The World We Have Lost is a seminal work in the study of family and class, kinship and community in England after the Middle Ages and before the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The book explores the size and structure of families in pre-industrial England, the number and position of servants, the elite minority of gentry, rates of migration, the ability to read and write, the size and constituency of villages, cities and classes, conditions of work and social mobility.

My Personal Review:
Many books rated 5 stars do not deserve them, but this does. I first read it as an undergraduate, and have continued to draw on it in grad school. Summarizing much of the early research by the Cambridge Group on Population and Social Structure, it helped inspire two generations of work on such topics as family history, demography and famine. Quantitative social history is now so well-established as part of the mainstream that it is hard to grasp how innovative Laslett's book was when it first appeared in 1965. Though some of its conclusions have been challenged, its status as a readable classic remains secure. Its generational peers include N. Cohn, Pursuit of the Millenium; E. Le Roy Ladurie, Peasants of Languedoc; E.P. Thompson, Making of the English Working Class; and various works by Fernand Braudel. For an interesting current exploration of several of Laslett's themes in England and Japan, see A. MacFarlane, The Savage Wars of Peace.