'TO SUPPORT ACTIVE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AT THE *GRASSROOTS*' THE *FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HISTORICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY*

By Daniel Weinbren

For over 20 years, the Family and Community Historical Research Society, FACHRS, has challenged the notion that universities should have a near monopoly on the construction, ownership, validation and transmission of knowledge. Its central strategy, of publishing research derived from its aggregation of data from connected local research projects, has its immediate roots in an Open University module, Family & Community History: 19th and 20th centuries, DA301. *This emphasised research construction co-operation within a social scientific framework. The roots of the FACHRS also lie in the development, since Victorian times, of sociable, collaborative and co-operative local history projects. The FACHRS's progress was framed by its engagement with communications and database technology and digitisation during a period when demarcation lines and epistemic identities, both within universities and outside them, dissolved and reformed.*

Since its formation in 1998 the Family and Community Historical Research Society, the FACHRS, with its membership consisting largely of graduates has produced a range of practical courses and historical studies largely based on the aggregation of individual local studies. Led by independent scholars, it has worked co-operatively and collaboratively with independent and institution-based historians, often engaging with personal accounts and with the methods often employed by genealogists. The first part is about its activities. In the second part, the focus is on the development of local history. While some of the antecedents of the FACHRS can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, many of these were filtered through the greatest influence on the FACHRS, the Open University (OU). It is the role of universities which is the subject of the third part.

The family and community historical research society

In 2016, over sixty FACHRS researchers across the country employed a wide range of sources to produce several publications, articles, conference papers, exhibitions and a web-based gazetteer and as well as the first academic history of a significant institution, *The British Almshouse: new perspectives on philanthropy ca 1400-1914*.[1] The Society enabled a network of people, widely separated by distance, to work together, take a comparative approach and to test historical generalisations. It was only one of many the FACHRS projects which have been run since 2000 when University of the West of England academic Peter Wardley launched a collaborative project with the FACHRS. Researching in London, Ireland, the Midlands, East Anglia, Cumbria, southern and northern England, members collated data about the replacement of Roman numerals by Hindu-Arabic ones on probate inventories between about 1540 and 1700.[2] The FACHRS Chair Clive Leivers described the project as 'a great success in its intrinsic content and demonstration of what the society should be about'.[3] Subsequent Society projects linked local research data in a similar manner. Each enabled members to form a patchwork which permitted analysis of the wider situation. On these projects, there was co-ordinated support for the researchers so as to encourage shared understandings of their subject matter and approach. Those working on a project about nineteen-century pauper emigrants received a reading list and other information, while those working on the school log books project could benefit from a pilot study and academic oversight from several academics. The FACHRS also encouraged individual members to promote projects. Geoff Gill, working as an academic adviser and Michael Holland, as project co-ordinator, secured external funding for their project which resulted in an illustrated collection assessing civil disturbances in relation to mid-nineteenth cholera.[4]

The first of the FACHRS' projects to result in a book, *Swing Unmasked: the agricultural riots of 1830 to 1832 and their wider implications,* was initiated in 2000.[5] Forty FACHRS members provided data, and in Shropshire, a local history tutor got his certificate students working on it as a class project. A CD database of over 3,000 incidents in 43 English counties and in Wales and Scotland was also produced. Previously Swing had been presented as a 'labourers' movement'.[6] The FACHRS uncovered 67% more outbreaks of violence than earlier researchers had concluded, repositioned the geographical spread, the time frame and the nature of the struggles.

Swing Unmasked was one of several publications of the period which reassessed the meanings of Swing.[7] Having developed structures for collaborative engagement, the Society promoted further networking and learning. The Southern History Society held a conference on *Captain Swing Reconsidered* and created a dedicated website to act as a portal for further research. There had long been close links between the FACHRS and the Local Population Studies Society and, following on from collaboration on the almshouses project, the FACHRS members gained full access to the Local Population Studies Society Book Club. Having

started out being taught, the Society started to teach. Its courses included Restoring Photographs; Getting the best out of Ancestry[TM] and how to analyse the data obtained; Family Reconstruction without a family tree; Palaeography; Researching and writing the history of your village; Using probate records. There have been sessions at which advice was offered on writing for newsletters, journals and books. The conference has been used for teaching. In 2016 the theme was 'Being Involved - Researching FACHRS Projects'. On that occasion, Anne Langley explained the origins of the almshouses project and 'offered a step-by-step guide to anyone who was thinking of co-ordinating a major project' and Brita Wood and Rob White reported on a mini-project on census enumerators.[8]

The possibility of a correlation between Swing riots and allotment provision was one of the topics covered in *Breaking New Ground: Nineteenth Century Allotments through Local Sources*, edited by Jeremy Burchardt of the University of Reading and a FACHRS member, Jacqueline Cooper.[9] Funded by two grants, one for research and another for the publication it relied heavily on members' research. A companion to the book was a CD containing a database of over 3,000 allotment sites and nearly 1,000 allotment tenants.

