

Local and regional history in southern tertiary education

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The recent report of the Blake Committee described local history as a 'mass' pursuit and called, in the most general of terms, for more training for its teachers and participants.¹ Implementation of such proposals would create considerable pressures on the institutions responsible, with implications the report avoided. This article will review the state of existing provision in the south and attempt to assess the possibilities of any considerable expansion such as Blake would require.

For present purposes 'tertiary' education is defined as being primarily concerned with teaching for degree or similar advanced qualifications. In the historic counties covered by this journal there are eight universities, three regional offices of the Open University (some of which cover midland areas as well), five polytechnics and nine institutes or colleges of higher education. The universities award their own degrees under individual royal charters whilst the other bodies depend on external validation, either by a local university or, predominantly, by the Council for National Academic Awards (C.N.A.A.). The bodies are clustered within the south which often reinforces local ties but makes for a high degree of relative isolation, particularly since lateral travel between the centres is far from easy and London is possibly the normal focus for all of them rather than any one place or institution within the south.

The siting and present role of each of these reflects both the importance of local pride and initiative over quite a long period and the considerable fluctuations in national policy during the last fifteen years or so. The universities of Bristol, Reading, Southampton, and Exeter (the order is that of the granting of charters) are products of the civic tradition set by northern and midland counterparts, emerging from substantial local colleges working for London external degrees and moving slowly towards independence. Sussex and Kent were born into fully-fledged university status as products of the 'green fields and plate glass' optimism of the 1960s, whilst

Bath and Surrey sprang from the reaction towards technology in the later part of that decade. All depend for the bulk of their income upon the State, through the filter of the University Grants Committee, although there still remains a considerable latitude as to how each body interprets its role within the very broad notions of university-level education. Although each is independent, there is a considerable monitoring of performance by a complicated network of external examiners from other universities (often outside the region), with some limited influence upon actual course patterns and teaching input. The Open University is a special case, the product of a populist government's feeling, well-founded as it turned out, that the existing university net let slip many potential candidates who could best be served by a combination of distance teaching with intermittent local support.

The non-university bodies represent another strand of piecemeal development and the implementation of a series of simplistic policies, which soon faced considerable problems as unforeseen patterns of consumer demand emerged. Polytechnics were formed from local colleges of technology and art but were altered considerably by, as indeed the colleges and institutes of higher education sprang from, the need in the early 1970s to redeploy expensive staff and plant threatened with redundancy as the government revised its plans for teacher training in the light of demographic projections. As a result some polytechnics acquired large but often physically separate departments of humanities, in stark contrast with the relatively compact university sites. A good example of this is Brighton. The Faculty of Technology, Library, and School of Architecture are sited in Moulsecoomb, and the Faculty of Art and Design in the centre of the town. When Brighton College of Education, four miles from the town, was threatened with closure and the University of Sussex refused to absorb it, it was taken over as the Faculty of Humanities of the polytechnic. In the later 1970s the short-lived East Sussex Institute of Higher Education, a combination of former teacher training colleges in Seaford and Eastbourne, about twenty miles away, was broken up and absorbed into the polytechnic management structure. These parts, and the other institutes, reformed themselves by shifting their emphasis towards a non-vocational arts degree market, admittedly with a leavening of graduate teacher provision.

All these bodies depend almost entirely on local authority direct financing, with an implicit tension between the preparedness of each authority to meet the costs of development and the demands of

external validating bodies for adequate provision for each course proposal. It is perhaps no accident that a number of polytechnics and institutes established new degree courses based upon the relatively mild validation demands of sympathetic local universities, before shifting as a going concern to the more stringent requirements of the C.N.A.A.²

There is in all types of institution a broadly similar departmental and subject pattern, produced perhaps by an emulation of extant university patterns. Within these bounds, however, there are considerable variations in the emphasis on 'local' and 'regional' studies. For this paper I shall deal largely with the work of history departments but it should come as no surprise to find that some departments of geography have a stronger input than the same institution's historians. For the sake of convenience, provision will be examined in three settings which are not entirely discrete: at undergraduate, postgraduate and research, and extramural levels.

