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Introduction

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The occasion

This book represents the result of two Anglo-German seminars on urban historical geography. The initial idea to organise these joint conferences was born from a concern to find new ways of contact and cooperation, together with a desire for a more effective form of international seminars between British and German historical geographers.

The first of the seminars was held in West Germany during 1982 and involved a number of field excursions held between Lübeck and Bonn, together with a series of papers. It was the success of this meeting that stimulated the demand for a further seminar, which was held in Britain during 1983. At the outset there was never an attempt to impose any rigid themes, indeed it quickly became apparent that the small group of participants had fairly eclectic interests. Such research foci varied both in terms of approach, subject matter, as well as historical periods. However, in contrast to this background of diversity the group was bound together by an interest in urban fieldwork, as reflected in the many excursions undertaken in both meetings. The reports and reactions underline that this specific form of a ‘moving conference’, which was developed and applied here, was especially rewarding in many respects, giving the opportunity to develop discussions within the field and helping to knit these together with the paper sessions.1 Besides this concept of management it was important, and a basic strategy of these seminars, that all the participants were involved in personal active research in urban historical geography.

More importantly the ideas for these seminars grew from a concern that contact between British and German historical geographers was extremely limited, especially by comparison with Anglo-French or Anglo-American initiatives. It was certainly becoming the case that a whole generation of British geographers was missing out on potentially rewarding contacts with their German counterparts.2 This situation had prompted Geipel to
comment that ‘relatively little information has reached the English-speaking academic community concerning developments in German geography since 1939’; which, whilst something of an overstatement, does highlight the frustration felt by many German-speaking geographers. In this respect the situation within historical geography contrasts with the position among urban historians both in Britain and more especially in the United States, where contact with German colleagues is far greater.

The idea of the seminars was to provide the means by which British and German historical geographers could understand each others’ work. This was to be achieved at a number of different levels, starting from the basic one of introducing the historical geography of urban settlement in the two countries. The obvious difference was between the political patchwork of states that conditioned the growth of German cities until the final quarter of the nineteenth century, as opposed to the relatively early uniformity of Britain. The difficulties of making direct comparisons between British and German urban settlements was a constant theme running through much of the field work and following discussions. Greater common ground was perhaps more visible in terms of methodology and approach. In most respects the basic techniques of analysis were similar, although slight differences in emphasis emerged in many of the papers.

Though direct empirical or objective comparison usually turned up differences between Britain and Germany, there was also a strong emphasis to find general lines of a comparative urban historical geography. Indeed, this is a general methodological aim which needs much further development on an international basis. Some progress has been made; for example, in Münster there exists an ‘Institute of Comparative Urban History’ (Institut für vergleichende Städtgeschichte), together with a long-term research project, ‘Vergleichende geschichtliche Städteforschung’, whilst in Japan there has been launched a new journal in 1982 under the title: The Comparative Urban History Review. Indeed, this whole problem of comparative study has been recently emphasised by Clarke and Simms who conclude their two volumes on The comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe: ‘When we have learned to ask comparable questions in a comparable manner and in comparable language, we may eventually succeed in building the foundations of a comparative history of urban origins.’

The whole question of internationalising historical geography has been widely discussed, especially following the success in 1957 of the first colloquium on the evolution of rural landscape in Europe. This and subsequent meetings suggested there was much to be gained by making cross-cultural comparisons of the development of field systems, settlement patterns and farming practices. Within urban historical work similar moves towards the breaking down of national barriers were being made particularly
through the historic towns atlas project. Perhaps of greater significance was the establishment in 1976 of the I.G.U. ‘Working Group on Historical Changes in Spatial Organisation’, which during its eight years of operation did much to promote international cooperation.

This relative increase in international contacts between historical geographers has certainly improved lines of communication, although coverage is still somewhat patchy. Moreover, whilst such links provide a necessary springboard for comparative work, important problems associated with such historical studies remain to be resolved. Early discussions among historians highlighted many of the difficulties as well as stressing the significance of such an approach. For example, Bloch believed that comparative history had three equally important uses. First, to test explanatory hypotheses; second, it could be used to discover the uniqueness of different societies; and finally to formulate new areas of study for historical research. Whilst few would doubt the value of a comparative approach, the problems associated with this form of study have often been ignored by urban historical geographers. In contrast, Bloch drew attention to the fact that ‘for each aspect of European social life, in each historical instant, the appropriate geographical framework has to be found’. To some extent this is a basic starting point, yet significantly little attention has been given to the problems of ‘unit delimitation’.

This raises a further general problem of international understanding and scientific cooperation, which has to be discussed more intensively in the near future, namely the international terminology of urban history and urban historical geography. International understanding and cooperation in research also means that there has to be a common terminological framework, a ‘comparable language’. The ‘International Working Group for the Geographical Terminology of the Agricultural Landscape’ made remarkable efforts to lay a foundation for establishing terminological frameworks. This is in the form of tables which offer criteria and terms for the understanding of existing phenomena and for the definition of established terms for different languages. Unfortunately, there is nothing comparable yet for the field of urban historical geography and urban history, and such an international and interdisciplinary project is badly needed.

