

# POPULATION CHANGES ROUND THE SHORES OF MILFORD HAVEN FROM 1800 TO THE PRESENT DAY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

MILFORD Haven is at the south-western corner of Wales. The harbour is formed by the drowned valley of the river Cleddau, the course of which is deeply incised into the 200-foot erosion surface that dominates the topography of South Pembrokeshire (see Plate), so that in all kinds of weather some part of the Haven is safe shelter for ships. The main length of the harbour is in the Old Red Sandstone outcrop, from Dale in the west to Cosheston in the east and probably overlies one of the larger faults produced by the Armorican earth movements. Above Cosheston the rocks are mostly Carboniferous; the main river and all its tributaries are heavily silted. The old river bed is scoured by the tide to give a depth at low water of 50 feet—a depth rare in the harbours of Britain—but on either side of this narrow channel the water lying over the old flood plain is always shallow. The river cliffs along the edges of the Haven are nearly everywhere too steep for settlement.

This much peninsulated area is washed by the warm waters of the North Atlantic Drift and the climate is strongly oceanic in character. Oliver (1959) discusses the climate of Dale; the climate at the eastern end of the Haven is not so very different from Dale's—a little less wind, more rain, and less sunshine. In general the whole area is endowed with a climate without extremes and favourable to man, and particularly to farmers.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the population round the shores of Milford Haven has fluctuated markedly, both in its total size and in its distribution. The past century and a half has witnessed the growth of the three entirely new towns of Milford, Neyland and Pembroke Dock. There have also been profound changes in the density of the rural population which has, in general, markedly declined. This process of change still continues, and a study of past population changes is of particular interest in 1960 in view of the imminent large-scale industrial development and the further population changes that will inevitably take place. These fluctuations, like all those that have preceded them, very clearly reflect the changing human reactions to the physical environment of the Haven shores, which, although it has not altered, has offered different opportunities in the light of changing economic and political conditions during the past century and a half.



View westwards along Milford Haven.

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## II. POPULATION CHANGES 1801-41

*With reference to Fig. 2 and the table of population statistics*

The most important episode in this period was the rise of the town of Milford. This is shown in the diagram (Fig. 2) by the very rapid increase in the population of the parishes of Hubberston and Steynton (Milford Urban District was not created until 1894). At the end of the eighteenth century there was no settlement at all on the present site of the town. In 1794, however, the owner of this area of land, who was impressed by the natural advantages of the Haven for commerce, obtained permission from Parliament to develop a port here. By the end of the next decade the building of the town had begun. The first inhabitants were seven Quaker families of whalers from Nantucket Island. They depended on the sale of spermaceti oil, for which the main market was London, for use in its street lamps. The whalers came across the Atlantic, both to be nearer their market and to escape from the devastation of the War of Independence. Thus at the beginning of the nineteenth century Milford seemed destined to become a prosperous whaling port. The basis of the town's activities was broadened, and its promise was further increased when an Admiralty contract was obtained for shipbuilding at Milford. The daily Irish traffic departed from its quay, and much miscellaneous trade in coal, limestone and corn, for example, was also carried through the port. Davies (1815) was able to record that the town's "prospect in the summer and autumn of 1813 was favourable". Later in the period its growth became slower. Political and economic conditions were radically changed when the government withdrew its special privileges to the foreign settlers, London turned to gas lighting, and the Naval Board's lease of Milford Dockyard was not renewed in 1813. All that remained was the packet traffic, some trade, principally in coal and lime, ship repairing, and a certain amount of shipbuilding.

The rapid rise of Pembroke Dock during the period 1801-41 is also shown in Fig. 2. In 1813 the Admiralty did not abandon the Haven when they left Milford, but moved to the opposite shore, where a new town was built, to become later the largest in the county. Although it was then and is still known as Pembroke Dock, it has little connection with the market town of Pembroke a mile to the south, except that it is within the old Borough. The silting of the Pennar River and the increasing size of ships made Pembroke's old harbour less accessible. Favoured by its extensive water frontage and ample land for building, the new dockyard thrived. At first the men employed there came daily by ferry from the other settlements round the Haven, particularly from Milford, Llanstadwell, Burton and Hundleton (for population increases see Fig. 2), but gradually the town itself grew, as terraces of houses were built close to the dock. In 1836 the Irish packet service was transferred from Milford to Pembroke Dock. Shipbuilding was stimulated in the 1840s by the growing disturbances on the continent, and more dockyard workers came in from other parts of the country. By 1841 population changes at Pembroke Dock were greater than those at other places along the shores of Milford Haven.

