

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERACY LEVELS IN WEST SUSSEX

by Doreen E. Smith

There has been considerable interest during recent years in the standards of literacy prior to the universal educational provision envisaged in Forster's Act of 1870. The ability to read and write fluently was a necessary requisite of the gentle classes and men of professional status, but the diffusion of literacy throughout the social order varied considerably in different parts of the country. It has been suggested that at a national level in later 18th century England around 60 per cent of the men and 40 per cent of the women were literate.¹ These figures however, conceal wide variations both at regional and local level, with towns generally displaying a higher rate of literacy than rural areas. Furthermore, levels of literacy in the emergent industrial towns were adversely affected by labour demands and population expansion.² Within such variations an occupational hierarchy has been found to be remarkably consistent, confirming the functional value of literacy in economic as well as social roles.³

The acquisition of full literacy includes both reading and writing skills. Mastery of the former is not possible to determine historically although the possession of books as shown by probate inventories gives indirect evidence as to the owner's reading abilities. On a broader canvas the publication of large quantities of cheap reading material denotes a ready market.⁴ Fortunately the ability to write leaves posterity with the chance of determining the incidence of writing literacy in time or place. The existence of documents requiring personal marks or signatures has become the *sine qua non* of researchers of literacy. Several sources have been utilised, probate records and the Church of

England marriage registers after Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, being the most common. Exempting only Jews and Quakers, all grooms and brides, together with two witnesses were required to sign a register kept for the purpose. It is likely that the resulting evidence relates to the 90 per cent of the population who were married, indicating their ability to sign in their middle twenties, some 15 years after leaving school.

The ability to sign on marriage can not imply the acquisition of full literacy. Many partners may have mastered the skill for the purpose required in the ceremony, as laboriously formed and misspelt signatures found in the registers testify. Since the teaching of reading preceded that of writing at this period, however, it is likely that calculations based on signatory evidence will produce measurements of writing literacy which would relate to a proportion of the population smaller than that with reading fluency, but greater than that possessing a total mastery of writing.⁵ Although the method used can not indicate any degree of writing fluency nevertheless it is a standard and direct test by which comparisons may be made.

The acquisition of literacy was dependent upon access to the means of instruction, whether informally, at home, or from existing educational establishments: endowed grammar, charity, parish schools or those run by private enterprise. In the case of formal schooling, probably only those children who could be spared from the economic necessity of contributing to the family income would be sent to learn from them. Levels of achievement would have varied with the length and regularity of

attendance. Reinforcement of the basic skills at some later stage in life was probably an ingredient of the levels of literacy obtained from parish registers and, to this end, it is useful to know what proportion of households possessed skills invested in one or other parent.

The communities chosen for this study of literacy in West Sussex include the parishes of Harting and Rogate on the Hampshire boundary, the market town of Midhurst with the associated parish of Easebourne and the diocesan centre of Chichester. In the 18th century the latter comprised seven parishes. The selection was influenced by the wish to include a range of community types: provincial town (in this case also the diocesan centre), market town and rural village. Since the economy of the latter would be based chiefly on agriculture it was deemed desirable to include parishes whose soils derived from successive geological beds from the Chalk to the Weald Clay.⁶

Literacy

When the median levels are compared, male literacy can be seen to conform to a hierarchy noted by other researchers.⁷ The highest level was found to have occurred in the diocesan centre, followed by the market town and, at a level of some 20 per cent lower, the three rural parishes. When female literacy is compared, the market town of Midhurst takes precedence over Chichester; Rogate brides appear to have been the least literate although the grooms achieved

the highest rural rate. Whilst the general literacy level for brides was between 15 per cent and 25 per cent lower than that of the grooms, the decadal difference ranged from 4 per cent, displayed in Rogate in the final decade, to 55 per cent in the same parish at the commencement of the period. The differential, fluctuating in all communities in the early decades, appears to level to figures of around 20 per cent in Chichester, 12 per cent in Midhurst, but to single figures for Harting and Rogate. It has been postulated that this phenomenon encountered in some rural parishes can be related to the demand for domestic servants and the preference shown by employers for literate applicants.⁸ Midhurst is notable for the constancy of its bridal literacy; it is likely that demographic and economic stability were contributory factors.⁹

