

Limitations on the role of British households as economic units

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Abstract

Households are often perceived as having both residential and income pooling functions. These claims are reassessed in this paper using evidence on households in the British past derived from detailed family budgets, information on the economic circumstances of persons in receipt of poor relief and enumerations of local populations. It is argued that the income of household members was not always shared out equitably with wage earning children using a proportion of their earnings for their own needs. Evidence that wives ate less well than their husbands is also discussed. In later sections of the paper consideration is given to the economic and cultural forces that helped shape household patterns and how these patterns have been interpreted by residents at the time, their contemporaries and later commentators. It is argued that inequity in the distribution of the household's resources and the extent of assistance provided from outside the household make it unwise for historians to rely solely on the occupation of the household head to determine the social position of the household let alone those of all its members.

1: Introduction

My own experience of living in different types of households illustrates how difficult it could be for a census enumerator to establish the boundaries of some households. In the summer of 1951 I entered my second household on the border of Wales when my father acquired a new property together with his married brother and two simple family households were merged and were then further enlarged with the addition of an unmarried brother. The new household was what Peter Laslett was later to call a *frèreche* or type 5d in the Laslett-Hammel classification scheme (Laslett 1972: 31). The property was, however, a large one and as there was a separate living room for each family (also accommodating the unmarried brother in one case), if a household is defined on the basis of the sharing of a common living room (see discussion in Wall 1982: 67), then two households would have existed not one. On the other hand, we did share a common kitchen and one stove. But there were two dining tables, one for each family, and two cooks. But the cooking was not divided on family lines as my mother cooked for the vegetarians who were my father, myself and her married brother-in-law while my aunt cooked for the carnivores; namely for all the members of her family except her husband and also for her unmarried brother-in-law and my mother. Viewed from this perspective, which any outsider could only have been derived from a detailed interview, there was just one household present. At the time we did not view the household as special nor distinguish it with a special name such as *frèreche* or anything similar. Yet both then and in earlier centuries, households of this type were very rare in England as analysis of censuses and census type documents has since shown.

In 1958, following legal advice that it would be more difficult with a shared property to ensure when one brother died that the property passed in direct descent and not laterally to the surviving brothers, we divided the property between the two families and two simple family households re-emerged without any change of residence. At various times other households also occupied other parts of the property, some permanently and one a week-end retreat. As their premises were (largely) self contained and included kitchens the census should have identified these as separate households. When I left for London in 1962, five households occupied property that had been run as one household until 1958.

In London I boarded in the household of the eldest sister of my mother. Two other unrelated males were also boarded. In a census, had one been taken, I might have been recorded as a nephew (a type of no family household in the Laslett-Hammel scheme comprising co-resident relatives who were not siblings and did not include either a married couple or apparent and child) Alternatively, the relationship could have been ignored in which case I would be listed as a boarder (and fall outside the Laslett-Hammel scheme). Such a census should, however, have placed all three boarders and my aunt in one household and listed as separate households the other inmates of the house who catered for themselves.

A year later, I moved into a flat with two unrelated students. As the lounge in this flat also functioned as the bedroom for one student it is not absolutely clear whether this would mean that with only partial access to a common living space we had created two households and not one (if to be registered as a household there has to be a communal living area). However we did establish a common budget to purchase food and operated a cooking rota so this would have been one household if the household was defined, as for the Family Expenditure Survey in Britain in the 1970s as a group of people living at the same address and having meals prepared together and with common housekeeping (Wall 1982: 68). But within a year I was on the move again to yet another part of London where I resumed my status of a boarder in the household of two widowed first cousins of my father. Again the census, had one been taken, could have classed me either as a distant relative or as a boarder.

This experience of living in different households also raises other issues than the difficulty of defining a household when the only information available is a census schedule or a survey form and the property has not been visited. The first is that as the census is only conducted every tenth year none of the time I spent in households which were not simple family households (limited to married couples with or without children or a lone parent with children) would ever have been recorded in a census. The second point is to note the extent of the collaboration between relatives, even in England, the supposed heartland of the North West European household system where simple family households predominate. Until the age of 24 I had spent more of my life in households that were not simple family households than I had within simple family households. Admittedly, my experience is very unlikely to be typical but it does illustrate the point that households of very different types can co-exist even though censuses show that simple family households constitute the majority of household in England. I will

therefore set out below (see sections 4 and 5) a broader perspective on the different types of households that have existed in England in the past. The focus will be on how both outside observers and some of the residents at the time interpreted the presence of different types of households, and thus complement Laslett's count of the frequency of different household types (Laslett 1972: 85; Laslett 1983: 518-9). First, however, it is necessary to give further consideration to how effective were English households functioned in the past at apportioning income between the various members of the household and whether households were self contained residential units..

The information on households in England before the first national census in 1801 is derived from lists of inhabitants drawn up by a variety of persons for a variety of purposes. Many were compiled in connection with the taxes levied under the Marriage Duty Act in operation between 1694 and 1705. Other lists were made at the behest of local landowners or by local clergymen; some lists appear from fuller details provided on wage earners than on farmers to be concerned with the economic circumstances of the poor (as in the case of the Cardington list of 1782, see Baker 1973, or Corfe Castle in 1790, see copy of list in Library of Cambridge Group). In many cases neither the name of the complier nor the objective can be discovered. The diversity of lists is so great that no standard definition of the household is likely and in fact almost no list-maker ever offered one when they enumerated the inhabitants, inserting lines or leaving spaces (although by no means invariably) to indicate where one group ended and the next began. These blocks of names were identified by Laslett (1972: 25) as households. He then made the further assumption that residents shared certain characteristics, in particular that they slept habitually under the same roof, cooperated together in many ways and had ties of support, dependence or mutual dependence with some or even all of the other residents. Laslett appreciated nonetheless that these assumptions could 'scarcely be regarded as secure (Laslett 1972: 25). He also recognised that relatives and others who lived near but not within the household (and therefore could not be considered household members) might still make an important economic contribution to its well-being and eat regularly at the family table. However, no firm evidence was provided to validate any of these propositions and in the following sections of this paper I will therefore first indicate some of the limitations to the level of support that was provided from within the household, and in particular by unmarried children. I will also attempt to quantify the extent of support received by households from members of other households and from the community in general, through, for example, assistance in cash or kind from the Poor Law. Certain sections of the population have been better documented than others, for example, persons receiving poor relief while continuing to live in their own homes (outdoor relief), the widowed and the elderly and of necessity the focus will have to be on these groups rather than on entire populations.

