

Editorial

If anyone had doubted that urban history had sufficient outlets among academic journals when the *Yearbook* appeared they must already have ceased to do so. Our contention is that to try and force such writing into one corner or another would be as foolish as it was self-defeating, for this is a field without a single academic focus and the disciplines that engage in it have such flourishing journals that it might seem almost mischievous to add to them. We content ourselves therefore with gauging the many-sided approach to the urban past, taking stock of what is being done, adding where we can to the effectiveness of such teaching and research as are moving in this direction, becoming indeed the necessary adjunct to them both, but stopping short of presenting the findings of research as such - of becoming a veritable journal ourselves. We are glad to find our purpose so widely welcomed by reviewers and correspondents, but above all by our subscribers, and we shall certainly hold to it.

Since the *Yearbook* was mooted the number of academic journals has continued to grow to such an extent that it is difficult to restrain the feeling that, taken together, there are just too many of them. Now that the publishing of books appears so fraught with difficulty, this might seem a churlish attitude, but the number of periodicals an individual subscriber can afford (or an institutional one for that matter), or can keep up with if he cannot subscribe, is not infinitely elastic, nor is it heresy to admit it. It is to be hoped that we have not yet reached saturation point, and certainly it is almost impossible to begrudge the newcomers individually.

We spy nothing specifically urban in the first issue of the *Journal of Mediaeval History*, a quarterly that started up in April 1975, nor in *Irish Social and Economic History*, an annual established the year before, but the opening issues of the *Journal of Historical Geography*, another quarterly, that began to appear in January 1975, seem to be bursting with urban possibilities. It is customary to say of a new journal that it remains to be seen whether its first brilliant explosion will make its loudest bang, but with two more new historical journals with general interests going off in 1976 we can but wait and see whether editors and contributors do have stamina enough to keep their standards up. *Social History* - would that it had avoided an established journal's title! - began publication in fine style in January 1976 with plans for three issues per annum, and it promises to define and develop the subject as a discipline having relations with other social sciences, and to 'seek to further current interests in such questions as social structure and social minorities, class and consciousness, popular and official cultures, urban and medical history, technological change and collective behaviour, mechanisms of social control and the social basis of stability and conflict.' *History Workshop. A Journal of Socialist Historians*, which emerges on a triannual basis for the first time in spring 1976, promises to go to unusual lengths in asserting 'the primacy of history for social theory, and to offer a more realistic account of social change than is offered by the short-lived hermetic typologies which pass in the name of social science.' The urban dimension to all these explorations cannot fail to be large.

More explicitly urban are no fewer than five other new journals. *Built Environment* is a bright if somewhat bristling quarterly that started to cater primarily to professional planners' interests in this country in June 1975 but may well prove to have a larger constituency than that, especially if the historical element, which is as implicit in the articles and reviews as it is in the

built environment itself, is brought to bear more explicitly in its columns and by its subscribers on the fundamental assumptions of planning at large. Another new quarterly, **Computers and Urban Society**, which is edited in the United States, is seeking to enhance the quality of urban life through electronic problem-solving and visualizes the faint possibility of bringing an historical perspective to bear from time to time. Whatever predilective shivers that may cause, there is in the relatively new biannual **Journal of Urban Analysis**, which was begun in 1973, a more generally oriented but highly sophisticated forum for the discussion of contemporary problems of urban policy-making and administration across an altogether wider field. Despite its unprepossessing appearance and somewhat bitty make-up, the **Journal of Urban History**, another American quarterly which started up in November 1974, deserves our closest attention. It opens its pages very wide, though without admitting to them as yet much material unrelated to the western hemisphere: the third issue, devoted to the history of the family in American urban society, contains some perceptive papers edited by Tamara Hareven. **The London Journal. A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present** is something quite different. It began to appear twice a year in May 1975 - more immaculate than any - and seeks a primarily historical focus for the comprehension of London's contemporary culture, its social issues, fabric, and economic and political life. It opens up exciting possibilities for it attempts to mediate the academic disciplines engaged in the analysis of these interconnected things and to promote a far wider and in some ways more naturally-derived apprehension of urban civilization for all concerned through comparative study than any yet offered by an exclusively academic approach. What we certainly see emerging in these new periodicals, when set down with the old, is a far more extensive range of alternative ideologies and uses of history than we have yet known. Had we not already got one in these pages, methinks, we might have had to invent an annual review of reviews to comprehend them all.

