

# Editorial note

The international dimension has occupied a central place in the pages of the *Urban History Yearbook* since its early issues and this latest edition, the sixteenth, extends that tradition.<sup>1</sup> No less than four articles are devoted to non-British topics and a fifth deals with a Canadian research initiative. The articles range from nineteenth-century studies of the political process in Philadelphia and of urban transit systems in New York, Chicago and Boston to a focus on that most urbanised of geographical areas, the Low Countries, where de-urbanization in eighteenth-century Dutch towns and the interaction of urban expansion and socialism in Belgium in the years preceding the First World War are subjected to analysis. Without losing the peculiarities of its own urban experience, the Belgian case will suggest some intriguing parallels to *Yearbook* readers in respect of the international dimension of emerging socialism and its interaction with the urbanizing process in Britain, France and Germany.

Australia, Argentina and America figure as the locus of important conferences, and reports of those meetings offer a window on urban history scholarship in those countries. From Italy, Poland, West Germany and the Netherlands reports on urban history meetings have been compiled, and the British scene is not neglected with accounts of conferences concerned with methodology, computing and urban-rural relations. In a yearly publication it is possible to combine these various conference presentations of research in urban history so that a broader view of themes, long-run developments and progress in larger collaborative and in individual work can be obtained. Since academic institutions are notoriously mean in financing attendance at conferences, and as publishers are now more sceptical about volumes of conference proceedings, arguably this function is more valuable than ever. As a result of being a yearly publication it is often up to eighteen months before conference reports are available to *Yearbook* subscribers. If you have a view on the

usefulness, coverage or other aspects of conference reporting please write to the editor.

Initiative has not been lacking in urban history during 1988. One notable development is the funding by the National Endowment for the Humanities of a summer school for college teachers at the University of Virginia. An intensive eight-week residential seminar programme has been developed by Olivier Zunz with a view to exploring the context and analytical framework for the stream of local city histories which continue to appear from museums, colleges and university presses in the United States. The rationale behind Zunz's initiative is informative. Before the publication of A.M. Schlesinger's *The Rise of the City* (1933), local urban history was largely the preserve of the amateur and antiquarian. In the 1940s and 1950s Schlesinger's seminal work prompted empirical studies of numerous cities and counterpoised the city as a dominant force in American history at least as important as Turner's paradigm of the frontier. By the 1960s the political imperative was for the historical origins of those social ills which had become so apparent in contemporary American cities, and scholars turned to a consideration of the antecedents of such *malaises*. A related, though distinct thread, also addressed the critical role of cities in the transformation of the south after the war between the states. The new urban history in the United States,<sup>2</sup> dating from the 1960s, remained unashamedly local — studies of local communities and segregation, land and housing developments and investigations of local politics and business. This emphasis on a specific urban place, though refreshingly interdisciplinary, rarely attempted synthesis. Though enriched by detailed research, history had become fragmented; the historian's craft of providing a universal view was under threat. So, ambitiously, Zunz plans to review how such specific studies fit into more general frameworks, putting the wider context back into local urban history; but it does express a conviction that urban processes have a dynamic beyond that of the purely local. Such reminders are also timely among the wider community of European urban historians.

Another initiative in the United States has been the formation of an Urban History Association, an expression of optimism in the field, and one shared by over 150 historians who have promptly joined. The American association published a newsletter in March 1989, available by contacting Ann Durkin Keating (Public Works Historical Society, 1313 East 60th St. Chicago, Il 60637). Few, if any, appointments in the field of urban history have been made recently in American universities, and it is to be hoped that this new association will be successful in its intention to deepen appreciation of urban issues and their historical context 'in the United States and around the world'. To this end the Association is committed both to sponsoring panels on urban history at conferences and to awarding prizes for published work and exhibitions. Urban historians everywhere will wish them well, and it is to be hoped that they find the *Urban*

*History Yearbook* useful not only as a bibliographical tool, but as a reflection of trends in European scholarship. No doubt American urban historians will become more fully aware of the *Yearbook*, and will wish to publish in it as a means of wider dissemination of their research.

