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Continuity and Change **30** (*1*), *2015*, *3–7*. © *Cambridge University Press 2015*
doi:10.1017/S0268416015000077

Reflections on thirty years of *Continuity and Change*

For those prone to reflection, even rumination, anniversaries invite and perhaps mandate the indulgence of such foibles. That said, temporal benchmarks should be solemnly observed in particular for a journal that maintains as a core theme the illumination and explanation of demographic events. As the surviving founding Editor of *Continuity and Change*, Richard Wall, the journal's guiding light, having been taken from us far too early, this bittersweet obligation falls to me.

As the journal reaches its current milestone, three decades, what better way to perform this task than by recording the way in which the mission of *Continuity and Change* was conceived? Having indulged in this reverie, I will then address the issue of whether and how the journal has, in my humble opinion, fulfilled its goal. After all, we are all historians of varying stripes, and therefore recognise the importance of creating a record for posterity. Doubtless when the journal reaches its Diamond Jubilee, let alone its Centenary volume, our intellectual descendants will want to know how this very curious journal that has always strived to bring together the often diverse and disparate, indeed oft-times unruly, disciplines of law, demography and social structure managed to get off the ground, let alone soar to the great heights that it has achieved. It is perhaps unnecessary to issue a caveat to our readership, largely historians who are cognizant of the limitations of memory and skeptical thereof, to take note of the bias of the recorder.

These reflections are offered by one well aware that, other than on the masthead, the role of Editor – and at *Continuity and Change* it has always been and probably will continue to be a shared dignity – is a limited one. Legal technicalities aside, and as a lawyer I should perhaps be more circumspect, it is correct to say that a journal is neither owned by its publisher and its staff who transform submissions once hardcopy (now electronic) into bound copies (above all striving to operate within budget) nor by its editors who select them. Ultimately, it is the 'content providers', our authors and the readers, who have a better claim to ownership. This is particularly the case with *Continuity and Change* where a 'special relationship' has always existed between all the above stakeholders. A collegial atmosphere has prevailed and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416015000077 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has always characterised the enterprise, one in which editors, referees, authors and the staff of the Press laboured together in order to print articles of the highest intellectual standards.

It all began quite a long time ago. The journal saw the light of day in an era in which the postage stamp governed written communication, though to be sure the fax machine was on the verge of threatening to replace it. In that bygone era, the word 'email' had to be regarded simply as a typographical error. In the realm of academic journal publishing, it was certainly not the best of times; one could easily make the case that the mid-1980s was the worst of times, only escaping such recognition largely because the decline in academic publishing has simply accelerated.

Richard Wall and myself, destined to be the first set of editors with uneasy custody of *Continuity and Change*, were connected, him very closely, me more remotely, with the Cambridge Group. There is no need to set out its rather lengthy official name since all who read these pages will immediately recognise which Cambridge and which Group. Volumes of collected articles had already been produced by that organisation, but Richard Wall had the vision to understand that the regular publication of research emanating either from Group members such as himself, or those on the fringes like myself, would be of great assistance in furthering the Group's diverse agenda and its prestige. Though *Continuity and Change* was not the Group's journal in any formal, official sense, that it was intimately bound to 27 Trumpington Street can hardly be denied. After all, Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley, the Group's founders, were on the editorial board, as was Roger Schofield, the Group's director at the time. Over the years, few Group members (both actual and spiritual) escaped a tour of duty on the board. This close association generated articles to be sure, but much more significantly the ethos of the journal, its collaborative nature, took its form from the one that prevailed at the Group, perhaps best characterised by the intellectual atmosphere (and good-natured banter) that prevailed at coffee and tea time in the Group's library.

Less interesting is my own involvement. I had left Cambridge in body though not in soul a few years earlier. At Cornell, I founded with a colleague *Law and History Review* as a competitor to the *American Journal of Legal History*. I had hoped that it would be an outlet for a 'new' legal history, one that used legal records to understand a cluster of themes in social structure in past time. While it achieved much success, and replaced the *American Journal of Legal History* as the American Society for Legal History's journal, the law, at least in the *Review*, devoured the history (as law is wont to do) and Cornell devoured me. I moved to Tulane Law School and the new dean, John R. Kramer, an undergraduate history major who had the uncanny ability to find funding for academic projects that he deemed worthy, was willing to subsidise a journal to retain my support for other of his many academic ventures. On the

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inside front cover, the masthead acknowledged 'grateful thanks' to the Tulane Law School.

Richard Wall, encouraged by another academic visionary, Peter Laslett, was prepared to participate in the enterprise. Somehow Richard arranged a meeting with Dennis Forbes, the then head of the Press's Journals' Division, in late December of 1984. Mr Forbes agreed to fly L. R. Poos, another displaced Cantabridgian, over to the Edinburgh Building, the Press's headquarters, to persuade him that the Press really did need to be on the cutting edge of this new intellectual venture. In the holiday spirit, no doubt, and content with the shared economic risk in the form of the Tulane subsidy, Mr Forbes agreed that the Cambridge University Press should launch the journal.

The easy part now accomplished, money and commitment to publish secured, the three of us needed to satisfy the academic community, those who would make the journal a success, that we did indeed have an agenda, that there was actually a vacant niche in the otherwise cluttered intellectual order that required just such an ornament. Many hours were spent formulating the language that still, after thirty years with a word changed here and there, graces *Continuity and Change*'s inside cover: '…*Continuity and Change* aims to define an area … Emphasis will be upon studies whose agenda or methodology combines elements from traditional fields such as history, sociology, law, demography, economics or anthropology or ranges freely between them.'

