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150 YEARS OF LOCAL HISTORY: LOCAL KENTISH PRACTICE AND NATIONAL TRENDS

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In the confidence of mid-Victorian Whiggish history the Introduction to the first volume of *Archaeologia Cantiana* (1858) celebrated Kent as the epitome, and indeed the originator, of all that was perceived to be good in England. Within the eloquent rhetoric, however, the aims of the journal have resonances which are still relevant today:

... a county history which should develop [sic] its subject in all its striking peculiarities, would do more than any other book towards giving us a living and clear insight into our national history.¹

and

... may we not expect that out of those enquiries to which the pages of this journal will be devoted, innumerable vestiges of events, of scenes, of life and manners, will present themselves to the future historian, which shall enable him to place these records in still clearer light...²

That first volume must have been welcomed throughout Kent as it provided something for everyone, covering the whole county and nearly all periods. The use of copies of original documents, colour illustrations and maps would have brought the local evidence immediately to the readership. Within the volume we get an introduction to the range of approaches to local history which has given rise to the tensions between the enthusiastic amateur and the professional historian that has become uncomfortably endemic in the practice of local history. The eloquent essay on 'Cowden and its neighbourhood' by Robert Willis Blencowe rejoices in the beauties and historical gems to be found in that part of the Weald, with little effort made to achieve historical accuracies, but with a lot of imagination.³ It is still a delightful read, but is it local, or even regional history? In comparison the transcription and brief commentary of Sir Roger Twysden's *Journal* by L.B.L. is carefully referenced to allow the original sources to 'speak for themselves'.⁴

The rest of this article will look at the history of the contrasts, similarities and tensions throughout the following 150 years through an examination of the development of amateur local research and an academic, theoretical framework for local and regional history, together with brief serendipitous excursions into a selection of studies (necessarily restricted by the imposed word limit) of Kentish history in all their wide variety.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the birth of many local and regional history societies whose work was published in journals for distribution to their membership, of which *Archaeologia Cantiana*, published as the transactions of the Kent Archaeological Society, was one. Building on the heritage of the gentlemen antiquarians of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these societies published articles of local interest, producing detailed records of locally observable material, such as inscriptions in the parish church or archaeological remains and genealogical information. This work, written by historians with an intense interest in the historical evidence they uncovered, was often untroubled by academic debate. Their main purpose was to record what they found. Much of the early output of these scholarly societies can legitimately be characterised as 'a jumble of chance genealogies, usurped glories and proofless assertions'.⁵ However, some material that is no longer available was recorded in the nineteenth-century journals and the work of these enthusiasts should not be ignored, rather approached with caution. As a recent article indicated; 'to dismiss and belittle their work would be to impoverish our own'.⁶

The proliferation of local county historical societies in the late nineteenth century culminated in a plan to create a series of volumes which would record the history of every county in England. What became known as the *Victoria County History* (VCH), begun in 1899, aimed to produce two types of volume for each county of England. 'General' volumes would offer articles on such topics as natural history, early settlement, political, religious and educational history. The 'Topographical' volumes would contain histories of individual parishes. Three general volumes were produced for Kent, in 1908, 1926 and 1932, but like many other counties further work was delayed until the revival of the VCH in the late twentieth century, the impact of which will be discussed below.

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This new movement in local history also saw a change in the personnel who were active in researching and writing up local history. No longer solely the preserve of the clergy and gentry, the new societies offered a sociable outlet for the interests and talents of the Victorian professional

classes who had the confidence, the means, the education and the leisure necessary to undertake local historical research.⁷ Their studies still owed much to the early topographical studies, starting with Lambarde and culminating in Hasted's *magnum opus*.⁸ Robert Furley, one of the original members of Kent Archaeological Society,⁹ prompted by the opening up of the Weald by the South Eastern Railway and his dissatisfaction with other writers' interpretations of the early administration of the Manor of Aldington, wrote his own *History of the Weald*.¹⁰ He called his study interchangeably a topographical study or a history, but he aimed to place 'before the public a popular History of the Weald of Kent'.¹¹

Furley's work followed a tradition which has continued throughout the ensuing century and a half, of writing up for publication a series of lectures.¹² One thing which he did, and which all local historians have to do, was to read as widely as possible both all available secondary sources, and as many extant primary sources as he could lay his hands on (before the general establishment of institutional archives), and he was happy to challenge all he read. So far Furley seems to have been an admirable progenitor of Kentish history, but then he dates himself by drawing on the arguments of some geologists who assumed that prehistoric Kent was part of the earth 'altered by the [Biblical] deluge'.¹³ He even speculates on the possible descent of Kentish people from Noah. We have to remember what opportunities were available to researchers in the mid-nineteenth century and what influences were determining their approaches to writing. Sources were far more difficult to access; history was still in its infancy as a structured university discipline; the science to support historical and archaeological research was still remote; but, as we have seen, the majority of both amateurs and quasi-professionals would have had a sound classical and religious education and the funds and opportunities to pursue their interests.

