W. G. HOSKINS AND THE VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY IN LEICESTERSHIRE

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W. G. Hoskins returned to University College, Leicester in 1946, and almost immediately threw himself into the task of reviving the Victoria County History in the county. He was appointed (honorary) county editor, and was responsible for setting up the required committees and for helping to raise the funding. He also planned and drove forward what became volumes II–IV in the Leicestershire 'set'. Hoskins soon found himself at odds with the VCH office in the University of London's Institute of Historical Research, and after he left Leicester for Oxford in 1952 some of the project momentum was lost. With work having resumed on the VCH in Leicestershire, this article sets out how the VCH has operated in the past, and what work has still to be undertaken.

The Victoria County History (VCH) was founded in 1899. Work started almost immediately in many counties, including Leicestershire where the first volume in the proposed county set was published in 1907. Work then stopped, as it did in many counties, as a result of the financial crisis which largely overwhelmed the VCH in 1908, and nothing further was done in Leicestershire until after the Second World War. With the founding of the Department of English Local History in 1948, W. G. Hoskins took up the VCH cause, and with funding from the county and city councils was able to drive forward volumes 2–4. After he left for Oxford in 1952, the baton was picked up by others, and eventually the first volume of topographical entries (Gartree Hundred) appeared in 1964. By then the enthusiasm, and the funding, had come to a halt, and the VCH in Leicestershire closed down. The recent revival of work, largely driven forward by the Squire D'Lisle and Professor Christopher Dyer, has brought the VCH back into focus in Leicestershire, and this article provides the background against which the new initiative needs to be set.[1]

The VCH was established in 1899, with an overall plan which envisaged Leicestershire being written in four volumes. This county 'set', to use the VCH's own terminology, included two volumes of general essays about the history of the county, and two volumes of topography, in effect individual parish entries concentrating on manorial descents. Volume I for Leicestershire was published in 1907. As with the first volume in most of the pre-First World War county sets, it included a substantial section on natural history. Much of this was written by

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[1] In the course of preparing this article I was able to call upon the help and advice of a number of people who were involved with the VCH in its post-war incarnation, including J. M. (Michael) Lee, Janet Martin, Susan Reynolds, the late Christopher Elrington and Joan Thirsk. Michael Lee read and commented on an earlier version of the paper.

national experts who wrote for all, or many counties, among them Richard Lydekker on palaeontology, B. B. Woodward on molluscs and T. B. B. Stebbing on crustaceans. Other essays in this section were written by local experts, including Montagu Browne, curator of Leicester Museum, who wrote on fishes, reptiles, birds and mammals.[2]

Natural history was followed by essays on Early Man, Romano-British Leicestershire, Anglo-Saxon remains and ancient earthworks. The introduction to the Leicestershire Domesday, and the text itself, as well as the Leicestershire survey, was supplied by the young Frank Stenton under the supervision of J. H. Round, and the volume ended with an essay on ecclesiastical history. Under the overall VCH plan this last essay would normally have been in volume II, but was probably included here because it was written and because the VCH was anxious not to waste any space.[3]

Work was also started towards volumes II–IV. Volume II in any county set normally included general essays on ecclesiastical history accompanied by accounts of religious houses, economic and social history, with separate entries on agriculture and industries, political history, education, sport and forestry. As with the chapter on ecclesiastical history, the sections on religious houses were prepared and written by Sister Elspeth of the Community of All Saints. Sister Elspeth had an Oxford background, and wrote on a number of counties. She had completed her work by 1908. Enid Routh wrote 25,000 words on the political history of Leicestershire, and John Harrison prepared material on agriculture which went into proof in 1908.[4] Other sections were written on forestry (Dr J. C. Cox), industry (Miss Ethel Hewitt), mining (H. Butler John), bell founding (H. B. Walters) and sport (E. E. Dorling).[5]

Background work had been undertaken for volumes III and IV, as for all counties, between 1904 and 1906 when a small army of recent graduates, many of them women, had been deployed to the Public Record Office and other national repositories to blanket search the indexes and catalogues for documentary references to individual places. Each reference was written on a slip of paper, and the slips were then collated on a county by county basis for future use. In Leicestershire's case this is as far as it went, and no manorial descents were drafted.

In 1908 the VCH ran into the first of a number of financial crises, and work stopped more or less everywhere. When a new financial guarantee was established in 1910, it was for work in ten counties, which did not include Leicestershire. Some funds were made available to pay authors whose work was not published, but no further work in the county was undertaken until after the Second World War.[6] This was not unusual. Both Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire had two

[2] VCH Archive, Institute of Historical Research, University of London (hereafter VCH), A11, William Page to Montagu Browne, 21, 27 June 1906, 18 July 1907; Browne to Page, 26 June 1906.
[3] VCH *Leicestershire* I (1907), xvii–xviii.
[4] VCH A11, correspondence of William Page with Enid Routh and John Harrison, 1905–7.
[5] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Board report, 31 Dec 1949; VCH, A. Taylor Milne to W. G. Hoskins, 15, 21 Feb, 18 March 1949; Hoskins to Milne, 27 Feb 1949.
[6] VCH A11, William Page to Enid Routh, 9 May 1910.

general volumes published before the First World War, but no work on topography was undertaken beyond collecting references on slips. The VCH was in abeyance between 1915 and 1923, and thereafter it was mainly busy with publishing volumes prepared before 1915. Rutland, which was due only two volumes in the grand VCH scheme, had volume I in 1908 (which included all the general essays for the county, including those which would normally have appeared in volume II) and volume II in 1935, with sponsorship from Mr Owen Hugh Smith of Langham, consisting of the complete topographical entries for the county.

This does not look like promising territory for Hoskins, but the position of the VCH had changed by 1947 in a way which made it seem more attractive to him as a project which could be attached to his new department. William Page, general editor 1904–34, gave the VCH to the University of London's Institute of Historical Research in 1932, and at much the same time work was revived in Oxfordshire. A single volume (II in the set) was published in 1907, but in 1932 a meeting convened by Sir George Clark decided to promote the Oxfordshire series in conjunction with the transfer of the VCH to the Institute of Historical Research. With funding from the city of Oxford – 'the City being the first local authority, as far as is known, to make a grant towards the expenses of the History' – and the Oxford colleges, the project was revived.[7] In 1937 work resumed in Warwickshire when local authority funding was made available from Warwickshire County Council, the cities of Birmingham and Coventry, the boroughs of Nuneaton, Sutton Coldfield and Stratford, trustees of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and private donations. A local editor was appointed, Philip Styles, on a part-time basis, initially to complete two volumes on the county. Much of Warwickshire III, Barlichway Hundred, had been typeset by the time that war broke out in 1939, and volumes IV, V and VI appeared respectively in 1947, 1949 and 1951.[8]

Immediately after the war, a further initiative came from Wiltshire, for which no pre-1914 volumes had appeared. In 1947, and coincidental with the opening of the county archive office, a county committee was formed, and with funding from a combination of the county council, the borough of Swindon and the city of Salisbury, a scheme was agreed whereby research would be undertaken in the county, and the University of London would be responsible for publication. An ambitious plan for Wiltshire was drawn up in 1948 with the intention that it should be completed in 20 volumes. What was developing here was a new model, which depended not on local patronage through a committee of grandees as in the pre-First World War period, but a working committee drawing funding from local authorities which could view the VCH as an extension of their commitment to archive conservation.

Hoskins clearly got wind of these developments, and recognised a potential opening for work in Leicestershire. He had been teaching at University College

7 VCH *Oxfordshire* I (1907), II (1939), III (1954).
8 C. R. J. Currie and C. P. Lewis, *A Guide to English County Histories*, Stroud, 1994, 408.

since 1931, but had spent the years 1941–5 as a statistician with the Board of Trade in London. He returned to Leicester in 1946, and was shortly joined at University College by Jack Simmons, as first professor in the Department of History. Simmons shared Hoskins's interests in landscapes and buildings, and together with F. L. Attenborough, the College principal, they formed a strong team which led eventually to the setting up of the Department of English Local History in 1948.[9] The result, in Joan Thirsk's words, was that 'some of the most exhilarating and perhaps most satisfying years in Hoskins's academic life spanned the period 1947–51'.[10] One of the exhilarations was the Leicestershire VCH.

