

Records of Social and Economic History

The British Academy's 'Records of Social and Economic History' series exists to publish primary sources that aid the study of social and economic history.

Professor Richard M. Smith FBA, who chairs the editorial committee, discusses the most recent volumes published in the series

THE SERIES of editions that form the *Records of Social and Economic History* series will in the course of 2013 reach 50 volumes. The current series, which began in 1972, will have been in existence for 40 years. Its contents, relating to British records extending from the 11th to the 20th century, serve as a reminder that British historians are in possession of a remarkable series of documentary sources including cartularies, revenue rolls, account books, personal diaries, letter books and censuses of varying types that concern a host of details relating to agricultural, urban, industrial, commercial, domestic and demographic matters. The sources that are edited in this series embrace subjects or bodies of evidence that concern areas usually larger than one county and therefore less appropriately published within the series maintained by local county record societies.

The two editions most recently published exemplify the aims of the series. One – *The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master* – concerns a remarkably detailed chronicle reporting his life by John Cannon. Cannon, a man of relatively humble rank, lived across a particularly important 60-year period of change in English society and economy from the late 17th century until the 1740s. The other – *The Early English Censuses* – is much more concerned with society and economy in the aggregate and on a national scale, providing a guide to and correction of the earliest English censuses. The volume fundamentally improves the ways in which these mammoth compendia of key data relating to England's rapidly expanding population between 1801 and 1851 can be exploited.

The Chronicles of John Cannon

Cannon's chronicles or memoirs have long been known, although used relatively little, by historians, notwithstanding the relative rarity in this genre. Their under-exploitation is largely explained by their length, since they contain 600,000 words of detailed accounts and are often composed of disconnected



Figure 1. The frontispiece from *John Cannon's Chronicles*. Source: Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society/Somerset Archives and Records Service.

Extracts from the Chronicles which display John Cannon's love of books

..... Amongst all the employments (at the ushering in of the year which I always held beginning with my birthday, March 28th, I now being now about 17 and my brother somewhat above 15) was our alternative keeping the markets with corn. I used to let my brother go to Shepton Mallet Fridays. And I myself chose Bruton Saturdays; my reason was because there lived one Oliver, a book seller, with which I conversed and bought books & maps, etc., and oftentimes broke my market money to compass my ends, which I would some way or other excuse to my father at night when I were to render an account of my market, & if it were very small deficiencies, then he would say very little. Nay, I was so taken with my books that the money my father allow'd me to spend at markets I have saved & laid out in my darling books, and so many market days have neither eaten nor drank from the time I set out till my return home again in the evening such was my assiduity to my books. (1701)

..... So following my school & these employments with cheerfulness, I got a pretty livelihood for myself & family whom I frequently visited, & yet my friends at Mere carried up three loads of Turfs as before whom I made welcome. Besides my quarterly & weekly scholars, I raised two charity schools which shall be shown in the beginning of the next year, when it was thoroughly settled & confirmed. Among those employments I delighted as before in vacant hours to peruse the best of authors in Divinity, History & other subjects: English Chronicles, Annals & the lives of the Eminent Fathers of the Church in all ages, being as to myself honest, sound & just in the censure of these authors. Only this great impediment often retarded my wishes: only the want of money to buy or furnish myself with such valuable pieces as I [had] often seen in the shops or studies of great & wealthy men. Still refusing all manner of pastimes or other vain delights or conversation, which to avoid I would frequently retire & solitarily sit by myself either in my school or bedchamber, and sometimes conversed with men of letters & learning, who also were fond of & coveted my company. (1731)

materials. In their original form they do not offer the reader a linear account of Cannon's life. However their editor, Professor John Money, has devoted years of careful research to bring order to this material, which for the first time makes it possible to gain a complete sense of Cannon's project. In this edition we can chart the life of an auto-didact: he was largely self-educated because his earlier academic promise did not lead on to grammar school or university following a severe decline in his parent's economic fortunes. That loss of parental well-being, and the resolve of his mother's close-knit family to preserve its control over what was left of the family land, indirectly resulted in his subsequently living a far from financially secure life – principally in the West Country, although frequently involving quite long periods in London. In fact the memoirs provide ample evidence of the ways in which London attracted Cannon, like so many others in the national population, as the city grew to be, by some considerable margin, the largest urban centre in Europe by the early 18th century. We see Cannon sent into agricultural service in his early teens and in that respect following a life course similar to that of so many of his adolescent contemporaries. Cannon however, while a young agricultural worker, developed as the archetypal self-taught man the tendencies of a compulsive bibliophile to such an extent that at times his book-buying placed considerable strains on his personal finances – a tendency that remained with him throughout his life.

