

The following is a draft section for an expanded and revised edition of the VCH Cumbria Volunteers' Handbook, which will aim to combine the guidance on 'Writing a Parish History' on the national VCH website and the Cumbria-specific guidance in the current Volunteers' Handbook.

## 4. Social History

### Aims and approach

The 'Social History' section of a parish or township history aims both to trace the origins and development of institutions which brought members of the local community together (schools, charities, the village hall, the local W.I., for example), and to provide an overview of the character of the community and how it has changed across time. While much of the evidence and many of the institutions are likely to date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is important not to forget that you should also be seeking to say what you can about the social character of the community at earlier periods. The account should be structured thematically, and the 'Social History' chapter should contain the following sub-headings:

- Social structure and character
- Community activities
- Education
- Welfare

The following notes are arranged under those four topics. As well as the guidance below, you should read the background papers which are to be found in the national VCH Guidance Notes (at <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/local-history/writing-parish-history/social-history>). These cover 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.

### 1. Social structure and character

The aim of this section is to encapsulate the socio-economic character of the place and how this has changed across the centuries. Even for the smallest parish or township, it should be possible to say something about the character of the community as well as its social structure.

Topics which are worth discussing for rural communities for all periods include:

- The character of the parish/township – was there a single village or more than one settlement? If the latter, how did they link together? If the settlement pattern was one of dispersed farms and hamlets, was there a focal point for community activities?
- The presence or absence of a resident lord of the manor or major landowner, and, in the case of an absentee owner, which families provided social leadership in the community.
- The impact of the pattern of landholding on the character of the community: was there a large 'home farm', run by a landed estate or was the community one of small family farms? What was the social character of those who provided labour on the farms: were they landless labourers or live-in farm servants?
- Was there a sharp divide between the status of owner-occupiers and tenant farmers? Or between farmers and landless labourers, or did the classes merge into one another?
- Was there a distinct class of tradesmen and craftsmen not employed on the land?
- How great was the proportion of the population deemed to be 'poor', or at least excused from paying tax?

For each of these questions you should ask how these variables changed over time. The social structure and character of many communities changed markedly in the 19th century (with the coming of the railways and growth of rural industry, for example) and/or the 20th (with the break-up of landed estates and the influx of the urban middle class into great swathes of rural England from the 1950s onwards).

**Sources.** You will undoubtedly gather material relevant to the above questions during your research for other sections of your article (particularly Landownership and Economic History). The following sources should prove particularly useful:

- 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 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Cumberland returns are rather fragmentary but those for Westmorland are full and 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).

Cumbrian rural communities exhibited some distinctive characteristics, setting them apart from communities in other parts of England (and perhaps making some of the standard themes in social history less relevant). To help you approach this section in the Cumbrian context, 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; for example:

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

The main focus here is on local organisations and institutions and the role they played in the life of the community. Most of the material is likely to relate to the nineteenth and (particularly) twentieth centuries but you should also include any evidence for communal activities in earlier times (such as horse racing or rushbearing festivals, for example). To set social activities into the wider historical context of the parish/township, you should ask when and why community activities were established and also when and why they declined or ceased.

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; rugby league; social activities associated with livestock fairs.

The staple fare of this section should include brief accounts of the following:

- **Friendly societies.** These were often among the earliest modern community organisations, established in the second half of the 18th century. They were joined in 19th-century towns by a wide range of voluntary organisations, some charitable, some educational and some purely social.
- **Social activities of religious organisations.** Both the Church of England and nonconformist congregations expanded their work in the later 19th century into social (or quasi-social) activities, such as temperance gatherings or setting up clothing charities. They provided social meeting places, especially for young people, often through uniformed organisations (scouts, guides etc.), as well as sporting activities. In many rural communities, the church and/or chapel provided virtually all the settings for spare-time activities.
- **The Women's Institute.** The WI came into existence during the First World War, and after 1918 was often central to the life of a village. By contrast, men's organisations such as Rotary and the Round Table have remained largely urban, as have the Freemasons.
- **Village halls.** Although some parishes had 'institutes' before the First World War, pressure for village halls arose mainly after 1918. Halls could not be provided by parish councils at that time and were usually established and managed by a separate voluntary committee, as were playing fields. In recent times the two have sometimes merged with the building of a community centre in one corner of a playing field, providing changing rooms and facilities for indoor sports as well as meeting rooms. Bodies responsible for halls, playing fields and community centres have sometimes obtained charitable status.
- **Inns and alehouses.** Inns capable of providing accommodation (where this can be established) should be included, but it is not necessary to mention every alehouse or beer shop. In market towns the names and dates of only the principal inns should be

