RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

A SURVEY AND GUIDE OF LISTINGS OF INHABITANTS

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I believe that one of the greatest challenges presented to the professional historian in recent years is how to harness to the advancement of demographic studies the work of the rapidly expanding number of amateur family historians in Britain. That much of the family reconstructions being attempted by beginners in that field do not meet the exacting standards demanded by demographers is undeniable, though there are also an increasing number of highly experienced researchers whose work I suspect does achieve this and which is barely being utilised at all in social history studies. Some demographers who are desirous of closer co-operation may be at a loss to know how this can be achieved, since the majority of family historians have been inclined to sit back and wait for demographers to approach them, and do not always appear to be overkeen to participate in professionally directed research projects but have preferred to organise their own projects mainly in the transcribing and indexing of record sources. Though some ground can be gained preparing family historians to be receptive to approaches by demographers, and others and myself are trying to achieve this, there remains something of a divide between the two disciplines.

Though co-operation in advanced studies may some day be attainable, I believe that the level at which we should aim initially is in joint ventures in the cataloguing of basic record sources which are used to different ends by both demographers and family historians. That such catalogues would be of value to local historians, who in many instances have already achieved a close contact, is also important. Of course sales of copies of the LPS series of Original parish registers in record offices and libraries to family historians has been considerable, whilst many demographers have purchased research guides published by the Federation of Family History Societies. Yet what I mean is the pooling of knowledge whilst such guides are being prepared for publication. A compromise would however have to be reached on how sources are presented, as the needs of and terminology used by demographers and family historians can be very different.

One of the subjects most urgently in need of a joint approach has been listings of inhabitants, where a considerable amount of duplication of effort has already occurred. Since the early 1960s demographers have been trying to locate comprehensive inhabitants lists dated before 1841, and a considerable archive of copies had been accumulated by the Cambridge Group. Yet mainly in the last decade, listings have also been, so to speak, 'discovered' by family historians seemingly unaware of demographic research in this field. A number of surveys
have been made going over much the same ground as had previously been covered by demographers, although interestingly the occasional new discoveries have been made, particularly from parish records recently deposited in record offices. Some leading family historians had made surveys much earlier, such as Don Steel for Berkshire in 1968, and curiously he had located and described at that time the very detailed listings for Hungerford of 1825 and 1828 which until 1989 were unknown to the Cambridge Group. Parallel research for listings has been undertaken by demographers and family historians for more than two decades, without each being apparently aware of the other's interest in them. Such an extraordinary situation seemed to me to be the ideal subject for a joint approach; there are I believe some others that could benefit from such treatment.

One of the most marked features of the explosion of interest in amateur family history research, has been an insatiable demand for detailed guides to record sources. Jeremy Gibson, in his series of Federation of Family History Societies guides, familiar to many demographers, has been one of the leaders amongst those who have tried to satisfy this appetite. His dual approach of presenting raw source material in a clear and concise way, arranged by counties and the repositories where the original documents are held, with details of printed and other copies and where located, and of publishing of short print runs, which enable guides to be continually updated and improved in reprints and new editions, seems to be a winning combination, and I felt this to be the ideal vehicle for a guide to listings. It was also fortuitous that I had already combined with Jeremy in a guide to militia records, and that some of his guides had already touched upon listings, such as some Marriage Duty Act assessments catalogued in his *Hearth Taxes*, and 1801-31 nominal lists in his *1841-81 censuses on microfilm*. Though initially Jeremy felt that listings was too slight a subject for a guide on its own, the inclusion of some other types of nominal lists, such as Easter books and communicants lists in England and Wales, examination rolls for Scotland and lists of protestant and catholic church members in Ireland, and the extension of the period of survey to 1930, excluding civil censuses but charting Victorian and later incumbents visiting books, should extend this sufficiently for such treatment.

My listings survey over the past three years is nearly completed, at least in preparation of the initial first edition, which it is hoped will appear in 1992 or early 1993. Throughout my research I have maintained close contact with the Cambridge Group and a number of individual demographers, as well as many people in the family history sphere.