The extent of the support households could derive from its members and from elsewhere raises important issues. In the first place if, for example certain members of the household used some of their earnings for their personal expenditure, there could have been some important limitations on the ability of households to fulfil what is often

assumed¹ one of its core functions by redistributing income between its earners and non earners (or less well remunerated earners). Secondly, the existence of major channels of assistance emanating from outside the household means that assessment of the viability of the household economy derived solely from the employments of members of the household could be seriously misleading.

2: The Household as an Income Pooling Unit

A number of lists record the earnings of different members of the households of the poor and the extent of poor relief. For poor widows with wage earning children, the earning power of these children could be crucial. For example, children provided 65 percent of earnings of nine such households listed in 1597 in Ipswich, 48 percent of earnings in 6 households in Salisbury in 1637, 89 percent of nine households in Corfe Castle, Dorset, in 1790 and 73 percent in 21 households in Ipswich in 1906 (details from Wall 2008, based on analyses of lists of the poor in parts of Ipswich and Salisbury in Webb 1966 and Slack 1975, the list of Corfe Castle in the Library of the Cambridge Group) and information on widows in Ipswich in Royal Commission on the Poor laws 1909, Appendix vol. XVII: Appendix to Interim Report no. 2, Appendix E: 421-8). It would, however, be unwise to assume that all the earnings of the children were placed at the disposal of the household in general. Evidence from other communities indicates that some children retained a proportion of their earnings to spend as they saw fit. One reference to this practice occurs in one of the budgets of labouring families in 1789 compiled by David Davies where the eldest son (aged 14) in the family of a married labourer from Holwell, Somerset, earned £6 10 shillings per annum but spent 15 percent of that on his clothing. This was considerably more, sometimes double, what most labouring families spent on clothing one person (Davies 1795, especially 179). There may also be a hint that older children may simply have used their earnings to meet the costs of their maintenance and retained the surplus for themselves, in a reference to an enumeration of Sandwich, Kent, in 1776, in which unmarried children above the age of 30 who still lived in the parental home were classed as lodgers (Boys 1792 cited in Wall 1972: 166). At the start of the twentieth century, Rowntree also argued that older children living with their parents in York, contributed only that part of their incomes to the family purse that any other lodger would pay for board and lodging (Rowntree 1902: 117, note 1)

Evidence is also available for the households of 12 widows in Ipswich in the early years of the twentieth century (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909, Appendix vol. XVII: Appendix to Interim Report no. 2, Appendix E: 421-8). On average the children of these widows had handed over to their mothers 74 percent of their earnings. There was, however, considerable variation within with one widow receiving all the earnings while at the other extreme another widowed mother received just under half of the earnings. In the households of two married men, his children were contributing two thirds of their earnings. Apart from the rare exception, these children, it should be noted, were considerably less generous than were their fathers who even although most retained some

¹ When for example the household is defined on the basis of common housekeeping as for the Family Expenditure Survey in Britain in the late twentieth century, see Wall 1982: 68.

of their earnings for beer and tobacco, made available a much larger proportion of their earnings to meet the expenses of housekeeping.

These findings need careful consideration. In the first place they would appear to indicate that widows and their non earning children might be somewhat poorer than would first appear from a consideration of the earning power of their households. However this would not be the case if the mothers were thereby spared the cost of maintaining their earning children. There is some merit to this argument but it is evident that widows would have lost some potential income as children retained some of their earnings for additional personal expenditure. In the rural districts of Suffolk investigated by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws (1909, Appendix vol. XVII: Appendix to Interim Report no. 3), adult sons living in the parental home were said to be meeting the costs of their board, lodging, mending and washing. Some sons were more generous in that they also paid most or even all the rent. However, there were also said to be some spendthrift sons who when out of work expected a parent to support them even if that parent was receiving poor relief. Level of earnings, custom and the character of the son were the three factors mentioned which determined what proportion of their earnings they were prepared to make available for the household as a whole.

The second implication is that the economic circumstances both of widows and married couples with earning children is likely to have been very variable depending on what proportion of their earnings children made available. It is also necessary to modify the standard understanding of how household income varies according to the age of the household head. As set out by Rowntree (1902: 171), this indicated descent below the poverty line between birth and 15, a second descent between about 30 and 40 when any children in the household would be too young to earn much, and then a final descent into poverty after the age of 65. Rowntree was thus ignoring his own observation that older children would not be contributing all their earnings to the household. If due account is now taken of this, then households where the head was between the ages of 50 and 65 (and which would be most likely to contain adult children) would be somewhat poorer than he envisaged. It also follows that the descent into poverty in old age or on widowhood might be less severe.

However, it should be emphasised that these remarks apply only to wage earning households. Studies of the economies of family farms in the 1940s and 1950s suggest that the situation of sons who remained, unmarried, at home to help run the farm were very different. These accounts, from Llanfihangel yn Ngwynfa, Montgoeryshire, in 1940 and Gosforth, Cumberland between 1950 and 1952 indicate that the sons of labourers had considerably greater independence and more cash than the sons of farmers (Rees 1951: 63; Williams 1956: 43). In return for this largely unpaid work one son could expect eventually to inherit the parental farm, sometimes jointly with an unmarried sister although they could be well into middle age before this occurred (see accounts of households in Rees 1951: 69; Williams 1956: 51). Sons who did marry would, once a suitable farm became available, be provided with by their fathers with most of the stock and implements. Daughters would also receive some stock but principally household goods (Rees 1951: 65). This would imply some depletion in the resources of the parental

farm as sons and daughters married but this was not very likely until many farmers were in at least in their late fifties given that the mean age a first marriage of the sons of farmers was over 31 and daughters of farmers over 27 in Llanfihangel yn Ngwynfa and over 25 in Gosforth (Rees 1951: 65-6; Williams 1956: 45)..