Quite what Hoskins knew about the VCH at this time is unclear. He had certainly used a number of volumes for south-western counties while preparing his 1929 London M.Sc thesis, but as for its organisation this is less clear.[11] He initially approached R. H. Tawney, who can perhaps best be described as his mentor in these years. Tawney had referred him to Professor V. H. Galbraith, Director of the Institute of Historical Research 1944–8. Hoskins also admitted he knew nothing of the financial arrangements for the VCH. Galbraith, aware of both the Wiltshire initiative, and also of continuing interest in other counties including Oxfordshire, passed Hoskins's letter to A. Taylor Milne, the Secretary and Librarian of the IHR, with a comment that the model proposed for Wiltshire might be followed in Leicestershire with a local committee, an honorary editor and a paid assistant. Hoskins met with Galbraith and Taylor in the IHR, where they discussed using the Wiltshire model in Leicestershire.[12]

With the support of Simmons and Attenborough, Hoskins threw himself into organising the VCH. By 22 October 1947 he had recruited the local committee, which was to be chaired by Sir Robert Martin, of Woodhouse Eaves, Loughborough, chairman of the county council, and also of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society. The other members were to be Simmons, Professor A. Hamilton Thompson who, among other roles, was President of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society, the Provost of Leicester Cathedral, Alderman C. R. Keen, chairman of the University College Finance Committee, Colin Ellis – 'a well known man locally and a prominent member of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society' – and himself, described as 'Reader (Designate) in English Local History at University College, Leicester'. Hoskins admitted to having difficulty finding a convenient date for a meeting for such a high-powered group, but meantime he had also drawn up 'an excellent list of contributors – all trained historians except one (the writer on Sport, which does not seem to attract academic research)'. He had also arranged to see Philip Styles, the Warwickshire VCH local editor, for some advice on how to proceed.[13] On 25 November 1947

[9] University of Leicester Archive (ULA), P/AR24, p. 13; E15/1/1–2.

[10] Joan Thirsk, 'William George Hoskins, 1908–1992', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 87 (1994), 345.

[11] W. G. Hoskins, *Fieldwork in Local History* (1967), 16–17. My thanks to Dr Robert Peberdy for help on this point.

[12] VCH, Hoskins to V. H. Galbraith, 5 Aug 1947; Galbraith memorandum, 6 Aug 1947; Hoskins to Milne, 27 Oct 1947.

[13] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 22 Oct 1947.

Hoskins and Simmons jointly wrote a memorandum to Attenborough stating the case for reviving and completing the Leicestershire VCH.[14]

Hoskins needed to know more of the funding position. Milne, on behalf of the IHR, explained how it worked in Wiltshire and Warwickshire. In Wiltshire it was estimated that £5,000 would be needed to prepare five volumes. This figure was based on what had happened in Warwickshire where the county council and the municipal authorities in Birmingham and Coventry had ordered in advance all the outstanding volumes (III–VII). These subscriptions, together with donations amounting to several hundred pounds, had been sufficient to produce volumes III and IV without loss, with London paying the editorial and administrative expenses and carrying the cost of publication.[15] Armed with this knowledge, Hoskins made a formal approach to the Institute of Historical Research to approve new work in Leicestershire under his leadership.[16]

Hoskins's original idea seems to have been to complete the proposed four-volume series. The first Leicestershire volume (I) had appeared in 1907, and Hoskins intended to complete volume II with its general essays, and then to produce the two topographical volumes.[17] For volume II he knew that earlier work had been done and was available in the VCH archive (stored in Northamptonshire at that time). He intended to build on this for volume II, although it was not clear that it could be recovered and made available for some months.[18] He proposed a new departure for the VCH by suggesting that volume III should be a single volume on the county town, leaving all the topographical studies of the other parishes in the county to volume IV. L. F. Salzman, the VCH general editor, accepted the idea of a volume based on Leicester but was less sure of the other proposals, suggesting that Leicestershire might require a total of five or even six volumes if it was to cover all 300 parishes adequately. Hoskins rather dismissively noted that there were only 220 and not 300 parishes, but he accepted that this was a matter for the IHR's own planning committee to decide.[19] In June 1947 the VCH general committee meeting at the IHR approved the resumption of work in Leicestershire.[20]

Discussing the content of volumes was easy: making the project work in practice was a different matter. In the post-war years, as research and writing were moved from the VCH London Office to county offices, often located in newly opened Record Offices, the procedure was to appoint a local figure as part-time, honorary editor, with a full-time paid assistant who would, in effect, do all the work. This was the model initially developed in Wiltshire, although G. M. Young, who accepted the position of editor, did so 'on the clear understanding that someone else should do the work. And that part of the bargain has been very

[14] ULA E15/1/2.
[15] VCH, Milne to Hoskins, 28 Oct 1947.
[16] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 22 Oct 1947; VCH General Committee minutes 1943–8, 89.
[17] VCH *Leicestershire* II, xiii.
[18] VCH Archive, Milne to Hoskins, 21 Nov 1947. It was eventually returned to the IHR in October 1948 when Hoskins was invited to inspect it at his leisure: Milne to Hoskins, 28 Oct 1948.
[19] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 12 Mar 1948.
[20] VCH, Milne to Hoskins, 11 Mar 1948; Hoskins to Milne, 12 Mar 1948; VCH Minutes 1943–8, 101.

strictly observed.'[21] Hoskins was, of course, to be the editor for Leicestershire, although he had no intention of being hands-off in Young's style, but before an assistant could be appointed some funds were needed.

Hoskins's plan, following the example set elsewhere, was to raise funding for five years, and then to rely on the success of the project to generate further funds. By the end of February 1948 he had secured £250 a year for five years from Leicester City Council, and was expecting a grant from the county council, although they were 'still fiddling about making enquiries as to what other counties do &c., and I think we shall be alright in the end but it is a tiresome delay' – a reference to their consultations with Warwickshire and Birmingham to establish exactly what the practice was.[22] He was also approaching the Leicester Lit and Phil, and the Leicestershire Archaeological Society for contributions, and he expected also to make 'a public appeal for the balance of the income we require'. By early March 1948 Hoskins was sufficiently confident of funding from the county council that 'Simmons and I are going ahead with the detailed planning of the volumes, especially of volume II, and hope to have all this arranged by the end of the Easter vacation'.[23] County Council funding was confirmed by June 1948.[24]

With progress being made, the Leicestershire committee turned itself from being provisional into being permanent, and in December 1948 it authorised the appointment of an assistant editor at a salary of £400. When this was advertised early in 1949, 24 applications were received. Richard McKinley, a research student at the University of Manchester, was appointed in March 1949, and allowed time to complete his M.A. thesis before moving to Leicester to start work on 1 June 1949.[25]

The VCH Leicestershire Committee was supplemented by a local editorial board, which held its first meeting on 13 January 1949 with Colin Ellis in the chair. Hoskins, Simmons, J. H. Plumb and Dr C. H. Thompson, the honorary secretary, attended. Thompson had been appointed in September 1947 as the first Leicestershire county archivist, when the newly formed office was formally established at the County Offices in Greyfriars. The other member of the editorial committee was Professor Hamilton Thompson, who had been nominated by the VCH Central Committee in London. He was not able to attend this inaugural meeting. Hoskins proposed that volume II should include general historical articles as was normal for the second volume of the series in other counties, volume III would be on the Borough of Leicester, and volumes IV and V would provide detailed topographical treatment of all places in the county other than Leicester. He tabled his plans for volumes II and III.[26] He was preparing a draft

[21] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 3 Nov 1948; G. M. Young, 'County History', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, LIII (1949), 219.
[22] ROLLR, DE 3220/35, DE 7147/2, 147, 149.
[23] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 29 Feb 1948, 6 Mar 1948; VCH Minutes 1943–8, 94.
[24] VCH Minutes 1943–8, 101; ROLLR, DE 7147/2, p. 145.
[25] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 27 Feb 1949; ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board 17 Mar 1949; VCH Minutes 1943–8, 108, 116, 126.
[26] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board minutes, 13 Jan 1949.

plan for volumes II and III to go to a meeting of the VCH General Committee on 7 March, and he had made arrangements for all the Leicestershire VCH material held in the Northamptonshire store at Goltho, to be moved to the Hatton Room at University College to join the library of the Department of English Local History. It arrived in two large packing-cases and turned out to include the unexpected bonus of 33,000 words of text on Leicester borough, together with the parish slips which had been collected for every county in the years prior to the First World War. Working space was also provided in the library for McKinley.[27]

While Hoskins was waiting for McKinley to take up the assistant editor post, he was busy planning the general essays for volume II, and the Leicester essays for volume III. None of the material which had come from Goltho was considered adequate to task at this stage, all of it having been written 40 or more years previously. McKinley's first task in June 1949 was to write material on political history for the periods 1066–1530 and 1885–1950, with J. H. Plumb filling the 1530–1885 gap.[28] McKinley also revised all of Sister Elspeth's religious houses contributions, and Cox's essay on forestry. Harrison's work on agriculture was set aside, and Hoskins signed up Rodney Hilton and Joan Thirsk to write the agricultural history of the county, Hilton before and Thirsk after 1540. Hoskins signed up further authors for industry and trade, communications (with A. Temple Paterson on canals and Jack Simmons on railways), population, cultural history (Simmons again), art history and patronage, education and sport. In the end, and even after some contributors had fallen by the wayside, it made up two volumes, while his own contribution (apart from editing the volumes) was a miserly three pages on footwear – he had originally said he would write all the economic history.[29] For the Leicester volume (originally intended to be III but eventually moved to IV when II overran) it was agreed to include topographical studies of six formerly agricultural parishes which had been incorporated into the city, namely Aylestone, Belgrave, Braunstone, Evington, Humberstone and Knighton.

