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## Introduction: structures and transformations in British historiography

*David Feldman and Jon Lawrence*

### The travails of social history

‘Social history is at present in fashion’, Eric Hobsbawm observed in 1971, when the popularity of the subject was also becoming allied to grand intellectual ambitions.<sup>1</sup> This was reflected five years later with the arrival of a new journal: *Social History*. In the first issue its editors announced confidently, and with a certain degree of belligerence, that social history was ‘not a new *branch* of historical scholarship’ but rather ‘a new kind of history’ whose mission was ‘to make incursions into all fields of historical analysis’. Social history was to transform historical practice by generating a new, more holistic understanding of past societies – a ‘total’ history.<sup>2</sup> The same editorial recognised the significance of precursors such as the *Annales* School in France and British Marxist historiography, but declared, ‘social history has no orthodox repertoire, no dominant central “core” around which revolve a score of minor interests and enthusiasms’.<sup>3</sup> Not even class. And this despite the fact that the journal rapidly became known for publishing a series of important interventions that dealt centrally with class formation, class-consciousness and class struggle in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, ‘From social history to the history of society’, *Daedalus*, 100, (1971), pp. 20–45, at p. 20. Appropriately enough, 1971 was the year when *Outcast London* by Gareth Stedman Jones was first published by Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Editorial’, *Social History*, 1, (1976), pp. 1–3, at p. 1. The contrast with the cautious, pluralist tone struck by Peter N. Stearns in 1967 at the launch of the American-based *Journal of Social History*, 1, (1967), pp. 3–6, is striking.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Editorial’, *Social History*, 1, (1976), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> For British examples from the later 1970s see, F. K. Donnelly, ‘Ideology and early English working-class history: Edward Thompson and his critics’, *Social History*, 1, (1976), pp. 219–238; A. E. Musson, ‘Class struggle and the labour aristocracy, 1830–60’, *Social History*, 1, (1976), pp. 335–356; John Foster, ‘Some comments on “class struggle and the labour aristocracy”’, *Social History*, 1, (1976), pp. 357–366; H. F. Moorhouse, ‘The Marxist theory of the labour aristocracy’, *Social History*, 3, (1978), pp. 61–82; E. P. Thompson, ‘Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?’, *Social History*, 3, (1978), pp. 133–165; Alastair J. Reid, ‘Politics and

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Despite its centrality to the debates of the 1980s and early 1990s that would signal the retreat of social history as a ‘totalising’ project, in the 1960s, and for much of the 1970s, class occupied a contested place in modern British social history. It was present only unevenly. It did figure, for example, in histories of social movements and popular politics. Characteristically, historians claimed that it was not possible to understand the actions of political elites without taking account of ‘pressure from below’ and often invoked the terminology of class as they did so. This tendency extended well beyond the ranks of Anglo-Marxists. To be sure, it can be found in Edward Thompson’s argument that it was the working-class radical movement that drove the Reform crisis of 1832 to its conclusion, but it is also there in John Vincent’s ground-breaking account of *How Victorians Voted*.<sup>5</sup> But the advance of social history meant not only writing the history of politics ‘from below’, it also meant expanding the subject matter of history itself. The history of material life was significantly present in this body of research. In part, this work developed from within the tradition of labour history where Marxism and class analysis were important. But economic history was equally significant and here, with few exceptions, Marxism and class analysis remained marginal in a sub-discipline still shaped by the Cold War. Taking their cue from economic history and social science, and sometimes located in distinct departments of economic and social history, historians made use of quantitative methodologies to gauge changes in the standard of living, in fertility and mortality, the crime rate and in the operation of labour markets. Writings on social policy, notably those of R. H. Titmuss, were another source of inspiration generating work on the Poor Law and the origins of the welfare state.<sup>6</sup>

Social history encompassed a close interest in the conditions of daily life. Historians strived to get close to the texture of lived experience in the household and the home, in patterns of consumption, in the worlds

economics in the formation of the British working class’, *Social History*, 3, (1978), pp. 347–361; Nicholas Rogers, ‘Money, land and lineage: the big bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London’, *Social History*, 4, (1979), pp. 437–454; Clive Behagg, ‘Custom, class and change: the trade societies of Birmingham’, *Social History*, 4, (1979), pp. 455–480.

<sup>5</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edn, (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 888–890, 899; John Vincent, *Pollbooks: How Victorians Voted* (Cambridge, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1960); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964); E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972). For Titmuss see the preface to Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy, 1886–1914* (Oxford, 1972) and Pat Thane, ‘Introduction’, in *The Origins of British Social Policy* (London, 1978).