Undergraduate teaching

There is no single degree in local or regional history anywhere in the south or indeed in England generally. Although it is provided for in one form or another within almost all the southern institutions the emphasis varies considerably. The situation largely stems from inherited or recently developed notions of history as an intellectual discipline. With predictable exceptions, most university undergraduate history courses are still influenced considerably by the formative Oxford Modern History syllabus and the variations on it fostered by the work of Tait at Manchester. It is widely held that the history student's early apprenticeship begins with the widest possible chronological and spatial span and narrows down only when there is a sufficient grounding for analytical skills to have been developed by a discussion of problems in the wider perspective. After this general grounding the range of more specialized courses is determined less by an agreed *corpus* of what constitutes a desirable body of knowledge or intellectual approach *per se* than by the research interests of individual members of staff and the availability of primary source material in a form that can be coped with by the average student without considerable technical preparation. These are usually offered as contextual options or as 'special subjects' (the real meat of history teaching!) at a point late in the second year, continuing into the third: even this practice is not universal. This

point is chosen almost invariably because the second long vacation is dedicated traditionally, at least in staff minds, to the collection of material for dissertation or extended essay use as part of assessment requirements. The writing of this dissertation, usually the most original piece of work any undergraduate undertakes, is expected to continue in the third year alongside taught courses which are often of only peripheral relevance to the work itself when it is at its most crucial point.

At this juncture it is perhaps necessary to make a point which is not always obvious. There are considerable differences between departments and institutions as to what is expected as the teaching input for courses which may be very similar. Universities rarely provide more than two hours a week of formal teaching on any one course for their arts students and the norm is probably closer to one hour, although that may be in very small groups. They have tended to operate on an assumption of intellectual osmosis amongst highly-motivated, very intelligent and virtually self-directing students capable of planning their own weekly, termly, and vacation work loads with minimal guidance. It is possible that the very rapid expansion of the last fifteen years has produced an influx less capable of this but few universities appear to have modified their practices in the light of this. Teachers in the other bodies will often admit, although usually privately, that they begin with a lower base of less capable, less qualified and less confident students who require a far greater input of weekly programming, teaching, and guidance. In fact, the growing trickle of their graduates who proceed to more advanced work, as well as the overall high standard of their normal degree submissions, are a testimony to the skill of many tutors as well as to their readiness to accept a much higher teaching load than their university counterparts.

One high cost of this is in the individual and institutional commitments to research. Some small process of convergence would appear to be taking place in which universities are accepting a greater teaching input to individual courses, although not necessarily in terms of overall individual workloads and the other bodies are acquiring a greater awareness of the demands of the intellectual disciplines *vis à vis* the students. This latter perception will probably accelerate as the non-university institutions recruit a growing percentage (if not number) of younger staff with impressive postgraduate research qualifications and deep commitment to the discipline as replacements for older staff who began and remained as teacher trainers. It would be foolish to pretend that this will not cause

considerable strains within the institutions which will eventually affect input to undergraduate courses.³

The proponents of local and regional studies at undergraduate level frequently base their claims on the teaching value of such courses – the immediacy of the issues, the value of an early introduction to primary materials, and the importance of the students' testing of general hypotheses and their seeing the complex processes involved in reconstructing the past. Perhaps the stridency with which these claims are sometimes advanced is indicative of the relative isolation within which the handful of professional practitioners feel themselves to be operating. If local history is still regarded frequently as an antiquarian pursuit, except where it offers convenient case studies, the wider concept of the region, so well developed in France, is even more rarely exploited in English history teaching. Certainly this is borne out by the pattern of undergraduate courses in the area, and at the point at which both positive statements and implicit assumptions are most evident – in the prospectuses. Most of these operate at a careful level of understatement, the subfusc of academic respectability: although local history is frequently mentioned, it is usually assumed that choices of subject and institution are influenced by factors in which local focuses play a minor part.

The southern university where local history is most immediately served is Kent at Canterbury, a 'new' university where the possibility of innovation is perhaps less influenced by established inertias. The Faculty of Social Sciences offers a Part II course, available in the second or third years: 'Aspects of the economic and social history of Kent'. This is taught over two terms, from October to March, with eighteen weekly seminars of two and a half hours duration: it forms one of the eight courses taken for finals. The objects are stated clearly in very detailed course handouts:

There are three components:

- 1) the economic and social development of the county between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries,
- 2) an introduction to regional and local history, their definition, scope, content and value to the study of history generally,
- 3) a critical examination of some major sources of regional or local history.

Each student is issued with a 'kit' with detailed bibliographies, background information and guidance on footnoting. One major element of the course is the 'group research project' in which members produce a corporate effort of which copies are retained

by individuals and in the university library. Final assessment uses an unusual two-part examination. One is a research question, for which a week is allowed to prepare an answer from 'source material anywhere within Kent'. The second is a two-hour open book examination into which notes may be taken. The course began in 1971 and depends for its entire input on one member of staff. It is also open to historians from the Faculty of Humanities.

