



## OUR VCH DRAFT TEXT: SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

In this short article we set-out the general principles used for the contents of our ‘big red books’ and therefore the text that will appear in them and the draft text that proceeds them. We also explain the purpose of draft text and invite your comments on any that is published. Draft text is normally published on the Derbyshire VCH website - <http://derbyshirevch.org/draft-text/>

### Basic Principles

Victoria County History (VCH) has always been conceived as a national encyclopaedia, not a series of books about individual counties, much less volumes of essays about different parishes. For this reason, an overall format has always been prescribed for county sets (the so-called ‘big red books’), the arrangement of volumes within county sets, and the contents of parish histories within each volume, including the sources to be used for each section of a parish history. This is done to facilitate comparison between parishes within a volume or a county set, and between parishes in different counties.

The other guiding principle behind VCH from its inception has been that the text should be based, as far as possible, on primary evidence, whether published or unpublished, not existing secondary sources, and that the evidence on which every statement is based (other than observations relating to the present day or those that are common knowledge) should be supported by a footnote citing the source from which the information has been taken.

Three important aspects of the way in which information is collected for VCH parish histories follow from these principles.

The first is that for each section of a parish history certain basic sources should be checked. Each VCH county has its own checklist, containing a mixture of standard national sources and others specific to the county in question. The checklist represents a minimum list to be checked, from which further research can be developed.

The second is that notes collected for a parish history are arranged under the same standard headings as the final text of that history. There are six sections, all of which are subdivided in different ways.

The third is that note taking is undertaken in a standard way – this need not concern us here.

### **The parish history**

As already explained, each VCH county set is divided into the introductory ‘General’ volumes, dealing with topics on a county-wide basis, and the ‘Topographical’ volumes, containing a history of each parish. The topographical volumes are arranged according to the ‘hundreds’ (or their equivalent) in each county. In Derbyshire, each hundred (or wapentake) will have to be divided into several volumes

Within each hundred, VCH tackles each parish in turn. For this purpose a ‘parish’ means an ecclesiastical parish and VCH follows the parish (and county) boundaries of the 1831 census. This means that parishes that have been transferred to another county since that date are included in the VCH for the county to which they belonged in 1831. In Derbyshire, as in other midland and northern counties, some ecclesiastical parishes contained several townships, which in 1894 became civil parishes. Each of these will usually be given its own heading within an account of the ecclesiastical (or ‘ancient’) parish, and each township will then be treated under the six standard headings outlined below.

### **The six sections of a parish history**

The six sections of a parish history, each of which has its own chapter here, are as follows:

***Introduction:*** containing basic information about the parish and about various topics which are not dealt with elsewhere, together with an outline of those which are dealt with more fully later. Much of this section is made up of an account of 'Landscape and Settlement', a general survey of the topographical development of the parish and of its buildings.

***Manors and other estates:*** an account of all the estates described at any period as 'manors', and of other units of landownership of any importance, either because of their size or because they existed as separate entities for more than two or three generations. This section is concerned with the ownership of landed property; estate management is considered under Economic History.

***Economic history:*** an account of how the population of the parish have earned their living since medieval times (including sources of employment outside the parish), divided into three main subsections, one on farming and other types of primary production, one on mining and manufacturing, and one on transport, retailing and other branches of the service sector of the economy.

***Social history:*** divided into subsections on education, charities and community activities (clubs and social organisations of all kinds).

***Religious history:*** including the parish church, other Anglican places of worship, Protestant nonconformity, the Roman Catholic church, and any non-Christian faiths represented in the parish.

***Local government:*** including the work of the manor court, vestry, parish council, poor law union, rural district council and modern district council, as well as the work of quarter sessions and the county council insofar as it impinges on the parish. For towns this section will also discuss the political life of the community.

#### **Draft text**

When research becomes advanced enough, draft text may be published for some forthcoming parish histories on our website. It is set-out using the principles outlined above. The text is then revised before publication.

Draft text is very much work in progress and should not be taken as a completed account. Indeed, you may find that not all chapters are present, or that some information is not as thoroughly researched as in the final version. It does, though, give an opportunity for those interested to make comments on it.

The text should not be cited or quoted elsewhere without first consulting the county editor, Philip Riden, who should also be emailed with any comments: [philip.riden@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:philip.riden@nottingham.ac.uk).

*This account is edited from the Derbyshire VCH Trust's County Handbook, by Philip Riden, published by the Derbyshire Record Society - <http://www.derbyshirerecordsociety.org/papers.php> - as their occasional paper No. 9, 2012.*