Another limitation on the ability of households to redistribute income is that there is considerable evidence from some populations that indicates that in the allocation of food priority was given to feeding the breadwinner and working adolescent children (Ross 1993: 33-5, 55). An examination of the diets of British men and women in the 1890s showed that men consumed more calories than women (3,320 as opposed to 1,870) and twice as much meat protein (dietaries collected by Dr Thomas Oliver as reported by Ross 1993:33). Fewer of the meals consumed by married women contained any meat. Analysis of the meals of adult males and females in six households from Corsley, Wiltshire, over a two week period in 1906, shows that meat formed part of 14 of the meals taken by married men but only 11 of those taken by married women (analysed from Davies 1909). Ross argues (1993: 34)), that when wives made sure that their husbands received the best of whatever food was available this not only acknowledged the value of the husband as a worker but also his privileges in the household. Another factor, however, could also play a role and that was peer pressure, the need of the man not to lose face at work. As a Mrs T explained to Rowntree to justify why she and the children had no meat for breakfast while the breakfast her husband took with him to work included bacon: [Mr T] 'must have a bit of bacon to take with him for his breakfast, or else all the others would talk so' Rowntree 1902: 332).

Some households also operated what were in effect dual economies. For example the wife of a farmer in Llanfihangel yn Ngwynfa in the 1940s was responsible for the poultry, the collection of eggs and the making of butter and from the sale of these at the local market bought the groceries, her own clothes and those of the younger children, and replenished the stock of household equipment. Rees considered that the wife's mini budget was largely independent of that of her husband and that wives tended not divulge the details (Rees 1951: 63). In some parts of southern Montgomeryshire, Rees reports that that the separation of budgets was even more marked with the wife of a farmer starting married life, separately financed by a dowry provided by her parents. Rees was inclined to see the origins of this practice in medieval Welsh law which allowed women married to freemen (but not serfs) to dispose of their clothing, meal, cheese and butter without consulting their husbands (ibid). This link, however, is speculative particularly as Williams also reported wives of farmers as operating their own budgets in much the same way in Gosforth, Cumberland in the early 1950s (Williams 1956: 41-2).

The households of wage earners provided fewer opportunities for husbands and wives to establish dual economies as the most of the income on which the household relied, was provided by the husband. However it seems highly probable that the wives of such men used their often meagre earnings to supplement the housekeeping budget. Not all such earnings were included when information was collected on household budgets and this may explain in part why the expenditure of some households was reported as exceeding their earnings (Eden 1797: 734). In 1909 Davies was still experiencing difficulties in

establishing whether, and if so, to what extent, wives supplemented the earnings of their husbands (Davies 1909: 138).

3 Support from Outside the Household

A number of cases of children supporting elderly widowed or disabled parents, even when they did not live with them, have been documented for English populations. One elderly man in Corfe Castle in 1790 was, for example, at least in part supported by his children who lived elsewhere (census of Corfe Castle 1790, copy in Library of Cambridge Group). On the other hand, Eden documented from Seend, Wiltshire, in 1796 much more limited assistance to a widow by a son aged 18, living independently, who was only giving his mother six pence a week as payment for her washing and mending his clothes. The rest of his earnings of ten shillings a week as a bricklayer were devoted to his own maintenance. From the information given by Eden, sixpence constituted 5 percent of his earnings and just over 3 percent of the income of his widowed mother who had several wage earning children and was in receipt of poor relief (Eden 1797: 797-8).

Examination of some family budgets from Corsley, Wiltshire in 1906 reveals the variety of arrangements that might be made. One aged widow, living on her own, was largely supported by a daughter who paid her rent of £5 and sent her bacon, butter, potatoes and firewood should her own store be exhausted (Davies 1909: 218). Analysis of the housekeeping budget indicated that the daughter provided 61 percent of the food budget in the first week of observation and 81 percent in the second². A niece who lived nearby looked after her and a great niece recorded the expenditure and the nature of the meals that the widow was eating. Three children helped to support another widow in Corsley. Two married sons each contributed two shillings per week and a married daughter made a home for her mother, taking three shillings and sixpence (88 percent of the four shillings) to meet the cost of her keep. In the summer the mother undertook some housework while her daughter was working in the garden and in return the daughter gave her a share of the profits from the sale of garden produce as pocket money, amounting in all to 12-13 shillings (Davies 1909: 190). The experience of this family thus demonstrates not only cooperation between siblings in the provision of care to an elderly parent but also the way in which an elderly widow could still make a contribution to the family economy and see that work rewarded by a transfer of cash from daughter to mother.

In general, however, married children with families of their own could only provide limited support to their parents. In 1906 in Market Drayton, Shropshire, married sons were typically paying six pence or one shilling to the Poor Law Guardians as partial compensation for the amount of outdoor relief the Guardians were providing to their widowed parent (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909, Appendix vol. XVII: Interim Report 4: 217). These amounts represented between 3 and 7 percent of their earnings and between 17 percent and half of what had been granted in poor relief. Many married children with households of their own did not provide any financial support to their parents. Analysis of the information that was provided on some of 'typical cases'

² The value of the food provided has been estimated using the information on the cost of these items when purchased by other families in Corsley.

selected by the Royal Commission from the list of outdoor poor in Govan, Glasgow, again in 1906 shows that only about half of the married children provided any assistance to a widowed mother (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909, Appendix vol. XVII: Appendix B 2). The evidence collected by Booth on the economic circumstances of the elderly in rural areas of England in 1892 also indicated that support from family members (identified simply as relatives), when available, was usually combined with other sources of income. The amount of assistance was not specified but the sources of support were given. Only a fifth of the elderly were maintained solely by relatives while a third needed the support of the Poor Law, just under a third received charity, a fifth were earning and 14 percent had savings from which they derived some income (see Wall 1992: 82; calculated from Booth 1894: 339-40)³. A quarter of all rural elderly were reported as receiving some assistance from relatives (Wall 1992: 81).