Whilst the figures given in Table 1 indicate the levels of literacy pertaining during the last half of the 18th century, they do not reflect the educational function of the respective communities. Although brides rarely married out of their native parishes, registers show that between 11 per cent and 45 per cent of the grooms marrying in one decade resided elsewhere. These grooms therefore can probably be presumed to have acquired their education at least at basic level in their parish of origin. Since the period was one of migration from the rural areas to the towns, it can further be postulated that these non-native grooms marrying in Midhurst and Chichester may well have settled

TABLE 1
Percentage literacy rates of Brides and Grooms 1754–1799

<i>Parish Years</i>	<i>Easebourne</i>			<i>Harting</i>			<i>Rogate</i>			<i>Midhurst</i>			<i>Chichester</i>		
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Br.</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Br.</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Br.</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Br.</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Gr.</i>	<i>Br.</i>
1754–59	37	62.2	27	29	48.3	27.6	9	66.7	11.1	20	80	55	170	72.9	56.5
1760–69	48	52.1	27.1	38	60.5	39.5	29	55.2	27.5	43	60.5	55.8	299	73.9	51.2
1770–79	52	48.1	36.5	49	42.8	20.4	34	58.9	38.2	54	74.1	55.5	416	74.5	51.9
1780–89	38	36.8	15.8	57	47.4	33.3	34	32.3	17.6	54	66.7	53.7	474	76.3	55.7
1790–99	59	47.4	30.5	60	36.7	30	25	40	36	58	63.8	51.7	530	65.8	45.1
Median		49.3	27.4		47.1	30.2		50.6	26.1		69	54.3		72.7	52.1

Source: Parish marriage registers

there. When literate, their migration would have enhanced existing literacy levels and provided literate or semi-literate backgrounds for the bringing up of children.

Recent research has shown children of literate parents understandably to display greater levels of literacy than those from families with only one, or neither parent literate.¹⁰ Where families were semi-literate, maternal literacy appeared to be of greater influence, although children of literate fathers were more literate than those of totally illiterate marriages. Paucity of information to be gained from the West Sussex registers used precludes support for this contention. It is, however, useful to ascertain trends in family literacy at this time.

children if circumstances permitted. Thus parental values might promote a diffusion of literacy throughout a community over a period of time. A stable economy was probably a pre-requisite for this situation to pertain: the costs of schooling had to be set against the loss of child labour in a family budget. Further, the pressures exerted by a rapidly expanding population would have had adverse effects on educational provision.

In these terms Midhurst, and more particularly, Chichester, appear to have experienced some disruption of trends towards improved literacy in the final decade. In the rural parishes the proportion of illiterate households was considerably higher: in both Easebourne

TABLE 2
Percentages of literate, semi-literate and illiterate marriages

Years	Easebourne			Harting			Rogate			Chichester			Midhurst		
	Tot.	semi-	illit.	Tot.	semi-	illit.	Tot.	semi-	illit.	Tot.	semi-	illit.	Tot.	semi-	illit.
1754-59	21.6	45.9	32.4	24.1	27.6	48.3	11.1	55.5	33.3	51.8	25.9	22.3	55	25	20
1760-69	25	29.2	45.8	31.6	36.8	31.6	24.1	34.5	41.4	46.8	32.1	21.1	44.2	27.9	27.9
1770-79	28.8	26.9	44.2	14.3	34.7	51	35.3	26.5	38.2	45.7	34.6	19.7	50	29.6	20.4
1780-89	13.2	26.3	60.5	26.3	28.1	45.6	11.8	26.5	61.7	50.6	30.8	18.6	48.1	24.1	27.8
1790-99	30.5	16.9	52.5	16.7	33.3	50	28	20	52	38.5	34	27.5	44.8	25.8	29.3
Median	23.8	29	47.1	22.6	32.1	45.3	22.1	32.6	45.3	46.7	31.5	21.8	48.4	26.5	25.1

Source: Parish marriage registers

The literacy status of marriage partners is of importance when the formative influences in the progression towards full literacy are considered. The value placed on education by a newly formed family probably reflected both personal and communal ethics. Religious, social and occupational involvements or aspirations probably had some bearing on the need for literacy and, though the statistics used relate only to writing literacy, they form the minimum levels for reading literacy which was possibly much higher.¹¹

Table 2 shows that in the towns totally illiterate marriages seldom formed more than one fifth to one quarter of the total in any period. The remainder therefore, could be expected to have sought some form of tuition for their

and Rogate the figure reached over 60 per cent in the 1780s. The cost effectiveness of literacy in such parishes could not have been great. Few occupations save those involved with retailing could have required its mastery and the presence of large estates in the vicinity meant that most men were occupied in agricultural labour.

