Making History Count

A Primer in Quantitative Methods for Historians

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APPENDIX A

The four data sets

The following sections provide a brief description of the four data sets that are referred to throughout the book and form the basis for the case studies discussed in chapters 14 and 15. The original works should be consulted for further discussion of the historical aspects and for more detailed information about the sources. The data sets are not reproduced in this book but can be easily accessed without charge via a special page on the Cambridge University Press web site: <http://uk.cambridge.org/resources/0521806631/>

Some of the series are entered in the regression models in the form of logarithms or as first differences, but all series are given in the data sets in their original form, and if any manipulation or transformation is required this must be done by users of the data set.

A.1 The iniquitous effects of the Old Poor Law

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a rapid increase in expenditure on poor relief in England. Fierce criticisms of the system led eventually to the establishment of a Royal Commission and to the introduction of a New Poor Law in 1834. Many contemporary critics of the Old Poor Law attributed the remorseless growth of expenditure to the widespread adoption of systems of outdoor relief whereby those in need could receive financial assistance at home without being forced into the demeaning conditions of life in a workhouse.

A number of historians have proposed other explanations for the rising level of relief payments. Some see the problem as arising from increasing poverty among farm workers, due to the falling real value of wages paid to agricultural labourers; the removal by enclosure of allotments on which labourers could produce milk, potatoes, and other foods to supplement their wages; and the decline in home employment opportunities for women and children as the rise of factory-based textile industry wiped out cottage industry. Others have emphasized the ability of arable farmers to exploit their local political influence to get the parish to pay relief to labourers in the winter months, thereby shifting part of the cost of keeping seasonal workers in the parish on to non-farming ratepayers.

Apart from its cost to the taxpayer, the Old Poor Law was also alleged to have had many iniquitous effects, chief of which was the widely-held belief that the granting to able-bodied labourers of outdoor relief related to the number of their children encouraged a high birth rate, and was thus responsible for an excessively rapid growth of population. The most famous exponent of this view was Thomas Malthus, who argued that relief payments artificially reduced the cost of having children and so undermined the 'preventive check' to population growth in the form of late marriage or abstention. This Malthusian argument was adopted by the Royal Commission as one of its grounds for the reform of the Old Poor Law.

In chapters 4 and 5 of a study published in 1990, George Boyer addresses these two issues with specific reference to conditions in southern England.[a] He compiled two data sets covering a sample of parishes in the south of England in 1831. To investigate the factors that influenced the level of relief expenditure he used 15 series for a sample of 311 parishes; these are described in table A.1.[1] We added a further series, POP.

For the principal investigation of the birth rate he was able to obtain information for a sample of 214 parishes for 10 series. Four of these are already listed in table A.1 (INCOME, DENSITY, ALLOTMNT, and COTTIND); the remaining six are set out in table A.2. The first column of the data set indicates the county in which the parish is located, using a numerical code for the name of the county: 1 is Kent, 2 is Sussex, 3 is Essex, and so on. The full list of 24 county code numbers is reproduced with the data set. The next column identifies the parish, again using a numerical code for the name; the actual names are of little interest and this code is not reproduced.

The main source for both these data sets was the Rural Queries (the replies to 58 questions distributed among rural parishes in the summer of 1832 by the Royal Poor Law Commission) and the enumeration of population, occupations, and other data in the 1831 Census of Population.[2]

Table A.1   Data set for investigation of relief payments in England in 1831

(a) Measured series for values c. 1831 unless otherwise noted

RELIEF	Relief expenditure of each parish per head of the population (in shillings)
INCOME	Annual income of adult male agricultural labourers in each parish (in £)
UNEMP	The ratio of the average number of unemployed labourers in each parish to the total number of wage labourers
LONDON	The distance to London from the centre of the county in which each parish was located (in miles)
FARMERS	The ratio of the number of labour-hiring farmers in each parish to the total number of parish ratepayers
GRAIN	The estimated percentage of adult males in each parish employed in grain production
DENSITY	The ratio of the total population of each parish to the acreage
WEALTH	The value of real property (land and buildings) in each parish in 1815 per head of the population (in £)
POP	The population of each parish

(b) Series for which the answer for each parish is either 'yes' (recorded as 1) or 'no' (recorded as 0)

COTTIND	Does cottage industry exist in the parish?
ALLOTMNT	Do labourers have allotments of farm land?
WORKHSE	Is there a workhouse in the parish?
CHILDALL	Does the parish pay child allowances?
SUBSIDY	Does the parish subsidize the wage rates of privately employed labourers?
LABRATE	Does the parish use a labour rate?*
ROUNDSMN	Does the parish use the roundsman system?**

Notes:

* Under the labour rate unemployed labourers were apportioned among all occupiers of property according to 'the extent of occupation, acreage rent or number of horses employed'.

** Under this system unemployed labourers were sent round the ratepayers in the parish with the expectation that they would be offered work.

Table A.2   Data set for investigation of the birth rate in southern England, c. 1826–1830*

(a) Measured series

BRTHRATE	The ratio of births per 100 families in each parish in 1826–30
INFTMORT	The ratio of deaths of infants aged 0–4 per 100 live births in each parish in 1826–30
HOUSING	The ratio of families per inhabited house in each parish in 1831

(b) Series for which the answer for each parish is either 'yes' (recorded as 1) or 'no' (recorded as 0)

CHILDAL3	Does the parish begin payment of child allowances at three children?
CHILDAL4	Does the parish begin payment of child allowances at four children?
CHILDAL5	Does the parish begin payment of child allowances at five or more children?

Notes:

* In addition the following four series listed in table A.1 are also used in the study of birth rates: INCOME, DENSITY, ALLOTMNT, and COTTIND.