# Conference Report
# Historical Sources and their Use in Local Population Studies

# Local Population Studies Society Autumn Conference 2018

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The Local Population Studies Society held its autumn 2018 conference on 3 November 2018 at the University of Oxford. The theme of the conference was 'Historical Sources and their Use in Local Population Studies'. The conference was introduced and chaired by Colin Pooley. There were four research papers in the morning session with three in the afternoon session. A summary of each one is given in this report. Thanks are due to the conference organisers, and to the University of Oxford's Department of Continuing Education at Rewley House for hosting the conference.

## Session 1

The first paper, 'Early modern apprenticeship and its sources', was presented by **Patrick Wallis** (London School of Economics). Wallis began by considering the historical problem of apprenticeship: what is our general understanding about the organisation and impact of early modern apprenticeship and does this understanding match the reality?

The Statute of Artificers (1563) created a generalised model of training with a set of rules built around it. The key characteristics of the Statute were that there was a training contract that could vary in price, and which had a long minimum term of seven or more years. The magistrates, not the guilds (a myth), provided the contract enforcement and heard appeals. Completion of the apprenticeship conferred a general license to work. The intended purpose of the Statute had been an attempt to combat the drift of labour from the land, but its outcome was the complete opposite as it provided an incentive to get a trade. In 1600, some 60 per cent of workers were employed in agriculture and this fell to approximately 45 per cent by 1700. The Statute generated records: registrations of entry into the guilds in London and a few other towns, and the court records in cases where the legal agreement broke down and the parties ended up in court. The Lord Mayor's Court in London heard cases relating to apprentices wanting to end their contract for a variety of

reasons but the most common, comprising 79 per cent of all cases, was that the contract had not been registered.

Some household and parish records from this period may also contain details of apprentices and their masters. Research has shown that at the start of the apprenticeship, co-residency between apprentice and master appears to have been the norm (over 60 per cent) although, in general, as the duration since indenture increases, co-residency fell, so that after a ten-year period since indenture, only 20 per cent of apprentices in the major towns co-resided with their masters, and only 10 per cent in London. In practice, it would seem that apprenticeship contracts were flexible and weakly enforced. Although poor law apprenticeships would be for younger children, by linking apprentice data to International Genealogical Index and baptism records, it was noted that most guild and craftsman apprentices were from a middle-class background. In 1580 their average age was around 18 years, though this fell to around 15 years and 6 months by 1800. Over the period 1600 to 1700 there was only a modest change in where an apprentice might train: London accounted for nearly 80 per cent of apprentices in 1600, falling to about 72 per cent in 1700 with the balance being in other cities and, increasingly, in smaller towns. Guild records of apprentices show a dramatic decline from 1660 to 1800 but the tax records show an increasing number of apprentices from 1710 to 1800. To ascertain the share of apprentices who later married back in their parish of origin, apprenticeship records and data from the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure were used, giving a total of 71 per cent. To summarise: apprentices (who were mainly male), were going to London and other towns and cities to serve their apprenticeships, and then returning to live and raise families in their parishes of origin.

Sources for rural apprenticeships are very fragmented and little has been written on the subject. We still know little about the quality of the training in rural apprenticeships, and how a person found a master to take them on as an apprentice.

The second paper: 'Women and work in early modern England: incidental evidence from church court depositions' was presented by **Charmian Mansell** (Queen Mary, University of London). Most records concentrate on male occupations and very little is known about women's everyday experience of work, paid or unpaid, in the period 1500–1700. The situation is the same for female servants: we know little about them, how they came into service, what kinds of work they did or even their age distribution. The University of Exeter's project *Women's work in rural England, 1500–1700: a new methodological approach*, covering the south west of England was undertaken to remedy this situation.[1] Church court depositions with their testimonies can provide detailed accounts of everyday activities and work as witnessed by the deponents and giving a 'voice' to females. However, it needs to be borne in mind that there was an imbalance in power at work here, servants were in danger of losing their jobs, so testimonies need to be treated with caution.

