

Briefing Note No. 6

Social History

These notes are intended to complement the VCH Guidance Notes on the 'Social History' section of a parish history and should be read in conjunction with them. You'll find the Guidance Notes at:

<http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/local-history/writing-parish-history/social-history>

As well as providing guidance on the topics which should be covered in the 'Social History' section and detailed advice on key sources, the Guidance Notes also include a series of useful background papers on the following topics:

- Community organisations since 1945
- Education 1870-1944 Act
- Education post-1944
- Charities and Poor Relief: early history
- Charities and Poor Relief: 19th and 20th century developments.

This Briefing Note aims to draw your attention to sources relating specifically to Cumbria. Your account should be structured thematically, and should cover the following topics:

- Social structure and character
- Community activities
- Education
- Charities and poor relief

Starting Points and Key Sources

1. Social structure and character

This is one of the more amorphous sections of a parish/township history, the aim being to encapsulate the socio-economic character of the place and how this has changed across the centuries. The VCH National Guidelines provide a helpful list of the sort of questions which you should ask. The following are some of the sources which should prove useful in answering them:

- Estate records. Rentals and surveys may provide information about the number of cottagers (or other inhabitants without landed holdings) in relation to the farming section of the community, as well as an indication of the balance between large and small farms. Where the lord of the manor was non-resident, you should try to identify who in the community acted as his agent and represented lordly power.
- Taxation records. The fragmentary Poll Tax returns which survive for the barony of Westmorland for 1379 include some occupational data (Carolyn C. Fenwick (ed.), *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381: Part 2, Lincolnshire-Westmorland* (OUP for British Academy, 2001)). The Hearth Tax returns include, from 1664, a list of householders exempted from payment because they were comparatively poor, which provides an indication of the socio-economic composition of the community in the later 17th century. The Cumberland returns are rather fragmentary but those for Westmorland have been published: Colin Phillips, Catherine Ferguson and Andrew Wareham (eds), *Westmorland Hearth Tax Michaelmas 1670 & Surveys 1674-5*. British Record Society Hearth Tax Series Vol. VI and CWAAS Record Series Vol. XIX (London: British Record Society, 2008 [*recte* 2010]).
- Census records. In an ideal world the census enumerators' books for each census, 1841-1911 inclusive, could be used to ascertain social character by analysing: occupational structure; locals versus migrants (using the place of birth data); numbers of servants; etc. Unless this information has already been captured (perhaps by a local history society), you will probably not have time to carry out a full analysis. For parts of north Westmorland only, remember the 'census' taken in 1787: Loraine Ashcroft (ed.), *Vital Statistics: the Westmorland 'Census' of 1787* (Curwen Archives Trust, 1992).

To help you approach this section, you may find it useful to consult (as contextual reading) some of the published secondary studies charting social structure and social change in individual Cumbrian communities; see:

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| J.D. Marshall | 'Agrarian wealth and social structure in pre-industrial Cumbria', <i>Economic History Review</i> 2nd ser. 33 (1980), 503-21. |
| J. V. Beckett | 'The decline of the small landowner in 18th and 19th century England: some regional considerations', <i>Agric. Hist. Review</i> , 30, (1982), 97-111 |
| J. V. Beckett | 'Absentee landownership in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: the case of Cumbria', <i>Northern History</i> , XIX (1983) |
| N. Gregson | 'Tawney revisited: custom and the emergence of capitalist class relations in north-east Cumbria, 1600-1830', <i>Economic History Review</i> , 2nd series, 42 (1989), 18-42 |
| A. J. L. Winchester | 'Wordsworth's "Pure Commonwealth"? Yeoman dynasties in the English Lake District, c.1450-1750', <i>Armitt Library Journal</i> 1 (1998), 86-113. |
| Jonathan Healey | 'Agrarian Social Structure in the Central Lake District, c. 1574-1830: The Fall of the "Mountain Republic"?', <i>Northern History</i> , 44 (2) (2007), 73-91. |
| A. H. Duxbury | 'The decline of the Cumbrian yeoman: Ravenstonedale: a case study', <i>CW2</i> , 94, (1994) 201-213 |

- D. Uttley ‘The decline of the Cumbrian yeoman: fact or fiction?’ CW3 7 (2007), 121-33 and
 ‘The decline of the Cumbrian “yeoman” revisited’, CW3 8 (2008), 127-46.
- I. D. Whyte ‘The customary tenants of Watermillock c.1760-c.1840: continuity and change in
 a Lake District township’, CW3 9 (2009), 161-74

2. Community activities

Again, the National Guidelines are very helpful in spelling out what should be covered: use them as a checklist of the sorts of activities and organisations which should be described in this section.