Clearly there are elements within this course more familiar to adult education or the non-university sector and possible because commitment to area growth made the purchase of the necessary support materials easy during expansion. By contrast, the University of Sussex made no real place available for local work when it 'redrew the map of learning' after 1961. Concerned to break away from traditional disciplinary constraints it defined 'regions' in global terms, Africa, America and so on, and sought to provide an introduction to history which drew upon the intellectual fruits of other disciplines in the broadest sense. The lack of almost any mediaeval studies and a very heavy emphasis on the social history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen any 'local' expertise emerging as a rather belated handmaiden to other concerns. Although a number of teaching staff have interests in the Sussex area, as well as in other English regions, this is only used in undergraduate history in individual guidance for students wanting material for special subject topics: an increasingly familiar pattern as many students decide to spend the summer in the Brighton area! Within the Economic History Major, a special subject, 'Change in English Rural Society, 1850-1914' makes a case study of Sussex. An optional contextual for students of any discipline in the School of Cultural and Community Studies, 'English Rural Communities', provides an introduction to local studies for second- and third-year students: an increasing number of the extended essays (4000 words) by which it is assessed use local materials impressively, although the conception is often over-ambitious for the time involved. Local history has an illustrative role in certain urban studies options and plays a major part in a three-term, second year historical geography course. This spans some 2000 years and ends with local fieldwork: in a number of cases this leads to an individual third-year project. It depends on one member of staff. It may be that the 'interdisciplinary' emphasis of Sussex work, with its own special form of intellectual excitement, and the tutorial system on which it rests are an inappropriate introduction to local studies as such. In

addition, there is a very real paucity of modern secondary material covering the local area.

Of the other 'new' foundations in the south, Surrey appears to offer no undergraduate options in local work but Bath advertises 'elective' courses, in the second year B.Sc. in Social Sciences, on Industrial Archaeology, with some local input. It is to the older universities, arguably with the strongest local links, that one turns for a more general picture of the state of local history teaching. On the whole, it plays a small optional role as well as reinforcing general period and topic papers with illustrations.

In the older universities, the position is best summed up in the words of one Exeter respondent: 'Like most university departments of history we aim at producing, up to first degree standard, good general historians.' In the Exeter history department, this means that some ten special subjects use illustrations from local sources but go no further in courses requiring about three hours teaching a week: there are no dissertations based on these. The pattern is slightly different in the economic history department where a 10,000-word dissertation on a local topic is regarded as central to the course structure. Because the present course is fairly new there have been as yet no problems of overlap with topics. 'Two or three' staff are involved in preparation and supervision during the second year.

Bristol's history department allows students to opt in their third year to present a 14,000-word dissertation instead of a particular course: supervision is provided but there are relatively few takers. Since 1977, the economic history department has offered a course on 'The economic and social history of the Bristol region, c. 1100-1850'. It is offered to third year students with a balance of 'lectures, seminars, visits to record offices and field trips': examination by a formal unseen counts for two-thirds of the final marks and course work one third. There is no dissertation and the subject will become an optional special subject in 1981-2 when the third year of a new syllabus will become operational. A limited reading list of secondary materials is provided. The department of geography is now offering (1979-80) a course in 'Bristol studies' for the first time. A second-year honours course, it will involve twenty three-hour sessions in the year, using five members of staff. It is based on a lecture series, covering one-third of the time, with individual and group work accounting for the rest. Assessment is by a mixture of individual and group projects and normal examination procedures.

Southampton has only a slight involvement in local studies in straight history. No special course is devoted to them but the city itself provides a core for a special subject, 'The English town', in which dissertations are optional. The department of geography is rather more involved, running a first-year introductory course on South Hampshire for one hour a week over two terms. This involves a field trip to 'medieval Southampton' and is assessed as one part of a conventional three-hour paper. There is, however, a new first year 'ancillary course' emerging called Medieval Studies which will offer a first term on the history of Wessex to 1150: this will provide the basis for a wider study of the mainland of medieval Europe. Two historians and a geographer take responsibility for the course with sporadic other contributions. At third-year level, local material illustrates geography courses, using pollens from local bogs to illustrate quaternary studies and also offering a source and record-office-based course on historical geography. In addition, some second-year students opt for limited local projects.

Reading's history honours degree offered from 1976-9 a course on 'English local history since 1500: sources and scope', which will be replaced in 1980 by 'The Home Counties in the English economy, 1600-1900'. It is an optional third-year paper, with forty hours teaching, the responsibility of one member of staff, and is examined by a conventional paper.

Finally, The Open University offers no specific local courses as such, but a number of options at Level 3 (the equivalent of the final year) require projects whose authors frequently employ local materials, as does a Level 4 course, A401, 'Great Britain, 1750-1950: sources and historiography'. In some cases the research work on local materials is examined in a sit-down paper. In the case of A305, 'History of architecture and design, 1890-1939', whose students often choose local buildings, there is a comprehensive *Project Guide*, in itself a model of exposition. Because of the particular pressures of distance teaching, the considerations of smallness and isolation are at a different level from those of other universities.

