

ESF / SCH EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP
Academic Local History and the Concept of Heritage:
Towards a European Model

26-28 July 2001, Cheltenham, UK

Convened by: **Rebecca STARR & John HOWE**
University of Gloucestershire, UK

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

I. Executive Summary:

The basic aims of our Workshop were (1) to investigate the varying conceptions of Local History throughout Europe, both at the academic and popular level; (2) to seek ways to link (“bridge the gap between”) these levels into a working continuum of theory and practice, driven by professional and nonprofessional expertise; and (3) to seek ways actively to engage local communities and volunteer groups in the process. These elements underpin the task of the recovery, preservation, and credible presentation of Local History.

The Workshop programme was a mix of theoretical enquiries (for example, Pogge von Standmann’s paper on ‘Heimat [hearth]’ which explored the case for reinterpreting national political histories in light of local/regional political cultures) and presentations. The latter ranged from, for example, role-play teaching methods for Swedish school children (Lindstöm and Eklund) to the on-line Local History and Culture of Tempere demonstration from our Finnish (Salminen and Peltola) delegates. Both theoretical and practical approaches allowed participants to make international comparisons during the discussion periods. During the Workshop it became clear that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Comparing methods of presenting Local History inevitably led to isolating, then comparing the theories upon which those practices rested. One area that emerged as a crossroads between theory and practice, and thus a potentially valuable conceptual framework for a European model for Local History, is that of “Public History” (Constance Schulz). Whatever the differences among our national histories, all papers acknowledged the importance everywhere of Local History as a source of identity building.

One practical aim of our Workshop was to investigate the links between academic Local History and the ways in which a community understands its heritage which might support a broadly ‘European’ model for thinking about, as well as retrieving, preserving and credibly presenting Local History. Therefore, this Executive Summary will identify the major themes emerging from the Workshop that could contribute to such an outcome under the broad rubrics below.

1) **Definitions of Local History:** Some time was devoted to discussing the varying definitions of the 'local' and its significance in terms of a community's identity. Did this depend upon a national or a political history for its organization and interpretative significance? What role did political boundaries play? All papers recognized a close relationship between the immediate community and/or parish boundaries as well as county units and regional designations for rural locales. All these units were treated as Local History. When speaking of cities, a different organizational approach may be required. Here a definition of Local History that recognizes a common urban 'experience' is crucial, especially where peoples from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds are represented. Not all the presentations addressed the question of whether urban Local History has special characteristics or problems. This question is one of the areas or ways ahead that would bear further work.

2) An issue related to defining Local History is **the problem of producing a genuine Local History at a national (or international) project level:** Input from members of the Victoria County History (VCH) Project, a long-lived (nearly a century) national project for producing a complete set of (multivolumed) Local County histories was especially helpful here. The VCH Project's own history illuminates some of the problems and opportunities involved in defining "Local History", and separating it from a national project's perspective. In recent years, this project has put into place several organizational links to local institutions uniquely adapted to tailor its work to that locale. In Gloucestershire for example, the VCH historians in 1996 were appointed research staff members at the University of Gloucestershire through a tripartite agreement between the Victoria County History project of the Institute of Historical Research at London, the Gloucestershire County Council, and the University of Gloucestershire. The University and County Council both in turn have links to Local History and other societies through a countywide umbrella organization, the Local History Committee of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council.

3) **Interfaces between academic and popular Local History,** especially (1) the role played by of genealogical research and the relationship of 'family history' to Local History. The highly active interest in and preoccupation of many individuals with these latter pursuits offers an opportunity to introduce those working in personal history to larger themes in social and cultural history at the European level. A key issue in this is 'education' at levels other than universities. Here the papers ranged widely as to means/outputs such educative products might take. The range included (apart from academic monographs) such outputs as Local History pamphlets/brochures, community histories, encyclopedia compilations, articles in Local History journals, archival collections, archeological reports, role playing scenarios, and web mounted projects. (2) The difficulty of engaging and catering for a multicultural audience in Local History (Kingsley on Birmingham) raised some provocative questions regarding inclusion. As multiculturalism becomes the norm, solving such problems in the local setting can serve as a laboratory for learning how to approach these issues in multicultural Europe.

4) **The centrality of archives and archival sources for Local History:** The importance of and use of certain sources and methodologies for Local History was fairly standard. Some of these included censuses, birth and death records, and newspaper accounts, manuscript collections of local people, records of local government activities. Less attention was paid to nonstandard historical source materials, such as objects and artifacts, buildings, photographs, clothing. Those Local historians that do incorporate these sources were more likely to work with other disciplines, especially archeology. One presenter included art and art history as a way into Local History, but no one mentioned geography, the importance of rivers for example, as an important source. Some used, but almost no one talked about the importance of maps as sources in Local History. These nontraditional areas and sources represent opportunities for thinking about a transnational European history.

