1 Introduction

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Lawrence Stone did not invent family history, but his landmark book *The Family, Sex and Marriage 1500–1800* remains the first volume to which many students and non-specialists turn for guidance on the history of family life in England. It not only established a new sub-discipline of history in the public consciousness, it presented a coherent and deliberately provocative hypothesis regarding the character of families in the past that continues to court controversy and stimulate further research today. For all the specialist books and articles that have been published on the early modern family in the past three decades none, it is fair to say, has reached as wide an audience, or aroused the same controversy, as Stone's seminal work. This collection of new essays marks the thirtieth anniversary of its publication, and a survey of the terrain that has been charted since then, through which Stone forged a pioneering trail. The considerable volume of traffic now plying this route has led to knowledge and discussion about early modern family history assuming the characteristics of a superhighway, one that has been the site of several notable collisions. It is our purpose to provide a roadmap through the enduringly popular territory staked out by Stone, and to signpost current and future directions.

The aim of *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, as Stone explained to his readers, was 'to chart and document, to analyse and explain, some massive shifts in world views and value systems that occurred in England over a period of some three hundred years, from 1500 to 1800'.[1] Central to his book was the hypothesis that the English family could be characterised in three descriptive phases which gradually superseded one another: the 'open lineage family' (*c.*1450–1630), the 'restricted patriarchal nuclear family' (*c.*1550–1700) and finally the 'closed domesticated nuclear family' (*c.*1640–1800). The earliest of these family forms, he argued, was characterised by cold, distant family relations; decisions about when and

[1] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977), p. 3.

whom to marry were made collectively by wider kin; family relationships were ruled by patriarchal male authority, and parent–child relations were often brutal. By the eighteenth century, however, the importance of kin had declined in a society that placed growing importance upon individualism; marriage was predicated upon mutual attraction; married life was supposed to be companionate, and parent–child relationships had become more loving and affectionate.

Unlike some other fields of historical research, such as diplomatic history and high politics, family history universally operates at the meeting point between history and the historian's own subjective experience (most people, historians included, have their views of the family shaped and coloured by personal experience). Few subjects are as emotive, or as politically charged, as the family, and, as a result, temporal distance from the past has at times lent less of a critical distance than might be thought proper for academic enquiry. Indeed, the vehemence that characterised debate between historians about Stone's book in the late 1970s and early 1980s has something of the quality, for a younger generation of scholars at least, of a rumour that their parents fought bitterly in early married life, but somehow patched up their differences when they realised that they were in it for the long haul. Alan Macfarlane, for example, delivered one of the earliest and most damning critiques of Stone's work, notably the latter's use of anthropological parallels without recourse to systematic bodies of evidence or consideration for cultural and temporal differences, such as those between modern Africa and early modern England.[2] Macfarlane also questioned Stone's methodology, and manipulation of historical evidence to fit his main hypothesis. One example of this was Stone's selective reading of personal documents such as the diary of Ralph Josselin, in which he chose only those passages where the Puritan divine appeared unmoved by the deaths of his small children, yet omitted those entries where Josselin expressed paternal love and concern. In later years, Macfarlane published two books which together presented an alternative meta-narrative to Stone; the first argued that a precociously modern sense of individualism emerged in England as early as the thirteenth century, and continued through to modern times; the second was a history of love and marriage that built upon this essentially static picture of personal relations from the medieval to the modern period.[3] In these two works, Macfarlane offered one of the few alternatives

[2] A. Macfarlane, 'Review of Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*', *History and Theory* 18 (1979), 110–11, 125.

[3] A. Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford, 1978); A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300–1840* (Oxford, 1986).

to Stone for considering the *longue durée*, but his analysis lacked the dynamic sense of historical change presented in *The Family, Sex and Marriage*.