After a thorough investigation of listings mentioned in demographic and family and local history books and journals, and the inclusion of all material in the Cambridge Group's listings files, it had been hoped that a circular letter sent round to record offices and libraries for further information, with limited personal attendances at some of them would have been sufficient. Yet it became clear from the experience of Dr Paul Laxton of Liverpool University, in his listings survey in the 1970s, and those of Jeremy Gibson later, that such a method was inadequate, as many archivists simply do not have time to prepare detailed surveys of their holdings of nominal lists, and without a
careful perusal of each document they are unable to evaluate which of these might qualify as listings. Being a family historian, not versed in the exacting standards demanded by demographers, I may not have been the ideal person to undertake such surveys. However, unlike the majority of professional demographers who have too many other commitments to coteplate these on such a scale - a bare minimum of seventy record offices to visit throughout Britain, and many more to contact by letter - I was willing to do this, and as a professional genealogist for some twenty years, I had already gained a reasonable degree of knowledge of record sources, to assess which of these might yield up listings.

At the rate of two or three record offices a month, for the past two and a half years I have used my best endeavours to complete this survey. Although a few documents may have been unjustifiably claimed as listings, which do not stand up to the test of demographic analysis, the experience gained of examining literally hundreds of documents, many rejected amongst those I accepted, I hope has achieved a reasonably accurate result.

Although demographers may consider it unnecessary, I have succeeded in relocating all the original documents from which the Cambridge Group’s copies were made, apart from a few in private hands. I thought it desirable that family historians should not need to approach the Cambridge Group for information on these, and this in the long term is in the Group’s interest too, so that they are not deflected from their primary role of advancing demographic studies. This relocation also had one benefit that was initially unforeseen, that in a few cases additional listings were found in the same original collections. For example, I found one for Leverton, Lincolnshire for 1755, in an earlier part of the incumbents memoranda book from which a 1762 listing had been copied for the Cambridge Group. I have not made a detailed survey of most university archives, as I trust that the majority of usable material has already been located by professional demographers, and copies forwarded to the Cambridge Group. A number of people have found listings in national and local authority libraries, and I have done what I can to survey them, though I suspect that more material may in time be revealed.

Of the 954 listings dated before 1841 which my survey has located in addition to those held by or known to the Cambridge Group, I would agree that the majority date from after 1801, or are not of the detailed type most sought after in demographic studies, although I think some may achieve that standard, particularly for Scotland where few had been previously traced. From the start of my survey I have supplied details on these to the Cambridge Group, and I have left it to their superior knowledge of analytical techniques to decide which ones they consider to be of most value, and no doubt in due course they will be able to recommend these to reseachers. My survey did not incorporate such an analysis, but has categorised listings into three broad groups: those which appear to name all inhabitants in a community, those additionally giving ages or birthdates, and those enumerating the population, but which do not name all people, usually only householders. Such an arrangement may appear to demographers to be naive and simplistic, and omitting categories such as those giving relationships and occupations which would have been useful to
know, but this is regrettably required for a brief condensed presentation of such sources to a wider public.

I hope nevertheless that this printed guide will be of some use to demographers, and that you will be able to assist me with amendments and discoveries as these come to light. Simple amendments such as incorrect reference numbers cannot of course be established until the first edition is printed. There are however other types of amendments I would like to know of, such as new evidence on the dating of certain listings. Others thought to be comprehensive may be proven to be imperfect - it is actually a rare occurrence to be able to prove this. In my survey I have purposely included the occasional imperfect listing, but generally only those which were intended to be complete when compiled but have since lost some portion of them - these may contain limited data unobtainable elsewhere. That these are incomplete will however be carefully recorded in the guide. It is difficult to know how many new discoveries there are to be made. Past evidence suggests that there may be some listings still in private hands, either dispersed from parish chests or in landed estate muniments. Some may directly come to the knowledge of the Cambridge Group or university archives which the appropriate county record office never hears about. The interest of historians in listings is a relatively recent phenomena, which was not anticipated when some record office and library catalogues were compiled. This can mean that some listings have long been held in depositories, but nobody knows they are there. The old catalogues of the British Library and Bodleian Library, compiled when demography was barely recognised as a subject for study, are perhaps the least helpful. Demographers have however achieved a great reputation for persistently seeking out and occasionally finding such elusive material, with the generous assistance of many archivists, and I very much hope this diligent quest will continue. By carefully charting those that have already been found I hope my guide will assist to that end.

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