

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Leicester
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA30 History
<b>Title of case study:</b> Local Histories and National Pasts: Empowering local people to reconnect with history
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Since 1948, Leicester historians have transformed the way we look at the past by pioneering new methodologies centred on Local History. In the last two decades, this “Leicester Approach” has reconnected history to ordinary people, involving them in historical research and showing in practical ways the relationship between history and local communities. This case-study highlights the public impact of Leicester’s latest research projects, which have systematically empowered local communities to explore, understand and enjoy their family, regional and cultural histories. In a fast-moving, migratory world, the projects enhance public awareness of a shared past, boost local place attachment, and foster cultural understanding and cohesion.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The ‘Leicester Approach’ to Local History has been seminal to the emergence and establishment of a distinctive method of studying the past. The research described in this case study encompasses the work of the <b>Centre for English Local History (ELH)</b>, which was founded by WG Hoskins in 1948 and was the first unit dedicated to the study of localities and regions, and the <b>East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA)</b>, founded 2001). The cumulative impact of the ‘Leicester Approach’ to Local History has been profound and its collective research output impressive; its staff and students have published well over 1100 publications since 1999 (1). Recent publications by ELH academics (Dyer, <b>Snell</b>, <b>Jones</b> and <b>Hopper</b>) include reflexive essays that develop the scope, nature and future direction of Local History as a distinct subject (2).</p> <p>Notably, <b>ELH</b>’s distinctive interdisciplinary approach is reflected in the research that has been conducted during the impact-relevant period from 1993. Focusing on the medieval period, the work of Dyer (2001-2010) and <b>Jones</b> (appointed 2007) has fused socio-economic history with archaeology and landscape in new ways. Directly relevant to this case study, is Jones’s <i>Digging the Peculiar (DtP)</i>, a new research project that builds on the methodology and results of the innovative <i>Whittlewood Project</i> (Dyer, <b>Jones</b> and Page, 1999–2005), which challenged both the chronology and circumstances of the creation of nucleated villages in England (3, G1).</p> <p><b>Hopper</b> (appointed 2006) has researched the inter-relationships between provincial religion and political culture in the early modern period, including notions of social mobility, honour, memory and reputation, with specific reference to the Civil War period (4). More recently, <b>P. King</b>’s research (appointed 2010) has widened the Centre’s expertise to include the history of crime and justice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His research investigates the geography of homicide and regional differences in capital punishment (5).</p> <p>For the modern period, the work of <b>Snell</b> (appointed 1985) has introduced new themes to the study of cultural regions. Central here have been the overlapping concepts of community and belonging, which he has examined via the poor law, charity and welfare, religion, marriage, literature, and burial grounds. His recent project (2008–11) on the impact of cemeteries and churchyard closures on local communities exemplifies this approach (6, G2); this project generates on-going advisory work with county councils, parish councils and local churches that are concerned about long-term management of cemeteries, as well as on-going liaison with every parish in the study counties.</p> <p>Other significant methodological elements of the “Leicester Approach” include oral history and surname studies – both analytical tools that generate new historical data, which enable the interrogation of big narratives from sources rooted in family experiences and small places. ELH hosted the English Surnames Survey (led in succession by McKinley, Camsell, Postles). The <i>East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA)</i> was established in 2001 with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, in partnership with the City and County Councils. Its director <b>Hyde</b> (appointed 2001) has led two externally-funded projects on the complex experience of migration into the East Midlands (G3). <i>Legacy of Partition</i>, a partnership between <b>EMOHA</b> and the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR), has created a new archive of memories of Leicestershire people who lived through the upheavals of India’s partition in 1947. <i>Migration</i></p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

*Stories* is a two-year project that has recorded stories of people from a wide variety of groups and communities who have moved into the East Midlands since the end of WW2 (7).

