
History as a Weapon

Betty Grant and the Local History section of the CPGB Historians' Group

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Abstract

This article seeks to partially rescue the story of the British communist historian Betty Grant, who contributed immeasurably to the formation of the CP Historians' Group's Local History section and its periodical, the *Local History Bulletin*, in the post-war period. Despite this, Betty Grant has received virtually no historiographical coverage up to now. The present work looks at the section itself, which embarked on the political project of studying local history through the lens of class struggle. This methodological approach reflected the political tension that existed between specialist and amateur historians at the time and which engulfed the Historians' Group itself.

Key words: Betty Grant, Marxist historians, local history, class struggle, CPGB

Who was Betty Grant? Anyone who has made a serious study of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and, more specifically, its Historians' Group (CPHG) will have come across her name. But the accounts and recollections of those who worked with her in the CPHG, such as Eric Hobsbawm, nearly all seem to overlook her contributions. Similarly, more recent studies have persistently failed to give Grant her due place in history.¹ This article seeks to rescue, in part at least, the story of Grant and her activities within the CPHG. It is, moreover, a call for further and more detailed research on her. It looks at Grant and the class-struggle-based, communist local history that she sought to develop, and examines the Local History section of the CPHG that she led in its formative years. This account of Grant and her work is necessarily strongly empirical, given the paucity of historical research to date on her and the CPHG Local History section.

The foundation for creating a group of historians in the CPGB which would wield history to further the struggle for socialism was laid during a conference in June 1946, when several communist figures met to discuss A.L. Morton's *A People's History of England*.² From this first meeting, the Historians' Group was born. Before long, the group had spawned several specialist sections and committees, which existed for different lengths of time and succeeded to various extents. These included, for example, the classicists and medievalists, the nineteenth-century section and even an Orientalist group, as well as the section concerned with local history. Some sections have received abundant coverage, for example the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century section, which David Parker has called 'the most dynamic and productive', or the nineteenth-century section, which has been described as the most active.³ But little or no research has been conducted on the Local History section. In a similar manner, while some CPHG historians have been studied thoroughly, notably those whom Harvey Kaye included in his 1984 ground-breaking study on the British Marxist historians (Eric Hobsbawm, Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, E.P. Thompson Victor Kiernan and George Rudé) others have often been overlooked or forgotten altogether.⁴ The aim of this article is to help rescue the history of the local historians in general, and of Betty Grant in particular. She and the Local History section (later Committee) had to overcome resistance from sceptical CPGB leaders and some academic communist historians in order to show the potential of local history in fostering class struggle.

David Parker places the origins of the CPHG Local History section as early as September 1948, after a meeting for 'the discussion on the peasantry' held by the early modernists.⁵ However, this meeting was just part of the process which explored the possibility of creating a local history section, rather than the constituting meeting itself. In fact, already in September 1947 the CPHG Committee was discussing the possible work of a Local Historians' section and Douglas Garman was 'to send [a] list of historians in each District to District Organizers' and 'to notify historians that their names had been given to [the] District'.⁶ This first attempt must have been quite unsuccessful, or maybe Garman was too busy with other projects, for in December he reported that the notification of other historians was for the time being 'unnecessary'.⁷ Also, there are no traces of any further development of this project until Betty Grant joined the CPHG Committee in March 1950.

Only from this moment on did the section begin to take shape. In October 1950 the first issue of its *Local History Bulletin* appeared, and in January or February 1951, a 'Report on Local History', most likely written by Grant, was circulated, though we do not know to whom it

was addressed.⁸ From the tone of the report it is clear that much work had been done, with Grant being ‘in contact with 30 individual comrades who are or have been actively interested in local history, of which 10 are in [the] Historians’ Group’.⁹

An ‘aggregate meeting’ held in September 1951 to reorganise the Historians’ Group ‘ended in recriminations, particularly over what some regarded as the unhelpful and patronising attitude of the academic members’.¹⁰ However, the Local History section seems to have gained from the meeting. This is probably due the fact that the section under Grant’s leadership had contributed to the formation throughout Britain of groups for the study of their local histories. These informal groups were reorganised into branches and shortly thereafter recognised officially. In December 1951 the CPHG Committee resolved that a Local History Committee ‘must be constituted in view of the amount of work developing’.¹¹ At the same meeting the names of Duncan, Moore, Marshall, Syers and Cadogan were put down as possible members of this committee.¹² The Local History Committee was finally appointed at some point between December 1951 and January 1952 – its series of Circular Letters began in January 1952.¹³

