

Institution: Keele University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA28 History		
Title of case study: Co-creating Local Histories		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Alannah Tomkins	Professor of Social History	1995 - present
Professor Karen Hunt	Professor of Modern British History	2006 - 2016
Dr Nigel Tringham	Senior Lecturer in History	1993 - 2019
Dr Andrew Sargent	Lecturer in Medieval History	2014 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>'Co-Creating Local Histories' presents a portfolio of research-led activity, undertaken jointly by professional archivists, volunteers, and academic historians, to address problems arising from rebarbative source material. The c.85 archival volunteers across two archives benefit through enhancement of their skills and confidence, becoming generators of academic historical research and facilitators of public access to voluminous sources. Archives' professionals benefit from academic and lay support in delivering their services. The significant reach of this impact, nearly 250,000 people to date (S5-6), enhances awareness and wellbeing in local county communities, including schoolchildren, and benefits the global community of family historians.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Local historical research has been a core feature of work by historians at Keele since the University's founding in 1949, and the University has been home to the Staffordshire <i>Victoria County History (VCH)</i> series since 1994. Regular publication of <i>VCH</i> parish histories is augmented by Tomkins and Sargent and underpinned by the influence of work from Hunt and Tringham. Impact has derived from several foci, around the First World War home front [3.1-3.2], the historic treatment of place and landscape [3.3-3.4], and the poor law [3.5-3.6].</p> <p>Impact has derived variously from a body of work as well as arising from prior publication. In the former case, Hunt's mobilisation of volunteer effort for accessing the mid-Staffordshire Military Appeals Tribunals 1916-18 secured impact before the associated monograph was released [3.1]. Hunt's long-term concentration on the home front [3.2] meant she was ideally placed to support volunteer investigation of the tribunals' evidence, including men's resistance to serving in the army. This collaborative research offered an important qualification to the more triumphalist memorialisations of the First World War, since <i>Staffordshire's War</i> was deliberately designed and published for a general audience.</p> <p>Similarly, Tringham, in preparing the <i>VCH</i> volume for Tamworth [3.4], recruited volunteers who transferred their existing interest in medieval settlements to Tamworth and its environs. Their research raised questions about the significance of the town as an important royal centre from the eighth century onwards. Consequently, the <i>VCH</i> publication was written in tandem with</p>		

preparations in Tamworth to commemorate 1100 years since the death of Æthelflaed, Lady of the Mercians (in 918CE). Close alignment between the research interests of Sargent and Matthew Blake, of the Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service, has generated collaborative writing about Æthelflaed [3.3].

Impact has also emerged from previously published work. Tomkins' monograph [3.5] flagged a methodological issue: the receipts for goods and services supplied under the pre-1834 English poor law were collected by parish officers in great numbers, but failure to use receipts as objects of research has led to gaps in our knowledge about the significance of poor-law expenditure for local economies. This key finding encouraged Tomkins to extract the data contained in receipts, in concert with multiple archival volunteers, taking her model from the earlier work of Hunt and Tringham. Work on Tomkins' pilot project began in Staffordshire in September 2015 with an initial volunteer group, and funding to extend volunteers' engagement in two other counties began in January 2018. The resulting research, written by the project's post-doctoral researcher, has been reviewed as '*important...fascinating... will contribute greatly to our understanding of food, gardens, institutions, and the economics of landscapes*' [3.6].

In these ways 'Co-Creating Local Histories' addresses problems in relation to the use of manuscript source material by archival custodians and by the public. This combination of publication and Keele's pattern of research practice has brought together the duties of archivists, and the enthusiasm of volunteers, with the ambitions of academic researchers.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 K. Hunt, *Staffordshire's War* (Stroud: Amberley, 2017)

3.2 K. Hunt, 'The politics of food and women's neighbourhood activism in First World War Britain', *International Labour and Working-Class History* 77:1 (2010)

3.3 A. Sargent and M. Blake, '“For the Protection of All the People”: Æthelflaed and Her Burhs in Northwest Mercia', *Midland History* 43:2 (2018), 120-154

3.4 N. Tringham, *Victoria County History for Staffordshire volume XII: Tamworth and its hinterland* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2021)

3.5 A. Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-1782* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006)

3.6 P. Collinge, "'He shall have care of the garden, its cultivation and produce': Workhouse gardens and gardening c.1780-1835", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (published online 2020)

The quality of this local history research is indicated by its publication in peer reviewed journals, with academic and specialist history publishers, and within the *VCH* series for Staffordshire. The *VCH* is one of the world's longest running history projects, which provides authoritative and encyclopaedic histories of parishes by county, supported by the UK's national centre for History, the Institute for Historical Research. Non-academic partners, particularly County Councils and Borough Councils, have taken up the research extensively, and the quality of the work and strength of these relationships have been endorsed and extended by the award of four externally-funded PhD studentships (among case-study staff and others, see below). The substantive grant income that has supported this work amplifies and underscores high-quality research activity.

