Update to "The Working Week in the Long Nineteenth Century: Evidence from the Timings of Political Events in Britain"

Abstract: This letter to the editor uses two new datasets to update my earlier research using the timings to political events to trace patterns of time use in nineteenth century Britain. Using catalogs of Swing Riots from 1830 to 1832 and of food riots from 1737 to 1817, I find strong support for the original arguments that the traditional holiday of Saint Monday was widely observed in this period, and that Sundays were set aside for religious (and not political) purposes.

Introduction

In a paper published in this journal last year, I used three catalogs of political events in nineteenth century Britain to trace the changing patterns of time use in that period (Tiratelli 2022). I made three particular arguments. First, I showed that observance of the traditional holiday of Saint Monday was widespread in the early nineteenth century before declining, first in modern factory towns, but then more generally, through the mid-1800s. Second, I argued that there was little political activity on Sundays, which seemed to reflect the importance of the Sabbath to the weekly rhythm of early nineteenth century life. Third, my sources also provided some evidence that the working day and the working week became more ordered over time.

That original research relied on three sources: Katrina Navickas's database of 2,227 political meetings from northern England (Navickas 2020); Matteo Tiratelli's catalog of 414 riots from Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow (Tiratelli 2019); and Charles Tilly's famous database of 8,088 contentious gatherings (Tilly and Horn 1988). But in the last year new data has become available through Cédric Chambru and Paul Maneuvrier-Hervieu's *Historical Social Conflict Database*, which has collected a range of historical event catalogues from around the world, including three for nineteenth century Britain (Chambru and Maneuvrier-Hervieu 2022). One of these is the catalogue of riots that was used in the original paper. The other two are the Family and Community Historical Research Society's compilation of 2,187 Swing Riots in rural England from 1830 to 1832 (Holland et al 2005), and John Bohstedt's database of 949 food riots across England (Bohstedt 2010). This makes it possible to extend the approach used in my original paper and test those earlier findings against new sources of data.

New findings

As I explained in the original paper, the rationale for using the timings of crowd actions as a proxy for time use is that crowd events depend on the availability of large numbers of people. This is true whether we use weddings (Boulton 1989, Reid 1996), "mass phenomena" (Harrison 1986), or, as in my original example, political events. The key assumption is that those who make up the crowd are more-or-less representative of the wider working population, at least in terms of the temporal patterns of their everyday lives. But there are two additional methodological features of these new datasets which deserve mentioning. First, they do not contain detailed information about the time of day in which the event took place. This means it is impossible to repeat the earlier analysis which examined whether they took

place inside or outside of normal working hours. Second, their temporal range is quite different to the original datasets. The catalog of Swing Riots covers only two years and one particular social movement in rural England, and so represents a particularly narrow snapshot of time use in this period. The collection of food riots also represents only a subset of political events and mostly focusses on the eighteenth century, extending up to 1817. (I have also excluded Bohstedt's less systematic coverage of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, n = 129.) Nevertheless, these two sources provide a welcome opportunity to test my earlier arguments against new data.

Table 1. Swing Riots in England by day, 1830–1832 (n = 1,965)

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1830 - 1832	20% (385)	18% (353)	12% (240)	13% (245)	13% (264)	13% (263)	11% (215)

Source: Holland, Michael, eds. (2005). Swing Unmasked: The Agricultural Riots of 1830 to 1832 and Their Wider Implications. Milton Keynes: FACHRS Publishing. Digitised as part of the Historical Social Conflict Database (Chambru and Maneuvrier-Hervieu 2022).

Notes: Percentages are the proportion of meetings taking place on that day per period (counts in brackets).

Table 2. Food Riots in England by day, 1737–1817 (n = 682)

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1737 - 1763	21% (28)	13% (17)	14% (18)	18% (24)	6% (8)	22% (29)	7% (9)
1764 - 1789	16% (23)	12% (17)	14% (20)	16% (24)	17% (24)	21% (31)	5% (7)
1790 - 1817	17% (68)	18% (73)	17% (67)	11% (44)	14% (55)	19% (76)	5% (19)

Source: Bohstedt, John (2010). The Politics of Provisions. Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550-1850. London: Routledge. Digitised as part of the Historical Social Conflict Database (Chambru and Maneuvrier-Hervieu 2022).