Demographic and Economic Factors

During the 18th century market towns in England experienced an expansion of population partly due to natural increase, partly to migration from the surrounding rural areas. Researchers into historical demography have found the number of entries in parish baptism, marriage or burial registers to relate well to the size of population.¹² At this period the marriage

rate can be assumed at eight per thousand when averaged over five years or more. The numbers of marriages shown in Table 1 indicate some growth in the rural parishes, a sustained increase in Midhurst and considerable growth in Chichester. The total of marriages performed in the seven city parishes demonstrated an increase of 40 per cent between 1770 and 1779. It is possible to postulate that this increase was concomitant with an expansion of the economy. Resulting labour demands may have stimulated migration from the rural hinterlands. Literate migrants seeking advancement can be seen as depressing the literacy levels in their native parish, whilst illiterates can be viewed as lowering the levels pertaining in the city. It is also possible that an influx of families moving to the more literate environment of a cathedral city may have overwhelmed the existing levels of educational provision. The literacy levels for both brides and grooms of the final decade, which would have been a generation later, support this hypothesis.

Through its port of Dell Quay, Chichester was the centre of considerable coastal trade in grain and flour, malt and hops.¹³ Much was bound for the capital whilst incoming trade included salt from Southampton and foreign linens transhipped from London. By the 1720s management of the corn trade in the city had been noted by Daniel Defoe on his travels through the country.

But some money'd men of Chichester, Emsworth, and other places adjacent, have join'd their stocks together, built large granaries near the Crook, where the vessels come up, and here they lay up all the corn which the country on that side can spare; and having good mills in the neighbourhood, they grind and dress the corn, and send it to London by Long Sea, as they call it . . .¹⁴

By mid-century turnpikes had begun to improve communications which had always been beset by the intractability of the Wealden clays. Overland trade to London increased as Benjamin Martin noted in 1759.

. . . the Market is not only supplied with Corn in great Plenty, but with Numbers of Fat Beasts, . . . It is well furnished with Poultry, and with Fish in great Perfection and Plenty, according to the Season, . . . and great Quantities of them and Prawns are brought up weekly by the Carriers to London . . . The London Road leading to this city is now made very good by a Turnpike, which contributes much to the Advantage of the City.¹⁵

Higher ranking members of rural society were able to spend time in the city thus promoting trade and professional services. Commercial directories of the period list men of the Church, Law and Medicine residing in the market town of Midhurst and in greater numbers, in Chichester.¹⁶ This core of educated men probably comprised the leaders of society and can be seen as contributing to the social diffusion of literacy through their households and spheres of influence. Midhurst lay on a route turnpiked in 1749. Its Thursday market was stated to be 'for all sorts of fat and lean cattle and hogs',¹⁷ whilst its connection with its rural hinterland is emphasized by the number of maltsters, brewers and millers listed in the *Universal British Directory* of 1794. Mercers and linen drapers were also numerically superior; their financial status as indicated by probate inventories of the previous century suggests a prosperous trade possibly linked with the importation of linens via Dell Quay.

Occupational structure

It has been shown that both the city and the market town would provide numbers of occupations which were literacy-specific. Apart from the professions, men with commercial and trading interests would have required the skill as did those craftsmen involved with retailing. For those who were wholly or partly illiterate, the urban environment possibly provided the stimulus necessary for the acquisition of literate skills. *Bailey's British Directory* of 1784 listed three booksellers as well as a printer and

publisher in Chichester. The *Universal British Directory* listed a stationer in Midhurst and two in Chichester. The spread of printing in 18th century towns can be seen both as a response to increasing levels of literacy and a stimulus to its promotion.

An occupational hierarchy is apparent in most studies of literacy.¹⁸ Whilst the gentry and professional men ranked highest, women and workers in agriculture are found to have been the least literate. Such evidence stems from the inclusion of occupational descriptions in the records used. With regard to the parish marriage registers the assiduity of incumbents or their clerks in obtaining this information varied not only by individual performance but apparently by local practice. Some areas possess registers with remarkably detailed information. West Sussex parishes used in this study are not amongst their number. Alone amongst the urban parishes, that of St. Peter the Great in Chichester recorded the occupational status of grooms from 1767 to 1779, whilst the rural parish of Easebourne included this information from 1754 to 1769 and Harting from 1754 to 1779.