The third feature shown by Fig. 2 is that, in general, the population of the wholly rural parishes was increasing at this time, in marked contrast with

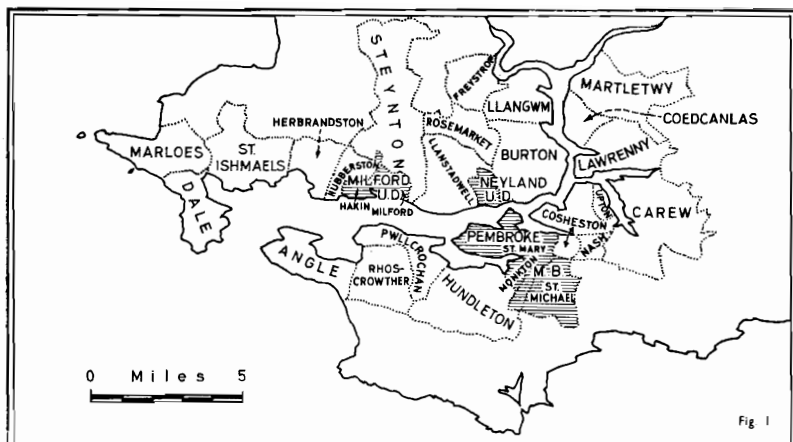


Fig 1

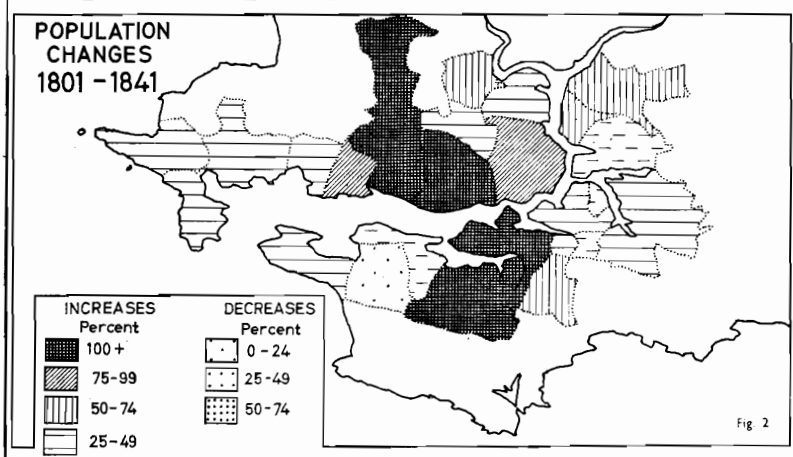


Fig 2

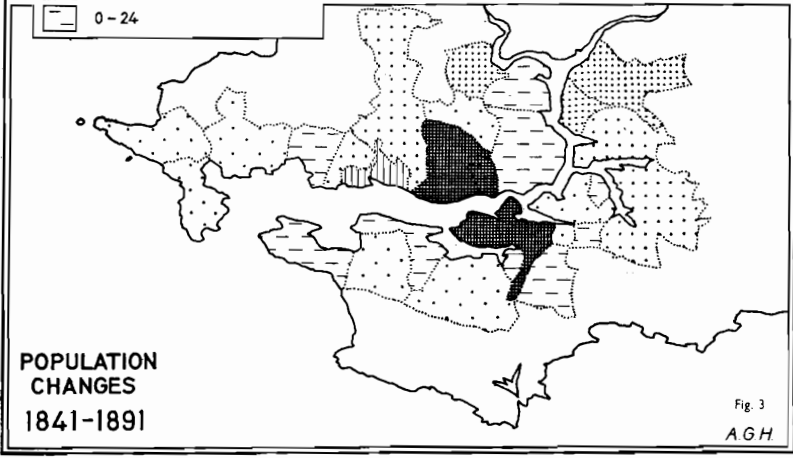


Fig 3

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FIGS. 1, 2 AND 3

Parishes and Populations in southern Pembrokeshire (based on Census Returns).

