

# CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC HISTORY

## RESEARCH SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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Australian  
National  
University

Friends of the ANU Centre for Economic History,

Welcome to the October newsletter. It includes a report on the annual ANU Archives Lecture and accounts of the activities of Australian economic historians at recent conferences. As usual there are announcements of future activities at the CEH. Stay tuned for more information as these programs are put together. Once again, thanks for your interest in the Centre and Economic History.

Tim Hatton, CEH Director

### *Tales of the Unexpected*

#### The Annual ANU Archives Lecture

This year's lecture was given by Professor Simon Ville (University of Wollongong), author of many influential books and articles on economic and business history. He began by reflecting on the importance of archival research in his own career, beginning with PhD research at the LSE on the English coastal shipping trade based largely on records held in the UK National Maritime Museum. For a decade from the early 1990s Simon held an appointment at the ANU during which time he developed extensive archival research on stock and station agents in Australia. As he put it, two major themes in his research have been *ships* and *sheep*. Since moving to Wollongong his research has diversified into other topics but it remains firmly based on evidence from the archives.

Simon elaborated on the pleasures and frustrations of doing archival research. On one level it is a hard grind that involves travelling to where the records are held, ploughing through large volumes of material and sometimes failing to find what you had hoped for. But long experience, digital cameras and research assistants help to lighten the burden. He extolled the virtues of connecting directly with the past by reading original documents unfiltered by the interpretations of others. And then the joy of finding something unexpected, which can transform the question that you started with into another more interesting one.—*continued on p. 3.*



--- Professor Simon Ville in full flow ---

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## **6<sup>th</sup> Asian Historical Economics Conference**

### **Hong Kong, 21-22 September 2018**

Research on China's economic history seems to be booming. Keynote speeches and China-related papers presented at the last AHEC were in the majority. But maybe that is not surprising if we know that the conference was located in Hong Kong, which is now within easy reach from most of China. And from most of the rest of East Asia, as total participation was around 100, a record for AHEC.

The two-day conference was well-organised by Zhiwu Chen and his colleagues at the University of Hong Kong. They timed AHEC well. It took place a few days after the devastating typhoon Mangkhut had hit Hong Kong. Hong Kong was still mopping up and clearing debris, but inward flights had resumed and the Cyberport conference venue was unaffected. The EHSANZ contingent was small; two of the society's expats located in China, and one who travelled all the way from Adelaide.

Stephen Morgan (Nottingham University-Ningbo) presented two papers; one a collaborative effort with colleagues from US/UK/China using grain prices to demonstrate market disintegration in China in the 1700s, and a new paper that analyses China's historical experiences with innovation in order to shed light on the country's ambitions to become the world's centre of innovation in the near future. *Continued next page.*



*Jolly fellows in Hong Kong. Left to right: Florian Ploeckl, Pierre van der Eng, Zhihong Chen (conference organizer) and Stephen Morgan*

## ***Asian Historical Economics Conference (continued)***

Florian Ploeckl (Adelaide University) presented results of his work with Lingyu Kong on the intricate interlocking networks spun by the directors of banks in China during the 1920s and 1930s. And Pierre van der Eng (ANU & Tsinghua University) discussed new research with Yutaka Arimoto (Hitotsubashi University) to demonstrate that markets for farmland in Indonesia were active in the 1920s and 1930s despite 'fuzzy' property rights in land.

The biennial conference of the Asian Historical Economics Society is now well-established. The concluding plenary session discussed among others the possibility of establishing an equivalent of the European Review of Economic History. The 2020 AHEC will be organised by Jessica Vechbanyongratana and her colleagues at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. ---  
*PvdE*

## ***Tales of the Unexpected (continued)***

These tales of the unexpected included revelations about vertical integration and diversified routes of coastal shipping companies as well as the surprisingly early internationalisation of businesses in Melbourne and many other examples. Simon concluded on the continuing importance of new and under-exploited archival resources as a key ingredient for original research. Ongoing challenges that include constraints on academic time and limited archival resources are counterbalanced by labour-saving technical progress in the digital age. --*TJH*

### **Australian Economic History Review**

The AEHR has increased its presence on social media. To get up to date announcements and news on interesting projects, articles, and conferences follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianEconomicHistoryReview/> and Twitter @EcoHistoryAU.

