

Weekly Marriage Patterns in Chipping Campden, 1753-1899

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Introduction: In an earlier paper I showed that, because Chipping Campden's economy was tied to arable farming, Campdonian's had a strong preference to marry in the autumn. Yet it may also be worth considering whether they had a preference for certain days of week? Nowadays, of course, Saturday is the most popular day. Indeed, figures from the Office of National Statistics suggest that in 2011 fifty-five per cent of marriages took place on Saturday. Apart from a modest build-up on Thursday and Friday, the number of marriages for the other weekdays was low. But was it like this in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? And, if not, why? The aim of this short paper is to answer these questions for Chipping Campden.

Our main source of information is the transcribed parish and civil registers for the years between 1753 and 1899. The former year has been selected because, not only does it mark the beginning of the Gregorian calendar, but it also coincides with the introduction of Hardwicke's Act which eliminated clandestine marriage. The registers do not record the day of the week on which the marriage occurred. They do, however, provide the date of marriage and, with the aid of some modern statistical packages, it is a simple matter to extract the day of marriage. A random series of checks with the yearly calendars confirmed that the results were accurate.²

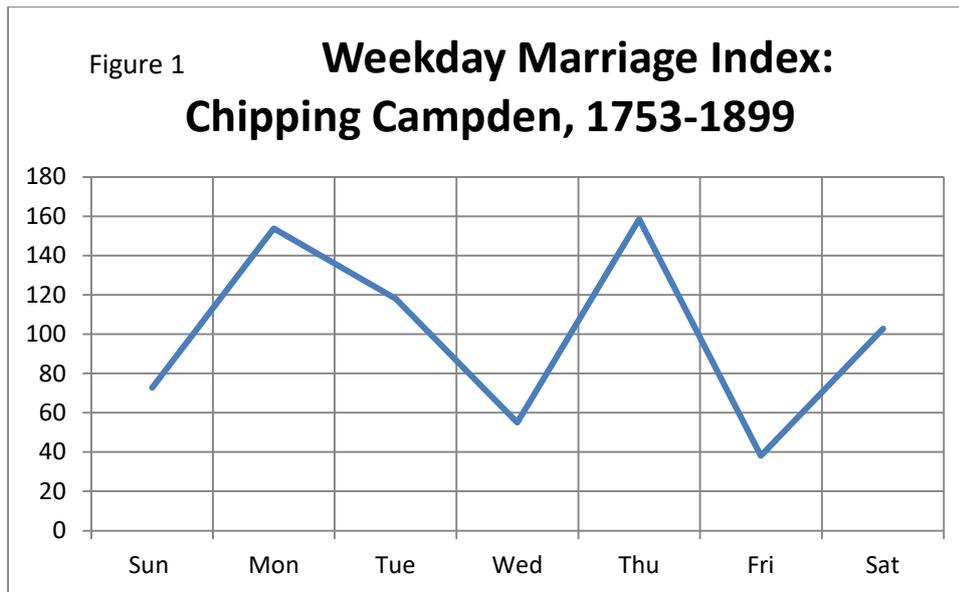
The Overall Pattern

Figure 1 shows the marriage indexes for the whole period.³ It immediately confirms that the marriage pattern was very different from the modern one. It reveals that there were two marriage peaks. The first occurred on Monday when the index was 60 points above the norm. It then fell on Tuesday and to a low on Wednesday, only to rise to another peak on Thursday. It then fell to a weekly low on Friday, only to rise slightly on Saturday before falling back again on Sunday.

¹ I should express my debt to Jenny Bruce who was responsible for the transcription of the parish and civil registers.

² The package used was PSPP. This can be downloaded free-of-charge

³ The marriage index is the proportion of marriages taking place on a day divided by 14.3, the proportion of the week that a specific day accounts for. It is probably easier to read that the simple daily proportions.



This raises the question why there should have been marriage peaks on Mondays and Thursdays. In fact, we should not be surprised by the Monday peak. A number of historians have noted that, in other locations, marriages were high on Monday. Thus, Reid discovered that in the early nineteenth-century Monday was the most popular marriage day in Birmingham, Blackburn and Manchester, although in Bristol it was the second most important day, Sunday being the most important.⁴ Similarly, Boulton has noted that in a number of London parishes marriage was overrepresented on Monday, only Sunday being more significant.⁵

Not only did Monday prove an attractive day for marriage but it was popular for other events too. For example, Mark Harrison examined the behaviour of crowds in Bristol in the years between 1790 and 1835.⁶ These crowds had assembled for a variety of reasons, such as rioting, election meetings, military pageants and sport. One of his main findings was that, again, Mondays, followed to a lesser extent by Tuesdays, was the most important day. Similarly, I carried out a study of homicide in both London and Wales in the years between 1730 and 1830. This showed that in both areas homicide deaths were highest on Monday followed by Tuesday. The evidence suggested that on these days drinking was relatively extensive.