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of work and leisure. They struggled to recover the choices made by the 'common people' as they made their own history and in doing so explored, for example, the history of women and histories of popular religion and belief. Some of this work, but by no means all, was shaped by the concept of class in one form or another. The eclecticism of urban history and especially of the magnificent collection of essays on *The Victorian City* provides a demonstration of the fruits of diversity.<sup>7</sup> Less happily, the three volumes of *The Cambridge Social History of Britain*, published in 1990 but in most respects redolent of an earlier era, provided an account of modern Britain in which class is a passing but not a structuring presence.<sup>8</sup> Research extended too to the history of popular culture or mentalities; on the growth of respectability, for example. For some, inspired by debates within Marxism, investigating respectability went hand in hand with a search for the aristocracy of labour. But another source was the work of G. S. R. Kitson Clark and his former research students. For Kitson Clark the rise of respectability did not express the dynamic of class relations so much as the outcome of engaged Anglican social leadership. As this suggests, the diversity of social history extended also to the intellectual and political influences that social historians carried with them in these years.<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite these wide-ranging origins, the debates which marked the diminishing authority of social history neglected the baggy heterogeneity of the field.<sup>10</sup> They often focused narrowly on the issue of class – and class in the nineteenth century, at that. Contributors moved quickly from their concern with the salience of 'class' for particular historical developments – the character of Chartism, for example, or the reasons for the emergence of the Labour Party – to assess 'the claims of specifically social historical explanation'. At this point, the fate of a certain interpretation of class in a particular period stood for the viability of

<sup>7</sup> Harold James Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols (London, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Q. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976); Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840–80* (London, 1978); F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900* (London, 1988); also Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982); see Miles Taylor, 'The beginnings of modern British social history?', *History Workshop Journal*, 43, (1997), pp. 155–176, which traces the broader contours of this non-Marxian post-war social history.

<sup>10</sup> These debates did arise elsewhere, however. See, for example, Jane Rendall, "'Uneven developments': women's history, feminist history and gender history in Great Britain", in Karen Offen, R. R. Pierson and Jane Rendall (eds), *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (London, 1991).

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social history in general.<sup>11</sup> If we keep in mind the pluralism of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, this was a strikingly narrow denouement.

Class could perform this role, in part, because it brought together so many facets of the new social history. This was despite – or perhaps because of – continuing debate over what the term meant, how the phenomenon was constituted and where it could be found. In British historiography, the central question for many social historians had been why, under the impact of rapid industrialisation, the disorder, popular protest and acute anxiety of the propertied classes in the first half of the nineteenth century had given way to the contained conflicts and relative stability of ‘the age of equipoise’ and the successes of popular liberalism. These questions inspired influential approaches to class as diverse as those of Harold Perkin – who constituted classes and the dynamics of conflict through contending class ideals – and John Foster – who sought to vindicate Marxism–Leninism in his account of *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*.<sup>12</sup> The narrative of crisis, containment and development inspired a vast corpus of research work on the labour aristocracy, respectability, popular culture and social control.

Beyond this, however, class has a special relevance for what seemed to be the central, epoch-defining, event in modern British history – the Industrial Revolution. In part this is because Friedrich Engels’s account of conditions in Manchester and other cities made a vital contribution to Karl Marx’s theory of history and programme of revolution driven by class struggles.<sup>13</sup> More generally, the combination of urbanisation, commercial growth and factory industry led many contemporaries to contemplate the impact of these changes on social relations and political stability, and as they did so they often used the terminology of class.<sup>14</sup> Historians of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain are able to find the terminology of class in their source materials in ways that historians of earlier periods do not. Moreover, because of the centrality of class to both Marxist and non-Marxist accounts of modern society, these references seemed to be especially significant.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Gray, ‘Class, politics and historical revisionism’, *Social History*, 19, (1994), pp. 210–211. For a similar formulation see Marc W. Steinberg, ‘Culturally speaking: finding a commons between post-structuralism and the Thompsonian perspective’, *Social History*, 21, (1996), pp. 193–214, at p. 194. See also Patrick Joyce ‘The end of social history?’, *Social History*, 20, (1995), pp. 73–91.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880* (London, 1969); John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> See Tristram Hunt’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>14</sup> Asa Briggs, ‘The language of class in early nineteenth-century England’, in Briggs and Saville, *Essays in Labour History*.