*Table of Population*  
(Based on

	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861
Milford U.D. . . . .					2,377†	2,837†	3,007†
Neyland U.D. . . . .							
Pembroke M.B. . . . .	2,515	2,415	4,925	6,511	*7,412	10,107	15,068
Angle . . . . .	328	353	392	458	388	437	512
Burton . . . . .	457	261	641	694	846	979	1,029
Carew . . . . .	871	911	975	1,020	1,056	991	993
Coedcanlas . . . . .	152	121	141	169	245	167	155
Cosheston . . . . .	401	404	555	678	513	551	602
Dale . . . . .	314	330	387	355	392	406	463
Freystrop . . . . .	445	461	478	636	671	679	576
Herbrandston . . . . .	185	160	223	221	249	255	257
Hubberston . . . . .	641	816	910	1,013	1,174	1,040	1,270
Hundleton . . . . .							
Lawrenny . . . . .	406	385	431	422	432	398	339
Llangwm . . . . .	568	585	644	697	796	928	900
Llanstadwell . . . . .	386	484	724	733	833	905	1,745
Marloes . . . . .	327	366	391	427	486	508	443
Martletwy . . . . .	558	629	773	725	846	829	703
Monkton . . . . .	673	770	1,021	1,128	*714	668	697
Nash . . . . .	95	96	101	133	128	132	147
Pwllcrochan . . . . .	203	171	199	174	212	214	264
Rhoscrowther . . . . .	219	204	193	231	209	201	202
Rosemarket . . . . .	317	270	412	456	473	465	451
St. Ishmael's . . . . .	403	429	458	527	502	528	469
Steynton . . . . .	1,291	1,961	2,405	2,984	2,903	3,616	3,710
Upton . . . . .	27	18	12	6	12	23	24

\* Indicates a boundary change.

† Figures for Parliamentary Borough of Milford, created 1832.

Statistics 1801-1951.

Census Returns)

1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1939	1951
2,836†	3,812†	4,070†	*5,102	6,399	7,772	10,104	*10,017	11,710
			2,827	2,423	2,714	2,157	2,059	2,206
13,704	14,156	14,978	15,853	15,673	15,472	12,009	11,026	12,296
510	458	502	484	519	459	399		317
909	934	1,027	1,037	983	894	824		*658
1,008	933	720	692	712	756	718		763
107	84	100	85	80	87	83		69
597	566	512	556	517	508	383		381
391	359	330	353	295	273	282		652
476	381	319	359	330	336	319		290
346	358	303	219	303	267	246		190
1,458	1,817	1,517	*236	244	255	253		192
			696	584	611	506		470
315	288	294	267	239	197	211		131
875	874	946	888	836	828	804		*1,088
2,571	3,017	3,641	*1,099	1,070	1,059	947		981
405	412	406	368	345	316	300		299
495	374	375	345	351	331	306		232
705	710	667						
141	104	121	119	96	88	98		63
340	190	259	160	137	126	133		66
238	212	168	113	135	115	111		137
389	366	382	428	379	384	383		370
404	480	457	434	406	421	422		442
2,988	3,223	3,764	*1,368	1,338	1,408	1,434	*	821
21	16	26	18	19	12	8		6

Note: 1841 onwards—part of C.P. of Monkton included within Pembroke M.B.  
 1894—Milford Haven U.D. created from part of Hubberston C.P. and part of Steynton C.P.  
 Monkton C.P. outside Pembroke M.B. became Hundleton C.P.  
 1900—Neyland U.D. created from part of Llanstadwell C.P.

later decades. In the early nineteenth century most people were employed in agriculture or fishing, including the gathering of shellfish, an industry especially important at Lawrenny and Llangwm. As Fig. 2 shows, however, the population increased most where a parish had mineral wealth—limestone in Carew, and anthracite in Freystrop, Martletwy, and Coedcanlas. In the early nineteenth century places with ready access to the sea had an advantage in transport costs over those in other parts of South Wales. The limestone was burnt with the coal to provide fertilizer, which was then in great demand.

### III. POPULATION CHANGES 1841-91

*With reference to Fig. 3*

The figure shows the great increase of population in Llanstadwell after the Great Western Railway decided that their terminus should be at the small settlement subsequently called Neyland, where there was a sheltered anchorage with deep water reasonably close inshore. After 1856, when the railway was completed, Neyland began to be busy, particularly with ferry and lighter traffic across to Pembroke Dock. Workers, including many dockyard men with their families, moved here from neighbouring parishes such as Burton and Rosemarket and also from other parts of the country. (See the Census Returns.) After Neyland's initial rapid rise, from 1861 its rate of growth slowed down. A railway was built to Pembroke in 1863, to the Dock in 1864, and by 1863 Milford had its own railway line as well, all of which greatly reduced Neyland's advantage. The Admiralty prevented any large-scale marine development at Neyland so as not to congest the deep water channel between Neyland and Pembroke Dock.

