Situated in the river's flood plain the Severn had an impact on the agricultural patterns and to a lesser extent on employment in the parish. This paper outlines the social patterns and changes experienced in the parish between 1830 and 1860.

The tithe documents of 1839 reveal that 682 acres were cultivated arable land, 1385 acres meadow or pastureland, 10 acres woodland and 20 acres "lie waste and unenclosed". Size of farm unit ranged from 6 acres to about 300 acres. There were 20 farmers and 137 agricultural labourers recorded in the 1851 census. Many farmers were tenants with the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester Cathedral being principal landowner, some of their holdings dating back to Domesday times.

The land holdings were very scattered with fields commonly located in six or so separate situations within the parish, presumably a survival from open field cultivation. The river meadows were still divided into narrow strips with different occupiers.

The population increased from 434 in 1831 to 494 in 1851. However the balance of men and women in the population changed markedly. In 1831 there were 152 females to 282 males but in 1851 the numbers of males and females was almost exactly equal. Of the male population in 1831 only 109 (38%) were 20 years or older. Similar figures are not readily available for females but may suggest that there had been an atypical male baby boom in the preceding two decades or that many females had moved from the parish.

Employment information for 1851 is fairly full. Of the 260 people to whom an occupation is ascribed half were directly employed in agriculture. A further 45 children were recorded as scholars. Eleven people

including a number of children were classed only as paupers and many others employed as agricultural labourers were recorded as paupers too because they were in receipt of poor relief. Causes of these payments included "old age, having or being a bastard, being crippled, paralytic, rheumatic or nearly blind". Payments ranged (in 1838) from 13s. to £3 7s. 7½d per annum. Three paupers spent some time in the Gloucester workhouse including 33 days by a "bastard and his mother".

Although 3 brickworks had opened in the parish only 10 people from the village worked there. Practically all other employees were in non-manufacturing employment such as house servants (13), dressmakers (11), land proprietors (6), laundresses, carpenters, blacksmiths and nursemaids (4 each). There were 2 schoolmistresses employed at the village school.

10 people lived on boats at the time of the 1851 census and of these two were the captain of a longboat and his wife. A number of locals got employment from fishing - a further indication of the importance of the river.

The parish records reveal the patterns of aid to the poor which, apart from Poor Law payments, included the dispensing of the Coal and Blanket Fund and other local charities. A record of subscribers to the coal and blanket fund and the way in which the money was used, but not the recipients, was kept on an annual basis. In 1852, the year of the Great Flood, £62 18s 6d. was raised entirely by voluntary subscription to aid the poor who had suffered losses.

Income from houses in Leather Bottle Lane, Gloucester contributed to the charities. However, against rent income expenditure on the houses had to be set including Land Tax and repair bills such as:-

A Estimate of repairing a House			
in Gloster			
	£	s.	d.
For repairing the Topes of the Chimbles and the Silling			
To Labring and Matariles	1	7	6
To plastering Whitewashing) and Colouring 5 Romes	1	17	6
For warking Matareles			
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	2	5	0

The Giles Cox charity founded in 1620 provided for £5 per annum to be distributed to the poor and had recently been administered as part of the coal and blanket fund. A report of the vestry committee on parish charities of about 1871 reviewed the state of the administration of the charities and made recommendations

concerning appointment of new trustees and sale of the properties in Leather Bottle Lane to purchase real estate in Sandhurst, the proceeds to be used for the benefit of the poor living in the parish.

The vestry minutes provide an insight into village activities through the middle of the nineteenth century. Attendance at meetings was dependent on payment of local Poor Rates with one vote for every person plus an extra vote (to a maximum of 6 votes) for each £25 rates paid over £30. Regular annual meetings were held to audit the accounts of the overseers of the poor, to appoint churchwardens, constables, a surveyor of highways, to distribute the charities and to manage the poor. The management of Sandhurst Meadow was arranged by overseers who were empowered to drive the Meadow and to deal with trespassers using the common land without their animals being marked. Owners were also allowed to run marked animals on the highway during daylight hours. In 1848 it was agreed that the floodgates of the Meadow should be opened between 1st December and 1st March each year and this decision was put into practice each year thereafter.

Legal action was taken to enforce payment of poor rates and in certain highway matters. For example, the surveyor of the adjoining parish of Barton St. Michael was summoned to enforce the repair of the highway leading to Sandhurst from Kingsholm Turnpike which was in "a very dangerous state". A "traffick" survey was undertaken in 1853 to assess the use of the Severn Towing Path as a base from which to calculate the appropriate rate to charge the Gloucester and Worcester Horse Towing Path Company.

Cholera recurrence was anticipated in September 1852 and special measures were adopted to ensure the proper cleanliness and ventilation in the homes of the poor and to improve sewerage. The surveyor was instructed to see that all public nuisance over which he had control be remedied as soon as possible; a number of specific cases being itemised including ditches, water-courses and dwellings. It seems that these methods were effective as there is no record of further outbreaks. Local opposition was voiced on one or two political issues. In 1854 the "Gloucester Waterworks and Local Board of Health and City Extension Bill" was likely to raise rates without increasing benefit locally. Proposed alterations to the Severn usually raised local opposition.

The manor house of Culverden was burnt down about 1850. An engraving of the house shows much original timber-framed construction with a substantial early nineteenth century addition. No records have been discovered to throw light on this loss.

Also in the 1850s the state of the parish church gave rise for great concern. A local landowner offered to pay half the estimated cost of repairs if the parishioners could raise the other half. Financial arrangements were made to borrow £250 against surety of the church rate. Estimates of the cost amounted to £1,298. Authorisation from the Consistory Court in Gloucester for rebuilding portions of the church and adding a north aisle was requested in 1857. A committee was formed to carry out the proposed plans which were duly fulfilled.

During this period a remarkable individual, William Cother, occupied Abbott's Lodge, a house with extensive grounds. He kept a full day book recording his household's horticultural and culinary activities in great detail. He was also not above sermonising on the problems of the middle classes in the period in which he lived. This extract is taken from this book and was probably written in the early 1830s:-

"My brother thinks I have valued these premises at too high - Times are such that it would be hardly possible to say what land is not worth in any situation. Perhaps near to a town and where land is adapted for building on it may be reduced in value than further in the country where the land can only be occupied by a farmer. The real fact is that, but very few years since, if these premises had been let, a choice of several good tenants residing in Gloucester would have been anxious to have taken them at £1 per acre, more than a common farming occupier, who would have improved the land from making a great deal of manure themselves.

"Building has been very hack and also causes a great depression. I have only to remark that I was myself disappointed to find such a depression and attribute it to the following causes. Mr. Peel's bill for making cash payments which was an unjust attempt to fill his own pockets and those of every other rich man at the expense of the middle classes who wanted and ought to have received support. The political Economists also put help in hand to the same cause - and Free Trade, completed it by ruining at least 9 out of every 10 of the industrious middle classes of society. These causes have depressed the Trade of the country as much as the land - and I doubt not have been the occasion of the Riots and confusion which has been for the last 2 or 3 years in this country. A careful man who by his business, was getting bread for his family, has just right to complain if he loses his independence by the knavery of others, however rich they may be.

"The times in a few years might alter for the better and incline people to build as heretofore; surely where there is so much capability, the Land must be now of more value than merely for occupation - A madman only would sell such a property without having a considerable allowance for its advantages, situation, etc. independent of its value for occupation."

Sources:

Parish Records including:

Tithe maps and apportionments

Censuses: 1831 and 1851

Deeds

Church Records including Vestry Minutes.

Private documents notably William Cother's day book.

All documents are held in the Gloucestershire Record Office.