The research activities of individual members of **EMOHA** and **ELH** have been diverse both in the themes they have tackled and periods explored during the impact-relevant period. As a true scholarly collective, however, local history at Leicester is characterised by the cross-fertilization of ideas across specific research contexts, ensuring that all have contributed directly or indirectly to the case-studies led by **Jones** and **Hyde** presented here.

This vibrant brand of local history remains influential to scholars working throughout Europe and beyond. Leicester-based local history has both shaped the experience of local history within Britain and is acknowledged globally.

### 3. References to the research

1. [English Local History at Leicester: A Bibliography and History, 1999–2008](#), ed. M. Thompson, P. Fisher and A. Fox, with Centre History by C. Dyer (2009)
2. C. Dyer, A. **Hopper**, E. Lord and N. Tringham (eds), *New Directions in Local History since Hoskins* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire University Press, 2011); R. **Jones** and K.D.M **Snell**, 'Re-politicising Local History', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 1 (213), pp. 5-13
3. R. **Jones** and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012); R. **Jones** and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape: Beginnings and Ends* (Macclesfield: Windgather, 2006)
4. A. **Hopper**, *Turncoats and Renegades: Changing Sides during the English Civil Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) [REF2:HOPPER1]; A. **Hopper**, 'Black Tom': *Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)
5. K.D.M. **Snell**, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); K.D.M. **Snell** and P.S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); K.D.M. **Snell**, 'Churchyard Closures, Rural Cemeteries and the Village Community in Leicestershire and Rutland, 1800–2010', *Jnl. of Ecclesiastical History* 63.4 (2012), pp. 721–57 [DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022046911002521> see REF2:SNELL3]
6. P. **King** 'Urbanisation, Rising Homicide Rates and the Geography of Lethal Violence in Scotland 1800-1860', *History* 96.3: (2011), pp. 231–59 [DOI: [10.1111/j.1468-229X.2011.00518.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-229X.2011.00518.x) see REF2:PKING3, and also REF2:PKING1]
7. R. Bonney, C. **Hyde** and J. Martin, 'Legacy of Partition, 1947-2009: Creating New Archives from the Memories of Leicestershire People', *Midland History*, 36.2 (2011), pp. 214-24; S. Gunn and C. **Hyde**, 'Postindustrial Place, Multicultural Space: The Transformation of Leicester, c.1970-1990', *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 8.2 (2013), pp. 94–111

#### Grants:

- G1. Jones** (PI): AHRC award [AH/G009740/1](#) (2008–9) – *Sense of Place in Anglo Saxon England*, £12,136; Dyer (PI): *The Whittlewood Project* (1999–2005), with multiple grants in excess of £535K from the AHRB, Royal Archaeological Institute, Society of Antiquaries, Society of Medieval Archaeology, Medieval Settlement Research Group, Archaeology Data Service.
- G2. Snell** (CI): ESRC award [RES-062-23-0929](#) (2008–11) – *Death and Community in Rural Settlements: Changing Burial Culture in Small Towns and Villages, 1850–2007*, £268k (£74,300 to Leicester).
- G3. Hyde** (PI) *Legacy of Partition, 1947–2009*, MLA: £9900 + £1500; **Hyde** (PI) *Migration Stories*, Heritage Lottery Fund and Renaissance East Midlands: £30,000

### 4. Details of the impact

In recent years, few disciplines have captured the public imagination more than Local History. Leicester's Centre for English Local History has been at the forefront of this development, pioneering imaginative approaches to the communication of the subject, both through its academic publications and outreach activities (e.g.: digital 'Town Trails' in partnership with local authority services and a multi-media production company (**Ai–iii**), and the establishment, in 2013, in collaboration with the Victoria County History, of the community-centred, HLF-funded *Charnwood Roots* research project (**Aiv**).