In the non-university sector there appears to be a much wider range of experiment and provision, with a much heavier emphasis on teaching. Brighton Polytechnic has a very strong focus on regional history, using it as one of two main courses in the final year of the history B.A. in Combined Studies. In addition it features as a third-year course in geography with an optional regional topic for special studies. Material is also used as illustration earlier in the courses. All the courses last one term, as does a first-year local study

option in the School of Architecture. Assessment for the Combined Studies is by essay and own assignment and by dissertation in history. Some redrafting is proposed in view of a shift to C.N.A.A. validation – considerable congestion is recorded in existing library resources because of demand.

The B.A. (Hons) Humanities degree at Bristol Polytechnic will offer a 'half module' on 'Aspects of modern British urban history' in 1980, validated by C.N.A.A. It will constitute one-sixth of the final-year load, with a final examination and one essay. In addition, there are special studies projects, covering 25 per cent of the final assessment. This is held together by a seminar and individual supervision framework geared to the project needs. Dissertations presented in recent years include work on Bristol suffragists, local Methodism, and working-class housing. In addition, as with many of the universities, some students choose local topics outside the region.

Kingston Polytechnic's School of Geography offers regional studies in second- and third-year options – these lead to a small research project requiring a 6000-word dissertation. Each student is attached to a member of staff for supervision of this work which begins in the second year: twelve staff are available for this.

Portsmouth Polytechnic offers a range of courses, including one of the most exciting in the region (see the *Extramural* section). Since 1972, history undergraduates have been offered an option, with two staff teaching it, on 'Hampshire, 1660–1800'. Economics students are allowed to work on a project, 'broadly interpreted', centred on a locality or region. Four students have so far done this: the topics include a study of Margate in 1851, the nineteenth-century Isle of Portland, and Wiltshire and west midland parishes.

Even more flexibility can be found among the survivors of the teacher training colleges. Christ Church College, Canterbury, offers a course begun in September 1978 which it regards as unique, part of a two-subject three year B.A. validated by the University of Kent. Part II offers a range of choices, including 'Canterbury and Kent, 1760–1914', 'The Church of Canterbury, 1070–1559', 'Kent and educational provision, 1750–1914' and 'Industrial Archaeology, East Kent'. Course work, essays, and a written paper are used in assessment. Depending on the student and component chosen, the dissertation could assume predominant importance. Four members of staff are available to service the courses, as well as a B.Ed. degree. In addition a new local history resources centre is being established (see *Extramural functions* below).

At Bognor Regis, the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education has followed the trend in moving from expertise gained in B.Ed. courses to developing major B.A. components. The History with Education programme provides a first-year course on 'Local Studies' for all students, usually some thirty in all. The emphasis is on method and analysis rather than locality, important for those students who will eventually work elsewhere: it appears to be an introduction to materials and their location, with case studies of demography and late-eighteenth-century popular unrest. In the final year a special subject and dissertation are required: one theme is specifically, 'The local community in medieval times', although local work is possible on the other options.

King Alfred's College, Winchester, offers a similar pattern in which 'the student concentrates on the development of essential historical skills and the use of original source materials'. In the first year, both local history and archaeology are offered with the possibility of subsequent theme studies and, in third-year archaeology, a course, 'Winchester and Southampton, A.D. 400-1500'. The College of St Mark and St John Plymouth offers a broadly similar pattern: at La Sainte Union, Southampton, Rolle College and the Gloucestershire Institute of Higher Education there is no mention of any such provision in their publicity.

Bulmershe at Reading uses local materials in its new C.N.A.A. B.Ed. and B.A. courses, but with a strong emphasis on teacher training. Groups of local teachers are being used to prepare teaching material linked with new CSE/O Level courses and a new certificate in local history is planned (see *Extramural*). Specific undergraduate courses have not yet been developed, although a handful of students work on local dissertations for wider special subjects. An interesting departure from the norm is that some 20 per cent of the assessment for this rests on an oral examination of the candidate. Four staff help with supervision and also provide some local history teaching guidance for third-year professional and postgraduate certificate work.

Finally, there is a singular flexibility of provision at the Dorset Institute of Higher Education, Weymouth.⁴ The history course offers a three or four year run (the latter for B.Ed. honours) validated by Southampton university. Part of the final assessment is a dissertation of up to 15,000 words, particularly in 'Option 2' which covers the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. After twelve hours of introduction to records, teaching is through tutorials based on the students' needs. In the B.Sc. course, 'Geography and the

landscape' which began in 1978, the students are offered an interdisciplinary foundation requiring a wide range of teaching input. In the second and third years special courses are offered on prehistoric and Roman Britain with special local emphasis. Total staff/student contact time is 240 hours (four staff are available), made up of lectures, seminars, and tutorials with supportive fieldwork.