With his characteristic energy, Hoskins was busy not only signing up authors and keeping both the county committee and the editorial committee happy, but he was also making increasing demands on the VCH Central Office at the Institute of Historical Research. When Ralph Pugh succeeded L. F. Salzman as general editor in November 1949, he found himself immediately under pressure from Hoskins, who requested the services of the architectural historian who at that time was responsible for providing detailed material on a small number of important buildings, including the parish church, 'in the first place for the City of Leicester itself, to which we are devoting a whole volume (vol III). The historical chapters are well in hand but I must make some definite arrangement for the topographical section, if we are to complete both parts of the volume simultaneously.' Hoskins characteristically added that there would not be a great amount of work to do 'since the city councillors have destroyed nearly everything of historic interest, but there are five (town) medieval churches and a number of medieval village churches

[27] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 13 Feb 1949.
[28] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board report 31 Dec 1949.
[29] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 24 Jan 1950.

(about six, I believe) of parishes now within the city boundaries. The amount of interesting domestic architecture would be small also, even taken up to about 1850–60.' Hoskins also requested support from Pugh in the form of a research assistant to work on classes of records in the Public Record Office 'such as the extents, the papers of the Committee for Compounding and State Papers references generally'.[30] This was all in his first letter to Pugh!

Hoskins's reference to the topographical material is a reminder that the Leicestershire project was at this point swimming in relatively uncharted waters. The topographical volumes had traditionally been researched and written in London, with fieldwork restricted to the architectural information. Today, the topographical studies are almost invariably written in the counties by professional staff and volunteers who learn the job as they proceed, usually from a more experienced colleague, but there was no precedent in 1949. Even Pugh, as general editor, had little experience – his first topographical publications for Wiltshire were in volume VII of the county set, which was published in 1953.

Hoskins assumed that he was responsible for recruiting topography authors, just as he was for the general volumes, and he assumed he could decide – as indeed he did – that the first Hundred to be studied would be Gartree. He reported to the VCH Leicestershire Editorial Board on 17 March 1949 that 'a substantial amount of work has also been done on volume IV … the Hundred of Gartree. A small number of contributors are also engaged in writing up the histories of other parishes in various parts of the county.' These presumably included Miss O. P. Wilson, who he had signed up to write the parish history of Aylestone, Miss Ruth Bird, Senior History Mistress at Wyggeston Grammar School, who was to do Humberstone and Knighton,[31] and Mr Bremer and Miss D. Shipley, who were to write Evington. McKinley was assigned Braunstone and Belgrave, the other two parishes which were to be covered in volume III.

Hoskins was aware that contributors to the topographical volumes would need some guidance. In his report written at the end of 1949 on progress during the year he wrote that:

> There are some 200 or more places to be dealt with in this way, and the difficulty of securing competent contributors for this section of the History are great. In order to give possible contributors guidance on the form of these accounts, the standard required, and the sources to be used, the Editor and Assistant Editor have between them prepared a specimen account of average length (4000–5000 words) relating to the village of Great Stretton. This will be duplicated and circulated to those who are interested as possible contributors.

Contributors were to be paid at the rate of 30s per 1,000 words. Hoskins signed up anyone who was available. J. M. (Michael) Lee, later editor of volume V, first met Hoskins during the summer of 1951 when he was on vacation following his

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[30] VCH Archives, Hoskins to R. B. Pugh, 13 Nov 1949; R. P. Pugh, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England General Introduction* (1970), 24.
[31] Oxford *DNB* (2004), 69420.

first year at Oxford. He was 19 at the time, but when Hoskins found out that he lived in Castle Donington he promptly signed him up for the VCH parish entry.[32]

Hoskins persuaded his editorial committee in Leicester that because of the work of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments it was his view that 'we shall reduce the architectural description of churches and domestic buildings to the minimum necessary for their intelligent appreciation … The saving of space so occasioned in the topographical volumes of the History will be valuable for an extended treatment of the history of each parish, which in the past has tended to be regarded almost purely as the descent of the manor, to the neglect of wider considerations.' Even so, in a report prepared for his editorial board on 15 October 1949, Hoskins wrote the following:

> It is becoming clear that we may have to contemplate one such topographical volume for each of the six Leicestershire hundreds. Thus the Hundred of Gartree contains 47 parishes and chapelries. An average account of each can hardly run to less than 4000 to 5000 words, according to the size and importance of the place. On this reckoning, a volume of some 200–240,000 words is required for this one Hundred if the work is to be done at all adequately. This allows only of the most concise accounts as the specimen history of Great Stretton, circulated last year, showed. Work on the Gartree volume is proceeding on this assumption. It will be appreciated that this would mean the completion of the Leicestershire History in eight volumes instead of the four originally envisaged.

He had also more or less completed the draft of Great Stretton, and he took the precaution of having the VCH Leicestershire Editorial Board read this so that it could agree with him that it was as compressed as it could reasonably be and that 'it was plainly impossible to compress the topographical accounts into two volumes'.[33]

Great Stretton was only just down the road from Hoskins's home at Wigston Magna, but more importantly it was one of Leicestershire's DMVs, which held a particular interest for Hoskins at this time. He had referred to it as such, albeit briefly, in an article published in 1944, and he returned to it in 1956.[34] He was working on the draft of the proposed Great Stretton entry in the autumn 1949. On 22 November 1949 he wrote to Dorothy Slatter at the Museum and Art Gallery saying that he and McKinley were preparing a specimen account, and 'I have chosen Great Stretton for this first specimen as it is an interesting place and not too large to begin with'. He then provided a list of things on which he wanted copies of any notes she may have had relating to Great Stretton from deeds and maps and a transcript of the Visitation records. She supplied him with some of the

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[32] It was never published as such, but appeared as a separate article: J. M. Lee, 'The Rise and Fall of a Market Town: Castle Donington in the Nineteenth Century', *TLAHS*, XXXII (1956), 53–80. The VCH has the original typescript.

[33] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board reports 15 Oct, 31 Dec 1949; DE 3220/36 Minutes of the General Committee, 9 Nov 1950.

[34] W. G. Hoskins, 'The deserted villages of Leicestershire', *TLAS*, 22: 4 (1944–5), 258, in which he noted that it had been reduced to no more than 5–6 families in the reign of Henry VIII, and 'Seven deserted village sites in Leicestershire', *TLAHS*, 32 (1956), 42–3.

material in a letter written on 25 November.[35] Hoskins lectured to the Archaeological Society about the VCH on 24 November 1949.[36]

In February 1950 Hoskins submitted to Pugh his topographical entry on Great Stretton. Pugh's response provides us with some idea of his reaction. He was particularly concerned with length. Great Stretton was simply a chapelry in the parish of Great Glen, and so not really a parish history at all. In 1931 it had a population of just 56, and yet Hoskins had written 5,000 words, 'which we reckon here to be a fair average for a rural parish of substantial size'. In addition, Great Stretton was in a place with a straightforward manorial descent, no school, charity, railway station or post office. Pugh added, diplomatically, that 'I am coming to believe that it is a mistake to try to use the VCH as an organ for publishing definitive parish histories', but it was clearly a problem to have Hoskins bouncing him into taking decisions that would apply widely and might later be regretted.[37]

The problem was that while Hoskins had written what was in some respects a standard entry much like those he must have read in the Rutland volume, he had added a section entitled 'The Village', which was a much more explicit economic history of the community. Pugh had his own ideas of how the VCH should develop, which included an expansion of the sections on religion, to include nonconformity, and a broadening of the education section. He also wanted greater attention to be paid to enclosure of the fields and to local government. Hoskins wanted rather more than this and insisted on travelling to London to take up the cudgels with Pugh: 'the point you raise in general about the length of the article is, as you say, so important that I feel I must take an opportunity of airing my views about it in person'.[38] Unfortunately we have no record of this meeting, although the text as published in 1964 was more or less as prepared in 1949.

Meantime, in January 1950 Hoskins suggested that the VCH Central Committee should consider an additional volume of 'Leicestershire Biographies' – a view that had been endorsed by his editorial committee. He wanted more pictures and maps – 'I am a great believer in the value of maps' – than was standard at that time, and he would have them drawn in Leicester. The VCH Central committee accepted the need for more maps, but turned down the biographies.[39]

All this enthusiasm was fine, but Hoskins's biggest problem between 1949 and his departure for Oxford in 1952 was that so many of the authors he had signed up either failed to produce at all, or failed to pass muster on quality, and this had the effect of slowing down the whole enterprise. Following the meeting at the IHR on 15 March 1950, Pugh recorded that Hoskins was confidently expecting to deliver volume II by Spring 1951 and volume III (still expected to be on Leicester at this stage) six months later, and that he was now planning six topographical

[35] ROLLR, DE 3220/36.
[36] *TLAS*, 26 (1950), 8. The lecture was not reported in *Transactions* and does not appear to have been published.
[37] VCH, Pugh to Hoskins, 9 Mar 1950.
[38] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 13 Mar 1950.
[39] VCH, Hoskins to Milne, 24 Jan 1950; Milne to Hoskins, 27 Jan 1950.

volumes, with a volume for each hundred, or 40–50 parishes per volume. The first one, on Gartree Hundred, he hoped to have ready by Spring 1952.[40]

Hoskins's optimism was commendable, but persuading his authors to produce proved much more difficult than he seems to have anticipated and, when they did so, to meet his own rigorous standards. The section on hunting for volume II (subsequently volume III) was to be written by Major Guy Paget, a scion of a local gentry family, and a member of the VCH Leicestershire committee. Hoskins rejected his entry 'out of hand' because (as he told Pugh):

> he could not be made to conform to any of the rules, refused to alter a line when I returned his contribution with my suggestions for improvement, and now says he wants to put the whole matter before the Editorial Committee, a step which I welcome though it will mean an unseemly wrangle I fear. I need hardly say that I propose to stick to my guns over this. You will have no idea what his stuff was like, which is a pity.

