

# **A comparison of domestic servants working in Dalkeith House with those working in the large town houses of Charlotte Square, Edinburgh**

## **Introduction**

The aim of this project was to compare domestic servants living in a stately home with those living in grand houses in the city of Edinburgh. Golby (1995, pp 44-45) gives an overview of servants working in a "big" house near Milton Keynes Village. The analysis, using Census Enumerator Books (CEBs), included numbers of servants, their birthplace, and whether they were still working there 10 years later. In this paper I will use a similar approach to analyse a stately home - Dalkeith House - and compare the findings with those for several grand houses in fashionable Charlotte Square, Edinburgh.

## **Sources**

The main primary sources used in the analysis were the 1871 and 1881 CEBs for St George's parish, Edinburgh (for Charlotte Square) and Dalkeith parish (for Dalkeith House)

Charlotte Square, at the west end of Edinburgh's New Town, had some of the grandest houses in Edinburgh at this time, typically with around 20 rooms. Dalkeith House, in Dalkeith, Midlothian, was one of the main residences of the Duke of Buccleuch.

I selected the years of 1871 and 1881 because the 1881 census for the whole of the UK has been indexed and produced on CD-ROM. This was important because I wanted, where possible, to include any families that had moved but had retained their servants.

Nominal record linkage was used to trace individuals from the 1871 to the 1881 census. The 1871 CEBs on microfilm suffered from the usual problems of being difficult to read. However, it was relatively straight forward to check the names and details between the two census years.

The other primary source used was a booklet giving a list of Dalkeith House servants who left after 1897 (National Archives of Scotland GD224/1040/45). This recorded the servants' names, occupations and their starting and leaving dates. Although this was for a different time period to the census, it allowed me to get a more detailed picture of the typical length of service at Dalkeith House, rather than just relying on the 10-year snapshot of the CEBs.

## **Numbers of Servants**

The first stage of the analysis was to look at the total number of servants in the two areas in the two census years.

Charlotte Square had 46 houses but, in one or other of the two census years, some were lodging houses, some were uninhabited and some had only a skeleton staff as the family were not at home. In order to give a valid comparison, I therefore only considered houses which were not lodging houses

and in which the family were resident on both census nights. This reduced the number of houses considered to 25.

The Duke of Buccleuch owned several houses and his servants were split into those that travelled with the family and those that remained at one of the houses. At the time of both censuses, the Duke was resident at Dalkeith House so both types of servants are included. However, to make comparisons with Charlotte Square, I considered only those servants enumerated within Dalkeith House, I did not include those in the stables, gatehouse or other cottages in the grounds.

The following table shows the number of servants in the two areas.

	Charlotte Square		Dalkeith House	
	1871	1881	1871	1881
Total Inhabitants	234	217	47	43
Number of family members and visitors	120	108	10	9
Number of Servants	114	109	37	34
Average number of servants per house	4.56	4.36	n/a	n/a

Table 1: Servants working in Charlotte Square and Dalkeith House (Source 1871 and 1881 CEBs)

In both locations, the number of servants per house dropped slightly between 1871 and 1881.

It is interesting to compare this with the overall statistics for the county for the same period. Using the Census of Scotland, I found the number of male and female servants. Since the total population of the county grew in this period, I wanted to show the number of servants as a percentage of the working population. For this, I considered the working population as those aged 15 years or over.

Servants in County of Edinburgh	1871	1881
Female servants	19354	21759
Male servants	1294	2042
Total	20648	23801
Female servants as %age of females over 15 years	16.28%	15.72%
Male servants as %age of males over 15 years	1.33%	1.76%
All servants as %age of population over 15 years	9.56%	9.36%

Table 2 – Servants working in County of Edinburgh (Source Census of Scotland 1871 and 1881)

This shows that, although the percentage of male servants increased slightly,

this is far outweighed by the drop in the percentage of female servants. These figures match the slight downward trend found for both Charlotte Square and Dalkeith House.

## **Length of Service**

A report on the wages of indoor domestic servants was produced by a Miss Collett for the Board of Trade in 1899 (Board of Trade, 1899). In the report, she also gave details of servants that, on the date of enquiry, had been in service in the same situation for varying lengths of time. Unfortunately, her report is from a slightly later time period than considered here but it is a valuable source and is used here for comparison.

