

Sir Tony Wrigley's Contribution to Local Population Studies¹

Andrew Hinde²

Sir Tony Wrigley, who died in February 2022, was, together with Peter Laslett, the founder of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (CAMPOP). With Roger Schofield and other colleagues at CAMPOP he wrote two of the most important books on the population history of England: E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: a Reconstruction* (London, 1981); and E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oeppen and R.S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1830* (Cambridge, 1997). The research for the first of these volumes led to the foundation of the Local Population Studies Society and this journal.

Tony Wrigley's intellectual and academic contributions were not limited to population history or historical demography. He began his academic life as a geographer, and wrote a chapter for one of the collections of papers edited by R.J. Chorley and P. Haggett which tried to synthesise the scientific and analytical approaches to that discipline.³ He also published several books on aspects of the industrial revolution, and made major contributions to economic and social history.⁴ These and his other achievements have been well documented in the obituaries that have been published over the last year. In this appreciation of his work, I want to focus on his impact on local population studies in general and,

1 <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps109.2022.12>.

2 Andrew Hinde: PRAHinde@aol.com.

3 E.A. Wrigley, 'Changes in the philosophy of geography', in R.J. Chorley and P. Haggett (eds) *Frontiers in Geographical Teaching* (London, 1965), pp. 3-20.

4 See, for example, E.A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth: the Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford, 1987); E.A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: the Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1988); and E.A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010); E.A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth in early modern England: food, fuel and transport', *Past and Present* 225 (2014), pp. 79-112; E.A. Wrigley, 'Reconsidering the industrial revolution: England and Wales', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 49 (2018), pp. 9-42; E.A. Wrigley, *The Path to Sustained Growth: England's Transition from an Organic Economy to an Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2016).

latterly, to say a few words about his role in the development of this journal *Local Population Studies* in particular.

Researchers undertake studies of the populations of local areas for many reasons. For some, learning about the population of their own village or town is an end in itself but many (probably most) have an interest in comparing the experiences of their chosen locality with the broader picture at the regional or national level. A problem for population history, at least for the period before civil registration and the first 'modern' censuses, was that the regional and national patterns and trends were not clear so there was no obvious point of comparison. It was the genius of Tony Wrigley and his colleagues at CAMPOP to realise that, if a sufficient number of local studies could be undertaken in a consistent way, a national picture could be constructed by pooling the data they produced. This would then provide a yardstick with which to compare individual local experiences, both those which contributed to the national picture and new local studies which might emerge. This was the logic behind *The Population History of England 1541-1871: a Reconstruction*, based on counts of baptisms, marriages and burials for 404 parishes scattered across England.

The details of what was produced in *The Population History of England* will be well known to readers of *Local Population Studies*. Suffice to say that the result was a coherent picture of population trends in England from the mid-sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries which was consistent with what we knew of the population both before (though this was not very much) and after that period. The book also produced an analysis of the components of population change, and especially the roles of fertility, mediated by marriage, and mortality in effecting changes in population numbers. It remains the standard point of comparison for any local researcher wishing either to validate his or her results, or to ascertain whether the locality being investigated was 'typical' of other places across the country.

For researchers in some topics, the time taken to gather and process data has meant that it was only practicable to study a small (local) population. This was the case with those topics which could only be examined after painstakingly constructing collective biographies of the individuals and families living in a specific locality, linking together vital events (births, marriages and deaths) so as to produce a collective family history. A good example of this is fertility within marriage, which requires the construction of birth histories, and which was the subject of one of Tony Wrigley's earliest publications in population history.⁵ Wrigley's contribution here was twofold. First, he adapted for the English data the rules first devised by the French demographer Louis Henry to reconstruct (or 'reconstitute') the