The aims of the book

Following on from the ideas of the two seminars this book aims to bring together a diverse collection of papers that reflect the state of present day urban historical geography in both countries. In one respect it represents the first major attempt to confront similar research projects and approaches in Britain with those in West Germany, and in this sense the joint publication may be regarded as a comparative literature. Conversely, it may also
be seen as marking a starting point from which full comparative and collaboratory research projects can develop.

In the British, as well as in the German, contributions directly comparative aspects will rarely be found, since the concept was to give in most of the contributions a general review of recent research within selected fields of work in each country. In some contributions a particular case study is summarised and presented as an example for a specific approach or field of research. The proposal was to cover more or less the most important approaches and questions of research that have been followed in Britain as well as in Germany. In order to gain a reasonable coverage a few contributions were obtained from non-participants in the seminars, although even in these circumstances the authors had expressed an interest in the aims of these meetings.

The book is wide ranging and starts with two chapters that provide a general overview of recent research in Britain and Germany. Whilst it is possible to see common threads between these two papers the contrasts are perhaps more revealing. For example, Richard Dennis and Hugh Prince stress changes in approach based around a variety of stimuli, whereas Dietrich Denecke gives greatest emphasis to the influence of techniques and methodology, referring to a greater number of special fields of research. More significantly, these chapters highlight some major philosophical differences towards the study of urban historical geography, although it is far from certain that such contrasts follow any nationalistic lines. In the absence of any comprehensive bibliographies these two chapters also serve to provide general comparative guides to the British and German literature.\(^{14}\)

In Part Two of the book emphasis is given to settlement evolution and aspects of medieval town development. This section also highlights the links between geographers, archaeologists and historians in the two countries; with the contributions by Chris Dyer, Heiko Steuer and Hans Stephan. These three papers, together with that by Brian Graham, examine the evolution of urban settlement in a national and regional context. In contrast Terry Slater’s paper concentrates on those factors influencing the internal design and layout of the medieval town.

It is evident from these chapters that medieval urban archaeologists are playing a leading role especially in researching the development phase of proto-towns, as reflected in long-term projects, in specific conferences and substantial publications of collected papers.\(^{15}\) It is also clear that there are many regional and topographical aspects, as well as functional and spatial relations, involved in this research which means that geographical questions are raised. To solve them, not only finds, dates and archaeological evidence are needed, but also geographical approaches, interpretations, theories and models of explanation. Historical geographers are still far away from a noticeable input of geographical aspects or of joint research,
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but they try at least to follow the results of recent archaeology. Certainly in the German context one example of an introduction of a geographical concept which has already found its fruitful application has been the central place model.16

The remainder of the book approaches the historical geography of the town from a thematic rather than an historic or chronological perspective; starting in Part Three with a review of work on social areas, social patterns and social processes. Three major themes emerge from these papers. The first concerns the long-standing debate over the timing of change between the pre-industrial and industrialising city. The applications of such ideas are most prominent in the essays by Elizabeth Baigent and Claudia Erdmann. These two chapters not only tackle in some detail the nature of social structure prior to industrialisation, but also, in the case of Aachen, highlight the cultural-political dimension. Furthermore the similarities between these two studies also perhaps refute some of the assertions by Lichtenberger on the uniqueness of the continental European city, and suggest that further studies are required on a wider range of the larger cities for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.17

The second main theme highlighted in this section is the contrast between the strong interest in the social structure, more precisely, the social topography and the pattern of social indices of the early modern town in Germany, as illustrated in Dietrich Denecke’s paper, and the relative lack of interest among British historical geographers on this period. Such a balance of interest is significantly reversed however when one compares the work on the social geography of nineteenth-century British cities, as discussed by Colin Pooley and Richard Lawton, with in this case the more limited research emanating from Germany. The final paper, by Lindsay Proudfoot, draws attention to a more specialised influence on social patterns, as well as reminding us of another dimension to the diversity of British towns.

Part Four considers the economic and functional components of urban settlements, which as the papers illustrate is a rather fragmented research area. In Germany there has been considerable emphasis and long-term interest on urban hierarchies and the measurement of centrality. Not only did such work start earlier, through the influence of Christaller, it has also remained a more significant focus of research in more recent times than is the case in Britain. Unfortunately, there is no representative paper for such work, but interested readers are referred to Blotevogel’s work and Denecke’s review in Chapter 3.18 In Britain similar goals have been pursued by Harold Carter as represented by his wide-ranging study of the urban hierarchy in England and Wales.

The remaining two papers in this section highlight the growing interest in the internal economic structure of cities. Heinz Heineberg and Norbert de Lange’s chapter focusses on the locational dynamics of office functions
and emphasises the changing nature of site influences in German cities. In contrast Gareth Shaw’s paper considers the growth of retail functions and their impact on urban land use patterns. Both papers either directly or indirectly allude to a significant gap in the lack of any work on manufacturing industries in nineteenth-century cities.