Subsequent studies of the English family in the 1980s tended to engage with, but cast doubt upon, Stone's hypothesis. For example, Keith Wrightson showed how patriarchal authority applied in theory to this period, but could be modified in practice, by illustrating the range of experiences of married couples in which much depended upon factors such as the personality and relative status of husband and wife. Far from being passive subordinates, some women developed strategies to modify or resist patriarchal authority, including marshalling support through friends, neighbours and kin to circumvent their putative subordination to their husbands.[4] Further research on the affective ties within families illuminated the limitations of Stone's approach to the history of parent–child relations. Linda Pollock, for example, presented much evidence for affectionate relationships between parents and children long before the eighteenth century.[5] The final part of Stone's book examined sexual attitudes and behaviour, chiefly within the upper classes. Stone focused on the more salacious aspects of sexual behaviour (a pattern he continued in his later work on adultery and divorce), while neglecting to examine what attitudes to deviant sexuality could reveal about normative ideals. Subsequent historical research on the history of sexuality, but also on family life in general, has provided a much more nuanced and detailed picture of the early modern family than Stone presented, but considerably more confusion over the 'bigger picture'.[6]

That there is no immediate alternative to Stone's model (its flaws notwithstanding) for thinking about change over time in the history of the English family is partly a reflection of several influences that have shaped the wider practice of academic history in the past three decades. In their development, social, economic, demographic, cultural and gender history have all had an impact on the writing of family history. In a survey of the historiography in 1998, Keith Wrightson noted some of the vibrant new research in early modern family history but also the lack of a metanarrative beyond Stone and Macfarlane for thinking about continuity

[4] Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London, 1982 and reprints), esp. chs. 3 and 4.

[5] Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge, 1983).

[6] See for example J. R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985); Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987); Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* (London, 1995), Part I.

and change.[7] Other leading historians have observed that their younger colleagues are less inclined to undertake 'grand narratives' in any field, not just family history, since the trend towards professional specialisation has led to more doctoral theses being researched on narrowly defined and thematically focused subjects.[8] It is deeply paradoxical that Lawrence Stone, who focused in the main upon the aristocracy, gentry and middling sorts, and who (as E. P. Thompson so witheringly pointed out at the time[9]) often ignored or patronised the 'common man', starts to look in retrospect like a 'people's historian', who succeeded in transcending the usual obstacles to disseminating subjects beyond the history of 'great men'.

Understanding the significance of Stone's work and the reasons why it courted such controversy requires a much longer look at the origins of the historiography of the family, dating back to the early nineteenth century. The industrial revolution refocused critical interest upon the family through contemporary concern regarding the effects of rapid urbanisation and factory production upon the social conditions of the labouring masses. Since then, each generation has produced a history of the family that speaks to its own time and political circumstances. Friedrich Engels, for example, addressed the rise of industrialisation, and its transformative effect upon the family into a unit of state-controlled production.[10] F. W. Maitland, as a late-Victorian, championed the rise of individualism (curiously anticipating Macfarlane), seeking thereby to downplay the importance of collectivity and feudal kinship, and instead emphasising the rational influence of English law and the gradual penetration of the state into areas of authority (such as the administration of justice) that had previously been exercised among tribal groups or clans through practices such as blood-feud.[11] The early French and German demographers, nostalgic for a 'golden' pre-industrial age that had never existed, developed and debated concepts such as the 'stem' family (*la famille*

[7] Keith Wrightson, 'The family in early modern England: Continuity and change', in S. Taylor, R. Connors and C. Jones (eds.), *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1998), pp. 1–22.
[8] David Cannadine, 'British history: Past, present – and future?', *Past and Present* 116 (1987), 169–91.
[9] E. P. Thompson, 'Look darling: A history of us!', *New Society* (8 September, 1977).
[10] Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first pub. (1884) as *Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*, trans. Ernest Untermann (Chicago, 1902).
[11] See Stephen D. White, 'Maitland on family and kinship', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 89 (1996), 91–113.

souche). They hypothesised that multi-generational households had been the dominant form of family structure before the impact of the industrial revolution, where kin lived and worked together, producing hierarchical stability under a patriarchal (in this case, meaning paternal) ordering, and social harmony through the provision of care for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.[12]