Pugh evidently defended Hoskins's decision to Paget, repeating the mantra that the editor's decision was final.[41] Subsequently the problem solved itself in a rather tragic way, although Hoskins could scarcely hide his relief when, writing to Pugh on 26 March 1952, he reported that Paget 'killed himself in the hunting field, or perhaps I should say "was killed" to avoid ambiguity. It was, I imagine, his idea of the perfect end – knowing him as I did – and it had the incidental effect, if one isn't being too unkind, of solving for us what was an insoluble problem.' He promptly signed up Colin Ellis to finish the article which he believed would ensure the final product would be 'perfectly satisfactory'.[42] The article appeared under joint authorship.

Hoskins was soon wilting under the strain. McKinley had proved to be a key appointment, and the editorial board agreed in October 1950 to increase his salary from £400 to £450 a year. It also accepted the need to relieve Hoskins himself, and for 1951 Dr C. H. Thompson was appointed as co-editor. For all his energy Hoskins could not prevent slippage. In January 1950 he told the Leicestershire committee that he hoped to have all the contributions for volumes II and III ready by the end of the year, with one or two coming in no later than March 1951. By January 1951 he was anticipating volume II reaching Central Office in the middle of the summer, and volume III later in the year. Neither had reached completion when in June 1951 Hoskins was appointed to a Readership in Economic History at Oxford.[43] According to Joan Thirsk he had become 'increasingly fretful and finally exasperated with committees, the tedium and frustrations of their meetings, and the thankless burdens of editorship'. He had no intention of giving up; in fact, he confidently expected to remain as editor while the two volumes currently in preparation were being completed, and then to resign in favour of McKinley, 'who can do the topographical volumes, and will do them well under the supervision of [Jack] Simmons here'.[44]

40 VCH, Pugh to Milne, 15 Mar 1950.
41 VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 11 Oct 1950; Pugh to Hoskins, 14 Nov 1950.
42 VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 26 Mar 1952.
43 ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board, 27 Oct 1950; VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 21 Jan 1951.
44 Thirsk, 'William George Hoskins', 347; VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 8 June 1951.

He had been let down on religious houses by Hamilton Thompson, who was in poor health and died in 1952 without doing any of the work. He tried to persuade Pugh to loan him central staff to do the research, but was refused.[45] He was furious: 'I am deeply perturbed by your inability to help us in the present emergency over the Leicestershire volume' he told Pugh. 'It was clearly said at the outset that such expert help would be available in London if required.' Nor would he accept Pugh's suggestion of leaving the religious houses chapter to a later volume: 'its proper place is in volume II…. The present emergency was none of our making: it could not have been foreseen. I would have thought if there was ever a case for receiving help from the central staff, this was it.' Part of his haste was because he had to resign the editorship by 30 June 1952 by the terms of his appointment at Oxford. He now threatened to resign early 'if I see no prospect of completing even volume II, as it was originally planned and as it was quite proper to plan it…. I am not prepared to linger on doing nothing effective towards the completion of the Leicestershire task.'[46]

Pugh later recalled that Hoskins 'asked me at very short notice to provide someone on my staff to revise the accounts of Leicestershire religious houses. I explained that such requests could not be acceded to at such short notice. WGH was annoyed and only abated his annoyance when he learnt that the only available person was [Benny] Wells who was leaving the service of the I.H.R.'[47] Hoskins calmed down and after an intervention from Simmons agreed that McKinley, who Hoskins referred to as 'a willing horse', should update the original work of Sister Elspeth.[48] Working, if not exactly cordial, relations were re-established.

By 10 October 1951 it was clear that Hoskins's hopes were fading. When he wrote his editorial report for the Leicestershire committee he hoped that volume II might reach the central office by the end of the year. McKinley had revised and updated the religious houses chapters, as well as sections on mining and quarrying, and banking, but Hoskins was still awaiting five chapters, including Simmons's contribution on railways. Volume III (on Leicester) was even less well advanced, although he remained optimistic about having it ready for Spring 1952. He noted also that McKinley was giving lectures on local history at the Department of Adult Education on Market Harborough and Kibworth: 'It may well bring in a number of contributors or helpers in the completion of the parish histories.' Great and Little Stretton, Great Glen and King's Norton were complete and work was reported to be proceeding on Castle Donington (Lee) and Market Harborough.[49]

McKinley succeeded Hoskins as editor on 1 July 1952, with a salary of £650. If he thought he now had full responsibility for the VCH in Leicestershire he was

[45] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 13 June 1951.
[46] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 22 June 1951.
[47] VCH, 'Notes of the General Editor's Relations with Leicestershire editors, 1952–5' (1977) (hereafter Pugh 1977). The notes are annotated by Pugh: 'They do not form a comprehensive record but paint a picture.'
[48] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 13 June, 25 July 1951; Pugh to Hoskins, 19 June 1951.
[49] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial board papers including a statement by Hoskins, 3 Oct 1951, and editor's report dated 10 Oct 1951.

soon disabused because Hoskins was not about to allow him to take over unfinished business: 'I shall be completing the editing of volume II in collaboration with him', Hoskins noted, 'and possibly volume III (the City of Leicester) also'. Hoskins wanted at least one of these to be published 'before our public money runs out, or we stand no chance at all of getting any more'. Also in July 1952 Hoskins promised the material to Pugh, and urged a publication date before their money ran out or 'we shall run the serious risk of a complete collapse of local interest, not to say the total drying up of all the income'. He sent the first batch of material to London on 7 August 1952.[50]

It now transpired that the material was far too extensive. It ran to almost 300,000 words without footnotes, and was in fact the equivalent of two volumes 'of the standard post-war size'. Hoskins reckoned the first of the two volumes would be around 280 pages. The result was a decision to divide the county of Leicestershire volume (II) into two (II and III), with the first volume covering religious houses, political and parliamentary history and agrarian history, and running to about 150,000 words, and the second volume including the sections omitted (industry and trade, communications, population, art history and patronage, education, Roman Catholicism and sport). Simmons's promised chapter on cultural history appears to have been omitted at this point. The volume was to run to 130,000 words. The City of Leicester was still to be covered in a separate volume, but this would now be number IV.

Still there was trouble ahead when Hoskins objected to a directive from Pugh about abbreviated references, and insisted on sending the material to London and leaving the general editor to sort out any difficulties. He and McKinley would sort out the discrepancies in the second volume on the county. Hoskins and McKinley wrote a joint editorial report on 22 September 1952 noting that volume II had gone to London, and that volume III (now renumbered to be the second general volume on the county) should be completed by the end of October. The Board also accepted that following the death of Hamilton Thompson, his place on the committee should be taken by Hoskins's successor at Leicester, H. P. R. Finberg.[51] In fact, in June 1953 Hoskins was asked to rejoin the editorial board, and the county committee.

The first of the two volumes was in galley proof by January 1953, with Hoskins still very much in the driving seat. In February he wrote to Pugh from All Souls, returning 'the completed Hilton chapter at last. I hope I have done all to it that I promised.' He had sent a copy to Rodney Hilton. But he then became annoyed with Pugh for not acting quickly enough; as Pugh later recalled, in September 1953: 'WGH and Jack Simmons pressed me in somewhat hostile tones to bring out II. I explained that I was as anxious for its appearance as they.' This was to be a recurring theme.[52]

[50] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 13 May, 18 July, 7 Aug 1952.
[51] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 26 Aug 1952; ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Board Report, 22 Sept 1952.
[52] VCH, Pugh to Hoskins, 27 Jan 1953; Hoskins to Pugh, 8 Feb 1953; Pugh, 1977; ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board Report, 11 June 1953.

As the first of the two county volumes now moving towards publication, a new issue arose over the dedication. Pugh later recalled that 'WGH asked me privately whether II could be dedicated to Sir Robert Martin. I explained that each volume was inscribed to the memory of Queen Victoria, and that great importance was attached to the continuation of this practice. The request was then withdrawn.' Pugh seems to have forgotten that McKinley also pressed him on the matter, writing on 24 July 1953:

> Professor Simmons has suggested to me that in view of the great part played by Sir Robert Martin in reviving the V.C.H. in Leicestershire and in securing its continuance, it is very desirable to make some special acknowledgement to him. The Professor suggests that this could best be done by dedicating to Sir Robert the new volumes of the history, or at least vol. II. This of course raises difficulties as the V.C.H. as a whole is dedicated to Queen Victoria. I feel however that effort should be made to overcome this disadvantage. To dedicate the Leicestershire V.C.H. to Sir Robert would not only please Sir Robert himself very greatly, but it would be very favourably received in the county generally. Some special recognition of his services is undoubtedly called for, and if it should prove quite impossible to include a dedication to him, I think that some special reference to his efforts should be made in the preface. I may mention that there is a precedent, as V.C.H. Rutland II was dedicated to a private person.