5 E.A. Wrigley, 'Family limitation in pre-industrial England', *Economic History Review* 19 (1966), pp. 82-109.

families.⁶ Initially, this adaptation led to a manual analysis using pieces of paper but Wrigley was involved, later, in developing algorithms for automating the process.⁷ Second, he was the principal investigator on the project which analysed the resulting data sets for a sample of 26 parishes in England (including the Devon parish of Colyton that was the example Wrigley had studied to measure fertility within marriage). This was able to provide a national picture of many aspects of the population history of England that were not able to be analysed in *The Population History of England 1541-1871*. The results of this exercise were published in a second volume: *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1830*. Because the work required for family reconstitution is much more onerous than that required for aggregate analysis, the number of local studies on which the national picture in *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1830* is based is, at 26, much smaller than the 404 employed in *The Population History of England 1541-1871: a Reconstruction*. Nevertheless, these 26 parishes have provided what remains the best overall picture we have of national trends in several demographic characteristics, especially fertility within marriage.

Thus far, the work we have discussed has mainly involved Church of England parish registers as the key source of data. But alongside parish registers, Tony Wrigley had a great interest in census data. This was evident in the 1970s when he edited what was, at that time, a key reference text for anyone analysing data from the nineteenth-century censuses: *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972).⁸ It was, for example, in this book that Alan Armstrong's extension of Charles Booth's classification of nineteenth-century occupations was published, as well as Michael Anderson's rules for identifying and separating households.⁹ Both of these have been routinely used for analysing local populations by generations of subsequent historians.

6 E.A. Wrigley, 'Family reconstitution', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.) *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (London, 1966), pp. 96-159. For the original work by Louis Henry, see E. Gautier and L. Henry, *La Population de Crulai: Paroisse Normande* (Paris, 1958).

7 See E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, 'Nominal record linkage by computer and the logic of family reconstitution', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.) *Identifying People in the Past* (London, 1973), pp. 64-101.

8 For those in the early 1980s analysing data from the census enumerators' books, Wrigley's edited volume was one of the two indispensable books (the other was Richard Lawton's *The Census and Social Structure: an Interpretative Guide to 19th Century Censuses for England and Wales* (London, 1978). Edward Higgs's *Making Sense of the Census: the Manuscript Returns for England and Wales, 1801-1901* (London, 1989) was still some years away.

9 W.A. Armstrong, 'The use of information about occupation', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.) *Nineteenth-Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 191-310; M. Anderson, 'Standard tabulation procedures for the census enumerators' books', in Wrigley, *Nineteenth-Century Society*, pp. 134-45.

In his last contribution to this journal, Wrigley wrote: '[i]t is both simplest, and for some purposes appropriate, to present information in terms of national units when describing and analysing major change, yet much of critical importance to appreciating the nature of the change is concealed if the discussion focuses exclusively on the whole country.'¹⁰ Looking at regional variation, perhaps initially at the county level, can, when combined with knowledge of the national trends, produce additional insights, but then moving to smaller sub-county units 'can prove as valuable in understanding economic and social structure and change in the past as when reviewing county characteristics within an overall national picture'.¹¹

Wrigley was here describing the process he followed in his analysis of the population growth rates of English counties. In the 1840s, John Rickman had published estimates of the populations of English counties from 1570 onwards, calculated using data on the numbers of baptisms, marriages and burials in a sample of parishes at various dates during the early modern period, under the assumption that county-specific baptism, marriage and burial rates had remained constant at their 1801 levels. Wrigley took advantage of the national population estimates published in *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: a Reconstruction* to present new estimates of county populations and compare them with Rickman's estimates.¹²

Perhaps Wrigley's most important and enduring contribution to the analysis of census data, however, is his analysis of the early English censuses, which was published in 2011.¹³ In a book and accompanying CD-ROM, Wrigley prepared a new set of corrected population tables for the first six English censuses of 1801 through 1851 based on both traditional hundreds and ancient counties and on registration districts and sub-districts (which facilitated the integration of these population tables with data for preceding and succeeding periods respectively).¹⁴ The additional potential of the CD-ROM allowed the publication of population totals for geographical units as small as the parish. He also integrated these population estimates for the first half of the nineteenth century with earlier estimates he had made of the populations of English counties between 1600 and 1800.¹⁵ The resulting tables allow an examination of population growth at the sub-

10 E.A. Wrigley, 'The general and the particular', *Local Population Studies* 100 (2018) p. 25, <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps100.2018.25>.