The family budgets (Rowntree 1902, Davies 1909 and the Royal Commission 1909, Appendix vol. XVII: Appendix to Interim Report 5, Appendix B 92) Govan: 180 and Appendix E (13) Paisley: 195) also indicate that on occasion some support might be provided by siblings resident elsewhere, more distant relatives and even neighbours. However such support (usually provided in kind rather than as cash) was usually limited and taking into account the number of potential donors, whether neighbours or relatives, was not often available (on the availability of kin see Moring and Wall 2008). Employers (or former employers) and local landowners might also provide some assistance. This could involve the provision of food while at work, allowing their labourers to buy grain at below the market price and permitting the gathering of firewood. The value of such assistance, given the many forms it might take, is difficult to estimate but was almost certainly less than the pensions some employers were paying to elderly former employees or their widows in the Thingoe Poor Law Union in Suffolk in 1906. These pensions of two shillings a week, paid by agents employed to manage the estates of the landowners, represented 80 percent of the amounts granted as out relief by the Poor Law Guardians. Payment of out relief was, however, apparently not curtailed nor were the pensions even recorded in the records of the Poor Law because these agents, many of whom also served as Poor Law Guardians, thus ensured higher incomes for their pensioners at very little cost to the landowner (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909, Appendix vol. XVII, Interim Report 3: 182-3).

Poor relief could also provide substantial additional support but again was clearly intended to supplement earnings with the level of assistance providing 10 percent of the income of the households of widows with wage earning children receiving assistance from the Poor Law in Ipswich in 1597, 17 percent in Salisbury in 1637, 22 percent in Corfe Castle in 1790 (assuming relief on the same scale as in other Dorset parishes at the time) and 27 percent Ipswich in 1906 (detailed analysis in Wall 2008 based on Webb 1966, Slack 1975, census of Corfe Castle in library of Cambridge Group and Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909, Appendix vol. XVII, Appendix to Interim Report 2, Appendix E (4): 152-7). Except in Ipswich in 1597 when only three of the nine households received poor relief, all these households even though both the widows and

³ Earnings and reliance on savings or property could be combined with help from relatives; hence the percentages exceed 100%.

their children were in employment, also received assistance from the Poor Law. Indeed most widows identified as belonging to sections of the population classed as poor or working for wages needed the assistance of the Poor Law: two thirds in Cawston, Norfolk, in 1601, 55 percent in Cardington, Bedfordshire, 71 percent in Corfe Castle in 1790 and 76 percent in Ardleigh, Essex, in 1796. Men from within the wage earning population were much less likely to receive poor relief: 48 percent in Cawston but only 10 percent in Cardington and just one percent in Ardleigh (analysed from Wales 1984, Baker 1973, Census of Corfe Castle 1790, copy in library of Cambridge Group, and Erith 1978). Only when men were elderly and at best earned much less than they had when younger, did appreciable proportions of men receive poor relief. For example 38 percent of elderly men from the wage earning population in Cardington were granted outdoor poor relief as were 10 percent of men over the age of 65 in Ardleigh. But these proportions were much lower than the proportions of elderly widows assisted by the Poor Law in these communities at 67 and 60 percent respectively.

In the late nineteenth century, total reliance on the Poor Law was unusual just as it had been in earlier centuries, and as was the case with support from relatives. Booth's study of the rural elderly in 1892 shows that just over a fifth of those who received poor relief, had no other source of support (Wall 1992: 82, analysis based on Booth 1894: 339-40). Other channels of support were charity and relatives (each 38 percent), the earnings of the elderly themselves (16 percent) and their savings and property (14 percent).

4 Households as Residential Units

Houses are malleable and can be extended and reconstructed to meet the changing requirements of the households within them or modified to accommodate fewer or additional households. The enumeration of the inhabitants of Puddletown, Dorset, in 1724-5 revealed many instances of how houses had been divided between different households, their living space clearly distinct from that of their neighbours, and with other households living in outhouses. Comparison with a later enumeration of 1765 also shows both examples of houses with one household at the earlier date accommodating two in 1765, and vice versa (copies of the enumerations in the Library of the Cambridge Group). If all lists of English populations were of this quality, identifying households would be no problem but the enumeration of the residents of Puddletown is unique. Reassessment of the hundreds of lists that were compiled before 1801 indicates that many did not, as Laslett believed, list households (Laslett 1972: 25). In urban areas, particularly London, it made more sense to list all the residents of each house while in numbers of smaller settlements it was deemed sufficient to list the inhabitants without making any attempt to distinguish one residential group from another. Some of the lists of the late seventeenth century taken in connection with the Marriage Duty Act of 1694 made separate lists of paupers (who were excused payment of the tax), and bachelors and widowers over the age of 25 without dependent children (who had pay an additional tax) rather than including them with other members of their households. Analysis of those lists that specified the relationships of all, or nearly all, persons within the name blocks to the first person listed indicated that more households were headed by married couples

and that they contained more relatives, but fewer children, servants and lodgers than initially Laslett and I had suggested (Wall 1983a: 496).

