Family History in Lancashire

Family History in Lancashire: Issues and Approaches

Edited by

Andrew Gritt

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For Catherine, Laura and Hannah.

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INTRODUCTION

ANDY GRITT

This book is the product of a conference held in Preston in November 2006. The conference was organised jointly between the Institute of Local and Family History at the University of Central Lancashire and the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. The chapters by Michael Anderson, Alan Crosby and Elizabeth Roberts were all presented as papers on the day of the conference. Steve Caunce's chapter was added later and my own introductory chapter is designed to explore aspects of the relationship between family history and academic history.

There are several overlapping purposes to this book. First, is to bring together some of the leading scholarship on the history of the family in Lancashire from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Indeed, it could be argued that the serious modern study of the impact of the industrial revolution on the family began with the pioneering work of Michael Anderson in the 1960s – work which he has continued for forty years now. Although "pioneer" is a word that is over-used, it may equally be applied to Elizabeth Roberts, whose ground-breaking oral history research forms the basis of her contribution to this book. Alan Crosby is widely known for his diverse research output, and his detailed analysis of some extremely rare but valuable evidence sheds interesting light on how one particular family experienced the industrial revolution. Finally, Steve Caunce, whose research has focused on various aspects of northern economic and social development from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, brings some of this experience as well as his own personal history as a native Lancastrian to bear on the often thorny topic of the value of autobiography and fiction to historical study.

The second purpose of the book is to demonstrate that sources that are familiar to family historians can be used to develop wide-ranging arguments, without abandoning the central interest in the history of the family. The four contributors approach their subjects in contrasting ways, and although the book in no way provides comprehensive coverage of the history of the Lancashire family, the source material that underlies each of

the chapters – census returns, autobiography, oral history and fiction – provide a complementary body of evidence on which to base further studies. Crosby's detailed analysis of Benjamin Shaw, for instance, provides a human dimension to some of the figures resulting from Anderson's census analysis. Literary sources and personal testimony, whilst being subject to questionable representativeness, provide context for statistical analysis. Similarly, they often remind us of the importance of "community" and of friends and neighbours, rather than the narrow range of kin who form the basis of much conventional family history research. This book, therefore, whilst not being presented as a model in any way, might be used by family historians to help frame and conduct deeper and wider-ranging research than might otherwise be the case.

The third purpose of the book is to encourage further research, in particular research that combines elements of the different approaches applied to microhistorical contexts. Academic historians are beginning to move in this direction as the value of microhistorical research becomes more apparent. Some of the best microhistorical studies of recent years have been focused elsewhere in England. This is at once unfortunate, and at the same time opportune. Hilda Kean's pioneering work *London Stories*, for instance, is an engaging, personal account of the authors' family, knitting together family history, academic context and a personal intellectual journey to form a rich narrative of the evolution of families, their public archival record and the private artefactual remnants.[1] Michael Collins' *Folk Like Us*, is a deservedly award-winning journalistic biography of the English white working class. Simplistic in its methods, and very much focused on Southwark, London, it nevertheless is an exemplar of how the history of local communities and society at large is both reflected in, and influential upon, families.[2] In *Microhistories* Barry Reay reconstructs rural communities in nineteenth-century Kent and demonstrates how collective biographies of "ordinary" people can inform our knowledge of a wide variety of social, economic, political and cultural issues.[3] Carl Chinn's work on working class communities in Birmingham combines the approach of the family and academic historian to produce an extremely rich social history.[4] Melanie Tebbutt's nuanced analysis of her own father's diaries enables her to undertake compelling research into

[1] Kean, *London Stories*
[2] Collins, *The Likes of Us*
[3] Reay, *Microhistories*
[4] Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity*; Chinn, *They Worked*

adolescence in 1930s Nottingham.[5] Others could be listed, but this selection represents a sample of the best that other regions have to offer. In each case there is nothing comparable available for Lancashire.