mentioned. Where an inn was the venue for meetings of a friendly society or a later societies and clubs, sporting or otherwise, this should be mentioned.

- **Amateur sport.** Amateur sport became organised in its modern form in the later 19th century and by 1914 most towns had a network of football and cricket clubs, some linked to a particular works or church, others open to all. Both games were also popular in mining villages, with clubs often heavily subsidised by employers and seen as socially integrative bodies. In rural villages, the squire and parson might take a similar view, especially of cricket, which was played by a wider range of classes than association or rugby football.
- **Recreational space.** This could extend from allotments and potato patches to golf courses, public parks and large recreation grounds. (Note that a public park or golf course which had private origins may be mentioned under 'manors and other estates', and a disused churchyard that has been turned into a recreational open space may be treated under 'church' or nonconformity.) Open air 'country sports', such as horse races, fox-hunting, hare-coursing and shooting should be mentioned.

In towns the range of community activities will be much wider, including theatres, concert halls, music halls, cinemas, museums and local newspapers.

**Sources.** 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.
- Parish magazines (from the later nineteenth century) often contain information on rural community clubs and associations such as nurses associations and bands of hope etc. Local Methodist magazines can also be useful.
- 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](http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/Online_catalogues/Nonofficial/charity.asp)
- The official guides that rural district councils used to publish, which often mentioned clubs and organisations in each parish, can be a useful source.
- Oral 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

Your account should be a history of education in your parish/township, rather than simply an account of the school(s): the histories of individual schools should be given in a relatively summary form. Places with no school of their own nonetheless educated their children: how was this achieved? If the local school closed, where did children go for schooling? In modern times most children from rural communities have attended secondary schools outside their own parish.

When it comes to public educational provision ('state' schools and their predecessors), the text will usually divide naturally into sections defined by the major legislation of 1870, 1902 and 1944. However, you ought also to include private schools and to try to capture the less formal end of educational provision, such as 'dame schools'. Remember also to include evidence for adult education, particularly where there was a long established lifelong learning or continuing education institution. (Note that the VCH originally intended that the history of ancient endowed grammar and independent schools would be covered in a separate county-wide article, but these should now be included under the parish/township in which they were located.)

Key topics to include are:

- the dates, location and establishment of schools, including any pre-1870 references to school teachers and schools, even if these schools cannot be located on the ground.
- the funding or endowment of the school, including names of donors of the sites
- the character of the school buildings and any changes in accommodation
- an indication of the size and type of school including average attendance, if known
- the transfer of authority from voluntary societies to Local Education Authority School Boards etc.
- brief information about teachers and curriculum, especially pre-1870
- the date and circumstances of discontinuance and any reduction in the status of schools (to infant status, for example)
- the existence of Sunday Schools, but only prior to 1870 when they were likely to have played a more general role in education than subsequently.
- for schools that are still open, the article should include a sentence giving the numbers of pupils and staff at the time of writing. The simplest ways to get this information is to consult the most recent inspection report via the OFSTED website or to phone or e-mail the school secretary.

For useful background to the topic, see the notes on 'Education 1870-1944 Act' and 'Education post-1944' in the VCH national guidelines and the background paper on 'Education in Cumbria before 1944' on the Cumbria County History Trust website (click on 'Sources & Resources' and then 'Background Papers').