5) **A Case Study:** The above concerns engaged delegates for two full days of papers, discussions and a plenary session. The final day was devoted to an 'on the ground' look at how some of these issues were addressed in a Local History project, *Silchester: a Roman Town*. An entire day was devoted to this field experience, looking at two methods of presenting and interpreting a particular Local History site to the public:

- (1) A visit to a special exhibition entitled *Silchester, a Roman Town near Bath* mounted at the Reading Museum. This exhibition featured a mixture of passive and hands-on displays, geared to all ages, that illuminated Silchester's physical and cultural development from prehistoric Celtic, to Roman, medieval and modern times.
- (2) A site visit to Roman Silchester, to observe an archeological 'open-day', presented by the archeologist in charge, while his students worked *in situ*. Although professionally presented, the story of Silchester was easily accessible to the many members of the public also present. The project displayed some analogies to the Istanbul as an archeological museum presentation (Bolognesi), in that it illuminated a Local History site situated in a European history context. All agreed that further exploration of the links between such Local History exhibitions and European themes was desirable.

II. Scientific Content of the Workshop:

Testing theories of Local History.

Relating Local History to national/international orientations.

Exploring means of promoting Local History and identity networks at local levels.

Exploring methods of teaching credible Local History at the popular level.

Exploring Local History perspectives in interpreting national and international histories.

Exploring Public History as an interface between academic and popular history.

Exploring a 'joined up' history model for Local and European cultural themes.

III. Final Programme:

Thursday 26 July 2001

9.00-9.15 *Registration*

9.15-9.30 *Welcome*

Rebecca Starr and John Howe, Convenors

Introduction to the European Science Foundation and the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

Professor Robert Halleux: ESF/SCH representative (replaced by Professor William Doyle)

Morning Sessions

9.30-10.45 Professor Constance B Schulz (Director, University of South Carolina Graduate Public History Programme and Distinguished Fulbright Professor, 2000-2001, at York University for the 'Heritage Studies as Applied History' Programme):

Large Questions in Small Places: Local History as Public History, The US and the UK Compared

10.45-11.15 *Coffee*

11.15-12.30 Professor Anthony Fletcher (Director: The Victoria County History Project, UK) *Collaborating with the Local Community in Writing Local History* -- Topic taken by Dr Nicholas Herbert.

12.30-2.00 *Lunch*

Afternoon Sessions

2.00-3.15 Mr Liam Irwin (Limerick University, Ireland): *Researching and Teaching Local History: The Irish Perspective*

3.15-3.45 *Tea*

3.45-5.00 Professor Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford University; Rostock University): *Local Political Cultures and Identities in German Towns*

5.00-6.15 Mr Nicholas Kingsley (Gloucestershire County Archivist): *Approaches to Local History in a Multicultural City: Modern Birmingham*

6.30-7.30 *Reception [Fullwood conservatory]*

7.30 *Dinner*

Friday, 27 July 2001

Morning Sessions

9.00-10.15 Dr Vagn Wahlin (Aarhus University): *University Historians and Local Historians in Denmark* Additional commentary by Mr Rane Wahlin, postgraduate student in Historic Preservation at Aalborg University.

10.15-11.30 Mrs Tina Lindström and Mrs Helen Eklund (Kalmar County Museum, Kalmar, Sweden) *Time travelling and historical role-play – a method to engage young people in the study of their local history*

11.30-11.45 *Coffee*

11.45-1.00 Dr Eugenia Bolognesi Recchi Franceschini (President, Associazione Palatina – Istanbul): *Local History in Istanbul: Literary Sources and Archaeological Evidence*

1.00-2.00 *Lunch*

Afternoon Sessions

2.00-3.45 Mr Tapio Salminen and Mr Jarmo Peltola (Research Fellows, University of Tampere, Finland): *Challenging the Tradition: Academic history writing and Local History in Finland today; Local History projects at Tampere University Department of History*

3.45-4.15 *Tea*

4.15-6.00 *Summary and ways ahead*

7.00 *Dinner*

Saturday 28 July 2001

Field trip (full day): Departure 9.15 from Fullwood main gates
Visits to Reading Museum and Silchester, a Roman Town: excavation-in-progress Open Day presentation to the Public, with Professor Michael Fulford.

IV. Assessment: needs of the field identified and suggested ways forward:

- 1) The need to broaden our understanding of sources. People in communities are profoundly interested in the 'stuff' of their ancestors' lives and work. How can historians adapt existing critical, responsible ways of understanding written sources to visual and material culture, the environment, landscapes (urban, rural), even symbolic landscapes such as gardens, fields, planting patterns and hedgerows.
- 2) The need to adopt innovative ways in which to deliver Local History. We had several examples ranging from role-playing to the Internet to an archeological site open day. Interactivity seems to be key to finding a successful interface between academic rigour and public engagement.
- 3) The need to cultivate and preserve not just Local History, but also the interest of local people in it. This interest is not necessarily a given. What is the role of the local historian, whether academic or nonacademic, in fostering a desire to understand and pursue one's identity through Local History? What organizational links can be forged between Local History societies and interest groups, local government and educational institutions to encourage individual and community interest in its history as 'local', but not parochial.