Key grants/fees include:

K. Hunt, 'The Mid Staffordshire Appeals Tribunal: a window onto everyday life on the Staffordshire home front', University of Hertfordshire AHRC First World War Public Engagement Centre (2014), £15.8K

K. Hunt, 'BBC 'Our Place in the First World War' project', Arts and Humanities Research Council (2012), [PI based at University of Worcester, Keele funding £21K, £37,744 K]

A. Sargent, 'Chase through Time', Staffordshire County Council, (2016-18), £8,716 consultancy fee

A. Tomkins, 'Small bills and petty finance: co-creating the history of the Old Poor Law', Arts and Humanities Research Council, three years (2018-20), £740K [Tomkins as PI £925K FEC].

N. Tringham, Victoria County History Staffordshire, Staffordshire County Council (2011) £85,000

N. Tringham, Victoria County History Staffordshire, Staffordshire County Council (2016) £40,000

Studentships comprise:

N. Tringham, AHRC CDA doctoral studentship in collaboration with the Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service, Staffordshire Landed Estates, completed 2017, c. £150K

A. Tomkins, ESRC CASE doctoral studentship in collaboration with the Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service, Occupational stress and the Victorian asylum, (2019-2022), c.£150K [Tomkins as PI]

A. Tomkins, AHRC CDA doctoral studentship in collaboration with the Cumbria Archives Service, Codebreaking the diary of a Georgian gentleman: the private papers of Andrew Hudleston, (2019-2022), c.£150K [Tomkins as Co-I]

I. Atherton, ESRC CASE doctoral studentship in collaboration with the Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service, In search of past time: popular perceptions of time, c.1550-1800, (2020-23), c.£150K [Tomkins advisor on application]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Beneficiaries of this impact are archival volunteers (historical skills, wellbeing), archivists (enhanced interpretation of holdings, professional support), plus local and global communities (cultural heritage provision).

Impacts for Volunteers

Volunteers are recruited in collaboration with archives, attend two-hour weekly sessions at archives (during Covid self-isolation, working from home), totalling 758 hours between April 2019 and March 2020 alone. They include men and women, typically retirees, who are supported materially (access to primary sources) and intellectually (academic guidance around research goals).

This working model has produced five substantive projects 2014-20. Hunt's research on First World War appeals tribunals dovetailed with Staffordshire Archives' recruitment of over forty people to calendar 2700 case papers [5.1]. Tringham worked with a small group to research the *VCH* volume for Tamworth. Sargent has collaborated with volunteers on a history of Cannock Chase, and on Uttoxeter's history for a future *VCH* volume [5.6]. Tomkins' poor-law project has worked with volunteers in Staffordshire and Cumbria to transcribe the content of historic receipts [5.2]. This methodology, triangulating volunteer hours, manuscript archives, and academic questions, involved targeted training for volunteers. Data collection for poor-law work, for example, evolved from completion of a spreadsheet to using a tailor-made data-capture form.

Volunteers working with academics has fostered research skills and stimulated writing skills, because they were treated as researchers in their own right' [5.3]. Volunteers report intellectual stimulation, a sense of achievement/feeling appreciated, and ability to engage with their surroundings in a more informed way [5.3]. Furthermore, volunteers have created social networks that they value as an important benefit of participating: '*you gain the social interaction, making*

friends with the other volunteers' [5.9]. Consistent academic input is what marks out these projects from other experiences of volunteering, since *'no-one was ever too busy to help you'* [5.3]. Volunteers have authored blog posts [5.1-5.2] and will be contributors of short pieces to the open-access Royal Historical Society book of the poor-law project (under contract).

