

HEMPSTEAD NEAR ECCLES, NORFOLK, 1851

Introduction

There are two places in Norfolk called Hempstead: Hempstead near Eccles and Hempstead near Holt. This paper is about Hempstead near Eccles. Eccles is famous for having been a thriving fishing village, most of which was swallowed by the sea in 1604, leaving its church tower stranded on the beach, until it finally collapsed in 1895.¹

Hempstead in the mid-nineteenth century was a purely agricultural community, and the 1851 census provides an opportunity to explore its characteristics, such as the age at which children were employed as agricultural labourers.

In 1851, only two Hempstead heads of household had occupations outside agriculture – the rector and a nurse. It was not always so. Wills and probate inventories show that in past times there were worsted weavers and linen weavers in Hempstead, as well as clerks, a carpenter, baker and brickburner.²

1851 Hempstead had 40 households and 194 residents. The lord of the manor was John Blake, who owned most of the land, which totalled 907 acres.³ John Blake did not live in Hempstead, however, but in Bramerton Hall, where he also had an estate, which he farmed.⁴

Heads of Household

All but one of the 40 heads of household were born in Norfolk, 15 of them in Hempstead itself. Not only were many of the heads local, but many were related. This can be seen from the fact that although there were 40 heads of household, they shared just 22 surnames. The most common surnames were Gray (6), Postle/ Pestle (5), Webster (3) and Neal (3). The complete list of heads of household is given in Appendix 1.

Occupations

The vast majority of heads of households were agricultural labourers (30 out of 40). There were 3 farmers resident in the parish, employing a total of 23 labourers. The largest farmer was William Littlewood with 300 acres of arable marshland, employing 16 labourers. Postle Pilgrim had 180 acres and employed 6 labourers, and William Wilkins had 33 acres and employed one. In addition, Samuel Peggs was described as a farm steward and may have worked for John Blake of Bramerton, the lord of the manor, who owned most of the land in Hempstead.

There was also a cattle dealer, John Dyble. This is revealing because it shows that Hempstead was engaged in cattle as well as arable farming. This was characteristic of the region, which had long been noted for producing “high quality malting barley, wheat and fat cattle”.⁵

Only two Hempstead heads of household had an occupation outside agriculture – Rev. Edward Wilkins, the rector, who was also rector of Lessingham, and Eleanor Gray, a nurse.

Women

There were only 4 female heads of household, 3 of whom were widows over 60 years of age. Eleanor Gray, the nurse, was the only one who had an occupation recorded.

Only one wife of a household head had an occupation recorded. This was Jane Peggs, who, along with her husband Samuel, was described as a farm steward, although this may have been a recording error, as in 1861 she is described as farm bailiff’s wife. However, even though most married women had no occupation recorded, some may have engaged in agricultural work on a seasonal and/or part-time basis.

Boys aged 15 and under

The only occupation recorded for boys aged 15 or under was agricultural labourer. It is thought that in general the 1851 census returns underestimate the numbers of children engaged in agricultural labour, for a variety of reasons, including reluctance of parents to supply the information.⁶ However, in Hempstead, such reluctance does not appear to have occurred, perhaps because as a small and exclusively agricultural community, it was simply known as the norm for boys to be employed as agricultural labourers at a young age. It is true, however, that some of the children not recorded as agricultural labourers, including those described as scholars, may well have engaged in agricultural work at harvest time and outside school hours.

The youngest boy recorded as an agricultural labourer was 8 year old Alfred Lines. Table 1 shows the numbers and percentages of boys aged 8 to 15 recorded as agricultural labourers by year group. It can be seen that by the age of 10, the vast majority of boys were employed as agricultural labours, and that all 12 to 15 year olds were so employed.

Table 1: Boys aged 8-15 recorded as Agricultural Labourers, Hempstead 1851

Age	Number in year group	Number recorded as Ag Labs	% of Year Group recorded as Ag Labs
12-15	11	11	100%
11	0	0	
10	5	4	80%
9	3	1	33%
8	3	1	33%

Girls aged 15 and under

Again, it is thought that in general the 1851 census underestimates the work of girls.⁷ In Hempstead, only one girl aged 15 or younger was recorded as having an occupation. This was 13 year old Elizabeth Woolstone, who was employed as a live-in housemaid in the household of William Wilkins, farmer. In addition, at least one Hempstead-born girl aged 15 or under was working as a live-in servant in a nearby parish. This was 14 year old Mary Postle, who was working as a house servant in the home of Phebe Woodrow, a draper, in Lessingham. The girls with no occupation recorded, who were living with their families in Hempstead, would also have been engaged in domestic tasks at home.