The CEH welcomes courtesy announcements from affiliates and interested parties for inclusion in our newsletter (subject to editing). Please send news items to: [CEH.RSE@anu.edu.au](mailto:CEH.RSE@anu.edu.au)

All CEH affiliates who are registered with RePEc are invited to add the Centre as an affiliation on IDEAS: <https://edirc.repec.org/data/cpanuau.html>

## **Centre for Economic History Discussion Paper Series**

The CEH website hosts a discussion paper series on a variety of topics in economic history. Recent additions include the following:

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|---------|--|
| 2018-09 | "Did Speculation in Land Pay Off for British Investors? Buying and Selecting Land in South Australia, 1835-1850," by Edwyna Harris & Sumner La Croix |
| 2018-10 | "The Biological Standard of Living in China during the 20th Century: Evidence from the Age at Menarche," by Pierre van der Eng & Kitae Sohn          |

Centre affiliates and visitors are encouraged to submit working papers to the series. All papers are available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/s/auu/hpaper.html>

## ***2018 Economic History Association Conference***

In September, hundreds of economic historians gathered in Montreal to attend the Economic History Association's 2018 annual conference. The theme of the year was "From Plague, Famine and War, Save us, O Lord: Shocks and Disasters in Economic History." This theme was chosen by President Cormac Ó Gráda (University College Dublin), and perfectly reflects his body of work on famines throughout the world.

Fitting with the conference's grim theme, Anne Case and Angus Deaton (Princeton University) presented their work on mortality in the United States. One of their main arguments is that capitalism has failed to address the serious health issues in the United States--that instead of lowering mortality rates, private companies are seeking to profit from pain and death. A striking pattern they pointed out is that prime-age white mortality has been increasing in many parts of the country. This increase is not due to any obvious health reason since heart disease mortality has dropped during the same time; rather, the deaths seem to be related to "despair." Evidence for despair comes from declining labor force participation rates for non-college-educated males, and that the availability of opioids has fanned the flames of this crisis.

Cormac Ó Gráda's keynote centered on the key shock about which he has written numerous books: the Great Irish Famine. A key question about the famine is what the government could have done to prevent hundreds of thousands of Irish deaths. Ó Gráda argued that the primary governmental action was not more relief through public works, but rather assisted migration away from Ireland. Not only would migration have helped those who left, but the remittances would have benefitted those who stayed. While many know about the Irish experience in the United States, Ó Gráda showed that those who migrated to Australia also did particularly well.

As always, a highlight of the conference was the dinner's roasting of the President. Yet the roasting was not quite successful: Joel Mokyr (Northwestern) made an attempt but noted that since "Cormac is not an asshole," it was difficult. The dissertation prizes were handed out at the dinner as well: Gillian Brunet of Wesleyan University and Erik Prawitz of the Research Institution of Industrial Economics in Sweden. Brunet's work is on the effect of fiscal policy on economic activity, which she explored through historical data on military spending. Prawitz's dissertation is on Swedish immigration and development; one of his papers estimates the effect of mass emigration to the United States on political development in Sweden.

Next year, Price Fishback (Arizona) will host the annual meetings in Atlanta, Georgia from September 13-15 under the theme of "Markets and Governments in Economic History."---ZW

## ***Upcoming Events at the Centre for Economic History***

**28<sup>th</sup> February and 1st March 2019**

### **"Fertility Transitions: Past and Present"**

**A full two-day programme packed with contributions by leading demographers and economic historians, including a keynote by Alice Reid (Cambridge)**

**11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

### **"Progress and Change in India"**

**Economic historians and development economists offer new perspectives on long run development in the Indian subcontinent, including a keynote by Bishnupriya Gupta (Warwick)**

More details, including the full conference programmes, will appear in future newsletters