Many writers on English society in the seventeenth and eighteenth century also found no inconsistency in dividing the population into units that they described as houses or families, the latter term signifying households as the term 'household' was rarely used. Even Gregory King, one of the most acute observers of the population and social structure of seventeenth century England, referred on occasion to 'houses or families' although elsewhere he presented exactly the same figures for units he identified as houses, and made other estimates which took account of differences between the number of persons per house and per household (Wall 1972: 163). During the course of the eighteenth century, the more perceptive observers began to make this distinction between the number of residents in a house and the size of the household (Wall 1972: 165-6) and in 1782 the influential writer on the state of the British economy, George Chalmers, could declare that 'house' and 'household', considered synonymous terms a century earlier, had by then acquired distinct meanings (Chalmers 1782: 115 cited in Wall 1972: 166). Nevertheless, failure to make appropriate distinctions between houses and households (still referred to as families) persisted into the nineteenth century as is evident from examining the results of the first national censuses. John Rickman, the official responsible for the first census of 1801 considered that the information relating to families (by which he meant households) was particularly suspect not only because the term had been variously understood in different parts of the country but because in some areas the question had been completely ignored (Census of Great Britain 1801: 496 cited in Wall 1972: 160). In the latter case it was simply assumed that the number of families (households) was the same as the number of inhabited houses (Census of Great Britain 1801: 40).

Some commentators were certainly uncertain as to whether they were documenting the number of persons in a house or in a household. For example, in successive editions of Richard Price's work on the population of England, 'houses' appeared as a column heading in the first edition of 1779, only to be omitted for the second edition and replaced with 'families' in the collected editions of his works in 1792, even though an adjacent column continued to be headed 'persons per house' (Price 1779, 1780 and 1792). Some of the data published by Price also feature in other studies of the time, usually recorded as referring to 'houses' but on one occasion to 'families'. However, in addition to confusion about whether persons per house or per household had been documented, ambiguity arose because of the frequently voiced opinion that the duties of the householder extended over all those persons who resided within his house. For example householders in Westminster in the early seventeenth century were held responsible for the good behaviour not just of their children and servants but also that of their lodgers (Manché 1924: 97, and for actions by children and servants, *ibid*: 119, 99). As late as 1851 the introduction to the 1851 census of Great Britain defined 'family' (household) as including all residents in a house, including casual lodgers:

'The first, most intimate, and perhaps most important community, is the family' not considered as the children of one parent, but as persons under

one head; who is the occupier of the house, the householder, master, husband, or father: while other members of the family are, the wife, children, servants, relatives, visitors, *and persons constantly or accidentally present in the house*' (Census of Great Britain 1851: xxxiv; my italics).

According to Sarti (2001): 33, citing the 20 volume Oxford English Dictionary of 1989, the first recorded use of the term 'family' to indicate all people who lived under one roof or under the same householder, date from the mid sixteenth century while in France such usage was considered rare in a dictionary of 1762. In the Middle Ages, 'family' might include all those who worked for the same master or used as a synonym for servants (Sarti: 2001: 32).

Alongside a broad definition of the household, some narrower ones also found favour. The same census report which in 1851 supported the broad definition of family (household) quoted above stated elsewhere that the census enumerators had failed in many instances to count as householders those single lodgers, widows and widowers who occupied parts of houses. For the analysis of the structure of the household that was included in the report, such lodgers were first reclassified as heads of households (Census of Great Britain 1851: c-ci; Wall 1982: 69; Armstrong 1972: 212-3). Such problems continued to bedevil the census takers into the twentieth century with Block commenting that the recorded total of 689,000 single person households in the 1931 was underestimated due to the recording of many such households as lodgers. These difficulties arose because the officials trying to interpret the results of the censuses considered that many of the persons reported by enumerators and householders as lodgers were actually householders as they had part of the houses in which they lived set aside for their use. The householders who filled in the census schedules (together perhaps with the enumerators, who for the censuses between 1851 and 1901, were responsible for copying the information from schedules filled in by householders) did not accept that those persons who took lodgings could thereby have established separate households. Different considerations drove Young and Willmott to redraw the boundaries of the household in their study of working class households in Bethnal Green in East London in the 1950s. As there was such extensive cooperation between family members, Young and Willmott decided they should pay no attention as to whether relatives were living in the same or a different household, providing they were residing in the same dwelling (Young and Willmott 1957: 209).

5 The Identification of Different Types of Household

When classifying households, most historians have adopted (sometimes with modifications and additions) the classification scheme developed by Gene Hammel and Peter Laslett (Laslett 1972: 31; Hammel and Laslett 1974). The classification distinguishes households on the basis of whether they contain just one conjugal family group, either a married couple (with or without unmarried children) or a lone parent and an unmarried child. Such households were termed simple family households. Alternatively, if households included not only a conjugal family unit but also other

relatives, they were identified as extended family households if the additional relatives such as grandchildren, siblings or a parent did not themselves form a separate conjugal family unit and as multiple family households if they did. Households without conjugal family units were of two types: first, solitaries, and, secondly, 'no family' households. These latter consisted of co-resident relatives such as siblings, or more distantly related or unrelated persons who were not members of a conjugal family unit (as defined above).

This classification has been widely used to chart geographical variations in household forms by region, the type of local economy and country (see studies cited in Wall 2001: 223, 227⁴). It has in fact become customary to characterise populations depending on whether they appear to favour the formation of simple or more complex households and in particular multiple family households (Wall 2001: 222-3 and 226-7) and Laslett himself used the classification in this way (Laslett 1972: 85, 1979 and 1983: 518-24). Yet comparatively little attention has been given as to whether members of these various societies were aware of the fact that they were living in households that centuries later have been designated as simple, extended or multiple let alone as a no family household even though the members of a no family household were usually relatives (on the limitations of the concept of the 'no family' household, see Wall 2007). When defining the boundaries of the household, Laslett was keen to stress that it was important to take account of where contemporaries thought these boundaries should be; whether for example to include or exclude the retired parents of the household head (Laslett 1972: 27). It thus seems logical that the same principle should extend to the identification of different types of household.