Fig. 3 also shows that Milford grew more slowly between 1841-91 than it had done from 1801 to 1841. Although some shipbuilding had continued, by about 1850 the town's development was at a standstill. Then in 1863 the railway link was completed, and in 1864 the building of Milford's dock was authorized by Parliament. Optimists hoped for an Atlantic port rivalling or surpassing Liverpool, but Milford's hinterland was anything but industrial. As Mackinder (1887) noted, "even if we grant that in the present conditions Milford Haven is a better terminus to the trans-Atlantic ferry than Liverpool, the fixed capital of Liverpool would impede the change" and (1890) "it is improbable that Liverpool will have to give way to Milford". The building of the docks was not completed until 1888 and by then shipbuilding had almost finished. The growth of the town was markedly retarded. Indeed, its population actually declined between 1861 and 1871. As a correspondent of *The Times* on "The State of Wales" wrote in 1888, "as far as appearances go, Milford, in spite of the great natural advantages of its position upon an unrivalled natural harbour, is a place in which business seems to languish".

Fig. 3 shows that at this time Pembroke was growing far more rapidly than Milford, particularly in the decade 1851-61, when the naval dockyard was very busy and a military garrison came to guard it. Not only did the population of Pembroke Dock increase, but employment was also found for large numbers of men from Cosheston, Hundleton and Neyland across the Haven. This

military element made the economy of the area unstable. In the early 1860s in the wave of optimism that followed the Great Exhibition and the end of the Crimean war, the garrison and dockyard workers were reduced in number and the population of the area declined. By the late 1860s however, shipbuilding, both naval and civilian prospered once more.

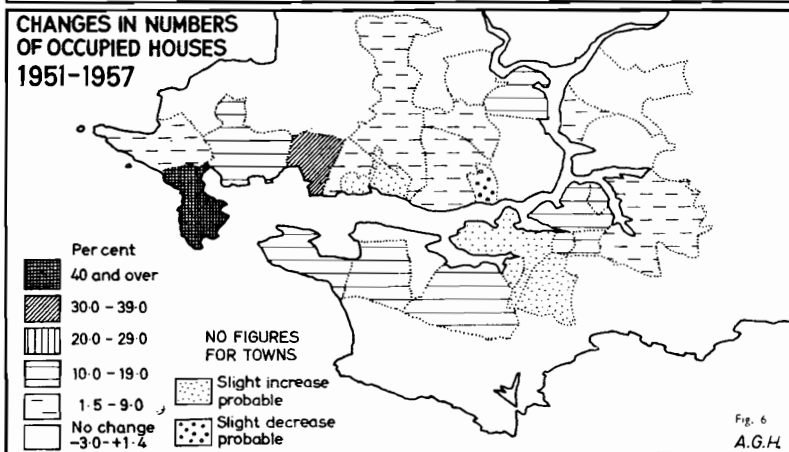
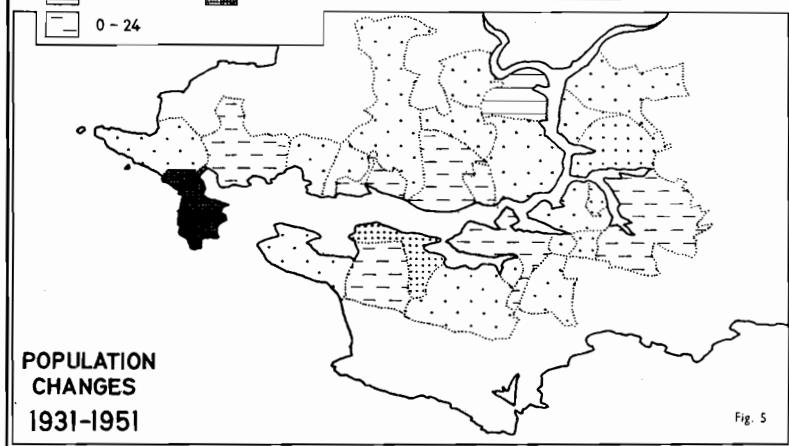
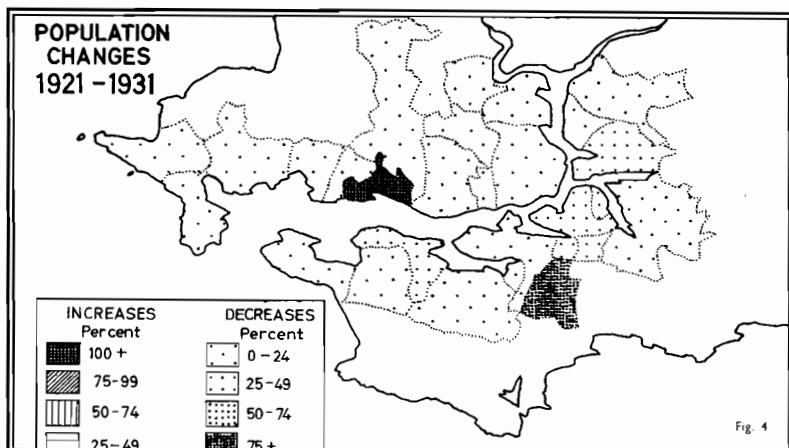
In the 1850s forts were built at nine places along the Haven as part of the defences of the Pembroke Dockyard. The numbers of military present account for the extraordinary fluctuations in the population of Pwllcrochan, Angle, Dale, Herbrandston and Hubberston, during this period. Fig. 3 shows even more clearly, however, that in other rural parishes at this time population decline was general. The country-wide agricultural depression, which set in about 1873 and deteriorated after 1880, fell with great severity on this area, despite its natural productivity. The crisis in corn prices, rather than the suitability of the land for pasture, caused large areas to be put down to grass. From Rhoscrowther, Dale, Marloes, and St. Ishmael's for example, farm workers moved to the South Wales mines where wages were much higher (see the Census Returns). The decline was greatest in those parishes where the population had expanded most rapidly in the earlier part of the century, as a comparison between Figs. 2 and 3 indicates. Local quarrying and mining both succumbed to changing economic circumstances. The demand for lime declined with the increasing popularity of other fertilizers, and the deeper anthracite seams became more difficult to work. Pembrokeshire had become a high cost region at a time when competition was intensifying, and when, in any case, the greatest increases in demand were for steam coal. Freystrop, Coedcanlas, Martletwy and Carew were now overpopulated, and a very large proportion of their inhabitants moved to the industrial districts of South Wales, or emigrated. The coming of the railways only served to increase this migration by killing the coastal trade and, paradoxically, making the settlements along the Haven more isolated than they had been for two hundred years.