'The Home Front 1914-15' project, launched in 2013 and supported by the Imperial War Museum First World War Centenary Partnership, was coordinated by Sue Smith. A wide range of topics were covered with some members undertaking research in conjunction with their local history or University of the Third Age group.[10] Outputs included many publications and instead of one book a series of themed booklets. A further project 'Communities of Dissent' followed the FACHRS pattern. There was a FACHRS co-ordinator, an academic project director, a sharing of sources and questions and a cross-disciplinary research network. In this case, the project focused on religious dissent in England and Wales between 1850 and 1939.

Major projects took years to complete. The commitment involved meant that only a relatively small number of Society members could devote the time required. The FACHRS adapted a familiar notion from the OU which has long recognised that part-time students are often daunted by large tasks but welcome discretely parcelled activities which build towards a larger project. The FACHRS provided opportunities for the collation of individual data into larger units often by completing a template. The first mini-project involved 14 members reviewing Victorian marriage registers by looking at marriages which took place within a month of a national census.[11] For a subsequent one, focused on railway station-masters mentioned in the 1881 census, 40% of the membership completed a research form.[12]

'ill-digested fragments'[13]

A conventional view of extra-mural local history is that such research

has always tended to be the pursuit of educated amateurs with time at their disposal. In the nineteenth century, these were typically gentlemen antiquarians or scholarly clergymen, producing volumes on the genealogy of the local squirearchy or the history of the local church.[14]

Such a characterisation marginalises the range of sources, topics and approaches which have long been employed. Moreover, it marginalises the idea that 'the early nineteenth-century English university was a fellowship of gentlemen, more precisely Anglican gentlemen, who sought to imbue their pupils with their own values'.[15] For the almshouses project, FACHRS members considered manuscripts, pictures, maps, censuses, trade directories and online databases and sources. They followed in the footsteps of Richard Gough whose *Observations concerning the seats in Myddle and the families to which they belong*, published in 1834, relied on parish records, manorial records and the recollections of his neighbours. For her three-volume, *Traditions, legends, superstitions, and sketches of Devonshire on the borders of the Tamar and the Tavy, illustrative of its manners, customs, history, antiquities, scenery, and natural history,* 1837, Anna Eliza Bray drew upon survey material, court records and documents in the offices of the Duchy of Cornwall. Some local records have been accessible to the public since the early nineteenth century and since 1838 it has been possible to view the central depository of papers belonging to the Crown. In 1888, the British Record Society published a calendar of Northamptonshire and Rutland wills 1510–1652. In 1893, May Ann Stapleton collected data about Oxfordshire's Catholic families, some of it from tombstones.[16] Mary Sturge Henderson's *Three centuries in North Oxfordshire* included the personal testimony of an elderly Chartist, while her *A corner of the Cotswolds through the nineteenth century,* 1914, was based on data from newspapers, material drawn by listening to local people and data from solicitors' offices. The publication of Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* in the World's Classic series in 1954 indicated that local history was increasingly conceptualised as being of significance. When, in 1957 the Council for the Conservation of Sheffield Antiquities was created to save the Sheffield Wheel from demolition, this was one of many planning decisions and interventions which made use of independently research local history. FACHRS was built on the tradition that local history researchers could engage with a range of topics, sources and people.

The FACHRS was founded during a period when genealogy was popular. Family historians practised research skills and techniques, notably evaluating sources, collating evidence, creating perspectives and working in archives. Many assisted in broader projects and offered information on migrant individuals who were otherwise difficult to trace. Genealogical societies created online resources and training. Mutual aid, publications and later websites offering advice, burgeoned. The 1881 Census for England, Scotland and Wales became popular when, in 1996, it was made available on microfiche and later CD. The indexing and computerisation of the 1901 Census enabled access to data to spread. In 1919, on the strength of having read Carlyle's essay 'On history', 1830, Great

Western Railways' stationmaster Henry Edward Hawker concluded that 'in a certain sense all men are historians' and wrote an autobiography.[17] There was an echo of this in 1994 when Ruskin College tutor Raphael Samuel declared history to be 'a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands'.[18] The FACHRS emerged from a milieu in which recording participants, sharing data and making use of record offices were relatively commonplace activities for independent scholars.

