



# UNDERSTANDING INEQUALITY:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY  
SOCIAL SCIENCE HISTORY  
OF YORK, 1900-2000

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## SUMMARY

The city of York has more social science research data collected on its inhabitants during the 20<sup>th</sup> century than any other city in the UK apart from London and Liverpool. Hitherto, this data has not been exploited to provide a rigorous study of social change in the city during this key period. Such a study will not only be of substantive interest in its own right, but also develop original methods for data linkage. This project draws on the expertise of sociologists and historians to conduct a scoping study which will pave the way for a large application.

## PROJECT

Since the vanguard research involved in Rowntree's poverty study of 1901, York has been subject to more systematic social research on its inhabitants than any other British town of a comparable size. A series of follow up studies (Rowntree, 1941; Rowntree and Lavers, 1951; Atkinson, Maynard and Trinder, 1980; and Bradshaw, 1999) have built on this pioneering study and have played a key role in influencing social policy. This material now has the potential to be used to conduct pioneering historical studies of social change, which will interest social scientists, modern historians, and the general public. This proposal will pave the way for a larger grant application which, given the international prominence of the Rowntree social research tradition, is likely to attract considerable support from funders.

This project is an interdisciplinary collaboration between sociology and history. Mike Savage is at the forefront of the historical re-analysis of social science data. His recent book, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford 2010) examines post war sociological studies of social class and gender using archived sociological sources since the 1930s. Mark Roodhouse is a modern British social and economic historian, who teaches a third-year module on *Poverty and Charity*, edits the *Borthwick Papers* which specialise in the history of Yorkshire, and is currently writing an article about the first two decades of the Gallup Poll. Chris Renwick works on the history of the biological and social sciences, and is currently examining the economist William Beveridge's efforts to reform British social science practices during the 1920s and 30s. Rowland Atkinson is a sociologist of urban inequality, social exclusion and housing. He teaches on the criminology program and has experience of statistical and longitudinal data analysis. He is currently completing a book on the history and contemporary nature of the domestic home in relation to fear of crime.

Our research involves three components:

1: *Networking and feasibility*. Mark Roodhouse will be bought out of teaching in summer 2011 to conduct interviews with all key stakeholders who have been involved in the collection of social science data on York in the 20th century. This will both generate information about the history of the archive, and also see if they wish to support a network leading to a research application. These will include (but will not be confined to):

- Archivists, such as Chris Webb at the Borthwick and Katherine Webb who catalogued the records of The Retreat and the York NHS Trust; Rita Freedman at the City Archives
- Ron Cooke who has an extensive network of contacts from his time as V-C and in his current role as head of the Civic Trust's project
- Janet Barnes (YMT) who is responsible for the Castle Museum's collections
- York Councillor Nigel Ayre, responsible for leisure, culture and social inclusion.

Bill Sheils (HoD, History) who catalogued the Rowntree papers and Sarah Shiels, who is researching the history of the Rowntree family.

- Jayne Rimmer (York Archaeological Trust), the historian working on the Hungate Dig, which has excavated this 19th and 20th century slum district.
- Alan Maynard (Health Economics) who reanalysed returns from Rowntree's 1950 survey and conducted a 4th follow up survey in 1975-78
- \* Jonathan Bradshaw (Social Policy) who conducted the 1999 restudy.

We will also hold a workshop bringing together as many of these key stakeholders, to discuss further funding bids, and enhance the web presence by linking these archives and activities more coherently.

2: *Feasibility study of record linkage and reanalysis*. Mike Savage, working with Chris Renwick and research assistant will assess how records from different inquiries can be linked to allow a comprehensive analysis of social change in York through the lives and trajectories of specific individuals. This would be enormously exciting, not only for historians but also for contemporary sociologists and economists who are excited by working on micro level longitudinal data, but who have few data sources to work on before 1991 (when the British Household Panel Study began).

The historical archaeologists working on the York Archaeological Trust's Hungate Dig are currently linking the data from their excavations to documentary records held in the York City Archives and elsewhere. Their work shows how it is possible to reconstruct a rich history of 'one of the main slum districts in York' (Rowntree, 1901, 5) by linking Rowntree's 1899 and 1936 survey findings, for which fieldnotes no longer exist, to recent archaeological findings, photographs, maps, oral history, census data, electoral registers, probate records, birth certificates, death certificates, and property deeds. By taking a similar approach and linking records for the entire 20th century, we could track the history of individual households and their members before, during and after the creation of Britain's welfare state. We will work alongside Sarah Rees Jones (History) who is working with Ron Cooke to put together a project developing an online platform with industry partners such as IBM that will allow users to access historic data, both quantitative and qualitative, at household level through a map interface. Externally we will consult the staff of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, the National Archives and the LSE. The Group pioneered the techniques of record linkage and family reconstitution during the 1960s while the National Archives and the LSE have completed projects to digitise 19th century poor law records and the records of Charles Booth's London poverty surveys respectively. This work would be done by the project officer working closely in association with the four investigators.

3: Study of how York became a central exemplar of social policy in the UK.

Alongside these two feasibility studies, Chris Renwick and Rowland Atkinson will take the lead in writing an interdisciplinary academic paper which will explore how the "York social research model" developed methodological repertoires and means of data collection which have had an enduring legacy. Our approach will go beyond the now familiar focus on the biographies of pioneers and instead concern themselves with how certain methods, such as the household survey, themselves become agents of knowing, mobilising, and acting. We will also use preliminary findings to reflect on how far we can ascertain on the changing forms of urban inequality over the 20th century.