Postgraduate and research work

There is a well established tradition throughout the whole area of source/project-based work as part of in-service B.Ed. degrees, postgraduate and advanced certificates and masters' degrees in education. Most of these are provided by the education schools of universities with their own history tutor, although he/she is not necessarily a local historian. As with the non-university sectors of undergraduate teaching, the tutors have usually turned to local studies as a means of increasing classroom involvement as a reaction against the monotony of so much traditional teaching.

A reflection of the patchiness of undergraduate teaching can be found in the input into direct research, where there are considerable institutional variations. Whilst the universities have a major commitment to research (it is usually a stated part of staff contracts, and tenure and promotion depend on a satisfactory research and publication record, however defined), the other bodies are often ambivalent, both in their attitudes and in their support, particularly where teaching is regarded as a primary concern. Because there is a considerable variety in the time, length, and disciplinary complexity of individual projects, it is almost impossible to evaluate here the total input into local and regional studies by teaching staff in the south. Many work on such themes, but focussed elsewhere in England, and a number of recent southern studies have been published by staff employed both elsewhere in England and abroad.⁵

Several traditions of research in the humanities may actually hinder a greater development of local work. Most scholars tend to work on individually conceived and implemented projects in which the largest input is the personal time of the executor. Usually these are low-cost, funded piecemeal out of personal pockets, limited institutional research funds, and occasional small grants from such bodies as the British Academy. Paradoxically, cheapness may be an enemy: in a society which associates low cost with low priority it is often these small funds with low margins which are the most threatened. Many scholars would seem to be quite happy if slightly greater

personal funding, ludicrously low when compared with many small-scale science projects, would allow more time to be spent on travel to London libraries and repositories where so much material is held. Research in progress beyond the doctoral level is notoriously vague, rarely being registered and with personal contact along scholarly grapevines as the only means of disseminating interest before publication, which is itself not always thought out in advance. Individual scholars may collaborate between institutions as in a currently almost completed study of regional migration patterns, but no individual department or consortium has so far instituted a major project using external funding such as may be found in other universities such as Lancaster where an S.S.R.C.-financed study of urban wealth is under way.

Institutions differ considerably in providing time for research, and the universities score heavily. Tutorial systems offer considerable flexibility in the individual's use of time and many staff expect, and are often encouraged, to take a 'research day' each week. (Whether it is always used for that is another matter!) In addition there is usually provision for paid and unpaid research leave. Because the other bodies depend heavily on teaching, personal research time is, whatever is said to the contrary, won often only after considerable battles. The position over paid leave varies: local authority paymasters are not easily convinced of its value. In some respects the position is worsening, paradoxically, as the upgrading of non-university courses demands a greater input of organization whilst theoretically requiring a higher level of personal scholarship amongst the staff. There is considerable tension in one body within the region because, now that sabbaticals are being introduced, they are being offered in strict rota to established senior staff with little recent research rather than to younger members often in the middle of substantial research and publication programmes. No attempt was made for this paper to evaluate individual or institutional performance in terms such as Halsey's, but it became fairly clear that the capacity for innovation by some staff is being inhibited as much by institutional rigidity as by the present financial constraints.

This uncertainty spreads over into the training of research students, theoretically the new generation of initiators and teachers. At the moment there is a considerable flux as external funding authorities such as the S.S.R.C. cut back sharply on their quotas. In some cases this has meant an abrupt end to promising careers, although the prospect of unemployment at the end of research has long been considerable. It is gratifying to many, except perhaps the

purse-holders, that a growing number of students has been prepared to follow the work for its intrinsic interest. One continuing sad feature has been the relatively low completion rate of much initial research, and the universities have often proved their own worst enemies in allowing inadequate students to embark on over-ambitious projects with insufficient preparation and supervision.

For the 'good' student (with a first or suitable upper second) there are two lines into research, if funds are available: most move directly into the work, some are trained in coursework first. Recruitment usually depends on the strengths of a particular department in general terms. Probably the bulk of students using English themes are working on local case studies but usually in an incidental rather than primary sense.

Only in Sussex do students for the M.Phil. or D.Phil. research degrees begin by preparation with a predominantly coursework M.A., but with a concentration on concepts and analysis rather than methodologies. It is completed by a 20,000-word, primary-source-based dissertation. In all the other universities students proceed straight into individual work for theses. Most are full-time but there is a growing proportion of part-timers, although there are considerable difficulties in terms of time and finance.