For many years academics have employed methods of nominal record linkage as a means of reconstructing complex and detailed life histories and interest in the historical individual is nothing new.[6] The academic community is well aware of the potential of family history research techniques and the purposes to which they can be put. Academics are conscious of the popularity of family history and increasingly make use of indexes and resources prepared by, and for, family historians. Moreover, they have coordinated a number of large-scale research projects with raw data being provided by volunteer "amateur" researchers, resulting in a number of ground breaking studies.[7] Nevertheless, amongst some professional historians, and even amongst some amateur local historians, there remains a degree of misunderstanding of the nature of family history, and a large measure of scepticism regarding its quality. As a consequence there is a general lack of recognition of the value of family history. Borrowing techniques and approaches or making use of indexes and finding aids is one thing, but it is the purpose to which those techniques are put that matters to the academic historian. They may utilise nominal record linkage for the purposes of reconstructing detailed life histories, but the subjects are often selected because they meet some predetermined criteria that serve the purposes of a wider enquiry. The wider enquiry is seen by academics to legitimise their research, and render it of greater value than the "less worthy" research of the family historian, whose subjects are usually predetermined and restricted to a narrow range of related individuals rather than being selected because of any more general significance.

This book explores the history of the family in Lancashire during and after industrialistion. It brings into focus the considerable intellectual overlap between academic and family history, whilst also serving to highlight some differences in approach and working methods. My chapter

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[5] M. Tebbutt, "Writing Family Stories: Making a Narrative of Family History" paper presented at the Beyond Genealogy conference, Institute of Local and Family History, University of Central Lancashire, 2007

[6] King, "Power, representation and the historical individual"; Wrigley, *Identifying people*. For some academic studies that have used detailed life histories in the North West see: Foster, *Seven Households*; French, "Parish gentry"

[7] Pooley and Turnbull, *Migration and mobility*. The activities of the Family and Community Historical Research Society are notable in this context

explores the value of family history, and its relationship to academic history. The contributors to the rest of the book report on their research into the history of the family in Lancashire, making this research accessible in a single cover for the first time. This book will thus be of value to students with an interest in the social history of the last two centuries, although it has to be said that it does not attempt to be exhaustive of its subject nor definitive in any way, for there remain many gaps to be filled. It is evident, for instance, that the chapters are largely focused on the urban working class in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but even here there are silences and omissions. It is not my purpose to make good or discuss at length these omissions. Such a task would not only be impossible, but would detract from the coherence of the book with its clear focus on the urban working class family. Moreover, far from offering fragmented, conflicting accounts, the authors of individual chapters provide contrasting, but complementary, approaches and analyses.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VALUE OF FAMILY HISTORY

ANDY GRITT

The history of the family in the North West has been the subject of detailed investigation from a variety of perspectives.[1] At the most basic level, it is inconceivable that the effects of the growth and subsequent decline of industrial capitalism were not felt first and most severely by those who experienced it first hand: the Lancashire urban working class. This issue lies at the heart of this book, as each of the contributors explores aspects of the family and the household and the impact of wider social and economic change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Students and family historians often tell me that they have traced births, marriages, deaths, tracked occupational changes, short and long-distance moves, visited places where ancestors lived, and photographed their final resting places. These footprints of lives are relatively easily uncovered for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although some continue further back into the early modern period. Nevertheless, for all of the facts they have assiduously collected and connected in a family tree, researchers explain to me that they would like to know more about the lives, character, and experiences of their ancestors, or even the framework within which families lived, died and made decisions that led to the footprints. My usual answer is that for most people it is not possible to study individual lives in great detail: the majority of the working and middle classes actually left very few details of their lives. Researchers who have access to personal correspondence, diaries, and annotated photographs, for instance, are extremely fortunate, and direct oral testimony is restricted to living memory. Consequently, to undertake sufficient research to write a detailed, evidence-based biography founded on the holdings of public archives would require a combination of an extremely detailed and

[1] See for instance, Anderson, *Family structure*; Griffiths, *Lancashire working classes*; Gritt, "Mortality crisis"; King, "English protoindustrial family"; King, "Poor households"; Roberts, *Woman's Place*

comprehensive set of records from a range of repositories and an almost infinite amount of time in which to do the research. The increased availability of digital records, which is rapidly transforming research methods, might speed up the process of information recovery, but the information on specific individuals is often very scanty. This lack of documentary evidence leads to assumptions, guesses, and leaps of faith often predicated upon our own present-minded attitude towards life in the past.

