LPSS Autumn conference report, 2012

New research in local population studies

The LPSS Autumn Conference 2012 was held at Oxford Brookes University on Saturday 3 November 2012. It was organised by Alysa Levene, Reader in History at Oxford Brookes and member of the LPS editorial board, who was absent due to the recent birth of her baby. The host for the University was Sally Tye, and Chris Galley, for LPSS, welcomed more than 40 delegates and speakers. The day was split into three sessions—with the first being devoted to demography.

Session 1: Demography

Our first speaker was Joe Day from the University of Cambridge who spoke on *'Identifying regions for local studies, new evidence from the 1881 Census'*. Joe indicated that the 1881 census specifies place of birth from whence migration patterns can be deduced. This data can be used on a large scale to identify regions containing individuals who have strong interconnections. He introduced recent research by British Telecom which analysed landline calls throughout the UK in 2001. This showed areas of modularity, with dense intercommunication within the region and clear boundaries between such areas, where there is very little traffic. Using a similar technique employing migration patterns, a parallel map was drawn up for 1881. When the two regional maps of 1881 and 2001 were compared, several common features were identified. Joe then moved on to distinguish between homogeneous regions and those which are defined by strong internal links. Concentrating on interactivity gives a more meaningful definition to a region. The 'noise' around diversity, within the region, is not as important as is sometimes thought. Administrative boundaries and human interaction have tended to develop together; so, some county boundaries still have significance, but this is not always the case: what is important is that the region shares a cultural history.

Joe showed that the north–south divide is a stable barrier on both maps, although the position of Lincolnshire is problematic, for it seems to belong in the south but most people in Lincolnshire consider themselves to be northerners. There was limited migration, about 12 per cent, across the less well known east–west divide, which probably developed because of the Pennines. While there is no longer a physical barrier to such movement, the cultural differences persist. Wales is an interesting case. There is a very strong north–south divide in the country, but North Wales is strongly connected to Cheshire and Merseyside, while South Wales is well integrated with contiguous English counties. However, the

Welsh border is a strong cultural fault line in regard to marriage choices since the Welsh tend to choose Welsh partners.

Urban areas are unique cultural zones but such sub-regions can share much with their rural hinterland. In the case of Bristol and Bath there is no physical barrier, so the divider between the two sub-regions, which include their country areas, is equidistant from the two centres. The dividing lines between regions are influenced by physical barriers but rivers can be both a barrier and a conduit. The technique described can be used to define meaningful regions and sub-regions. For example, an examination of parliamentary constituencies shows that boundaries often cut across culturally coherent sub-regions. In south-west Wales, Welsh speaking communities are sometimes divided into two constituencies. Using the partitioning techniques described above, boundaries can be re-drawn to reflect coherent cultural communities in the present day. The same technique, concentrating on modularity in migration patterns, gives rise to more meaningful regions for the demographic study of communities in the past.

The second paper on *'Studying the stayers: the stable population of a small town over two hundred years'* was given by Lyn Boothman from the University of Cambridge. Lyn studied Long Melford, a large parish on the Suffolk–Essex border, between the years of 1661 and 1861. This is a small town, which was involved in the textile industry from the 1350s. The surrounding area is mixed agricultural, mainly arable but pastoral on the flood plain. The textile industry was in decline from the end of the eighteenth century but there was a revival in the town's fortunes in the 1840s. To analyse her data Lyn identified four groups of stayers. First, individuals or couples with at least one set of grandparents resident in the town were designated third generation. A second group, second generation with at least one set of parents but no grandparents, was identified as local residents. Other groups were based on the length of time spent in Long Melford: those who had moved in and spent at least 30 years in the parish and those who were born in the parish and stayed for 30 years or more. These four groups constituted all of the 'long stayers'. Three periods were singled out for extended study using extra sources: 1661–91, 1753–83 and 1831–61.

The results were presented as a series of bar charts and the conclusions were summarised. The proportion of third generation individuals and couples, with at least one set of grandparents in the town, increased over the three periods but those with a shorter connection to the town, second generation, decreased, indicating that people who were already in the town stayed but fewer new families were arriving, as one would expect in an area where the main industry was in decline. The proportion of parishioners staying in the parish for more than 30 years increased between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but decreased between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, another indication that the textile industry was struggling. However, the highest proportion of marriages within the parish was in the nineteenth century, indicating an increase in inter-relationships and a consolidation of families already in the village.