For Scotland, the report showed that, from a sample size of 638, 7% of the servants had been in their present position for 10 years or more. It also showed that the “general servant” spent the shortest length of time in a particular household, with 47% in the UK as a whole, being in their present position less than a year. This compares with 33% for cooks and 35% for housemaids. Since neither Charlotte Square nor Dalkeith House had “general servants” I expected to find more than 7% still in the same position 10 years later in both areas.

For Charlotte Square, of the 25 families considered in 1871 for this study, 15 were still in residence in 1881. Of the remaining 10, I traced 4 that were still living together in the UK as a family. Of these 19 families, a total of 11 servants out of 83, or 13.25% were still working for them 10 years later. Some may have left and returned to the same family within the 10 years, but I have no way of knowing this from the census snapshots.

At Dalkeith House only two out of the 37 servants, 5.4%, who were working there in 1871 were still there in 1881.

The results for Charlotte Square were much as I had expected, but those for Dalkeith House were not. Why was the figure so low?

I decided to investigate further by looking at the records of Dalkeith House servants held in the National Archives of Scotland (GD224/1040/47). Although this is for a slightly later period than the CEBs, it is of a similar time period to Miss Collett’s analysis.

In order to make the information comparable with Miss Collett’s findings, I selected a specific date (31<sup>st</sup> December 1899) and worked backwards in time from that date as if I was asking Miss Collett’s questions on that day.

The results are shown in the following table.

	Miss Collet's Findings for Scotland	Dalkeith House
Number in Sample	638	34
Under 1 year	35%	24%
1 year and under 2 years	20%	38%
2 years and under 3 years	13%	12%
3 years and under 4 years	7%	6%
4 years and under 5 years	6%	3%
Total under 5 years	81%	83%
Average years of service	1.3	1.64
Total over 5 years and under 10 years	12%	9%
Average years of service	6.5	6.67
Total 10 years and upwards	7%	9%
Average years of service	17.9	17.75

Table 3– Source: Board of Trade (1899), GD224/1050/45

These numbers show that for this slightly later period, the average length of service of Dalkeith House servants is almost identical to that found by Miss Collett. As mentioned above, since these are not general servants I would have expected their average length of service to be longer, although it does show 9% staying 10 years or more, rather than the 5.4% found above. To see if Dalkeith House was exceptional, an analysis of other stately homes and the comparative conditions and wages of their servants would be interesting.