Forging links

The familiarity of co-operation between professional and independent scholars bolstered FACHRS. In 1899, the *Victoria History of the Counties of England* series began as a private project on the fringes of the academy. Numerous women graduates were employed to work on parish documents. Subsequently, production became based within part of the University of London. In 1906, a group of teachers and academics founded the Historical Association to support and promote history teaching and research. In 1911, students were allowed to join, and in 1917, membership was opened to all.

Between the wars, when there was considerable professionalisation of archaeology, London constables 'formed an archaeological group to look for relics of Norman and Roman London whenever they happened to have freshly excavated sites on their beats'.[19] There was co-operation and initial post-war growth in the numbers of university- and field-based archaeologists.[20]

After the war Iona and Peter Opie developed their work on the culture of children, notably *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959) largely independently of universities. School teacher George Ewart Evans' collection of interviews, *Ask the fellows who cut the hay*, 1956, helped to popularise the memories of labourers and the notion that people from a wide range of backgrounds and with numerous experiences were of interest to both social scientists and historians. The BBC television series, *Yesterday's Witness*, 1969-77 featured interviews with older people. The programmes, made outside the academy, elevated local history and rendered it accessible. Between 1969 and 1973, the University of Essex supported the *Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918* project. It involved over 500 open-ended interviews being recorded, transcribed, coded and made available to researchers.[21] In 1968, the journal *Amateur Historian* became the *Local Historian* and the first edition of *Local Population Studies*, the work of institution-based and independent scholars, was published. *Scottish Local History* published material from amateurs and professionals as did *Oral History*, founded 1969. Women's studies was taught unofficially before it gained formal status, only reaching the OU in 1983 with the *Changing experience of women* module. Its successor, *Issues in women's studies*, ran until 1999.

In addition to working, sometimes uneasily, with universities, local history research was often a collaborative activity for the practitioners. In 1922, Rosalie

E Bosanquet edited *In the troublesome times: memories of old Northumberland collected by the Cambo Women's Institute*. This collective endeavour was co-ordinated by a graduate of modern history at Oxford in 1902 history graduate. Written in response to a Women's Institutes competition to produce a book about local customs and monuments, it included numerous details of local life. Lionel Munby, who had a first in modern history from Oxford, started to teach local history in Hertfordshire in the 1940s and soon got his students involved in their learning. Between the 1960s and 1980s, many Hertfordshire local history publications and societies were inspired by him. FACHRS was founded during a period when guidance on planning permission had led to a growth in archaeological investigations prior to new building projects. The number of archaeologists working outside the academy on development-funded digs grew. Between 1995 and 2001, the Council for British Archaeology coordinated 600 largely unpaid researchers who recorded details of nearly 200,000 military sites.[22] Community archaeology, supported by professionals, was fostered with examples in Great Ayton, North Yorkshire and Sedgeford, Norfolk.[23] These digs set out to research, record and disseminate information about landscape features and local history.

After the Second World War, the number of history societies and courses grew as did opportunities for people to gain secondary education and attend universities. The first university department of local history was established in the late 1940s at Leicester. According to Carter, who focused on universities rather than popular scholarship, it was only at this point that local history was 'no longer a mere handmaiden of national history'.[24] Certificates, diplomas and graduate degrees in local history followed. Courses were run by the Workers' Educational Association and extra-mural departments.[25]

In 1979, Lord Blake, provost of Queen's College, Oxford chaired a 'Committee to Review Local History'. It aimed to assess interest in and the study of local history in England and Wales and to recommend how the needs of practitioners might be met. It received 70l written submissions, 247 of them from voluntary societies. It also reported the growth of, and roles played by, local history within both the for-mal and informal education and the need for national and county coordinating and representative bodies. In 1982, the National Standing Conference for Local History (established 1948) became the British Association for Local History. It notes that local history is 'where amateur and professional can meet and work profitably together' and it aims 'to encourage and assist the study of local history as an aca-demic discipline and as a rewarding leisure pursuit'.[26]

After completing courses with Eileen Kelly at Liverpool Community College, a group of women started to research women in history. Between 1982 and 1999, the Second Chance to Learn: Women's History -Women's Lives group at the City of Liverpool Community College produced 15 local history booklets. A Centre for Applied Historical Studies was established at Middlesex University. Under the direction of academic staff students contributed to a number of books and local historical projects.[27]