School

There was no school in Hempstead itself, but the school in nearby Lessingham was intended for Hempstead as well as Lessingham children.⁸

There was a clear gender difference in the numbers of children recorded as scholars. There were 11 boys described as scholars, the youngest being age 4 and the eldest age 9, but only 3 girls, a 6 year old and two 8 year olds. This suggests that education was considered even less important for girls than boys.

Servants

The rector and the 3 farmers had live-in servants. It has been suggested that census takers found it difficult to distinguish between the domestic and agricultural roles of live-in servants.⁹ However, as can be seen in table 2, the roles of all but one of the Hempstead residential servants were very clearly specified. In particular it shows that all the females were employed as domestic servants.

Table 2: Live-in Servants, Hempstead 1851

Head of Household	Name of Servant	Type of Servant	Age	Where born
WILKINS Edward	RAY Hannah	Cook	39	Arbourer
Ditto	MANN Mary A	House maid	24	Lynn
LITTLEWOOD William	DURRANT Susanna	House servant	32	Rollesby
Ditto	KIRBY Charlotte	House servant	19	Ingham
Ditto	ALDEN Samuel	Groom	22	Denton
WILKINS William	WOOLSTONE Elizabeth	House maid	13	Palling
Ditto	DRAKE James	Ag Lab	17	Ingham
PILGRIM Postle	MANN Elizabeth	House maid	23	Hempstead
Ditto	PULL A (female)	House maid	20	Southrepps
Ditto	WARTERS John	Servant	25	East Ruston

It was common in agricultural areas for young people to work away from home before marriage as live-in servants. Table 3 shows Hempstead-born young people aged 21 and under who were working as live-in servants in nearby parishes in 1851.

Table 3: Live-in Servants aged 21 and under, born in Hempstead, living elsewhere

Head of Household	Name of Servant	Type of Servant	Age	Where living 1851
MATTESON William (Malster)	BURTON Elizabeth	Cook	20	Dilham
RUDD Ash (Farmer)	CARISON George	Agric Servant	19	East Ruston
CUBITT Benjamin (Farmer)	GRAY Elizabeth	House servant	18	Lessingham
WOODROW Phebe (Draper)	POSTLE Mary	House servant	14	Lessingham
ALDOUS John (Farmer)	SCOTTER Emma	House servant	21	Palling
HEWITT Mary (Fundholder)	SCOTTOW Sarah	House servant	19	Lessingham

Community Facilities and Services

There is no sign from the census returns or local directories that there were any community facilities or services in Hempstead in 1851, apart from the church. It seems that Hempstead residents would have had to go to Lessingham for anything else. It was less than a mile away, so this was not too much of a hardship. As well as the school, Lessingham had a grocer and drapers, a variety of craftsmen, a police officer, a pub, and a carrier to Yarmouth.¹⁰

Hempstead 30 years later

Hempstead in 1881 was in many respects similar to 1851. Most heads of household still worked in agriculture (29 out of 36). There were 23 agricultural labourers, 4 farmers, and 2 farm bailiffs. The only other occupations were rector, carter and charwoman. There were also some familiar surnames. Two of the farmers were Charles Littlewood, who had 450 acres and employed 14 men and 4 boys, and Edmund Dyball who had 26 acres. The most common surnames were Postle/ Pestle/ Pestell (5) and Webster (3).

There were also some familiar faces. One was John Pestle, one of the farm bailiffs. In 1851, he was 9 years old and already an agricultural labourer. In 1881, he was married with children, the eldest of whom, his 9 year old stepson and 5 year old daughter, were both described as scholars. In 1851, the youngest agricultural labourer was 8 year old Alfred Lines. In 1881, he was still an agricultural labourer. He was also married with children, the eldest of whom, boys aged 12, 8, and 6 and a girl aged 10 were all described as scholars. This is one of the main differences between Hempstead in 1851 and 1881. By the later date, education to age 10 was compulsory. The youngest boy recorded as an agricultural labourer in Hempstead in 1881 was William Hemp, aged 13, although younger children may have continued to work at harvest time and outside school hours.