Peter Brandon in his 2003 study of the Kent and Sussex Weald makes only one minor reference to Furley, in association with Hasted, on the accepted location of the northern boundary of the Weald,¹⁴ and a quick survey of Brandon's secondary sources highlights why. Within an extensive bibliography, only a handful of pre-Second World War texts are cited. So how different are Furley and Brandon in their approaches? Brandon was able to allude only briefly to the general county history, by now so well-known and studied, in order to deliver a different kind of personal interpretation of the historical landscape of the Weald, whereas Furley saw it as his duty to educate his readers in the full history of the county which he believed was woefully neglected.¹⁵ In 1994 Michael Zell wrote yet another kind of study of the Weald, concentrating on one century, the sixteenth, and evaluating the nature of Wealden industry and both its impact within the regional community and its place in the wider economic and social history of the country.¹⁶

Early progress made on the all encompassing Victoria County History was halted by the First World War. The momentum was not recovered and what progress was made was slow. This stagnation reflected the general state of local history in the inter-war period. Whilst parish histories continued to be produced the discipline was of little interest to the academic world and the leisured classes that had been the mainstay of research and publication were in decline. Nevertheless, local history continued to play a part in more modern versions of the topographical study. Both Arthur Mee in *The King's England, Kent* (1936) and Alan Bignell, *Kent Villages* (1975), like Furley and Brandon, wax lyrical about the manifold beauties of the Kentish landscape, but when they get to the detail of their studies it is the history of the people and places that they invoke.

It was not until after the Second World War that new life was breathed into the world of local history. The impetus for change originated in the new perspectives in history that were being developed within the academic world. The influence of the *Annales* school of French academic social historians, who in the 1930s had begun to explore the regional differences which shaped their country's history had begun to filter through to the English universities. At the same time, the new wave of post-war English historians shifted the perspective of their research. History 'from the bottom up' began to consider and value the experiences of all sectors of society, not just the social élite, and to apply new methodologies, influenced by the emerging social sciences.

This new energy coincided with the expansion of the County Records Offices. Although these had originated in the inter-war period, from 1946 they became established in every county and expanded their holdings. This move to collect, sort and catalogue public and private archival material offered the local historian better access to a wider range of documentary source materials.¹⁷ In Kent the first county archivist was appointed in 1932 and the Kent Archives Office opened in 1938, to be superseded by the Centre for Kentish Studies in 1989.

It was in this atmosphere that the Leicester School of Local History was set up in 1947. This positioned local history as a legitimate academic discipline and saw the beginning of the debates which have shaped subsequent work in this field. Early protagonists in the field of English local history at Leicester were keen to define their area of study. Both Finberg and Hoskins, the first two Professors of Local History within the school, were in broad agreement that local history should concern itself with the 'origin, growth, decline and fall' of communities.¹⁸ This definition allowed for a broadening of the legitimate field of study for the local historian. Indeed it demanded that the timescale of local studies

should be expanded to encompass the *longue durée*. In social terms, local histories were no longer confined to the study of the élite; people at all levels contributed to the development of a community and oral history gave voice to those whose memories and experiences would not otherwise have been recorded. Hoskins' insistence that the local historian should get his boots dirty encouraged a new generation of enthusiasts to use their powers of observation to explore the landscape and the industrial archaeology of their chosen area of study.

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Whilst this new impetus resulted in much work being produced during the 1950s and 1960s, in the longer term the academic world began to recognise that local history as a discipline was becoming overly parochial in its approach and that much of the material that was produced was lacking in purpose. This problem was addressed by J.D. Marshall in 1963. He pointed out that 'intellectual death lies within the single parish viewed in isolation'.¹⁹ A problem that presented itself to academic historians such as Spufford, Wrightson and Levine in the 1960s and 1970s, was that their detailed studies of particular aspects of local communities highlighted inadequacies of using administrative boundaries to define local communities.²⁰ Two main areas of debate arose from these observations during the 1970s and 1980s, concerned with defining the concepts of 'region' and 'community'.

The debate identified two types of region. Alan Everitt argued that England offered a distinct regional picture but that the regions were defined by geological differences rather than administrative boundaries. These natural regions, or 'pays', often cut across county boundaries and experienced differing rates of development and reaction to national trends.²¹ Joan Thirsk divided the country into distinct farming regions, which again cut across administrative boundaries.²² The discussions of 'community' also released local history from the confines of the parish. Whilst it could be argued that in some circumstances and at some points in time, the parish *was* the appropriate area for the study of 'community', the definition was expanded to encompass a societal perspective; a 'community of interest' was a legitimate area of study for the local historian, even though such communities cut across recognised local and regional administrative boundaries.²³

