

Institution: University of Essex
Unit of Assessment: 30 – History
Title of case study: The Uses of the History of Individual Identification
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Edward Higgs' research on the history of state and citizen data collection has become the standard work in the field. This research has included the I-CeM Project, which is creating a digital version of the British censuses 1851 to 1911 from data supplied by a commercial genealogical services provider, Find My Past. I-CeM's on-going collaboration with Find My Past has already improved the operations of the latter's data team. The anticipated future benefits of these digital data have already been used to support Find My Past publicity and tender applications. Higgs' expertise in the area has also informed the arguments and evidence he has provided for the UK Government and German state archivists on their census strategies. It also underpins his participation in the EU-sponsored Ethics Committee of the European Association for Biometrics, in which Higgs contributed historical knowledge to the development of ethical standards for biometrics companies.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Research and publications by Edward Higgs (Senior Lecturer in History from 2000, Reader from 2004, Professor from 2009) have made internationally recognised contributions to the history of census-taking and of other mechanisms by which state authorities gather and store personal information about their citizens. His book <i>Making Sense of the Census Revisited</i> (2005) elucidated the structure and meaning of the historical census records, and has become the standard work in the field. In addition, his monographs <i>The Information State in England: the Central Collection of Information on Citizens, 1500-2000</i> (2004), and <i>Life, Death and Statistics: Civil Registration, Censuses and the Work of the General Register Office, 1837-1952</i> (2005), placed the British census in a broader institutional, political, and social context. Most recently his 2011 monograph <i>Identifying the English</i> extended his work to all forms of identification of individuals based on information gathering in the past 500 years.</p> <p>From 2004 to 2006 he was employed on a JISC-funded project to research and write essays on the history of British census-taking for the Histpop website (www.histpop.org). This is an open-access website providing images of the published British census reports, and of the <i>Annual Reports of the Registrar Generals</i>, for the period 1801 to 1931. This showcased his further detailed work on the history, content and interpretation of census records, and the work of the General Register Office, deepening the knowledge base underpinning the impact. Higgs' articles in popular journals such as <i>BBC History</i> and <i>Who Do You Think You Are Magazine</i> have disseminated this research to a wider non-academic audience.</p> <p>In 2008, in collaboration with Professor Jane Caplan, University of Oxford, Higgs received a Leverhulme Trust international network grant of £46,000 to establish an international network for the study of the history of identification (IdentiNet). This network held two international conferences in 2008 and 2009, and a collection of the papers published in 2013 as <i>Identification and Registration Practices in Transnational Perspective</i>. This work was particularly important to developing Higgs' research in the history of biometrics, which would inform his advice for the Ethics Committee of the European Association for Biometrics (covered in section four below).</p>

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Finally, Higgs' research on the history of census data led to his acquisition of funding for research designed to produce industry-facing outputs. In 2009 Higgs, with Professor Kevin Schurer of the University of Essex Data Archive, was awarded a large external grant from the ESRC (£848,143) for the Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) Project. This involved the creation of a single digital dataset of the manuscript British census enumerators' books from 1851 to 1911, and is one of the world's largest historical dataset projects. The project was undertaken in partnership with Brightsolid, the parent company of the online genealogy business Find My Past. Brightsolid provided Higgs and Schurer with the raw census data used to create the I-CeM dataset. The I-CeM project developed Higgs' research on the history of personal information collation to devise coding and classification systems for Brightsolid's raw census data. I-CeM's innovations in census data classification included its integration of the Scottish returns from 1861 onwards into the dataset, data previously categorised independently due to the fact that Scotland had its own census-taking apparatus and its own conventions for information gathering.

3. References to the research

Higgs, E. (2004) *The Information State in England: the central collection of information on citizens, 1500-2000*, London: Palgrave. ISBN: 978-0333920695

Higgs, E. (2004) *Life, Death and Statistics: Civil Registration, Censuses and the work of the General Register Office, 1837-1952*, Hatfield: Local Population Studies. ISBN: 978-0954162108

Higgs, E. (2005) *Making Sense of the Census Revisited*, London: The National Archives and Institute of Historical Research. ISBN: 978-1905165001

Higgs, E. (2011) *Identifying the English: Personal Identification 1500 to the Present*, London: Continuum. ISBN: 978-1-4411-8203-6

About, I., J. Brown, and G. Lonergan (eds.) (2013) *Identification and Registration Practices in Transnational Perspective*, Palgrave MacMillan. ISBN: 978-0230354388

Research Funding

Kevin Schurer, University of Essex (PI) and Edward Higgs (Co-I); *The Integrated Census Microdata Project*, ESRC; 06/04/09 – 30/6/13; £848,143

4. Details of the impact

Higgs' work on census data and identification has had three impacts: through the I-CeM project, the research has brought benefits to the commercial activities of an industrial partner; through Higgs' advice to the European Association for Biometrics, the research has informed ethical guidance for the collection and storage of biometrics data throughout Europe; and through the submission of expert testimony Higgs has informed the operations of state census-data collection and archiving both in the UK and in Germany.