The local population would have known that households could be larger or smaller and more or less complex as all the historical populations that have so far been studied even when dominated by a particular type of household, for example by simple family households in England or by multiple family households in many Russian populations, also included some households that were of a different type (complex households in England and simple family households and solitaries in Russia). It does not necessarily follow, however, that such households were viewed at the time as aberrant or different. If, for example, we look at the ways households in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were understood at the time, we find that not even the most perceptive observers classified households on the basis of their kinship structure. Terms such as simple and extended family (or anything similar) were never used. Most informed observers knew (correctly) that English households were usually small, containing on average, between four and five persons (observations summarised in Wall 1972: 168-9). However, even when they exaggerated the size of households this was because they

⁴ This is despite the fact that the classification has also attracted a great deal of criticism, particularly its focus on kinship ties while ignoring the economic contribution to the household economy of different members of the household, regardless of their kin relationship to other members. The classification should in fact be accompanied by other analyses of the composition of households (as recommended by Laslett 1983: 560-3) or the classification of households in terms of their kinship structure extended to take note of the presence of servants, boarders and lodgers. Not all households of solitaries, for instance were one person households as the presence in such households of servants, boarders and lodgers was ignored when classifying such households as solitaries as the householder did not share the household with a relative or friend.

included in the household too many servants and lodgers as opposed to large numbers of relatives, in addition to unmarried children. John Graunt, for example, who was the first to attempt a serious investigation of mortality in England, allowed three servants as well as a man and his wife and three children when estimating in 1662 the average size of London households as containing eight persons (Graunt 1662, cited in Wall 1972: 168 and see Laslett 1973). Other commentators such as Arthur Young in the 1770s tended to over-estimate the number of children in the household, particularly if the parents were poor (cited in Wall 1972: 171). Two (presumably prosperous) farmers responding to an enquiry by Arthur Young into the consumption of meat reported families (households) of 14 and 16 persons respectively, but in this case this did not signify the presence of many children or relatives but that they had included in their households passing tradesmen, labourers employed on a seasonal basis and harvesters (Young 1784-1815 XXXII: 517, 525 cited in Wall 1972: 167). Exceptionally, references can be found to English households containing many relatives but such households are not identified as households of a particular type but only in terms of the relationships between the various members. Nor are these references accounts of actual households. George Cruikshank for example was simply presenting a caricature of the Victorian household when he envisaged it containing 47 persons, including 25 children together with parents, grandparents, two great grandmothers, three aunts, one uncle and seven servants (cited in Wall 1972: 172). Nor had T. D. Fosbroke, writing in 1807, actually seen the household of Mrs Church of Staunton, Gloucestershire whose household prior to her death ten years earlier, he reported had contained the old lady herself, her daughter, granddaughter and her granddaughter's children (cited in Wall 1972: 173).

The first national census of Britain was taken in 1801 and was then continued decennially (apart from 1941). From the outset totals of families (households), houses and persons resident in each parish were published but before 1951 almost no attempt was made to investigate the composition of households even though from 1851 the relationship of each member of the household to the household head was recorded in the enumeration books and after 1911 on the schedules completed by householders. There were just two occasions when household composition was analysed and these were for a specially selected set of districts in 1851 and 1861. The results were published as part of the General Reports (Census of Great Britain 1851: c-ci; Census of Great Britain 1861 and Census of England and Wales 1861)⁵. Households were first distinguished according to the marital status of the household head: 62 percent of whom were married couples, 16 percent widowers and widows, and 21 percent bachelors or spinsters. There were also a few households (less than 1 percent) where the household head was absent on the night of the census. The members of the household were then classified according to whether they were identified as children, relatives, servants or trade assistants. The details of classification established how many households headed by married couple, the widowed or the unmarried contained children, relatives, servants or trade assistants; how many only children, only relatives, only servants or only trade assistants etc. but no attempt was made to interpret the patterns. There was no reference to boarders or lodgers as such

⁵ The basis on which these districts were selected is unknown but they are not a representative sample of districts. Almost no rural areas were included in the 14 districts selected in 1851 and 11 of the 14 districts were located in the north-west, the north-east or the south-east.

persons had been reclassified for the purposes of this analysis as heads of households which accounts for the high percentage of households reported as headed by unmarried men and women. Nor did the Census distinguish different types of relative. Taking all 14 districts together, 12.6 percent of households contained relatives, not far short of the 15 percent that reanalysis of the published results of the 1951 Census suggested was then the case nationally (Armstrong 1972: 213; Wall 1982: 69)⁶. However, as pointed out above, as the numbers of households in these districts in 1851 have been inflated by reclassifying lodgers as household heads, then, as argued by Armstrong (1972: 213), 19.7 percent of households could contain relatives rather than 12.6 percent, indicating a significant fall in the proportion of households with relatives during the following century. The disparity between these two estimates indicates the importance of defining the household in such a way that the same definition is applied at both dates⁷. On the other hand, it may not always be appropriate to attempt to impose a consistent definition when, as for example in the present case, the improvement in living standards between 1851 and 1951 made it relatively easy in the middle of the twentieth century to perceive certain individuals as residentially independent when their equivalents a century earlier could be recorded as lodgers. Due regard also does need to be paid to how the members of these households defined, or can be inferred to have defined their households, giving their views precedence over the opinion of distant census officials. If this approach is applied to the recording of households in the 14 districts in 1851, then lodgers should not have been reclassified as householders and 19.7, not 12.6 percent of households contained relatives.

Another issue is why the officials responsible for publishing the results of successive censuses ceased after 1861 to explore the issue of household composition, only taking it up again in 1951. One might perhaps draw the inference that in comparison say with information about numbers of people, houses and families, the age structure, marital status, occupations and migration (as measured by birthplace against current residence), it was less easy to identify why either central or local government officials needed to have details about the relationships of household members. The omission is, however, a little puzzling as elsewhere in Western Europe the composition of the household was investigated in detail before the end of the nineteenth century. To cite just one example the census of Berlin of 1880 taken by the city authorities included a classification of households into 32 categories (Census of Berlin 1880 Part II: Table VIII).