In 1998, a Government Green Paper, *The learning age: a renaissance for Britain* argued that lifelong education should become the norm, that it was 'the continuous development of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are essential for employability and fulfilment'. It called for 'a culture of self-improvement for the many and not the few'.[28] Many graduates who wished to acquire appropriate skills and knowledge looked not for fresh stocks of formal knowledge but to access informal learning communities built around practice.[29] Further studies confirmed the importance of informal learning to UK.[30] It was outside the formal sector that 'most of the significant learnings that apply to our everyday lives are learned'. Furthermore, 'informal and self-directed learning now form part of our everyday existence' and there is much responsible extra-mural scholarship.[31]

The FACHRS was founded at time when the disbenefits of a boundary between formal and informal learning were widely understood and *The Local Historian* provided models as to how to structure extra-mural liaison.[32] The FACHRS journal, *Family & Community History*, 'designed for academic researchers, teachers and students with an interest in family or community history', noted academic interest in the small scale and the interest outside universities in local and family history. Its first editorial concluded that 'the time is ripe to capitalize on this increasing convergence'.[33] A few years later Ruth Finnegan professed herself 'doubtful of whether there really is some marked divide between the processes of knowledge creation outside as against inside the universities'.[34]

The culture and environment that had supported considerable co-enquiry and co-production was undermined during the twenty-first century. This was a period where those auditing university researches emphasised the international significance of output. The official data-gathering exercise during the period 1986–2008 (it was replaced in by the REF in 2014) was the Research Assessment Exercise. It had two aims, the second of which was to provide 'comprehensive and definitive information on the quality of UK research in every subject area'. It sought to record and 'assess the entire research system'.[35] Knowledge creation outside the academy was marginalised. Moreover, there was an overall reduction in the fund-ing of part-time and lifelong learning by the Workers' Education Associations and Local Education Authorities. Despite this shift, 'the FACHRS has not become a relic of that age and frame-work, but remains a dynamic and proactive agent in promoting and undertaking collective, valuable and distinctive research activity'.[36] Its research indicated that extra-mural scholarship can expand and challenge con-ventional academic understandings. Universities, eager to enhance the student experience and to demonstrate that transferable skills and employability were being supported, renewed their interest in research-informed learning and teach-ing. Some encouraged greater learner participation, with students engaged in enquiries, presentations and writing.[37] Jackson has concluded that the Knowledge Exchange Framework, the Research Excellence Framework and the Teaching Excellence Framework (later Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework) have supported the revival of local history in universities.[38] FACHRS became a model for university-based research by students.

In 1998, Sheeran and Sheeran felt that amongst historians it was the local historians who were especially 'unreflective', with a marked reluctance to enquire into their own procedures.[39] However, the FACHRS always connected history and the social sciences. In 1909, influenced by socialist investigators Beatrice and Sidney Webb, London School of Economics graduate Maud F. Davies wrote *Life in an English village: an economic and historical survey of the parish of Corsley in Wiltshire*. She surveyed family budgets and diet as well as drawing on archives. To write *At the works: a study of a manufacturing town*, 1907, Florence Bell organised women to collect historical and other data about Middlesbrough. The notion of social science theories and practices informed G H Tupling's *The economic history of Rossendale*, 1927 and Alfred J Wadsworth and Julia de Lacy Mann's *The cotton trade and industrial Lancashire, 1600–1780*, 1931. The sociologists Marshall, Lockwood and Dore were influenced by the historian Edward Thompson and cultural theorist Raymond Williams. Both of the latter were, in turn, influential within the OU.[40] In 1952, the history journal *Past and Present* was launched. It addressed historical counterparts to social anthropology and sociology, notably social mobility and crowd psychology. E.H. Carr's *What is History?* 1961 also indicated how social history could be linked to the social sciences. In 1964, academics Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley founded the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure and worked with 270 volunteers to gather data from the baptisms, marriages and burials records, then held in churches across the country. The data was then aggregated and assessments appeared in a number of publications. In 1976, the first issue of *Social Science History* defined work in the field as 'research that attempts generalisations of some breadth verified by systematic examination of the relevant evidence and supported by quantitative analysis when appropriate'.[41]

Michael Drake characterised this Cambridge project as 'a case of inside-out', that is of the academy reaching out to communicate its aims and objectives and to validate the work of those he termed 'intellectual hod carriers'.[42] Drake worked with the Project and studied half-a-million baptism, marriage and burial records from Morley Wapentake, Yorkshire. When he used his experiences of how to deal with large amounts of data and how best to organise teams of researchers, he col-lapsed the dichotomy of 'inside-out and 'outside-in' and strove for synthesis. This was done first at the OU, which he joined in 1969 and subsequently in FACHRS in which he was active during its formative years being 'an inspiration behind much of the philosophy which underpins the journal and the Society'.[43] He was a founder co-editor of its academic journal, and his article for its first edition modelled the use of everyday materials as sources for historians.[44]

