

Cumbria County History Trust: VCH Cumbria Project

Director's Report to AGM 2014

This report summarises progress made between February 2013 and February 2014.

1. Jubilee Digests

Since the digests were formally 'launched' at last year's AGM, a final push enabled us to wrap up this part of the project; the final digest was posted just before Christmas 2013. The completion of the digests marked a milestone in the project. Making these brief summaries of historical information available online for every community in Cumbria (344 in all) represents a major achievement, particularly as the majority have been compiled by volunteers. Eric Apperley has also completed the task of producing a map to accompany every digest. He has now moved on to loading one or more photographs for each place, drawing on those available at geograph.org.uk. Allerdale Below Derwent, Cumberland, Eskdale, East and West wards have already been completed. The digests and maps can be consulted by going to <http://www.cumbriacountyhistory.org.uk/data-bank> and clicking on the interactive map.

The accuracy of most digests remains to be checked: we would be most grateful to hear from anyone who is willing to undertake this task, if only for a limited part of the county.

2. Parish/township histories

An updated list of articles completed and in progress is attached. Eight drafts of parish/township articles (6 complete; 2 partial) are now published online. Those posted since the last AGM are: CASTERTON (by Emmeline Garnett); HELSINGTON (by Sarah Rose); KIRKANDREWS ON ESK (partial draft, by Fay Winkworth); KIRKBY LONSDALE (by Emmeline Garnett) and STANWIX (Religious History only, by Jane Platt).

Work is in progress on a further 29 parishes/townships. I am very sorry to have to report that we have lost one of the project's most active volunteers, Libby Seddon, who died in January 2014. Libby had thrown herself with great gusto into researching the history of Walton and had begun to write the article. We will miss her.

3. Other resources posted on the project website

The website provides a structure within which to post other historical material relating to places in Cumbria and the range of such resources has continued to expand across the year. Where these relate to a particular place, they are posted on the parish/township page in

question; where they relate to a wider area they are posted under 'Themes'. Resources now include:

- a detailed architectural study of Skelsmergh church (which extends and complements the account in the township history) and an introduction to 19th-century church architecture, as a guide to volunteers, both prepared by Michael Haslam (a specialist in church architecture).
- Occasional Papers published by the Department of Economics at Lancaster University in 1965, which contain statistical material on Cumbria, namely: R. F. Lord and M. C. Whitby, *The Agriculture of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Occasional Paper no. 6, Sept 1965) and the sections on 'Population', 'Employment' and 'Tourism' from M. N. Fulcher and J. Taylor, *Cumberland and Westmorland: facts and figures* (Occasional Paper No. 5, Sept. 1965). These have been scanned and posted with the authors' permission.
- Education in Cumbria before 1944 by Michael Winstanley
- The Dacre Inheritance, 1569-1601 by Richard Brockington

4. Training and Supporting volunteers

Handbook: a second edition of the volunteers' handbook was published (both online and via LULU) in August.

Volunteers' meetings: Sarah Rose and I continue to meet with volunteers to provide detailed guidance for those who are actively researching and writing parish/township histories. Meetings over the past year have focused on the Landownership (14 February; 10 volunteers attended), Religious History (29 August; attendance: 14), and Social History (27 November; attendance: 9) sections of a parish article. Further meetings are planned, to focus on Local Government (14 March) and Landscape and Settlement (later in the spring). A meeting for the wider volunteer body was held on 9 May, to discuss opportunities for making further contributions to the project, short of researching full parish/township histories. A further meeting is planned in Spring 2014 (see below, sec. 5).

'Surgeries': Sarah Rose has continued to offer weekly 'surgeries' for volunteers, alternating between Kendal and Carlisle Archive Centres. These have been attended regularly by volunteers, though numbers have generally been small.

Peer support group: as a result of discussions with volunteers, we have established an informal peer support group, to enable volunteers to support each other, by, for example, sharing their expertise with those embarking on research and writing. A group from the Penrith and Carlisle areas has met (coordinated by Richard Brockington).

5. Building on the Digests: next steps for volunteers

Sarah Rose and I met 23 volunteers on 9 May to discuss how those who had completed Digests but did not wish to commit themselves to researching and writing full parish/township articles might make further contributions to the project by developing the online 'Resource bank' for each place. This might include: gathering links to local websites, constructing a place-specific bibliography of printed works, or researching a specific aspect of a place's history in order to flesh out information in the Digest. The response to these suggestions was very modest: only 5 bibliographies were received.

As an alternative project for the wider body of volunteers, we are currently drawing up plans to gather basic information on parish clergy, starting with the clergy lists found in many churches and/or in church guidebooks. We are flagging up the need for such work in the next issue of the Newsletter and plan to hold another meeting in Spring 2014 to encourage volunteers to take part in the exercise and to offer guidance.

6. Other matters

Changes at VCH National Office. Elizabeth Williamson stepped down as Executive Editor of VCH in November. Leadership of the VCH has been reviewed and a new post of Director of the VCH at the Institute of Historical Research has recently been advertised. The membership of the national VCH Advisory Committee is being revised to ensure better representation from county trusts such as CCHT.