In Britain, perhaps some of the most imaginative initiatives have been clustered around the efforts of the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester. Exchanges of staff and students in urban history between Leicester University and European universities, although not exactly a new initiative since they have in various forms been operating for ten years, have taken on a different scale and significance with the mutual participation of Leicester, Leiden, Leuven, Giessen and Santiago in ERASMUS-funded teaching exchanges. In both 1988 and 1989 the Leicester-Leiden axis will operate with students undertaking courses in urban, social and related historical areas as part of their undergraduate degree. The sheer effort and energy required in the development of these arrangements is testimony to Peter Clark's commitment to urban history, and this European initiative has firmly established the Centre for Urban History as one with genuinely international status. The recent move of Professor Anthony Sutcliffe to Leicester has itself added considerable lustre. Already the international reputation of the Centre for Urban History is reflected in a steady stream of visitors from the United Kingdom and overseas who use specialist urban and transport history collections in the Centre and university library, as well as other resources and proximity to London as the basis for their work while in Leicester. Anyone interested in long or short periods of attachment as research associates with the Centre should write to Professor P. A. Clark, Centre for Urban History, College House, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK, from whom further details of CUH seminars, the twice yearly *Newsletter*, other activities and, of course, subscriptions can be obtained.

Another important venture through the Centre for Urban History aimed at the enrichment of teaching resources at all levels of higher education is the commissioning in 1989 of a series of readers – key articles with a commentary by prominent British urban historians. This four-volume series, under the general editorship of a former *Yearbook* editor, David Reeder, covers the medieval period to the early twentieth century, and is intended to counteract the erosion of journal subscriptions caused by education cuts in higher education, and to serve as an introduction for many students about to commence project work in connection with school exams.

Not exactly a *Who's Who* of Urban History, a revised edition of the Research Register in Urban History is in the process of compilation. The intention is to record areas of research interest and recent publications. As it is several years since the last edition was produced there is obviously a considerable change in those active in urban history research, broadly defined. Please state your interests,

and those of others known to you and active in urban history, and send details to Diana Dixon, at the Centre for Urban History (address above).

Another urban history initiative beginning to gain momentum is the Centre for Metropolitan History at the University of London. Established in 1987 as a collaborative venture with the Museum of London, and in the most difficult circumstances given the dismantling of the government of London, the CMH addresses a longstanding need to provide a focus for the history of London. Derek Keene acts as Director, and research projects now gaining momentum include a social and economic study of medieval London, food supply to medieval London, epidemics and mortality in pre-industrial London, the evolution of the central financial district 1690–1870, and office life and environment 1870–1980. In addition, a bibliography of London history before 1939 is in preparation, as is a register of research on London.<sup>3</sup> The importance of London as a great European metropolis has been recognized since Roman times, and with rich research seams continues to illuminate the unfolding processes of urbanization. Details of conferences, seminars and other CMH activities can be obtained from Dr D. Keene, Institute of Historical Research, 34 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9EZ.

Organizational and personnel changes have strengthened the composition of the editorial team of the *Yearbook*. To Diana Dixon's annual magical trick of producing a classified bibliography of publications in urban history, Nigel Goose has agreed to act as conjurer's assistant alongside Nick Wilson. Though there is no sleight of hand, only polished prose, David Reeder's responsibility for reading recent theses is shared with the welcome addition of Stana Nenadic. Bill Luckin replaces Rick Trainor in the unenviable task of reviewing periodical literature since 1800 — a truly arduous responsibility in view of both the proliferation and obscurity of urban history publications. For five years Rick Trainor has valiantly scoured journals to bring *Yearbook* readers an eclectic appraisal of the significant and quirky in urban history. His efforts have been much appreciated, and will now be redirected towards conferences and wider *Yearbook* affairs. The retirement of Peter Boulton from Leicester University Press marks the end of an era, as explained below, and the editorial board have expressed thanks to him and to Susan Martin for their attentiveness to the production of successive *Yearbooks*.