1 See J. Whittle, M. Hailwood, C. Mansell and I. Dudley, *Women's Work in Rural England, 1500–1700* https://earlymodernwomenswork.wordpress.com [accessed 24 April 2019].

The church courts heard cases that were produced by the court itself, for example adultery, not attending church and assaults. The courts also heard a class of cases where there were disputes between two or more parties, such as defamation, contested wills, matrimony and tithe payments. There is often a brief biography of the witnesses, their age, occupation, place of birth (useful for an idea of migration and distances travelled) and how long they have lived in their current place of residence. Details of defendants are only occasionally revealed. In the study area, the South West of England, approximately 27,000 people appeared before the church courts between 1550 and 1650, of whom 21,679 were male. Of the female deponents, only 623 were classed as servants, but many may have been missed as depositions often lacked details of occupation. Some depositions were short, whilst others were pages long, giving 'scene setting' information about daily life in this period. Analysis has been undertaken of these female servants' depositions, and specifically whether they related to incidents within the household (49.2 per cent), in some way connected to the household (8.2 per cent) or not connected to the household at all (42.6 per cent). There was little difference in these percentages between rural or urban areas. In this period, men were perceived to be in the public sphere, whilst females were more associated with the household. The figures above, however, show that women were not restricted to the household and spent a considerable time outside of it. They might be going to markets, shops, fairs, running errands or getting involved in husbandry: in short, they were multi-tasking. Just by being outside in the street, the servants were interacting with the wider public, including neighbours' servants, friends, possibly relatives or complete strangers who might engage in conversation or pass on the latest gossip or rumour. Part of their household duties might be required to be undertaken outside, such as taking the washing to the local brooks or streams where they would be interacting with the other women doing the same work. Here they were outside the control of their masters and could socialise and be part of the local community.

The third paper, 'Seventeenth and eighteenth-century churchwardens' and quarter sessions' records for population studies: possibilities and problems', was based on parishes in Devon and was presented by **Marion Hardy**. The nineteenth century censuses give detailed information about the population and, as we know, another major source of information—pre-dating these censuses—are the parish registers. The parish chest, however, held the documents dealing with parish administration which included the accounts of the churchwardens and overseers of the poor. Churchwardens were responsible, amongst other duties, for keeping an account of the income and expenditure relating to the parish church and services provided by the parish. The norm for most parishes was two churchwardens, though larger parishes might have more. Where churchwardens' records survive, it is possible that details of the local rates based on property value and levied on named property owners or occupiers can be found in these accounts. Overseers of the poor were also parish officials whose duty was to raise a poor rate on a similar basis to the local rate for the relief of the parish poor. Similarly, they were required to keep a record of income and expenditure, itemising who were the recipients of

poor relief and the amount. Whilst the churchwardens were responsible for transgressions of church law, the parish constables were responsible for law and order within the parish and were the link between the churchwardens, the nearest justice of the peace and then quarter sessions. The role of the constables became more important after midsummer 1700 when responsibility for monitoring travellers was transferred to them from the churchwardens.

By looking at family names in the lists of ratepayers and details of those receiving poor relief for different years, Hardy obtained information about the resident population and the scale of population 'turnover' (those whose names disappeared from the lists and those who were new entrants). It was the responsibility of the churchwardens to record people entering the parish. This mobility created another set of documents: settlement certificates and settlement examinations. A settlement certificate meant that a parish could allow an 'outsider' to work in the parish, but should that person become unemployed then their home parish would provide their poor relief.[2] A settlement examination, under the auspices of the parish Overseer of the Poor and a justice of the peace, took place when it looked like someone might become a burden on the parish. It may be possible to work out a summary of a person's individual history from the details contained in a settlement examination. Disputes over settlement cases were dealt with at the Quarter Sessions, whose records are another source of information. Hardy used cases from Devon to illustrate how these sources of information could be used to look at those people who were on the move, and to establish whether they were male or female, travelling alone or with their family or other companions, where had they come from and whither they were going.