Notwithstanding the absence of a grammar school education, his self-taught literacy and numeracy equipped him for a career that lasted from 1707 to 1721 in the excise

service, moving in succession between Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Somerset. Having joined that service in the midst of Marlborough's Wars he involved himself operationally in Britain's most important revenue-raising agency, which was at the heart of the country's provision of public credit. Cannon's memoir casts light on practices and politics that are otherwise poorly documented, since so few of the excise's own records survive for this early period. In the midst of his period in the excise, he married a bride in London who was entirely unknown to his Somerset family. Cannon's account of his sexual experience before marriage, which is noteworthy for his candour, has already attracted the attention of cultural historians who are interested in post-puritan attitudes to adolescence and sexuality. However, his account has so far been exploited somewhat selectively, so the full edition may serve as a corrective to some of this work.

In 1721 Cannon's promising career in the excise was brought sharply to an end as he was dismissed, apparently for malpractice. He entered on a difficult phase as bad debts thwarted his efforts to set up as a maltster, and he experienced variants of what appeared to be physical and emotional breakdown, before a short-lived spell back in the excise in 1729-30. This seemed to jolt him into a re-ordering of his life, which now saw him more active in the affairs of his local society rather than in those of the central state. His self-taught skills made it possible for him to work as scrivener and accountant, and eventually as town schoolmaster and clerk to Glastonbury's newly created workhouse and two of the town's parishes. Indeed he became a pivotal figure in that community,

In 1737 when Cannon was 53 he can be observed catching up with his life hitherto. That earlier period accounts for half the text, and the remaining six years of his life the other half. So there is undoubtedly greater detail for this last period in which there are far greater specifics of his dealings with others, his dreams which are described quite vividly, the weather, sermons and above all the conflicts and tensions of small-town life.

John Money provides a lengthy introduction to the memoir that is invaluable in enabling the reader to gain so many insights into Cannon's world. These insights extend from the character and importance of kin relations, neighbourliness, the culture of small debts and credit, parish politics, and attitudes to religion at the parish level which also reveal his attitudes to the beginning of the Methodist revival and Catholicism. In his later years we see his attitudes to Patriot politics from a provincial perspective. And while more controversial, Money draws out what he sees as Cannon's sense of self, identifiable perhaps since the finished manuscript was a reworked third rewrite.

The Early English Censuses

The printed volumes of the six censuses from 1801 to 1851 have proved to be a vital source of information for economic and social historians, particularly those interested in population change during a vital stage in the transition of the English economy. Use of these volumes is far from straightforward, since they display many defects related to arithmetical mistakes made by the census clerks, printing errors, omissions of certain categories of persons and variability in the units for which information was reported. A particular difficulty arises from the fact that the composition of the census unit was not constant from census to census.

Professor Sir Tony Wrigley FBA, in this the 46th volume in the series, has undertaken a major exercise in the correction of errors in the census volumes, and produced a series of tables reporting population data in a way that makes it possible for the first time to report demographic change over time in a consistent and hence accurate manner. As a result of Professor Wrigley's labours we are now in possession of a new version of the original data relating to each of the census volumes which corrects arithmetical and printing errors and introduces omitted information. The census units are also standardised.

The first five censuses from 1801 to 1841 employed the traditional units of the parish, the hundred and county, but while the census of 1851 continued to use the parish, units of higher order became the registration sub-district, the registration district and the registration county. As a result it is not possible using the printed censuses to measure change for a particular locality in a consistent fashion through time. Professor Wrigley has now presented these data in a way that makes it possible to track back information in a manner compatible with the new reporting units of 1851 to 1801, and forwards using the traditional units from 1801 to 1851. All of these data are presented in tables that, if of a modest size, can be found in the printed pages of this volume or, if of a size too

unwieldy to print in a conventional fashion, are made available in the accompanying CD.

This volume also contains two 'bonuses'. In Chapter 4 Professor Wrigley makes use of the information derived from Anglican parish registers that were collected by John Rickman. The registers were published in the early census volumes to create new estimates of population totals for English counties over the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as more finely tuned population counts for English hundreds over the late 18th century. The fruits of this recalibration can be seen in Figure 2 which shows the rates of population growth between 1801 and 1851 in English registration districts. While the English population grew by 96 per cent, three quarters of this took place in groups 7 and 8 which contained only 10 per cent the national population in 1801. In contrast groups 1 and 2, accounting for 37 per cent of the national population in 1801, generated only 12 per cent of the national growth in the following half century. Such information shows how dramatically industrialisation and urbanisation was concentrating demographic growth in this critical period of England's industrial revolution.

