

<p>Institution: Keele University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: D30 History</p>
<p>Title of case study: Local history and local communities in Staffordshire</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Keele University’s long-standing research expertise in local history, particularly that of its immediate region, has had a significant and enduring impact on professional practice, community resilience and individual well-being. Keele historians have provided vital assistance to local archivists and heritage practitioners in the preservation and public dissemination of the region’s history and cultural heritage through the provision of substantial works of reference and support for study-days and community ‘road shows’. Their research has helped sustain local societies and encouraged a variety of volunteering initiatives, whereby groups and individuals are empowered to engage in their own study of the past.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This case study is founded particularly on the contribution of Keele historians to the Staffordshire <i>Victoria County History</i> [VCH] volumes. These are essential works of reference for all those working on local history projects, including members of local history societies and independent researchers as well as academic historians. Joint support for the Staffordshire VCH is at the heart of sustained collaboration between Keele University, and Staffordshire and Stoke Archives and Heritage Service to promote critical understanding and engagement with local history. The <i>Victoria County History</i> volumes are based on systematic analysis of crucial source material in local and national archives, and so provide guides to and interpretation of often intractable or barely catalogued collections for the benefit of heritage professionals and local and family historians. The volumes also provide a fundamental framework for further research on the county, by analysing changing administrative structures, social and economic developments, and religious and political history. By taking the ancient parish as its focus, the <i>Victoria County History</i> is the only national project which addresses specific local developments in a way that can successfully communicate and engage with independent scholars and the broader public in a convincing and sustained way. Four volumes of the Staffordshire VCH [ref: 1] have been published since 1994 when Keele assumed responsibility for the enterprise, all researched, written and edited by Dr Nigel Tringham (Lecturer in Medieval History 1993-2004, Senior Lecturer 2004-present) who has worked for the VCH since 1979, and been employed by Keele since 1994. Tringham brings to the VCH an unrivalled knowledge of the county’s rich archival heritage, and of the challenges involved in interpreting medieval sources in particular, founded on his expertise in editing the records of medieval religious institutions [refs: 6,7]. The quality of individual volumes is assured through an editorial review process managed by the central VCH office, Institute of Historical Research, London, and recent volumes have broadened in scope to take account of developments in historical scholarship. For the Staffordshire volumes this process has owed much to two historians appointed in 1995 in part for their expertise in local history. Dr Ian Atherton (Lecturer in History 1995-2003, Senior Lecturer 2003-present), a specialist in the religious and political history of seventeenth-century England, has encouraged a stronger focus on the religious experiences of parishioners rather than on ecclesiastical institutions as well as contributing expertise on early modern politics [refs 2,3]. The work of Dr Alannah Tomkins (Lecturer in History 1995-2007, Senior Lecturer 2007-present) on poverty, medicine and professionalization has helped to broaden the social vision of the VCH [refs 4,5], seen in the full analysis of servants as well as landowners in the most recent volume. All three historians have made significant contributions to the history of Staffordshire from the pre-conquest period to the nineteenth century but insights from other localities (Shropshire, Herefordshire, and York, for example) have also informed approaches to research on this county.</p>

3. References to the research

Selected Publications:

1. *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Stafford*, vol. VII, *Leek and the Moorlands* (1996); vol. IX, *Burton upon Trent* (2003); vol. X *Tutbury and Needwood Forest* (2007); vol. XI, *Audley, Keele, and Trentham* (2013); all edited by Tringham, IX and X have substantial contributions by Atherton and Tomkins.
2. I.J. Atherton, 'Royalist Finances in the English Civil War: the case of Lichfield Garrison, 1643–5', *Midland History*, 33:1 (2008), 43–67.
3. I. Atherton and D. Como, 'The Burning of Edward Wightman: Puritanism, Prelacy and the Politics of Heresy in Early Modern England', *English Historical Review*, 120:489 (2005), pp. 1215–50
4. A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty 1723-82. Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester University Press, 2006).
5. A. Tomkins, 'The excellent example of the working class: Medical welfare, contributory funding and the North Staffordshire Infirmary from 1815', *Social History of Medicine*, 21:1 (2008) pp. 13–30
6. N.J. Tringham (ed.) *Charters of the Vicars Choral of York Minister*, 2 vols. *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series*, vols. 148, 156 (1993, 2002).
7. N.J. Tringham (ed.) 'Three thirteenth- and fourteenth-century surveys of Burton Abbey Manors' and 'Select documents for the medieval borough of Burton-upon-Trent', *Staffordshire Record Society*, 4th series, volume XX (2004), 1–58.

