

The Population Investigation Committee

Its history and influence over the last 75 years

Friday 18 February 2011, 14:00-18:30

Wellcome Collection Conference Centre, 183 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BE

Programme

Chair: Prof. Sir Tony Wrigley, University of Cambridge

14:00 – 14:30

Registration

14:30 – 14:40

Welcome, introduction

Prof. Sir Tony Wrigley, University of Cambridge, Chairman of PIC 1984-1991

Early afternoon session

14:40 – 15:10

From eugenics to political arithmetic: The early history of the PIC

Dr Edmund Ramsden, Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter

The Population Investigation Committee (PIC) was founded amid considerable controversy surrounding eugenics, birth control, and even the study of population itself. Through the study of demography, its founders, A. M. Carr-Saunders and C. P. Blacker, sought to realise a means of improving the human race that was more consistent with contemporary scientific, social and political values. In their appointment of David Glass, however, the work of the PIC would also reflect the 'political arithmetic' of the great critic of eugenics, Lancelot Hogben. In this paper I will explore this tension between the ideals of social justice, efficiency and improvement as reflected in the demographic surveys of the PIC.

15:10 – 15:40

David Glass and the PIC

Christopher Langford, London School of Economics and Political Science

David Glass' early life and work. His political and scientific viewpoint. His work for the Positive Eugenics Committee and the early PIC. The Royal Commission on Population, and later research. The journal *Population Studies*. The IPU and the IUSSP. His undergraduate and graduate teaching; the MSc. in Demography.

15:40 – 16:10

Setting up the 1946 national Birth Cohort Study

Prof. Michael Wadsworth, Honorary Senior Scientist, MRC Unit for Life Long Health and Ageing

The Population Investigation Committee (PIC) was influential in establishing the Royal Commission on Population, and having piloted a study of maternity in the late 1930s, the PIC undertook a national study in 1946.

The PIC appointed Dr JWB Douglas to direct the study, and in 1948 they jointly published their influential findings in *Maternity in Great Britain* (Oxford University Press). Douglas began a follow-up of the babies born in



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1946, and the sample selected for that purpose became the first national birth cohort study. The interests of both its director James Douglas and of the PIC's chairman, David Glass, are evident in the study's concern with development in terms of health, growth, cognition and educational attainment. Data from those early years have continued to be of great value in understanding the subsequent life of the sample, in particular health and the processes of ageing, currently being measured at ages 60 to 65 years in over 80 percent of the sample members who are alive and resident in Britain.

16:10 – 16:30

Tea and coffee

Late afternoon session

16:30 – 17:00

The Scottish Mental Surveys of 1932 and 1947

Prof. Ian Deary, University of Edinburgh

The origins (rationales and aims) of the Scottish Mental Surveys of 1932 and 1947 are described. The resulting data and findings are summarised. Relationships with the Population Investigation Committee are discussed.

The subsequent, including present-day, uses of the Scottish Mental Surveys are described. The latter include work on cognitive ageing and cognitive epidemiology. Surviving members of both Surveys are still being followed up in the Lothian and Aberdeen Birth Cohorts of 1921 and 1936, and some findings from these programmes are presented.

17:00 – 17:30

Revisiting the Demography of the British Peerage

Prof. Richard Smith, University of Cambridge

Tom Hollingsworth published his famous demographic study of the British Peerage as a supplement to *Population Studies* in 1964. The data set which was created in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a particularly early case of computerisation of an historical data set. Since this work was done a half-century ago there have been formidable advances in computing power and techniques for the measurement of mortality from incomplete data have emerged. This paper will report on some of the work done at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population that has enabled significant revisions to Tom Hollingsworth's earlier demographic findings to be made.

17:30 – 18:00

Placing the PIC in the context of the archival record

Dr Lesley Hall, Wellcome Library

The PIC archive is not just an important collection in itself, it has strong ties with other archival collections in the Wellcome Library and elsewhere, revealing wide-reaching personal and institutional connections. Its synergistic relationships with these other collections will be explored.

18:00 – 18:30

Questions and discussion



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