

THE NEW VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY OF HAMPSHIRE

By JOHN HARE *and* JEAN MORRIN

Hampshire was the first county in the country to have completed its coverage for the Victoria County History of England, with all its five volumes being published, between 1900 and 1912. These have formed an essential first step for much work in local history in the county.

But pioneering has its problems. The original parish histories reflected many of the assumptions of their age: a world dominated by the landowner and apparently by the church of England. Now a parish history needs to cover the life of all in the community, its economy and society and not just the rich. But in addition, the communities themselves have been transformed in the last century. Basingstoke is no longer the flourishing but relatively small market and industrial town, while the villages around are no longer predominantly inhabited by the workers of the land. As historians we now have use of the riches of the local Record Offices, that were unavailable a century ago.

In 2007, a century after the first edition, several organizations pledged their support to update and extend the VCH for a new age. These included the Hampshire Archives Trust, the Hampshire Record Office, the Hampshire Field Club and the University of Winchester. Realism dictated that work should initially focus on a limited area and the Basingstoke area has proved an admirable choice.

OUTPUTS

Whereas the original work came out in large volumes, the new VCH Hampshire is initially published as a series of ‘shorts’, each dealing with a relatively small area: a parish, or a pair of parishes, or a period in the history of a town.

To date four volumes have been published covering: *Mapledurwell*; *Steventon*; *Basingstoke: a Medieval Town 1000–1600*; and the latest, on *Cliddesden, Hatch and Farleigh Wallop*. Future titles which are being worked on or are in press include *Penton Mewsey*, a village near Andover, further villages in the Basingstoke area and a study of Basingstoke in the 19th century. The advantage of this ‘short’ approach is that it provides concrete tasks attainable within a limited time span, particularly important with the use of volunteers, while retaining the opportunities for a traditional red book at a later date. Within the basic red book structure, it also allows greater flexibility to explore the particular strengths of a village’s documentation. While the output is seen in the ‘shorts’, as chapters are produced, they are made accessible on the VCH web site under ‘work in progress’, and documents and short articles can be seen in the VCH explore site.

The choice of the places covered has reflected both local and national interests. Unlike their predecessors the studies give full attention to the economic life of the communities, to agriculture and the industries of the area, from the expansive cloth industry of the later Middle Ages and early modern period to later brick kilns and paper making.

BASINGSTOKE

As the main town in the area, Basingstoke will be treated in several volumes, with the medieval volume now out. It was already an important town within the county, as a market centre and a route stop. It became particularly important in the 15th and 16th century with the growth

of the cloth industry in the town and in the area around. The succeeding centuries saw a decline in the cloth industry while Basingstoke retained its role as a market centre and as a stopping road on the main route to the west. The coming of the railways both devastated the through traffic trade and opened up the opportunities for the development of machinery and clothing industries that saw Wallis and Stevens steam rollers and Burberry coats exported around the world. The next volume on 19th century Basingstoke should provide an interesting example of wider urban growth in this period, and how a town could respond to the opportunities of the coming of the railways.

THE VILLAGES AROUND

Mapledurwell was acquired by Corpus Christi college, Oxford shortly after its foundation and the College's archive provide an important core for the study of the parish.

Steventon is a chalkland village best known as the birthplace and childhood home of Jane Austen, where many of her books were first written. But it possesses other problems, ranging from the dilemmas of families with English and French lands when England lost possession of its French territories at the start of the 13th century, to the problems of lord-tenant relations at the end of the 16th century.

Cliddesden, Hatch and Farleigh Wallop are two chalkland parishes, which include a deserted village. The two parishes shared the common ownership since the 16th century of a gentry and later aristocratic family, the Wallops.

Hitherto the focus has been on the chalklands, but current projects include the contrasting development of the claylands with their pattern of dispersed settlement and very different agriculture, as seen in the forthcoming short on Newnham, Up Nately and Hook. This is nearing completion and includes the alien priory of Andwell.

Dummer is another well-documented chalkland village, illuminated by a 19th-century diarist, lord of the manor, and with interesting early evidence of religious dissent.

Herriard village possesses an exceptional range of sources in the magnificent archive

of a resident landlord family who remained here, from the 16th to 20th century, including much material on the agrarian economy of this chalkland parish in the Middle Ages and early modern periods.

Old Basing was one of the largest and most populous parishes and provides another clayland study as well as what was for long the chief residence of the greatest lord of the area, the Paulets of Basing House, until its destruction during the English civil war.

METHOD OF ORGANISATION

Work is being carried out on a voluntary basis under the leadership of historians Drs Jean Morrin and John Hare. Supplemented by limited commissioned works by younger historians and seasoned VCH authors. A group in Basingstoke meets fortnightly to transcribe 16th and 17th century wills and inventories as preparation for the writing of the histories and provides a focus for planning research, while individuals write the text for publication on the web or eventually as shorts.

The project receives no public finance and is dependent partly on sales, but above all on grants and donations to keep going. The Hampshire Field Club and the Hampshire Archives Trust have supported us with valued grants, as have other funding bodies together with many private donations. We need to maintain this finance in order to continue, and ideally need to fund raise on a larger scale in order to be able to expand the project. The pace and scope of our work very much depends on the scale of this support.

It is hoped both that our work will encourage other fully referenced studies of villagers beyond our own VCH area, and will provide case studies that will be of interest to historians whose concerns may be more national, but who value the insights that the study of the localities can bring. Rewriting Hampshire's history is very much a long-term project, whose value should be seen both on a national as well as a county-wide scale. The project should help towards a reappraisal of Hampshire's past and help generate further interest in the development of its diverse communities.

Not surprisingly progress has been affected and delayed by the COVID-19 crisis with the consequential library and record office closures, and the need for social distancing. Despite the difficulties work continued where

possible at home. Above all the Wills Group and discussions have continued through virtual meetings and have remained an important element of continuity for the project.

PUBLICATIONS

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| J. Hare, J. Morrin, & S. Waight, <i>Mapledurwell</i> , £7 +£2 p&p. | J. Hare, <i>Basingstoke: a medieval town, 1000–1600</i> , £12 +£2 p&p. |
| J. Morrin, with contributions by J. Hare, <i>Steventon</i> £12 +£2 p&p. | A. Deveson & S. Lane, <i>Cliddesden, Hatch and Farleigh Wallop</i> , £14 +£2 p&p. |

Copies can be purchased from Dr Jean Morrin, 23 West Road, Emsworth, PO10 7JT. Cheques should be made out to Hampshire Archives Trust (VCH Project).

‘Work in progress’ is accessible on VCH web site: <https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history/county-histories-progress/hampshire>

Other shorter piece and, documents, particularly transcripts of wills and inventories are accessible on the VCH Explore site (although this is now frozen): <https://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/county/Hampshire>

Authors: John Hare, 7 Owens Road, Winchester, Hants SO22 6RU & Jean Morrin, 23 West Road, Emsworth, PO10 7JT

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