By the mid-twentieth century, early experiments in the use of computer technology offered new techniques for challenging this 'golden age' hypothesis using quantitative data to show the variety of family forms that had existed before the nineteenth century across Europe. Early pioneers of this approach such as Louis Henry and Peter Laslett found a marked difference in the prevalence of extended family structures in the southern Mediterranean countries over the primarily nuclear family formations in northern Europe, including the Low Countries, England and Scandinavia, from at least the sixteenth century.[13] Demography offered (and in many respects still presents) the least parochial approach to the study of the English family, with a strong tradition of quantitative research that demonstrates comparative pan-European and indeed global trends in household size and composition.[14]

Since the 1960s, the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure has harnessed evolving computer technologies to develop increasingly sophisticated quantitative techniques to study family history, such as 'back-projection' (the calculation of population size and structure using surviving sources such as parish registers and nineteenth-century censuses, which allows a best-guess of the numbers of people in preceding generations), and 'family reconstitution' (the linking of data concerned with the baptisms, marriages and burials of individual families).[15] For the first time, historians could substantiate some surprising findings about early modern households that exploded the myth of the pre-industrial extended family, and which now are accepted as

[12] This debate is usefully summarised in M. Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500–1914* (London, 1980), pp. 22–30.

[13] L. Henry, *Anciennes familles genevoises* (Paris, 1956); Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1965); see also L. Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson (eds.), *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986).

[14] See for example P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R. M. Smith (eds.), *Bastardy and its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan* (London, 1980).

[15] E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (London, 1981), and E. A. Wrigley *et al.*, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580–1837* (Cambridge, 1997).

incontrovertible features of early modern society: population growth was controlled through couples marrying late (in their mid- to late-twenties) or not at all; the structure of most families was nuclear, although households could be larger with non-family members resident such as apprentices, lodgers and domestic servants; remarriage was common upon the death of a spouse after ten to fifteen years of marriage.[16] The findings of the Cambridge Group in the 1970s and 1980s, which were at first revolutionary, have now become widely accepted, although it is still the case that many of the implications of this demographic evidence have yet to be fully explored.

Other than demography, perhaps the single most important influence upon the study of family history to have emerged since the 1970s is the study of gender, for which Anthony Fletcher's *Gender, Sex and Subordination* (1995) remains one of the most influential single volumes in recent years. Fletcher's work surveyed the construction of gendered ideas through medical, religious and literary sources. He highlighted not only prescriptive material, but the distinctive experiences of women and men within the family by exploring personal narratives, which provided insights into (among other things) the gendered expectations that shaped the upbringing of girls and boys.[17] As Fletcher's book illustrates, the consideration of masculinity as well as femininity as social constructs has been particularly popular since the 1990s. Moreover, as sensitivity to the variables in power distribution according to age, status and gender has increased, so (as will shortly be discussed) historians have come to question the concept of 'family' itself.

In the past thirty years, the rise of new historicism and postmodernism has also influenced the practice of history through the insistence upon the specifics of cultural production and meaning, 'multiple readings' of sources, and a suspicion that the study of the past through systematic gathering and sifting of archival evidence is less important than the 'linguistic turn', something against which Stone himself protested vociferously.[18] Closer attention to the language used by contemporaries has,

[16] See the works cited in note 15; also E. A. Wrigley, 'Marriage, fertility and population growth in eighteenth-century England', in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp. 137–85; D. Weir, 'Rather never than late: Celibacy and age at marriage in English cohort fertility', *Journal of Family History* 9 (1984), 340–54.

[17] The experiences of children and teenagers as recorded in their own words remain relatively under-explored: see Anthony Fletcher, *The Experience of Children in England, 1600–1914* (New Haven and London, forthcoming, 2007).