Exeter's history department has twelve postgraduates, with only one taught course (on medieval palaeography for those who need it) – a much smaller number may be found in the department of economic history. Bristol reports 'a diminished number of students' working on M.Litt. and Ph.D. dissertations. For the M.Ed. a small number usually work on local themes. Southampton is in a similar position, as is Reading which has eighteen full and part-time students working on local themes out of twenty-six in the department. Some of these use the facilities of the Institute of Agricultural History and Museum of English Rural Life in the university, but for reasons which are 'practical' rather than because of any specific institutional commitment to regional work. Kent has both full and part-time students with strong local interests. Few of Sussex's substantial number work on local themes but it is expected that a new two-year part-time M.A. will be introduced in October 1980, of which Part II will involve a coursework option in local studies, culminating in a 20,000-word dissertation.

Most teaching appears to be in the form of sporadic supervision and there are singular institutional differences in the allowance for and emphasis on this. 'Work in progress' seminars are usual but the approach is often exemplary rather than instructive: similarly,

students prepared to make the effort and able to get there may use the Institute of Historical Research's facilities in London.

For the other bodies the C.N.A.A. allows for research degrees, of which there are few as yet, usually demanding an external university supervisor as well. It must be said that the information it usually demands from the latter is quite excessive, perhaps a symbol of that body's own uncertainty. In most cases it is too early for any significant input to have developed, particularly in light of the ferocious competition for a shrinking pool of grants. One notable exception to this is Brighton Polytechnic, Falmer, where an internally-funded research assistantship has just been allocated to a local project: an appointment has been made, after national advertisement, to work on patterns of rural crime and the establishment of a police force in East Sussex, with the expectation that the holder will complete a C.N.A.A. doctorate. It took several years of submissions before the allocation was made. The Open University also allows for local M.Phils and D.Phils supervised primarily from local institutions with some nominal central control – the costs of this and the relative isolation militate against any considerable numbers.

Extramural functions

Nationally, the greatest growth of local and regional teaching has been in 'extramural' work, variously described as 'adult' or 'continuing education'. In history such courses now far exceed general ones. Most are provided by specific university departments for a part-time heterogeneous audience meeting largely in the evenings in local communities. In the south, the scale of provision is shown in Table 1.⁶

TABLE 1: *Extramural classes in local history*

<i>University</i>	<i>1976/7</i>	<i>1977/8</i>
Bath	0	0
Bristol	36	57
Exeter	29	27
Kent	11	11
Reading	3	1
Southampton	7	1
Surrey	4	2
Sussex	10	12
	100	111

A roughly equal number of courses is provided in archaeology.

Because of changes in methods of collecting statistics, it is difficult to establish the long-term significance of these figures, except that they probably represent the peaking of rapid growth during a period of considerable optimism and relatively generous funding which has now ended abruptly. The variations in size between universities depend largely on the geographical areas served. For instance, Bristol covers the city itself and the counties of Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset and the western half of Dorset. By contrast, Sussex has only East Sussex and a small part of West Sussex, and Kent has only its own county. The older universities have a long tradition as 'responsible bodies', whilst Sussex and Kent emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as the far-flung empire of Oxford broke up.⁷ There were no university-provided local history classes in East Sussex in 1969, two in 1970, and twelve in 1978, all based on 'research', training students on primary materials.

Although full-time lecturing staff are responsible for their programmes in most cases, the bulk of the teaching is done by part-time tutors, most of whom, although graduates, are drawn from outside the universities. Whilst the backbone of course provision is the 'sessional', some 20–24 weekly meetings in a year, there is considerable flexibility: one major growth of the past decade has been in relatively intensive residential or day schools.

It is in place- or theme-specific courses with a strong 'workshop' content that the growth has been most obvious, indeed possibly the most stimulating feature of the last decade. Partly it is due to a growing demand for stimulus from already qualified students and partly to geographical mobility and its social effects. But perhaps the greatest influence has been a body of professional tutors dissatisfied with the 'secondhand' nature of much history teaching, seeking more intensive teaching practices in which students are led to a closer understanding of the process by which history is written. One important component of this is the notion of an end-product; local journals now carry a number of papers stemming from individual student work and group publication is becoming more common. At Sussex this has involved the creation of a series of 'occasional papers', of which eight have so far appeared and six more are in preparation. These are produced as cheaply as is compatible with a reasonable appearance and priced to cover costs: they have become self-financing, are usually reprinted several times and have a circulation both national and abroad. They boost morale and inform both the local community and other historians, together with series on BBC Radio Brighton.

Most university work of this type is seen solely as provision for its own sake, a crucial point at which professional and amateur meet in common understanding and enthusiasm. It is supported by general lectures such as Exeter's biennial Harte lecture in local history and by more sporadic efforts elsewhere.

