

CHALICE USE CASE

VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY

Introduction

The Victoria County History (VCH) is a set of volumes documenting the social and economic histories of various English counties. Like the EPNS, editorial responsibility is devolved to individual county editors. The first editions appeared in 1901, and in 1933 the project was taken over by the Institute of Historical Research. Some, but not all, of the VCH volumes are available via the British History Online portal. The online text is machine readable, i.e. not simply available as PDFs.

The VCH is of great interest to CHALICE for four main reasons:

- It contains broad geographic coverage, with a county-based structure not dissimilar to EPNS. The internal structure of each entry is, however, quite rigid, which would make the construction of a schema to support compatibility easier.
- VCH is deeply and richly referenced. Each entry contains a large collection of footnotes, and many readers use it as a set of pointers to other material, both primary and secondary. Many issues concerned with placenames in VCH refer to the forms given in EPNS volumes.
- It is partially online, giving an opportunity for dialogue about digitisation strategies.
- It contains types of information which are structured around certain kinds of historical entity that recur through the corpus, both text and images. An example of the former of particular relevance to placename is manors, and example of the latter is heraldic images.

User group

VCH has a wide constituency of users, both within historical research and among the general public. For example many archaeologists use the for background research on sites and monuments, and to get an overview of their research questions, where those research questions relate to a particular county or area. The volumes also have a strong constituency of amateur and local historians. It is therefore primarily a reference resource whose emphasis is on *breadth*, and whose *depth* is contained within its references.

It is indeed notable that the majority of the space on each page of the VCH, at least of modern editions, is taken up by references. VCH is very deeply referenced, frequently by material of a local documentary nature, rather than broader syntheses or secondary sources. For this reason, VCH acts as a signpost to historical sources about particular locations: frequently one of the main purposes to which historians put it is as a source of source material to help them navigate archives and other local resources. The EPNS very often features as one of the references consulted; as do 'grey literature' such as unpublished archaeological reports (see <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/greylit>). As the amount of primary and secondary material available has increased in the course of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, so the more recent VCH volumes contain a many more secondary references and online literature: there is a noticeable shift in the percentage of

the page space which is narrative, and which is taken up by footnotes. As a compendium of what has been written before, the VCH is invaluable.

Internal structure

VCH records information by parish. Like EPNS, these parish entries are relatively consistent. Unlike EPNS however there is little or no editorial variation of that structure between counties. Small and lightly populated parishes follow much the same formula as the much larger ones. This is also consistent through time: present day volumes follow the earliest on written in (e.g.) 1905. Each entry has an introduction (which will often describe the derivation of the placename), the size, population etc. There is then a section on land ownership, manors and estates, including information on the landowners. This information will often follow the documentary records back to Domesday Book records. In addition to this information, presented chronologically are sections on economic history, social history and local government. Parish entries become progressively longer until the 1980s, and then are cut back in length, although they are still fairly substantial.

Links to other sources

An initial analysis showed that there is likely to be near-total overlap of the (mainly modern) placenames that appear in CHALICE and in the VCH. In some cases, the EPNS will be the sole reference for a section of VCH about a particular part of a particular county. It is therefore inevitable that there is overlap. However, EPNS does not go in to the same level of detail about other kinds of information that may be related to placenames, such as families, persons and manorial descents. In this regard it is noted that placenames are one kind of entity which, of course, form the primary focus of EPNS. VCH on the other hand focuses persons. This being the case, as well as EPNS, there are several datasets which could be valuably linked with (person) entities in VCH, for example the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (<http://www.oxforddnb.com>). Information such as the names of major landowners are likely to appear in DNB, which would also be referenced in VCH (more so in the more recent VCH volumes, which have been produced since the DNB was made available online). In addition to this, all the references, including EPNS references, are consistently formatted (County name, volume number, date). This means they could, potentially, be exposed to the same kind of parsing techniques that were used by the CHALICE team on the EPNS volumes (where the VCH is digitally available).

One resource that has been of considerable relevance to VCH is the Domesday Database (<http://domesday.pase.ac.uk>), a massive database of names of landowners listed after 1086, and also the names of the Saxon landowners who held the land before the Norman Conquest. It is, in other words, a 'database of the dispossessed'. A large number of the manorial descents described in VCH go back to 1086, so many names in VCH appear up in the Domesday database. Linking to the latter can tell the user that, for example, the Shelvock Manor near Shrewsbury, Shropshire was held by Odo, on behalf of Earl Roger in 1086 but was held previously by the (Saxon) Earl Edwin before the Conquest.

