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19th and 20th Centuries

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Drake, M. (ed.) (1994) *Time, family and community: perspectives on family and community history*, Oxford, Blackwell in association with The Open University (Course Reader).

Braham, P. (ed.) (1993) *Using the past: audio-cassettes on sources and methods for family and community historians*, a series of six audio-cassettes with accompanying notes, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Calder, A. and Lockwood, V. (1993) *Shooting video history*, a video workshop on video recording for family and community historians, with accompanying notes, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

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PREFACE

Many thousands of people are currently exploring their family trees or investigating the history of their localities. It is an absorbing hobby – and more than just a hobby. It combines the excitement of the chase and the exercise of demanding investigative skills. It also leads to personal rewards, among them perhaps an enhanced awareness of identity, achieved through the process of searching out your roots within the unending cycle of the past, and something to hold on to in the confusions of the present.

At the same time scholars within a series of social science and historical disciplines are increasingly realizing the value of small-scale case studies, extending and questioning accepted theories through a greater understanding of local and personal diversities. Sociologists now look to individual life histories as well as generalized social structure; geographers emphasize the local as well as the global; demographers explore regional divergences, not just national aggregates; historians extend their research from the doings of the famous to how 'ordinary people' pursued their lives at a local level.

This volume and the series of which it is a part have as their central purpose the encouragement of active personal research in family and community history – but research that is also linked to more general findings and insights. The series thus seeks to combine the strengths of two traditions: that of the independent personal researcher into family tree or local history, and that of established academic disciplines in history and the social sciences.

Now is a particularly appropriate moment to bring these two sides together. The networks of family and local historians up and down the country have in the past had scant recognition from within mainstream university circles, which (in contrast to the active involvement of further education and extra-mural departments) have sometimes given the impression of despising the offerings of 'amateur researchers'. Explicitly academic publications, for their part, have been little read by independent investigators – understandably, perhaps, for, with a few honourable exceptions, such publications have been predominantly directed to specialist colleagues. But there are signs that this situation may be changing. Not only is there an increasing awareness of the research value of micro studies, but higher education as a whole is opening up more flexible ways of learning and is recognizing achievements undertaken outside traditional 'university walls'. Our hope is to further this trend of mutual understanding, to the benefit of each.

There are thus two main aims in these volumes, overlapping and complementary. The first is to present an interdisciplinary overview of recent scholarly work in family and community history, drawing on the approaches and findings of such subjects as anthropology, social and economic history, sociology, demography, and historical geography. This should be illuminating not only for those seeking an up-to-date review of such work, but also for anyone interested in the functioning of families and communities today – the essential historical background to present-day concerns. The second, equally important aim is to help readers develop their own research interests. The framework here is rather different from traditional genealogy or local history courses (where excellent DIY guides already exist) since our emphasis is on completing a project and relating it to other research findings and theories, rather than on an unending personal quest for yet more and more details. It differs too from most conventional academic publications, in that the focus is on *doing* research, rather than absorbing or reporting the research of others. These volumes are therefore full of practical advice on sources and methods, as well as illustrations of the kinds of projects that can be followed up by the individual researcher.

Given the infinite scope of the subject and the need to provide practical advice, we have put some limits on the coverage. The timescale is the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a period for which the sources are plentiful and – for the recent period at least – oral investigation feasible. (The critical assessment and exploitation of primary sources within this timescale will, of course,

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develop skills which can be extended to earlier periods.) There is no attempt to give a detailed historical narrative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. Rather, we present a blend of specific case studies, findings and theoretical ideas, selected with a view to giving both some taste of recent work, and a context and stimulus for further investigation.

In terms of area, the focus is on the United Kingdom and Ireland, or, to put it differently, on the countries of the British Isles (these and similar terms have both changing historical applications and inescapable political connotations, so since we wish to write without prejudice we have deliberately alternated between them). This focus is applied flexibly, and there is some reference to emigration abroad; but we have not tried to describe sources and experiences overseas. Thus, while much of the general theoretical background and even specific ideas for research may relate to many areas of the world, the detailed practical information about sources or record repositories concentrates on those available to students working in England, Ireland (north and south), Scotland and Wales.

