

Section B: Researching Your Article

The following notes provide guidance for researching each section of a VCH parish or township history for the VCH Cumbria project. They should be read in conjunction with the general guidelines on 'Writing a Parish History' which are available on the national VCH website: <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/local-history/writing-parish-history> The guidance notes on the pages below are complementary to the national guidelines, and draw attention to specific sources for Cumbria and to distinctive aspects of Cumbrian local history with which you will need to be familiar when you embark on your research.

A VCH parish or township history follows a set template and the notes below are arranged under each of the standard sections, as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Landownership
3. Economic History
4. Social History
5. Religious History
6. Local Government

The guidance in Section B is addressed to those researching and writing articles on rural parishes and townships, as these will form the vast majority of the articles in Cumbria. Articles for towns will be longer and have a somewhat different structure – guidance for volunteers working on the history of urban settlements will be given separately.

Townships and parishes

One distinctive feature of Cumbria's history which affects the arrangement of VCH articles for the county is the frequent lack of coincidence between the boundaries of ancient ecclesiastical parishes and those of the unit of civil administration, the township or 'constablewick'. In Cumbria some ancient ecclesiastical parishes covered vast areas, embracing numerous townships, each of which often functioned as a discrete local community, coinciding with a separate manor or estate. We are using the civil parishes as they existed around 1900 as the basis for dividing the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland into units for the preparation of articles. Some civil parishes (particularly in the Cumberland lowlands) were the successors to entire ancient parishes; others (especially in Westmorland) represented single townships. As a consequence, some articles for VCH Cumbria will deal with what was historically a single township, while others will deal with the whole of an ancient parish.

If the civil parish you are researching coincides with an ancient ecclesiastical parish, you will find that the national guidelines can be followed throughout. If the civil parish you are researching represents a township which was part of a larger ancient parish, some sections of the guidelines (particularly the Religious History section) will be less applicable. For these larger ancient parishes a separate short article will be needed, covering the history of the parish church and the administrative history of the parish as a whole. Again, separate guidance will be given to individual volunteers.