The importance of the local branches was acknowledged in a January 1952 ‘statement on the present position’ of the Communist Party Historians’ Group circulated by its Chairman, Rodney Hilton, and its Secretary, Diana Sinnott, which stated that the newly formed branches had ‘the primary job of popularising history in their Districts, and this of course includes local history’.¹⁴

The September 1951 aggregate was also the meeting when the re-organisation of the *Bulletin* into the first series of *Our History* was formalised. A few months before the actual meeting, in May 1951, it was agreed that the *Bulletin* ‘should be extended and adapted for use by regional Groups’ and the aggregate offered the occasion to discuss the proposal in depth and with many members of the Historians’ Group.¹⁵ The new periodical was given a larger scope than the coverage of the work done on local history. The last issue of the *Bulletin*, August/September 1953, confirmed this, stating that the new periodical would cover both ‘research which has been done [...] on local history’ as well as ‘on particular aspects of more general history’.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that the report on local history work of January/February 1951 highlighted organisational problems, which could be overcome only ‘if the study of history became recognised in the Party as a political job’.¹⁷ It was also stated that ‘at the moment’ there was ‘absolutely no stimulus to action in this field. Therefore the attitude of the Party to history is crucial’.¹⁸ At the January 1951 CPHG committee meeting, Grant

'stressed the number of people found doing historical work unconnected with the group, found during her Local History work'.¹⁹ This was nothing new and, in fact, she had reported problems to the CPHG committee as early as May 1950, when she 'complained that the committee had not given her sufficient help on the local history organization'.²⁰ The Group considered this to be 'valid criticism' and 'the secretary was instructed to write to the London District asking them what help they required exactly from local historians, so that the work of the local historians' section could be concentrated for the time being on a definitive project'.²¹

It would be misleading to think that Betty Grant was a troublemaker and the cause of polemics with others. In April 1951, the CPHG secretary Diana Sinnott reported on discussions with the *Daily Worker* over the publication of historical material, enriched with political relevance, and stated that the editor 'did not seem willing to discuss the practical details of such co-operation'.²² The Group even discussed 'whether a criticism of the attitude of the [*Daily Worker*] Features Editor should be sent to the N.C. [National Cultural] Committee' but 'at this stage' they agreed to 'take no action'.²³ The results of this meeting are blurred in the pages of the subsequent meetings – the September one reported '[n]o advance on relations with D.W. Sec.' – while the aggregate and its outcomes take on more and more importance.²⁴ At this time the *Daily Worker* had more pressing problems – the paper was investing much energy into and receiving plenty of external criticism for the reports of Alan Winnington, the only British correspondent with the North Korean army, so the historians might have agreed to drop the cause for this reason.²⁵

Betty Grant was the leading figure in the Local History section and without her relentless effort it is unlikely that the section or its *Bulletin* would have made much progress. Recalling the post war years, Hobsbawm noted that 'local branches of the [Historians] group were set up [...] largely on the initiative of one dynamic member who campaigned tirelessly for local history and launched the Group's *Local History Bulletin* in October 1951'.²⁶ Although Hobsbawm did not mention Grant by name, it is clear that the Historians' Group committee decided in December 1949 to invite her to the following committee meeting so that 'the formation of a local history group might be discussed with her'.²⁷ The *Bulletin* was launched in October 1950, (not 1951 as Hobsbawm recalled), and from the beginning '[a]ll correspondence' was to be sent to 'Mrs B.F. Grant', further proving that she was the dynamic member that Hobsbawm described.²⁸ Once Grant had been 'co-opted on to the [CPHG] committee in order to organise work on local history' from March 1950,²⁹ she worked to promote it through articles in the CPGB's journal *World News and Views* and the *Daily Worker*.³⁰ In July 1950 she 'reported that an article on local