Building on his interest in the integration of a popular interest in family history with the disciplines of history and the social sciences Michael Drake and colleagues developed a series of OU modules.[45] *Historical Sources and the Social Scientist*, D301, presented 1974–1988, enabled students to engage in 'explorations of the past undertaken for the explicit purpose of advancing social scientific

enquiry'.[46] Students' history dissertations, on topics of their choice, employed social scientific methods to complete history dissertations. During the 1980s, the rapprochement between history and sociology was exemplified by the launching of the *Journal of Historical Sociology* in 1988. However, the social sciences came under scrutiny and in 1983 the Social Science Research Council amended its remit and became the Economic and Social Research Council. Nevertheless, in 1994 the OU launched a final-year module, *Family and Community History: 19th and 20th centuries*, DA301. It was presented until 2001. It has been defined as

> left-of-centre egalitarianism that wishes to encourage people who lack academic qualifications to participate in and acquire academic skills through a non-elitist process.[47]

The module was framed by the wider OU commitment to recognising and valuing the students' knowledge and experience. It emphasised the need to employ the scientific methods of clearly identifying aims, hypothesising and using theoretical models against which the findings of local research might be set. Using a problem-based learning approach, students were taught the skills required for small-scale research.[48] It was noted that the module authors' took a 'skills-based approach to the subject, and they advise students to conduct small-scale research by testing out facets of the different definitions of the concept.[49]

At its inception, members of the FACHRS were OU graduates. They were trained in the OU's co-operative and collaborative research methods. Like most OU students, the FACHRS researchers are part time, based not on a campus but in their homes, use correspondence and the Internet and rarely meet one another. In order for them to engage with hands-on experimentation and primary sources, the OU provided home experiment kits and broadcast versions of canonical dramas. Tutors were urged not to concentrate only on imparting the canon of accepted knowledge but rather to encourage students to question the assumption that there was an accepted body of theoretical knowledge about which they need to learn.[50]

Those who studied *Science: A Foundation Course*, S101, 1979–1987, collected data about the peppered moth near where they lived (i.e. collectively, all over the country). These were incorporated into a peer-reviewed article.[51] Students on *The Man-Made World: A Foundation Course*, T100, 1972–1979, carried out noise experiments around the country and collected data. On one of the modules' television broadcasts, the results were presented and assessed. The country's first university module in ecology, *Ecology*, S323, 1974–1985, included a project element which enabled students to follow their own interests. Students selected a project from a wide choice of topics, carried out practical work and collated the data. Students also carried out group projects.[52] By 1976, there were at least ten OU modules which included a project element.[53] In that year and also in 1984 and 1992, a quarter of assessed OU modules contained or consisted of projects.[54] Between 1976 and 1985, *Art and environment* TAD292 invited students to develop 'strategies for creative work' both in their assessed work and at the

module's residential schools.[55] Over 100 of the earliest students of TAD292 helped to remake the module for subsequent presentations. A survey noted that self-help groups were 'extremely helpful' on TAD292.[56] Some of those who studied TAD292 formed a society, Tadpoles, to develop ideas from the module which supported their subsequent collaborative practices and self-directed learning. Between 1984 and 1997, the OU sold the stand-alone East Anglian Studies Resources pack. Developed with the Norfolk Federation of the Women's Institutes, it included facsimiles of primary sources and recordings of older local people's personal testimonies. These gave learners opportunities to interpret material for themselves. There were ideas for activities, readings and visits. In 1986, a tutor for the Cambridge University Board of Extra-Mural Studies organised a residential course based on the pack. Another group of learners met one another through an advertisement in a parish newsletter and used the pack as a guided approach to independent learning.[57] Subsequently, the OU established a Millennium Award scheme for 'communicating history through computer literacy' which involved 60 local groups working to gain computing skills via history projects.[58]