#### IV. POPULATION CHANGES 1891-1931

*With reference to Figs. 4 and 7*

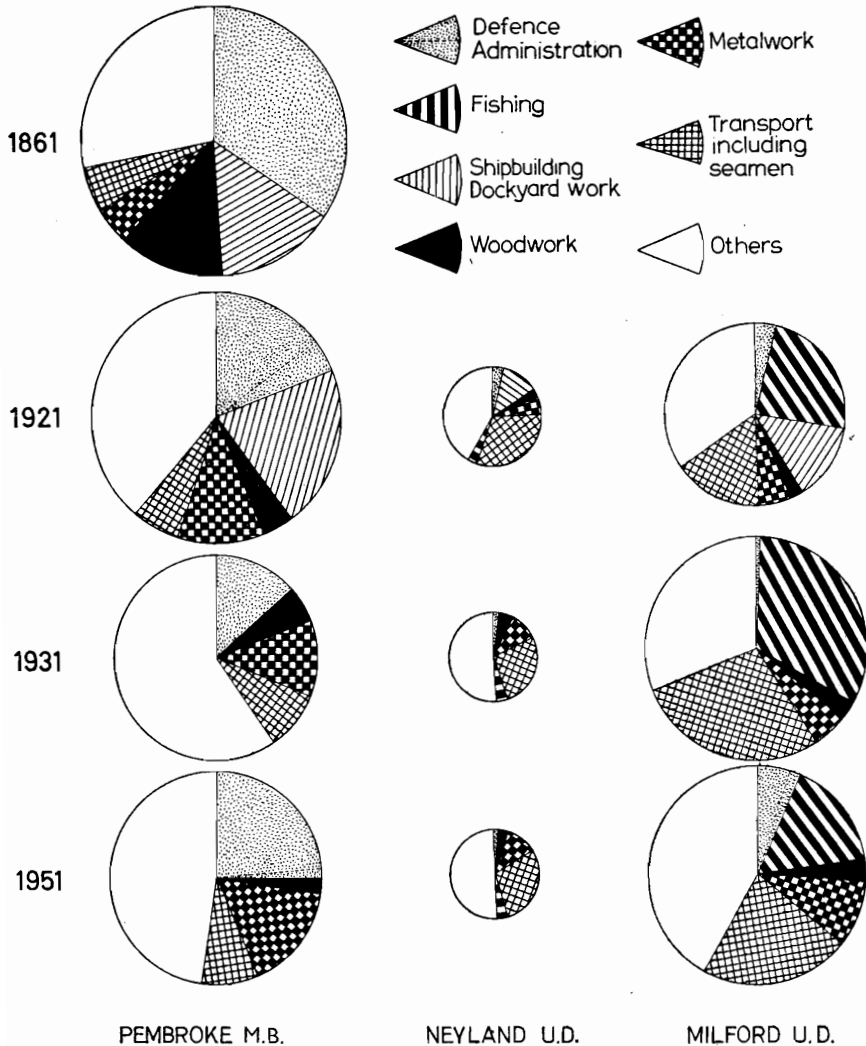
From 1891 to 1931 the town of Milford was the only settlement on the Haven shores in which the population increased and this was due to the establishment there of a fishing industry. In 1888, when the docks were finally completed, no liners came, but several east coast drifters moved to Milford and their numbers grew rapidly. The main fishing grounds to the west are easily accessible from Milford and the fishing industry was able to take over all those man-made facilities that had been intended for trans-Atlantic traffic. Milford grew partly at the expense of Neyland. The latter's small fleet migrated to Milford to utilize its much better dock facilities (and Neyland received its final sentence when, in 1906, the G.W.R. Irish traffic was transferred to Fishguard on the completion of the new harbour at Goodwick). By this same year, Milford had become the sixth largest fishing port in Great Britain. As the number of boats increased, its population increased as well. Rees (1954) quotes the *Pembrokeshire Herald* in 1912 which said that "the fish trade is Milford's sole industry . . . The