[18] Lawrence Stone, 'History and Post-Modernism', *Past and Present* 131 (1991), 217–18; see also Patrick Joyce and Catriona Kelly's response in *Past and Present*, 133 (1991), 204–13.

however, been extremely productive, not least in revealing that early modern people did not define the family in the way in which Stone supposed. According to Naomi Tadmor (who examined a range of eighteenth-century diaries and fictional texts), when early modern people referred to their family, they could include members of their household who were unrelated by marriage or blood. Instead of the 'family' there was a concept of the 'household-family'.[19] Furthermore, whereas Stone had no compunction in writing about 'the English family' as though a consensus could be reached about what the family is and has been in history, subsequent historians produced multiple definitions of the subject, insisting upon the contingency of 'families' in various socio-economic and cultural settings. As early as 1980, Michael Anderson insisted upon the diversity of family forms, functions and attitudes, and concluded that a single history of the Western family could not be written.[20] More recently there has also been a recognition that most people experienced family life with more than one family. There was the birth family, the family in which young people might reside if they learned a trade as apprentices or worked as domestic servants, the new family that was formed upon marriage, and further families that could be established when the death of a spouse led to remarriage, step-parents and step-children.[21]

In addition, the spread of postmodern ideas since the 1980s has encouraged historians of the family to attempt to uncover the voices of those who did not represent the majority experience of family life. Berry and Foyster's chapter on childless men in early modern England in this volume is a reminder that not all family lives were conducted in the nuclear family context, but that the pressure to conform could lead to family practices such as surrogate parenting. Previously marginalised or taboo subjects such as marital violence and child abuse are also receiving attention from early modern historians.[22] The revelation of hidden histories is to be welcomed, but the time will no doubt come when current research undertaken in the context of heightened present-day preoccupations with issues such as one-parent families, paedophilia, high divorce rates and gay marriage will in turn be superseded in as-yet unanticipated ways. The family mutates, and the writing of family history must do so too.

[19] Naomi Tadmor, 'The concept of the household-family in eighteenth-century England', *Past and Present* 151 (1996), 111–40.
[20] Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family,* p. 14; the title of Colin Heywood's *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge, 2001) also reflects this attitude.
[21] Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1450–1800* (Harlow, 2001), p. 6.
[22] See Martin Ingram, 'Child sexual abuse in early modern England', in M. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 63–84, 257–62; Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History 1660–1857* (Cambridge, 2005).

During the thirty years since Stone's book was published, contemporary concerns about the family have certainly shifted, and new approaches to the study of history have thus emerged. To fault Stone for not having the prescience to anticipate later historical trends (the field of gender history springs to mind) is, however, fundamentally to misunderstand the novelty of what he achieved in *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, and its importance as one of the canonical works of early modern historiography. In his selective use of sources, Stone was less than a model historian, but his hypothesis about the evolution of the modern family has proved to be 'good to think with'.

Any collection on the theme of the early modern family must simultaneously demonstrate the chronological and thematic breadth which is emblematic of a vibrant field of research, but also the selectivity that comes with specialist focus. All contributors to this volume were asked to reflect upon their research in relation to the landmark contribution of Lawrence Stone to the field, and with this request all have happily concurred. The points of agreement and dissent with Stone's hypothesis summarised at the outset of this introduction are instructive. In general, throughout the collection, there is agreement with Stone that the family in the early modern period was of great political significance, since analysis of contemporary writings has shown that the health and security of the nation was believed to rest on the stability of family life. As one seventeenth-century author declared, 'the family is a seminary of the Church and Commonwealth'; thus, the family was intended to be the testing ground for male authority; 'it is impossible for a man to understand how to govern the Commonwealth, that doth not know how to rule his own house'.[23] The belief that good order in the family depended upon the morality of its members, and that if there was disorder in the family its repercussions would be felt well beyond the walls of the family home, meant that the family was regarded as a public institution. As Joanne Bailey and Tim Stretton show in this volume, individuals outside the family unit, whether servants, employees, neighbours or friends, were rarely reluctant to comment upon or directly intervene in the family lives of others. Families were everybody's business in this period.