The parish of St Peter the Great was territorially the largest of the seven parishes of the city. In addition, possibly because its services took place in the cathedral, it was preferred by numbers of brides and grooms resident in other Chichester parishes. Of the total marriages taking place between 1769 and 1779, some 55 per cent included the occupational description of the groom. It is likely that men of independent means figured largely amongst those unspecified since the literacy rating of this group was 81.5 per cent and that of their brides 76.3 per cent. Table 3 gives the literacy levels of occupational groups in rank order together with that of their brides.

The higher levels of literacy pertaining amongst the brides of those grooms engaged in retailing or service occupations may perhaps underline the usefulness of a literate wife.

The periodic inclusion of occupational descriptions in Easebourne and Harting reveals a socio-economic structure which included a few

members of the gentry or substantial farmers, a number of those dealing with the processing of grain, provision dealers, rural craftsmen and building services. At the base of the structure was the large number of those grooms employed in agriculture, 44 per cent of the total recorded in Easebourne and 26 per cent in Harting. Unspecified grooms formed 33 per cent in Easebourne where their literacy level was 79 per cent. As with Chichester, this group may have included men of independent means since the parish was closely linked to the market town of Midhurst. In Harting 50 per cent of the marriage entries bore no occupational descriptions. Since in this group the literacy level was 49 per cent it may be that agricultural labour was represented in the unspecified category as well as in the 26 per cent who were described as labourers. As before the literacy ranking is apparent although only a comparatively small percentage of grooms of this period can be related to literacy-specific occupations.

Whilst the sample is small, the value of literacy to those with retailing interests is apparent whilst labouring groups with no occupational need display literacy levels of 30 per cent or under.

TABLE 3
Literacy of occupational groups, St Peter the Great
1769-1779

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>No. in group</i>	<i>Grooms % lit.</i>	<i>Brides % lit.</i>
Professions and gentry	8	100	100
Yeomen and farmers	3	100	66.6
Clothing manufacturers	7	100	57.1
Retailing trades	7	100	71.4
Building trades	20	95	45
Craftsmen	42	81	47.6
Processing trades	5	80	40
Services	7	71.4	57.1
Military and naval	28	67.8	25
Labourers	44	29.5	13.6
Husbandmen	10	10	20

Source: Parish marriage registers of St Peter the Great

TABLE 4
Literacy of occupational groups, Easebourne 1754-1769 and Harting 1754-1779

Occupation	Easebourne		Brides % lit.	Harting		Brides % lit.
	No. in Gr.	Grooms % lit.		No. in Gr.	Grooms % lit.	
Prof. and Gentry	1	100	100	1	100	100
Yeomen	1	100	100	2	100	0
Prov. dealers	}	—	—	3	100	66.7
Processing		3	100	66.7	—	—
Building	5	80	40	4	75	75
Services	—	—	—	8	50	37.5
Labourers	37	26	8	30	30	16.7
No stated occupation	28	78.6	46.4	59	49.2	27.1

Source: Parish marriage registers of Easebourne and Harting

Schools and Schooling

Since in the market towns trade and commerce formed the mainspring of the economy, understandably the higher levels of literacy were to be found there. So too were the schooling facilities. Whilst most parishes, intermittently if not on a regular basis, possessed a schoolmaster, endowed and charity schools were more likely to be found in the towns and cities. The first decade of the 18th century saw the foundation of three such schools in Chichester. Oliver Whitby's will of 1702 left money for the purchase of a school house and dwelling for a master and 12 poor boys of Chichester, Harting and West Wittering, the parents to be exempt from poor tax and not Dissenters.¹⁹ Instruction was to be given in writing and arithmetic.