Lyn then identified four classes: (1) aristocracy; (2) gentry; (3) middle class and (4) working class. The aristocracy and gentry declined proportionately over the three periods while there was an increase in the labouring people. In the seventeenth century, groups one and two met the same stability criteria as the general population. During the move to greater industrialisation, 1831–61, the largest stable group was second generation in-comers in tertiary industry belonging to the upper two social classes.

Contrary to received wisdom that the labouring classes lived in nuclear households, kinship links were strong and increasingly so in the lowest social group. In fact, such households could be described as dynamic, with people constantly moving in and out in response to changing economic circumstances. In the same period, 1831–61, kinship links in the upper class declined. In conclusion, Lyn cited the case of Joseph Theobald. He lived from 1802 to 1872 and his life illustrates the longevity of some families residence in the town. His family can be traced back in Long Melford for nine generations before him and descendants live in the town today—his namesake runs a successful local business.

The final paper on *'Historical demography and population history: different approaches to the declining fertility of the industrial working classes in the late nineteenth century'* was given by Paul Atkinson of the University of Huddersfield. Paul pointed out that the early approaches to studying fertility decline in the nineteenth century were purely demographic. More recently, the focus has been on sociological indicators such as family strategies and parental sentiments. He suggested that the best strategy is to blend these two strands together. Paul did this by examining three contrasting towns, Middlesborough (dependent on heavy industry), Bradford (wool and textiles) and Leeds (a mix of industry and commerce), concentrating on identifying cultural communities and the relationship between husbands and wives. Sources used include eighteenth and early nineteenth century censuses for household structure and cultural information from written sources such as local newspapers. Paul used the proportion of children under five to the number of women of fertile age which, while not perfect, gives a good indication of fertility in the general population.

The decline in fertility started in the 1870s in Bradford, in Leeds and Middlesborough in the 1880s. Fertility dropped most quickly in Bradford and stayed highest in Middlesborough over the whole of the late nineteenth century. An important factor in this fertility decline was the growth of female occupations, a clear factor in Bradford where the textile industry employed large numbers of women. In Middlesborough, women were marrying earlier than in the other areas. Late age of first marriage is seen as a way of limiting family size so it is not surprising that the highest fertility rates are seen in the north-east. In Leeds and Bradford there was a change in the mix of people present resulting in an excess of women. These changes in age and sex structure are a function of the labour market, as illustrated by Middlesborough where the needs of heavy industry lead to an excess of men. The imbalance in the sexes can lead to differences in the way men and women negotiate fertility, with the more numerous gender having the greater say.

These demographic results were then amplified by looking at attitudes to family using newspaper reports and working class autobiographies. These sources showed a change to more affectionate parenting and a longer period of childhood. Fertility was restrained in order to improve the life chances of existing children. Childhood was gradually constructed as being more dependent and extending into the teens. Another factor was the attitude of landlords in 'decent' areas, who would not let to larger families. Late nineteenth century working class parents made choices, which reflected changing sentiments, and this drove demographic changes. Paul concluded by suggesting that all good studies should use a mixture of numerical and written sources—the balance being dependent on the focus of the study.

Our keynote talk, *'Local Population Studies: familiar ground and new opportunities'*, was given by Steve King of the University of Leicester. Steve opened by remembering a meeting in Liverpool at which he spoke 20 years ago. At that meeting he challenged the then current emphasis on numerical data at the cost of the wider picture. He proceeded to outline some current research projects which employ a rich variety of sources. These are: Jeremy Boulton on pauper lives; Kevin Schürer, digitising the census; Rebecca Probert, rethinking co-habitation; Joanne Bailey, family relationships and Steve himself, courtship. He pointed out that these studies are redrawing the boundaries of the questions which may be asked of the data.

He then identified four issues for local population studies: questioning the paradigms; challenging Wrigley and Schofield; the distinctiveness of England and Wales as against Europe; and the fall in the age of first marriage. He posited that Wrigley and Schofield did not have enough evidence to reach meaningful conclusions in two respects. The Cambridge Group practised 'pure demography' which excluded many important sources of data. There is a dearth of family reconstitutions for urban and industrial areas. One area in which these deficiencies are obvious is in the study of mortality. Peter Razzell has found that while the reporting of baptisms is reliable, burial records are inadequate. In pauper records 98 per cent of baptisms are present while the figure for burials is only 48 per cent. The disjunction is greatest for children, for those in urban areas and those in the north. Wrigley and Schofield's explanation of the rise in fertility in the eighteenth century is also in doubt. Their explanation that this was the result of a falling age of first marriage does not stand up to close scrutiny. Most of the effect is due to the disappearance of a class of 'persistently late marryers', the majority of marriages in 1810 took place at about the same age as those in 1750. Steve emphasised that there is often a greater nuance in behaviour than the figures suggest, for example, late marrying families beget late marrying families.