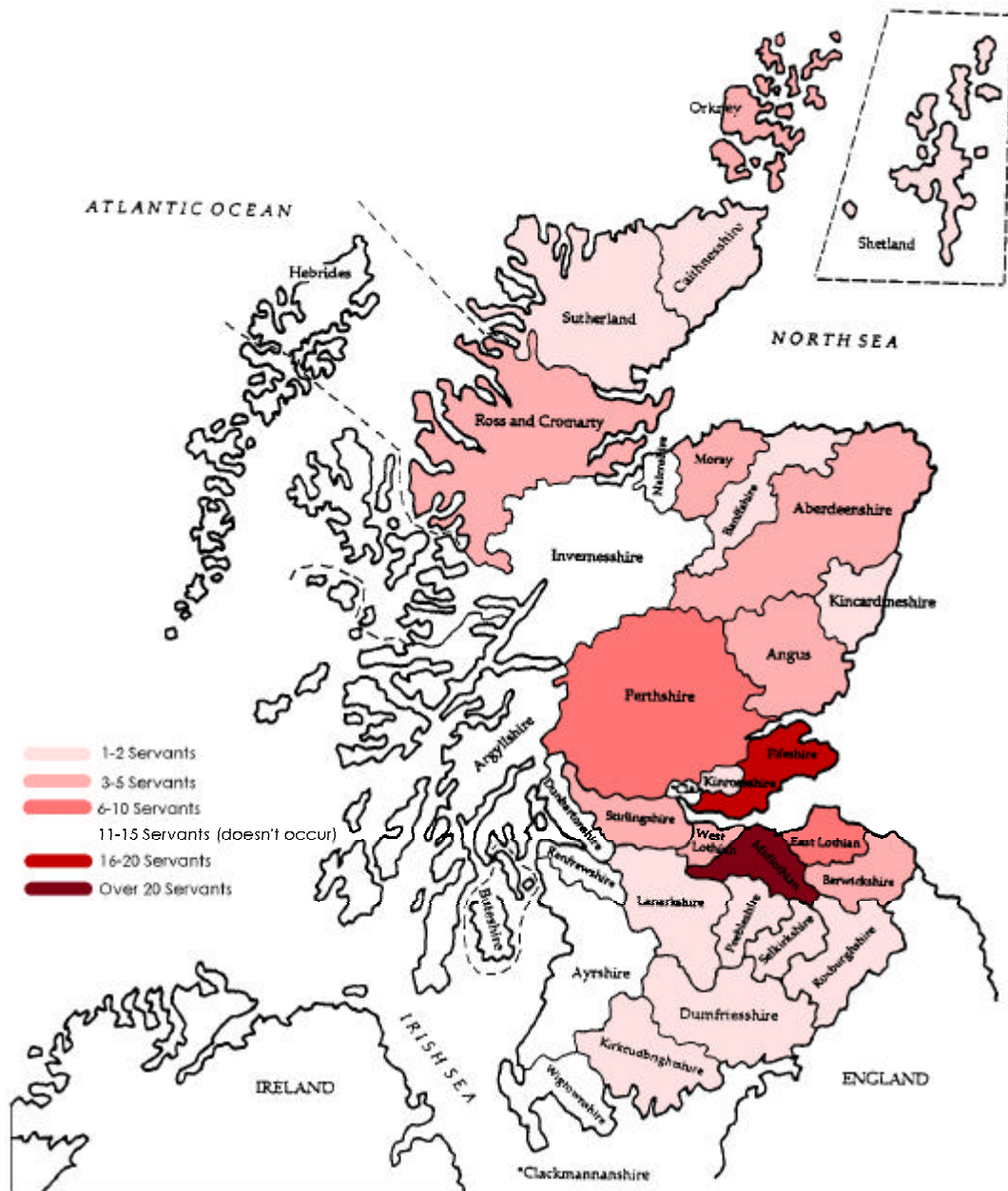
### In-Migration

Figure 1 shows the birthplaces of the servants working in Charlotte Square in 1871. In addition to those shown, one servant was from England, one from Germany and for one the birthplace was not decipherable.

78% of the servants were born outside the local county of Midlothian and 57% were born outside Midlothian and it's bordering counties. The map shows more coming from the east side of the country – perhaps due to travel by boat down the east coast. The figures match Dawes' findings (Dawes, 1984, p112) that the main supply of servants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was from the country. McBride (1976, p38) also stated "the increased urbanisation of domestic service and the decline of agricultural employment established the channel for the permanent urban migration of many domestics".

Dalkeith House, however paints a different picture. In the 1871 census, only those permanently based at Dalkeith House (7 in total) were born in Scotland, and none of them in Midlothian. All the travelling servants were born in England or further afield (1 each from France and Germany). The Duke's staff were

obviously recruited from his house in London. Again, it would be interesting to see if Dalkeith House was exceptional by analysing other similar stately homes.



Birthplace by County of Servants Working in Charlotte Square in 1871

Figure 1

## **Primary Sources**

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (1999) 1881 British Census and National Index (CD-ROM)

General Register Office (Scotland) 1871 Census ref 685/1 Enumerator Book 64

General Register Office (Scotland) 1871 Census ref 685/2 Enumerator Book 17

General Register Office (Scotland) 1871 Census ref 683 Enumerator Book 8

National Archives of Scotland GD224/1040/45, Dalkeith House - List of Household Servants and Coachmen from 1897

## **References**

Board of Trade (Labour Department) (1899) *Report by Miss Collett on the money wages of indoor servants*, London, HMSO, British Parliamentary Papers, 1899, XCII

Census of Scotland 1871 and 1881, HMSO

Dawes, F. V. (1984) *Not in Front of the Servants*, London, Hutchison & Co.

Golby, J. (ed.) (1995) *Communities and Families*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press in association with The Open University.

McBride, T (1976) *The Domestic Revolution*, London, Croom Helm