



A reception was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013 to celebrate the move of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social structure to become an interdisciplinary research centre shared between the Department of Geography and the Faculty of History as of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013



### ***Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure***

**Baptised: 1964**  
**Married: 2013**  
**Buried: TBA**  
**Family Size: 53\***

*\*53 Ph.D. theses completed to date*

**Welcome to the reception: Speeches at 5.30**

As of the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 the Cambridge Group for the History of Population became an interdisciplinary research centre shared between the departments of Geography and the Faculty of History after 12 years in the Department of Geography. The move to becoming an inter-school research centre has facilitated a significant expansion of the Group and a reception was held in the Senior Combination Room at the Old Schools to celebrate.



Dr Alice Reid



**Dr Alice Reid (Geography) began the formal proceedings with a short speech, the text of which follows:**

‘The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure was founded nearly 50 years ago by a geographer (Tony

Wrigley) and a historian (Peter Laslett). This event today is not an anniversary - there will be an anniversary conference next year for that - but a celebration of it becoming for the first time a truly interdisciplinary unit with strong links to both history and geography. In its early days the group was a stand-alone unit funded by the SSRC/ESRC, and then spent a decade affiliated to the history faculty before joining the geography department. Being attached to a department or faculty offers great advantages: notably computer and administrative support, the potential for more collaboration, and teaching opportunities which can generate interest among a new



generation of scholars. In these respects being physically part of a department is crucial, so we are really pleased that our new arrangements will provide these benefits for both our economic historians in the history faculty and our demographers in the geography department. We will of course continue to run interdisciplinary research projects, seminar series, and our all important coffee time as a joint enterprise, and we hope that some of you will be able to join us in some of these activities. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Alice Reid and I have been at the group for 21 years, having come first as a research assistant, studied for my PhD and am now a Senior Research Associate. The group's supportive and friendly atmosphere has been a key factor in its success in fostering my career and those of many others too and I am confident that these new arrangements will continue to encourage new generations of specialists in the history of population and social structure.’



Dr Leigh Shaw-Taylor



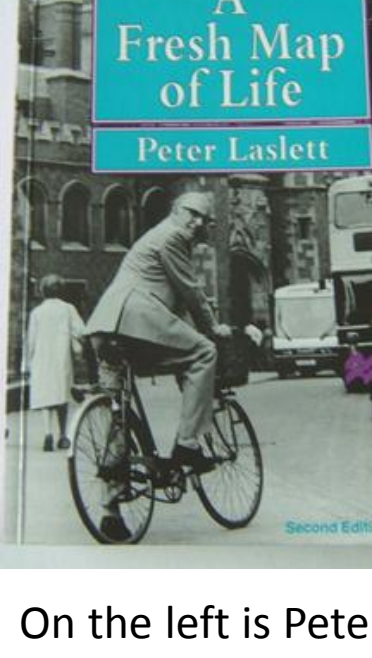
**Dr Leigh Shaw-Taylor (History), director of the Group then spoke as follows:**

‘It is a great pleasure to see so many people here this evening, especially considering the reminder email I sent out to many of you this morning, with directions telling people to turn right through the door on the left when they arrived. It is especially good to see two former directors of the Group, Roger Schofield and Richard Smith. It is good also to see Kevin

Schurer, a former postdoc at the Group, subsequently the head of the UK Data Archive and now PVC at the University of Leicester, whose recent project to digitise the nineteenth century census returns will form the bedrock of much of the Group's research activities over the next decade. This work will keep the Group at the forefront of historical work on something which is now suddenly sexy and branded as ‘big-data’ but which has been at the centre of the Group's work since its inception nearly fifty years ago. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Leigh Shaw-Taylor. I'm a lecturer in the Faculty of History and I have recently become director of the Group. When I have finished we will leave you free to enjoy this magnificent fifteenth century hall, the champagne and the assembled company until we get turfed out at seven o'clock.



As most of you will know the Group is now a cross-school research centre based in the Department of Geography and the Faculty of History. One purpose of having this reception is to explain how these new arrangements will work but before I do that I want to provide some context by saying something about the history of the Group which won't be familiar to everyone here.