Manorial descents are given narrative descriptions in the older volumes. In the Domesday Book record, the Manor's name will appear early in the record. In the example given above, both the names Edwin and Roger appear in the Domesday database, and in the Domesday

account for that parish in which the Manor appears. There are typically 10-12 parishes per topographic volume, and 3-4 Manors per parish. Given that there are many (place)names in Domesday that also occur in VCH and EPNS, a combination of these could trace not only the history of the name of Shelvock Manor back to its origin as the Vill of Wykey; alongside the prosopographical history of the families that owned the manor. It should be noted that in VCH entries, Domesday the first reference to appear in the record, rather than the name of the manor, and or the name of the lord of the manor. Individual manors are unlikely to have been renamed, however they may have ceased to have be important. The VCH still traces such cases nonetheless. This being the case, a direct link between VCH and EPNS would be likely to entail a special focus on the terminology associated with manorial placenames.

It should be noted that in EPNS, references to manorial descents are far less linear. For example:

Shiprock township (in Davenham parish):

'Sheep-brook', perhaps a brook where sheep were washed, v. sceap, broc, and hyll, maior, minor, l&yf.tel, cf. Rudheath 1 11. Some forms show confusion with *scell, *scille 'noisy' (as in Shell Brook 1 67), and scid 'a beam (possibly a foot-bridge)'. Ship-brook was the seat of the Vernon family's barony baronia de Schip-brouk 1317 Misc et freq. Castle Hill (110-672712) 1819 Orm2 111 253, from which the remains of a castle were removed c.1789, marks their stronghold. A later house was near Manor Fm infra.

Or

Allostock (in Nether Peover Chapelry)

The ancient manors of Hulme and Bradshaw are in Allostock, while Lostock Gralam has no manor-house. Nor is there now a hall at Allom, but there probably was, for the place was 'a vill' in 1296 (Ipm 111 271, No. 408), it gave rise to surnames, and is distinguished from 'Church' Hulme 278 infra.

It should also be noted that Lostock Gralam, in this case, is in fact a false-positive: there is no manor there.

It is important to note that all georeferences etc which are used by the Domesday database, and which are relevant to VCH, are based on point data. The boundaries of the Manors, and indeed those of many other spatial entities and other categories of placename in VCH are unknowable. This closely mirrors the experience of CCED. As with CCED, point data stands as more reliable vector format than polygons. Again, the possibilities of churches arise: one type of point feature that is consistent throughout the VCH is the parish church, which is always described. Much like CCED, it would be possible to use a Linked Data approach to link a reference set of church names in VCH (or indeed EPNS) to a reference set in, e.g. Ordnance Survey. In more modern VHC entries, accounts referring to churches also give the listing and the entry in *Buildings of England*. There is also the potential for linking to church

plans online, albeit in a rather less empirical way. There would however be a problem of ambiguity, unless each point was associated in every record with a latitude/longitude coordinate, as many churches are known simply by their dedication (e.g. 'All Saints' etc).

Imagery

One element of some interest in terms of linking is the representations throughout the VCH of coats of arms. In most volumes up till 1939, most volumes contained line drawings of these, to accompany mentions of titled families and persons. One thing that would be considered useful would be a taxonomy of places linked to a complete list of coats of arms, and depictions of them. Where a name is mentioned without a depiction of the arms, an illustration could be retrieved.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, there are two main obstacles to building links between the CHALICE resource and VCH (quite apart from the fact that neither corpus is fully digitized, and overlap between the portions of each which are is somewhat limited): 1) mismatch between the terms used by the two corpora to describe comparable spatial entities (all of which much be expressed as point data to circumvent the fact that the boundaries themselves, insofar as they ever existed, are unknowable), and the differing approach each corpus has to the building of historical narratives; and how those narratives describe the terms in question (even if the terms are clearly/consistently defined and articulated). The 'Shiprock township' example above example above illustrates this. The presence of a 'Manor Fm' is an incidental piece of supporting evidence for the placename under discussion. Likewise, the Allostock entry only mentions the manors of Hulme and Bradshaw by virtue of the fact that they happen to be in Allostock; whereas in VCH these would be primary pieces of information.

Therefore, whether 'linking directly' between CHALICE and VCH is feasible or even desirable is somewhat open to question. A more fruitful approach on the other hand might be to harvest terms used by VCH and use those to make CHALICE more searchable (exactly the same could apply to other use cases, certainly to CCED and probably to the ADS also). Examination of the VCH, and discussion with IHR staff, has shown that a *taxonomy of terms* which can be both consistently georeferenced and linked to EPNS terms is needed. To describe VCH content, one would have to start with pre-Norman land definitions; go up to hundreds and shires for the majority, rapes, and other names which can be mapped. Parishes generally cannot be mapped (since their boundaries are unknowable), and townships fall within parishes. Below that is the level of named fields, which are tied to tithe and enclosure maps. As we have discovered in the course of the CHALICE project, some EPNS volumes have provision for named fields, others do not: it is down to the approach of the individual county editor. In VCH, the terms 'hamlet' and 'township' is used interchangeably.