However, even for elusive individuals about whom we can only recover the barest of information, our guesses and assumptions can be based on wider knowledge rather than hearsay. Here is one of the ways in which academic studies can make a major contribution to the development of family history: in the absence of detailed information about specific individuals, knowledge of issues, themes and places, or studying other families or individuals similar to our own ancestors, can provide clues that help us to fill the gaps in our research. Indeed, this practice of interpreting microhistories within the wider context of the social group or the history of place is one thing that distinguishes the academic approach to microhistory from the family historian's research methods. The success of this technique is plain to see in the writing of Chinn, Kean and Reay.[2] Even Collins, a journalist rather than an academic, seeks to understand the history of his own ancestors within the context of two centuries of the London working class, and this broader context gives his writing greater depth and purpose. His ancestors provide the basic narrative, the raw genealogical data, but family history only makes sense when viewed within the broader social, economic, cultural and political trends which impact on it, and which it reflects.[3] Nevertheless, families don't necessarily conform to a grand narrative of history and I do not wish to suggest that studying the group is a proxy for studying the individual. There is a fundamental interaction, which can be harmonious or otherwise, between an individual and wider society. This interaction has significant ramifications and, as Hilda Kean suggests, "personal and broader histories…are not necessarily the same histories though one is structured by the other".[4] Individuals don't always act as they are "supposed" to: society is complex, and even individual families are made up of contrasting individuals. Personality, of course, is a key aspect of this but

[2] Chinn, *They worked*; Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity;* Kean, *London Stories*; Reay, *Microhistories*
[3] Collins, *The Likes of us*
[4] Kean, *London Stories*, 171

the coincidence of individual lifecycle, family lifecycle and wider changes in society are fundamental to the experiences and development of the family. Thus, unemployment due to a trade downturn is likely to cause widespread hardship; however, that hardship is likely to be much more severe for the family who are already overburdened with non-working children whilst families comprising several young working adults could be relatively unaffected. The First World War decimated some families who were unfortunate to have several sons of the right age to fight; others whose sons were too young or too old were unscathed. It is apparent that there is no single linear path of historical development, and no universal interactivity between "society" and the individual.

When family history research becomes "stuck" at a certain depth and the researcher wants to delve deeper in order to develop knowledge and understanding, one solution is to widen the search. Genealogical text books frequently suggest this approach to get round gaps in the records or resolve ambiguous entries in censuses or parish registers. However, the search could be widened in other ways. For example, extending the scope of the enquiry beyond family history to study the group or groups to which ancestors belonged, or to spend time studying particularly well-documented contemporaries, might prove fruitful. Studying the group is relatively easy, if time consuming. There are ample opportunities to study occupational groups, religious groups, communities, towns, villages, and migrants using a wide range of easily accessible source material in local, regional and national archives, many of which sources will already be familiar to family historians. Some family historians do take this route, and in the process undertake some extremely valuable research. The broader context can also be studied by focusing on other well documented individuals, and here there is a growing list of published sources, as well as innumerable unpublished subjects, on which to draw. The experience of individuals can be studied through journals, memoranda books and autobiographies, and in this context the writings of individuals such as Samuel Bamford, Roger Dewhurst, Edmund Harrold, Richard Latham, John O'Neil, Benjamin Shaw, William Stout and Peter Walkden, are invaluable for studying the family and economy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[5] The later nineteenth and twentieth centuries provide manifold personal accounts from individuals as diverse as

[5] Hewitt and Poole, *Samuel Bamford*; Billington, *Captain Dewhurst*; Horner, *Edmund Harrold*; Weatherill, *Richard Latham;* Brigg, *John O'Neil*; Crosby, *Benjamin Shaw*; Marshall, *William Stout*; Chipping Local History Society, *Peter Walkden*

Anthony Burgess, Katharine Chorley, Alice Foley, Joe Gormley, Walter Greenwood, Bill Naughton, Robert Roberts, Eric Sykes and William Woodruff as well as a very large number of less well-known figures.[6] Such autobiographies provide invaluable evidence and offer details that are rarely recorded in other sources. It is also possible to study "ordinary" people through the lives of social superiors, so the writings of individuals such as William Blundell and Basil Thomas Eccleston[7], social commentators such as Hugh Shimmin and Allen Clarke[8], even "realist" story tellers such as M.E. Francis and Elizabeth Gaskell offer a different perspective from which we can benefit, despite their inevitable class perspective.[9]

Family historians often seem slightly disappointed at this response, and speaking as a family historian myself, I can understand this. The fact of the matter is that although we can learn about the past through family history, it is more relevant to us as individuals when we feel we have some direct connection with it, and vicariously researching our own past through the lives of individuals who were *like* our ancestors, or who appear to share some of their characteristics, always feels like second best. From my perspective, the slowly emerging but elusive biographies of my ancestors, who between them displayed a very broad spectrum of personal attributes from drunken, violent thugs with a propensity for illegitimacy to hard-working Christians with socialist tendencies, have a greater human and personal interest to me than other research I conduct for purely academic purposes. Although the two are complementary, they are often quite separate and only occasionally do they coincide.

