Prosopography and History of Healthcare

Centre for the Historical Record, Kingston University London

1 June 2013

A one day workshop was hosted by Kingston University's Centre for the Historical Record on the use of Prosopography in the history of healthcare.

The workshop (which received generous sponsorship from the Wellcome Trust) was attended by 30 historians, archivists and PhD students, including delegates from Canada, Denmark and Russia. Papers covering a range of themes; and the programme also included a generous allowance of time networking, including a closing roundtable discussion.

The papers presented covered a wide range of themes, from early modern medical networks, networks which influenced the development of medical practice in the American south, and early thoughts about the development of Soviet psychiatry. Two papers discussed use of prosopography in nursing history: one studying the characteristics of nursing and nurses in a Danish institution, the other nursing and nurses in two 20th century hospitals in Belfast and Glasgow. Particular interest was sparked by a paper on use of prosopographical techniques in studying the health of convict prisoners while another discussed more conventional uses to map networks among Dr Sloane's patients, but then stepped beyond the conventional to look at new ways of displaying and interrogating networks using specially designed computer algorithms. Leaving human health to one side, the final paper turned to veterinary science and the use of prosopography to investigate the experiences of women veterinarians

The day was rounded off with a discussion. Several issues had recurred throughout the day and are represented in a series of questions below.

- How can data be shared between researchers in the same field?
- How can large volumes of data be transcribed cost-effectively and efficiently? Is crowd sourcing the answer? Or volunteer groups? Do they have different management challenges?
- How can archivists help researchers locate obscure sources in their archives?
- Can qualitative methods of analysis yield as useful results as quantitative methods?
- How can technology be harnessed to address these challenges?

The workshop concluded that it would be desirable to establish a virtual network where the discussions can continue. A JISC Mail list will be set up soon, which will welcome new members with an interest in prosopography as a tool in researching history of healthcare. We also intend to set up a page on the Centre for the Historical Record's website (http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/historical-record/) where abstracts of the above papers and news will be available. For any more information please contact Sue Hawkins: s.e.hawkins@kingston.ac.uk or Carmen Mangion: ubcesdc@mail.bbk.ac.uk.