**Sources.** The best starting points will be directories (you could start with *Bulmer's History and Directory of Cumberland* (1901) and *Directory of Westmorland* (1906)) and the 1818 Parliamentary survey of schools (Sarah Rose can supply copies). 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 & Pevnsner, *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:

- William Nicolson, *Miscellany Accounts of the Diocese of Carlisle: with the Terriers Delivered to Me at My Primary Visitation* (CWAAS, 1877) [for parishes in Carlisle diocese pre-1856]
- *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 Diocese of Carlisle, 1814-1855: Chancellor Walter Fletcher's 'Diocesan Book' with additional material from Bishop Percy's parish notebooks*, ed. Jane Platt (Surtees Society Vol. 219/CWAAS Record Series Vol. XXII, 2015) [for parishes in Carlisle diocese pre-1856]

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](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](http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/Online_catalogues/official/sb.asp)

Evidence of private schools should be sought in trade directories and in census enumerators' books, 1851–1911, which should be checked for boarding schools, to see what sort of children attended the school.

Local studies libraries may contain ephemeral publications (centenary history booklets, programmes from school openings, runs of school magazines etc) which may provide evidence not available in more formal records.

Published data and records in national repositories include:

- The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK): Reports from 1704; those for 1705-32 contain lists of the English Charity Schools in which the society



was interested. Information for 1724 as reprinted in M.G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement* (1938)

- Charity Commission reports 1819-40, 32 volumes. Index volume at House of Commons 1840(279), xix, part 2. Arranged by counties, places and titles of charities. They provide evidence of the existence of charity schools.
- the Church of England Record Office may contain material on Church schools. Its holdings can be located via their website, and ordered in advance to be seen at Lambeth Palace Library: <http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/>
- British and Foreign Schools Society Reports.
- National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church – annual reports.
- Catholic Record Society – for information on Roman Catholic charity schools and parish schools in the modern period.
- The National Archives: Ministry of Education records (ED). These are very extensive; the most useful classes are probably those for schools which received annual grants (available from 1846), namely:
  - ED 7: Preliminary statements 1846-1924. When applying for a grant a school had to supply information about its income, expenditure, accommodation, staffing, fees and number of pupils.
  - ED 21: School files 1857-1945, which should survive for every school which received a grant. These files include the 'preliminary statements' after 1924 and contain correspondence about premises, trusts, inspection and school organisation.

#### 4. Welfare (or ‘Charities and Poor Relief’)

The focus here is on all aspects of welfare, including poor relief, charities, medical services and institutions such as orphanages, hospitals and nursing homes. Charities for the relief of the poor should be mentioned here; other charities will be mentioned in their appropriate place (e.g. under Education or Community Activities, for example). The description of charities should focus on endowed charities providing alms, doles, apprenticeships etc. for the poor. The balance between what to include here and what to reserve for the discussion of poor relief in the Local Government will require some thought. As a broad rule, we 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.

For useful background to the topic, see the notes on ‘Charities and Poor Relief: early history’ and ‘Charities and Poor Relief: 19th and 20th-century developments’ in the VCH national guidelines and the background paper on ‘The Poor Law in Cumbria’ on the Cumbria County History Trust website (click on ‘Sources & Resources’ and then ‘Background Papers’).

#### Sources.

- A good starting-point is the Reports of the Charity Commissioners compiled in the late 1820s, which describe the state of benefactions and their endowments at the time.
- 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](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 (usually among parish records). After 1834 information will be found in the records of the Poor Law Union, not in the parochial records
- Wills of the founders of charities should be sought where details of an endowment are not available from other sources: remember to search for wills proved in the Prerogative Courts of York (held at Borthwick Institute) and Canterbury (at The National Archives, PROB 11) as well as in the diocesan probate courts.
- Check the Charity Commission website ([www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)) for details of all current charities. This site is useful on local charities registered with the Commission. To find defunct charities as well as those that are still extant, tick the box labelled ‘Include charities removed from the register’, before clicking the ‘run search’ button on the ‘Search by Name and Keyword’ page.