Selected Grants:

Sept 2007–Jan 2008: Dr Tomkins, AHRC Research Leave, 'Provincial Obstetrics in late eighteenth-century England'.

Sept 2007–Jan 2008: Dr Atherton, AHRC Research Leave, 'Cathedrals and the British Churches, 1538–1670'.

Oct 2012–Sept 2015: Dr Tomkins and Dr Tringham, AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, 'Staffordshire landed estates and the development of urban communities in the long nineteenth century'.

The research has been published by leading publishers and in peer-reviewed journals.

4. Details of the impact

Active involvement in researching and writing local and family history is a significant marker of individual well-being and community cohesion and resilience. Consequently, Staffordshire and Stoke Archive and Heritage Service are committed, indeed required, to undertake systematic public engagement and educational activity, and to provide the resources and training that support individuals and groups in their own historical work. The VCH volumes and associated initiatives of the Keele historians involved with the VCH make a very significant contribution to the Archive Service's outreach work. The value placed on Keele's research expertise is demonstrated by the generous funding given to the university by Staffordshire County Council, to support Dr Tringham's work on the VCH and other local history activities. This funding has included £260,000 in grants between 2008 and 2013, with the County Council continuing to pay £30,000 per annum, despite current funding constraints [source 1].

As Tristram Hunt MP wrote on the launch of the latest VCH volume, 'these big red books are invaluable sources', and serve as starting points for most research on local history. They are widely available in local libraries and systematic attempts are made in Staffordshire to make them accessible to the public. High-profile public launches of each volume are one element in this strategy; Hunt's Marc Fitch lecture at the launch of the latest volume attracted an attendance of more than 100; in the local press he noted that the VCH was 'changing with the times', bringing the 'downstairs world' of Trentham Hall to life [source 2]. Furthermore, Staffordshire Archive Service has arranged cheap paperback publication of specific sections, such as the constituent Pottery towns, Lichfield cathedral, Walsall borough, and small villages, such as Gnosall. Some 300 copies have been sold to date, bringing an income of over £1500 to the Record Office. Finally, most of the

volumes are now freely available in electronic format through the Staffordshire VCH website, part of the Institute of Historical Research's British History Online. Recent volumes are attracting over 20,000 downloads each year: between 2008 and 2012 inclusive vol. VII (Leek and the Moorlands) was accessed approx. 117,000 times, vol. IX (Burton) 112,500. Older volumes are still relevant: Lichfield was accessed 101,500 times over the five years, while Stoke and Newcastle (vol. VIII) was accessed over 30,000 times per annum (174,000 in all) **[source 3]**.

These figures indicate the value of the VCH to readers and researchers beyond academic institutions (particularly as they largely match general population patterns in the county). The scholarship in the VCH is an essential reference point for Staffordshire Archive Service, deployed as contextualization in cataloguing and informing successful applications for grant support, as in the 2009 award to calendar and digitise Quarter Sessions records, so extending access to vital materials for understanding Staffordshire's (and Britain's) past. VCH articles inform many of the service's public dissemination activities, including exhibitions, 'road shows' and its website. 'Out of Darkness', an exhibition which highlighted the county's rich collection of original pre-Conquest documents, was informed by VCH work on Domesday, and the paperback edition of the relevant section from vol. IV was on sale. Each year the Archive Service takes a road show (featuring a local exhibition and activities with archives) to a different village, the choice influenced in part by whether it has or soon will be featured in the VCH. For Gnosall in 2011, the Service arranged for the reprint of the VCH article on the village. Attendance at these road shows usually varies from 150 to 300; the enthusiasm generated at the Gnosall event prompted the formation of a local society that won lottery funding for new interpretation panels **[source 1]**. The VCH is also referenced on the Archive Service's Staffordshire Places website article on Gnosall **[source 4]**.