Nevertheless, a number of academic historians have embraced the techniques of family history, as Chinn, Drake, Finnegan, Hey, Kean, Lawton, Mills, Reay and Rogers demonstrate.[10] These academics have

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[6] Burgess, *Little Wilson*; Chorley, *Manchester made them*; Foley, *Bolton childhood*; Gormley, *Battered Cherub*; Greenwood, *There was a time*; Naughton, *On the pig's back*; Roberts, *Classic Slum*; Sykes, *If I don't write it*; Woodruff, *Nab End*. Of the lesser known examples, see, for instance Read, *Manchester Boyhood*; Ashworth, *Autobiography*. See also Smith, *Century Speaks*. Steve Caunce's chapter develops this theme

[7] Gritt and Virgoe, *Basil Thomas Eccleston*; Tyrer, *Nicholas Blundell*

[8] Walton and Wilcox, *Low life*; Clarke, *Windmill land*; Clarke, *Moorlands & memories*

[9] Francis, *North Country Village*; Gaskell, *North and South*

[10] Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity*; Chinn, *They Worked*; Drake, *Time, family and community*; Hey, *Oxford guide*; Kean, *London Stories*; Lawton, "Peopling the

used microhistorical techniques as a method of investigating the past, allowing each of them to study aspects of social history in innovative ways. Their work has been well received within the academic community. However, the measure of the success of this approach is not simply how other academics receive these works but the extent to which this work is fed into, and influences, the family history community. Here there remains much to be done, despite the efforts of individual academics, often working in isolation even within their own institutions, to engage with the family history community. However, if academics develop the techniques of the family historian for their own purposes they are unlikely to be received warmly by family historians if, in the process, they over intellectualise. At a local level, despite decades of work by academic historians on the history of the Lancashire working class, few of these studies have influenced the nature or scope of family history. Indeed, for the most part, academic and family histories have occupied entirely separate spheres, despite their considerable intellectual overlap and common evidence base.

Whilst academic historians have subjected working class families to detailed analysis, the volume of this work is dwarfed by the collective work of family historians. However, despite this difference in magnitude, a much higher proportion of the academic research is, theoretically at least, in the public domain. Indeed, only a fragment of the results of family history research are ever made publicly available. Whether this is due to a lack of skill or will on the behalf of family historians is open to conjecture, although it is apparent that the absence of a wider research agenda frequently restricts the scope and purpose of family history enquiry. Most family historians lack the requisite knowledge and training to develop and circulate broader arguments based on detailed research on exemplary families. Experienced and widely-published academics can struggle to get narrow case studies accepted by academic publishers of books and journals and unpublished amateurs are likely to get little encouragement from such quarters. The most frequent outlet is undoubtedly family history newsletters, although these are of variable quality and few achieve wide circulation. In part the private consumption of family history research is a defining aspect of the discipline: individuals research their own family history for their own private reasons. In this respect, family history is not a public activity. On the other hand, the family historians who seek a wider audience for their research often fail, despite their eagerness to talk about,

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past"; Mills, Wheeler and Woollard, "Comparative perspectives"; Reay, *Microhistories;* Rogers and Smith, *Local family history*

and occasionally write about, their family history. Some family historians publish their work privately. It would not be appropriate for me to select any particular privately published book of this nature for critical review, but their quality and value are frequently questionable. Unfortunately, the reputation of these books prevents the relatively small number of quality publications from acquiring the wider audience they deserve.

An alternative method of disseminating research results is through the sharing of accumulated, rather than evaluated, data. Sharing GEDCOMs or making family trees available online is a common activity, but sharing data is not the same as sharing research results in an accessible form. The family tree is an excellent way of storing and organising data, but it is an extremely poor method of communicating research results. It can provide a basic framework and a visual representation of the internal connections within a family, but family trees do not communicate history in the sense that history is a discursive, persuasive, evaluative and highly subjective discipline. Furthermore, despite the availability of the technology and the frequent data file-sharing that takes place, this usually remains firmly within the individual researcher's family group. Collective data is rarely pooled for the purpose of wider analysis leading to a deeper understanding of significant historical issues. Pooley and Turnbull have demonstrated what can be achieved by aggregating family history research, but work of this nature is noted for its scarcity as well as its quality.[11] Unfortunately there are few formal means of pooling research results for detailed general analysis. If such a facility existed enabling individual researchers to contribute standardised data in a form that could be manipulated and analysed, it would without doubt form one of the most powerful history research databases available, able to answer questions with which academics will otherwise continue to grapple for some considerable time to come.