These new definitions and concepts helped to release local history from the straightjacket of the parish and also emphasised the need for placing the findings of the local historian within a broader regional or national perspective. Marshall advocated that the way forward was co-operation in local history as a means of counteracting what he perceived as the 'fragmentation of an almost alarmingly varied field'. Rephrasing his

earlier criticism of parochialism in the discipline, he stated that 'to use all the historical technology available to study a tiny patch of England is to lose one's sense of proportion and certainly our effectiveness'.²⁴

Largely by default local history in universities became the preserve of social and economic historians whose output has provided a wealth of carefully researched theses, monographs, articles and collected works. While these may not appear easily accessible for the enthusiastic amateur, they do in fact often provide inestimable resources and the rigour of their debates are excellent examples of the dynamics of good history, such as Zell's contribution to the debate on proto-industrialisation.²⁵ Zell provided a list of 'key questions' for the historian to ask in order to focus on the nature of rural society in comparison with the sixteenth-century Weald. Eight of these nine questions, beyond the very specialist argument Zell puts forward, relate closely to the sources and evidence used generally by local historians: topography, date of permanent settlement, type of agriculture, structure of landholding, inheritance customs, availability of labour, family patterns and population growth, and access to raw materials and markets.²⁶

Joan Thirsk, in her Foreword to *The Economy of Kent 1640-1914*,²⁷ part of the recent Kent History Project, discussed the challenge to late twentieth-century historians to produce something different from the more traditional 'parish-by-parish history of Kent'. The changes within historical study and the wider availability of sources provided what she described as a changed scene adding that 'realism obliges us to adopt a different plan'.²⁸ So rather than a topographically and parish based study, the editors of the project chose a thematic approach. This has produced elegant collections of essays which reflect the individual scholarship of a wide range of professional historians and should be on the shelves of every committed student of Kentish history, despite their exorbitant price. However, the student new to the County's history will not find everything they look for and will also need to consult more basic sources for the initial framework, before exploring the Kent History Project volumes for the richer understanding of particular topics.

The 1980s and early 1990s saw a major expansion in the teaching of local and regional history within universities, often as part of their undergraduate, extra-mural or dedicated MA programmes. This was not merely an exercise in giving information about the history of the local area but rather a training ground for a new generation of local historians who were well grounded in the sources and methods that were required to produce research of good quality. At the same time the ideological separation between the economic and social historian and the political and cultural historian was being eroded, often somewhat painfully, and thus provided a wider context for local studies. Another feature of this period was the expansion in the number of local history group research projects

which had their origins in university and adult education continuing education programmes.²⁹

iv

Over the past 150 years the markets for local and regional studies have differed widely. Topographical regional studies such as those by Furley, Mee, Bignell and Brandon are all aimed at the widest regional market. Two other categories of local or regional history are probably aimed at narrower, and largely separate, markets. The history of a single community in its most common form is written for the local community or for those with a particular interest in the locality, often by an author with a personal connection. Recent examples include B.U.L. Berry, *Hastingleigh 1000-2000 AD* (2002) and Helen Allison, *Hollingbourne, The History of a Kentish Parish* (2002). Brian Berry acquired the Lordship of Hastingleigh in 2002 and worked with local people to produce the volume, and Helen Allison specifically wrote her book for 'everyone who knows Hollingbourne or whose family originate there' (Foreword, p. v.).

The academic study is normally not aimed at the wider 'popular' market, but for its own community, as often as not by those with no immediately identifiable link to the area.³⁰ The 'academic' will always be dissatisfied with the history which perpetuates 'facts' which have been disproved by more recent documentary or archaeological investigations. The 'amateur' will equally feel discomfited by the study which applies carefully constructed theories to their own locality without consulting the local detail. But it would be wrong to assume that these two broad categories can never meet within a common market place. In an ideal world the latter uses the tools of 'academic' history to underpin the veracity of a local study, and the former can address research topics which have the widest possible appeal, and, to complete the circle, each draws on the work of the other. The divisions and tensions do not necessarily arise from the works themselves so much as within the institutions, societies, and of course the publishers, which identify themselves with and by particular styles and approaches.

Today the practice of local history is in a good state of health. There is room for the amateur and the professional to work side by side, as is evidenced by projects such as England's Past for Everyone (EPE), set up by the Victoria County History, and administered in Kent through the University of Greenwich; and the very recently published study of Hadlow led by Joan Thirsk.³¹ Two senior officers of the KAS, both now retired academic historians, Dr Christopher Chalklin and Professor David Killingray, have taken an active part in their local history societies, respectively Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, encouraging and supporting collaborative publications. *Tonbridge in the Early Twentieth Century* includes the excellent essay by P.L. Humphries on several Tonbridge

families in the interwar years.³² This chapter has all the ingredients to appeal to the immediate local interest, but is written with an astute historical perception. As Humphries says so succinctly:

But merely to offer a series of family reminiscences in the present volume would be unforgiveable self-indulgence. The lives of the Butcher family of Meadow Lawn and the Humphries family of Barden Park Road may be fascinating on a personal level, whereas on the broader canvas of history they will be accounted of little moment, unless, like figures in the foreground of some old master, they serve principally to fix our attention, before drawing us into contemplation of the broader perspective and vitality of their landscape. If successful, the result of this juxtaposing of the specific and general is a most fruitful synthesis.³³

Many of the county history societies set up in the second half of the nineteenth century continue to thrive, publishing research by amateurs and professionals alike and incorporating representatives from the academic world on their editorial boards. The more stringent refereeing of journals has not discouraged the amateur, but has ensured that the reader can be confident of the standard of research and writing. Universities offer local and regional history as part of their undergraduate, postgraduate and extra-mural studies, producing ever-increasing numbers of well-trained historians, ready to carry out good quality research and contribute to the overall health of the discipline.

