

Abstracts of articles

Bill Luckin

Accidents, disasters and cities

Despite a massive proliferation in the literature on 'risk' and 'disaster management' in the contemporary world, historians have been slow to clarify their thoughts on these issues. The paper seeks to remedy this state of affairs. For the purposes of exegesis, it separates disasters, mishaps and accidents into 'natural', 'social', 'symbolic' and 'individual' categories, before summarizing and interrogating the influential theoretical work of Karl Figlio in this field. In terms of conclusions, the article suggests a provisional social-historical methodology for the recovery and reconstruction of the individual 'moment' of the accident; proposes a breaking down of the barriers between 'domestic' and 'non-domestic' occurrences of this type; and analyses reasons for lack of scholarly interest in the area as a whole. Focused predominantly on Britain, the paper also draws selectively on European and extra-European experience; and deploys numerous examples derived from urban history in order to press home its major points.

Jeremy Boulton

Clandestine marriages in London: an examination of a neglected urban variable

This article sets out the incidence of clandestine marriage in Restoration London. Analysis of parish registers of large suburban parishes suggests that such private unions peaked twice in the capital's history, immediately after the Restoration and again in the first half of the eighteenth century. Understanding the phenomenon is important since the increase in private weddings on the scale encountered was unique to London. Historians have failed to explain the growth in such unions satisfactorily. The practice is unlikely to be explained by the growth of religious dissent, by a desire to save money or to circumvent parish or parental control over choice of spouse. The custom's popularity can be explained more convincingly by reference to wealthier Londoners' traditional predilection for private weddings, which was sanctioned by the church, and to emulation of the habit by those lower in the social scale. Adoption of the practice was further facilitated by increasing levels of disposable income and by the commercialization of the wedding ceremony after the Restoration.

John Schofield

The capital rediscovered: archæology in the City of London

This article reports on the contribution made by almost twenty years of archæological excavations to the historical outline of the City of London from earliest times to c. 1800. It seeks to familiarize historians with programmes of excavation and publication, and argues that the regional implications extend well beyond the confines of the metropolis.

Vanessa Harding

Communicating London's early history

In an age of 'performance indicators', how does society measure museums' presentation of history, and does this affect the manner in which history is communicated? The internal conflicts between presenting history and preserving research integrity are the context for this review of recent curatorial and archæological work in London.