In addition, the OU promoted the development of student-directed learning groups.[59] Opened to students in 1971, the OU always sought to distance itself from an image of universities as ivory towers. The distinction between formal univer-sity education and external mutual improvement where 'knowledge was some-thing to be shared around' was noted by John Allway, born 1902.[60] He recalled the differences between the 'ample opportunities' at the WEA for 'questions and discussion' and being a student at Oxford with the 'formality' of lectures and the 'aloofness' of academics who were reluctant to answer questions or be drawn into discussion.[61] The OU offered support for the formation of self-help groups from 1973 and by 1974 there were over 1,000 student-directed learning groups.[62] DA301 was designed to encouraged students with different levels of expertise and engagement to work together on common tasks and to learn from each other. Its teaching materials (which included printed material, cassettes and CDs) were pro-duced by teams of academics who worked in co-operation with non-academic staff. There was both correspondence and face-to-face teaching by locally based part-time staff and a residential element lasting a few days. Students were taught about oral history, and case studies of the authors' family histories were provided as part of the teaching materials. Module team chair Ruth Finnegan noted that the module was 'owned by the students. They wanted to do the research'.[63]

At the OU, the significance of self-esteem to learners was recognised and there was encouragement of reciprocity and mutual respect of the life experiences of other adults. The OU adapted the idea that 'a student's colleagues often represent the least recognised, least used and possibly most important of all the resources available to him [sic] and that 'the deepest foundations for learning are self-confidence, trust, belief and love'.[64] In 1975, John Ferguson, the OU's Dean of Arts, contrasted the OU with other universities where 'many students would pass

through their whole student career without any effective personal confrontation with individual members of staff'.[65] Dialogue and collaboration were presented as aids to intellectual development and learning. Almshouses project co-ordinator Anne Langley, described how 'we had a briefing meeting for the authors at the beginning and this is where, you said, more skilled people could help less skilled'. She has helped to run a self-help group for authors where members could 'bounce drafts off each other and read material before it is submitted'. She noted of the FACHRS committee that 'We all chip in when it comes to the [annual] conference and help run it'.[66] These decisions echo the pedagogy of the OU which had long blended distance and face-to-face teaching.

The OU recognised that many OU students having arrived at the OU with few positive experiences of education. It sought to reinforce self-esteem as an aid to academic success.[67] There was encouragement of reciprocity and mutual respect of the life experiences of other adults and recognition at the OU that 'higher education has much to learn from its alumni'.[68] There were echoes of this elsewhere, such as in the work of a retired medical practitioner who argued that local history could benefit from independent scholars employing their professional knowledge and experience.[69] Frances Brooks' explained: 'I am used to doing chemistry research. I have worked in universities all my life' before noting that her self-confidence was 'killed' at her workplace and only revived through studying with the OU.[70] Brita Woods left her work in a bank because it was 'too regimented … it was making me physically ill'. She felt that 'The major thing that the OU has given to me is confidence … to meet people … in my own abilities, knowledge that I can work out and problem solve'.[71] Others in the FACHRS referred to 'gaining confidence and the skills' and a new career.[72] Other graduates noted improvements in their collaborative learning, motivation and identities as learners.[73] Former DA301 student Linda Kirk felt that the module led her to start to research for other people.[74]

FACHRS member Diane Mehew said that she had gained research and organisational skills as well as confidence.[75] FACHRS activist Jacqueline Cooper gained specific skills, such as 'how to do references and check your facts … put things in the right order and do your bibliography' and also a sense of confidence in her abilities. She felt that DA301 'gave me a sense of direction' and went on to edit books and a twice-yearly local history journal (a 'mixture of academic and more popular articles') that she helped to launch and to be active in a federation of historians 'like me'.[76]

FACHRS Members also noted that they learnt from one another. Angela Blaydon felt 'I have learnt a lot from being a member of the Society […] i ts given me tools to be able to find out and know where to go or how to go about it to delve deeper', while Vanessa Worship felt that her engagement with the FACHRS was 'definitely a learning experience'.[77] Sociability aided the recruitment and retention of members. Member Brita Woods said 'It is lovely to be involved with like-minded people', while Sue Smith said of the FACHRS, 'socially it's a good

group of people, we enjoy it and we are all like-minded because we've got a shared interest and I get that from it and it's good to mix with academics'.[78]

Collaboration across space and time were taught on DA301 through a formative Computer Marked Assignment and the collation and distribution to subsequent students of research projects.[79] Later the students' reports were made available more widely, through FACHRS, enabling the original student authors to use the research findings of the subsequent students. Students could also rehearse skills at residential schools and join self-help groups. This experience provided a model for the FACHRS to employ technology to connect researchers. At the FACHRS' 1999 conference, 'Working together', the FACHRS website was established to support information sharing and later income-generation links and sales. Over 100 people attended the 2000 AGM and conference, 'Input to output: getting to grips with the new technology'. [80]

Don Dickson felt that a FACHRS project which involved the collation of data from physically dispersed sources was

> a classic example of how you take learning from an Open University course like DA301. You can have the FACHRS evolve from that and then the FACHRS itself can start to evolve … it becomes a learning resource and we start to deliver learning to the public.[81]

Geoffrey Crowther, the OU's Foundation Chancellor, opened the university with words which emphasised that it encouraged learning to be open.