As a consequence of the lack of public dissemination of high quality family history research, or the pooling of data, the varied and detailed work undertaken by family historians simply fails to attract the audience it deserves, and, unfortunately, the collective work has little or no impact upon the general stock of historical knowledge. Family historians have repeatedly shown me work of the very highest quality, from detailed contextualised biographies to more wide-ranging research. I have seen work on nineteenth-century families, for instance, where successive generations of an extended family were mapped onto large-scale street

[11] Pooley and Turnbull, *Migration and mobility*

plans. The results showed that even over several decades the extended family was largely restricted to a small geographical area of no more than a few streets. Despite frequent moves within the neighbourhood it is clear that this particular family existed within an extremely dense kinship network. Moreover, as marriage leads to individuals belonging to, or being "adopted" by, more than one kinship group, this evidence provided insights into the structure and cohesiveness of the wider community, and the interconnection between a large proportion of the inhabitants of a relatively small urban district. Such work would form a remarkable and highly publishable academic research project; for a family historian it was fairly ordinary, and my attempts to persuade the researcher to publish unfortunately failed. The work of family historians, therefore, is a very large body of research whose impact is rarely felt by the academic community, and whose true potential has not, to date, been realised or harnessed. It is apparent that family historians and academic historians rarely read the same material; indeed, "popular" history books and research guides are rarely written or read by historians working within the university sector, and the research output of university academics is either prohibitively expensive, or is published in specialist academic journals which are distributed only to individual or institutional subscribers – and therefore beyond the reach of "amateur" historians.

This distance that exists between academic and amateur researchers is compounded by the lack of contact and understanding between the two groups. I said above that there remains a degree of mistrust and misunderstanding about the nature and quality of family history research; in some senses this is reciprocated amongst the ranks of family and local historians. It has to be said that, to some extent, mistrust of some academic research output is justified: few have much of an appetite for impenetrable prose, the (conscious or unconscious) spurious research topic, or the number-crunching statistical approach of the econometrician. Nevertheless, when I talk to family historians whose only formal history education ended at school, they often express pleasant surprise about the nature of some academic history output and the directions in which academic historians have developed their subject in recent decades. Indeed, whilst school history curricula are often dominated by twentieth century European history and global conflict, a considerable body of academic literature has been concerned to investigate a much wider variety of topics

and issues which local and family historians find not only informative, but reassuringly familiar.[12]

This revolution in history writing emerged from the 1950s, in part due to Hoskins' seminal contributions to, and founding of, academic local history as a quite distinct discipline to the related and much older antiquarian tradition, which continues to thrive.[13] At the same time a group of predominantly left-wing historians were beginning to explore the history of the working class in a way that had not been attempted before the Second World War. Most historians have now moved away from the overtly ideological approach popular in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, although this does not mean to say that social history or the notion of "history from below" has been abandoned. Indeed, the proliferation of local studies and the growing academic attention paid to the social history of "ordinary" people, has led to a situation where the amount of knowledge is both overwhelming, and still incomplete.

As historians are increasingly undertaking detailed microhistorical studies, applying the techniques of family history as a means of shedding light on the complexity of history, is it right to distinguish between family history and academic history? Does family history sit comfortably and respectably alongside political, social or economic history? Is the distinction due to the amateur/professional divide? There are many individuals who earn an income undertaking family history research on behalf of other people, writing the occasional magazine article and delivering public lectures, but there are few professional historians with recognised academic qualifications working within the University sector who would describe themselves, or would be happy to be described, as family historians. The difference is one of approach: historians are interested in *issues*, which might include aspects of the history of the family including kinship networks, community cohesion, household structures, migration patterns, social and economic welfare, demographic trends and inheritance customs. Family historians, on the other hand, primarily focus on *their* family – and the wider context is background to help them understand specific, predetermined individuals. The process of

[12] "Don't mention the war so often, exams watchdog tells teachers", *The Guardian*, 22 December 2005; "Children should first learn that history begins at home", *The Observer*, 25 May 2008; "Stop endless lessons about Nazis. Tell us our national story instead", *The Observer*, 10 June 2007; "Pupils give up on history lessons", *The Independent*, 26 May 2009; "300 schools to become Holocaust specialists", *TES*, 10 July 2009