In 1710, under the aegis of the S.P.C.K., public subscriptions, augmented by the proceeds of charity sermons, were used to found two charity schools, one each for 30 boys and girls. William Hayley, later Dean of Chichester and Thomas Manningham, later its bishop, were early subscribers to the organisation so that it is not surprising that with their leadership, foremost citizens of the city and its environs formed the first list of subscribers.²⁰ The first

entries in the account book of the Grey Coat school record the annual payment to the master of £20 and the purchase of four horn books, 20 catechisms and 30 sets of boys' clothes.²¹

The initial intake of 1710 included boys in the age range of seven to 11. Three were 'discarded' during the first year and subsequent intakes were all aged seven. By 1712 five had been expelled and two had been put 'to ye other school'. In 1714, two of the original intake having reached the age of 14, they were put out to apprenticeship. In the early years these were purchased for £5, a further £2 being given for clothes. A note dated 1723 at the back of the account book stated that '... no boy was to continue more than four years, without the particular approbation of the stewards.' This period was, presumably, considered long enough for the achievement of writing and numeracy skills. Evidence for the girls' curriculum is sparse. The accounts for the boys' school included payment to '... Mrs. Holney for the girls' making the boys' shirts.'

Churchwardens' Presentments of the Chichester parishes add little further information regarding the educational facilities afforded in the city. The parish of St Andrew returned a schoolmaster in 1772 and at that time

St Pancras recorded a dame school. Those for St Peter the Great include, in 1769, as well as the three schools stated, '... a Grammer school annex'd to the Prebend of Highleigh.' By 1818 however, Nicholas Carlisle in his description of endowed grammar schools in England and Wales says of the Prebendal School that, 'this foundation is not to be deemed merely a Grammar School... rather an Ecclesiastical Seminary for the preparation of Youth for the Ministry.'²²

In 1672, Gilbert Hannam, a coverlet maker of Midhurst founded a grammar school, '... out of meare charity to the poor Children of the Towne of Midhurst.' Carlisle states that they were to be '... such as can at their first coming to schoole well reade the Bible or Testament.'²³ In 1769 the churchwardens returned that there were no scholars, since none could be instructed, but that there were, '... some private charity schools... supported by accidental contributions.' From the same sources, Easebourne in 1742 possessed a free school, taught by a woman, where 12 children were instructed in reading. Harting in 1758 stated that its schoolmaster was '... of good life and diligently teaches.' Rogate in 1769 declared its schoolmaster to be '... of good life, sober conversation and diligent.'

The schoolmaster referred to in the Harting returns was probably James Exall who was appointed schoolmaster by the Catholic owner of Ladyholt, John Caryll. His old house of Harting Place near the church was allowed to fall into a parlous state but remained in use as a dwelling and school room.²⁴ After Caryll's financial collapse the new owner of the adjacent estate of Up Park, Sir Matthew Fetherstonhaugh viewed the room in use and agreed to allow Exall £15 p.a. in order to '... teach a certain number of Poore Children.'

Opportunity and Achievement

It is clear that both the opportunity to acquire literacy and the advantage taken by those in a position to do so is more readily

apparent in the city and market town. Not only are the higher literacy figures to be found there, but the greater degree of wealth pertaining was likely to have attracted the services of those wishing to teach and to have stimulated the benevolence of those who desired to promote educational opportunity. Whilst members of the gentry together with those occupied in the professions of the Church, Law and Medicine were likely to have become literate through accident of birth or through parental ambition, for other ranks of society the acquisition of literacy required family commitment and some forfeit of income. At a period where child labour was an economic necessity for many families of artisans or labourers, money spared from the family budget for educational purposes needed to be seen as either cost effective or as a necessary payment towards the maintenance of the cultural or traditional background they enjoyed.

The main forces promoting literacy would seem to have been financial freedom and occupational needs or aspirations. Self-help cannot be ignored but motivation has to be considered in similar terms or in a social or religious context. These conditions would not have existed in the rural parishes to anything like the same extent. Table 4 indicates a fairly basic occupational structure, but it is not possible from this sample to determine the degree of wealth existing in either Easebourne or Harting. All the rural parishes of this study would have possessed an economy based on agriculture necessarily supported by a large number of agricultural labourers. The possession of land, whether leased or owned however, would have conferred a degree of wealth and to this end it is useful to know how many of those involved in agriculture worked in their own interests as opposed to those of an employer.

