DISTRICT OF MOBILE — PORT OF MOBILE

The 3 day of February 1837
We, Ovid G. Sparks, owner of the Slaves named and particularly described in the within MANIFEST, and Aldrich master of the Steam B. So Alabama do solemnly, sincerely, and truly swear, according to the best of our knowledge and belief, that the persons within described were not imported into the United States since the first day of January, 1808, and that, under the laws of the State are held to service and labor. So help us God.

O. G. Sparks
S. Aldrich

PORT OF MOBILE, the 3d day of February 1837 1, JOHN B. HOGAN, Collector of the District of Mobile, do hereby certify that within is a true copy of the original Manifest, or List of Slaves, filed in this Office; and I do hereby further certify that the owner of said Slaves and Aldrich master of the "So Alabama" have this day made oath in manner directed in the ninth section of the act of Congress, passed the second day of March, 1807, prohibiting the importation of Slaves into the United States. I do hereby authorize the said Master to proceed with the said Slaves named as within and being twenty five in number, to the Port of New Orleans.

Given under my hand at the Custom House, MOBILE, the day and year above written.

Thos Stringer
Dy Coll'


Leslie Bradley

The second Local Population Studies Conference attracted some forty members with a wide range of experience from those only just entering the field of local history and local historical demography to others with years of research experience.

We were indeed fortunate in having Peter Laslett, co-founder and co-director of the Cambridge Group, to get the conference off to a good start with his lecture on the Friday evening on 'Growing old in pre-industrial England'. It would not be entirely unfair to describe his lecture as a plea for more vigorous research in a field in which too little is known, but at the same time he ably summarised what is known. Stressing the difference between 'expectation of life' and the actual experience of physiological ageing (which, he suggested, was not too different from modern experience), he first looked at the question 'How many aged people were there?'. Apparently, subject to local and temporal variations, 15-20 per cent of the population in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries might be expected to be over sixty years of age and perhaps 5-6 per cent
over sixty-five. Where did they live? A few would be lodgers, a few would be living with married children, but the great majority, perhaps 80 per cent, would be classed as heads of households, for the extended family was not a common feature of the English family household structure. Mr. Laslett briefly touched upon how the aged were supported and the attitude to them of the established institutions, and then turned to personal relationships. It is, he said, regrettable that so little is known about the relationships between the aged and the young and their attitudes one to the other nor, indeed, about the relationships and attitudes obtaining between the aged and their children or near relatives. Here, he suggested, is a very fruitful field for enquiry and one in which the local research worker should be able to contribute a great deal.

The first group, led by Roger Schofield and Richard Wall, was concerned with 'The household and family in local research'. In the first session Roger described the sources available from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century not only for population estimates but for gaining some insight into the structure of the family and the experience of individuals — chantry certificates, ecclesiastical enquiries, taxation returns, census documents as well as parish registers — exhibiting and discussing copies of several of them in some detail and stressing their variability in reliability and in the amount and nature of the information which they convey. Turning to their use for population estimates, he discussed the multipliers needed to convert aggregative totals for more or less well-defined sections of the population into overall population estimates and the degree of under-registration which might be expected in parish registers at various periods.

The second session, led by Richard, was concerned with the information which could be gleaned about individuals from nominative documents — how many, for example, of those named in one list appeared in the next list say ten years later, whether non-appearance in the later list was due to death or migration, the extent and distance of migration. In general and for obvious reasons it is usually difficult to trace the movement of other than heads of households. The very detailed information given in Marriage Duty Act returns was discussed. Finally Mrs. Pickles contributed an interesting account of the very extensive research into mid-Wharfedale in which, amongst other issues, she has traced population changes and related them to the economic circumstances of the area.

The third session turned our attention to household structure. Richard outlined the scheme of categories which Peter Laslett has proposed for this kind of analysis. Copies of the 1851 census for the parish of Grotton, Suffolk, enabled members of the group to attempt to apply this classification and raised a number of difficulties which led to lively discussion. One point emerged clearly, that no such scheme could fail to produce anomalies. These would as a rule be peripheral research, to modify the classificatory scheme. A notable example cited was that of Sunderland. At the time of a census many husbands could be away at sea on long voyages. Technically, then, the wives would be the head of the household at the time of the census and strict application of the Laslett rules to the census would be seriously misleading.
The fourth and final session was devoted to social and occupational analysis. Richard outlined the schemes proposed by Laslett and Armstrong for social, and by Laslett, Wrigley and Armstrong for occupational classification. Here again discussion of a specific case provoked objections and discussion, particularly on the point that these occupational schemes obscure very important status differences within each group. The session ended with a most interesting description by Barry Stapleton of what might be described as a very extended multi-generational family reconstitution in which he combined a great deal of information from more than sixty separate sources — a sort of family tree — to which information had been added on social and economic circumstances.