Millennium projects, often funded through Heritage Lottery Fund and other bodies, provided a focus for local communities to work to discover their own history for themselves, and this resulted in a wide range of publications, including local histories and village surveys, many of which have been reviewed in the pages of *Archaeologia Cantiana* and the *KAS Newsletter*, testament to the continuing enthusiasm of communities for their own history. The outcomes of many of these projects show the benefits of the greater awareness of source material and the involvement of a wide number of people with a range of historical skills and knowledge.

v

The changes in approach resulting from the greater engagement with the purpose and theory of local history in the twentieth century can be seen in many studies. To take a very Kentish topic first, in 1907 George F. Bosworth wrote a section on hop-picking in his *Kent Past and Present*, in which he described the timing and practice of hop-picking in the nineteenth century. His only mention of those who did the work is to describe the 'motley crowd [of Londoners that] ... through the Kentish highways', alleging that the 'work is said to be particularly healthy' and that at the end of a day, after earning 1½d.-2½d. per bushel:

... the ‘hoppers’ or ‘foreigners’, as the villagers call them, retire to their camps, which the farmers who own the hop-gardens have built for their accommodation. Here they light their fires, boil their kettles, and eat drink, and jest and talk, till overcome by weariness they fall asleep and all is still.³⁴

Seventy years later Christopher Wright compiled his *Kent through the Years*, covering much of the same ground as Bosworth. However, his sections on hop-picking highlight the completely different influences on post-war historians.³⁵ Wright drew on the current work of economic and social historians such as Chalklin, Everitt, Hobsbawm and Rudé. Bosworth, while more nearly contemporary with the nineteenth century hop-pickers, wrote as a complete outsider, but Wright used well-researched evidence, measured in relation to George Orwell’s 1931 experience of hop-picking in Wateringbury, to give a deeper insight into the late nineteenth-century hop-pickers’ living conditions ‘which would have been regarded as inadequate for horses, subsistence wages, which stopped the moment it rained and an open hostility from Kentishmen which no coloured Londoner would accept peacefully today’.³⁶ Nevertheless, Wright’s account is still to a certain extent a quasi-romantic view of a hop-picking rural idyll. But at the same time that Wright’s book was published, Michael Winstanley was working on his oral history project on life in Kent at the beginning of the twentieth century, demonstrating the potential of evidence drawn from those previously without a voice in our history.³⁷ His section on hop-picking, while recognising the large numbers of London hoppers, rightly also explored the significance of the hop-picking season to the local labour market. He neatly dovetailed the traditional meticulous approach of the economic and social historian with the oral evidence of those who spent the last days of the summer holidays picking hops in order ‘to rig themselves out for winter’, sometimes alongside children from the local workhouse and ladies working for charity.³⁸ Although both Wright and Winstanley were professional historians,³⁹ their books had as wide a popular appeal as Bosworth’s would have done.

If the recent millennium provided a focus for local studies, other events have also provided the opportunities for providing ‘souvenir’ histories of individual places. In 1932 the National Union of Teachers held its annual conference at Folkestone and a commemorative volume was published for participants.

In compiling this souvenir the Council has endeavoured to avoid anything in the nature of a Guide Book, but through its contributors to give some idea of the engrossing and abiding interest which this part of our England possesses in its history and association from the earliest times ...⁴⁰

Just over twenty years later, in 1954, the outgoing Mayor of Folkestone,

John Mcrieff, and his wife sponsored a similar collection of essays to share and celebrate their enthusiasm for the town and the surrounding countryside.⁴¹ The contributors to both these small books were drawn from well-respected local people, informed amateur historians and qualified specialists. Both have chapters on the geology and natural history of the area as well as the predictable historical chapters. The only significant identifiable difference in their respective approaches is the rather more 'establishment' approach of the Mcrieff collection, but both are essentially in the manner of the early twentieth-century local histories.

Far more self-consciously aware of their responsibilities as historians are the authors of two studies of the Hoo Peninsula published in 1947 and 1980.⁴² In the later book Philip MacDougall described Ralph Arnold's 1947 study as the

only ... account published, which dealt specifically with the entire Peninsula ... it is somewhat dated and rather patchy in places. His format was to take the area village by village, with a rather over-zealous one-third of the book devoted to the tiny village of Cooling.⁴³

MacDougall himself took a chronological approach, bringing together a comprehensive account informed by both his own economic and social background and the ideology of the post-war academic local historians. Nevertheless, just as we have seen with the similarities of the eulogies on the Weald over the past 150 years, MacDougall's introductory chapters deal with his impressions in much the same way as Arnold.