Distinctively Cumbrian community activities for which an eye should be kept open include rushbearing rituals; fox hunting; hound trailing; cock fighting; shepherds’ ‘merry neets’; communal funeral and wedding customs (e.g. the ‘bidden’ wedding); wrestling; horse racing on common land; social activities associated with fairs.

You will undoubtedly encounter evidence for a range of social and cultural activities in sources used principally for other sections (e.g. references to clubs and societies in the records of churches or factories; rushbearings or village wakes mentioned in churchwardens’ accounts). Key sources include:

- Trade directories: these usually include mention of a range of societies and clubs
- Ordnance Survey maps: successive editions of the Six-Inch and 1:2500 maps show the physical manifestations of several of the sorts of activities which should be covered in this section: inns; theatres; reading rooms; temperance halls; golf courses; public parks etc.
- Manor court records can be surprisingly useful for earlier periods, including references to local customs, such as fox-hunting.
- Since some community activities, notably village and community halls, were run by local charities, their records are sometimes found among the records of charities: see the online guide to records of Charities held in Cumbria Archive Centres at:
http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/Online_catalogues/Nonofficial/charity.asp
- Oral history evidence may well be valuable here. Some local history societies have recorded the memories of elderly folk over the past 20 years or so; long-term residents who are still alive may be able to shed light on communal activities not recorded elsewhere. The officers of local societies may have records detailing the foundation and development of their organisations.

3. Education

The best starting points will be directories (notably *Bulmer’s History and Directory of Cumberland* (1901) and *Directory of Westmorland* (1906)) and the 1818 Parliamentary survey of schools (which have been used when compiling the ‘Jubilee Digests’). These should enable you to draw up a list of pre-20th century schools in your parish/township.

The location of schools can be gleaned from Ordnance Survey 1st edition Six- or Twenty-Five-Inch maps; the architectural history of some schools buildings is summarised in Hyde & Pevnser, *Cumbria* (Buildings of England series, 2010).

Since most early schools were connected to a parish church or chapel of ease (and schoolmasters were required to be licensed by the bishop), the visitation surveys should be consulted next, namely:

- EITHER William Nicolson, *Miscellany Accounts of the Diocese of Carlisle: with the Terriers Delivered to Me at My Primary Visitation* (CWAAS, 1877) [for Carlisle diocese pre-1856] OR *The Cumbria Parishes 1714-1725 from Bishop Gastrell's Notitia, with additions by Bishop Porteous 1778-1779*, ed. L.A.S. Butler, CWAAS Record Series Vol. XII (Kendal, 1998) [for parishes in Chester diocese pre-1856]
- 'The Diocesan Book of Walter Fletcher, Chancellor of Carlisle Diocese, 1814-46'; copies of the relevant entries will be made available to volunteers working on particular parishes.

For many schools, your main source is likely to be the records of the school itself, most of which are now deposited in Cumbria Archive Centres. Enter the name of the school into CASCAT or use the following **online guides** which link to detailed descriptions of the records:

- for records of individual schools (which include such sources as managers' minutes, log books and admissions registers):
http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/Online_catalogues/official/schools.asp
- for records of School Boards, 1870-1902:
http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/Online_catalogues/official/sb.asp

Remember that your account is a history of education in your parish/township, rather than simply an account of the school(s). If the local school closed, where did children go for schooling? You ought also to try to capture the less formal end of educational provision, such as 'dame schools' – for the 19th century, trade directories can enable you to identify private schools of this type.

4. Charities and poor relief

The focus here is on charities for the relief of the poor; other charities will be mentioned in their appropriate place (e.g. under Education or Community Activities). The balance between what to include here and what to reserve for the discussion of poor relief in the Local Government section is not completely clear from the National Guidelines. I suggest that you focus here on the experience of the poor, in terms of the sort of relief they received, and reserve discussion of the administration of the Poor Laws for the Local Government section.

The National Guidelines provide clear advice on key sources for charities. For Cumbria, remember the online guide to records of Charities held in Cumbria Archive Centres at:
http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/Online_catalogues/Nonofficial/charity.asp For poor relief, the accounts of the parish or township overseer(s) of the poor will be the key source before 1834, where they survive.

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