

VCH Cumbria

Working Together: Guidance for Research Groups

A key way in which volunteers can contribute to the VCH Cumbria project is to join a group of volunteer researchers to work together on a particular township. Members of these groups will benefit from shared skills and experience, while the findings of each group can be used by a 'drafter' to prepare a VCH township article.

1. Getting Started: Organising Group Work

Forming Research Groups

Research groups can include two or more VCH volunteers. You may already know someone, or several individuals who you would like to work with to research a particular place or group of nearby settlements. Alternatively, if you are seeking someone to work with, please contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator who can put you in contact with other volunteers in your area.

Each group will need a leader, or convenor, even if more than one member of the group produces draft articles. The role of the group leader will be to lead the activities of the group and to act as the contact between the group and the Volunteer Co-ordinator. This will require attending meetings with the Volunteer Co-ordinator and providing feedback from these meetings to your group members.

The group will have to decide on how regularly you would like to meet and where.

Choosing Your Area of Research

Having formed a group, you will all have to decide on which parish/townships you would like to research.

The VCH Cumbria project is 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. This means that there are 311 places, 198 in Cumberland and 113 in Westmorland for which separate VCH histories will be written. A list of these places can be found on the CCHT website:

<http://www.cumbriacountyhistory.org.uk/victoria-county-history-project>

However, please note that some civil parishes also correspond to ancient parishes (particularly in Cumberland) and therefore include several townships. The [list of articles](#) will indicate which townships will need to be included in the same article.

- ❖ *Example:* Gosforth in Allerdale Above is both a civil parish and an ancient parish, which includes the townships of Seascale, Bolton, Boonwood, Gosforth and Newton. This means that the article on Gosforth will also cover all of these settlements.

- ❖ *Example:* Shap in West Ward is both a civil parish and an ancient parish. However, while Shap Ancient Parish included the chapelries of Mardale and Swindale, both chapelries became separate civil parishes by c.1900. This means that Mardale and Swindale will need separate articles, while the rest of the ancient parish will be included in the Shap article.
- ❖ *Example:* in Leath Ward, the townships of Little Salkeld, Hunsonby and Winskill, Glassonby and Gamblesby all belong to Addingham Ancient Parish. However, because all of them became separate civil parishes by c.1900, each will have their own article.

If you need any advice about selecting which parish/township to research, please contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

NB: PLEASE DO NOT EMBARK ON RESEARCH WITHOUT CONTACTING THE VOLUNTEER CO-ORDINATOR SO AS TO BE CERTAIN NO ONE ELSE IS WORKING ON THE SAME ARTICLE.

Interests and Abilities

Volunteers work best when they are doing something they enjoy. Researching for VCH Cumbria should allow you to explore aspects of history in which you have a personal interest, as well as provide you with an opportunity to enhance your experience of local history research.

Before beginning your research, the group leader should find out what aspects of history each member of the group is interested in? What are their strengths and experience in the field of local history research? What skills do they have? How good is their Latin or palaeography, for example?

This information will help you decide how your group can divide the research between you.

How would you like to divide the research?

There are 6 sections which make up a parish/township article:

- introduction
- manors and estates
- social history
- religious history
- economic history
- local government

- ❖ You may decide that you would like to work together as a group on one section at a time.
- ❖ You could divide the sections between you according to individual interests, experience or skill. For example, someone who has a background in researching religious history could take on that particular section, while someone with an interest in education or poor law provision might like to work on the social history section.
- ❖ If you are working on an ancient parish with several constituent townships, each member of the group could work on a different township in that parish.

- ❖ You may decide to research chronologically, perhaps one person dealing with 19th and 20th century history, another with 17th and 18th century history. If someone in the group has good Latin and palaeography skills, it may be best that they work on sources from the medieval and early modern periods.

Before you make your decision, please note that Briefing Papers offering specific guidance on sources for Cumbrian townships are not yet available for each section. However, the national VCH guidelines for each section are available on their website:

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

All Briefing Papers are arranged thematically, as are the VCH national guidelines.

2. Researching a Parish/Township History

Over the next 12 months we will be producing Briefing Papers for each of the topic sections which make up a VCH article. These can be downloaded from the “Resource” section of the CCHT website:

<http://www.cumbriacountyhistory.org.uk/resources-progress-vch-cumbria-project>

Each paper is tailored to researching places in Cumbria, by advising on sources relevant to the county. However, please note that these Briefing Papers are only a starting point. They do not provide an exhaustive list of all the source material relevant to your parish/township history, and they should always be read in conjunction with the national VCH guidelines:

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

In addition to these guidelines, the Volunteer Co-ordinator and/or Project Director will hold regular meetings with group leaders. This will provide an opportunity for you to share any issues or concerns that members of your group have encountered. Alternatively, you can seek support from the Volunteer Co-ordinator via telephone (01524 593141) or email (s.rose2@lancaster.ac.uk).

Please remember to keep the Volunteer Co-ordinator informed about what your group is working on and your progress. This will make it easier for us to help you.

3. Research Discipline

Working as part of project involving numerous researchers requires all concerned to be sensitive to the need for communal disciplines, even though much of your time will be spent ploughing a lonely furrow among the archives or at the computer. The following advice is offered in the hope of ensuring the smooth running of the project:

Remember the VCH principles of accuracy and referencing. When making notes be sure to record the exact source of the information (including page number if a printed source or full record office

reference if a manuscript). If using archive material in private hands, remember to give a full and accurate attribution and to include an acknowledgement of thanks.

Honour your commitment to the project. If circumstances prevent you from completing a task you have offered to undertake, please let the Volunteer Co-ordinator know as early as possible, so that someone else can take the work on.

Avoid treading on the toes of fellow volunteers: please check with the Director or Volunteer Co-ordinator before you embark on your research to make sure that the place or topic has not already been assigned to someone else.

Always adhere to good practice when using archive sources. Follow the Search Room rules for users of archives in record offices, remembering that these may vary in detail from one repository to another. If consulting records in private ownership, do nothing which might in any way damage the reputation of the project or the Trust. The wishes of archive owners in relation to handling and copying of documents should always be respected.

Only post on the project website material which you have obtained permission to publish. In particular, remember that in no circumstances should you post an image of a document taken for VCH research without the owner's consent.