Publicity: Sarah Rose wrote an article on the VCH Cumbria project for *Local History News*, no. 108 (Summer 2013) and a blog for British History Online, extolling the value of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments Westmorland volume, which is now available online. An article on the VCH Cumbria project, prepared by a freelance journalist, Susan Riley, will soon be appearing in *Lancashire Magazine*. CCHT and the VCH project will be represented at Lancaster University's 'Campus in the City' scheme in March, when shop-space in St Nicholas Arcade is being used to showcase research projects based on Lakeland heritage.

Local and Regional History Seminar Series. A new seminar series in Local & Regional History has been mounted by the History Department at Lancaster University during academic year 2013-14 (6 seminars between October and April on Wednesday afternoons). Details are regularly emailed to members of CCHT and VCH volunteers, who are invited to attend free of charge.

Cumbrian session at Anglo-American Conference. The Director of the Institute of Historical Research has invited the VCH Cumbria project to organise a panel on the impact of the First World War in Cumbria for the 83rd Anglo-American Conference of Historians to be held in

London on 3-4 July 2014. Four speakers will participate: Chris Brader on 'The state and the cinema in wartime Carlisle'; Jane Platt on 'Reverend Simpson's War: the rector of Caldbeck and the local community, 1914-1918'; Jo Vellacott on 'The war work of an anti-war activist: Catherine Marshall, 1914-1918'; and Jonathan Westaway on 'Mountains of memory, landscapes of loss: Scafell Pike and Great Gable as war memorials, 1919-1924.'

Out-county archive sources. Initial steps have been taken to obtain digital images of key archive sources relating to places in Cumbria held in record repositories at a distance from the county:

- Sarah Rose has gathered images of 17th-/18th-century visitation records for those parts of Cumbria in Chester Diocese held in Lancashire Archives and Cheshire Record Office, including the 'Compert Books' for 1674-1720 in Lancashire Archives (ARR 15) and the Articles of Enquiry for 1778, 1789 and 1821 in Cheshire Record Office (EDV 7).
- Stuart Heatherington (a volunteer who lives in Sussex) visited The National Archives, Kew, to take images of key documents needed by the volunteers working on the article for Helbeck (National Farm Survey 1941-3; 18th/19th cent documents concerning a landed estate; a late 13th-century plea for debt).
- Tiffany Hunt made an initial visit to the Borthwick Institute, York, to assess the 16th-/17th-century metropolitan visitation returns for Carlisle Diocese and the Cumbria deaneries of Chester Diocese, with a view to seeking a quotation for digital copies.

Gordon Elliott Archive: in March the project received the research notes of the late Gordon Elliott of Hull, who pioneered the study of Cumbrian field systems. They are meticulously arranged and will form an invaluable resource for the Economic History sections of articles for places in Cumberland.

I should again like to record my thanks to the officers and trustees of CCHT for their continuing support across the year and, of course, to Sarah Rose, who not only supports volunteers and carries out most of the day-to-day activity of the project (posting material on the website, compiling and distributing newsletters, for example) but is also researching and writing parish/township articles herself. In Cumbria we have been pioneering a new way of realising the aims of the VCH, based firmly on mustering the skills and enthusiasm of a large team of volunteers. The commitment of so many volunteers and members of CCHT has enabled the VCH Cumbria project to continue to make real progress, as the increasingly rich content of the project website demonstrates. I look forward to continuing to work with the Trust across the coming year.

Angus Winchester
February 2014.

Appendix: Parish/township histories completed and in progress

1. Completed and posted

<i>Place</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Status</i>
CASTERTON	Emmeline Garnett	Interim draft (complete)
HELSINGTON	Sarah Rose	
KIRKANDREWS ON ESK	Fay Winkworth	Incomplete interim draft
KIRKBY LONSDALE	Emmeline Garnett	Interim draft (complete)
MOSSER	Angus Winchester	
RENWICK	Richard Brockington	
SKELSMERGH	Tony Cousins	
STANWIX (Religious History)	Jane Platt	Interim draft of section

2. Allocated to volunteers and in progress

<i>Place</i>	<i>Volunteers</i>
APPLEBY	Andrew Connell
ASKHAM	Lyn Cole
BAMPTON	Patricia Garside and members of Bampton & District LHS
BARBON	Emmeline Garnett
BARROW IN FURNESS	Alan Smith
BROUGH	John and Margaret Gowling
BURNESIDE	Members of Burneside Heritage Group, led by AJLW
CLIBURN	James Underwood
CROOK	Helen Pugh and Linda Peel
DACRE	June Hall (working with Alan Rich)
DALSTON	David Wilcock
GAMBLESBY	Sarah Rose
HELBECK	John and Margaret Gowling
HUNSONBY & WINSKILL	Lydia Gray
KIRKANDREWS ON ESK	Chester Forster (completing research begun by Fay Winkworth)
KIRKOSWALD	Richard Brockington
LONGSLEDDALE	Barbara Blatchford
MARTINDALE	Jane Penman
NATLAND	Sarah Rose
NEW HUTTON	Chris Shearin
NICHOL FOREST	Chester Forster
ORTON & TEBAY	Members of Orton & Tebay LHS (led by W. Higgins)
PENRITH	Michael Mullett
SEDGWICK	Paul Cheesbrough
STAFFIELD	Richard Brockington
STANWIX	Adrian Allan
TROUTBECK	Mary Wane (has requested a volunteer to assist her)
TEMPLE SOWERBY	Margaret Ball
THWAITES	Colin Richards

Updated to 20.2.14.