Stone's focus upon the social elite meant that, although he paid attention to their property and inheritance considerations, he was not concerned with examining how economic issues affected the majority of

[23] William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 3rd edn (London, 1634), p. 28; John Dodd and Robert Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1612), p. 16; S. D. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988).

early modern families. However, within the rural and proto-industrial economy the family home was the base for economic life, and all family members, whether men, women or children, were expected to be economically productive. Proof that couples were financially independent and self-sufficient before they married, set up their own households, and started families, was routinely required by those in positions of authority. The frequency with which husbands and wives worked alongside one other, performing similar tasks and contributing equally to the household economy, has been the subject of extensive and lengthy debate.[24] A crucial question for historians of women, and (to a lesser extent) children, has been how far their economic input was valued so that it affected the balance of power in early modern households. Historians who regarded the early modern period as a golden age of family life at least partly derived their argument from the conviction that this was a time in which married women were more economically active than in the period that followed.[25] With more recent studies focusing upon women as consumers as well as producers, discussions about these issues seem set to continue.[26] What is undisputed is that, to function as economic producers and consumers, women were required on a regular basis to leave the home. In addition, as John Walter's chapter in this collection shows, women's work and management of family budgets could lead them to assume very public roles as participants and sometimes leaders of popular protests. The presence of children alongside their mothers and fathers on such occasions shows families acting together as economic units. Understanding the economic responsibilities of family members also helps to explain patterns of property crime in early modern England, as Garthine Walker argues here, and in particular highlights the crucial part played by married women in criminal activities.

For the many families that struggled at subsistence levels, day-to-day financial decision-making by family members, rather than just the choices

[24] For an overview of this debate see the useful collection of essays in Pamela Sharpe (ed.), *Women's Work: The English Experience 1650–1914* (London, 1998). On the working lives of middling-sort women, see Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London, 1991), and Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (London, 1996). More recently, see Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760–1830* (Oxford, 2006).

[25] An idea first put forward by Alice Clark in *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919), but since much disputed. See for example, Amanda Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *Historical Journal* 36, 2 (1993), 383–414.

[26] For a summary of recent historiography, see H. Berry, 'Women, consumption and taste', in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Women's History: Britain, 1700–1850* (London, 2005), ch. 9.

made at marriage and death examined by Stone, could make all the difference between economic survival, ruin and starvation. Furthermore, Steve Hindle's chapter demonstrates that the experience of poverty, and the likelihood of needing to resort to the parish for relief, was shaped by the family life-cycle. Families with young children, widows, the sick and the elderly were all at vulnerable stages of the life-course when family members could be viewed as more of an economic burden than an asset. Thus the life-cycle approach to the writing of family history has led to more awareness that family experience is contingent upon age as well as status and gender. For example, Walter shows how, depending upon age and gender, contemporaries could either license or condemn the active engagement of family members in popular protests. Instead of Stone's division of the life-course into just two stages of childhood and adulthood, studies of youth and old age have also demonstrated the multiplicity of the 'ages of man', and the inter-generational dynamism that was a feature of early modern family relationships.

As Hindle recognises, early modern families did not operate in splendid isolation, but were embedded in a network of kin, friends and neighbours. The individuals in these networks could provide economic and emotional support, and more negatively, as Tim Stretton argues, become the critics and agents of control and regulation when family life broke down. Stone's theory that kin played less of a role in aristocratic and genteel life as the period progressed has been widely challenged.[27] The contributors to this volume demonstrate that the importance of kin may well have varied across the social scale: Hindle finds that kin were of minor importance to the survival strategies of the poor compared to neighbours, whereas Ingrid Tague's analysis of aristocratic family life demonstrates that kin and family lineage continued to be key concerns among the ruling elite in the eighteenth century.

Since the 1990s, the meaning of friendships to men and women have been explored by historians, especially in the light of their emotional content, but also the extent to which friends could act as substitutes or even competitors for family affections merits further examination.[28] Neighbours made up the communities in which families were located, and

[27] See, for example, K. Wrightson, 'Household and kinship in sixteenth-century England', *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1981), 151–8; and D. Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction in early modern England', *Past and Present* 113 (1986), 38–69.

[28] For examples of historical studies of friendship see A. Bray, 'Homosexuality and the signs of male friendship in Elizabethan England', *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990), 1–19; A. Bray and M. Rey, 'The body of the friend: Continuity and change in masculine friendship in the seventeenth century', in T. Hitchcock and M. Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660–1800* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 65–84; N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001); and