The survival rate of these papers is patchy, their condition may be poor and there may be problems in reading early handwriting. As with any record given verbally, the officials may have written down what they heard, so recorded names and places in particular, may not be entirely reliable.

The fourth paper, presented by **Sue Jones** (University of Oxford) was 'Parish registers, probate inventories and "big data" in the study of early modern Surrey'. Parish registers and probate inventories are well known sources. 'Big data' is a recent phrase which describes the use of aggregate sources rather than specific ones. The increasing availability of digital resources and increased computing power has facilitated its widespread use.

2 Under the Old Poor Law, each person had a *settlement*, being the parish which was liable to support him or her according to the Poor Law, should (s)he become ill, infirm or unemployed. At any one time, each person had one and only one settlement, but this could change over the life course. For example, at birth it was common for a person to take his or her father's settlement. But if that person were employed in a different parish for a continuous period of 52 weeks, the settlement would transfer to the parish where (s)he had worked, and this new settlement could itself be superseded if the person moved again and worked for another continuous period of 52 weeks in a different parish. There were other ways, too, in which a settlement could change. Establishing a person's current parish of settlement, therefore, involved constructing a 'potted biography'. Perhaps the most well-known study using settlement examinations is K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985).

Parish registers are the records of church ceremonies of baptisms, marriages and burials from about 1540. They have limitations. Bodies may not be buried in the place of death, nor was everyone who died in a parish from that parish. In some Surrey parishes, burials of nurse-children are recorded, often from London. Baptisms were not always performed in the parish of birth. The parish registers were originally hand written, but many have been transcribed and the transcripts made available in local archives. This is convenient for users, but does not solve all the problems with the source. The register may be poorly preserved, the handwriting atrocious, or the transcription poor and inaccurate. Another valuable source are probate inventories. After a person's death their personal moveable property was recorded and valued. The better off were more likely to make a will, so a socio-economic bias exists in probate inventories. A Surrey example, comparing the occupations of those for whom inventories were drawn up and their occupations recorded at burial showed that of labourers (who comprised approximately a third of the population), 2 per cent had inventories, whilst of farmers, yeomen and husbandmen (who comprised about a quarter of the population) three quarters had inventories. In farming, inventory values can vary as the value of crops in the ground increased by the time of year until harvest, whilst stock was seen as less vulnerable after its birth.

For Jones, 'big data' meant data where most of the records and resources are available to analyse, there is no need to sample; where we not looking at individuals but at trends or patterns and discovering evidence in parish registers for non-demographic questions. Surrey marriage registers showed that in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the timing of marriage was restricted with a big dip in Lent and Advent. This changed as time went on: by 1740 the Advent dip had disappeared and although a Lent 'dip' remained, it was much decreased. 'Big data' for early modern Surrey was used to analyse the following topics: migration, agriculture, mortality crises and combining parish registers with information on London apprentices. On migration it allows the analysis of which parishes grooms and brides were coming from and how ease of travel affected movement between the north and south of the county. On agricultural topics, surviving probate inventories show how livestock was important in the south of the county, but arable farming more important further north. An alternative approach to understanding the agrarian economy uses parish registers and the seasonality of marriage, the argument being that the timing of marriage was based on financial risk, reward, the availability of free time and was hence linked to type of agriculture. In arable areas, marriages were most common in the autumn after the harvest; in pastoral areas, there was a spring peak, after lambs and calves were born; in industrial or urban areas, no strong seasonal peak was observed, as work was not very seasonal. Mortality crises in Surrey were caused by plague and harvest failures in the 1590s, when the pastoral, remote parishes of the south east of the county were worst affected. Female mortality advantage is associated with famine where fewer women die than men. In Surrey there is also evidence that typhus was a cause of death in some mortality crises. Apprentice sources (disputes involving apprentices in the Lord Mayor's Court, Merchant Taylor's Guild and the Records of London Livery Companies Online website),

were combined with the parish registers to calculate 'apprentice densities', the ratio of London apprentices to population.[3]

## Session 2

The afternoon session was made up of three very different but all very good presentations. **Vanessa Harding** (Birkbeck, University of London) began, talking about 'Maps and mistakes: sources for early modern population studies'. She showed us reproductions of many superb maps, very well reproduced, which made her presentation visually stunning. She began by saying that she was going to talk more about maps than mistakes, and to start with the early modern period and move forwards. She stressed that alongside maps made at the time, later maps were useful for the early modern period; as a tool for understanding and possibly even explaining.

