

Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. i + 242pp. 32 plates, 10 figures, 1 table. \$50.00/£33.50. doi:10.1017/S0963926808005804

It is 38 years since Michael Thompson, in an inaugural lecture, made a plea for the consideration of horses in the Victorian city. Considering the horse's crucial role in nineteenth-century cities it is surprising that the subject has received so little research – no more than a few case studies – and no overview; it is all but invisible in the relevant volumes of Georges Duby's *Histoire de la France urbaine* (1983) and *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (2000). McShane and Tarr's book, mercifully free of academic argot, a pleasure to read and full of enjoyable and surprising revelations, is welcome. And, if you'll forgive the metaphor, it covers the ground well.

The most obvious comment to British readers is that this is about horses in the *American* city: but London, Paris, Toronto and Montreal are glimpsed in passing, and the wide-ranging Introduction (in some ways the best part of the book) does draw on European, especially British, works on the economic and social history of horses and their interdependency with humankind. The authors organize their material into eight topics: markets, regulation, urban transit, leisure, stables and built environment, nutrition, disease and mortality and the decline and persistence of the urban horse. The central theme is horses as 'living machines': horse power in cities before the internal combustion engine and in places where the only alternative, steam, was either too costly or simply inefficient and impracticable. The longest chapter is on the subject likely to be most familiar to urban historians, that is horse-drawn transport, the means by which cities suburbanized. It is an excellent digest and pays due attention to conflicts over the social use of the streets and opposition to streetcars which combined a 'modern' technology with an ancient source of power *qua* machine. The chapters on nutrition and health are synthesized with equal authority and rich detail; ill health among horses, especially in the major epizootics, stresses dramatically that the authors' starting point, the total symbiosis between humans and horses, embraced more than economic considerations. Medical and veterinary science gradually revealed that horses and humans threatened each other's health. Urban working horses persisted into the twentieth century (and there are still some 250 police horses in Britain) but the rapid transition to electric transit went hand in hand with more healthy and *modern* cities.

Despite the book's wide range and vigour, I have two main misgivings. First, it is too short: time and again the authors open up a topic and close it just when you are getting interested. This may, of course, be a measure of the authors' success but their excellent detailed summaries are not always accompanied by critique. Secondly, the discourse sometimes moves uneasily between the general and the particular. Evidence from this or that city is deemed sufficient to support general statements about horses in American cities, or sometimes (it seems) cities in general. To expect more than occasional context from other countries – mostly in Europe – would be unreasonable but this greedy reviewer wanted more systematic analysis to allow comparisons *across* American cities. The authors know well enough that New York and Boston (the ubiquitous exemplars, with Pittsburgh) did not represent the nation, despite the ex-cathedra reassurance that 'there is no reason to believe the pattern was much different elsewhere' (p. 37). Were there differences between

cities? If so, why? And in what sense is the statement that 'society became more dependent on the horse' [in an unspecified part of the nineteenth century] true? A selection of well-chosen photographs adds understanding and appeal, but it is a shame that they are not reproduced on appropriate paper. The best image, of an elaborate frame house being moved along an unidentified street (for the record it is San Francisco in 1908 by Sumner W. Matteson), appears on the dust wrapper only and will be discarded by most academic libraries before the book is shelved. One more gripe for the publishers, though they are in crowded bad company. Is it too much to ask for a consolidated bibliography of the kind without which a Ph.D. dissertation would be referred?

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Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London 1868–1906*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007. xii + 260pp. 11 tables. £50.00.
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Historians examining the complex nature of London's local politics face an unenviable task. By 1885 the city was a patchwork of constituencies, returning 59 MPs to Westminster. It was a socially and culturally diverse metropolis and its rapid suburbanization has been seen, following the path-breaking work of Paul Thompson, as a key factor explaining political change. The growth of Conservatism and the eventual break-up of the Liberal coalition were, in this view, a result of the division of the city into (relatively) socially homogeneous constituencies. There is much in this debate to interest the urban historian. It raises fundamental questions about the relationship between urban social geography, electoral systems and political change and encourages reconsideration of the dynamics of British suburbanization.

Alex Windscheffel's ambitious study examines the question from the perspective of the Conservative party in London. This is a welcome change in that although there has been much written about the 'decline' of the Liberal party or the relative failure of Labour and Socialist parties, less attention has been given to the Conservatives. This is odd in that the Conservative party's populist transformation in the era of mass urban politics is clearly a significant factor in explaining the tardiness of their opponents' electoral performance. In order to explain this transformation Windscheffel delves deeply into the nature of local party activity, the nature of electoral narratives and, for some constituencies at least, the social geography of neighbourhoods and communities. Such a complex array of material is not easy to organize and this is reflected in the book's rather complex structure. The first section appears to focus on electoral languages and discourses. However, this section also offers something of a chronological review of local politics in London, the basic dynamics of civic Conservatism, redistribution debates, broad electoral trends and the social composition of constituencies. The middle section of the book is more tightly organized, focusing on issues of organization, campaigning and candidates. This is followed by an interesting discussion of municipal Conservatism, although here one might wish for more on Conservative attitudes to 'the government of London' problem before the 1889 Act. Finally, there is a valuable examination of the Conservative party's fortunes at the end of the