Contributing an Historical Dimension to the Ethics of European Biometrics

Given his extensive research and publications in the history of identification, Higgs was invited to take part in a number of EU-funded programmes bringing together European Commission officials and biometrics vendors to discuss the merits and dangers of biometric systems. These included the RISE project (Raising pan-European and International Awareness on Ethical Aspects of Biometrics and Security Technologies) and the TABULA RASA project addressing direct attacks to

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trusted biometric systems, both funded via the EU's Framework Programme 7. Higgs is now a member of the Ethics Committee of the European Association for Biometrics, a non-profit organisation advancing the proper and beneficial use of biometrics in Europe, with participation by industrial stakeholders such as Safran Morpho, European governments, and international bodies such as the European Commission and European Parliament. Higgs is also a member of the Integrated Mission Group for Security Task Area 3 (IMGS-TA3) group on Ethics, Society and Human Factors providing information and policy documents for stakeholders in European security research, specifically those engaged in research orientation and management (within the European Commission H2020 programme), national security research representatives and directors, as well as end-users and regulators.

Feedback on Higgs' contributions to these groups includes the following statement from the Chair of the Ethics Committee of the European Association for Biometrics:

Professor Higgs was invited to contribute to both the RISE and the TABULA RASA projects. On the basis of his contribution to those projects Prof Higgs was appointed as a member of the Ethics Committee of the European Association for Biometrics. As a member of the Ethics Committee he has helped to develop the EAB's ethics policy. Specifically, Prof Higgs has provided valuable advice on the historical dimension of the ethics of biometrics. His advice has led to the inclusion of an historical dimension into the ethical policy produced by the European Commission and the EAB.

Chair of the Ethics Committee of the European Association for Biometrics

Influencing State Archiving and Social Science Policy (UK and Germany)

In 2012 the UK Government mooted an end to the British census. In response to this suggestion a Parliamentary Select Committee heard evidence from a variety of institutions with interests in census data. As a leading historian in the field, Higgs was invited to submit evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Science and Technology respecting the future of the British census. In his evidence Higgs argued that substituting the census with alternative means of data collections would seriously undermine the usefulness of this data for historical research, and that alternative data sources would need to meet a number of criteria that are presently only met by census data [corroborating source 2]. Higgs' contribution, along with other evidence submitted to the Committee, resulted in a Committee report that warned that alternative sources of data would need to be significantly improved in order to be an adequate substitute for census data [corroborating source 3].

In 2013 Higgs was invited to speak at the State Archives North Rhine-Westphalia in Düsseldorf. The State archives held a colloquium addressing the topic 'Archives and Statistics' attended by around 100 local state archivists, statisticians, and social scientists. Higgs spoke about the I-CeM project and the general state of historical censuses and data sets in Britain in order to inform State Archive discussions of how to improve archiving and the access of official statistics in Germany. Feedback from an archivist at the State Archive who organised the event confirms that Higgs' contribution is helping the State Archives make decisions about cooperation with commercial providers and the presentation of census data online [source 4].

Find My Past – benefitting I-CeM's industrial partner

In 2009 Higgs and Schurer went into partnership with Find My Past to undertake the I-CeM project. Find My Past (FMP) is a company that provides online genealogical services to over 2 million

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amateur genealogist customers. I-Cem offered FMP a way to enhance its services in order to increase competitive advantage. FMP's raw census data was provided to the project in order to code, classify, and enhance the data. This is an on-going collaboration with FMP that has already brought benefits to their operations during the project and has anticipated benefits for their future business. FMP's Business Development Director lists the following as benefits of the I-CeM project to FMP's business so far [source 5]:

Knowledge transfer - discussions between in-house data team and project leads have enriched our own ideas for enhancing our data clean up and standardisation procedures, which have been used to benefit data not included within the project. Association with the project has provided validation of our own data collection to the broader genealogical and archive community – we have used this in publicity and tender application

Director of Business Development and Licensing, Find My Past

The enhanced dataset is due to be handed to FMP by the end of 2013. Once the dataset has been incorporated into the business of FMP, their Business Development Director anticipates 'improved search experience for customers [and] competitive advantage...resulting in increased revenue and customer retention' [source 5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact [All sources saved on file with HEI, available on request]

1. Chair of the European Association for Biometrics Ethics Committee, and of the IMGS-TA3
2. 'The Census and Social Science', Written evidence submitted by Prof Edward Higgs to Parliamentary Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmsctech/writev/1666/m19.htm>
3. 'The Census and Social Science', Third Report of Session 2012-2013, House of Commons Science and Technology Committee:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmsctech/322/322.pdf>
4. Archivist, Landesarchiv North Rhine-Westphalia
5. Director of Business Development and Licensing, Brightsolid (parent company to Find My Past)