Emblematic of the Centre's success in raising the profile of Local History is Michael Wood's popular six-part BBC documentary *The Story of England* (2010) which looked at 2,000 years of

## Impact case study (REF3b)

British history through the prism of the Leicestershire village of Kibworth using many of the methods developed during ELH's *Whittlewood Project*. The choice of location followed C. Howell's influential 1983 book on Kibworth's medieval and early modern history, which originated as a PhD thesis undertaken at ELH. The first show attracted an initial TV audience of 438,000 and conservative estimates of viewing figures for each episode following global distribution and digital downloads are well in excess of 2 million; the book of the series sold out its hardback print run and reprint of 35,000. The *Story of England* series led directly to another – *The Great British Story – A People's History* (BBC2 in 2012, with viewing figures of 1–2 million per episode) – which was tied directly to an HLF small grant programme, 'All Our Stories' which funded local heritage projects nationwide, many using archaeological and local history methods showcased at Leicester. Reflecting on the experience, Wood (**Bi-ii**) paid particular tribute to Leicester's outstanding contribution to the study of Local History, which he said had "*influenced the writing of history in Britain and much further afield*". He added that it has been: "*the inspiration behind a lot of my 100 or so films*". Wood's comments on the seminal impact of the "Leicester Approach" to the popularization of Local History are echoed by Penelope Lively, who has observed that: "*Today, television programmes on the landscape and its past are ubiquitous, but Hoskins was the pioneer. He did a series of his own, back in the 70s, a magisterial figure by then, presiding over local history and landscape history studies from his professorial chair at Leicester University*" (**Biii**).

Central to the Leicester Approach to Local History is the recognition that macro processes are best studied in micro contexts and that knowledge should be taken out of the academy and into communities. As a direct consequence of this, Leicester historians lead the way in turning hundreds of members of the public of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds into enthusiastic local history researchers. This is highlighted by two specific examples outlined below.

Jones' *Digging the Peculiar (DtP)* is an interdisciplinary fieldwork programme (2011–present) centred on Southwell, Nottinghamshire. It deploys archaeological and historical research methods to investigate fundamental problems about the chronology and creation of towns and villages in England. The local community has been involved in all its activities including excavation, geophysical survey, earthwork survey, building survey and palaeoenvironmental sampling. As a result of training received, Southwell Community Archaeology Group is now using the excavation and recording techniques learnt on the *DtP* programme to conduct independent research into the historical development of their town. Their activities have fed back into *DtP* projects, research design and results. Encouraged by their involvement in the *DtP* programme, in 2012 the Group successfully applied for a small grant from a Heritage Lottery Fund scheme 'All Our Stories', deploying the survey techniques to investigate research questions of their own (**Ci-ii**).

In nearby Norwell, the Heritage Group is to produce new booklets on the early history of the village using findings from *DtP* fieldwork in 2013, including artefacts found by local people in village gardens. The secretary of the Group noted: "*For the inhabitants of this village this project has provided, and will continue to provide, an entirely new perspective of their own environment. It has enabled an appreciation of links with the past ... In summary, a most positive experience both socially and archaeologically.*" (**Ciii**).

The *DtP* project has also involved local schools. For example, more than 50 Year 8–11 students from the Nottingham Samworth Academy worked on the site in June 2013. The Vice Principal said that the experience was particularly valuable because, "*it allows our students to engage in activities which enrich and extend the curriculum, showing them how their familiar subjects combine in the world outside school*". It provided "*unique educational experiences ... to broaden the often limited social and cultural experiences many of our pupils have had to date*" (**Civ**).

The role of local communities as 'co-producers' of local historical knowledge is illustrated by **Hyde's** projects developed with Leicester's diverse migrant communities, in partnership with local government agencies and national funding bodies. Leicestershire County Council have noted "*the immense value*" of EMOHA's outreach programme, enabling very many local history projects to use oral history techniques to capture local historical knowledge (**Di**). In 2012–13 the HLF East Midlands funded 147 local history projects, 58% using Oral History methods and all these were referred to EMOHA as a condition of funding; HLF consider EMOHA "*a powerful community engagement tool*" (**Dii**). Since 2008 EMOHA has provided 115 training sessions attended by 1079 people. Community participation of this sort underpinned *Migration Stories*. **Hyde** trained