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As mention of Marx indicates, social history was also shaped by its political engagements. The partisan energy generated by the highly technical debate on the standard of living in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was due in large measure to the way these exchanges were not only about a confined historical problem but also concerned, in the context of the Cold War, the historic effects of capitalism and the free market more generally.<sup>15</sup> Increasingly it was by researching and interrogating class that historians developed a reciprocal relationship between their political beliefs and scholarly expertise. These were, indeed, the years of the forward march of labour in which the trade union movement achieved unprecedented numerical strength and political influence, in which the Labour Party claimed to represent, among other things, the interests of 'labour', and when debate on the left focused on whether these interests were best advanced from within that party or outside it. In this context the relationship between working-class formation and working-class politics in the nineteenth century held a special significance. For the emergence of class and the development of an organised labour movement appeared to be the lasting legacy of the nineteenth century, one that disclosed the historic trajectory of the British left and that continued to shape the present. The History Workshop movement and the first appearance of *History Workshop Journal: A Journal of Socialist Historians* in 1976 made these connections overt. Several of the exchanges in these years – on the history of trade unionism, for example, or on the relationship between class and sexual difference – had resonances in, or even clear implications for, the present.<sup>16</sup>

Yet even before social history came under radical theoretical attack its explanatory power was weakening. In part this arose from its own success. Notably, the pursuit of 'experience', inspired by some of Edward Thompson's programmatic statements and by history from below more broadly, brought to light a whole range of experiences that could not be contained within the class paradigm (or sometimes even within left politics). Here the impact of feminism and women's history

<sup>15</sup> Peter Mathias, 'Preface' in Arthur J. Taylor (ed.), *The Standard of Living in Britain in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1975), pp. vii–viii.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Price, *Masters, Unions and Men: Work Control in Building and the Rise of Labour* (Cambridge, 1980); Jonathan Zeitlin, 'The emergence of shop steward organisation and job control in the British car industry', *History Workshop Journal*, 10, (1980), pp. 119–137; Dave Lyddon, 'Workplace organisation in the British car industry', *History Workshop Journal*, 15, (1983), pp. 131–140; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983); Sally Alexander, 'Women, class and sexual difference', *History Workshop Journal*, 17, (1984), pp. 125–149.

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was crucial. But the general point extended more widely as historians' exploration of experience revealed just how diverse this had been.<sup>17</sup> New histories of the Industrial Revolution were also corrosive. Both quantitative and qualitative studies now revealed that industrialisation was a slower and longer process than had been imagined in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Yet this now discredited view of the Industrial Revolution had underpinned the work of Perkin, Foster and others. These difficulties were most keenly felt and understood by those historians who had turned to social history to generate histories of society as a whole. The idea that social history might generate such a total history began to appear less and less likely as diversity made synthesis, at the societal level, more problematic, and as the foundational concept of the Industrial Revolution appeared a less dependable basis for the edifice. Finally, in 1979 the left in Britain experienced the first in a historic series of political defeats. It had not only been historians of the left who had been drawn to social history or to the history of class, but undoubtedly they had exerted a huge influence on discussion and debate. For these figures, the repeated defeats of the 1980s and 1990s prompted radical questioning about the direction of history, the role of the labour movement and the historical significance of 'class'.

Most fundamentally, in the early 1980s social history came under attack from historians who questioned the place of material life in historical explanation and who focused instead on the ways identities and interests are created *within* culture. This shift from society to culture, from an exploration of experiences and structures to meanings and identities, registered not only in history but across the humanities and social sciences. One salutary effect was to renew and extend the field of study. Historians were now able to ask how identities which appeared to be 'natural' or a part of 'common sense' had, in fact, been invented, sustained and transformed discursively. The work of Michel Foucault was hugely influential here, leading historians to focus on the relationships between these discursive structures and the operation of power. Accordingly, the burgeoning field of women's history now turned, not to the recovery of women's experiences, but to the processes through which

<sup>17</sup> The growing attention to the history of immigrants and of antipathy towards immigrants is just one area where the pursuit of experience burst the bounds of class. Kenneth Lunn (ed.), *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society, 1870–1914* (Folkestone, 1980) was a path-breaking collection. Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London, 1985) also helped to define the trend.

<sup>18</sup> Raphael Samuel, "'The workshop of the world': steam power and hand technology in mid-Victorian Britain", *History Workshop Journal*, 3, (1977), pp. 6–72; G. N. Von Tunzelmann, *Steam Power and British Industrialization* (Oxford, 1978); Nicholas F. R. Crafts, *British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1985).