[13] Hoskins, *English Landscape*; Hoskins, *Midland peasant*; Hoskins, *Local history*

"doing" family history is dynamic, and something of a journey, but the dynamism of family history research usually ends with the recovery of information. However, regardless of the researcher's background and aims, even the most detailed of analyses only ever represents a snippet of the complexity of the lives of individuals, families and communities. But of course the process of recovery, and the recoverability of information, is neither fixed nor guaranteed. Consequently, whilst many family histories fulfil an important function for the individual researcher, few attract wider interest or formulate wider arguments. The specificity of the contrasting lives of individuals demonstrates that it is dangerous to generalise on the basis of biographical detail. At a certain level of abstraction the lives of a large social group such as the nineteenth-century Lancashire working class defy generalisation, yet without generalisation history would become rapidly bogged down by the minutiae of fine detail. Let us consider some contrasting lives.

In February 1834, William Chew, the 16-year old son of Peggy Chew of Whalley was bound apprentice to Thomas Rhodes, a tailor, also of Whalley, until William's twenty-first birthday. The £5 premium was paid to Rhodes by the churchwarden and overseers of the parish, indicating that William was from a poor background, requiring the assistance of poor relief to obtain an apprenticeship.[14] In the 1841 census William was enumerated as being 21 years old, and despite the fact that he had completed his apprenticeship he was still residing with his former master and working as a Journeyman Tailor.[15] By 1851, Chew had moved to King Street, Whalley, where he resided with his new employer, Richard Frankland, along with two other journeymen tailors.[16] Chew remained unmarried throughout his life. In both 1861 and 1871 he was still living in the Frankland household in Whalley where he was recorded first as a 43-year old boarder then a 51-year old lodger.[17] The last census entry for Chew was that for 1881 when, at the age of 61 he was still living in King Street, Whalley, although he was now in the household of Thomas Wilkinson, a 51 year old tailor and draper with a wife, daughter and three sons.[18] In addition there were three other lodgers and boarders and a servant. Chew's death was registered in Clitheroe in 1887. Chew has no known descendants and after his apprenticeship pursued the same

[14] Lancashire Record Office [L. R. O.] PR 2777/33
[15] The National Archives [T. N. A.] HO 107/510 f.25 p. 20
[16] T. N. A. HO 107/2256 f. 441 p. 6
[17] T. N. A. RG 9/3088 f. 5 p. 4; RG 10/4166 f. 11 p.5
[18] T. N. A. RG 11/4174 f. 6 p. 5

occupation for all of his life and seemingly lived for over three decades on the same street in Whalley.

Whilst Chew's life appears, on the surface at least, to have remained free of familial and economic complexity, that of his contemporary John Rhodes was a little more eventful. John was the son of John Rhodes, an illiterate weaver of Whalley. In 1839, at the age of nine, he was apprenticed by his father to Thomas Rhodes and Henry Robinson, tailors of Manchester.[19] In 1851 John, now a 22-year old journeyman tailor, was back living at his parents' house in Whalley.[20] By 1855 he was married and living with his wife, Jane, in Preston where they were enumerated with their three children in 1861.[21] John had given up tailoring and was recorded as a railway Porter. Following Jane's death John married Alice Croasdale at Preston in 1864. By 1871, John was living with his new wife and four children in Avenham Lane making his living as a railway Guard.[22] This was clearly a time of upward social mobility for the Rhodes family. By 1881, John and Alice were living in Christ Church Street, Preston. John was now a coal agent, and his near neighbours on the same page of the enumerator's book were mostly in similar white-collar occupations: cashier and bookkeeper, solicitor's general clerk, superannuated officer of excise, outdoor officer of customs and a railway inspector.[23] John obviously prospered and in 1891 the family had moved to semi-rural Penwortham on the outskirts of Preston.[24] Now aged 61, John was recorded as "living on own means", still surrounded by artisans, tradesmen and low-status white collar occupations. He died in 1894 and in 1901 his widow was still living in the same Penwortham house and was also recorded as "living on own means".[25]

The final example is that of James Wilkinson of Chipping. James had benefited from an education at a charity school, and when he was apprenticed to the trade of wheelwright in February 1858 at the age of 14 he was able to sign his own name, unlike his father John, a worker in a cotton factory. James was apprenticed to John Norcross of Ribchester.[26] According to Wilkinson's apprenticeship indenture, Norcross was a