Was *Continuity and Change*'s agenda immediately fulfilled? Newly launched journals are rarely able to garner the scholarship of established academics. The great worthies can roam elsewhere. It is with respect to submissions that the Group connection was so critical. In the first place, the Group's prestige rendered *Continuity and Change* a slightly more respectable outlet than most. More importantly, the late eighties were a salutary era in one respect. A new generation of Europeans, western and then eastern, descended on the Group. Queues formed outside Richard Wall's office comprised of scholars working on household structure: unpacking yet another 'census-like enumeration'. That is not to say that papers on other social structural history and historical demography topics did not come our way, attracted to the intellectual Mecca that was 27 Trumpington Street. A second source of submissions was the wealth of papers presented at the Social Science History Association annual meeting. At these American, and later European, conclaves, the Family and Demography networks produced sessions that generated both individual papers and special issues. The editors would listen intently at the back of the room during sessions and then pounce on presenters in order to garner a submission.

Finally, I had not given up on my own vision of legal history. What struck Richard Wall, the non-lawyer, was the number of research projects in social structural history that made extensive use of legal records as evidence.

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These papers surfaced at conferences sponsored by Tulane, were solicited and were spontaneously generated. Richard became a self-taught lawyer, as I had become a self-taught, albeit less proficient, historical demographer. Richard was a harsh judge of what constituted a *Continuity and Change* article, especially in legal history, and manifested exacting standards to determine whether particular legal records marshaled by an author could sustain his or her argument.

The early years of the journal often felt like a struggle as we brought rudimentary works, frequently from the pens of young scholars whose native language was not English, to meet and even surpass the exacting editorial standards set by our taskmasters at the Press, first Ella Harris and then Daniel Pearce. It was taxing for the three of us, to balance our *Continuity and Change* mission to seek out and refine the research of budding scholars with our other academic responsibilities, but it was a labour of love. My own formulation of the necessary mindset, which I shared with my fellow editors Richard and Larry, Phillipp Schofield and Eilidh Garrett, was that given the minimal compensation, conference expenses at best, one only did it because it was 'fun'. Fun it was; all of us who were and are privileged to edit this journal are provided with a justification and an obligation to delve into topics far removed from our core intellectual interests. This liberty, I believe, has expanded our intellectual horizons and has had a salutary effect upon the quality of our own research.

In retrospect, *Continuity and Change* delivered upon its undertaking. This assertion can be proved by an exercise in counting. During its first five years, *Continuity and Change* published 74 articles. Authors of articles were drawn from all the academic disciplines enumerated on the inside cover. As to subdiscipline or field, the articles ranged widely. Almost all (by my count 69) dealt with social structural history, but there were 26 articles that I would classify as legal history and 31 as demographic history, again by my idiosyncratic characterisation. How does one explain the disparity in these numbers: 126 topics in 74 articles? Glance, once again, at the sacred words set out on the inside cover. The greater part of the articles published were 'studies whose agenda or methodology combines elements' of the above disciplines.

The marriage amongst these three fields continued in subsequent volumes of *Continuity and Change*. This can best be demonstrated by reference to special issues. Perhaps the special issue in the Twenty-fifth anniversary volume that was produced to honour Richard Wall: 'Special Issue on Kinship and Beyond from the early Modern to the Present' edited by Naomi Tadmor and Richard Smith provides an example. The pledge that *Continuity and Change* 'aims to define an area' is apparent between its covers. The disciplines represented, easily deduced by references to the schools and departments with

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which the authors were associated, were inclusive: demography, history, law and anthropology are represented, with the addition of social policy and historical geography.

The salutary blend continues. Again an idiosyncratic tally of the articles published in volumes 26 to 28 (the last three full volumes in hard copy as I write) demonstrates that our mission continues. Forty-four articles were published during the three years these volumes represent. Again, most of the articles, 35, fall into the broad category of social structural history, but the legal historians can claim 21 of the articles, and the demographers 15. Once again, only a scant handful (less than a dozen) do not cross disciplinary boundaries. *Continuity and Change* continues to fulfill the niche painstakingly defined three decades ago; the triad of the primary fields law, demography and social structural history blend together well between its covers.

Though my tallies presented above may be regarded as suspect, one can simply review the contents page of the most recent special issue 'Law courts, contracts and rural society in Europe 1200–1600' to demonstrate my point. Chris Briggs has brought together the work of four scholars who have worked on credit arrangements in local courts in Catalonia, Holland and Poland. His introduction draws comparisons from his own work on medieval England. The interdisciplinary quality of the special issues, a feature of *Continuity and Change* since volume 3, remains a crucial motif effectively employed to further the journal's mission.

No doubt the journal has evolved over the years. Each editorial team has placed their own gloss on the themes that were isolated by the Founding Editors in 1986. Yet, the sales pitch used to launch the journal still resonates three decades later. Connections between scholars in the various disciplines can and will continue to be forged and *Continuity and Change* has played a substantial role in so doing. Our current quartet of editors, Chris Briggs, Susan Leonard, Julie Marfany and Mary Louise Nagata, are certainly up to the task of carrying the mission forward.

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