Overall, the Workshop's purpose was exploratory -- to unpack some of the fundamentals of developing a broadly 'European' model for thinking about, as well as locating and sharing the practical aspects of retrieving, preserving and credibly presenting Local History. Dissemination of the Workshop's findings are now underway in the preparation of an edited volume of essays, with Introduction (John Jurica and Rebecca Starr, eds). We are also discussing the feasibility of building upon the foundation of this experience by proposing a Network.

IV. Statistical information:

Age structure:

20-30: 1
30-40: 2
40-50: 6
50-60: 4
60-70: 6

Countries of Origin:

Denmark: 2
Finland: 2
Germany: 1
Italy: 1
Ireland: 1
Sweden: 2
United Kingdom: 7
United States: 2

V. Final List of participants

Dr Eugenia Bolognesi, Director, Italian archaeological mission for a survey of the Great Palace in Istanbul, Associazione Palatina Istanbul, Corso Italia No: 29, Rome 00198, Italy
Tele: +39.6.85356159
FAX +39.6.8553794
desimoni@dsi.uniroma1.it

Mr Hugh Conway Jones: Local historian, author of *Gloucester Docks: An Illustrated History*, and *Working Life on Severn and Canal: Reminiscences of Working Boatmen*.
1 Grovelands, Gloucester, GL4 3JF, UK
Tele: +44-1452-619679

Professor William Doyle: ESF/SCH representative
william.doyle@bristol.ac.uk

Mrs Helen Eklund, Kalmar County Museum, Box 104, S-39121 Kalmar, Sweden
Fax: +46-480-451365
helen eklund@kalmarlansmuseum.se

Dr Nicholas Herbert: Editor, Gloucestershire VCH, Gloucestershire Record Office, Clarence Row, Alvin St, Gloucester, GL1 3DW, UK
Tele +44-1452-425292
FAX +44-1452-426378
nherbert@gloscc.gov.uk

Mr John Howe, Principal Lecturer and Head of School of History and Local Studies,
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, PO Box 220, the Park, Cheltenham, GL 50 2 QF, UK
Tele +44-1242-532880
FAX +44-1242-532725
jhowe@chelt.ac.uk

Mr Russell Howes, Local historian, 68 Barrowfield Road, Stroud, GL5 4DG, UK
Tele +44-1453-758429

Mr Liam Irwin, Head of History, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, South Circular Road, Limerick, Ireland
Tele: +353-61-204987
FAX: +353-61-313632
liam.irwin@mic.ul.ie

Dr John Jurica: Assistant editor, Gloucestershire VCH, Gloucestershire Record Office, Clarence Row, Alvin St, Gloucester, GL1 3DW, UK
Tele +44-1452-425292
FAX +44-1452-426378
jjurica@gloscc.gov.uk

Mr Nicholas Kingsley, County and Diocesan Archivist, Gloucestershire Record Office, Clarence Row, Alvin St, Gloucester GL1 3DW, UK
Tele +44-1452-425292
FAX +44 1452 426378
nkingsle@gloscc.gov.uk

Mrs Tina Lindström, Kalmar County Museum, Box 104, S-39121 Kalmar, Sweden
FAX: +46-480-451365
tina.lindstrom@kalmarlansmuseum.se

Mr Jarmo Peltola, Research Fellow, Dept of History, FIN-33014 University of Tampere, Finland.
Tele +358-3-2156536
FAX +358-3-2156980
ttjape@uta.fi

Mr Tapio Salminen, Research Fellow, Dept of History, FIN-33014 University of Tampere, Finland.
Tele +358-3-2156540
FAX +358-3-2156980
hitasa@uta.fi

Professor Constance Schulz, Director, Public History Programme, Department of History, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, USA
Tele: +01-803-777-4854 (direct line) or 777-5195 (History dept office)
FAX: +01-803-777-4494
schulz@sc.edu

Mr Brian Smith, Chairman, Trust for the VCH of Herefordshire, Bryn Farm, Vowchurch Common, Hereford HR2 0RL, UK
Tele +44-1981-550623

Dr Rebecca Starr, Senior Lecturer, School of History and Local Studies, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, PO Box 220, the Park, Cheltenham GL 50 2QF, UK
Tele +44-1242-532880
FAX +44-1242-532725
rstarr@chelt.ac.uk

Professor Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, University College, Oxford, OX1 4BH, UK; Visiting Professor, Rostock University, Germany
Tele: +44-1865-276656
FAX: +44-1865-276790
poggevonstrandmann@univ.ox.ac.uk

Dr Vagn Wahlin, Department of History, University of Aarhus, Denmark
Tele: +45-86-256588
Fax: +45-86256589

Mr Rane Wahlin (postgraduate student observer), Department of History, University of Aalborg, Denmark.