[19] L.R.O. PR 2777/31/37
[20] T. N. A. HO 107/2256 f.217 p.12
[21] T. N. A. RG 9/3128 f. 146 p.72
[22] T. N. A. RG 10/4203 f. 171 p.6
[23] T. N. A. RG 11/4239 f. 98 p.20
[24] T. N. A. RG 12/3428 f. 2 p.11
[25] T. N. A. RG 13/3942 f. 5 p. 1
[26] L.R.O. DDX 1174/6/100

wheelwright although the 1861 census records him as a "carpenter farmer of 11 acres". The 1861 census records Norcross and his family living in Ribchester along with an apprentice carpenter, 15 year-old William Blackburn.[27] The same census records Wilkinson, now a 17-year old apprentice iron moulder, living with his father in Chipping.[28] Why had Wilkinson changed his master and his trade? Why was he not living with his master as other apprentices did? The 1871 census records James Wilkinson, cotton warehouseman, living in Over Darwen, aged 29, with his wife Margaret, aged 32, and 12 year old son, Alfred.[29] So, how do we explain Wilkinson's occupational, residential and family history between 1851 and 1871? Backtracking from 1871 reveals an unexpected story. Alfred had been born in Goosnargh on 24 June 1858 to Margaret Wilkinson. No father was named on the birth certificate. Clearly, Margaret was pregnant at the time James signed his apprenticeship indenture, though whether it was known that James was the putative father is not certain. Not only was James only 13 or 14 at the time Alfred was conceived, but James and Margaret were possibly cousins. Apprentices were specifically barred from marriage and sexual activity, and a 14 year-old apprentice father would have been a local scandal and certainly grounds for the apprenticeship with Norcross to be terminated. A new master was found, but it was not until the end of 1864, at the end of his apprenticeship, that he and Margaret married in Chipping. In 1851, Margaret Wilkinson lived with her grandfather, Joseph Bretherton senior, aged 77 and a "farmer of 48 acres [in] Chipping and Goosnargh".[30] Margaret's father, John, was recorded in 1851 as a farmer of 30 acres in Goosnargh, but by 1861 the farm had gone and John and his two teenage sons were recorded as "ag. labs" and this appears to have been the sole source of income to sustain the household of six individuals, including two-year old Alfred.[31] Margaret, meanwhile, had become a servant, and in 1861 was living and working within the household of Thomas Jackson, a farmer of 20 acres and resident at the Shuttleworth Arms, Barton.[32] In the last census entry for James the family of three was living in Brook Street,

[27] T. N. A. RG 9/3142 f. 90 p. 3
[28] T. N. A. RG 9/3085 f.19 p. 8
[29] T. N. A. RG 10/4188 f. 20 p. 33
[30] T. N. A. HO 107/2268 f. 454 p. 4
[31] T. N. A. HO 107/2268 f.454 p.5; RG 9/3143 f. 25 p. 3
[32] T. N. A. RG 9/3143 f.98 p.10

Preston, where James was licensed victualler at the Commercial Inn.[33] James died at the end of 1881.

These biographies are typical of the type of research undertaken by family historians – and academic historians often use similar types of biographies as exemplars of a broader trend. But what do they tell us? They might be reasonably interesting but are they of any real value? The answers might lie in our relationship to William Chew, John Rhodes or James Wilkinson. The family historian might consider themselves to have learned a great deal about their ancestor, but, taken in isolation, the academic might not value this research as highly. As simple biographies, they lack context, and without context it is impossible to interpret their wider value. The academic historian uses an exemplar because it helps to demonstrate or elucidate a broader argument. In other words, the example is chosen *by* the historian as a representative example of a wider group in order to illustrate a more general point.[34] In contrast, the biographical research undertaken by the family historian *is* the means and the end: the intellectual pursuit is clear enough, but there is no wider academic purpose to this research. Indeed, such biographies are not necessarily exemplars of anything, they are not selected by the researcher because of their typicality or otherwise, nor are they selected to "prove" a wider argument. Rather, they are selected *for* the researcher usually because of biological (consanguinal) or marital (affinal) relationships. To the academic historian it matters whether their examples are representative and they ought to have the desire and means to consider this. Family historians on the other hand rarely consider typicality, largely because this seems unimportant to their primary interest in their own ancestry. However, if family history is used as a means of understanding the past, it must be remembered that family history without context always runs the risk of producing historical knowledge based on nothing but a series of atypical individuals. As David Hey points out, "No single example of a family tree…can serve as an example adequate illustration of the immense variety of human experience".[35]