history work had been submitted by her to W.N.&V. [*World News and Views*].³¹ Occasional articles were clearly not enough though, for soon after Grant had joined the CPHG Committee she already wanted to obtain a dedicated page for local history in the *Daily Worker*.³² By September 1950 her 'proposal to start a monthly bulletin on local history work was approved'.³³ Moreover, 'she agreed to finance the first [*Bulletin*] issue' and she 'proposed the establishment of a central fund for the historians' group and offered to donate a large sum', once again showing remarkable initiative and dedication.³⁴ The minutes further reveal that she later did the 'duplicating job' of the *Bulletin* issues for March/April and May 1952 'in order to cut out this big expense' and printed '130 [copies] each time'.³⁵

As a communist, Betty Grant was committed to the construction of a more egalitarian society, and fought artificial structures that fostered social inequality, for example the divisions between professional academics and the broader society – something that far too often still persists today. She was not alone in this and as mentioned above, at the September 1951 aggregate meeting several Historians' Group members had criticised the attitude of the academics.³⁶ The previous year, in July 1950, she had emphasised the 'academic sectarianism she had encountered' in the nineteenth-century section and 'demonstrated from her work on local history the great fruitfulness of direct contact with people in the party and the working class movement' to the Group committee.³⁷ To Grant, local history should be a liberating activity for and by the people, rather than the exclusive domain of a few professional academics. However, as we shall see, her propositions showed at times some ambiguities, almost unconscious incongruities about who these 'people' were.

Post-war Britain witnessed a social trend of specialisation that appeared to be dividing society in 'specialists' and 'amateurs', with the former enjoying an ever-increasing influence at the expense of the latter. This growing tension was also reflected in the Historians' Group and in how they intended to do history (or histories). The wider phenomenon has been examined by David Matless, who shows how this amateur-professional tension was tangible in films like Charles Crichton's *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1953) as much as in works by local historians, for instance W.G. Hoskins's seminal *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955). These works showed two worlds that were defined by strikingly diverging, if not opposite, values: 'state bureaucracy versus local community, the amateur versus the expert, "human" value versus commercial value, local character and meaning versus national standards'.³⁸ CPGB members were not immune from this growing social development as, for example, Kevin Morgan has shown in his account of the tension between the two figures

of the more technically-minded engineer and the string-lover musician, who regarded each other with suspicion in communist jazz-loving circles in Britain.³⁹

A passage from 'The Present Position of Local History in Britain', a short circular letter written by Grant, can help highlight the tension and ambiguities that appeared in the making of a communist local history. Although the precise intended audience for the letter and the specific date she wrote it are unclear, internal evidence suggests that it was meant for the members of Historians' Group, perhaps only its Local History branches, and was produced shortly before the September 1951 aggregate meeting. Grant lamented that local history was often

treated as parochial history – with an iron curtain erected along the parish boundary [...] [I]t can be presented in episodic fashion, depending entirely on the scanty evidence which happens to be available for a tiny area, without any reference to national developments [...] [B]ecause of the admitted difficulty of producing the evidence of the class struggle, without detailed research, a merely amateurish treatment of local history can easily miss this evidence, and the result therefore appears to contradict the theory of class struggle [...] 'Local history' has tended therefore to become identified with rural areas, cathedral cities and country towns. The industrial areas have been neglected.⁴⁰

There are three points in the passage that are of particular relevance. First, the local history that Grant envisaged must take account of national developments. The 'village' was to be analysed in relation to the broader development of capitalism on the national scale and the struggles it provoked. Only in this way could an inclusive sense of (national) class struggle, rather than fragmentary one of parochial 'nativism', be highlighted and fostered. Grant's approach to history indeed reflected the characteristic described by Kaye's argument that communist historians developed 'Marxism as a theory of class determination, the core proposition of which is that class struggle has been central to the historical process'.⁴¹ Anything, or anywhere, must be utilised to foster the class struggle.