Although the universities collaborate frequently with local authorities and the Workers', Educational Association there has been some small, rather hesitant growth where polytechnics have taken over art schools with thriving adult class programmes. This is not easy in view of existing 'empires' and the present pattern of financing which is likely to inhibit institutional co-operation. A good example of this growth is in Brighton where the polytechnic's Faculty of Art and Design now houses a small Brighton Centre which hosts 'workshops' provided both separately and in conjunction with the university – good pointers for the future.

One area where the midlands and north far outstripped the south in the last decade was in the provision of much more intensive training for local historians in the form of certificate courses. There are three of these now in the south, all of them very new, with one development in the pipeline. In 1978 Bristol introduced a University Certificate in Arts on Field Archaeology and Local History. This involves two years of part-time study with four hours of winter evening lectures a week in Bristol supported by residential and fieldwork courses in the summer. There are no entrance requirements and the current fee is £21 per year. Examinations at the end of the first and second years are supplemented by 'a dissertation on some aspect of landscape history'. Apparently the first course was sufficiently successful to justify its repeat.

Perhaps the most successful, and in some ways the most surprising, newcomer has been the Diploma in English Local History offered by Portsmouth Polytechnic since 1976. The course lasts one year, running January–December, to allow the long vacation to be used for dissertation groundwork. It demands one full day a week in term with seven hours of teaching each Wednesday – the basic cost to students is £48. Recruitment is normally limited to graduates or holders of certificates of education and the like. Six staff service the needs of some 10–16 students a year, offering courses in sources and methods, palaeography, industrial archaeology, and so on. It is examined by means of two papers and a dissertation. There is a wide age range in the students, who come predominantly from the counties surrounding Portsmouth, although enquiries have been received from as far afield as Ipswich. It is an exciting development,

the brainchild of a group of interested staff from several departments who undertook a considerable task of persuasion to launch it. One unusual aspect is that Gales Brewery provides an annual prize of £30 for the best student, to be spent on books! The course is now well-established.

In 1979 the University of Kent introduced a Diploma in Local History provided by the School of Continuing Education and Working Party on Local History. It is aimed primarily at graduates and teachers, although it allows for 'those with a considerable and demonstrable experience of the study of local history'. Over three years it provides teaching for two ten-week terms a year, comprising one two-hour evening lecture/seminar a week. Students are expected to write four essays, of which the three best will be assessed, in each of the first two years, which cover Kentish history since the Anglo-Saxon invasions. The first term of the third year is devoted to sources and methods, either medieval or modern, and the rest of the year to preparing a dissertation of 6000–8000 words using primary material – the final assessment component. No fee is stated on the initial publicity and the first year has attracted twenty-one students for whom five staff are available.

At Bulmershe College in Reading, planning is proceeding for a similar certificate, which will be taught by college staff but offered under the aegis of the Oxford Department of External Studies. It is likely to begin in 1980, offering two years of taught courses followed by one year of supervised work. It will combine part-time winter teaching with residential weekends. A first year of general landscape history will be followed by training in source and methods and a final dissertation with seminar papers.

Although these represent a new direction in provision and co-operation, no university in the south has yet matched Lancaster, East Anglia, and Keele in providing a regional studies centre as a focus both for undergraduate teaching, research, extramural activities, and publishing. Exeter went some way towards this in 1970 by establishing the Institute of Cornish Studies at Redruth, with a professor and three research staff, but this is a very special case with a strong Celtic influence. Christ Church College, Canterbury, established a Local History Resources Centre in 1979 with very generally stated co-ordinating functions for local work, but it is still in its very early stages. Portsmouth Polytechnic has strong links with the Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire Local Studies Centre which mounts an annual one-day conference on a theme such as 'Transport'.

Prospects

If the Blake Report's demand for training assumes a relatively even provision across the regions then it is clear that the south has quite a long way to go indeed, even by the standards of inadequacy elsewhere. Yet, for all its patchiness, the present range has emerged from a healthy academic pluralism, historic accident in the placing of institutions, and a suitably flexible adaptability to some very sharp fluctuations in provision and expectations over which the institutions have no control. In terms of personalities, there is a very high level of present commitment which is not always matched by institutional readiness to initiate growth, except under threat. It is not possible, because of the range of institutional financing, to make the sort of comparative evaluation of input and user costs into the service of local history which is possible for record offices, for instance, or to urge the imposition of some universal norm, a minimal U.G.C. estimate of input for instance.⁸

The possibility of further growth looks very doubtful at the moment. Universities which treated local history as an 'integral' rather than 'major' focus of their concerns, seem to see little need for further development and may shrink in their contribution. By contrast, many of the other respondents were, if not exactly optimistic, at least more positive in their evaluation, with the rider that present levels of support were the minimum acceptable. Perhaps having to undergo one recent exercise in survival planning, unlike the universities, has made them rather more resourceful.

