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Puncturing the Malthus Delusion: Structural change in the
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Abstract

Accounts of structural change in the pre-modern British economy vary substantially. We present the first time series of male labour sectoral shares before 1800, using a large sample of probate and apprenticeship data to produce national and county-level estimates. England experienced a rapid decline in the agricultural share between the early seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, associated with rising agricultural and especially industrial productivity; Wales saw only limited changes. Our results provide further evidence of early structural change, highlighting the significance of the mid-seventeenth century as a turning point in English economic development.

Keywords: Labour force, Sectoral distribution, Labour productivity, Britain, Wales

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