

Abstracts of articles

David Postles

An English small town in the later Middle Ages: Loughborough

The thesis of 'urban decline' in the late Middle Ages has been largely based on changes within incorporated boroughs. Loughborough was a small town in Leicestershire, closely involved in intra-regional exchange between three different farming regions. By the late fourteenth century, if not before, its central precinct had a definite urban form, including a specialized marketing form. Indicators (such as demographic estimates, litigation, and property-holding) suggest that the town did not suffer any substantial decline in the late Middle Ages. Structural changes in the countryside, with a greater emphasis on specialization of production, may have maintained the town as a centre of exchange and consumption.

James S. Amelang

***Vox populi*: popular autobiographies in early modern urban history**

This article reviews research on autobiographical texts written by artisans and other members of the urban popular classes during the early modern era. After reviewing some of the ways in which urban history has incorporated personal literature by authors from diverse social backgrounds, it explores the meaning of the term 'popular autobiography'. After examining the contribution of this unique historical source to the study of urban politics, society and culture, the essay then focuses on the specific question of what autobiography can reveal about the study of popular sociability. A preliminary list of popular autobiographers figures in the appendix.

Keith Laybourn

The Guild of Help and the changing face of Edwardian philanthropy

The Guild of Help was formed at Bradford in 1904 with the idea of introducing a new, more community-based, approach to deal with the increasingly important problem of poverty. It emerged to overcome the failures of charity and the threat of increased state intervention, seeking instead to get all the community to take

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responsibility for the poor. The movement spread rapidly and soon became a major constituent of voluntary urban relief in Britain. Yet, in the end, its community approach failed, largely because solving the problem of poverty was well beyond its means, and intent, but also because it was unable to draw the churches, the working classes and charities into working with the well-regulated system of help for the poor which it envisaged.

Mike Savage

Urban history and social class: two paradigms

It is argued that there are two very different paradigms evident in recent research. One approach, often found in labour history and studies of working-class culture and politics, sees the urban as a providing the spatial arena in which class formation takes place. The second, often found in studies of the nineteenth-century middle class, sees place as an aspect of class formation. This latter approach suggests that the cohesion and cultural strength of social classes linked with their spatial identification, and that urban historians need to explore how particular places become associated with social classes. This approach can be used to explore the growing importance of working-class institutions in controlling the arena of twentieth-century cities. The processes by which predominantly middle-class towns and cities became redefined as working-class places throws important light on the history of the Labour movement in the twentieth century.