Arnold was very conscious that there was a historical debate in play when he was writing in the late 1940s and while confessing that when 'I read Burnet's *History of My Own Time* for my special subject [at Oxford], I used to play with the idea of straying down the primrose side paths'. He goes on to justify his 'literary-historical' approach focusing on a relatively small local area in the nineteenth century, having already set his credentials as a historian through his grandfather, 'a member of the Kent Archaeological Society from the year after its foundation in 1857, a frequent contributor to its *Transactions*, and later one of its Vice-Presidents, [who] was a scientific historian whose scholarship would have satisfied even the exacting standards of the late Professor Bury'.⁴⁴ Although there *is* much that is dated in Arnold's work, he believed that local history was about the people who lived and worked in the place, and in this way his awareness of the 'lesser' people presaged MacDougall's more modern approach.

One of Finberg's criticism of much local history was that local amateur enthusiasts concentrated too much on the more recent evidence and therefore unbalanced the whole interpretation of a locality and its

community.⁴⁵ Three very different publications on the village, town and now London borough, of Beckenham, subsumed within Bromley, reflect the fascination of places and events within the collective memory. These publications also contribute to the history of changes in county administration and population growth. In 1910 Robert Borrowman published *Beckenham Past and Present*. The late nineteenth-century attitudes to local history which attracted so much criticism by the mid-twentieth century are crystallised by the author in his preface:

The typical English village, however varied the locality, almost invariably presents the same plan of construction. A group of cottages, farms and country houses, representing different degrees of social rank or worldly prosperity, all clustering round the Church, whose tower rising above the buildings bears silent yet eloquent witness to the ‘eternal verities’. The parish Church is the great memorial of every place. It tells a tale of long antiquity, it records the growth and prosperity of the village of which it forms the centre, it preserves the names of those baptised, married and buried within its walls, and the unbroken continuity of its ministrations.

For these reasons we have in the following pages devoted considerable space to descriptions of the old Beckenham Parish Church of our younger days and of the magnificent building which has taken its place. It appeared to us that it was fitting that special attention should be devoted to this part of the history of Beckenham.⁴⁶

The early history of Beckenham thus quickly gives way to a study of the church and the élite from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, although there are short chapters on the old workhouse and local charities. These chapters show a tension between the advantages to the rate payer of the reduced rates introduced by the 1834 New Poor Law, and a concern for the inadequacy of diet, provision of clothes and bedding, and washing facilities.⁴⁷ The concentration on those initiating local change in the nineteenth century, either through charitable works or public service, provides the modern local historian with an insight into the structure of society when perceptions of responsibility for social welfare were on the cusp of change. And nineteenth-century photography of course enables us to see people and places in their contemporary setting.

In 1970 H. Rob Copeland reissued *The Village of Old Beckenham*, which he had originally published in 1962 as *From Village to Borough*. This small, privately produced booklet is mainly a collection of data about Beckenham with some useful studies of the changes to individual properties and local statistics. Most surprisingly, nothing is said about the 1965 incorporation of Beckenham into Greater London, which would have happened between the publication of the two editions. Far less is learned about the community than in Borrowman’s study, but local and

family historians would find plenty in it to trigger more wide-ranging researches.

Copeland, like Borrowman, concentrated on the nineteenth and early twentieth century and this trend was continued in the recent millennium revised edition of Inman and Tonkin's *Beckenham*. This is a truly contemporary local study which brings the people to the fore. However this book too is rather inward looking. There is an underlying regret at the changes which have stripped the old village of its identity and 'the gradual concentration of local government function in Bromley once the Borough had been abolished'.⁴⁸ The dereliction of the Town Hall, so proudly opened on 20 October 1932,⁴⁹ and its replacement by a Marks and Spencer 'food store' encapsulates this sense of loss. Change is described but its motivators are not discussed or evaluated. Fascination with the past, preservation of memory and the pace of modern change, all contribute to the desire to study and record local history, and it is not therefore surprising that so much should focus on the more recent period where the written and visual evidence is in great abundance, and change appears to be more rapid and dramatic. Nevertheless, many recent volumes, like *Beckenham*, also draw on the developments of the past half century.