Tringham gave a lecture at the opening of the 'Out of Darkness' exhibition, one of many examples of how the expertise of Keele historians in partnership with the Archives service contribute to informing the public, and encouraging active participation in historical research. A talk by Atherton on the early modern heretic Edward Wightman prompted commemorations by Lichfield city and the cathedral of the 400th anniversary of Wightman's execution in April 2012 **[source 5]**. Keele historians speak at regular themed day schools (on Landscape in 2009, for example) and at the annual Staffordshire History Day (organised since 2012 by the Archive Service, and Birmingham and Keele Universities) that is attended by over 100 people. In addition there are annual 'VCH Study Days' held at the Record Office introducing smaller groups to research techniques on specific topics (Aristocracy in 2009, Industries in 2012, for example). All events are evaluated by the Archive Service and responses feed into future developments **[source 1]**.

The VCH offers experienced independent researchers and newer local historians opportunities to research and publish local history. A member of the North Staffordshire Guild of Historians and an independent garden historian (previously unpublished) contributed to the work on the household at Trentham for volume XI, as did members of the history society in the small village of Betley (where 172 people attended the archive road show in 2009) **[source 6]**. The combined impact of the 2010 road show and the start of VCH work on south-east Staffordshire prompted the formation of a local history society at Clifton Campville. Some of its members participate in the Staffordshire Community Research Group run by Tringham and archive staff at the Record Office, which is now working mainly on sources for the next VCH volume. A study of 'Lordship and Community' in the medieval village is already on the central VCH 'Explore' website, which also features work on Gnosall **[sources, 1, 7]**. Local volunteers contribute to national initiatives, such as the project to catalogue and digitise the 19th-century correspondence of the London-based poor law commissioners with local guardians, run by the British Association for Local History (BALH) with the National Archives. Through Tringham's initiative and supported by a grant of £36,100 from the heritage lottery fund, 15 people from north Staffordshire, mentored and trained by experienced local historians, are part of a Midlands volunteer research community working on 'Pauper prisons... pauper palaces', illuminating the history of the Victorian poor **[source 8]**.

The significance of the VCH then is not just that it has impact on, but that it works in partnership with, the local archive service and both sustains and benefits from a thriving group of local historians and societies. The county council's generous support for the VCH and broader local

Impact case study (REF3b)

history initiatives at Keele is linked to their 'Healthy Living Initiatives' as well as their heritage strategy. Evaluations suggest that the main audiences and participants come from active older people although younger people are represented in the Community Research Group [source 1]. The VCH team similarly recognise that local history is a democratic rather than an exclusive endeavour, that active participation in historical research empowers individuals, and that informed and critical understanding of the past helps sustain local communities. Their dissemination, partnership and training activities aim to maximise these benefits.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Source 1: Staffordshire and Stoke Archive and Heritage Service.

Source 2: *Tristram Hunt MP* website, 'The Sentinel – the importance of County Histories', 14th May 2013: <http://www.tristramhunt.com/web/2013/05/14/the-sentinel-the-importance-of-county-histories/>

Source 3: VCH Central Office, Institute of Historical Research. Figures to the nearest 500.

Source 4: Staffordshire Archive Service website:

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/history/placeguide/SPGGnosall.aspx>

Source 5: Lichfield Cathedral.

Source 6: Member of North Staffordshire Guild of Historians.

Source 7: Victoria County History Website 'Clifton Campville: lordship and community':

www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/items/clifton-campville-lordship-and-community

Source 8: Research and Records Coordinator, 'Pauper prisons ...pauper palaces', Midlands project, British Association for Local History.