> This University has no cloisters – a word meaning closed. Hardly even shall we have a campus. [Milton Keynes] is only where the tip of our toe touches ground; the rest of the University will be disembodied and airborne. From the start it will flow all over the United Kingdom.[82]

The FACHRS followed the example. Annual conferences ceased being held in Milton Keynes. Rather, Birmingham, Colchester and Leicester were selected. It began to run its own travelling recruitment 'roadshow'. The OU model of blending face-to-face meetings with communication between those at a distance from one another was adopted by the FACHRS. In 2005, it opened an archive and meeting room but this was only where its toe touched the ground. Much of the time it flowed around the country.

The FACHRS approach was also influenced by a body formed by DA301 staff, Open Studies in Family and Community History, OSFACH. It produced an eight-page *Histories for the Millennium* leaflet. This encouraged people to get together to produce histories of their communities by suggesting topics for research and guidance on how to start, where to get help and how to present results. A study was made of the impact of the leaflet.[83] The FACHRS sponsored a two-day conference on the 'Histories for the Millennium'. Prior to the foundation of the FACHRS OSFACH produced its own newsletter and established groups in 13 regions. When the FACHRS was created, initially it had regional groups based on the areas of the UK covered by the 13 OU regions and nations as used by OSFACH. The East Midlands organised a conference on 'Hosiery Past and

Present' and followed up with one on oral history. In the South-East Network, Simon Fowler established a collaborative research project 'Changes in public houses during the centuries' which linked to the 2001 conference theme, 'Beer and Skittles'. There were regional newsletters, trips to record offices, talks on how to publish local history and an oral history workshop. However, most of the regions were too large for face-to-face meetings to be easily arranged and soon the society changed its strategy and focused on particular themes, rather than particular areas. In 1997, a further OSFACH initiative was launched. Financially supported by the Wellcome Trust and co-ordinated by Michael Drake, 'The decline of infant mortality in England and Wales, 1871-1948: a medical conundrum' involved 20 graduates who had passed DA301.[84] They submitted their research work for a BPhil, an MPhil or a DPhil. Sue Smith, who studied DA301 and was a founding member of the FACHRS, described the connection:

> When we were doing the infant mortality project we were all over the country really so we could meet up with each other through FACHRS as well as independently.[85]

OSFACH, like DA301, modelled the collation and manipulation of quantitative and qualitative data, the use of computing and the presentation of results.

In April 1998, OSFACH sponsored the conference which launched both the FACHRS and the journal *Family & Community History*. The first editorial described the FACHRS aims as being 'to support active empirical research at the grassroots that has wider implications than the purely genealogical or parochial'.[86] The development of the FACHRS rested on its involvement with university and academic structures, particularly those of the OU. It built on the interest in personal testimony and the acceptance of an approach which emphasised that society and social relationships could be studied in a scientific manner. It also relied upon the deeply entrenched idea that local history research could be carried out by independent scholars working collaboratively or with the support of a range of bodies besides universities. The FACHRS built upon the sometimes marginalised 'tradition of "autodidacts" and hobbyists outside work'.[87] It combined this with engagement with professionals. While, as Jackson noted, 'the organisational and intellectual interface between academic and non-academic local history has contracted', there were some tensions.[88] Nurtured within a university the FACHRS was always independent of the OU. Its survival long after the stream of former OU module students dried up when DA301 ceased to be taught in 2001, has been because it has acted as a catalyst for learning and cognitive change. Clive Leivers, the inaugural Chair of the FACHRS, noted that from the start the Society was in charge of the 'academic adviser'. Such a person was to be on tap, not on top. He added, 'we have managed to provide a way in which we can encourage and advise people in research'. Leivers recalled that one of the founding academics wanted the Society to be called Family and Community History. At the inaugural conference '[we] must have spent a good half hour debating what to call the Society and the reason research is in the title is that the people said we are coming together because we want to do further research'.

Leivers' vision was wider than that of a university department. It was that the FACHRS should help family and community historians all over the country to exchange ideas and co-ordinate their work.[89] The FACHRS was able to bridge the gaps between scholars, be they institution-based or independent, because the skills, confidence, expectations and conduct required to seek out collaboration and support, while retaining control, had been acquired through being immersed in the cultural patterns, the embedded relational issues and the priorities of the OU.