The documentary sources that form the basis of many local studies are made more easily accessible, whether in national, local or private archives and locating the appropriate source materials is made easier by on-line catalogues. The general availability of computer technology has had a significant impact on the work of local historians. As Pat Hudson pointed out in 1995, computers have not only increased the overall accessibility of archival material but also offer a greatly enhanced potential for aggregating the small details of everyday life. 'In both social and economic history, local level reconstructions of communities and families and collective biographical research open the way to new levels of understanding of the lives of ordinary people previously hidden from history'.⁵⁰ Increased accessibility, whilst offering this valuable potential has some drawbacks. The local historian in the early twenty-first century is faced with a challenge not experienced by previous generations. The sheer volume of source materials made readily available by online digital technology has the potential to overwhelm all but the most focused of local historians, amateur or professional.⁵¹ On the more human side, the Kent History Federation, set up in the 1930s, acts as a forum for local history societies to share knowledge, developments and, above all, their enthusiasm for the discipline.⁵²

Local history is no longer on the margins. Valued as a discipline in its

own right, when practised with academic rigour, the debates of the last sixty years have strengthened the position of local history on the broader historical canvas. Academic debate about the aims and objectives of local history has continued beyond the early definitions of community and region discussed above. In the mid-nineties, Marshall entered the fray again, seeking firmer definitions and frameworks for the discipline. He argued that the factors which influence perceptions of 'community' within a given locality were legion and that historians did not yet have a firm grasp on these factors.⁵³ A couple of years later he re-expressed the view, first aired in 1978, about the fragmentation of the academic discipline of local history. Reviewing Marshall's book, David Hey argued that this fragmentation is evident in every academic discipline 'with the explosion in modern knowledge'. He could not agree with Marshall, who 'seems to regret that the subject has gone in numerous directions and can no longer be contained in a framework upon which we can all agree. I myself will continue to favour a plurality of approaches'.⁵⁴

In the same year, 1978, the Conference of Regional and Local Historians (CORAL) confidently set out what they believed to be the six principles of local history:⁵⁵

- 1 History is primarily concerned with change over time, rather than a single narrow snapshot view of the past.
- 2 A broad approach to local studies is essential. Indeed, such is the fragmented nature of academic disciplines relating to the human past that it is only by focusing on the local that these parts – political, economic, social, intellectual, cultural, geographical and archaeological – can be brought together.
- 3 Local History must be understood within the context of its region (which may be defined as part of a country, a whole country, or an international area).
- 4 Local History must be comparative. It asks not only what happened and why, but what was the wider significance of what was happening and how does this relate to what was happening elsewhere.
- 5 Local historians should be aware of the theoretical issues implicit in their study of a locality – what is meant by a locality, a region, a boundary, a sense of identity – and why a locality should be studied.
- 6 The scope of local history should not be predetermined by traditional administrative units, such as the parish or county, without first questioning the meaning and logic of these units.

Royle, in reviewing these principles made it clear that CORAL did not want to create 'a critical dichotomy' between professionals and amateurs. 'The unfortunate emphasis on the gap between the amateur

and the professional has been created by the political need to convince 'real' historians that local history is a 'real' subject'. Co-operation rather than conflict is the key to the survival of the discipline.⁵⁶ As Alan Rogers pointed out 'the validity of the differing perspectives of local history is equal ... these differing views of local history are needed because only in that way can professional and amateur alike develop critical reflection on our views of the past of any local community'.⁵⁷

As the millennium approached, a furious debate was sparked in the pages of *The Local Historian* by George and Yanna Sheeran. In an article entitled 'Reconstructing local history', they argued that professional local historians, by focusing almost exclusively on methodological issues, had failed to develop a 'philosophy of local history'.⁵⁸ In their view, this philosophy should develop from an engagement with the debates that had been considered by other branches of history concerning the tensions between the modernist and postmodernist approaches to historical research and knowledge. This broadside provoked a series of generally negative responses in subsequent issues of the journal. The general feeling was that professional historians could not have failed to be influenced by the postmodernist debate.⁵⁹ They fully understood that history is not objective observation and implicit in the professional historian's work was an awareness that 'historians do not discover truths; they write narratives ...'.⁶⁰

Whilst many local historians might not have agreed with the general thrust of the Sheerans' article, the level of response and the subsequent debate are indicative of the necessity to continue discussion of the discipline and its philosophy, if only to guard against complacency and isolation from mainstream academic history. As John Beckett stated in a recent review article, 'good local history ... needs to address the issues which are open to wider debate', particularly if it seeks academic acceptance.⁶¹

Against this background of continuing academic debate, the growth in interest in family history has encouraged more and more enthusiasts to find out more about the communities within which their ancestors lived and worked. Moreover, both amateur and professional are beginning to work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledging that whilst aims, objectives and methodologies may differ, they share a common interest in recovering the past.

vii

To conclude, four very different types of local and regional history, all of which have been embraced, encouraged and in some cases, funded by the Kent Archaeological Society, can be cited as recent and current examples of both the practical co-operation and the intellectual sharing of experience.