The emphasis is also on encouraging small-scale projects. This does not mean that larger patterns are neglected: indeed, like other more generalized findings and theories, they form the background against which smaller studies can be set and compared. But small, manageable projects of the kinds focused on in this volume have two essential merits. First, they link with the emerging appreciation of the value of research into diversities as well as into generalizations: many gaps in our knowledge about particular localities or particular family experiences remain to be filled. Second, they represent a form of research that can be pursued seriously within the resources of independent and part-time researchers.

This second volume focuses on population movements, communities and aspects of community life. It can be read on its own, but it is also linked to the other volumes in the series which complement and amplify the topics considered here. The companion volumes (listed on p.ii) turn the spotlight on individual families and the broader patterns of family history revealed by recent research (Volume 1); on family- or community-based activities that can be studied at a local level such as work, social mobility, local politics, religion, or leisure (Volume 3); and, in Volume 4, on some of the many sources and methods that can be used to conduct and communicate research in family and community history.

This book forms one part of the Open University course DA301 *Studying family and community history: 19th and 20th centuries* (the other components are listed on p.ii). DA301 is an honours-level undergraduate course for part-time adult learners studying at a distance, and it is designed to develop the skills, methods and understanding to complete a guided project in family or community history within the time constraints of a one-year course – comparable, therefore, to the dissertation sometimes carried out in the final year of a conventional honours degree. It also looks forward to ways in which such a project could be extended and communicated at a later stage. However, these volumes are also designed to be used, either singly or as a series, by anyone interested in family or community history. The introduction to recent research, together with the practical exercises, advice on the critical exploitation of primary sources, and suggestions for research projects, should be of wide interest and application. Collectively, the results of such research should not only develop individuals' investigations but also enhance our more general understanding of family and community history. Much remains to be discovered by the army of amateur and professional researchers throughout the British Isles.

Since a series of this kind obviously depends on the efforts of many people, there are many thanks to express. As in other Open University courses, the material was developed collaboratively. So while authors are responsible for what they have written, they have also been both influenced and supported by other members of the course team: not just its academic contributors, but also those from the editorial, design, and production areas of the University. There was also the highly skilled group who prepared the manuscript for electronic publishing, among them Molly Freeman, Maggie Tebbs, Pauline Turner, Betty Atkinson, Maureen Adams, and above

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Our list of thanks is a long one and even so does not cover everyone. In our case its scope arises from the particular Open University form of production. But this extensive co-operation also, we think, represents the fruitful blend of individual interest and collaborative effort that is typical in the field of studying family and community history: a form of collaboration in which we hope we can now engage with you, our readers.

USING THIS BOOK

Activities

Many chapters in this volume are designed not just as texts for reading or reference but also for active study. They are therefore punctuated by a series of activities, signalled by different formats. These include:

(a) *Short questions*: these provide the opportunity to stop and consider for a moment before reading on. They are separated from the surrounding text merely by being printed in a different colour.

(b) *Exercises*: these are activities to be carried out as part of working through the text, requiring anything from ten minutes to an hour to complete. Follow-up discussion comes either immediately after the exercise in the main text or (when so indicated in the exercise) in the separate comments and answers at the end of the book.

(c) *Questions for research*: these are suggestions for longer-term research projects to follow up selectively according to personal interest or opportunity *after* working through the relevant chapter(s). Note that although there are frequent references to 'your family' or 'your community', in practice any family or community in which you are interested will do equally well. In fact, taking one on which there are *locally* available records may be more practicable, as a first stage at least, than chasing the details of your own.

Schemas

These are lists of questions, factors or key theories which can help in formulating research, providing a kind of model or template against which research findings can be compared.

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