William Camden's *Britannia*, first published in 1586, was the first historical and topographical survey of Great Britain. It integrated landscape and documentary sources, and from the 1607 edition it includes a full set of county maps, based on the work of Saxton and Norden. This was very influential and spawned a number of local studies using a chorographical approach (the art or practice of describing on a chart). These studies involved thinking about land and landscape as part of writing about the history of a place. Within the early modern period there are broadly three groups of maps: national, town and estate. Christopher Saxton's maps and those that followed increased in detail, although they did not involve surveys as such. This period saw a shift from 'views' to 'plans', the increase of maps with text and historical notes, and county maps showing administrative divisions, such as those of John Speed.

By the mid seventeenth century there was a shift from pictorial maps to plan form maps, such as those of London by Ogilby and Morgan in 1676. These were much more accurately surveyed (although not perfect) and more detailed, with multiple sheets. For the first time a map of London had a key to enable users to find small streets and courtyards. Early modern town maps have an ambition of accuracy but some have other aims as well; military maps and maps of ports, harbours and coasts become more common. They are maps for practical uses, as are estate maps but the latter have another purpose, that of describing or celebrating ownership. Even if they are not accurately surveyed they describe ownership; in the same way some city maps begin showing groups of properties which were in the same ownership.

As time passed, maps became more accurate, and the larger scale Ordnance Survey (OS) maps in particular can help users see back into the past: footpaths for example can show a lot about the past while describing the present. The early OS maps also created the first ever national map of parish boundaries.

Harding finished by providing a list of online sources of maps (Table 1).

3 ROLLCO Project, *Records of London Livery Companies Online*, https://www.londonroll.org [accessed 24 April 2019].

**Table 1 Some online sources of historical maps**

| Web site address | Description |
|---|---|
| bl.uk/onlinegallery | The British Library online gallery; hundreds of maps and plans of Britain of all types, and many more of other parts of the world |
| maps.nls.uk | The National Library of Scotland site includes maps of all parts of the British Isles and gives access to Ordnance Survey maps which are zoomable and can be downloaded as .pdf files |
| historic–cities.huji.ac.il | This site from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem includes many early modern street maps |
| hollar.library.utoronto.ca | A good site for the drawings of Wenceslaus Hollar including his maps (search for 'maps') |
| townmaps.data.history.ac.uk | The catalogue of British town maps from the Institute of Historical Research website |
| historictownsatlas.org.uk | The British historic towns atlas, which uses later nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps as a base to locate buildings and other things there in the past |

**Note:** All web sites accessed 24 April 2019.

**Source:** V. Harding, 'Maps and mistakes: sources for early modern population studies', paper presented at the Local Population Studies Society conference on Historical Sources and their Use in Local Population Studies, Oxford, 3 November 2018.

**Claire Connor** (University of Bristol) spoke about 'Looking for 630 passengers: using online genealogical sources to uncover the lives of the passengers on the 1852 voyage of SS Great Britain from Liverpool to Melbourne'. This was a voyage in response to the Gold Rush, the first of SS Great Britain to Australia. Connor was able to identify 300 of the passengers from online sources; there are another 100 people where she has possible identifications. This was a time when there was a commercial urgency to developing trade with Victoria. Connor told us that this first voyage has provided more material than 'all the rest'; she suggested that because of a 'sense of modernity and progress', more materials, especially diaries, from later voyages were retained by the individuals and their descendants.

All the passengers had paid fares, and there has been relatively little research into non-assisted migrants, who have been poorly documented until the recent digitisation of the passenger lists. She gave the audience a fascinating insight into the passengers on this voyage, with plenty of personal details. Amongst the more general details that emerged were the following.