In order to move on, projects need to involve an element of 'added value'. He then outlined some of these. Jill Caine studying migration in Lincolnshire identified spheres of interaction (people in Skegness have many links to the north of the town but few to the south as there are poor road connections to the south). Beryl Loughran examining community turnover in Northamptonshire recognised an increasing polarisation of

communities leading to the creation of dynasties. Kim Price mapped regional variations in poor law negligence and by bringing together disparate pieces of research a clearer picture emerges. Steve is also using coroners' reports to look at issues of courtship, particularly the effect of jealousy.

Steve then considered how greater progress could be made by 'looking at the latent'. It is more meaningful to define families in terms of kinship rather than relationships, when studying fertility and mortality. Pauper letters show that this group has dense kinship networks. They live in 'fluid' rather than nuclear households. Another fertile field would be the construction of new agendas, for instance the study of disability. A study has been carried out looking at four categories, blind, deaf, dumb and insane. It was found that there is no universality in the understanding of individual disability. This particularly applies to insanity in which definitions widely vary, whether mental impairments such as 'simple minded' are included, as do attitudes to disability. Such differences can be seen in regional distributions on a map of historically reported disability.

In conclusion Steve noted that that when building models, 'noise' can be tolerated in the short term, but it is still important to continue to look for patterns. Finally, he called for more 'public history'. There is a need to communicate agendas more widely and always to try to look outwards.

Session 2: Medicine and welfare

The first paper was Sally Tye's *'The re-enchantment of the eighteenth-century Westminster workhouse'*. Her paper looked at the role of religion in the Westminster workhouses and, in particular, its importance in the discussion of welfare support. She argued that religion has been overlooked as an important influence in the development of pauper provision. Sally has been looking at the early eighteenth-century workhouse and its fight against immorality among the working poor. Many historians have suggested that the need for medical provision and cost meant that ideas of reform were soon abandoned. She suggested that this is why religious influence is not often mentioned in relation to poor law development.

The workhouses discussed included St George's Hanover Square, which was designed and developed by the SPCK. It was established in 1726 and housed around 600 inmates. Religion played a key role from the start, as prayers were read, lessons (catechism) taught and services provided. St Margaret's also spent money on religious items throughout the first half of the century as there is evidence of payment for clergy and a schoolmaster. She concluded that these were Anglican workhouses, but appeared to be tolerant of Protestant Dissenters. The evidence relating to the positions of Catholics is limited, although it was stated that apprentices could not be placed with a Catholic employer. Religion played an important part in the Westminster workhouses, even in the face of economic concerns, and expanded alongside the medical provision.

Rosemary Leadbeater's paper on *'Smallpox amongst Oxfordshire families in the eighteenth century'* started by outlining the nature of the disease which saw mortality of up to 70 per cent and no effective treatment: neither was it a disease restricted to the poor. Her research has focused on the eighteenth century and she produced a map of traceable smallpox deaths. This had been completed using burial records for 82 per cent of parishes in Oxfordshire (the remainder are part complete) and where the cause of death was given as smallpox. She stated that this was not an absolute account due to the nature of the source material. In addition she produced a table for Oxfordshire comparing smallpox burials with the total, annual and average number of burials. Thus, for example, in 1758 in Burford 75 per cent of all burials for that year (a total of 185) were attributed to smallpox and the average annual figure for burials was 36. In addition it appears that the disease was contained within parishes as those next to Burford did not exhibit higher burial numbers.

A number of graphs and data illustrated the paper showing the burials by regions and variations within the regions, and revealed that many areas remained constant throughout the period. This was supplemented with data for households in Banbury in 1718–19 and 1731–33. Male deaths between the two periods fell from 24 per cent to 14 per cent of the total and children's deaths rose from 57 per cent to 65 per cent. By analysing family reconstitutions and parish registers, Rosemary has been able to identify 75 families in the first outbreak and 62 families in the second who had suffered at least one death. The information was able to supplement the previous data: for example if there was one parental death, 85 per cent of children survived. The first outbreak lasted 11 months and the second 23 months. In only one case did the records show the death of both parents from a total of 137 families identified.