Notes

[1] N. Goose, H. Caffrey and A. Langley eds., *The British Almshouse: New Perspectives on Philanthropy ca 1400-1914* (Milton Keynes: FACHRS, 2016). See N. Goose, and S. Basten, 'Almshouse Residency in Nineteenth Century England: An Interim Report', *Family & Community History* 12, no. 1 (2009): 65–76.

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[3] 'News', *Family & Community History*, 4, no. 2 (2001): 157.

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[5] M. Holland ed., *Swing unmasked: the agricultural riots of 1830–1832 and their wider implications* (Milton Keynes: FACHRS, 2004).

[6] E. J. Hobsbawm and G. Rude, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969).

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[9] J. Burchardt and J. Cooper eds., *Breaking New Ground: nineteenth-century allotments from local sources* (Milton Keynes: FACHRS, 2010).

[10] In 1984, under the influence of an OU founder, Michael Young, the University of the Third Age was created to encourage informal learning through self-managed co-operatives for older people. E. Midwinter, *500 Beacons: the U3A Story* (London: Third Age Press, 2004).

[11] Other mini-projects include ones on Postmistresses, Rural Policemen, Bank Managers, Victorian Marriages, Career Servants, School Mistresses and one on School Holidays and Closures 1881–1921 which was linked to the School Log Books Project. The FACHRS 2015 mini-project idea, Census Enumerators, looked back to DA301 and to D301.

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[13] The first chair of the Conference of Teachers of Regional and Local History in Tertiary Education, which was formally constituted in 1978, was John Marshall. This is his summary of much local history, see J. D. Marshall, 'The Antiquarian Heresy', *The Journal of Local and Regional Studies* 15, no. 2 (1995): 49.

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[16] M. A. B. Stapleton, *Three Oxfordshire parishes; A history of Kidlington, Yarnton and Begbroke* (Oxford: Oxfordshire Historical Society, 1893).

[17] H. E. Hawker, 'Introduction', *Notes of my Life, 1870–1918* (Gloucester: W G Davis, Stonehouse, 1919).

[18] R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past And Present In Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), 8. Samuel's interest in working with students is reflected in R. Samuel ed., *Village, Life and Labour* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1975) and R. Samuel ed., *Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

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[23] https://www.sharp.org.uk/ and http://greatayton.wdfiles.com/local–files/startup/Menu.pdf (accessed January 27, 2019). The 1999 FACHRS conference included a contribution by Keith Robinson entitled 'Democratic archaeology at Sedgeford'.

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[70] Frances Brooks interview by Ronald McIntyre, 30 December 2011. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[71] Brita Woods interview by Ronald McIntyre, 7 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[72] Dick Hunter interview by Ronald McIntyre, 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[73] These accounts accord with the findings of studies based on the personal accounts of graduates', post-university learning and narratives of adult learners. See for example, R. Brooks and G. Everett, 'The Impact Of Higher Education On Lifelong Learning', *International Journal of Lifelong education* 27, no. 3 (May/June 2008): 239–254; R. Johnston and B. Merrill, 'Non-Traditional Students—Tracking Changing Learning Identities In The Inter-Face With Higher Education', in *(Re)generating Research in Adult Learning and Teaching*, ed. C. Hunt (Sheffield Sheffield; SCRUTREA/University of Sheffield, 2002), 141–149; L. West, *Beyond Fragments: Adults*, *Motivation And Learning: A Biographical Analysis* (London: Taylor and Francis; Merrill, 1996); P. Alheit, 'Biography And Narratives: Adult Returners To Learning', in *Researching Widening Access To Lifelong Learning Issues And Approaches In International Research*, eds. M. Osborne, J. Gallacher, and B. Crossan (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 150–163.

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[75] Diane Mehew interview by Ronald Macintyre, 3 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[76] Jacqueline Cooper, interview by Ronald McIntyre, 28 February 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[77] Vanessa Worship, interview by Ronald McIntyre, 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education; Angela Blaydon, interview by Ronald McIntyre, 5 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[78] Sue Smith, interview by Ronald Macintyre 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education; Brita Woods, interview.

[79] Students' local history dissertations were collated on a series of CDs, *Project reports in Family and Community History*. These were edited by Dan Weinbren, Lucy Faulkner and Ruth Finnegan.

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[86] Drake, Finnegan and Weinbren, 'Editorial', 3 .

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[89] Clive Leivers, interview by Ronald McIntyre, 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

Disclosure statement

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