The Group began life in 1964 as a collaborative project between the department of Geography and the Faculty of History since it was founded by the late Peter Laslett, then in the Faculty of History, and Tony Wrigley then a recently appointed lecturer in the department of Geography

On the left is Peter late in life cycling the wrong way down Trinity Street as he had done every day for several decades on his way from the Group to Trinity. On the right is the young Tony Wrigley with his trade mark spectacles.

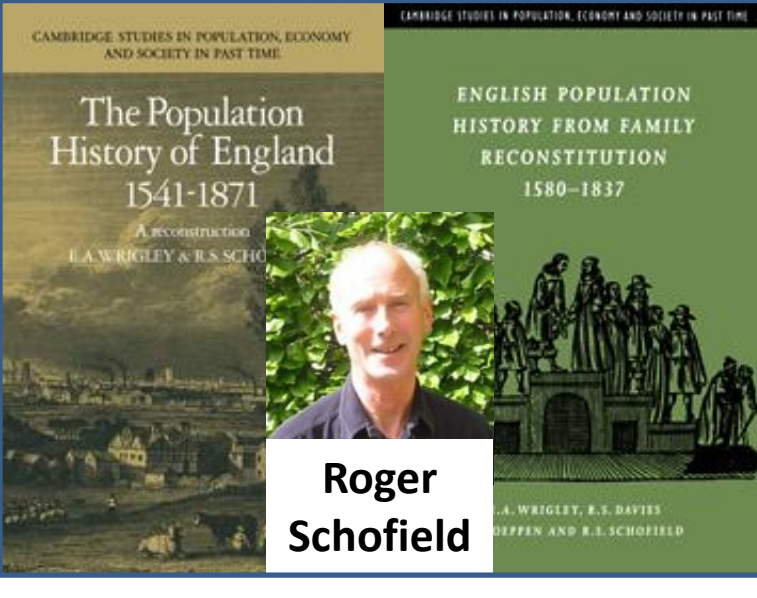
The Cambridge Group was founded to undertake quantitative research in family history and demographic history. The work by Laslett and others pioneered the history of family forms as a major international



field of enquiry supporting a number of scholarly journals.



Generations of undergraduates are familiar with Laslett's and the late Richard Wall's *Household and Family in Past Time* (1972) and *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, ed. R. Wall with P. Laslett and J. Robin (1982).



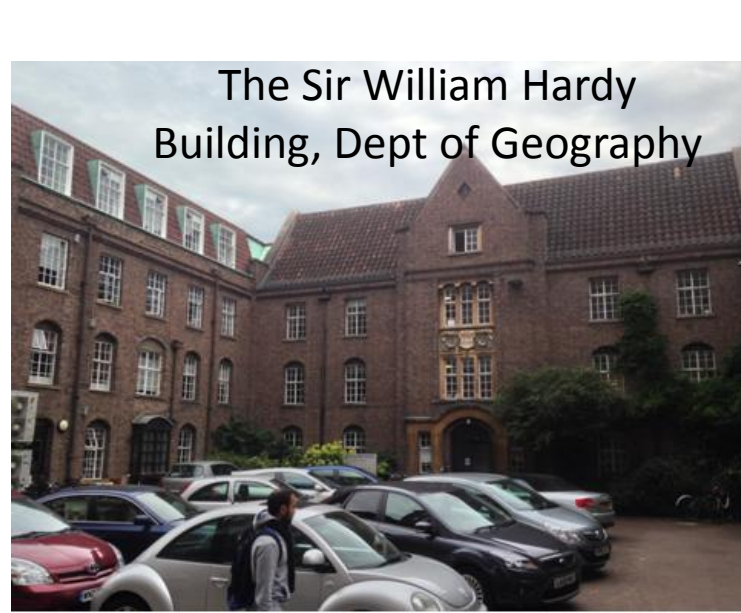
At the same time, work on Anglican parish registers transformed England's population history with E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England: A Reconstruction* (1981, 1989) and E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837* (1997).