The second point concerns the tension between amateurs and professionals. Although Grant, following a trend of British communists at the time, expressed the need to develop a communist history *for* and *by* the people, in the passage above it is only those who have achieved an understanding of the scientific theory of class struggle who could succeed in making a non-amateurish (i.e. professional) local history.⁴² The 'people' assumes then an ambivalent meaning because it was only those who understood the class struggle who could make proper (professional) history.⁴³

This ambivalence or even contradiction, reflected Grant's attempt to reconcile on the one hand her ideal that 'the people' – obviously a larger entity than just a few specialists – should write their own history, and, on the other hand, her attachment as a communist to the doctrines of 'Marxism-Leninism'.⁴⁴ In effect, Grant wanted hers to be a people's history and a professional-revolutionary history *at the same time*, a difficult enterprise to undertake and an even more difficult, if not unsustainable, proposition to endorse.

Third, communist local history as Grant conceived it sought to look at both rural and urban centres. Either could be used to highlight the class struggle that existed in them, although urban areas would generally provide more useful historical material to glorify past labour movements and achievements. History was to serve the development of the class struggle.

In this respect, communist local history was very different from the approach of W.G. Hoskins, which, as Matless has described, presented 'a series of powerful cultural oppositions; urban against rural, national and international against local, individual against state, shallow theory against deep particularity, planning against landscape, modernity against tradition [...] past against present'.⁴⁵ Those local historians who were also communists did not recognise the dichotomy between, for instance, the local and the national since this would have meant missing the point: studying the evolution of capitalism. Moreover, communist local historians saw history as a site for present struggle which would serve to bring about a new, better society in the future. The point, as many radical historians have put it over the years, was to use history to change the world.⁴⁶

It is worth looking more closely at the *Local History Bulletin*, those who contributed to it, and the sort of history and ideas it put forward. As the official periodical of the Local History section, twenty-six issues of the *Local History Bulletin* were published between October 1950 and August/September 1953, meaning that it appeared almost monthly. As the CPHG Local History section Circular Letter proudly observed in January 1952, there was 'no other regular historical article being issued elsewhere in the Party'.⁴⁷ This, once again, challenges the notion that the nineteenth-century section was predominant in the CPHG. Grant was not only the prime motor of the *Bulletin* and an active contributor of articles; at first she also sustained it economically. As the January 1952 statement by Sinnott and Hilton informs us, the *Bulletin*, up until then had been 'circulated free of charge' and only from that moment on it cost '2/6 p.a.'.⁴⁸

The *Bulletin* consisted of two parts, the first half 'performed an organising role' and included news about the work of people on local history at a national level.⁴⁹ It aimed to serve as a means of communication between

the various branches of the party scattered around Britain so 'to provide contact between local research and work being done nationally, by means of which the local branches will gain experience, under guidance, of tackling suitable subjects which may provide valuable new knowledge'.⁵⁰ Additionally, '[e]ach Bulletin, apart from the first', was 'accompanied by an article, written by an expert. The original purpose of these articles was to provide a factual background, on a national scale, to local research on specific subjects'.⁵¹ Although contributors to the *Bulletin* often signed themselves only with their initials, it is fairly certain that George Armstrong, Eric Hobsbawm, Rodney Hilton, Brian Pearce and Christopher Hill, amongst others, published articles in it.⁵²

Nonetheless, the *Bulletin* did not aspire to be an exclusive academic periodical and, instead, it should be considered its antithesis. Grant's concern was to break down social divisions, such as that between 'the people' and professional academics. The *Bulletin* was a tool to enable the people 'to find out more about their own local history in order to make their political work more effective'.⁵³ The success of the *Bulletin* should not be exaggerated: in early 1951, shortly after its foundation, Grant stated that around two-hundred and fifty copies were being printed, with thirty-five being sent to 'leading comrades in King St.' and 'District Secretaries' who probably required copies for historical interest as well as to keep an eye on the work of the local historians.⁵⁴ Moreover, the *Bulletin* was only sustainable thanks to Grant's contributions of her own time and money. It was a political commitment; the political struggle provided the primary motivation for the *Bulletin* and the CPHG local historians.