An Historical Atlas of Kent (2004) is a collection of short specialist essays from a wide range of academics and amateurs from all the contingent specialist disciplines which contribute to regional studies, enhanced by quality mapping by John Hills of Canterbury Christ Church University. Postgraduate theses such as Sheila Sweetinburgh's University of Kent thesis on Sandwich and two recent studies of early modern Cranbrook by Anthony Poole (Roehampton University) and Lorraine Flisher (University of Greenwich) are exemplars of the strength of the discipline at university level. The first two studies have now been published in book form making their findings more immediately available to the local historian.⁶² But the range of postgraduate theses on Kent, by students throughout the country (and even abroad), is as extensive as it is varied, and can now be searched on-line.⁶³ The Rye and hinterlands research project c.1000 to c.1660 is being carried out with the assistance of volunteers with a great variety of skills, experience and local knowledge. This is an integrated project on the history, historic buildings and archaeology of Rye and its hinterlands led by Dr Gillian Draper, David and Barbara Martin, and Dr Alan Tyler.⁶⁴ And, finally the Kent contribution to the VCH's EPE, led by a specialist academic local historian, Dr Andrew Hann, has relied for much of its primary research and local surveys on a large group of volunteers drawn from amateur local historians and students. The project is due to be completed by September 2007. Together with the main text by Hann, the volume includes two-page spreads compiled by volunteers and other local historians with interests in the industrial Medway. Many sites have been surveyed by volunteers overseen by professionals, and a large collection of data, much of it in digital format has been collected to be accessed on the project website.⁶⁵ And a new generation of local historians will be encouraged by the education project. The VCH has, not without much debate and some internal angst, striven to meet the challenges of twenty-first century approaches to local and regional history, while retaining the spirit of the nineteenth-century enthusiasts, adding paperback volumes and a website to the final goal of a new generation of red books.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Archaeologia Cantiana*, i (1858), Introduction, 12.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 111-123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 184-214. The journal continues in the next three volumes, ii, 175-220; iii, 145-176; and iv, 131-202. *Archaeologia Cantiana* has continued to publish articles on Twysden and in 2004 Sue Petrie demonstrated the way the study of history has built on the work of previous generations and the wider opportunities and availability of sources; Sue Petrie, 'The Religion of Sir Roger Twysden (1597-1672): a Case Study in Gentry Piety in Seventeenth-Century Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxiv (2004), 137-162

⁵ P. Goubert, 'Local History', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Winter 1971, 115.

⁶ C. Smith, 'Continuity and change: the future of the Victoria History of the Counties of England', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 32, no. 1 (2002).

⁷ F.W. Jessup, 'The Origin and First Hundred Years of the Society', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXX (1956), 1-43.

⁸ W. Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent* (1576); E. Hasted, *The history and topographical survey of the county of Kent*, 4 vols (1778-99).

⁹ *Archaeologia Cantiana*, I (1858), xxii.

¹⁰ R.F. Furley, *A History of the Weald of Kent, with an outline of the early history of the County*, 2 vols (1871-74).

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. xiii.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 2; other examples of collections of lectures include H.P.R. Finberg and V.H.T. Skipp, *Local History: objective and pursuit* (1967); and J. Eales, *Community and disunity: Kent and the English Civil Wars 1640-1649* (2001).

¹³ Furley, *History of the Weald*, p. 3.

¹⁴ P. Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald* (2003), p. 14.

¹⁵ Furley, *History of the Weald*, p. xiii.

¹⁶ M. Zell, *Industry in the countryside. Wealden society in the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁷ L. Stone, 'English and United States Local History', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Winter 1971, p. 129; P. Riden, *Local History: A Handbook for Beginners* (1989 edn.), p. 21.

¹⁸ H.P.R. Finberg, 'The local historian and his theme', in Finberg and Skipp, *Local History: objective and pursuit*, p. 10; W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (London, 1984 edn.), p. 14.

¹⁹ J.D. Marshall, 'The Use of Local History', *The Amateur Historian*, vol. 6, 1 (1963), p. 17.

²⁰ M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge 1974); K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-1700* (New York, 1979).

²¹ A. Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (Leicester, 1985), pp. 1-9.

²² J. Thirsk, *Agricultural regions and agrarian history in England, 1500-1750* (1987).

²³ J.D. Marshall, 'Local or regional history, or both? A dialogue', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (1978). C. Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History* (Leicester, 1987). See also, E. Lord, 'The boundaries of local history: a discussion paper', *The Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, Vol. 14, 4 (1994), pp. 75-87, for a summary of these debates.

²⁴ Marshall, 'Local or Regional History or Both?'

²⁵ Zell, *Industry in the countryside*, chapter 8, 'The Weald and "proto-industrialisation"', pp. 228-246. See also, B. Short, 'The de-industrialising process: a case study of the Weald 1600-1800', in Pat Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries. A perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 156-74.

²⁶ Zell, *Industry in the countryside*, p. 229.

²⁷ Alan Armstrong (ed.), *The Economy of Kent 1640-1914* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. vii-xi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

²⁹ J. Unwin, 'Local history group research projects in adult continuing education', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 24, no. 1 (1994).