FIGS. 4, 5 AND 6

Population Changes in southern Pembrokeshire (based on Census and Rating Returns).



The areas of the circles are proportionate to the numbers of men employed

	PEMBROKE M.B.	NEYLAND U.D.	MILFORD U.D.
1861	5788		
1921	5228	834	2775
1931	3433	638	4121
1951	3936	634	3939

FIG. 7

Occupations in the urban areas (based on Census Returns).

population of the town has been doubled by means of it". From 1914 to 1918 there was little fishing but the town became an important naval base. After the war was over the numbers employed in fishing increased again and, in 1931, Milford replaced Lowestoft in fourth place after Grimsby, Hull, and Fleetwood. This prosperity, as Fig. 4 shows, was reflected in an increasing population even during the decade 1921-31, in contrast with the general decline elsewhere.

Pembroke Borough shared in this general decline, although from 1901 to 1921 its population had remained large without actually increasing any more, for the garrison was maintained and much shipbuilding was carried out. In particular World War I was a time of great activity, but from 1918 onwards the military element that had given Pembroke Dock its vitality was progressively withdrawn. In 1926 the dockyard was reduced to a care and maintenance basis. The repercussions of this disaster were felt all over the area from which the dockyard had drawn its labour—Cosheston, Hundleton, Llanstadwell, Burton and Neyland—but Pembroke Borough itself was worst hit, with a total population loss of 23 per cent. between 1921 and 1931. No plans had ever been made to absorb labour that would be redundant when military demands lessened. Fig. 7 shows only too clearly that the range of occupations in 1931 was no greater than it had been in 1861 and that the whole economy of the town was dependent on defence and the dockyard.

Fig. 4 shows that village populations became smaller between 1891 and 1931. Quarrying and coastal trading had died out; village fishing was reduced to a remnant; a little coal mining lingered on—the last pit in Freystop was not finally closed until 1948; the military element had disappeared when the forts became obsolete. Only agriculture remained but low wages and primitive housing did nothing to discourage emigration.

## V. POPULATION CHANGES 1931-51

*With reference to Figs. 5 and 7*

Between 1931 and 1939 the population of Milford declined slightly, reflecting the decrease in the proportion of the national catch of fish landed at its dock and a corresponding drop in the numbers employed in the fishing industry. This recession was partly checked by the setting up of the Royal Naval Armaments Depot at Newton Noyes in 1934 and by the starting of a shipbreaking yard. During World War II Milford prospered as a busy naval base and after the war was over the local economy continued to thrive. The armaments depot retained a considerable labour force, and the fishing fleet was for a while larger than ever before, but overfishing, rising costs and falling catches caused much anxiety in the town in which the fishing industry, with its ancillaries, remained easily the most important source of wages. Fig. 7 shows how serious the changes were between 1931 and 1951.