In Chapter 5 Professor Wrigley in collaboration with Dr Max Satchell, and exploiting the tools of Geographical Information Systems, generates accurate areal measure-

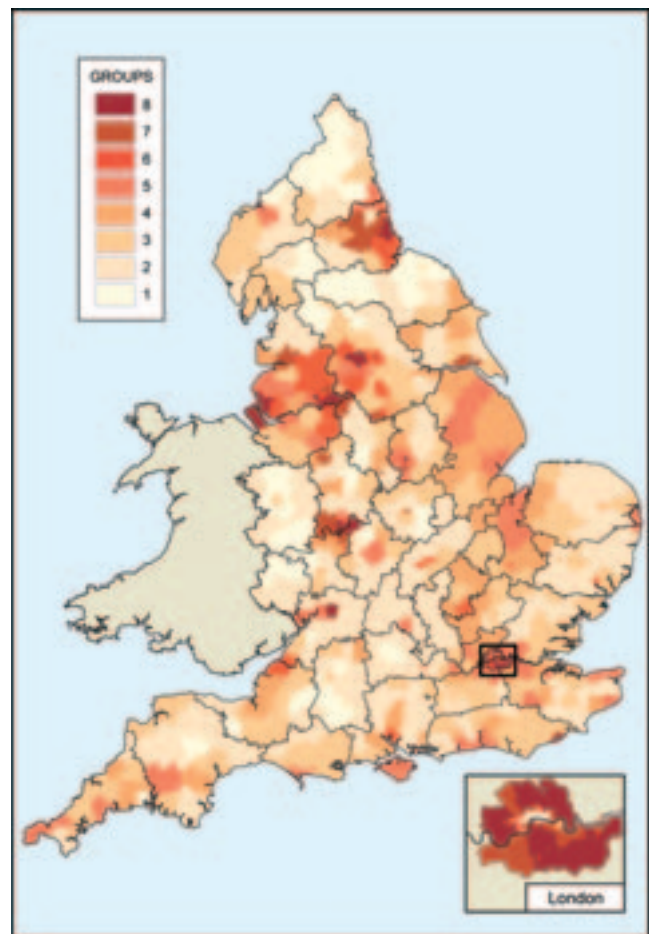


Figure 2. Rates of growth of population in registration districts 1801-51.

ments for all of the census units. These make it possible to create accurate measures of population density and a number of other social and economic variables that can be more effectively extracted from the census returns for mapping purposes. This volume differs from others in this series in not being in a strict sense an edition of a historical source, but it will make it possible to utilise one of the most important primary sources central to the work of economic and social historians in a manner that has never previously been possible.

Forthcoming editions in the series cover such diverse subjects as the business and household accounts of Joyce Jeffreys, a 17th-century spinster; Samuel Brittan's diary kept while a civil servant in the shorted-lived Department of Economic Affairs between 1964 and 1966; Nehemiah Grew's Treatise on England's economic development presented to Queen Anne; and London's custom accounts of the mid-15th century. Such variety reflects the quality of the primary evidence that enriches the study of British economic and social history to which the series will

continue to be a major contributor through the hard work of a team of tireless editors.

Richard M. Smith is Emeritus Professor of Historical Geography and Demography and Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge, and a Fellow of the British Academy. Since 2010 he has chaired the British Academy's Records of Social and Economic History Committee.

The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master is edited by John Money, and was published in two parts in 2010. Part 1 covers the period 1684-1733; Part 2 covers the period 1734-1743.

The Early English Censuses is edited by E.A. Wrigley, and was published in 2011.

A listing of volumes in the *Records of Social and Economic History* series can be found via www.britac.ac.uk/pubs

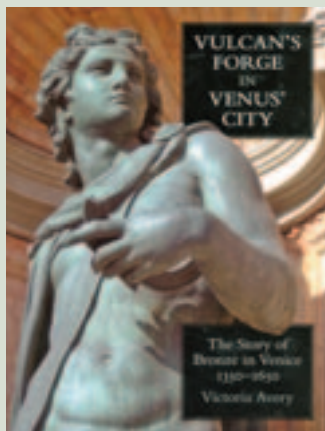
Vulcan's Forge in Venus' City: The Story of Bronze in Venice, 1350-1650

Between 1350 and 1650, a vast number of bronze objects – large and small, decorative and functional – were produced in Venice for domestic consumption and for the export market. From unique works of art specifically commissioned from renowned sculptors by wealthy patrons, to low-status artefacts mass-produced by founders for speculative sale in their shops, Venetian bronzes are distinguishable from those made at the same time in other centres by the great beauty and variety of their form, their rich ornamentation, and their high quality.

Based on a wealth of unpublished documents and newly available scientific data obtained during recent conservation projects, a new British Academy book (published December 2011) by Dr Victoria Avery tells the story of bronze in Venice through the objects themselves and the people who commissioned, made and owned them. It reveals the location and purpose of key independent foundries in the city centre, as well as the state-owned foundries at the Arsenal. It sheds light on the identities of the founders, their daily lives and

workshop organisation, and tracks the rise and fall of the most important dynasties, their successful collaborations and fierce rivalries. The genesis and creation process of certain significant bronze masterpieces is discussed, together with a number of long-forgotten casting disasters and abortive commissions.

The text and documentary appendix are enhanced by lavish illustrations, which include newly commissioned photographs of recently restored works of art, and unpublished historical photographs.



The book arises from Dr Avery's British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship. She is now the Keeper of Applied Arts at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Further information on this latest volume in the *British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monographs* series can be found via www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/