Even in the late twentieth century, census officials have not deemed the issue of the presence in the household of relatives other than children of sufficient importance to distinguish them as a category of household member (details summarised from Wall 1982: 64-5). Tabulations of household for the General Household Survey and Family Expenditure Survey ignored relationships completely in favour of (different) combinations of adults and children. The decennial census did take account of relationships within the household but did not identify all relatives and also changed the

⁶ In making this comparison it has been assumed that there was no major inconsistency between 1851 and 1951 in the definition of 'relative' and there is no way of determining whether such an assumption is valid.

⁷ The same point also arises in connection with comparisons across space whether between different regions or countries.

classification from census to census. In 1951, for example widowed and divorced children who resided with their parents were counted as children and in 1961 and later as relatives. Siblings of the household head, if under the age of 16, were also included with other children in 1951 and in later censuses as relatives. In 1961 it is impossible to identify households with 'lone ancestors' (a household with a parent or grandparent of the household head or his wife) if unrelated persons were also present in the household. The recorded number of households with relatives was also defective in the tables on household composition in the Census of 1971 in that grandchildren resident with a grandparent in the absence of their parents were counted as children and not as relatives and households containing two or more married couples or parent-child groups, who were related but not by direct descent were not identified. The fivefold classification of households used by Gray for his study of the household in Britain in 1947 also paid very little attention to relationships between household members other than those between parents and adult children (Gray 1947 as cited in Mogeys 1956: 15-16). His category of 'other' households, for example, included widows with children, widows with grown up children and also married couples living with married children and some grandchildren. A much more informative classification was used by Young and Willmott in their study of the working class families in Bethnal Green in East London. Having found it difficult to extract useful information on the composition of the household from the 1951 Census they devised a classification scheme that in fact bears a close resemblance to the later Hammel-Laslett classification of household types but with some additional details such as distinguishing between parents living with married sons, married daughters in two generation households and between parents with married sons and married daughters in three generation households (Young and Willmott 1957: 209-10⁸). The only advantages provided by the Hammel-Laslett scheme is the identification of households of widowers and widows with unmarried children and the presence of other relatives than siblings in households also containing one married couple or parent and unmarried child.

Apart from some inferences about how the members of certain populations may have perceived the difference between the status of householder and lodger, none of the evidence considered so far offers any insight into the range of views that residents (as opposed to outsiders) might hold of the differently structured household within their community. For this, other evidence is needed and some is available from examination of sociological and anthropological studies of both rural and urban populations undertaken in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

It seems sensible to begin in Llanfihangel yn Ngwynfa, Montgomeryshire which was the earliest of the communities to be surveyed, in 1939 and 1940. In Llanfihangel, farmers and their relatives undertook 80 percent of the work on the farms carried out by males while the wives, female occupiers of holdings and their female relatives did 90 percent of the work undertaken by females (Rees 1951: 60). Fifteen percent of the households of the farmers contained additional relatives such as an unmarried sibling, uncle, aunt,

⁸ There are also major similarities between the Hammel-Laslett scheme and the classification of households proposed by Henry (1967): 44-5 and used by Blayo, Klapisch and van der Woude in Laslett and Wall (1972) although Henry considered that a widow or widower heading a household was also the head of a family even if there was no other member of the family present.

nephew, niece or cousin and there were a number of three generational households. However, almost half of these three generational households were regarded by Rees as temporary or makeshift arrangements. Two of the households contained married daughters whose first child had arrived before a farm had been found for the new family (the young husbands lived with their own parents). Another two households included widowed daughters with children and a further two three generational households were established when the grandparents took into their households the illegitimate child of a daughter. Instances where a married son lived with an aged father formed a distinct minority even of the three generational households (Rees 1951: 70-1). There is a certain similarity between these households in Llanfihangel and the interpretation I offered of the role of the household as a provider of welfare in order to explain the presence of relatives in the households of the inhabitants of Colyton, Devon (only a minority of whom were farmers), in the middle of the nineteenth century (Wall 1986: 282-9, but see Laslett 1988: 155 who insisted that such arrangements had to be acceptable to the householder and could not be claimed as a right). In Llanfihangel, there seemed to be no conscious preference expressed in favour of a particular type of household other than that if there were no unmarried children, an aged father should live in the household of a married daughter. This is in sharp contrast to the acknowledgement of the higher status of married men who would no longer be referred to by their Christian names and the name of their father's farm but by Christian and surname or as 'the husband of a particular farm'. On the other hand it is possible to infer a decided preference against the co-residence of a married son with his parents given that so few did so even though in a large number of families, one son, usually the youngest, inherited the parental holding (Rees 1951: 68). For this, there could be an economic explanation as hill farms would not generate sufficient income to support a large household. Rees, however, felt that many of the residence patterns were shaped by medieval Welsh law according to which the father retained control of the land of the kindred until his death and was then succeeded by his youngest son (Rees 1951: 71). Another inference that could be drawn is that it was the influence of his mother that prevented the inheriting son from marrying during her lifetime as she would never willingly surrender the management of the household to a daughter in law.

In Gosforth which Williams studied between 1950 and 1952, the usual practice was for farmers to retire to a house they had bought in the district and pass the farm to a son, usually the eldest (Williams 1956: 49). It seems plausible that inheritance by the eldest rather than the youngest son (as in Llanfihangel) was feasible because the father was prepared to retire. On the other hand, both in Llanfihangel and Gosforth, the co-residence of a married heir and a parent was unusual. In both communities, therefore there very few stem families of the classic type even though many farms were inherited by a son. In Llanfihangel, most heirs did not marry until their parents were dead; in Gosforth until they had retired. Both in Llanfihangel and Gosforth it was also customary for the widow of a farmer to retain possession of the farm for the rest of her life (unless in the case of Gosforth her late husband had already retired). When in a few cases, a son did inherit the holding immediately following the death of his father and his mother was still alive, the inheriting son would be obliged to support her for the rest of her life as long as she did not remarry (Rees 1951: 72; Williams 1956: 52). The latter limitation

appears also in arrangements governing the transfer of customary land on some medieval English manors (although the widow did not forfeit the land if her new husband paid a high entry fine) and in retirement contracts in the Nordic countries (Ravensdale 1984: 202-3; Moring 2006).