At Pembroke Dock as in Milford, the population declined until 1939 but by then the army had returned to its barracks, an important oil storage depot had been built, and part of the former dockyard had been taken over as a flying boat base by the Royal Air Force. Although very busy during the war

Pembroke Dock was, for its size, one of the most badly bombed places in the whole of the British Isles, and many temporarily left the town. After the war was over the military element did not at once disappear—the barracks, the oil tanks, and the Royal Air Force Depot all remained for a time. Employment in shipbuilding and repairing rose slowly, and the necessary broadening of the economy was partly provided by two new factories—one manufacturing small steel articles, and the other textile goods—giving employment to at least four hundred. These have thrived. Indeed, at Pembroke Dock in 1951 the future appeared more promising than at Milford.

Fig. 5 also shows that by comparison with the two previous periods the position in the rural parishes improved a little between 1931 and 1951. Some of the increases were only temporary. During World War II military establishments, particularly those involved in the Battle of the Atlantic, spread all round the Haven; agriculture was subordinated to military necessity. The population increases in Marloes, Angle and Carew were short lived, but in Dale a naval base was maintained, providing much employment, and War Department married quarters were built in the village. (This base is due to close in 1960; the population of Dale will change again in numbers and kind as these many houses come to be used by newcomers.)

The other village increases can be largely ascribed to increased agricultural prosperity. Improved road transport, allied to the advantages of the climate, has made the production of liquid milk, early potatoes and market garden produce profitable. Price (1953) shows that, along most of the Haven's shores, the drift from the land has been allayed by the provision of better housing, transport services, piped water, electricity supplies and other amenities. As Fig. 5 records, however, decline continues in some of the rural areas. The population of Pwllcrochan has fallen further because new building has taken place only in Rhoscrowther—the combined population of the two parishes is now less than half of what it was in 1801. The continued decline of Burton is probably a reflection of its poor transport services, its scattered settlements, and its lack of community ties. What slender hope there might have been for a recovery in the old coal mining areas died when exploratory work was concluded in 1951, and the National Coal Board finally abandoned the South Pembrokeshire Coalfield.

## VI. POPULATION CHANGES 1951 TO THE PRESENT DAY

*With reference to Fig. 6*

Fig. 6 is based on the changes in the numbers of occupied houses between 1951 and 1957. It shows that in the rural areas the more favourable trend which set in before 1951 has persisted and become more widespread. At one end of the scale the War Department is largely responsible for the increase of 72 per cent. in the number of houses in Dale since 1951; at the other end the old coal mining villages, such as Martletwy, have a desolate appearance, with their many derelict houses and much waste land.

No figures could be obtained for the urban areas other than estimates of their population totals at the end of 1957. The number of inhabitants in Neyland

—about 2,000—has fallen a little further since the last census. There is no likelihood of further growth unless the town attracts some new employment. The population of Milford has, in contrast, probably increased a little since 1951 (the estimate at the end of 1957 was 12,000). The fishing industry has recovered only slowly. From more than 100 boats immediately after the war the fleet declined to only 40 in 1956, but in the middle of 1957 had increased again to 45. Further expansion, sufficient to remedy Milford's unemployment problem is, however, unlikely. Pembroke Borough's population has probably risen slightly since the last census, but the strong military element renders its economy unstable. The flying boat base at Pembroke Dock has been abandoned and, in view of the further defence cuts announced in April 1957, the Member of Parliament for Pembroke, in a letter to *The Times*, 16th July, 1957, expressed concern for long term employment prospects. The present unemployment rate in Pembroke Borough and Milford is very high—11·0 per cent. according to *The Times*, 28th February, 1958—which is much greater than the national average—1·9 per cent. at that date.

## VII. FUTURE POPULATION CHANGES

*With reference to Fig. 8*

It has been stated by the Prime Minister (May 1957) that the Haven will in the future become one of Britain's major oil ports. Schemes of the Esso and British Petroleum Companies are already in progress. Other possible major developments are indicated in Fig. 8, and other concerns, particularly petrochemical factories, are likely to develop in the area.