The past year has tended to pose the alternatives for urban historians in other ways. The comparative neglect of the period before 1800 and the somewhat fragmented treatment of its urban themes come out most forcibly, of course, when offered against the vivid and balanced handling of them by French historians - most notably of late perhaps by Maurice Garden in his **Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle** (1974). The provincialism of local and regional studies in Britain is nowhere more marked than in the insular studies of individual towns torn from their agrarian context, and in those self-styled regional histories which lead the reader blindfold past the towns or hail them as ships in mid-ocean. The alternative to the encapsulated study of a chosen community, or even a collection of them - as in Margaret Spufford's vivid reconstruction of what it was like to live in an East Anglian village three or four hundred years ago, in her **Contrasting Communities, English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries** (1974) - might be one in which the subtler interconnections between town and country, and town and town, within urban systems of varying degrees, would emerge. It may be that the methodological breakthrough offered by Christopher N. L. Brooke and Gillian Keir, **London 800-1261: The Shaping of a City** (1975), will permit a step in this direction. Among the necessary and commonly accepted ingredients in their third volume in this all-encompassing series lies their discovery of a way of marking off the developmental phases of a town through the study of parish and ward boundaries - something that appears applicable to most other English towns in some degree owing to the numerous parishes they contained. The eleventh and twelfth centuries can be represented accordingly as the decisive foundation period for the capital, the point at which the host of communities within the walls emerged from the Dark Ages with the authentic identity of a city.

That kind of painstaking achievement through the study of the shapes on and of the ground, though all too liable to become misleadingly deterministic if pressed too far, would perhaps have made a truer act of homage to that patron

saint of landscape studies, W. G. Hoskins, than all but one of the essays designated urban in his *Festschrift, Rural Change and Urban Growth, 1500-1800* (1974), edited by C. W. Chalklin and M. A. Havinden. Hoskins' work stemmed from Tawney's, and in giving the study of the landscape - the urban quite as much as the rural - so squarely into the hands of the historians he required them to use their eyes as they had seldom done and to connect what they saw on the ground with what they prised from their documents. Urban history requires these connections at every step, and above all the connections that must be sought between the mercurial structures and paraphernalia of a place and the localized and more diffused processes in which they cohere. In seeking the largely logistical reasons for Leeds' East End in the Chalklin and Havinden volume, Maurice Beresford must be thought to be going perhaps a shade too far in his otherwise masterly exemplification of these things: here, in the 'wholly local problem of the timing, the motives, the movers, the strategy of housing development', he contends, 'here, rather than with aggregates, are the foundations of historical explanation.'

Chalklin, too, in his major work, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England* (1974), which elucidates the building process of that period as never before, might be held to be laying the stress too heavily on the bricks and mortar, and of burying their meaning too deeply in their respective localities. Yet the great virtue of such work - apart from its unremitting struggle for historical comparison and its refreshingly non-metropolitan approach - lies in the thrusting of the building process and the resulting artifact of the city into the forefront of our thinking about urban growth and change. The most fundamental obligation of urban history - whatever it may yield besides - is to undertake a task no one else will and make plain how the land was built upon in the way that it was. Here is, in truth, a dynamic set of elements that offers an organizing focus for urban historians over a much longer period of time than might have been supposed: a reminder, among other things, that much of what is commonly taken to belong exclusively to the nineteenth-century phase of urban development - its values and its mechanisms - derives directly or indirectly from the eighteenth.