Literacy and Wealth in the Rural Parishes

Land Tax assessments of the 18th century allow a calculation of those men paying tax on land both as tenants and owners.²⁵ Linked to the first census in 1801, some estimation of the

TABLE 5
Land Tax payers of Easebourne (1782), Harting (1783) and Rogate (1785)

<i>Land Tax analysis</i>	<i>Easebourne</i>	<i>Harting</i>	<i>Rogate</i>
Named Land Tax payers	45	65	48
Est. percentage of total pop. (1801)	30	43.1	47.1
Value of land as represented by tax per acre	1.66s.	1.45s.	.88s.
Percentage tax paid by owner/occupiers	54.8	25	34.5
Percentage tax paid by tenants	45.2	75	65.5
Percentage paid of total		Numbers	
Under 1%	23	52	24
Between 1 and 2%	8	9	4
Between 2 and 5%	6	4	9
Between 5 and 10%	1	1	3
% assessed for principal landowner	57.8	57.8	22.9
Owner occupiers as percentage of total taxpayers	31.3	26.7	50.8

Sources: W.S.R.O. Land Tax returns for Easebourne, Harting and Rogate; *Victoria County History Sussex 2*

proportion of the population thus taxed can indicate the size of the remainder who, if not concerned with trade or craft must have depended upon agricultural employment.

The total Land Tax paid in a parish when divided by the acreage yields a tax value placed on an acre which, though not utilised by assessors of the tax, is useful for present day evaluation. Rogate can be seen to have been the least favoured whilst Harting parish included much chalk downland used mainly for sheep. The better soils of Easebourne, however, came largely within the confines of Cowdray Park.²⁶ Easebourne and Harting can be seen to have been dominated at this period by large landowners, Lord Montague at Cowdray and Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh at Up Park. By contrast the major landowner in Rogate paid little over one fifth of the total. Lewes Buckell was not resident in the village and may have paid tax elsewhere, but nearly 80 per cent of the Land Tax raised in Rogate came from smaller owner and tenants.

Despite the wider distribution of land, over 50 per cent of an estimated population in Rogate did not own land or property sufficient to make them liable for tax. The figure was even higher for Harting and reached 70 per cent in Easebourne. Whilst this section of the community possibly included smaller tradesmen and craftsmen, the majority of those untaxed would probably have been landless labourers. For those who owned neither land nor skill the level of poverty prevailing probably militated against the acquisition of literacy. A Parliamentary enquiry in 1803 showed that in Harting and Easebourne over 29 per cent of the population were in receipt of poor relief.²⁷ In Rogate where, as has been shown, there was a wider distribution of land the figure was 14.3 per cent. A further alleviating factor in the economy of Rogate was the late enclosure of common: 850 acres were enclosed in an Act of 1820, another 830 in 1856.²⁸ Prior to these Acts the labourer held his rights of common thus having access to firewood and other domestic supplies.

TABLE 6
Literacy status of Owners and Tenants in Land Tax Assessments

<i>Land Tax and Parish Register Analysis</i>	<i>Easebourne</i>	<i>Harting</i>	<i>Rogate</i>
Tax payers traced	17	24	16
Land owners signed	6	4	4
% of total tax paid	4.7	0.8	7.4
Land owners marked	0	0	1
% of total tax paid	0	0	1
Tenants signed	7	12	9
% of total tax paid	13.4	33.4	18.7
Tenants marked	4	9	2
% of total tax paid	5.3	1.2	12.1

Sources: W.S.R.O. Land Tax returns. Parish marriage registers

* One man paid equivalent amounts as owner and tenant otherwise the larger sum paid categorized the entry

The middle ranks of society can be presumed to have comprised small landowners and tenant farmers. Analysis of Land Tax returns can produce a rank order of wealth by totalling tax paid on plots of land owned or leased, bearing in mind that taxpayers may have paid in more than one parish. Nominal linkage with the parish registers allows determination of literacy status.

CONCLUSIONS

The highest rates of illiteracy were to be found amongst those without land, trade or skill. Whilst these men were to be found in the urban as well as rural areas, the greater demand for unskilled labour lay in the agricultural villages. Those families above the level of extreme poverty were less likely to have had access to schooling in the rural areas and were probably less stimulated to seek it for their children. Above this social level, the possession of land, whether freehold or leasehold appears to have been more directly related to the possession of literacy: farm management would have necessitated

involvement with marketing and the exchange of news and views of those similarly engaged. For those involved in processing and retailing, literacy would have been essential for the purposes of accounts and record keeping. Whilst many craftsmen were illiterate, those concerned with the retailing of their products undoubtedly benefited from the acquisition of literacy and possibly numeracy; the possession of these skills would have enabled them to work on their own account. It may well have been that those who were unskilled in this respect sought employment on the larger local estates.