The Group received funding from the then Social Science Research Council and became an SSRC Research Centre in 1974 and ceased to be part of the University. At that point the dual role of running the Group and holding a lectureship in the department of Geography became untenable and Tony resigned from his lectureship in the department of Geography thus breaking the link with Geography altogether though three key members of the Group: Tony Wrigley, Richard Smith and Jim Oeppen had begun their careers as Geographers.



In 1990 the Group became affiliated to the Faculty of History. But in 2000 the ESRC finally turned off the funding which had halved in 1995. At that date the Group was faced with closure and was no longer able to pay the rent on its offices at 27 Trumpington Street.

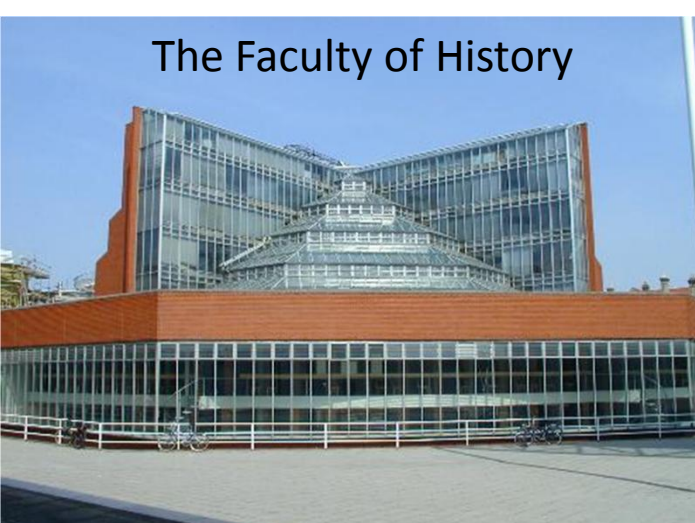
For a while it seemed likely that the Group faced extinction. But the Geography Department, with Andy Cliff then at the helm, stepped in and saved the Group with generous rent-free accommodation, computing facilities and other resources, an act for which we remain profoundly grateful and will not forget.



Under Richard Smith's direction the Group then pursued a different funding model: applying for numerous research grants from a wide range of funding bodies. Whilst continuously nerve wracking, this was a runaway success. I don't have figures all the way back to 2001 but since 2003 the Group has been awarded 46 different grants totalling over £6m and I would like to pay tribute here to Richard's Smith's phenomenal success as director not just in keeping the Group alive but massively expanding its range of research interests without losing its intellectual coherence. Under Richard's tenure the Group grew to be a substantially larger entity than it had been as an ESRC research centre. But despite the Group's success in bringing in research grant income and the accompanying research outputs this funding model left the Group continuously vulnerable to financial collapse and the haemorrhaging of long-term research staff possessed of irreplaceable human capital. Over a long period of time going back probably to 2000 and perhaps earlier the Group has given Richard more sleepless nights than anyone deserves. More recently I have shared in this unwanted privilege. Much of the Group's vulnerability derived from the high ratio of staff on short-term, research-grant-funded contracts to established staff.



The Isaac Newton Trust provided crucial support over the last five years. A relatively modest grant of £240,000 over that period has provided fall-back funding for staff on research contracts. Without that, nearly all of the Group's research officers would have been made redundant and the Group would have been greatly reduced and left without the capacity to bid for further research grant income. For a variety of reasons the last two years have been especially difficult and regrettably we have lost some very long-standing friends and colleagues. But, without the critical support of the Newton Trust it is very unlikely we would have anything to celebrate today.



With the move to being a research centre shared between two departments but retaining a unitary structure, the Group has been able to expand. And I'd like here to give special thanks to Mark Goldie, the History Faculty's outgoing head of department and to Liz Haresnape

for their unstinting efforts to welcome us back into the Faculty and their persistence and imagination in finding us accommodation, resources and much else. All that remains is to install full air conditioning in James Stirling's iconic but spectacularly impractical building and here we have high hopes of the new head of department David Reynolds and the requisite funds from the central administration or perhaps some legally binding directive on humane working conditions from the EU.