The second seminar group, led by Christopher Charlton and Derek Turner, studied the techniques of aggregative analysis and of family reconstitution and related the requirements of these research techniques to the educational objectives and needs of the various age groups likely to be working in this area. It was generally agreed that parish register studies could offer interesting and useful work at almost all levels in the educational system provided a means could be found of breaking down the necessary tasks into convenient and small units. The value of register and census analysis to the local historian whose interest in these sources was more general than that of the historical demographer was discussed at some length, as were the methods by which demographic data could be integrated with information from other local historical sources.

One session was devoted to the methods open to groups interested in analysing the 1841, 1851, 1861 or 1871 census enumerators’ books. Here again it was stressed that groups will frequently require results of some kind after a comparatively small investment of time and effort. It was pointed out that this need not necessarily invalidate the quality of the research as with careful planning and strict control of the group’s progress it should be possible to bring together a number of limited studies. As in seminar 1, occupational analysis received attention and like seminar 1, it was generally felt that hard and fast rules must be subjected to careful scrutiny before they were adopted. Indeed, for many groups the analysis of the underlying logic of the Armstrong or any other system would be itself a valuable educational experience, particularly if it grew out of the genuine problems encountered in handling census information. A good deal of time was spent discussing practical issues such as useful books and pamphlets and, more important, how far parish register and census studies in schools, colleges and adult groups can survive in an increasingly hostile economic climate in which the cost of photocopying has risen alarmingly and to which, who knows, the new policy of the Church Commissioners on fees for searching parish registers may be about to contribute a serious blow. However overall the seminar took an optimistic view of the future for group research in this field, particularly where it could be related to other historical studies.

Saturday evening was devoted to ‘New projects in local studies’. Roger briefly outlined the conclusions which were emerging from the Cambridge Group’s 600 parish aggregations and the twelve family reconstitutions which have been made for carefully selected parishes. He outlined a long
list of topics on which the Group is researching or would like to research and in which they would like others to research; saturation local studies of several adjacent parishes; epidemics; courting customs and illegitimacy; the role of lodgers; the household structure of ethnic minorities; family structure in medieval England and, indeed, other medieval studies. This was followed by a lively session in which other members of the conference gave brief accounts of the work on which they were engaged. Many of us felt that this exchange of ideas was one of the highlights of the conference and few will forget Mary Turner's racy account of her work on a district of Manchester.

Saturday afternoon was left free for members, if they wished, to explore the neighbourhood. Some of us for example found Castle Ashby and especially its pictures quite absorbing. It says much for the devotion of conference members that the majority turned up after tea for the business meeting. According to the constitution of the Local Population Studies Society, the conference should have been the occasion for replacing the steering committee by a permanent committee. It appeared however that those members of the Society present formed such a small proportion of the total membership of around 180 that it was decided to do no more than accept nominations for the committee and shortly seek further nominations and conduct a postal ballot. Derek Turner explained the operation of the Book Club and imparted the unwelcome news of his imminent retirement from its management. A successor was appointed until such time as the newly elected committee should take over — and there will be more about this later. Turning to the affairs of the journal, a brief outline was given of the progress of the journal and of its associated publications — Original parish registers in record offices and libraries, The first supplement to original parish registers in record offices and libraries which will be published shortly and The Plague reconsidered: a new look at its origins and effects in sixteenth and seventeenth century England which will be published in the autumn — and of some future plans. A number of suggestions were made for consideration by the editorial board.

The heat of the sun — and the heat of the discussions — clearly led to some powerful thirsts and if the quality of the local beer was disappointing, that cannot be laid at the door of the conference organisers. Certainly we all owe our thanks to the organisers of this very successful conference (I was not one of them, so that I can properly say this!) and to those who bore the brunt of leading the seminars and discussions, and not least to the Warden and staff of Knuston Hall for looking after our material comfort. As usual the personal contacts made outside the formal meetings contributed greatly to the value of the conference and I am left with the impression that all of us, however great or small our experience in local population studies, found interest and stimulus in our gathering.