These results did not occur by chance. At this time, when self-employment was common, people tended to have different work patterns. They tended to treat Monday - Saint Monday - as part of the weekend. On Tuesday many would return to paid-work. Work effort would then intensify over the week until Saturday, which was often pay day. Thus, on Monday people were free to pursue their own interests. Sometimes they would work on their own account,

⁴ D.A. Reid 'Weddings. Weekdays, Work and Leisure in Urban England 1791-1911: The Decline of Saint Monday Revisited', *Past and Present*, 1996, No 153, pp.135-163.

⁵ Jeremy Boulton, 'Economy of Time? Wedding days and the Working Week in the Past', *Local Population Studies*, No 43, 1989, pp28-46.

⁶ Mark Harrison, 'The Ordering of the Urban Environment: Time, Work and the Occurrence of Crowds 1790-1835', *Past and Present*, No 110, 1986, pp.143-68.

and sometimes they would pursue a variety of leisure activities, which included marriage or the attendance at weddings.

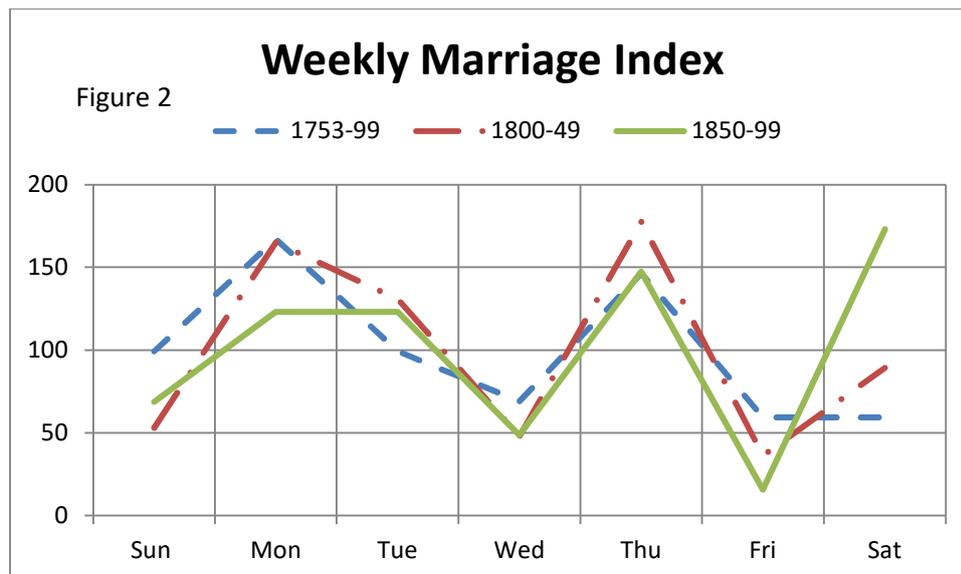
However, during the course of the nineteenth century the working week was gradually restructured, and Saturday half-day began to replace Monday as part of the weekend. According to Douglas Reid, this restructuring was led by employers in the industrial areas.⁷ Here the stimulus towards restructuring was the adoption of steam power and mechanisation, as a result of which employers needed regularity in employment. Even so, in many areas St Monday hung on until the First World War.

The Monday marriage peak in Campden, therefore, is probably a hang-over from Saint Monday. But why the Thursday peak? Its origins are obscure, although it does have an inexorable logic given that Campden was a market town with a long tradition of Wednesday market days. On market days, of course, there would have been an influx of a considerable number people into the town. Consequently, business activity would have been high and, for many people, Wednesday would have become the focal point of the week. Thursday, by contrast, would have been a much quieter day. Few people would have come into town and economic activity would have been low. This left people with considerable flexibility about how they should spend the day. Some might have used it as an opportunity to tend the kitchen- garden, allotment or potato patch. Others may have taken the opportunity to pursue traditional leisure pursuits, and some may have used the opportunity to marry, knowing that many of their friends would be free to join them and that the income lost from marrying rather than working was low.