Pugh refused to be moved, responding to McKinley on 8 August 1953:

> First, the dedication of each volume to Queen Victoria's memory is treated with deep seriousness here and periodically forms the subject of correspondence with the Palace. For this reason we could not, in my judgement, introduce a second dedication without reference to the Queen. I do not feel that I can raise the question in that quarter at the present time, notwithstanding the partial precedent set in the case of Rutland II.

He went on to add his concerns about setting a precedent since there were committees in other counties and their chairmen had also moved mountains such as Alderman Robins in Wiltshire, while elsewhere chairmen were not necessarily very active. Despite this defensive stand, at a meeting in September 1953 the request was renewed by Jack Simmons when Pugh gave the same answer. But the VCH committee was less stubborn than the general editor: 'The upshot', Pugh later recalled, was that 'the VCH committee agreed to give a leather-bound copy of each volume to each chairman and an excessively fulsome praise of Sir Robert was inserted in the volume'.[53]

Pugh, of course, wrote the editorial introduction. He sent it to Hoskins for approval on 2 March 1954: 'I enclose the draft of the Editorial Note to VCH Leicestershire II and of the title-page to that volume. The draft has already passed through McKinley but I should like you to see it also, in case you have any comments to make.' Hoskins responded positively without any apparent concern that Pugh had overdone the fulsome praise:

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[53] Pugh, 1977: VCH, Pugh to Hoskins, 5 Mar 1954: 'It was decided by the central V.C.H. Committee last term that Sir Robert Martin should receive a copy of Leicestershire II bound in half-leather on publication.'

> It now begins to look exciting after all these years of preparation. I have taken out one of my degrees – it looks too much with all this lettering. The draft Editorial Note is admirable. Your reference to Sir Robert Martin is excellent. Would it be possible to present him with a complimentary copy of the volume, do you think? It would be a handsome gesture, which would delight him personally.[54]

Hoskins added that he had discussed whose names should appear in the preliminary matter as the editors, and had agreed with McKinley that volumes II and III should be edited by Hoskins assisted by McKinley, volume IV should be edited by McKinley assisted by Hoskins, and volume V onwards by McKinley alone: 'This seemed to represent a fair attribution of the credit and labour.'[55]

Hoskins appeared on the title page as W. G. Hoskins, M.A., Ph.D.: he was not named as a contributor of any of the articles to volume II. Pugh acknowledged in the editorial note that he had 'planned the present volume, its successor, and the articles which are to form the history of Leicester City and edited much of the material submitted'. Of Martin he wrote: 'deep gratitude must be felt, as much by the University of London as by Leicestershire, to Sir Robert Martin, Chairman alike of the Leicestershire County Council and of the local V.C.H. Committee. His lively interest in the Leicestershire history and powerful local influence have contributed most valuably to the whole enterprise.' The contribution of Professor Jack Simmons was also acknowledged.[56]

Even with publication looming there was still time for trouble. At a meeting of the VCH Leicestershire general committee on 25 June 1954 which Pugh was unable to attend due to illness, with volume III going through the press, Colin Ellis raised (as Pugh recalled it) 'the question of some stylistic alterations that I had made in the text of a (poor) article that he had written'. McKinley told the committee 'that certain difficulties had arisen between the General Editor and himself regarding contributions to Volume III', and the situation deteriorated further following the meeting when McKinley wrote to Pugh about the Ellis complaint. As Pugh later recalled: 'I received a letter from McKinley couched in very unsuitable terms about this incident. I summoned McKinley and returned the letter to him saying that I could not accept it. There was also a milder protest from Professor Allaway. These incidents were frequently reverted to by McKinley.'[57] The articles in question must have been Allaway's piece on Adult and Further Education, and Ellis's revision of the troublesome text on hunting.

With volumes II and III finally out in 1954 and 1955 respectively, attention turned to volume IV on Leicester. McKinley reported on 9 May 1955 to the Leicestershire editorial board that completion had taken longer than anticipated 'partly through the dilatoriness of one contributor';[58] in fact, the contributor on Roman Leicester was Frank Cottrill, formerly Keeper of Archaeology at Leicester Museum. He moved to a similar position in Winchester in 1947, and simply did not have the time to complete the work. In the role of editor, McKinley struggled

[54] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 4 Mar 1954.
[55] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh, 4 Mar 1954.
[56] VCH *Leicestershire* II (1954), editorial note.
[57] Pugh, 1977; ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board Minutes, 25 June 1965.
[58] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board Report, 9 May 1955.

to keep up with Pugh, who thought him dilatory and inefficient. When in October 1955 McKinley submitted several articles for volume IV, Pugh found them 'very inferior and returned them for revision':

> McKinley sent them back with the minimum of change and with the bland assertion that he thought they would do. The other articles then arrived, several of them disorderly or unfinished and in two instances overlapping. The minimum of help was given to my staff and me in putting these things right. Indeed every suggested change was resisted in terms that were often offensive. My right to alter any articles was also questioned.[59]

Relations with Pugh remained hostile. McKinley met Pugh on 17 November, but 'nothing very much emerged from this meeting, except that I asked for and was promised an outline of the design of this volume (which was sent on 30 November).... Mr McKinley left London with unexpected haste and without saying good-bye to me.'[60] Janet Martin, McKinley's assistant 1953–5, recalls how he 'wrestled to get contributions out of other people' for volume IV. Pugh, she also recalls, was 'a terrible trial' and McKinley 'was totally incapable of managing such a man'.[61]

Pugh finally received the rest of volume IV on 6 December 1955, and the volume came out in 1958 with nothing on Roman Leicester. It was acknowledged in the editorial note to be the first VCH volume 'to be devoted exclusively to the history of a provincial town', and 'it was planned by Dr W. G. Hoskins, while still Reader in English Local History at the University College, Leicester, now the University of Leicester. Dr Hoskins also commissioned many of the articles that form the volume, but, owing to his departure for Oxford, he was unable to edit them.'[62]

While these volumes were slowly working through the VCH Central office, McKinley returned to work on the Gartree Hundred volume, with the help from October 1953 of an assistant editor, Mrs Janet Martin, who was completing a BLitt. degree at St Hilda's, Oxford, and also writing a topographical entry for the VCH Oxford series. With six, rather than the original two, topographical volumes now planned, funding was becoming an issue. A joint report by Pugh and McKinley, dated 12 May 1956, set out the difficulties. Hoskins had established the project 'as a kind of by-product of his academic responsibilities as Reader in English Local History at the University College', but after he left it was necessary to replace him with a paid editor (McKinley), and then to appoint an assistant (Martin). Work had progressed satisfactorily, but only 17 of the anticipated 230 topographical studies (for the county) had been finished, and among parishes yet to be researched were Market Harborough, Melton Mowbray and Loughborough. To continue, the contributing bodies needed to increase their contributions to provide an annual total of £2,400.[63]

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[59] Pugh 1977.
[60] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board Report, 7 Nov 1955; Pugh, 1977.
[61] Personal communication, 22 May 2009; Susan Reynolds recalls McKinley being 'a gloomy character ... difficult to deal with ... he visited as rarely as he could and when he had to he was remote and pretty unfriendly'.
[62] VCH *Leicester*, IV (1958), editorial note.
[63] ROLLR, DE 3220, Editorial Board Report, 12 May 1956.

While this message was being absorbed by the various funding bodies, McKinley and Martin continued with their work, and by October 1956 McKinley was reporting that 32 of the 47 Gartree parishes had been completed, and that work was in progress on other parishes and the history of Market Harborough. He expected the volume to be finished by the end of 1957. In November the VCH committee agreed to approach the city and county with a view to increasing their contributions in order to keep the project going until 1963 and give some hope of completing the topographical volumes.[64] The original grants from 1948 were renewed without contention in 1952.[65]

By 1957, however, the times were not propitious, and on 18 January Simmons wrote to Pugh to tell him the bad news. Pugh should expect to receive notice of a meeting of the committee on 7 February:

> this has been called to advise the Committee to abandon the History altogether at least for the time being. I saw Sir Robert Martin today and he said there was not the least hope that an approach to the County Council for funds would be successful – this of course after he had sounded the Finance Committee informally. All their estimates are to be pruned by 2.5% and it will be virtually impossible to get permission for any additional expenditure even on the most necessary objects. If the County Council, under the sympathetic leadership of Sir Robert Martin, takes this view, it isn't likely that the City Council will make any grant at all. I fear therefore that the sensible course to take will be to recognise that circumstances have been too strong for us and to abandon the completion of the History at vol. V. I hope it will be possible to take up the matter again and carry vols VI–X through when the general financial position is more favourable.[66]

Sir Robert Martin was gloomy and blunt, and he told the committee that 'he had had preliminary conversations with regard to the appeal to the Local Authorities for a further and larger grant to the work of the VCH of Leicester and that the impression he had formed was that it would be wiser not to press the application during the present financial emergency'.[67]

With the project running out of money McKinley jumped ship and on 21 May 1957 he wrote his final report as editor before he was to depart in August. He noted that it would not be possible to complete Gartree Hundred before he left, and that eight or nine parishes would be unfinished.[68] The editorial committee met on 12 June 1957 when it agreed on the need to try to complete Gartree Hundred 'by engaging a competent person on a temporary basis for one year at a salary of £1000'.[69] In effect, this was to use the money that they could guarantee would be available before the county council withdrew its support. John Michael Lee, then at Eastbourne College, was invited by Simmons to apply. With references from

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[64] Ed Rep 30 Oct 1956, VCH Leics general comm. minutes 22/11/56.
[65] ROLLR DE 3220/35, Sir Robert Martin to K. Goodacre, town clerk of Leicester, 27 Nov 1952.
[66] VCH Archive, Professor Jack Simmons to Pugh, 18 Jan 1957; Pugh to Simmons, 24 Jan 1957.
[67] ROLLR DE 3220, Minutes of the General Committee, Leicester, 7 Feb 1957.
[68] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Report, 21 May 1957.
[69] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Committee minutes, 12 June 1957; VCH Archive, Memo written by Pugh, 4 June 1957.