Whilst the endowed and charity schools have left records of their foundation, many parish schools together with those set up by private enterprise tended to be ephemeral, leaving little record for posterity. Although largely undocumented there may well have been an extensive infrastructure of such schools teaching the rudiments of reading and writing, responsible for an indeterminate proportion of the signatures forming the basis of literacy estimates. Elsewhere in England religious, social

and cultural traditions may have constituted shaping forces in the pattern of literacy prevailing. In the parishes of West Sussex

considered here the greater influences appear to have been a degree of economic freedom and occupational aspirations.

Author: Doreen E. Smith, Brightwells Cottage, North Lane, South Harting, Petersfield, Hants. GU31 5NN

Notes

- ¹ R. S. Schofield, 'Dimensions of Illiteracy 1750-1850', *Explorations in Econ. Hist.* **10** (1973), 446
- ² W. B. Stephens, 'Illiteracy and Schooling in the Provincial Towns 1640-1870: a comparative approach', In *Urban Education in the 19th Century* (ed. D. A. Reeder) 1977, 28
- ³ Schofield, 450
- ⁴ V. E. Neuberg, *Popular Literature, a History and Guide: from the beginning of printing to the year 1897* (1977), 102-22
- ⁵ Schofield, 441
- ⁶ For the detailed geology of the rural parishes see E. M. Yates, 'Medieval Assessments in North-West Sussex', *Trans. Inst. Brit. Geographers* **20** (1954), 75-8
- ⁷ R. A. Houston, 'The Development of Literacy: Northern England, 1640-1750', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* **35** (1982), 208
- ⁸ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society, 1830-1870: the geography of diversity in Provincial England*, (1987), 21
- ⁹ S. A. Harrop, 'Literacy and educational attitudes as factors in the industrialization of north-east Cheshire, 1760-1830', in *Studies in the History of Literacy: England and North America*, (ed. W. B. Stephens) Educational Administration and History Monograph **13** (Leeds 1983), 52
- ¹⁰ D. Levine, 'Education and family life in early industrial England', *Jnl. of Fam. Hist.* **4** (1979), 376
- ¹¹ Schofield, 440
- ¹² P. Laslett, D. E. C. Eversley, W. A. Armstrong, and E. A. Wrigley, *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (1966), 54-5 also 90 n.9
- ¹³ T. S. Willan, *The English Coasting Trade 1600-1750* (1938), 148
- ¹⁴ D. Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain 1724-6*, (1974 edn.) 135
- ¹⁵ In T. J. McCann, *Restricted Grandeur: Impressions of Chichester 1586-1948*, (W.S.C.C. 1974)
- ¹⁶ *Bailey's British Directory for 1784*, 4; *Universal British Directory* (1793), 2
- ¹⁷ F. E. Sawyer, 'Fairs and Markets', *Suss. Arch. Coll.* **36** (1938), 189
- ¹⁸ A ranking of trades by illiteracy in the period 1580-1700 is to be found in D. Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (1980), 132
- ¹⁹ W(est) S(ussex) R(ecord) O(ffice) Schools File, Will of Oliver Whitby Add. MS 7101
- ²⁰ R. W. Unwin, 'The Established Church and the Schooling of the Poor: the role of the S.P.C.K. 1699-1720', *The Churches and Education* (ed. A. McClelland) Hist. of Educ. Soc. (1983), 17
- ²¹ W.S.R.O., Grey School Account Books, Cap VI/1
- ²² N. Carlisle, *Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools in England and Wales* (1818)
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ H. D. Gordon, *A History of Harting*, (1877 reprinted Petersfield 1975), 204
- ²⁵ For use of the Land Tax as source material see M. Turner and D. Mills, *Land and Property: The English Land Tax 1692-1832* (1986)
- ²⁶ Yates, 82
- ²⁷ Abstract of Returns Relative to the Expense and Maintenance of the Poor, *Parlt. Papers* 1803-4 xiii
- ²⁸ W. E. Tate, *Inclosure Acts and Awards* (Rec. Pub. **1** W.S.C.C. 1950)