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gender differences were made. This shift registered more widely as similar questions extended to sexual identities and the politics of the body, to national identities, to tradition, to race and ethnicity, and of course to class itself.<sup>19</sup>

The turn to culture, discourse and meaning thus opened new horizons but obscured others. As early as 1991, Raphael Samuel wrote alarmed by ‘the self-conscious drive to make representation the only significant field of study’.<sup>20</sup> In 1995 Patrick Joyce argued that ‘the salutary effect of postmodernist thought might be said to lie in its invitation to question the idea of a clear distinction between representation and the “real”’. He suggests that our perception of the reality of the past can never be apprehended apart from the discursive categories of the texts we study. The role of the historian is then to ‘trace the discursivities of the social’ and in this way histories of ‘society’ and of ‘class’ may still be written.<sup>21</sup> This suggestion did not go unanswered, but the interests of succeeding cohorts of historians have moved away from social history as it was once conceived. It is not that social history is no longer practised but, contrary to the hope expressed in 1976, it is now firmly established as one branch of historical scholarship among many. In place of the ambition for a ‘total’ social history, the emphasis is now very much on the reconstruction of ‘the social’ at the micro level: on the careful analysis of the small-scale and the immediate – on how human beings interact with each other and with the material world. This new ‘material’ turn comes in many forms, from the resolutely post-modern to the stubbornly empiricist, but it is striking how a common lexicon of keywords seems to dominate – ‘everyday life’, ‘material culture’, ‘place’, ‘practice’ and ‘network’ stand out.<sup>22</sup> Across a range of topics, from the family and sexual practices, to

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, 1981); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982*, (Cambridge, 1983); Joan Scott, ‘On language, gender, and working-class history’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 31, (1987), pp. 1–13; Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, *Englishness: Politics and Culture* (Beckenham, 1986); Denise Riley, ‘Am I that Name?’ *Feminism and the Category of ‘Women’ in History* (Basingstoke, 1988); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992); Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–67* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘Reading the signs’, *History Workshop Journal*, 32, (1991), pp. 88–101, at p. 96.

<sup>21</sup> Joyce, ‘The end of social history?’, pp. 78, 83–84.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences* (London, 2002); Frank Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the future of history: things, practices and politics’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48, (2009), pp. 283–307.



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the domestic interior and the neighbourhood, social history therefore remains dynamic and innovative, even if there is much less confidence that a holistic picture can be constructed from these fragments of the past.<sup>23</sup> Much of this work now eschews speculating on connections between the social and political, although particularly among the more empirically minded there remains an underlying emphasis on the determining role of material life.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, in their emphasis on language and the techniques of ‘governmentality’, many political historians have continued to speculate on connections with society and social change, though for the most part now in contingent or particular, rather than structural ways.<sup>25</sup>

**Stedman Jones and British history**

This broad story of historiographical change is also Stedman Jones’s story, but not, it must be stressed, in any simple sense. Stedman Jones’s relationship to social history was always that of the critical outsider. He admired it for challenging the narrowness and conservatism of mainstream historical practice, but his own principal interests and enthusiasm often lay elsewhere: in reconstructing the interrelated history of economic structures, ideas and politics, rather than in the popular cry to write new histories ‘from below’. From his student days Stedman Jones had been a strident advocate of the need to reject the complacent traditions of empiricism and positivism in British historiography, and he consistently challenged the illusion that empiricist history was somehow non-ideological and non-theoretical.<sup>26</sup> In this he was allied to key

<sup>23</sup> Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain, 1860–1940* (Cambridge, 1996); Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fish and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960*, (London, 1999); Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918–1960* (Oxford, 2006); Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (New Haven, CN, 2006); Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes, c.1880–1930* (Oxford, 2001); Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor: The East End of London, 1885–1914* (Oxford, 2004); Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918–1950* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Griffiths, *Lancashire*; Brodie, *Politics of the Poor*.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge, 1991) and *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993) and *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). For an attempt to explore the inter-connection of structure and discourse, see Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 1998); Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005), adopts a similar position.

<sup>26</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘The pathology of English history’, *New Left Review* [hereafter *NLR*], 46, (November–December 1967), pp. 29–43; reprinted as ‘History: the poverty of



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figures of the new 'New Left' in the early 1960s; notably writers such as Perry Anderson, Stuart Hall and Tom Nairn, who were also engaging with the work of European intellectuals, including Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, Jean-Paul Sartre and, somewhat later, Louis Althusser, in an attempt to challenge what they perceived to be the insularity of the older generation of English socialist intellectuals including Marxists such as Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams, as well as more orthodox 'Labourist' figures such as Margaret Cole and Henry Pelling.<sup>27</sup> In 1967, Stedman Jones declared that socialist historians must abandon the 'safe pastures of labour history' and the 'cosy humanitarian niche which liberal historians have always been all too happy to accord to them'. Instead they should 'establish the *theoretical* foundations of any history, they should advance into the structure and history of the ruling class, into the interpretation of the historical morphology of whole cultures. They should follow the example of perhaps the most successfully revolutionary group of modern historians – the *Annales* school.'<sup>28</sup>