Hoskins and Simmons, and with parish histories for Castle Donington and Lubenham already written, he was the obvious front runner for the position of temporary local editor. He took up the appointment on 27 August 1957, and was attached to the Leicester History department for 1957–8.[70] His commission was to complete a manuscript for each of the seven ancient parishes and two parts of parishes (18 places in total) on which no work had been done by the previous editors. But what he found was that

> only five ancient parishes (10 places) had been completely finished in accordance with modern V.C.H. requirements; that fifteen ancient parishes and four parts of parishes (21 places) either lacked certain necessary sections (e.g. parish administration, charities), or had not received adequate treatment in topography and architecture; and more important, that thirteen ancient parishes (16 places) would require quite a considerable amount of re-writing, particularly those written more than five years ago. It appeared that to finish the whole Hundred was more than a year's work for a single person.[71]

Lee worked hard. By April 1958 he had completed articles on the three ancient parishes (6 places) which remained to be written in the first half of the alphabetical list (B–K), and on the hundred of Gartree itself as an introduction, for which a map has been drawn. He had also revised articles on twelve parishes, and searched the printed sources to the remaining four ancient parishes and two parts of parishes (12 places) for which at that time no articles had been prepared. He expected to complete work on B–K, the Hundred article, and the map before his contract ended.[72]

Lee's report was considered at a meeting of the VCH Leicestershire committee on 30 April 1958 which proved to be exceptionally contentious. It was agreed that Lee could only be expected to complete the B–K section, and that the VCH Central Office would attempt to have it sent to the press by the end of December 1958 to be published as Gartree Hundred Part I.[73] The meeting heard that applications to the county and city councils had met with limited success. The city had agreed to funding for a further 12 months (£500) in the 1958–9 financial year, and the county had agreed to contribute £250 in each of the financial years 1958–9 and 1959–60. This was obviously good news, given Sir Robert Martin's earlier gloom, but Pugh was having none of it and told the committee that this would be insufficient to complete the volume. The committee was 'disturbed by the General Editor's reluctance to give a firm date when the MSS could go to press'. All he would say was that the Central Office would expect to send Gartree Hundred I (B–K) to press by the end of 1958.

In the face of Pugh's intransigence, the meeting then discussed what to do. Simmons and Hoskins argued that since there was no guarantee that the volume would be finished before the funding ran out, the two councils should be informed

[70] John Michael Lee, 'Discovering Provincial Society through the Hoskins circle', unpublished talk. Copy in VCH archives.
[71] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Board Report, 15 Apr 1958.
[72] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Report, 15 Apr 1958.
[73] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Report, 15 Apr 1958.

of this situation.[74] According to Pugh, writing later, the meeting was close to agreeing

> to call for the immediate payment of the 1958–9 grants, ask Mr Lee to stay for about six months and put at least a sum of about £250 at my disposal. Dr Hoskins, however, then moved, and Professor Simmons accepted, a reference back to the two Authorities on the ground that if their grants were drawn upon without ensuring the completion of Gartree there might be some grounds for a charge of deception. I acquiesced in this, believing that the reference-back was probably a formality quickly disposed of. It was only after the meeting that I learnt privately from Dr Parker [Dr Leslie A. Parker, the county archivist] that the first stage of the reference-back could not begin before July. By that time of course there is a strong probability that Mr Lee will have made up his mind to take some other post.

Pugh concluded in his own mind that

> some members of the Committee (particularly Professor Simmons and Mr Ellis) wish first to have a 'row' either with the Institute or with me, and then to proclaim to the world that cooperation is impossible and that they must publish Gartree themselves…. Hitherto I thought the Leicestershire Committee had mismanaged its affairs but was fundamentally well disposed to the VCH. I am now most strongly of the opinion that its leading members are ill-intentioned and are trying to make trouble for the Institute and its officers. Though the facts are hard to prove I have reason to think that they are also trying to stir up dissention in other committees.[75]

Both sides were clearly furious at the outcome of this meeting, but while Pugh could retreat back to London, it was Michael Lee who found himself caught between the warring factions. On 3 June Parker reported to Milne at the IHR that he and Lee were trying to formulate a plan to make sure Gartree Hundred could be finished, but the funds would run out by the end of August which was also when Lee's contract expired. Leicester had previously agreed to a grant of £500 for the year 1958–9 so it could be finished, and the county council to £250 in 1958–9 and 1959–60, but that the committee was 'disturbed by the General Editor's reluctance to give a firm date when the MSS could go to press'. As a result, the city had decided to withdraw its grant.[76]

Lee was also working on a plan to see Gartree finished before his money ran out. He wrote to Pugh on 9 June 1958 setting out the various issues and options as he saw them:

> the local committee has no definite plans and is at the moment just in the throes of conflicting rumours and intrigue. What I fear is that Sir Robert [Martin] will become tired of this and will cease trying to work for a solution. Here, it seems to me, is an excellent opportunity to show your good will and weigh in with a definite proposal to Sir Robert himself. My position here will be easier if you could send a definite offer from the Institute to finish Gartree for a certain sum within a certain time – or at least if you could take the initiative in setting negotiations for a settlement moving. It would of course be better if you and I could agree on our proposal…. I have offered to write up the unfinished parishes in a part-time capacity….

[74] ROLLR DE 3220, Committee minutes, 30 Apr 1958; Pugh, 1977.
[75] VCH, Pugh memo to IHR Director, 29 May 1958.
[76] VCH, L. A. Parker to Milne, 3 June 1958.

The problem as Lee saw it was that relations had completely broken down. 'Simmons', he continued, 'has told Parker that the initiative will never come from London. Parker and I feel that it will cut the ground from under Simmons feet if you come in at this stage with a firm and generous offer…. You see, what has happened with the City Museums and Library Committee is that they have passed a vote of what they say is "no confidence" in the London end of the VCH organisation.' Lee was clearly fearful that the whole project would collapse: 'I am afraid that the Simmons party will be able to persuade the County Records Committee to do the same unless we can establish it clearly that the VCH is perfectly prepared to negotiate a business-like agreement….'

Simmons, according to Lee, was intending to subvert the VCH committee in order to get his way:

> Simmons has suggested that instead of calling a proper VCH Committee before the next County Records Committee on 4 July, Parker should gather together those members of the VCH Committee who are also on the Records Committee to discover what attitude they are to take. (This involves Simmons, Col. Freer, the Rev. Mr Adams and Mrs Keay, but I understand Mrs Keay never turns up.) I do wish to prevent this. All it will mean I am sure is that Simmons will poison Freer and Adams against us. But if you made a definite proposal now and arranged a meeting of the respective officers as I have suggested to draft a plan to be presented to the local VCH committee before 4 July, the meeting which Simmons is suggesting would lose its point…. Your natural reluctance to commit the Institute to an agreement which involves a time-limit might be a stumbling block. Can you see any way round this? I understand from the Director of the Museum that the City Committee had been given to understand (presumably by Colin Ellis and Simmons) that one could never secure any kind of guarantee from the VCH.

Lee's proposal made sense in the light of the local belief that the VCH Central Office would never offer a guarantee. It was because of their annoyance over this that Hoskins and Simmons wanted the money to be retained in Leicestershire, whereas before 30 April Hoskins had been willing to support a proposal for the funds to be used to pay for the VCH Central Office to finish the volume. With no guarantees on the table that offer had been retracted on 7 June.[77] On 10 June, Parker wrote to Milne to say that in view of the 'considerable local discontent with the way the history is handled at your end', they proposed the convening of a meeting to involve the IHR Director, Pugh, Sir Robert Martin, Lee and himself.