- Many people returned from Australia; this was true in general and also amongst the travellers on this voyage, of whom about a third of those identified returned to the United Kingdom.
- The data contain errors and biases. Transcription errors can be found online. Some people avoided officialdom and forms when they reached Australia.

- There is a bias inherent in the data in favour of the wealthy and the criminal, and some people were clearly running away from their own past.
- The passengers were mainly middle class, male and single; many were commercially 'savvy' young men who were attracted to the gold fields but stayed in the cities, or who set up businesses to 'fleece the miners'. There were no older men to be pushed out of the way in the commercial world.
- The passengers included people whose families had paid them to leave England; others were 'kept men' whose families in England regularly sent them money to stay in Australia.
- A dozen men arrived on the SS Great Britain and turned straight round and returned to England on the same ship!

Connor used a range of sources to trace details of the passengers, including Ancestry, Free BMD, Family Search, the National Archives, Trove online (National Library of Australia), Papers Past (New Zealand), and regional archives.[4] She also contacted families and organisations directly. This was a fascinating presentation, with many details of individuals and families.

Our third afternoon speaker was **Martin Gorsky** (Centre for History in Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), who spoke about 'Local data, national patterns: sources for the history of hospitals and sickness insurance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'. He spoke partly about sources and methods in this area of research, then gave us case studies of a database of voluntary hospitals and one of a friendly society and finished with a warning of the limits of database methods.

Voluntary hospitals emerged in the eighteenth century, most as subscription-based charities for the 'deserving poor', with honorary consultants and philanthropic governors. There were also hospitals engaged in acute clinical medicine, both general and specialised, like Great Ormond Street. For these hospitals the principal sources are annual reports, management records and surviving patient registers and/or case notes. From the later nineteenth century an annual year book providing national statistics was published. The late eighteenth century also saw the emergence of what became 'general practice', all private, with sliding scales of user fees. Friendly societies began to offer sickness insurance to the working classes; benefits could include wage replacement if sick, home care and medicine from the 'club' doctor, and death benefits for survivors. Surviving rulebooks, membership registers, actuarial reports and benefit books are the main sources here.

Gorsky spoke briefly about the purpose of databases, data management, record linkage and pattern elucidation/aggregate analysis before moving on to talk about the Voluntary

4 The websites of these sources are as follows: https://www.ancestry.co.uk, https://www.freebmd.org.uk, https://www.familysearch.org/en/, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/ [all accessed 24 April 2019].

Hospitals Database.[5] It provides a geographical view of hospitals and can be searched for surviving data about individual hospitals, providing photocopies of documents. Users can also examine the provision of such hospitals nationally, the extent of variation, change and continuity. The database confirms that there was an 'inverse care law', in that there were more hospitals in wealthier places, where need was less, possibly as a result of the presence of wealthy donors and supporters.

Gorsky's second case study was the Hampshire Friendly Society Database developed at the University of Southampton, not online as some patient data is too recent to be made public in this way. He gave us a detailed look at the database, which includes records of around 36,000 episodes of sickness, which can be used to answer questions such as whether morbidity rose during the mortality transition or did sickness rise as people lived longer? The answer, according to both the Hampshire Friendly Society database and another data set from the Independent Order of Foresters, was yes. Both datasets also confirmed that older people claimed more often than younger, and the incidence of sickness remained fairly stable over time, falling only amongst people aged over 65. The same pattern was evident in relation to the duration of sickness: older people made longer claims, and over time the length of claim only rose amongst those aged over 65. The Hampshire Friendly Societies saw a significant rise in the proportion of older members, although this stabilised in the 1920s and after.

Older men submitted fewer claims for infectious diseases and colds, but more claims for diseases of the circulatory and musculo-skeletal systems and for bronchitis. The illnesses which led to the longest duration claims amongst men aged 59–70 years were those of the circulatory system, the nervous system and mental disorders.

5 The Voluntary Hospitals Database can be found at http://www.hospitalsdatabase.lshtm.ac.uk [accessed 24 April 2019].