

Editorial note

This fourteenth issue of the *Yearbook* seeks to provide an overview of academic work in urban history for 1986. Looking back over the urban history scene in Britain, it is only fitting to begin on a sad note with the sudden death early in the year of Professor Sydney Checkland. Although Sydney Checkland had retired from the University of Glasgow, he had been very active in academic work based at Cambridge. One of his last engagements had been to give the H. J. Dyos Memorial Lecture at Leicester in May 1986, on the theme of the relations between business and urban history which he had made distinctively his own. This is not the place to present an appreciation of the outstandingly varied and imaginative contribution which Sydney Checkland made to historical scholarship. What should be remembered here is the part he played in promoting and guiding urban history in Britain, as well as the quality of his writings on the industrial city in general and Glasgow in particular. Sydney Checkland had many interests, but he was always willing to give time and attention to urban history matters. He supported Jim Dyos in sponsoring the formation of the British Urban History Group, and he remained for more than 20 years a wise and friendly adviser. At the international conferences of 1966 and 1980 he provided the Group with stimulating reflections on the state of the art, but he also acted, at a more informal level, and behind the scenes, as elder statesman, when called upon to give his views on what might be the best course to take.

Another event which marked 1986 as the end of an era in urban history was the holding of a Council meeting on the organizational future of the Group. Decisions were taken, subsequently reaffirmed at the annual conference at Cheltenham, to reconstitute the Council with a more open membership, join up with other organizational centres that had developed, and set a new pattern of conferences. The Belfast conference of April 1987 was planned as the last of the old-style meetings to be replaced in the future by mainly one-day meetings on specific themes. The Council anticipated meeting regularly – as it has done since – and will expect to plan another major conference eventually to bring urban historians working in different periods together. In this situation, it is pleasing to report the rebirth of the British *Urban History Newsletter* in autumn 1986, edited by Sue Wright of the Department of Local History, University of Leicester, and supported by the Centre for Urban History at Leicester in conjunction with the Urban History and Pre-Modern Town Groups. Its publication reflects a need for keeping an ever-growing body of urban historians informed about academic events, projects and research. As the first issue indicated, the need for this service is all the greater because of the way that urban history has developed in Britain in the post-Dyos era, with a plurality of research topics and approaches, covering a more extended chronological period than formerly, and with a diversity of organizational centres. The *Newsletter*, published in the spring and autumn, will not only keep urban historians up to date about what is going on, but should help to develop a greater sense of communality by encouraging urban historians to regard themselves as part of a broadly based academic enterprise which has some common themes and objectives. A series of publications being planned by the Leicester Centre will be seeking to make work available on the new themes currently being pursued, some of which are highlighted in this *Yearbook's* review of theses.

The *Yearbook* will continue to survey publications and conferences in the field as best it can, not only for Britain, but for other countries more selectively. Among the articles this year is a lively review of urban history in China, a country

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featured for the first time. Otherwise the articles are home-based, and concerned more than usually with research techniques and methodology, particularly in relation to the study of the urban middle class in the nineteenth century on which a mini-symposium was organized. It is worth noting how several of the articles this year reflect the growth of computer-assisted research.

From time to time, the editor receives letters about the *Yearbook*, and he was gratified to learn recently that one such correspondent looks forward to receiving his copy each year with as much eager anticipation as he once had for the *Boy's Own* annual. On the other hand letters very occasionally arrive complaining about our sins of omission, especially with regard to publications issued in other countries. In fact, the extent of our international coverage depends mainly on the service we receive from our overseas correspondents, and on the energy of the bibliographers. Unfortunately we are now without the invaluable services of Diana Dixon in the last context. She developed the bibliography in the first instance, and kept it going with the help of Anthony Sutcliffe. This year Nicholas Wilson has taken over and created the bibliography for Britain single-handed. We were fortunate to be well supplied with bibliographical material from overseas correspondents, including two sets of American entries covering 1984–5 as well as 1985–6.

For the future, the editor hopes to strengthen the international links and coverage, and bring some new recruits to the editorial team. A start has been made with an invitation to Peter Borsay of University College, Lampeter, who will add to the representation of the early modern period and share the review of articles with Rick Trainor, who has formerly undertaken the entire coverage, as he has done for this issue. The editor thanks all the contributors, especially the members of the editorial board, and is grateful for the co-operation and tolerance of Susan Martin and Peter Boulton of the University of Leicester Press. He continues to be interested in receiving articles in keeping with the nature of the *Yearbook* – for example, bibliographical surveys, comparative studies, discussions of major themes, or of methodological issues and approaches, or of the use of historical sources. Intending contributors should contact the editor at the School of Education or the Centre for Urban History, University Road, Leicester.