³⁰ Mavis Mate, *Trade and Economic Developments 1450-1550, The Experience of Kent, Surrey and Sussex* (2006). Mate is Emeritus Professor at the University of Oregon, and is also currently involved with the English Heritage funded project on the development of Sandwich from its origins to c.1600, together with Sarah Pearson, Dr Helen Clarke and Keith Parfitt.

³¹ J. Thirsk (ed.) with Bridgett Jones, Alison Williams, Anne Hughes and Caroline Wetton, *Hadlow. Life, Land and People in a Wealden Parish 1460-1600* (KAS 2006).

³² P.L. Humphries, 'Tonbridge Families Remembered: a Study of Life in South-West Tonbridge, 1918-39: Home and School', C.W. Chalklin (ed.), *Tonbridge in the Early Twentieth Century* (1999), pp. 83-114.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁴ G.F. Bosworth, *Kent Past and Present* (1907), p. 185.

³⁵ C. Wright, *Kent through the Years* (1975).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-70.

³⁷ M.J. Winstanley, *Life in Kent at the turn of the century* (1978).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-2.

³⁹ Christopher Wright was a teacher at Kent College, Canterbury and Michael Winstanley a lecturer at the University of Kent, funded for his project by the Social Sciences Research Council.

⁴⁰ *Folkestone Souvenir* (1932), p. v.

⁴¹ R. Howarth (ed.), *Folkestone Past and Present* (1954).

⁴² R. Arnold, *The Hundred of Hoo* (1947) and P. MacDougall, *The Story of the Hoo Peninsula* (1980).

⁴³ MacDougall, *Hoo Peninsula*, p. x.

⁴⁴ Arnold, *Hundred of Hoo*, pp. 2-6.

⁴⁵ Finberg and Skipp, *Local History: objective and pursuit*, pp. 75-6

⁴⁶ Robert Borrowman, *Beckenham Past and Present* (1910), pp. xvi-xvii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-172.

⁴⁸ E. Inman and N. Tonkin, *Beckenham* (2002), p. 129; Beckenham formally became a chartered municipal borough in 1935, H.R. Copeland, *The Village of Old Beckenham*, revised edn 1970, p. 45.

⁴⁹ Copeland, *Old Beckenham*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ P. Hudson, 'A new history from below. Computers and the maturing of local and regional history', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 25, no. 4 (1995), 221. The investigations into the built environment in the current Sandwich project [see note 30] will result in supporting relational databases to provide the wider public with access to both printed and primary sources.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the problems and potential of information technology for the local historian, see S. Jordan, 'History and information technology: some implications for the local historian', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 31, no. 2 (2001).

⁵² Kent History Federation, Hon. Sec., Mrs S. Broomfield, 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, TN11 9HD; email: s.broomfield@dia1.pipex.com.

⁵³ J.D. Marshall, 'Communities, societies, regions and local history. Perceptions of locality in High and Low Furness', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 28, no. 2 (1996), 48.

⁵⁴ D. Hey, 'Let battle commence', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 28, no. 2 (1998), 123-4, reviewing J.D. Marshall, *The tyranny of the discrete. A discussion of the problems of local history in England* (Ashgate 1998).

⁵⁵ E. Royle, 'Local history in context: twenty years of the Conference of Regional and Local Historians (CORAL)', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 28, no. 3 (1998), 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 178-9.

⁵⁷ A. Rogers, 'Participatory research in local history', *The Journal of Local and Regional Studies*, Vol 15, no. 1, 9.

⁵⁸ G. and Y. Sheeran, 'Reconstructing local history', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 29, no. 4 (1999), 260.

⁵⁹ Responses are to be found in *The Local Historian*, Vol. 30, no. 2 (2000), 187-9; Vol. 30, no. 3 (2000), 124-5; and Vol. 31, no. 1 (2001), 47-50. See also, A. Crosby, 'The Amateur Historian and *The Local Historian*: some thoughts after fifty years', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (2002), 152, for a brief summary of the impact of this article.

⁶⁰ Sheerans, 'Reconstructing', 256.

⁶¹ J. Beckett, 'Revolutionary thinking', *The Local Historian*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2005), 282.

⁶² S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England: gift-giving and the spiritual economy* (2004); A. Poole, *A Market Town and its Surrounding Villages. Cranbrook, Kent in the later Seventeenth Century* (2005); L. Flisher, 'Cranbrook, Kent and its Neighbourhood Area, c.1570-1670', University of Greenwich Ph.D (2003).

⁶³ Index to theses (UK), <http://www.theses.com/>; or through individual university websites. A survey of theses reveals a further dimension to the tensions between amateur local studies, the majority of which have a tendency to focus on the more recent past, while theses tend to cluster in the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and early modern periods.

⁶⁴ This three-year project is funded by the Romney Marsh Research Trust, founded by Jill Eddison. It builds on the Trust's previous interdisciplinary work and publications. The website for the Rye project is <http://www.rmrt.org.uk/>.

⁶⁵ The official website for the project: <http://www.englishspastforeveryone.org.uk>.