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A Publication of the SSRC Cambridge Group  
for the History of Population and Social Structure

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RICHARD WALL

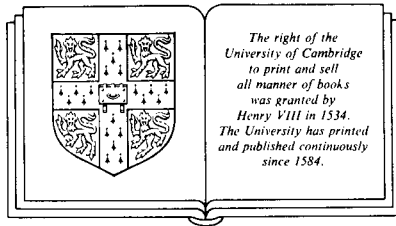
in collaboration with

JEAN ROBIN

and

PETER LASLETT

of the SSRC Cambridge Group for the  
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## Preface

The discipline of family history has grown so rapidly in recent years that inevitably it has come to suffer from a certain lack of comparability and methodology. The earliest studies in the present generation of writing were on the grand scale, outlines of family systems applying to half or more of the European continent. Later the thematic approach, descriptions of families within economic, cultural, or legal systems, and the local study came to be favoured. Family history lends itself particularly well to the latter, since it is easier at this level to set out the social, economic, and cultural influences on family patterns. Nevertheless, other approaches retain their validity, not only to guard us against the atypical case study but to focus attention on key concepts such as the family as work group, concepts which are all too easily lost sight of when sifting through the detail of a particular community study.

The individual contributions to the present volume reflect this division in the literature, some being particular, some general or thematic; indeed, they have been selected to illustrate both the range of approach to, and the variations in, European social structure of past times. Inevitably, a work of this sort could not go forward without a great deal of collaboration among the various contributors, and I am grateful to them and to others for responding so fully to points that have been raised during the editorial process. Our debts in this direction are acknowledged at the appropriate place in each chapter. The major burden, however, has been borne by the staff of the SSRC Cambridge Group, past and present, and here I would like to record my appreciation of the editorial and secretarial assistance of Karla Oosterveen, Doreen Togher, Les Pepper, and Amanda Tanner and the advice of my fellow editors, Peter Laslett and Jean Robin. On Karla Oosterveen initially and then on Jean Robin have fallen



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some of the most burdensome tasks of reference checking and table standardization.

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*June 1982*

RICHARD WALL