In these combustible circumstances the meeting was called on 24 June in Leicester. Present were Sir Robert Martin, Colin Ellis, L. A. Parker, Lee, the IHR Director Professor J. Goronway Edwards, Taylor Milne and Pugh, and the intention was 'to ascertain whether or not some means could be found to overcome the difficulties which had arisen with the parish histories for Gartree Hundred'. An unsigned memorandum from this meeting recorded that 'the crux of the matter seemed to be a feeling among members of the Leicestershire Committee that the London Office was reluctant to give a definite limit as to what it would require in the way of finance from the local body in order to complete the whole of Gartree, and firm dates when Gartree Part I and Gartree Part II could go to

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[77] VCH, R50, J. M. Lee to Pugh, 7, 9 June 1958.

press'. The London contingent accepted that £500 would cover the cost of seeing the two parts into print, and that if Lee could be retained for a further six months, 'there was a reasonable probability that Gartree B–K would go to press by the end of the calendar year 1958, and Gartree L–W by the end of 1959'. The total requirement would be £1,090, and Lee agreed to accept a pay cut if he was asked to stay for the extra time. If the county and city councils paid up their promised sums for 1958–60, in other words, the books should be finished.[78]

All this was fine, but naturally enough Lee was concerned with his own future. On 3 June he was interviewed for a research post in the Department of Government at Manchester, and on 14 July 1958 he told Pugh's assistant, Christopher Elrington, that he had been offered the position which he thought he should take. His reluctance to stay on is hardly surprising, but it was doubly unfortunate that only five days later he was able to tell Elrington that the financial situation was saved because the Museum Committee had now endorsed the grant to the VCH: 'and the Editor can now draw on local funds for completing the work. The Hoskins-Simmons policy has been defeated.'

As a result of these various manoeuvres the only real business of the Editorial Committee when it met on 22 July 1958, with Hoskins present, was to confirm an extension of Lee's contract to the end of September 1958, before he departed for Manchester. His services were to be retained thereafter in a part-time capacity by payment of an honorarium to enable him to continue work on parishes L–W. The intention was that he should complete B–K before he left in September, and L–W by the end of December 1959. The City members were not particularly happy with this arrangement: Lee told Elrington on 23 July that 'the only trouble was caused by the City members who said that if I did not stay 6 months they thought the City would withdraw its money. Hoskins and Simmons said hardly a word and Sir Robert Martin managed the whole meeting splendidly. The prospect is not very bright but if the City back out, the county may stay with us.'[79]

At the end of September 1958 Lee departed for Manchester, and for the first time since 1949 there was no member of staff for the VCH Leicestershire.[80] The University Library agreed to retain the VCH notes prepared for the Gartree volumes,[81] and a slightly mysterious leaflet was circulated pointing out that from 1 October there would be no local editor, the VCH office would close, and that Gartree Hundred would need to be finished 'under a part-time editor [Lee] who will be assisted by voluntary helpers'. Volunteers were asked to contact Rev Douglas Adams of Market Harborough, who had been a member of the VCH Leicestershire General Committee since 1952.[82]

Lee continued to work part-time on the parish histories, but to try to avoid some of the accusations of incompetence that had come from Leicester, it was

[78] VCH, Memo of 24 June 1958 meeting.
[79] ROLLR DE 3220, Editorial Board minutes, 22 July 1958; General Committee minutes, 22 July 1958; VCH, Lee to Christopher Elrington, 23 July 1958.
[80] Lee's other contribution to scholarship while at Leicester was *Leicestershire History: a handlist to printed sources in the libraries of Leicester* (Leicester, Vaughan College Papers, 4, 1958).
[81] VCH, Pugh to Miss Rhoda Bennett, 22 Sept 1958; Miss Bennett to Pugh, 23 Sept 1958.
[82] ROLLR DE 3072/159.

agreed to set up a sub-committee to handle the Leicestershire volumes. Pugh prepared a memo for the committee:

> work began on the hundred in 1950 but until 1957 it was never carried on intensively, for during those years Mr McKinley's main preoccupation, naturally enough was the preparation of volumes II–IV. When Mr Lee arrived in August 1957 he found the texts of over 30 articles, hardly one of which was ready for the press. Many were only roughly typed… some lacked whole sections; and the architectural descriptions were incomplete or needed complete revision. Apart, therefore, from writing the histories of three unwritten parishes, Mr Lee has had a great deal of disorder to clear up.[83]

By the time he left for Manchester, Lee had handed over 23 articles to Pugh, together with the introductory Hundred article. The parishes B–K were complete except for the architectural entries on which Mrs Margaret Tomlinson, the VCH architectural editor, was still working. Pugh found that several of the 13 articles 'are not at present of an acceptable quality, and cannot be published without considerable revision… many of the articles exhibit those shortcomings that are sometimes thought to characterise the "old style" VCH'. This is because some sources had not been used, including the tithe awards and Parliamentary Surveys. Even more concerning was the fact that altogether they were only 180,000 words: 'and, though we now favour short volumes, it may be felt that, even with an index, this is too little for a volume'. Of the 21 articles for the proposed L–W volume, three were unwritten and the rest would need a good deal of work: 'the fact is that the 44 articles together would make a volume of very suitable size'.[84]

This latter finding was endorsed at the first meeting of the sub-committee called for 20 October 1958, which decided that Central Office would need to take responsibility for the completion of the project in a single volume. Some of the B–K parishes were 'not yet of an acceptable quality and will need considerable revision', and the calculations about L–W suggested that it was too short to be a single volume. To fund this work the Central Office proposed to claim the unspent £750 from Leicestershire to put towards completion of the work.[85]

This, inevitably, opened up the old debate about where the money should be spent, and when Pugh wrote to Lee on 28 October 1958 to tell him the sub-committee's decision Lee responded on 29 October negatively:

> I cannot envisage the local committee agreeing to pay over any balance of money to the IHR. At least, when I put out feelers to discover what opinion on the subject was last May–June time, both Parker and Wells were against the idea. Would the establishment of a local fund which you are authorised to spend be acceptable?... The only thing that worries me is the local attitude that 'nothing shall go to London'. You must confess that this was one of the main reasons for appointing me in 1957.

Pugh now had to defend this position at a meeting of the VCH Leicestershire Committee called in Leicester on 10 November 1958, which would consider the

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83 VCH, Committee Minutes, 1958–62.
84 VCH, Pugh memo, 13 Oct 1958.
85 VCH, Professor J. G. Edwards to Sir Robert Martin, 23 Oct 1958.

terms of Professor Edwards's letter, pre-circulated to members. Neither Hoskins nor Colin Ellis could attend, but both made their views known to Parker in no uncertain terms. Hoskins wrote to Parker from All Souls on 7 November in characteristically combative terms:

> In the first place I do not really care for the setting-up of a Sub-Committee in London on the Victoria History of Gartree (as Prof. Edwards calls it) without, apparently, any representative from Leicestershire being present or being able to express any contentious views on this contentious question. However, this Sub-Committee has not only been set up but has apparently made up its mind without the slightest reference to us in Leicestershire as to the best course of action to be taken. This seems to me an extension of the odious principle that 'the gentleman in Whitehall knows best' – a principle which I heartily oppose and shall always oppose. I do not care for London bureaucracies of any kind.
>
> As to the Sub-Committee's conclusions about the inadequate length of the Gartree volumes, if separated into two parts, this is precisely what Prof. Simmons and I (and possibly others on our General Committee) said from the beginning. This division into two miserably thin volumes was entirely Pugh's idea from the start, and we opposed it as long as we were able. But since matters of publication did not come within the province of the Local Committee, we were obliged to give way.
>
> My main point, however, is that I am wholly against the handing-over of the Gartree material, and even more so the money from local sources to the Central Committee in London. There is no firm guarantee, to put it bluntly, that the Gartree material will not moulder for years in the basement of the Institute of Historical Research, like so much other material gathered over the past decades. Prof. Edwards's letter makes no promises about when the Gartree material will be published, only that 'the central editorial staff will proceed with this work forthwith, *as far as the general needs of the History allow*' (my italics). I do not regard this as at all a satisfactory guarantee of early publication, especially in the light of our experience of the central editorial policy during the years we have been working on the Leicestershire history.
>
> The matter is an even more fundamental one than this. I am convinced and have always been convinced, that one simply cannot write English local history sitting on one's backside in a London office or a London library. I have seen examples of this kind of 'local history' and they give themselves away at a glance. I should hate to think that we had had any of our Leicestershire local history manufactured in the Metropolis by people who had never seen the county and who think that all history is to be found in documents.
>
> I would like to see the Gartree material kept in Leicestershire (possibly in the County Record Office) until such time as it is thought feasible to initiate a topographical survey of our own, parish by parish, possibly under the aegis of the new University of Leicester. There is a precedent for publishing outside the Victoria County History; the magnificent *History of Northumberland* is a witness of this.

Ellis was equally adamant, telling Sir Robert Martin on 6 November 1958:

> I am obliged to say that in my opinion the procedure they propose appears quite unacceptable.... Their proposals seem to be that we should hand over to them £750 and all the work which has already been done, and for which we have paid the local editor, in return for a vague understanding that they would complete the Gartree volume as and when it might be convenient for them to do so. I am afraid that all our material would leave Leicestershire and be deposited in their archives for an indefinite time.