Looking back on this period in 1984, Stedman Jones recalled being attracted by the 'cultural iconoclasm' of the *New Left Review*, and acknowledged that 'the political and cultural positions pioneered by the *New Left Review*' had been an important influence on him in the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> Stedman Jones first wrote for the *New Left Review* in November 1964, when he was just 21 (reviewing Donald Read's *The English Provinces c1760–1960*) and he served on the journal's editorial board continuously from 1965 to 1983.<sup>30</sup> But although Stedman Jones shared the New Left's emphasis on the relevance of current political dilemmas for the writing of history, he nonetheless always privileged the demands of

empiricism' in Robin Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1972); Stedman Jones, 'From historical sociology to theoretical history', *British Journal of Sociology* 27, (1976), pp. 295–305, at p. 296; also his 'History in one dimension', *NLR*, 36, (March–April 1966), pp. 48–58, reviewing A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945*.

<sup>27</sup> Chun Lin, *The British New Left: A Critical History 1957–1977* (Edinburgh, 1993); Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC, 1997); Duncan Thompson, *Pessimism of the Intellect?: A History of New Left Review* (Monmouth, 2007); Madeleine Davis, 'The origins of the British New Left' in Martin Klimke and Joachim Sharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Basingstoke, 2008). See also Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism, neo-Marxism and the discursive approach to history' in Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *Was bleibt von marxistischen Perspektiven in der Geschichtsforschung?* (Göttingen, 1997), at pp. 159–163.

<sup>28</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Pathology of English history', p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian London* (1971: London, 1984), 'Preface to the 1984 edition', pp. xiii–xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *Pessimism?*, pp. 10, 123–124, 172; *NLR*, 29, (January–February 1965), 'Editorial Board'.

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professional historical scholarship over immediate political purposes – his was neither a didactic history to inspire the present generation, nor an overarching meta-history, such as that associated with the *New Left Review*, with its emphasis on the supposedly arrested political and intellectual development of Britain compared with continental Europe.<sup>31</sup> Hence his early interest in reconstructing the micro-contexts that had sustained the latent Toryism of an apolitical working class in late nineteenth-century London, as well as his emphasis on the fragility of radical sub-cultures and the inherent difficulties of mass mobilisation. Significantly, he recalls that his original intention as a graduate student had been to recast the *New Left Review*'s central question 'Why no British revolutionary tradition?' by asking instead the more overtly historical question: 'Why the triumph of liberal ideas and assumptions among the mass of the population?'<sup>32</sup> As this determination to recast the New Left's pessimistic, counter-factual analysis suggests, Stedman Jones was never wholly aligned with the Anderson/Nairn circle, nor was he ever as comfortable as them with history as sweeping polemic laid down by a New Left clerisy. Perhaps significantly, *Outcast London*, published in 1971 when Stedman Jones was 28, included thanks both to Edward Thompson and to Perry Anderson. But, by then, it was already clear that Stedman Jones's closest intellectual ties were to Raphael Samuel, a central figure in the first New Left of the late 1950s and, like Stedman Jones, subsequently an intellectually restless and un-doctrinaire member of the broad 'New Left' (though, after the 'restructuring' of 1961–1962, crucially *not* part of Anderson's inner circle at the *Review*).<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Samuel was the founding spirit of the History Workshop movement at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1966 (when Stedman Jones was a graduate at Nuffield College). From the outset, the ethos of Samuel's history workshops was radically different from the self-consciously intellectual spirit that characterised the *New Left Review*. Though never overtly populist, the History Workshop movement was avowedly popular – its aim was to promote grass-roots historical practice within a broadly socialist–feminist culture (though *History Workshop* only

<sup>31</sup> See esp. Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the present crisis', *NLR*, 23, (January–February 1964), pp. 19–45, and 'Components of the national culture', *NLR*, 50, (July–August 1968), pp. 3–57.

<sup>32</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, '1984 Preface', pp. xiv–xv; also in his 'History and theory: an English story', *Historein: A Review of the Past and Other Stories* [Athens], 3, (2001), pp. 103–124, at pp. 109–110 [available at [www.nnet.gr/historein/historeinfiles/histvolumes/hist03/hist03stedman.htm](http://www.nnet.gr/historein/historeinfiles/histvolumes/hist03/hist03stedman.htm)].

<sup>33</sup> Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* [1971 edn], pp. v–vi, and 'Raphael Samuel: obituary', *The Independent*, 11 December 1996; Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin* (London, 1995), p. 29; Thompson, *Pessimism?*, pp. 7–8.