

Editorial note

Few historians would disagree that in an expansionary phase more initiatives are possible than in contraction. Yet in the face of the attack upon higher education, the drastic reduction of research funds and postgraduate studentships in urban, social and economic history by the reconstituted Economic and Social Research Committee, and an ethos which rewards relevance rather than scholarship, urban history has continued to transmit positive signs of life. A contributory factor has been the stewardship of David Reeder as editor of the *Urban History Yearbook* from 1978 to 1987. Others, rightly, will evaluate the worth of the *Yearbook* and its contribution to urban history, but in difficult times, David Reeder has stabilized the number of subscriptions, reformulated the editorial team, and during a period when urban history has itself spawned discrete sub-groups, sustained a varied temporal and disciplinary coverage in the articles published in the *Yearbook*. Judged by the articles alone, no one could accuse the editor of a chronological preference or the lack of an interdisciplinary perspective. Ever aware of the financial constraints on researchers without recourse to institutional funds and on postgraduates and temporary staff, and of the erosion of salaries in higher education, and with the collaboration of Leicester University Press, David Reeder has endeavoured to contain the cost of the *Yearbook*; between 1981 and 1986 the cost of the *Urban History Yearbook* has increased by 32 per cent compared to an average price increase of 48 per cent in books generally, according to the most recent data from the Publishers Association. In real terms the cost of the *Yearbook* is less now than in 1981, and on the basis of words per page and per £ subscription, the *UHY* represents good value for money in relation to many journals. Notwithstanding this immense editorial labour spanning nine *Yearbooks* between 1979 and 1987, David Reeder has also undertaken to survey recent theses in urban history, to act as review editor, to coordinate the bibliography when production problems have emerged, and generally to act as sweeper for an editorial board scattered throughout Britain – all while maintaining his own research, teaching and publication, and an active role in the Urban History Group in various capacities. It is particularly reassuring to a new editor not only to inherit a durable product central to the international dissemination of urban history, but also to be able to enlist the experience of David Reeder as a member of an editorial board whose other members are themselves deeply committed to urban history and supportive of the editor.

It is as a research tool that the *Urban History Yearbook* remains most widely used. Articles providing historiographical surveys, methodological insights, appraisals of source materials, and an annual average of 1000 indexed bibliographical items culled from approximately 560 periodicals and innumerable monographs and edited collections, provide indispensable assistance to those intent upon new lines of research, as well as to 'old hands' and reference librarians. Cross-referenced by town and classified thematically, these entries offer a convenient method by which, annually, to update reading lists or embark upon research projects at a time when few higher education libraries can afford even 1 per cent of the titles screened. Most issues have included a 'state of the art' piece in a specific field from current practitioners – municipal socialism (Kellett, 1978), politics in the Victorian city (Fraser, 1979), community and social geography (Dennis and Daniels, 1981), social mobility in the city (Kaelble, 1981), political and economic systems in medieval and early modern towns (Reynolds and Goose, 1982), city systems (King, 1983), new urban history (Mohl, 1983), central and local

government relations (Hennock, 1984), urban elites (Trainor, 1985), and religion and secular society (McLeod, 1978; Brown, 1988) are some examples. Judged by the admittedly imperfect criteria of citations in periodicals, subscribers' comments, and bar chat at urban history meetings, consumer reports hold such wide-ranging survey articles in high regard.

Editorial policy, therefore, remains committed to the pursuit of excellence in the form of urban historiographical surveys and new methodological perspectives. Shorter articles on source materials are always welcome. In addition, a steady flow of detailed research articles, often stemming from recent Ph.D. theses, have found the *Urban History Yearbook* a suitable outlet for publication, and in this respect the *Yearbook* has been in the vanguard of disseminating new research findings. It is hoped that that flow of substantive research-based typescripts will continue to land on this editorial desk (the address for contributors is given at the end of this note).

A regular feature of the *Yearbook* has been its interest in non-British urban history. Most conspicuously this has taken the form of surveys of recent developments in the urban history field of a particular country or regional grouping. For example, the spotlight was successively turned on Australia (1979, 1984), Japan (1980), India (1981), the United States (1983), New Zealand (1984), South Africa (1985), Ireland (1986), China (1987) and in this 1988 issue, the Nordic countries of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland. Research findings and trends, important monographs, new techniques, bibliographical guidance, and where appropriate, the relevance to British and North American urban history, have been highlighted by scholars prominent within their respective countries. The insider's perspective on new academic developments is particularly valued, based as it often is on access to publications in languages other than English, and on access to information systems and personal networks which, for the foreigner, are difficult to comprehend, far less utilize. Further surveys of this type are in preparation.