Williams was keen to stress the difference between retirement arrangements in Gosforth from those in some other rural communities. In Gosforth, the farmer and his wife on retirement relocated to a new house in the district whereas in medieval England and in contemporary Ireland, a separate room was reserved for them on the farm, or in Germany in the *Altenteil* which was still on the farm but often consisted of a separate dwelling (Williams 1956: 53). This distinction, however, places too much emphasis on the element of residential proximity (indeed the Irish case was interpreted by Laslett (1972: 27) as involving co-residence when the essence of the retirement arrangement was the same. It seems very likely that even after retirement the elderly couple continued to assist with the farm work just as they did elsewhere (Moring 2006) and just as did the sons of farmers in Gosforth who were not destined to inherit the parental farm and who moved off the farm after they had married. Some sons although living in different parts of the parish turned up daily to help their father (Williams 1956: 46).

The children of the residents of Gosforth whose fathers were neither farmers nor craftsmen, were allowed a greater deal of independence once they reached working age. Nevertheless, the villagers informed Williams that when families had been larger at the start of the twentieth century, the practice had been to reward whichever child had taken care of the elderly parent by ensuring that it was this child who received the larger share of any moveable property after their death, as there was no land to inherit (Williams 1956: 57). Both Moge (for Oxford) and Young and Willmott (for Bethnal Green) also indicate that even in urban areas in the 1950s, the ties between working class parents and their adult children, particularly between mothers and daughters remained strong after they had established separate households. Indeed, as mothers and married daughters spent so much time in each other's households and ate and drank there, Young and Willmott argued that to some extent the households were merged as eating at the same table helped define what constituted a household (Young and Willmott 1957: 31). Moge in reporting the proximity of the households of married daughters to those of their mothers in the St Ebb's district of Oxford, termed them stem families even though the generations did not co-reside, there was no land to inherit and the link was between mothers and daughters rather than between fathers and sons (Moge 1956: 54). It is significant that Moge had to borrow the term 'stem family', used by Le Play to identify peasant families where the son designated as the heir co-resided with his father. Moge's adaptation of the term implies that there was no suitable expression in use locally to describe this type of pattern. Both in Oxford and Bethnal Green it was possible to observe a clear preference on the part of both generations to live near rather than to share a household, with the persons interviewed, emphasising the negative aspects of a shared household with the parents (Moge 1956: 54; Young and Willmott 1957: 17).

Discussion

The evidence discussed above demonstrates that there were some important limitations to the amount of support available from within the family. For example, many wage earning children contributed only a proportion of their earnings to the household budget. In some poorer families, married women did not eat as well as their husbands. On the other hand it is also clear that many children even when they had households of their own were willing to contribute through their work or in cash to the support of their parents. The Poor Law, employers and former employers might also assist in some cases. Such assistance should be viewed as complementary to that provided by family members, whether residing in the same household or in other households, rather than replacing assistance that the family might otherwise have provided.

Some of these sources of support are easier to quantify than are others. The support of the Poor Law to widows with wage earning children was shown for example to provide between 10 and 27 percent of the income of such households in various populations between the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Such a level of support seems relatively modest and does not suggest that the collectivity was as significant source of assistance as Peter Laslett argued should be the case for societies such as that of England where nuclear households predominated. Such households could offer less family support than could complex households in the event of the illness and death of a productive member of the household (Laslett 1988: 155). On the other hand, more extensive support from the Poor Law would be provided to the elderly, both men and women, who were either no longer able to work or who could earn very little (Wall 2006: 142). This indicates that in the past the collectivity in England was an important resource for those persons in greatest need of assistance, although instances of elderly persons who were almost entirely supported by their children, who had households of their own, have also been recorded for various communities (for example from Corsley, Wiltshire, in the early twentieth century).

Evidence has also been produced above that demonstrates that support from family members in England to a widowed mother could be limited. At the outset of the twentieth century, for example, married sons with households of their own to maintain, were contributing no more than between 3 and 7 percent of their earnings to the Poor Law Guardians in Market Drayton, Shropshire, as partial compensation (varying from 17 to 50 percent) of the assistance provided by the Guardians to their widowed mothers. Evidence from Ipswich for the same period shows even working children resident with their widowed mothers contributing only 73 percent of their earnings to the household budget. Nevertheless, it is clear that the widow's own earnings combined with the contribution from the earnings of her resident children provided the largest share of the household budget.

Intermittent and generally a smaller amount of support was provided by the other constituent elements of the collectivity such as friends and neighbours, charities and the Church (to adopt Laslett's 1988 definition of collectivity). More significant was assistance from employers in the form of provision of subsidized food (and sometimes in the form of pensions from former employers). Such assistance could be viewed as

another type of support by the collectivity but perhaps should be considered as an addition to the wages of the worker or former worker.

There are also some wider implications of these results that need consideration. Much research, for instance on social mobility and the standard of living of different sections of the population uses information on the occupation of the head of the household (or family head in the case of studies based on analyses of parish registers) to determine the social position of all members of the household or family. Variability in the extent to which members of different households pooled their incomes and in the frequency with which the standard of living of particular households was boosted by assistance from members of other households as well as from various public bodies, indicates that such measurements of social position will in some cases be seriously misleading. Not all labourers for example would be equally dependent on the wages paid them by their employers. Some persons in late middle age might not be quite as prosperous as first appears if co-resident children retained a proportion of their earnings. Nor would the difference in the standard of living of widows heading their own households and that of married women be as large as suggested by the different earning power of their households if married women did not receive an equal share of the household's resources.

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