The final paper in the third session was provided by Carl Whiting, entitled *'The poor laws and the Bristol Corporation of the Poor, as represented within the Bristol press, 1819–1847'*. He outlined that the previous focus on the work of the provincial press has been on the opposition to the New Poor Law, especially in the North of England. He believes that there has been no study of the poor law prior to 1834 based on the provincial press.

Bristol had six newspapers in press during this period, but there is a general dearth of information regarding the poor law as the archives were destroyed during the Second World War. The evidence, from the archives, shows that there was a discussion in the corporation but not on the ideological background to the poor law, except on a couple of occasions. The main issue for discussion was the poor rate and its steady increase, especially the rapid increase after the Napoleonic Wars. More interest was generated by the issues of Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill. These issues were not seen in ideological terms prior to 1834. Carl emphasised the limit on space as there were only four pages in the publication and they needed to cover the above issues, local news and advertisements. It was not an issue of note. The 1834 Act had a mixed reaction in the press, dividing it on political lines. There was opposition to the inhumanity of the proposals and

the loss of local autonomy, which may lead to higher rates. It was, however, a minority concern. Of the press editorials studied, 22 were on Catholic Emancipation and only 6 on poor law reform. In summary, there was no ideological debate in the provincial press and this may explain why there was no anti-poor law movement in the Bristol area.

Session 3: Local communities

The 'Local communities' panel presented two very insightful papers from early career researchers, which together made a powerful case for the importance of studies of the localities in understanding rural and urban populations. Julie Moore, from the University of Hertfordshire gave a paper entitled, *'Silk hats, counter-jumpers and the rural experience. The county of Hertfordshire, 1880–1914'*, which explored the perceptions and practices of newly wealthy and professional urban incomers to the county of Hertfordshire from 1880 to 1914, when the county was in the grip of agricultural depression. Their influx was facilitated by excellent rail networks with London with professional commuters mostly settling in the districts around Watford, Barnet and Cheshunt. Julie challenged the view that urban-centred landowners treated their new rural environment as playgrounds and had little sense of local obligation. Instead, she found that they took up local office, and invested their money and time on amenities, building and restoring churches, funding healthcare facilities, and public parks and village halls. Julie showed that these commercial millionaires' activities were shaped by a very clear, if nostalgic and idealised, model of 'traditional' paternalist relationships and duties and an aesthetic vision of rural heritage. Though less wealthy, the professional families who settled near the railway stations shared this nostalgia for a rural idyll, settling in newly built Tudorbethan style villas—romantically named cottages, which were marketed as bringing rural leisure pursuits to the merchants, brokers, and lawyers keen to move to the country.

Julie's paper not only offered insights into the interaction between urban and rural living, it showed how different demographic experience was between town and country, even in one county. Determining the size of provincial urban populations is, of course, a difficult task. The final paper of the session, by Graham Butler, from the University of Newcastle, entitled, *'"Bills, Bills and more Bills"? An investigation into the Newcastle and Gateshead Bills of Mortality, 1736–1848'*, helped shed more light on achieving this objective using Bills of Mortlaity. The London Bills are perhaps the most well-studied of such sources and have alerted demographic historians to the problems of their baptism and burial data, from their inconsistency when compared to parish registers with respect to under-registration. Mortality Bills' provincial counterparts are far less investigated. Graham presented some valuable findings from his research on the Newcastle and Gateshead Bills which he collected from the local press. These Bills covered four major parishes in Newcastle and two in Gateshead. Graham showed that the Bills of Mortality contained more burials than those listed in the parish registers and, crucially, has been able to explain this as the result of the 'Ballast Hills effect'. This burial ground outside Newcastle city walls, formed

originally from the ballast dumped by ships, was used from the late seventeenth century to 1853 to bury nonconformists and, thanks to its extremely cheap rates, the poor. Though the burial registers for Ballast Hills do not exist, the Bills of Mortality include their burials, which neatly account for the shortfall in the parish register data. Crucially, Graham's paper demonstrated that local studies of demography are absolutely essential in order to flesh out our understanding of national demography: analysing data from Anglican parishes alone is not reliable.

Lively discussions, which continued throughout the lunch and coffee breaks, followed each session. Thanks to all our speakers for the efforts they made to make day interesting, lively and rewarding. Thanks are also due to Sally Tye and Karen Rothery for ensuring that our visit to Oxford ran smoothly and efficiently.

Mary Cook
Rowena Burgess
Joanne Bailey