A new departure for the *Yearbook* in the field of international urban history is the overtly comparative study. Though the 1988 edition retains a firmly British flavour, from 1989 the *Urban History Yearbook* will confront the need to pursue cross-cultural comparisons in the search to understand the nature of urban processes. The initial setting, perhaps predictably given the nature and volume of publications, is North Atlantic – Britain, Canada and the United States. In this respect future *Yearbook* initiatives may further subscribe to a view of urban history advanced by its first editor H. J. Dyos, namely that while specific urban locations convey local colour, of more fundamental interest are the general processes shaping urban development. This is not to say that process is invariably more important than locus. Clearly urban history needs an amalgam of case studies and general theories. But by embracing an international dimension it is hoped that the features and more general mechanics of urban change may be exposed.

This editorial commenced by remarking on the continuing flow of research in urban history, a trend which owes much to the deep reservoir of interest among local historians concerned to set the specific urban experience of their town or region within the context of broader themes in urban history. How typical, how unusual was the urban experience of a particular town in relation to its neighbours, rivals, or boroughs with allied economic or other functions is an approach which is commonly adopted. The *Urban History Yearbook* has faithfully attempted to incorporate such interests – specifically scanning local history journals and citing relevant material in the annual bibliography. But it is also hoped that the thematic articles contained in the *Yearbook* participate in a two-way process by contributing approaches and ideas which provide the context and overview for many of these local urban history studies. In the current academic climate it is clear that much high-quality urban scholarship continues outside the precincts of universities and polytechnics, and in this respect, editorial policy, as

initially fostered by both Jim Dyos and David Reeder, remains committed to encouraging typescripts from new authors and from those who may not have previously considered the *Yearbook* an appropriate outlet for their work. Perhaps this more expansive explanation of the perceived functions of the *Urban History Yearbook* and of editorial policy will continue the *Yearbook's* longstanding support for and encouragement of researchers about to embark upon publication.

The sheer volume of work required from the editorial board is yet another indication of the range and breadth of urban historical interest and the *Yearbook's* attempt to survey it. Mention of the number of annual bibliographical entries has already been made. The scale of this task imposes considerable burdens and requires special organizational skills. The *UHY* took the unusual step of adding a second bibliographer to the editorial team, and to complement the sterling work from Nick Wilson were fortunate to entice Diana Dixon out of her 'retirement'; 1986 remains the only year since the foundation of the *Yearbook* in 1974 that she has not acted as bibliographer. The survey of periodical literature, that feat of annual magic Rick Trainor has managed to perform by seeing connections between the most unlikely articles often published in the most unusual places, has also been 'double teamed', with early modern and medieval urban history articles admirably surveyed by Peter Borsay (assisted by Malcolm Hogg). If other members of the editorial team are not mentioned by name it is certainly not because there was less for them to do; more it is a reflection of their continuing stalwart efforts. No less cooperative have been Peter Boulton and Susan Martin of Leicester University Press who have dealt sensitively and patiently with a particular form of urban ritual, the baptism of a new editor. Their efforts are appreciated.

The current crop of articles in the fifteenth issue of the *Yearbook* spans the medieval to the present day. Callum Brown provides a masterly examination of declining church attendance and the social significance of late-Victorian religion and doubts whether this was simply a product of urbanization. Jan Eivind Myhre evaluates the contemporary urban history scene during a hectic decade of official town histories to commemorate the founding of numerous towns in five Nordic countries. Elizabeth Baigent shows how tax data and record linkage provide useful insights into the structure of eighteenth-century wealth. Elizabeth Rutledge, by using tithing rolls to argue that the population of Norwich, like that of York, continued to expand in the early fourteenth century, contributes to the ongoing debate as to whether medieval towns continued to increase up to the Black Death or faced decline after 1300. Richard Rodger and Jennifer Newman examine the background to property registration in Scotland in the early seventeenth century and claim that the Register of Sasines, a neglected source, has considerable research potential for urban history from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. A. J. Vickery scrutinizes town histories, directories and guides to show what Victorians thought of their urban environment and how this can be interpreted.

Substantive case studies, methodological issues, comparative surveys, essays in bibliography and historiography, and accounts of sources and methods of interest to urban historians in all periods are welcome. Intending contributors should send typescripts to:

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