

Editorial note

In the last six years, urban history has been subjected to quite a searching examination as to its state and nature, culminating in the rather elaborately critical essay on H. J. Dyos and British urban history in the August 1985 issue of the *Economic History Review*. There may be a case now for some kind of stocktaking to reflect on what kind of issues have been raised in the spate of commentaries in reviews and review articles. Evidently urban history is surviving as a study even if it is being undertaken in an even more pragmatic way than formerly. The continued publication of the *Yearbook* – this is the thirteenth issue – must be regarded as evidence of the continuity of research, writing and teaching. But the margin for success in academic publishing of this kind is quite small. It is sad to report, for instance, that one of the American journals with which the *Yearbook* had exchange relationships, *Urbanism Past and Present*, has ceased independent publication, although the good news is that it is being merged with the *Urban History Review* of the University of Winnipeg which will continue such features as the ‘peripatetic urbanist’ and ‘Research and Methods’, as well as maintaining a bibliography. Readers of this *Yearbook* might note that both the *Review* and the *Journal of Urban History* will be reviewing the last three issues, the latter in a forthcoming piece on the ‘tools of the urban historian’. English urban historians will also welcome news of another publishing venture from America, indicative of market confidence, in the reprinting by Garland Publishing of 35 titles, chosen and edited by Lynn and Andrew Lees to illustrate the rise of urban Britain, 1837–1914.

The British scene, as the *Yearbook* shows, was marked once again by much conference activity, the last of which, on urban history in Scotland, was held just too late for a report. There was a time when the annual conference in April was the main venue for urban historians, but this was before the growth of separate meetings by specialized subgroups, including the growing body of the Early Modern Towns Group. Whether such fragmentation is a good or bad thing is arguable, but it must be encouraging to know that there is still much scope for new groups and initiatives. In this connection, it is not being immodest to claim that Leicester has become associated with one of the most important local initiatives to have been taken in recent years, with the setting up of a Centre for Urban History, drawing support from urban historians in other universities and institutions in the Midland region. The centre will be welcomed generally, one hopes, as a logical development for a university which Jim Dyos as its first and only Professor of Urban History helped to establish as a leading centre in the world for the historical study of the city. The aim now is to provide a base for existing and future funded research projects in the university and to provide resources and a forum for its members, other urban historians and visitors. The Centre has started up with a programme of regular seminars, details of which and of other activities can be obtained from Peter Clark, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Leicester.

At the national level, the Urban History Group has been considering a replacement for the indefatigable energy of Anthony Sutcliffe now that he has decided, for personal reasons, to relinquish the chairmanship, and also to leave the editorial board of the *Yearbook*. Anthony Sutcliffe has a very different personality from that of the late H. J. Dyos, but he graced the chairmanship as a greatly respected scholar in both English and European modern history, and he worked quietly and modestly behind the scenes to help sustain the community of urban

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historians, especially in regard to conferences, and to keep its organization going. His contribution to the *Yearbook* from its inception was invaluable, not only as co-editor of the bibliography since 1974, but in a more general sense, in his willingness to give advice on manuscripts and other aspects of the editorial work, and particularly his ability to keep the *Yearbook* in touch with Europe through his many contacts, especially in France and Germany.

The editorial board working as a team have once again succeeded in providing all the usual features of the *Yearbook*, and fortunately Diana Dixon was able to produce the bibliography with the assistance of Nick Wilson, a research associate at the University of Loughborough, and a budding urban historian in his own right. Thanks are due to them all, and also to the correspondents in Britain and overseas who supplied information, notably bibliographical material, and to the staff of Leicester University Press as always. Apart from the interesting essay on trends in Irish urban history, the articles this year are all based on England. There is an attempt to highlight the methodological problems of using urban criminal statistics which links up with the session on 'Crime and urban society' at the 1986 Urban History conference. There is also a focus in this issue on London, a city which is attracting renewed attention, notably from a new generation of early modern urban historians. It is hoped as well that the reports provided on the new projected 'municipal history' of London, and on the project to recover and process the data in the archives of the great London survey of Charles Booth, will be of more than local interest. The London historical scene, it might be added, is still abundantly vital, sustained by conferences and numerous writings on aspects of London history, including those to be found in *The London Journal*, another resilient publication once associated with H. J. Dyos and edited now by John Hall of Queen Mary College, an institution which celebrated its centenary in 1985–6. What London lacks, however, is an academic centre, with post of reader in London history, formerly based on University College, remaining 'frozen'.

As for the *Yearbook*, the editor would like to encourage a greater flow of articles. Plans are afoot to extend international coverage again next year, and articles on European urban history will be especially welcome, as will other articles, or suggestions for articles, in keeping with the *Yearbook* – for example, bibliographical surveys, comparative studies, discussions of major themes, accounts of sources and methods, and also of methodological issues, including substantive case-studies, provided they are shown to have methodological significance. Intending contributors should contact the editor at the Victorian Studies Centre or the School of Education, University of Leicester.