The very rapid shift from expansion to 'siege' in tertiary education has brought a sharp end to optimism. However modest the numbers of local historians may be, the expectations of much further provision now exceed the capacity to provide them. Few of the graduates and research students will be able to use their acquired local skills in direct employment, although no doubt it will have a leisure value. In fact, the widespread recreational function of such studies in society in general is now at a point of serious paradox. Whilst they are clearly envisaged as a part of the 'rational recreation' which is demanded for the much-threatened (or promised) employment changes of the 1990s, the present round of cuts is likely to damage the minimal extant structure which provides for it. There is a double sting in the tail: by the standards of much other work at tertiary level, local studies teaching is a low-cost activity, but with margins that are easily eroded by any across the board cuts. Yet to initiate any expansion such as Blake would require, demands

a level of initial and maintained funding that is expensive by comparison with the maintenance of existing general courses. An academic environment in which libraries are being forced to cut back on keeping up periodical stocks is not one in which the purchase of new materials is easily envisaged. Likely to be worst hit is the funding of adult education 'workshops' unless a much higher proportion of the costs can be shifted directly to the consumer.

Yet is all hopeless? There are some very positive indications of intermediate-level training in the new certificate courses. One major area which the universities might explore profitably is the development of part-time M.A.s with flexible entrance requirements which could combine coursework with a research apprenticeship. The possibility of part-time short-term students is one which all tertiary institutions are discussing as one response to the demographic and employment predictions for the 1990s. In some senses, the likelihood of continued convergence appears considerable unless there is a strong reverse push towards the binary system envisaged when the polytechnics were set up. With the increasingly independent, but frequently proto-university stance of the latter bodies, the possibility of unnecessary duplication is actually increased and the likelihood of valuable co-operation and shared resources may be wrecked on the rocks of institutional jealousies and differential inputs in costing and personnel to particular developments.

For local history studies in the south to make much progress, yet without their becoming a hived-off area of academic specialism with the myopia that usually entails, an uphill fight is going to be necessary. There is a great deal of institutional inertia and both intramural and intermural jealousies to be overcome. For the short-term, the best possible development would probably be the encouragement of 'clustered' provision by neighbouring institutions, using shared seminars, centres, and teaching. It would not necessarily be a step in the direction of new 'multiversities' but it could go a long way towards using scarce resources to maximum effect and strengthening local academic input to the community. Central to this could be a redefined role for 'extramural' departments whose effective integration with their own institutions' central concerns is often minimal yet whose experience of management could lead to major new institutional links and, if not rapid growth, at least a considerable strengthening of the work.

This paper could not have been written without the evident co-operation of a considerable number of people to whom I am very grateful. A loosely

formulated questionnaire was sent to some fifty-six departments likely to be involved within the region. Apart from some few cases of institutional or personal inertia, and the possibility of postal loss, most replied, often at considerable length. Indeed, most of the information had to be starkly summarized in order to keep within the limits of space available. I apologise in advance for any misrepresentation which may have crept in. The non-respondents are summarized, where possible, from their own publicity – if that conveys a wrong impression then the remedy is obvious.

Notes

¹ See Standing Conference for Local History, *Report of the Committee to Review Local History* (1979), *passim*. There is a brief discussion of some provision in Patricia Garside, 'Local History in Undergraduate History Courses', *The Local Historian* xiii (2) (1978), pp. 67–74.

² For a discussion of these and some related implications, see A. H. Halsey, 'A Tale of Two Systems: field studies in the great Poly/Varsity mismatch', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 16 November 1979, pp. 20–1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ There is some discussion of the background in Glanville J. Davies, 'The Study of Local History – Opinion and Practice: 2. Local History Studies in a College of Education', *The Local Historian* xi (7) (1975), pp. 395–9.

⁵ See, for instance, the work of Professor Everitt on Kent, or Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex 1600–60* (1975), not to mention many of the contributions to this journal. It is not my intention to claim that work on an area should be a monopoly of particular institutions, rather that they should give a lead.

⁶ These figures are taken from the *Annual Reports* of the Universities' Council for Adult Education, which have only produced information in this detailed form for the past four years or so. They may be supplemented by H. J. Smith, *Review of Adult Classes in History 1978–9* (1979), a pamphlet produced for The Historical Association.

⁷ 'Responsible bodies' are those which the Department of Education and Science aids directly with up to two-thirds of their teaching costs, leaving control of expenditure substantially to the discretion of the recipients.

⁸ See W. N. Yates, 'Regional History and the local record office', *Southern History* i (1979), especially pp. 214–16.