Appendix 1: Heads of Household, Hempstead, 1851 Census

Name of Head	Date & Place of Birth	Occupation of Head
WEBSTER William	1811 Hempstead	Ag Lab
WILKINS Edward	1797 Somerset	Rector
GRAY Isaac	1819 Hempstead	Ag Lab
NEAL Elizabeth	1822 Hempstead	None
GRAY William	1815 Brumstead	Ag Lab
POSTLE William	1814 Palling	Ag Lab
LITTLEWOOD William	1793 Hempstead	Farmer employing 16 labs
PESTLE Ann	1789 Hempstead	None (widow)
GRAY Thomas	1825 Hempstead	Ag Lab
LINKHORN James	1812 East Ruston	Ag Lab
NEAL James	1816 Irstead	Ag Lab
GRAY Eleanor	1787 Lessingham	Nurse
WILKINS William	1824 Ingham	Farmer employing 1 lab
LINES William	1811 Dilham	Ag Lab
WEBSTER George	1811 Palling	Ag Lab
WOOLSTONE William	1814 Hempstead	Ag Lab
PESTLE James	1814 Yarmouth	Ag Lab
COLE Robert	1795 East Ruston	Ag Lab
PESTLE Alfred	1826 Hempstead	Ag Lab
HUBBORD James	1822 Crosswicke	Ag Lab
GRAY John	1815 Hempstead	Ag Lab
PILGRIM Postle	1807 Hasbro	Farmer employing 6 labs
DYBLE John	1812 Ludam	Dealer
PEGGS Samuel	1820 Colthorpe	Farm Steward
WEBSTER Robert	1805 Hempstead	Ag Lab
SHREVE John	1801 Bacton	Ag Lab
BELL Richard	1779 Brumstead	Ag Lab
LITTLEWOOD Samuel	1804 Waxham	Ag Lab
NEAL Samuel	1827 Hempstead	Ag Lab
BELL John	1780 Brumstead	Ag Lab
GRAY Benjamin	1824 Hempstead	Ag Lab
WARTERS William	1812 Hempstead	Ag Lab
WOOLSTONE Benjamin	1817 Palling	Ag Lab
MANN Joseph	1801 Witton	Ag Lab
SPOONER Jonathan	1823 Hempstead	Ag Lab
WOODROW Matthew	1808 Hempstead	Ag Lab
HUBBORD Charles	1815 Crosswick	Ag Lab
PESTLE John	1816 Yarmouth	Ag Lab
TUBBY William	1805 Hickling	Ag Lab
NOCKELS Hannah	1777 Brickling	None (widow)

Appendix 2: Hempstead by/with Eccles Wills and Probate Inventories 1597-1751

Date	Name	Occupation
1597	ULPHE Nicholas	Baker
1602	ESTMORE John	Brickburner
1611-12	SKINNER/ SKYNNER John	Clerk
1638-9	SMITH/ SMYTH John	Carpenter
1647-8	GUNNER Richard	Linen weaver
1650	HASELOPP Thomas	Clerk
1751	WATERSON Joseph	Worsted weaver

Note: (i) Wills stating only Hempstead not included because could be Hempstead by Holt
(ii) Yeomen and husbandmen not included

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¹ Storey, Neil R, *The Lost Coast of Norfolk*, Sutton Publishing, 2006, p102-5

² *Wills and Probate Inventories*, Norfolk Record Office

³ White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Norfolk 1854*, p 489

⁴ 1851 Census for Bramerton, Norfolk

⁵ Holderness, Jim, 'Farming Regions, 1500-1750' in Ayton, John et al (eds) *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, Norfolk Museums Service, 1993, p102

⁶ Kirby, Peter, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, p12

⁷ *Ibid*, p 11

⁸ White, *op cit*, p 492

⁹ Kirby, Peter (2003), *op cit*, p12

¹⁰ White, *op cit*, p 492