During the hectic round of publishing mergers in 1988, one amalgamation which failed to attract much publicity was the acquisition of Leicester University Press by Pinter Publishers. However, the retention of the 'Leicester University Press' imprint means an ongoing commitment to the publication of urban history monographs, and of the *Urban History Yearbook*. The editorial board welcomes the opportunity to work with Pinters, whose experience in commercial publishing and worldwide distribution should assure readers of easier *Yearbook* availability. Given the international dimension to

*Yearbook* contents during the 1980s when 36 per cent of articles were of a non-British character, 51 per cent of conference reports were concerned with meetings held beyond British shores and that, as a matter of course, the bibliographical and periodical surveys rely very heavily on non-British journals, the promise of improved distribution is seen as particularly encouraging by the editorial board. This should particularly be the case in North America where Columbia University Press will act as distributors. However, the editorial team is also keenly aware of the importance of the needs of British readers, and will continue to attach a high priority to this area in terms of the continuity of bibliographical and source materials, as well as to retaining a balance in the geographical and temporal coverage of articles.

The editorial policy associated with the *Urban History Yearbook* since its inception has consistently sought to sustain broad and interdisciplinary terms of reference. Articles, conference reports and other regular elements have been published with such principles in mind, and based on the view, stated in 1974, that urban history was concerned with the degree to which economic, social and political relationships within cities possessed a symbiotic character by virtue of their urban dimension. By contrast, many historical events often took place in cities but did so in a way which was almost irrelevant to them; they had no long-term significance for, made little impact on or contact with the specific groups or organizations which contributed to the special flavour of the city. Such historical events were parasitical in the sense of using the city as a temporary host without interacting with it. Under these conditions the city was 'purely incidental' to such events.<sup>4</sup> Dyos, and through his efforts as its editor, the *Yearbook* offered a much broader interactive view of the urban dimension. The city was seen as a locale in which the properties of a larger social system were concentrated and manifested, but on which an urban dynamic was superimposed. The urban variable acted as a spatial fixing agent to a social system which otherwise lacked definition, specificity and ultimately reality. It is this approach which underpins Paul Wheatley's recent view of European urbanization<sup>5</sup> and one which he implores more urban historians to adopt. Wheatley reacts against those historians who concentrate on one variable, as though all others could be held constant, and sees this as particularly damaging to urban history, which is dependent on the interactive principle. More recently, Rollison, apparently labouring under the misconception that if the name of a town appeared in the title of the research or publication then that was sufficient proof of its being urban history, simplistically argued that 'urban history, with its emphasis on particular cases, leads us astray'.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in an earlier sentence Rollison states that: 'We need to look, not at particular towns and villages, but at routine relationships between them on a regional, national and international scale: at urbanizing *societies*.'<sup>7</sup> This is precisely what has been undertaken

annually in the pages of the *Urban History Yearbook* which, while it remains committed to publishing studies which reveal the urban processes at the local level, has also sought to advance an understanding of the broader mechanisms — local, regional, national and international — by which particular urban characteristics have been produced.

## Notes

- 1 For a review of that tradition, and of the content and impact of the *Urban History Yearbook*, 1974, see E. Bloomfield, 'The *Urban History Yearbook* — interdisciplinary forum or indispensable research tool?', *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 16 (1987), 75-7.
- 2 For a review of this work see R.A. Mohl, 'The new urban history and its alternatives: some reflections on recent U.S. scholarship on the twentieth century city', *Urban History Yearbook*, 1983, 19-28.
- 3 'Register of Research in Progress on the History of London', *The London Journal*, 13 (1987-88), 87-96.
- 4 H.J. Dyos, 'Editorial', *Urban History Yearbook*, 1974, 5-6 and his inaugural lecture, *Urbanity and Suburbanity*, 1973.
- 5 P. Wheatley, 'European urbanization: origins and consummation', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17 (1986), 415-30.
- 6 D. Rollison, 'The bourgeois soul of John Smyth of Nibley', *Social History*, 12 (1987), 315.
- 7 *Ibid.*, his emphasis.

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**Contributors** should send double-spaced typescripts to:  
Richard Rodger,  
Department of Economic and Social History,  
University of Leicester,  
Leicester LE1 7RH,  
UK

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Pinter Publishers,  
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