## Impact case study (REF3b)

volunteers drawn from communities in Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire to use domestic camcorders and laptops to create their own videos, which were made available to the community via the project website (Diii). *Legacy of Partition* (2008–9) also involved extensive meetings with community groups in Leicester and Leicestershire, leading the way to the creation of a permanent oral history archive, with a digital exhibition, curating memories of the 1947 Partition of India. This archive is one of the first to curate oral testimonies of this historical phenomenon, ‘*such information is rare and hard to find*’ and ‘*these high quality materials [are of] not only local but national and international significance*’ (Div). What is more, the testimonies collected as part of the project opened up a dialogue between Leicestershire’s diverse South Asian migrant communities about their troubled past, thereby ‘*contributing to feelings of inclusion and common humanity and shared citizenship*’. The impact of the project was particularly felt in local schools. The Deputy Director of Inclusion at Rushey Mead School, Leicester, noted: ‘*The resources allowed the pupils to...interpret this event afresh as a period of history from which lessons can and must be learned rather than vendettas and scores settled*’ (Dv). *Legacy of Partition* was cited as a case-study of good practice on inter-generational learning in a *National Institute of Adult Continuing Education* (NIACE) report to Government (Dvi).

With these and many other projects, Leicester historians are proving to local communities that history is not remote, theoretical and academic, but local and relevant. History borrows everybody’s shoes, and Leicester leads the way in helping local communities discover how their own footprints add to the continuing story.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### A. History for Local People:

- i. *Town Trails* – Melton Mowbray – <http://www.townwalks.co.uk/>
- ii. Letter from Leicestershire County Council
- iii. Letter from Apercu Media
- iv. *Charnwood Roots* – English Local History, Victoria County History, Heritage Lottery Fund Project announcement  
<http://www.hlf.org.uk/news/Pages/MajorheritageprojectrallieslocalpeopleinCharnwood.aspx - .UoxuMo3GKHk>

### B. Leicester’s foundational role in TV Local History

- i. Letter from M. Wood
- ii. M. Wood (July 2011): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW1KpGh8sNg>
- iii. P. Lively, ‘Comment: My hero: WG Hoskins’, *The Guardian* 25.11.2011  
[\[http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/25/hero-wg-hoskins-penelope-lively\]](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/25/hero-wg-hoskins-penelope-lively)

### C. Empowering Local Learning through History and Archaeology

- i. [Local newspaper report](#) on the SCAG HLF ‘All Our Stories’ grant, its interdisciplinary methodology and links with Leicester:  
[http://bramleynewspaper.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1252:telling-our-story&catid=21:news&Itemid=20](http://bramleynewspaper.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1252:telling-our-story&catid=21:news&Itemid=20)
- ii. SCAG HLF grant: <http://www.hlf.org.uk/ourproject/Pages/Oct2012/f2b75ec4-34aa-4bbe-9641-2e226241113a.aspx - .Uovyuo3GKHk>
- iii. Letter from the Norwell Parish Heritage Group
- iv. Letter from the Vice Principle of Nottingham Samworth Academy

### D. Co-Producers of Local Knowledge

- i. Letter from Heritage Support Officer, Leicestershire County Council
- ii. Letter from Development Manager, HLF East Midlands
- iii. *Migration Stories* website - <http://www.migrationstories.co.uk>
- iv. Letter from Senior Archivist, Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
- v. Quoted in R. Bonney, C. Hyde and J. Martin, ‘Legacy of Partition, 1947-2009: Creating New Archives from the Memories of Leicestershire People’, *Midland History*, 36.2 (2011), pp. 214-24, at p. 223
- vi. *Legacy of Partition*: Leicestershire County Council project website:  
[http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/leisure\\_tourism/historyandheritage/recordoffice/recordoffice\\_exhibitions/legacy\\_of\\_partition.htm](http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/leisure_tourism/historyandheritage/recordoffice/recordoffice_exhibitions/legacy_of_partition.htm)