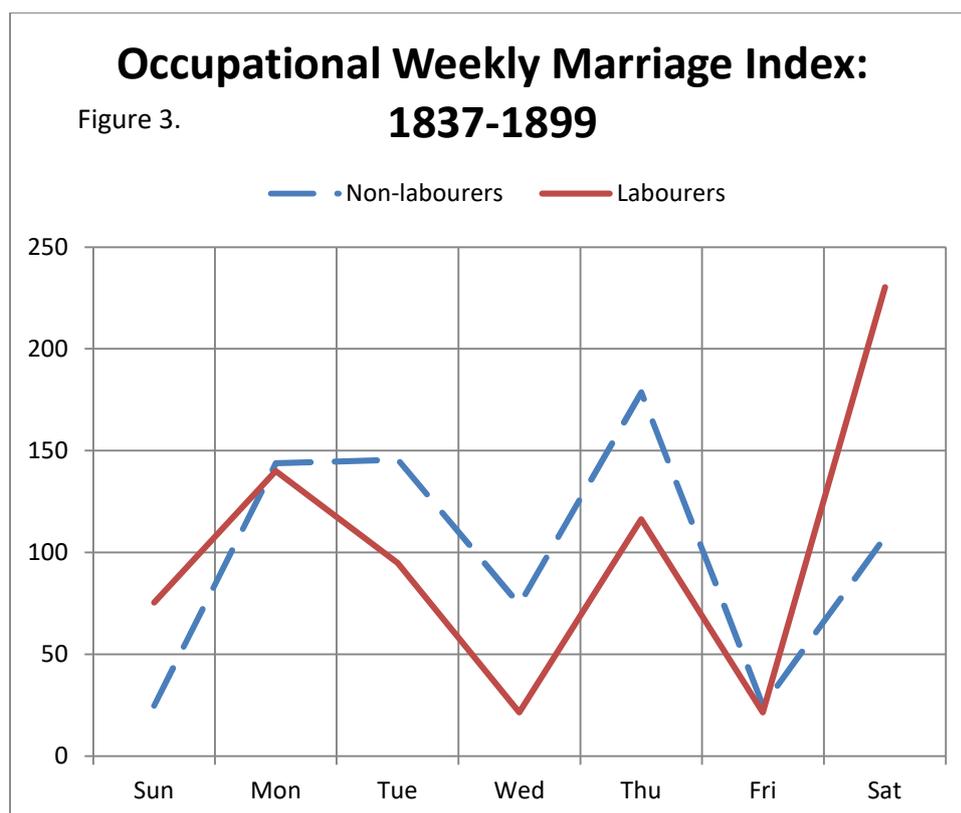
Changes to the pattern

We also need to raise the question whether the pattern remained consistent over time. To answer this, the data has been broken down into three sub-periods: 1753-99, 1800-49 and 1850-99. The outcome is shown in Figure 2. It suggests that there were few changes between the first and second sub-periods. However, there was a significant change between the second and third, viz., that Saturday took over as the most important wedding day of the week. This coincided with a decline in importance of the Monday and Thursday peaks, although both are still evident. On the strength of this, it seems that Campden was slowly moving towards a modern marriage pattern before the First World War.

⁷ D.A. Reid, 'The Decline of Saint Monday 1766-1876', *Past and Present*, No 71, 1976, 76-101.



We can get some further clues about the rise of the Saturday peak by looking at an occupational breakdown of marriages. With the introduction of civil registration in 1837 the registers began to record the occupation of the bridegroom. Consequently, it was decided to divide the weddings into those of Labourers and the Rest. The vast majority of Labourers, it should be said, were probably farm labourers. The result of this breakdown is illustrated in Figure 3. It shows that there was a close correlation in the fluctuations between the two groups. The main difference is that Labourers were much less likely to marry on Thursdays, their preferred day being Saturday and to a lesser extent Monday.



This occupational marriage information has also been broken down into two sub-periods: 1837-69 and 1870-1899 (Table 1). The latter sub-period coincided with the years of the Great Agricultural Depression, when there were considerable incentives for farmers to cut costs. It is evident that, regardless of group, there was a decline in Monday and Thursday marriages and an increase in Saturday. The increase in Saturday marriages, however, was particularly marked amongst Labourers. The implication is that farmers embraced the modern marriage pattern relatively early. This pattern, however, was not peculiar to Campden. It seems to have been quite common in rural areas across the country. The Registrar General's figures for 1864, for example, show that in both Surrey and Kent – corn-producing agricultural counties – and Cumberland, Westmorland and Northumberland – animal rearing counties – the most popular day for marriage was Saturday.

Table 1 **Marriage Indexes: Labourers
and Non-Labourers**

	1837-69		1870-1900	
	Labourers	Other	Labourers	Other
Sunday	113	38	11	10
Monday	150	160	122	127
Tuesday	110	122	70	170
Wednesday	20	51	23	99
Thursday	123	202	105	153
Friday	20	42	23	7
Saturday	164	83	344	133

We can only speculate as to why farmers should have embraced the modern marriage pattern early. The most obvious explanation is that farmers had an especially strong incentive to minimise absenteeism. This is most evident in livestock husbandry which required constant supervision of the animals. But in many grain-producing activities work was carried out in teams, the productivity of which would be adversely affected by absent labour. Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century, if not before, the employment of male agricultural workers had become regularised so the farmers had considerable influence over when their labourers worked, and, as a result, they were able to increase the incidence of Monday and Thursday work in exchange for half-day Saturday. It is also clear that, with transport improvements, by the mid-nineteenth century farmers were selling – directly or indirectly – to large urban centres which increasingly were moving towards the modern working week. This made it inevitable that sooner or later local farming would have to conform.

Conclusions: To answer the questions posed in the introduction, it seems that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Camptonians had a very different marriage pattern from that to-day. Monday and Thursday marriages, both of which are relatively unimportant to-day, were very common in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This reflected the tendency of males to treat these days as ones of leisure, or at least as days when they worked on their own account. However, by the late nineteenth century things had changed. Monday and Thursday were still days when there were an above average number of marriages, but Saturday had become the main day for weddings. This was in large part due to a change in the nature of the working week in agriculture.