Impacts for Archive Professionals

Collaboration with archivists has promoted manuscript interpretation and facilitated service users' access to holdings, by means of public events. The First World War tribunals project, for example, led to 29 associated outreach events, talks, and study days, with 610 attendees, while the touring exhibition went to 16 venues over 18 months (visitor figures reported by the venues totalling 134,742 [5.6]).

Collaboration with Keele has also led to financial benefits for archives. A successful application by the Staffordshire Archives to the Wellcome Trust for a cataloguing and digitisation project, worth £167K, cited Tomkins as an advisor and member of the steering group. Studentships from both ESRC and AHRC, secured by Keele in collaboration with the Staffordshire and Cumbria Archives Services, add human resource and explanatory capacity for participating archives. [5.3]

Archives across England benefit from a report about the advantages of working simultaneously with volunteer research groups and university academics, based on the poor-law project. [5.7] Academic input has been identified as taking pressure off archive staff in running volunteer groups, at the same time that academic/volunteer activity confers external advocacy for the English archive accreditation process. [5.3]

Enhancements for heritage provision to communities and worldwide

Sargent's and Tringham's research facilitated support for Tamworth Borough Council's events celebrating Æthelflaed (June-July 2018). Council activity included unveiling new statues of Æthelflaed, exhibitions that brought Tamworth Castle to new audiences, and 'Mercian Mosaic', an outdoor artwork constructed by volunteers. These events promoted Tamworth's history via nearly 30 press releases and regional televised coverage. The research underpinning these events 'added a prestige' to Council efforts to 'inform, engage and forge new partnerships' [5.5].

Cumbria poor-law volunteers have visited St Bede's Primary School in Carlisle 2018-19, to lead History sessions with pupils at key stage two. Children's feedback confirms their enjoyment of the research process: *'it's like decoding a secret message.'* [5.4].

Benefits of Keele's research are extended to the global genealogical community, chiefly via online resources. The Staffordshire military tribunal papers have contributed surname data to the Staffordshire names index, an online facility used by genealogists worldwide. Associated blogs have attracted praise from among 1600 followers [5.1, 5.6]. The poor-law project has extracted over 45,000 lines of data, which will be offered for free to international genealogical website [FindMyPast](https://findmypast.co.uk/) [5.2]. Finally, poor-law researchers have developed a gadget facilitating smartphone digital photography in archives, described by the team as *'DIY archiving'*, and *'a Top Trumps game'*. [5.8, 5.10]

In these ways, Keele historians have proved exemplary at engaging and upskilling people of all ages in the co-creation of local histories.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Staffordshire Military Appeals Tribunals blog <https://staffsappeals1918.wordpress.com/>
NB blogs may be found by selecting any of the thematic headings given horizontally below the website title.

5.2 Poor law project website <https://thepoorlaw.org/> including dataset and volunteer blog posts. The latter may be found by selecting a county from the menu along the top of the screen, and clicking on either people, places, or things.

5.3 The Small Bills Project Qualitative Evaluation Report by Earthen Lamp (August 2020), auditing the experiences of poor-law project participants among volunteers and archivists.

5.4 Compilation of feedback from Cumbrian school children, schoolteachers, and teacher trainers.

5.5 Communication from Louise Troman (Heritage and Visitor Services Manager at Tamworth Castle), Tamworth Borough Council Æthelflaed Anniversary Report, claiming to have reached 97,000 readers of *BBC History Magazine* (September 2018)

5.6 Letter of support from Matthew Blake, Participation and Engagement Officer for the Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service, noting visits to the venues hosting the First World War touring exhibition totalled 134,742 people (September 2020).

5.7 Archival *Volunteering for Research*, a report for archive services about the benefits of three-fold collaboration with volunteer groups and academic researchers published at <https://www.archiveswestmidlands.org.uk/news/a-model-project> (October 2020).

5.8 Rosemary Collins, 'The Lasting Value of Vouchers', *Who Do You Think You Are?* 30 June 2020 (magazine spin-off from the popular BBC TV programme of the same name), with a circulation of 13,500 in digital and paper copy, offering copies of the poor-law project's Top Trumps game to readers via a competition.

5.9 Small Bills project film available at <https://youtu.be/qaUWNneAZCA?list=PLm6S-wsxg6AjAVo2X5E3um4FauK15b5O> (download held within Keele's repository)

5.10 DIY archiving distribution list 2018.