The more significant inflexion in recent writing appears nevertheless to lie in this shift of attention to the building process, most conspicuously perhaps in the range of research and published work now in train - good, bad, and misleading - and in the formation of specialized groups concerned with the nearly contemporary history of planning and housing. F. M. L. Thompson's *Hampstead* (1974), more explicitly and expertly than any, seeks the forces made incarnate in 'the awkward real world' through the process of fashioning these shapes on the ground. Here is a veritable landmark that sets bounds to the landed proprietors' part in the unconscious accretions of suburbia - something that lies across the path of anyone tracing the conscious pursuit of the ideal urban community in our times. That is already becoming a pursuit in itself, as the recent spate of historical surveys of town-planning by non-historians shows; Peter Hall's *Urban and Regional Planning* (1974) offers a particularly succinct and measured account of the development of the ideologies and mechanisms of planning in Britain, and L. S. Bourne's *Urban Systems: Strategies for Regulation* (1975) extends it comparatively and bibliographically; J. B. Cullingworth's *Reconstruction and Land Use Planning, 1939-1947* (1975) lays stress on the centrality of the idea by appearing as the first of the new official peace-time histories to be published by H.M.S.O.

The history of a technique is as easily shunted into purely intellectual sidings as the history of a social process is liable to perpetual levitation, and it is an excellent thing that the older historical tradition of giving such things a local habitation and a name should persist. Sir Francis Hill's fourth volume on his home town, *Victorian Lincoln* (1974), is indelibly of its place and its people, as elegantly old-fashioned as a frock coat, as intimately informed as a village postman - and as welcome as the day. Were it not for an anthropomorphic epithet that still causes sane scholars palpitations, the skilled synthesis

of the physical and social elements comprising a town might yet be winning the applause it deserves. In one sense, indeed, the test of whether urban history is succeeding is the degree to which the analytical themes and structures are being made to reveal and explain the places that are recognizable on the ground; not in terms of a series of local mysteries penetrable only in their own terms (as Hill's *Lincoln* and Simmons' *Leicester* rather present themselves), but in as many dimensions as will allow their particularity and their universality to come out. The day of the thoroughly sophisticated urban biography has not yet come and it may be as well that not one of our important cities has had so complete a portrayal in the older terms as to discourage their fuller interpretation in the new. What we continue to see for the time being is a more unilateral approach, as exemplified by Alan Armstrong's *Stability and Change in an English County Town* (1974), in which he does some simple things well and makes us aware of the people behind the aggregates, and Hugh McLeod's *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (1974), in which he puts together some less easily composed fragments with great care and perception. Even where the scope becomes multi-dimensional, as in the third volume of the *History of Birmingham* (1974) by Anthony Sutcliffe and Roger Smith, what we witness is a deliberate denial of the excesses of full-blooded characterisation (as in Asa Briggs's second volume) for the more ascetic delights of anatomical dissection - the dimensions shorn of the mystique.

The seductive possibilities and pitfalls of a more openly imaginative approach to a single episode in the history of a great city can, on the other hand, scarcely have been demonstrated with greater flair or more total involvement than by Richard Cobb in his *Paris and its Provinces, 1792-1802* (1975). One can point to the lengthening lines of questioning he opens up - or fore-closes; to the uncanny feeling he has for the most primitive contest between town and country; to the self-indulgent interlocution almost between dramatist and plot; but what one must for once (if not called on too often) applaud is this capacity for imaginative insight and historical feeling that stands in such stark contrast to the more theoretical and systematic analysis that is now *de rigueur*. The mechanistically comparative application of a set of criteria to one case after another, regardless of the beguiling contours any one of them may offer, is a more ordinary and more demanding virtue in the urban historian, but who shall say which in the end will prove more revealing?

As we go finally to press, the Social History Society of the United Kingdom has launched itself with all gallants flying, on a course that promises well for urban historians, not least because it seeks more legitimate access for *bona fide* researchers to those basic social archives in public hands still restricted by excessive barriers and rules. Now that the most delicate matters of State are kept secret for no more than 30 years, who can justify keeping those of birth, marriage, death, income tax, census enumeration, or the Home Office dark for a 100 or more? Half-a-century would seem interval enough. Urban historians have long been dismayed by the denial to them of the opportunity to analyse the full societal process of urbanization in the very country in which the modern experience of it first occurred in modern times. They are bound to welcome this new initiative unreservedly.

It remains to say that the Editorial Board has continued to divide its work somewhat loosely but that the chief responsibilities have been shared as follows: reviews, David Reeder (books), Penelope Corfield (articles); bibliography, Diana Dixon and Anthony Sutcliffe; research, H. J. Dyos. From 1977 the Yearbook is to be slightly enlarged.