These changes will profoundly affect the size of the future population of this area; it may well be doubled by 1981. The Local Government Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, writing on 22nd July, 1957, stated that there is "every reason to suppose that, in less than a generation, Milford will have an industrial area extending eight or nine miles on each side of the estuary, and that its population will have grown from the present 12,000 or so to something like that of Tyneside". Some may find this idea exciting; others may think that the *Manchester Guardian* took an unnecessarily gloomy view.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The population round the shores of Milford Haven has always been changing in numbers. The present pattern is no more permanent than any that went before; new activities, bringing in new groups of people, will inevitably change it. Changes have succeeded each other very quickly since 1801. The numbers moving in or out and the focal point of movement have continually fluctuated in response to the opportunities for work or lack of them. Although the development of particular parts of the Haven has often been at the expense of other parts, in the long run the great influences since 1801 have been the railways, steam navigation, the commercial advantages of units larger than a village can sustain, and the uncertainty of European politics.

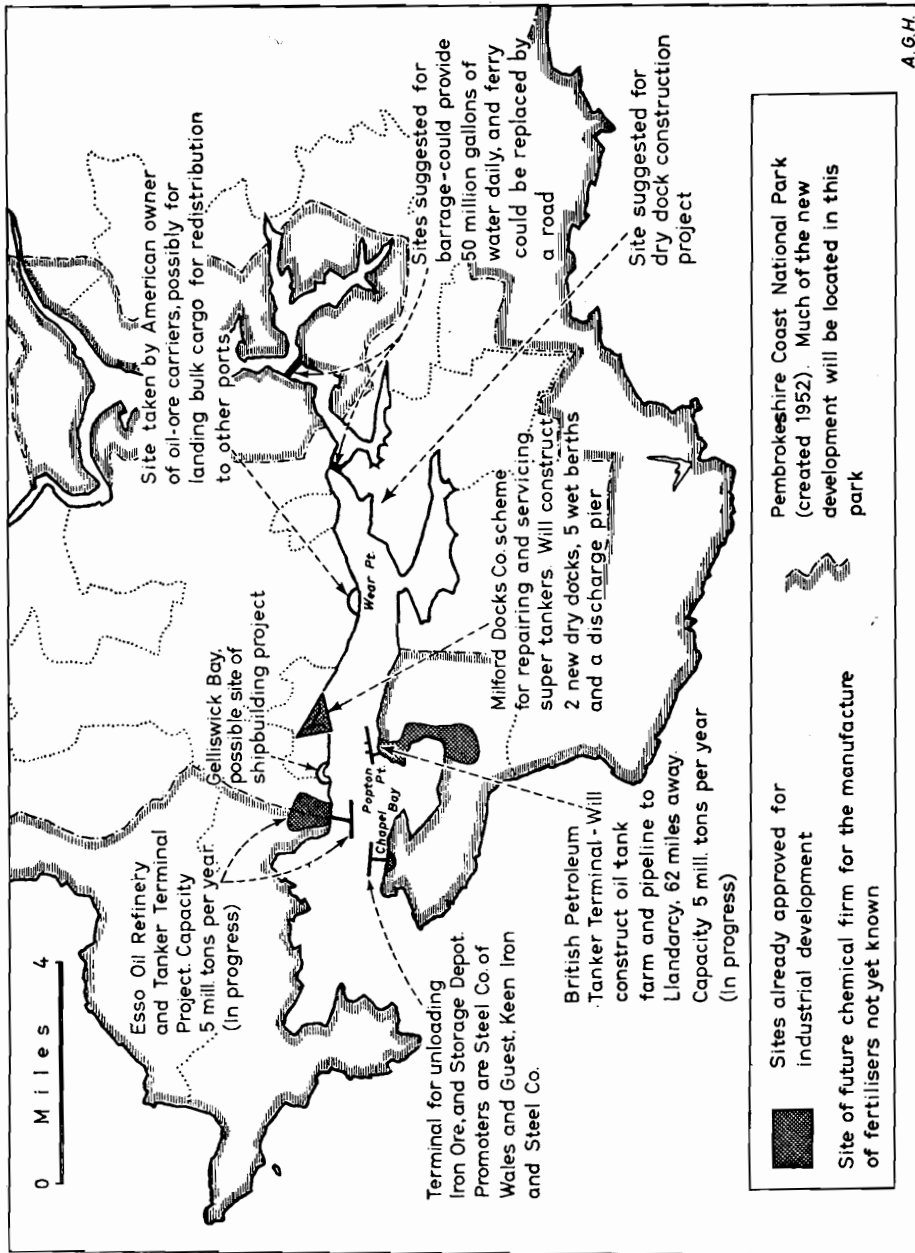


FIG. 8

The future development of Milford Haven—plans put forward up to 1958.

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