

WEALTH IN ALRESFORD IN THE 1890s

By

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This paper is a study of occupations, and their effect on standards of life, in two adjoining areas of mid-Hampshire, one urban and one rural, in the 1890s. The areas chosen are New Alresford as the urban area and Itchen Stoke, including Abbotstone, as the rural one. The areas are compared on the basis of the following factors:-

- a) Class grouping.
- b) Occupations, in particular, agricultural labourers.
- c) People of independent means.
- d) Households with live-in servants.
- e) Wills.
- f) Dwelling size/value.
- g) Other sources. The aim is to see which area had the higher standard of living.

The primary source has been the Census Enumerators' Books for 1891. This census is of particular interest as it only became available to the public a few years ago. The population of each area was, for Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone 303 and Alresford 1,464. The sample was the central core of roads in each area. In Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone the sample was 44 households (221 people) and in Alresford 148 households (776 people). This represents in Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone 72.9% of the population and Alresford 53.0%. The figures in the rest of the article refer to the sample rather than the total population. The details are as follows :-

TABLE 1

	<u>Alresford</u>	<u>Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone</u>
Total population	1,464	303
Sample population	776	221
Ditto as percentage of total population.	53.0%	72.9%
Males	379	113
Females	397	108
Children (up to 14 years)	228	60
Males	118	31
Females	110	29
Households	148	44

BACKGROUND

The 1890s, just 100 years ago, are further away in time than most peoples' direct memories, but well within that of the previous generation.

Alresford was a market town, with two or three small farms on the outskirts, 57 miles from London by road and 75 miles by South Western Railway. Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone was predominantly a farming area with work centred around Abbotstone Farm and others nearby. In 1840, there were no watercress beds shown on the local tithe map, but, by 1865, when the railways came, watercress growing had become a thriving business. It was then easier to transport the watercress to far off places, which had been impossible before. "Cress could be picked in the afternoon, taken by horse and cart to Alresford Station that evening and be on sale at Covent Garden in the early hours of the following morning. This was the main export from Alresford, as corn and meat were less profitable, because of overseas competition". (Alresford Displayed).

The railway seemed to carry everything anywhere. There was watercress, sheep to and from the sheep fairs, chicks, straw and livestock, as well as passengers. Milk was brought in churns from farms in the area, including Abbotstone Farm, put on a train to London, Southampton or wherever.

The Sanderson family, when moving from East Anglia to Abbotstone, hired a train to bring the whole family, plus furnishings and livestock. This was in 1914, but it had been common practice for a number of years.

In the 1890s, according to A.J. Robertson in his book "History of Alresford", there was major restoration work going on at the local parish church, St. John's. This would have provided work for people in the area, including bricklayers, builders, carpenters, perhaps the blacksmiths, and certainly for casual labourers. The need for the work had been identified, in a report, considered in 1896. The cost was then estimated to be £5,500 (about £330,000 in today's money) and Mr. H.H. Walford of Arlbury offered to donate half the cost.

Isabel Sanderson, in her book "Itchen Stoke" tells of the women helping with the harvest and, if the harvest was late, many children staying away from school in order to help. "It is difficult to imagine that less than a hundred years ago mothers and children walked through the stubble fields of Itchen Stoke, collecting ears of corn one by one". It is hard to believe the hardship that went on.

a) Class grouping

In Alresford in 1891, the greatest percentage of heads of house was in Class Structure Bank 3, e.g. white collar workers, including shopkeepers and skilled craftsmen, with 48.7%, as shown in table TABLE 4

	<u>Alresford</u>	<u>Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone</u>
Persons of independent means	13	Nil
Ditto as percentage of total sample	1.7%	Nil

d) Households with live-in servants

The numbers of live-in servants are a useful indicator of wealth, although in some families in the 1800s, daughters were classed as servants in the census. In Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone, there were ten servants in three houses; six at the Rectory, two at the Auctioneers and Surveyors and two at Abbotstone Farm. In Alresford there were 45 servants in 34 houses, mostly those of shopkeepers. Overall 6.8% of the households in Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone had live-in servants, whilst in Alresford the proportion was 23.0%. However, it should be noted that, where there were live-in servants in Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone, there were more per

household. The details are as follows :-

TABLE 5

	Alresford	Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone
Servants (live-in)	45	10
Ditto as a percentage of total sample	5.8%	4.5%
Households with servants (live-in)	34	3
Ditto as percentage of total sample	23.0%	6.8%
Average number of live-in servants per household	1.3	3.3

This indicates a higher level of wealth in Alresford.

e) Wills

Inventories, lists of personal possessions often produced in conjunction with a Will, are useful pointers to an individual's wealth. Valuations of estates, produced for taxation purposes, and now published in the local press, are also useful. Large estates have been taxed since 1894. The Estate Duty introduced then remained substantially the same until replaced and extended by Capital Transfer Tax in 1974. Unfortunately, data from neither source were available for the relevant period.

f) Dwelling size/value No rate books were available for the relevant period.

(g) Other sources

Another useful pointer comes from the Hampshire Advertiser. In 1891, Mr. Arthur Hardy Wood of Alresford House, Pound Hill, Alresford then aged 46, took the lease of the Ickworth Estate, near Bury St. Edmonds in Suffolk. The estate extended over 10,000 acres. The house stood in a park of 1,500 acres which contained deer, highland cattle and a herd of shetland ponies. He can't have been short of money to have taken on this estate. Whilst living here in Alresford he had a staff of eight, including a housekeeper, a governess, two footmen and four maids.

CONCLUSION

The following are the key details :-

TABLE 6

	Alresford	Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone
Proportion in Class 3	48.7%	22.7%
Proportion in Class 4	23.6%	63.6%

Proportion of agricultural) labourers)	1.3%	14.9%
Proportion of households) with live-in servants)	23.0%	6.8%

The rural area also increased the prosperity of the urban one by :

- a) sending goods to Alresford for sale or for onward transport by rail;
- b) buying goods in the Alresford shops;
- c) making use of the services offered in Alresford.

On the basis of the above, it is concluded that the urban area of Alresford had the high standard of living, with its wealth coming from the skills of its people, the location of the town and the fertility of its soil, although, for many, these were converted into the more tangible assets of money and property.

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