So, are the biographies of any of these apprentices significant at all? Which is the "typical" experience? To be frank, we simply don't know – no detailed research on the collective biographies of Lancashire

[33] T. N. A. RG 11/4232 f. 105 p. 19

[34] Most academic historians will work in this way, but see Hindle, *On the parish?* for a recent book that uses this technique to illustrate the lives of the seventeenth-century poor

[35] Hey, *Oxford guide*, 11

apprentices from this or any other period have been published and it is not easy to access general survey data that would enable us to place them into a broader context. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we are completely ignorant of the broader context. These examples have apprenticeship in common, but apprenticeship is not the only context. Indeed, the contexts are multiple: demography and reproductive behaviour, social mobility, poverty and prosperity, household structures and kinship networks, migration, the local history of the rural townships north and east of Preston, and the relationship of this area with the urban environment. When considering these different contexts any one of the three examples could be considered "typical" but in other respects they are all untypical. Nevertheless, if we based our understanding of nineteenth-century working class men on any one of these individuals then this would be very misleading. Family historians have been known to dismiss academic arguments, rejecting them on the basis that a reasoned, evidence-based generalisation cannot be true because it fails to accord with their own detailed research on an individual. It could be that the specificity of family history research could mislead: general models are not invalidated by an exception.

Of course, it would be easy to dismiss this discussion as being of no real importance: family historians have their subjects chosen for them; academics study broader trends. But there are themes in the biographies above that are developed throughout the rest of this book. Alan Crosby's account of Benjamin Shaw, for instance, resonates with aspects of the experience of James Wilkinson; the contrasting household structures are given context by Michael Anderson's work; survival strategies and domestic arrangements are developed in Elizabeth Robert's chapter, and Steve Caunce investigates the extent to which family and community thrived despite adversity.

But there remains a fundamental weakness in the biographies: their incompleteness. The lives of the apprentices showed marked contrasts, and the three examples appeared to live lives of varied complexity and eventfulness. On the above evidence, William Chew lived the least eventful life and, in the absence of progeny, is unlikely to have been studied by family historians. So who studies the unmarried, the celibate, the infertile? By definition, the subjects of family history research under normal circumstances fulfil the predetermined criteria that they have living descendents with the time, money, education and motivation to undertake family history research. Without the "complexity" of child-bearing, many individuals go unstudied. Moreover, the "complexity" or "eventfulness" of

lives can only be judged by the traces we have of those lives. The needs of society to record itself means that certain life-time events are almost always recorded and reasonably easily recovered: birth, marriage, and death for instance. Censuses record changes of address, household composition and occupation and the fact that it is a legal requirement to complete a schedule ensures near universal coverage. The poor are recorded in the records of overseers, guardians and workhouses; the criminal are recorded in court and prison records and satisfied journalists' desires for the scurrilous and scandalous in the local and national press; tradesmen are listed in trade directories and almost the entire population was captured in lists of one kind or another periodically required by local or central government. The public record might seem fairly comprehensive, and an adequate basis for full and detailed biographies of large numbers of people without bias or prejudice. But this is a little misleading. So much of the complexity of lives takes place away from the gaze of those responsible for keeping records. Not only can much happen in the years between census enumerations, but there are countless individuals for whom there is barely a trace of their lives beyond the records of the birth and death and their presence on the intervening census. It is possible that such individuals are recorded elsewhere in a wide variety of sources, but to find them would take an extremely long time, and the details often fail to repay the effort from an intellectual point of view, although from a family history perspective any fragment of fact might be considered precious. With the archival record being biased, and the most rapid route to research success being through civil registration and census, both of which provide clues which take us to other sources, any notion of eventful lives – and consequently detailed biographies – is predetermined by the extent to which such events were recorded in documentary evidence to which we now have access. William Chew might have had a life of religious teetotal abstinence, self-improving through rational recreation, education and small-scale charitable works amongst the poor of Whalley. I have no evidence to support this, and of course an equally fictitious but otherwise contrasting scenario could be presented. However, such activities are not easily recovered and would not be recorded at all in the rather conventional sources used to write the brief account above.

These detailed life histories *are* important, if only to demonstrate the diversity of experience. Nineteenth century society, much like our own, was full of contrasts. Personal effort and external circumstances combined to determine the course of the life of individuals and family groups. Moreover, such examples help to demonstrate the complexity of society and the lives of individuals, and disprove deterministic theories of