The organisational and political tensions between the CPGB leadership and the Historians' Group discussed above reflected the uneasy relationship between them. The CPHG had the potential to be a formidable political weapon, but one which was not always wielded and supported intelligently by the party. As Willie Thompson observed in 1992, many rank-and-file communists regarded some party leaders as figures of 'awesome, almost mythic, authority'.⁵⁵ In the early years of the CPHG, the line of the CPGB leadership was one of unremitting orthodoxy, with the Party's theoretician R. Palme Dutt being an excellent example of the dogmatism of the late Stalin era.⁵⁶ This was particularly felt in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the period of 'high Stalinism'.⁵⁷ This was the time of the show trials in Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia against alleged Trotskyite agents and conspirators under the orders of the so-called 'Anglo-American imperialists', when the CPGB leadership stood with Moscow in its campaign against Tito in Yugoslavia, and the official CPGB historian James Klugmann promptly and abruptly issued the (quite distressing) *From Trotsky to Tito* in 1951.⁵⁸

Given this unfavourable political and ideological climate, Grant's achievements in developing and sustaining the CPHG Local History section stand out today even more strongly, and point to the need to reappraise previous notions of the relative importance of different strands in the CPHG.⁵⁹ What features characterised Grant's approach to local history and why was (and most likely still is) this deemed not as worthy as that of, say, those historians whom we now label *the* British Marxist Historians?⁶⁰ These are questions for future research.

The crisis of 1956, following Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the twentieth CPSU congress and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Hungary led many British communists, including many CPHG members, to leave the party. Others, such as Betty Grant and Eric Hobsbawm, chose for various reasons to stay with the party and the group. Grant's attitude can be gauged from some of the recently released material on the CPGB held in the British National Archives. This includes intercepted letters, articles and phone calls that MI5, the British intelligence service, acquired on some of the members of the CPGB.⁶¹ Two letters dated 8 November and 3 December 1956, from Grant to Edwin Payne, at that time Secretary of the CPHG, show her as sensitive yet resolute, and highly aware of the precarious position of communists in the Cold War. To Grant, every chink in the party's armour was exploited by the 'capitalist enemy' to undermine it, and therefore unity must always be shown – even when it was a masquerade. So, in the November letter, Grant stated that the invasion of 'Hungary has indeed been a body-blow', concluding that 'I find it difficult to stop! Like everyone else, I have a lot to say!'.⁶² She also added that the 'main fight' for the Group 'must be precisely on history, i.e. a fight for absolute freedom to speak the truth about British history, and for objectivity, not expediency'.⁶³ As for her attitude to the CPGB leadership, she wrote

the Party belong [sic] not to the present leadership as a private concern for them to run as they like but to us the rank-and-file, and beyond us, the Labour movement. Therefore, the Party must go on, and members must not leave because they are disgusted with the leadership (or lack of leadership, as in my case). They must stay in, and fight. However, from now on, fighting means something more than keeping strictly to the rules provided by the vested interests.⁶⁴

However, she was also determined not to allow the Historians' Group, and the CPGB more broadly, to crumble in controversy under the Cold War pressure. In her December letter, she reproached Hobsbawm for publishing a letter criticising the Party support for the Soviet invasion in

the *New Statesman* and *Tribune*, after it had been rejected for publication in the CPGB official organ, the *Daily Worker*.⁶⁵ This letter came after decisions had been already taken by the Group, and away from public spotlight, on how to act unitedly in face of the fractions that the invasion had brought. In a passage worth citing at length Grant explained to Payne,

I have no idea how you react to his [Hobsbawm's] draft, if you have had it. But that is not the point, even if you agree absolutely with Eric's line, it is still not the way to do things. That sub-committee was set up precisely because the others could see that there were still points to be sorted out, and Eric and I were put on it (with you as Secretary of the Group) because it was seen that he and I had the strongest opposing views. I am certainly not prepared to allow 'absentee' members, and ex-members, of the Group to sway the Group away from decisions already taken.⁶⁶

In a rather caustic final remark, she concluded, 'Well, what do you know? I'm answering this [John Saville's] letter myself, since it is a personal one. And I shall not mince matters. I no longer think the *main* task of the Hist. Gr. of the Party is to "keep sweet" those who have left or are intending to leave'.⁶⁷

By January 1957, Betty Grant had become Secretary of the entire CP Historians' Group, although, given the large exodus from the party and the group in 1956-57, we cannot say how far her elevation was owing to a lack of alternative candidates.⁶⁸ At the same time, the approach she had pioneered in the Local History section, issuing regular publications on historical themes, had been adopted by the CPHG as a whole: from spring 1956 *Our History* became the CPHG's quarterly pamphlet series. It is fitting that the very first issue was entitled 'The Class Struggle in Local Affairs'.

