Abstracts of articles

Stephen Hipkin
Closing ranks: oligarchy and government at Rye, 1570–1640

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the development of oligarchic government was accomplished in many English corporate towns by the introduction of a common council, the exclusion of the commonalty of freemen from participation in decision-making processes, and often their removal from the municipal and/or parliamentary franchise. Resistance to such changes among rank-and-file freemen frequently gave rise to civic strife, factionalism and oligarchic dependence on outside support. But analysis of developments at the town of Rye in Sussex suggests that an alternative (or subsidiary) route to oligarchy, less prone to fostering factionalism and dependency on crown agents, may have existed in towns where it was possible strictly to control freeman admissions and promote rule by exclusive commonalty.

David Vincent
Secrecy and the city, 1870–1939

This paper discusses the treatment of space and social interaction in the emerging modern city, and argues that the notion of 'reserve' developed by Georg Simmel blurs the key polarity between secrecy and privacy. Case histories of home visiting and gossip are used to examine how the boundaries between the two forms of blocked communication were constructed and negotiated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British city. There was no unilinear transition from open to closed personal contacts, but rather a series of conflicts and anxieties generated by issues of class and political authority. The contingent distinction between privacy and secrecy revolved around the question of trust, which was in turn a function of domestic and corporate prosperity.

Martin Powell

Did politics matter? Municipal public health expenditure in the 1930s

This paper examines the relatively neglected topic of municipal public health expenditure in the inter-war period, and emphasizes two neglected dimensions: the political and the geographical. After justifying the importance of the topic and the approach and giving some details of municipal public health provision, a quantitative analysis of expenditure in the urban county boroughs is presented. In general, the analysis tends to argue against conventional wisdom in stressing the political dimension instead of the economic dimension in explaining the pattern of expenditure, giving a positive answer to the question posed in the title.

Alan Mayne

A barefoot childhood: so what? Imagining slums and reading neighbourhoods

Starting with Englander's denial (*Urban History*, 21, 2 (1994)), that 'slums are ... real only in words, ... rather than being rooted in the material conditions of everyday life', the article draws a distinction between historical analyses of slums, which entail an examination of words, signs and symbols, and analyses of inner-city neighbourhoods which have been overshadowed by slumland representations. It is claimed that this latter task entails a nuanced materialist historicism, attuned to the surviving material and oral culture of actual neighbourhoods, in place of Englander's faith in an older style of historical materialism.