Today, in terms of people, the Group is the largest it has ever been. Most of the 'And social structure' element of the Group is now in the Faculty of History with an unprecedented four University Teaching Officers and one Emeritus Professor. These consist of myself; Chris Briggs whose pioneering work on medieval credit and consumption continues Richard Smith's expansion of the Group's remit to encompass the medieval period; Amy Erickson, who has forcefully and effectively put women and gender at the heart of much of the Group's research on occupational structure and Samantha Williams, who, alongside more demographic interests, continues Richard Smith's work on England's precocious cradle to grave welfare system, the pre-1834 poor law; and last but not least, our emeritus Professor Sir Tony Wrigley. This gives the Group a massively improved basis for long-term stability and survival as the UTOs can apply for the full range of research funding much of which non-established research workers, however talented or distinguished are not eligible to apply for.



Globally, Cambridge history is most renowned for two developments in the last fifty years. The first is context dependent intellectual history, pioneered by Peter Laslett, the so called Cambridge School, which remains deeply embedded in the University with its own extensive undergraduate and graduate teaching programme running across two University departments. The second, is the demographic work which has made the Cambridge Group the most distinguished quantitative social science history research centre globally for five decades. The centre of gravity of demographic work remains in the Department of Geography. Many people might think that the demographic history of this country was essentially completed with the publication of the Wrigley, Davies, Oeppen and Schofield volume in 1997 but nothing could be further from the truth. Monumental and definitive in many ways as that work is, like all good research it opened more questions than it answered. The demographic history of the parish register period 1537-1837 remains a major pillar of research activity at the Group and has taken wholly novel directions in recent years with work by Romola Davenport, Peter Kitson, Gill Newton and Richard Smith. Moreover, the Group's research interests in demographic history now cover a much longer time span than 1537-1837. With many others we eagerly await Richard Smith's definitive monograph on the demographic history of the medieval period whilst the nineteenth and early twentieth century remain the focus of work by Alice Reid and Eilidh Garrett.



One criticism of the Group's pioneering work on demography, which had some validity, though it reflected the limited volume of source material available, was the focus on national aggregates and the limited attention given to geography, which was perhaps surprising given that both Tony Wrigley and Jim Oeppen were geographers by training. That slowly began to change after we moved to Geography, largely through the efforts of Max Satchell to bring Geographical Information Systems, or GIS, into the Group's work, first in the long running project on occupational structure that some of us have been working on since 2003 and more recently to the Group's demographic work which has also become profoundly geographical in recent years.

The new arrangements for an intellectually coherent unified research group shared between two departments give us a brighter future than we have enjoyed since the ESRC first cut funding back in 1996. Challenges remain, but there is much to celebrate. It is good to remain in Geography and it is good to be back in History.



Though somehow we managed to end up with a foot in two buildings which everyone agrees aren't fit for purpose and should be demolished.

I want to end by saying something briefly about how the new arrangements will work. In many ways much less has changed than is apparent on the surface. In reality the Group has been a shared entity since 2006 when I was appointed to a lectureship in the Faculty of History. Since that date the Occupational Structure of Britain project which Tony Wrigley and I direct has been shared between both departments an arrangement which has greatly benefitted both departments.

Henceforth the Group will have a director with day to day responsibility for directing the group and representing the Group to the outside world. But the governance of the Group will lie with a management committee consisting primarily of the UTOs and Senior Research Associates in the two departments. Some research projects will sit within one department or the other but many, and probably most, will be shared between the two departments. Staff in the two departments will often be working on more than one research project at a time but REFable research grant income will generally flow through the department where staff are habitually physically located. The Group will remain a unitary entity and I hope we can engineer arrangements, whereby graduate students in one department might be supervised, where it is most appropriate, by supervisors in the other department.

By the end of the year the Group should have five large research grants under consideration at the ESRC, the Wellcome Trust and the Leverhulme Trust. Whilst average success rate with these bodies are between ten and twenty percent the Group's track record with these bodies is approaching an astonishing 90 per cent over the last 12 years. There will be a conference to celebrate the Group's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in September 2013 details of which will be announced soon. The future is bright and, if current demographic trends continue and I pay rather more attention to lifestyle issues, there is a chance I will be able to attend the Group's centenary. Thank you.