Notes

1. The virtually complete silence in scholarship has finally been broken by Willie Thompson who has at least recognised this historical omission; see Willie Thompson, 'From Communist Party Historians' Group to Socialist History Society, 1946-2017', in *History Workshop Journal Online*, 10 April 2017; see <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/from-communist-party-historians-group-to-socialist-history-society-1946-2017>
2. David Renton, 'Studying Their Own Nation without Insularity? The British Marxist Historians Reconsidered', *Science & Society* 69 (2005), p561.
3. David Parker, *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution: Debates of*

- the British Communist Historians 1940-1956*, London 2008, p9; Alexander Hutton, "Culture and Society" In *Conceptions of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, 1930-1965* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, Darwin College, 2014), pp282-283.
4. Harvey Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis*, Basingstoke 1995. On academic coverage on some of the historians, see, for instance, Richard Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm: A Life in History*, Oxford 2019; Timothy Shenk, *Maurice Dobb: Political Economist*, Basingstoke 2013; Harvey Kaye and Keith McClelland (ed.), *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, Philadelphia, PA 1990. The list goes on.
 5. Parker, *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution*, p247.
 6. Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Communist Party of Great Britain archive, National Cultural Committee, CP/CENT/CULT/05/11, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1946-51, fo. 26, 26 September 1947.
 7. Ibid.
 8. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 4, Report on Local History, January/February 1951.
 9. Ibid.
 10. Parker, *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution*, p247.
 11. CP/CENT/CULT/05/12, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1951-4, fo. 38, 9 Dec. 1951.
 12. Ibid., fo. 40, 9 December 1951.
 13. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 24, Circular Letter n. 1, January 1952.
 14. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 37-8, January 1952.
 15. CP/CENT/CULT/05/12, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1951-4, fo. 12, 18 May 1951.
 16. CP/CENT/CULT/18/07, *Local History Bulletin* 26, fo. 119, August/September 1953.
 17. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 5, Report on Local History, January/February 1951.
 18. Ibid.
 19. CP/CENT/CULT/05/11, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1946-51, fo. 124, 12 January 1951.
 20. Ibid., fo. 105, 13 May 1950.
 21. Ibid.
 22. CP/CENT/CULT/05/12, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1951-4, fo. 8, 13 April 1951.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid., fo. 26, 21 September 1951.
 25. Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-1951*, London 1997, pp216-219.

26. Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton*, London 1978, p27.
27. CP/CENT/CULT/05/11, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1946-51, fo. 81, 10 December 1949.
28. CP/CENT/CULT/18/07, *Local History Bulletin* 1, fo. 2, October 1950.
29. CP/CENT/CULT/05/11, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1946-51, fo. 92, 4 March 1950.
30. *Ibid.*, fo. 95, 4 March 1950.
31. *Ibid.*, fo. 109, 30 July 1950.
32. CP/CENT/CULT/05/11, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1946-51, fo. 107, 10 June 1950.
33. *Ibid.*, fo. 114, 16 September 1950.
34. *Ibid.*
35. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 29, Circular Letter n. 2, March 1952; fo. 31, Circular Letter n. 3, June 1952.
36. Parker, *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution*, p248.
37. CP/CENT/CULT/05/11, Historians' Group Committee minute book 1946-51, fo. 111, 30 July 1950.
38. David Matless, 'One Man's England: W.G. Hoskins and the English Culture of Landscape', *Rural History* 4 (1993), p195.
39. Kevin Morgan, 'King Street Blues: Jazz and the Left in Britain in the 1930s-1940s' in Andy Croft (ed.), *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*, London 1998, p127.
40. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 14, Betty Grant, 'The Present Position of Local History in Britain', date unspecified.
41. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians*, p6.
42. See, for instance, A.L. Merson, 'The Writing of Marxist History', *Communist Review* (July 1949), p596, cited in Hutton, "'Culture and Society'", p274.
43. Similarly, as Matless points out, Hoskins' criticism of modern experts is 'countered not by bumbling amateurism but by another authority, itself held to be more English', which is 'experience and knowledgeable observation' of the English rural landscape; see David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, London 1998, p277.
44. For the spreading of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, or at least its interpretation in Britain, see Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933*, Cambridge 1980, pp108-114; for more details on the influence on the historians, see also Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', p22.
45. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p276.
46. For instance, Hobsbawm famously stated that history and the social sciences 'are essentially "applied sciences" designed, to use Marx's phrase, to change