11 Wrigley, 'General and the particular', p. 26.

12 E.A. Wrigley, 'Rickman revisited: the population growth rates of English counties in the early modern period', *Economic History Review* 62 (2009), pp. 711-35.

13 E.A. Wrigley, *The Early English Censuses* (Records of Economic and Social History new series 46) (Oxford, 2011).

14 Wrigley, *Early English Censuses*.

15 E.A. Wrigley, 'Rickman revisited: the population growth rates of English counties in the early modern period' *Economic History Review* 62 (2009), pp. 711-35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.2009.00476.x>.

county level for almost a century, from 1760 to 1851, a period during which England experienced the most rapid population growth in its history. It is also worth mentioning Wrigley's contribution to the Occupational Structure of Britain c. 1379-1911 project at CAMPOP. This project aims to chart the occupational structure of the country over more than five centuries, and is another example of research which emphasises local patterns within the national context.¹⁶

It is clear from the foregoing examples of his work that Tony Wrigley made a substantial direct contribution to the study of regional and local populations. Perhaps his most important legacy to the study of local population change, though, is indirect. The work of CAMPOP, as it developed under the guidance of Wrigley and Peter Laslett, in the words of J.D. Marshall, 'gave local historical demography a set of aims and purposes, above and distinct from the illumination of the individual locality *per se*'.¹⁷ And, although much (though, as we have seen, by no means all) of Wrigley's own work was directed towards national patterns and testing general hypotheses, his research and scholarship has inspired many students of local populations, and continues to do so to this day. Without his efforts in, first, setting up the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, and subsequently directing its work with such dedication and enthusiasm, local demography would be immeasurably poorer.

Finally, it is worth saying a few words about Tony Wrigley's contribution to this journal. His association with the journal was not as direct or as close as that of his colleague Roger Schofield. He was there right at the beginning, though, attaching his name to the first editorial in 1968 which set out the aims of the journal: 'to provide a link which will enable those working in their local communities to draw attention to their discoveries and difficulties, to keep them informed of other people's work, and to provide a place where their enquiries can be answered and where the techniques used in this field of research can be explained and examined'.¹⁸ Although never a member of the Editorial Board, he contributed to editorials and the regular reports of news from CAMPOP for many years, as well as writing a number of short articles in the early issues. He was a strong supporter of the journal throughout, as is evidenced by his willingness to make contributions to the 40th and 50th anniversary issues.

16 For more details of this project, see the web site <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/occupations/overview> [accessed 20 March 2023].

17 J.D. Marshall, *The Tyranny of the Discrete: a Discussion of the Problems of Local History in England* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 36.

18 P. Laslett, R. Schofield and E.A. Wrigley, 'Intentions', *Local Population Studies* 1 (1968), p. 3.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Eilidh Garrett and Chris Galley for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Appendix. List of Tony Wrigley's publications in *Local Population Studies*

- E.A. Wrigley, 'Baptism/marriage ratios in late-seventeenth century England', *Local Population Studies* 3 (1969), pp. 15-17.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'The use of the description "widow" in parish registers', *Local Population Studies* 3 (1969), p. 17.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'Clandestine marriage in Tetbury in the late 17th century', *Local Population Studies* 10 (1973), pp. 15-21.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'Checking Rickman', *Local Population Studies* 17 (1976), pp. 9-15.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'The changing occupational structure of Colyton over two centuries', *Local Population Studies* 18 (1977), pp. 9-21.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'A note on the life-time mobility of married women in a parish population in the later eighteenth century', *Local Population Studies* 18 (1977), pp. 22-9.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'Review of *Plagues and Peoples*, by W.H. McNeill', *Local Population Studies* 20 (1978), pp. 50-2.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'Population history: recent changes and current prospects', *Local Population Studies* 81 (2008), pp. 7-8.
- E.A. Wrigley, 'The general and the particular', *Local Population Studies* 100 (2018), pp. 25-32.