Notes: Percentages are the proportion of meetings taking place on that day per period (counts in brackets).

Three clear patterns emerge from these new sources (Tables 1 and 2). First, Mondays are one of the most popular days for Swing Rioters and for food riots (particularly in the early part of Bohstedt's dataset). Second, it is rare to see crowds of any kind taking to the streets on a Sunday. Third, and this is something new compared to the original data, food riots are fairly heavily concentrated on Saturdays.

The last of these is the most distinctive, but also easy to explain. In this period, Saturday was very often market day and the form of the food riot meant that it often focussed on sellers who were perceived to be charging too high a price, hence violating the "moral economy" which regulated the market for essential goods in this time (Thompson 1971; c.f. Bohstedt 1983, Randall 2006).

The other two patterns provide strong support for my earlier findings. They suggest that the tradition of Saint Monday was widespread across rural and urban England in the early nineteenth century and suggest that its roots extend back into the 1740s. Because this shows that the traditional day of holiday lasted far beyond 1800, it reinforces my argument in favour of the orthodox narrative about Saint Monday over its revisionist critics (e.g. Voth 2000). In the original paper, I also argued that Saint Monday started to decline from the 1820s in some industrial towns, with the rest of the country following a few decades later. Because these new datasets end in the early nineteenth century, they don't allow me to test this argument directly, but the prevalence of *rural* Swing Riots on Mondays in the 1830s in no way contradicts it.

These new sources also support my suggestion that the Sabbath was reserved for religious purposes for much of this period. This seems to be particularly true for food riots, perhaps reflecting the importance of shared communal identities and social ties to a successful food riot (Thompson 1971, Bohstedt 1983, Bohestedt 2015). Again, these sources do not shed any light on the apparent decline of Sabbatarianism during the peak of Chartism in the 1830s and 1840s, but nor are they inconsistent with the original argument.

In conclusion, these new data sources provide strong additional support for the arguments made in the original paper. They also demonstrate the value of digitising, compiling, and making freely accessible historic databases. For those invested in social scientific approaches to historical questions, these moves are to be welcomed and I hope that we can continue to use new data to revisit and update earlier findings.

References

Bohstedt, John (1983) Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790–1810. Harvard University Press.

Bohstedt, John (2010). The Politics of Provisions. Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550-1850. Routledge.

Bohstedt, John (2015) 'Food Riots and the Politics of Provisions in Early-Modern England and France, the Irish Famine and World War I,' in Michael Davis (ed) Crowd Actions in Britain and France from the Middle Ages to the Modern World. Palgrave Macmillan: 101-123.

Boulton, Jeremy (1989) "Economy of time? Wedding days and the working week in the past." Local Population Studies (43): 28–46.

Chambru, Cédric & Maneuvrier-Hervieu, Paul (2022) Introducing HiSCoD: A New Gateway for the Study of Historical Social Conflict. Working paper series, Department of Economics 407, University of Zurich.

Harrison, Mark (1986) "The ordering of the urban environment: Time, work and the occurrence of crowds 1790–1835." Past & Present (110): 134–68.

Holland, Michael, eds. (2005). Swing Unmasked: The Agricultural Riots of 1830 to 1832 and Their Wider Implications. FACHRS Publishing.

Navickas, Katrina (2020) "Political meetings mapper" [data collection], www.historyofpublicspace.uk/political-meetings-mapper-2/ (accessed December 16).

Randall, Adrian (2006) Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England. Oxford University Press.

Reid, Douglas A. (1996) "Weddings, weekdays, work and leisure in urban England 1791–1911: The decline of Saint Monday revisited." Past & Present (153): 135–63.

Thompson, E.P. (1971) "The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century." Past & Present (50): 76–136.

Tilly, Charles, and Horn, Nancy (1988) "Contentious gatherings in Britain, 1758–1834: Version 2" [data collection]. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Tiratelli, Matteo (2019) "Catalogue of riots in Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester, 1800–1939" [data collection]. UK Data Service.

Tiratelli, Matteo (2022) "The working week in the long nineteenth century: Evidence from the timings of political events in Britain", Social Science History 46 (2): 291-313.

Voth, Hans-Joachim (2000) Time and Work in England 1750–1830. Clarendon Press.