Ellis proposed instead that the notes be retained 'in local custody where they will be available to students, and that we shall explore the possibility of publishing the material ourselves and, of course, reimbursing ourselves to any extent possible by the sale of our publications'.[86]

The minutes of the 10 November meeting record that there was 'considerable discussion' as to the time it would take for the VCH Central Office to complete the volume. Pugh expressed the view that 'in view of the other commitments of his office, it may be possible to send Gartree to press within four years'. The committee expressed 'the strong hope that the volume may be completed in a shorter time than this'.[87] The following day Sir Robert Martin wrote to Professor Edwards:

> Mr Pugh seemed unable to commit himself to any firm estimate of how long the work was likely to take, and I must emphasize that this point was of cardinal importance in the Committee's decision. They were quite unable to contemplate any such period as four years with any acquiescence, and I hope that they may be able to have some assurance that the work will be tracked and brought to a conclusion in a very much shorter time than that…. Two of those who were unable to be there, Professor Simmons and Mr C.D.B. Ellis, had written urging very strongly that the work should be completed locally, in order that the Gartree Volume should appear in a reasonably short time.

The letter makes no mention of any funding going to London and the minutes record only that the offer from London to complete the parish histories should be accepted, and that an approach should be made to the city and county councils to maintain their grants to the VCH.[88]

Edwards responded to Martin on 18 November 1958 to say that he was not surprised Pugh was non-committal given that they did not know what, if any, work Lee would be able to do, there was a good deal to do in terms of revising and in some cases updating articles, and 'Pugh has not yet had an opportunity of judging the amount of work that these revisions will involve'. He was glad to hear that the committee had decided to recommend that the county and city councils should implement their suspended grants since funding coming from Leicester would accelerate publication, but the volume would appear at some point even if the money was not forthcoming. In the wake of these discussions the county council agreed to maintain its full grant for 1958–9 in order to complete the Gartree work, but the city had pulled out after agreeing to meet half the debt outstanding when Lee left at the end of September 1958.[89]

The Leicestershire Committee did not meet again until 20 November 1961 when it accepted the resignations of Hoskins, Simmons and Ellis. Pugh, who attended, pre-circulated a report to the effect that volume V would contain 42 articles. A–K were completed, and for L–Z ten parishes needed to be revised and in some cases parish records consulted, 12 needed architectural details

[86] ROLLR DE 4330, Ellis to Martin, 6 Nov 1958.
[87] VCH, Committee Minutes, 1958–62, meeting 10 Nov 1958.
[88] Ibid.
[89] ROLLR DE 3220/35, Parker to ?, 13 Mar 1959.

incorporating, and about ten minor queries needed resolution. He hoped the volume would be ready by the end of the year. Pugh's assurances were accepted, and the committee resolved only to meet again when the book was completed. Lee, meantime, continued to revise parish entries funded from the remaining money which was held by Dr Parker.

The final meeting of the committee took place on 23 November 1964, when it was recorded that all the funds had been spent, less £41 14s 11d which remained in hand. Pugh told the committee that with the publication of volume V, a further five volumes would be needed to complete the county's Hundreds. He added that the IHR would prefer Leicestershire to follow the pattern established elsewhere and have the project funded by the county council to the tune of £4,000–£5,000 a year for up to 20 years. But he also noted that 'as the recruitment of qualified and experienced staff for the work is a very serious problem an immediate resumption of work on Leicestershire could not be contemplated'. The committee resolved that the project should continue and that the county council should be approached to undertake the necessary funding until the completion of the project.[90] The committee did not meet again, and if anyone approached the county council, the outcome is unknown.

By the end of 1962 volume V was more or less ready for the press. McKinley was consulted about the contents page, Janet Martin helped to read the proofs, and Hoskins declined to be mentioned, telling Pugh in March 1962 that:

> As regards Gartree Hundred, I am delighted of course to hear that things are so far advanced, and that we may expect the volume in the reasonably near future. I don't think I need see my piece on Great Stretton again, as I have lost my intimate knowledge of Leicestershire and have no access to local sources; so that I could do nothing effectively with it. To the best of my ability and knowledge, the piece on Great Stretton was accurate at the time I wrote it, and I certainly could not improve on it at this distance. I don't think you need explain that that small contribution to the volume is mine. It is hardly worth mentioning.[91]

When VCH Leicestershire V finally appeared in 1964 it did so with hardly any sign of Hoskins's influence. The topographical studies of Gaulby and Frisby and Great Stretton, and of Market Harborough, were all attributed to the assistant editors. The volume editorial ascription was J. M. Lee and R. A. McKinley. Eight parish histories were attributed to McKinley, 11 to Lee and 23 to Janet Martin. Dr Keith Allison, then senior assistant in the VCH Central office, had undertaken much of the editorial work required in London.[92] Publication was accompanied by a celebratory meeting of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society at which Michael Lee pointed to some of the highlights of the volume. He noted the oddity of starting the Leicestershire topographical volumes with an area which was so lightly populated, but added that it showed 'that places themselves have a history whatever their present population'.[93]

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[90] VCH, Leicestershire file 1960–4: Gen Committee Minutes, 23 Nov 1964.
[91] VCH, Hoskins to Pugh (from 3 St Leonard's Road, Exeter), 19 March 1962.
[92] VCH *Leicestershire* V (1964), xv.
[93] J. M. Lee, 'The Gartree Hundred', copy in the VCH archives.

The project survived for another decade. The VCH Leicestershire committee met for what turned out to be its final meeting on 23 November 1964, when it agreed that if the other five volumes were to be completed it would be necessary for the county council to take over financial responsibility for the project. This proposal was then referred to the County Records Committee, which recommended to the County Council at its meeting on 24 February 1965 that no action should be taken. Perhaps surprisingly, the council did not accept this, and passed the matter back to the Records Committee for further consideration. In 1967 the Records Committee appointed an ad hoc committee to look further into the possibilities of additional work. To quote Dr L. A. Parker's 1973 account of what happened next:

> A deep cleavage of opinion arose as to whether or not an alternative plan should replace the traditional Victoria County History and no conclusions were arrived at and since then no further action has been taken. Technically I suppose the General Committee of the VCH is awaiting an answer from the County Council to its request made in 1964. However, the General Committee has lost all its members (save C.C. representatives last appointed in 1970) either by resignation, death and non-appointment of representatives by the City of Leicester.[94]

The inertia which set in is perhaps not surprising, but an outstanding sum of £50 was repaid to the county council in 1970 in order to close down the financial side of the work,[95] and yet the county council continued to appoint representatives to sit on the non-meeting 'VCH History of Leicester Central Committee'. It was only in January 1974 that the county council approved a recommendation that since the committee had not met for ten years appointing representatives made little sense, although even now there was reluctance to take the final step:

> In view of the dormant state of the Committee there seems little point in this Committee appointing representatives to it…. The Committee is, therefore, recommended to take no action on the appointment of representatives to the General Committee… and that the Director Designate of Museums and Art Galleries be requested to look into the need to reopen the question of the Victoria County History.[96]

Whether or not the Director Designate did make any such investigations, the committee did not meet again.

To conclude, in the late 1940s, and in conjunction with, although not dependent on, the setting up of the Department of English Local History, W. G. Hoskins put together a consortium including the University College, the county and city councils, and a number of other groups including the Literary and Philosophical Society, to fund the revival of the VCH in the county. Since the publication of the first general volume in 1907 no further work had been done, although the VCH files turned out to contain a good deal of unpublished material that was transferred to Leicester for the project, and then revised. Hoskins was appointed local editor, inevitably, and threw his energy into completing the

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[94] ROLLR DE 3072/159, Parker to Mr P. Barratt, 2 Jan 1973.
[95] VCH R73, Parker to Pugh, 11 Dec 1970, Pugh to Parker, 15 Dec 1970.
[96] ROLLR DE 3072/159, G. R. Lang, County Secretary, report to Council, 7 Jan 1974.

general volumes (II and III), the first ever single volume VCH account of a town (IV) and the first of six planned topographical volumes (V – Gartree). It was an impressive record but it ran up against all the usual problems: authors who either failed altogether to produce – hence the absence of a chapter in volume IV on Roman Leicester – or had to be encouraged and still went way over deadlines and word lengths; funding which ran out because production was not fast enough; and the perils of working with local authorities who were only ever able to commit on five-year time periods for a project that needed at least another 20 years to complete when it finally closed in 1964.

Through the whole story runs Hoskins's relentless energy in which authors were hassled, and the VCH Central Office was regularly asked to undertake pieces of work which could not otherwise have been done. Hoskins produced – eventually – but quite what would have happened in Leicestershire had he not departed for Oxford in 1952 we cannot know. By the time he returned to the Department of English Local History in 1966, volumes II, III, IV and V had been published, and the project had run out of money. More crucially, he had grown cynical about the VCH Central Office's handling of the project, the time everything took, the reluctance to accept deadlines. For his part, Pugh found Hoskins and the project more generally after 1953 problematic. In 1977 he even wrote a long memorandum setting out his own recall of events, which he inserted into the VCH Leicestershire files in the IHR before he retired. He found Hoskins awkward, and the end result was the breakdown of relations between the Leicestershire committee and the Institute of Historical Research. It was a sad end to an ambitious project, but the recent revival of work suggests that the missing Hundred volumes are now firmly back on the local research agenda.