- the world and not merely to interpret it (or alternatively to explain why it does not need changing)', see, Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, London 1997, p178. For a similar point, expressed in different terms, see Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History*, second edition, Champaign, IL 1990, pp35-55.
47. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 24, Circular Letter n. 1, January 1952. Unless stated otherwise, all italics, capitalisation, underlines, etc. quoted in the article are present in the original texts.
 48. Ibid., fo. 38, The Communist Party Historians' Group – a statement on the present position, from Diana Sinnott and Rodney Hilton, unknown recipient, January 1952.
 49. Ibid., fo. 24, January 1952.
 50. Ibid.
 51. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 24, Circular Letter n. 1, January 1952.
 52. CP/CENT/CULT/18/07, *Local History Bulletin* 2, fo. 8, November 1950; n. 3, fo. 12, January 1951; n. 7, fo. 36, June 1951; n. 10, fo. 50, October 1951; n. 14, fo. 76, March/April 1952.
 53. CP/CENT/CULT/18/07, *Local History Bulletin* 1, fo. 1, October 1950.
 54. CP/CENT/CULT/18/08, Local History Committee papers, 1950-8, fo. 4, January/February 1951.
 55. Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991*, London 1992, p88.
 56. John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: a Study in British Stalinism*, London 1993, pp38-39.
 57. Edwin Roberts, 'From the History of Science to the Science of History: Scientists and Historians in the Shaping of British Marxist Theory', *Science & Society* 4 (2005), p546.
 58. Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-1951*, pp196-197.
 59. For instance, Parker, *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution*, p9 and Hutton, 'Culture and Society', pp282-283.
 60. The anachronism which many historians are guilty of has been strongly assaulted by what has come to be known as the Cambridge School of intellectual history. See Richard Whatmore, *What is Intellectual History?*, Cambridge 2016, pp39-40. For some methodological works on this approach to history see, for instance, Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969), pp3-53; Quentin Skinner, 'Motives, Intentions, and the Interpretation of Texts', *New Literary History* 3 (1972), pp393-408.
 61. For a first commentary on these documents, as well as a very useful website link to them, see, Evan Smith, 'The CPGB Response to the *New Statesman* Letter and the Historians' Group: From the newly released MI5 Files on

- Hobsbawm', in *Hatful of History*, 24 Oct 2014, see <https://hatfulofhistory.wordpress.com/2014/10/24/the-cpgb-response-to-the-new-statesman-letter-and-the-historians-group-from-the-newly-released-mi5-files-on-hobsbawm>
62. The National Archives (NA), KV2/3983, MI5 documents on 'Hobsbawm, Eric John Ernest' P.F.211,764, intercepted letter from Betty Grant to Edwin Payne, 8 November 1956 [copied 22 Nov. 1956], fo. 268B.
 63. Ibid.
 64. Ibid.
 65. Smith, 'The CPGB Response to the New Statesman Letter and the Historians' Group'.
 66. NA, KV2/3983, MI5 documents on 'Hobsbawm, Eric John Ernest' P.F.211,764, intercepted letter from Betty Grant to Edwin Payne, 3 December 1956 [copied 31 December 1956], fo. 276B.
 67. Ibid; John Saville, Historians' Group member, left the Party over the Hungarian invasion.
 68. Parker, *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution*, p248; (index) p279.