The final section of the book covers two main themes, namely urban morphology and the conservation of historic townscape. The first of these provides perhaps more than anything else the early bridge between British and German historical geographers. At a personal level this link owes much to the efforts of M. R. G. Conzen and his work on town plan analysis. Indeed, Conzen played an active role in both of the seminar meetings, and his paper shows the understanding of town growth that can be provided by town plan analysis. At a wider level the many contacts between English- and German-speaking geographers through the interest in urban morphology have been recently reviewed by Conzen.\textsuperscript{19} Jeremy Whitehand’s contribution represents a substantial extension to this early work, and demonstrates the importance of using detailed building records. In terms of research in Germany the approach developed by Whitehand from the morphogenetic studies of Conzen is indeed innovative, as there as yet are no comparable studies of this type. The work of Jürgen Lafrenz draws attention to a much more specialised aspect of recent work on urban morphology and town topography being undertaken within German-speaking countries, using the techniques of metrological analysis.

The paper by Terry Slater and Gareth Shaw highlights the contrasting approaches taken towards the conservation and management of historic towns. In both countries it is the pressure for commercial development that constitutes the greatest threat, but in Germany conservation planners are at an advantage over their British counterparts, because of the more enlightened general attitude and the past history of such work. Indeed, in Britain urban historical geographers have already noticed the necessity to contribute to this field of an applied research, and in Germany there is a growing interest and production of applied studies for planning and conservation purposes.\textsuperscript{20}
PART ONE

Recent trends in urban historical geography
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Research in British urban historical geography

RICHARD DENNIS and HUGH PRINCE

This chapter reviews current trends in British research in urban historical geography. First, it traces new developments since 1970, identifying convergent interests that have drawn together geographers, planners, architects, archaeologists and historians as well as divergent interests that have pulled apart geographers and historians. The review then examines progress from well-established fields of inquiry such as urban morphogenesis through to social area analysis, initiated during the quantitative revolution and fostered by the release of vast quantities of nineteenth-century census data. Interest is then directed towards ideological questions, introducing recent Marxist interpretations of urban patterns and processes, classical economic interpretations of urban hierarchies and systems and psycho-cultural interpretations of symbols and images in built environments. Finally, the contribution of historical geographers to conserving historic townscapes is briefly mentioned.

Progress in British urban historical geography since 1970

To judge from the volume of published work, urban historical geography is thriving in Britain. Recent texts on urban geography offer substantial accounts of historical changes and developments and urban historical geography now has an introductory text of its own. Knowledge of urban historical geography of countries beyond England has begun to be brought together in book form, with new titles on Ireland, Scotland and Wales. New periodicals have been founded to provide outlets for an increasing flow of articles. These include the Urban History Yearbook (founded in 1974), Journal of Historical Geography (1975), London Journal (1975) and the Planning History Bulletin (1979). Special issues of the Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, in addition to regular individual contributions to major journals, major research seminars financed by the Social Science Research Council (now the Economic and Social Research
Council) and many funded research projects, all indicate an apparently flourishing specialism.³

Urban historical geography has been stimulated by a parallel growth in urban history which gained respectability through such influential works as Asa Briggs’ Victorian cities, published in 1963, and partly through the evangelistic efforts of H. J. Dyos, whose own Victorian suburb (1961) provided a model for urban historical research, and whose cottage industry of Urban History Newsletters paved the way for the substantial Urban History Yearbook. A further stimulus was given by social historians who began to collect written and oral testimony about the history of common people living in towns and cities, working in mines and mills.⁴ At the first international conference on urban history held in Britain, out of forty-three participants three (Carter, Conzen and Freeman) were geographers and others were sympathetic to geographical perspectives. Of the sixteen papers subsequently published in The study of urban history (1968) two were by geographers, both concerned more with morphology and built environments than with urban society.⁵

This impression of vigorous growth is less obvious in the statistics collected in two recent surveys. The Register of research in urban history 1984 lists a total of 630 entries of which 80 are definitely associated with geography departments, but among this apparently large tally, several titles are followed by the words ‘project abandoned’ or ‘suspended’.⁶ In the Register of research in historical geography 1984, out of 495 projects 130 are primarily urban in focus but absolute numbers are inflated by enumerating projects rather than researchers. Several enterprising researchers list different aspects of their work as separate projects.⁷ Whilst absolute numbers are on the high side, the distribution by period more truly indicates the orientation of current research, as shown in Table 2.1.

There is an overwhelming concentration on cities in and since the industrial revolution, for which few special skills (e.g. in palaeography or medieval languages) are required. More research has been undertaken by urban
geographers delving into the past than by historical geographers, moving away from their traditional concern for agrarian landscapes. Of the geographical research on medieval and early modern cities that has been carried out, much has been undertaken by social and economic historians rather than by geographers.

Urban morphogenesis

Until the 1960s most urban geographers concerned with the internal structure of cities focused on morphology, and most urban morphology was historical, plotting the ages and types of buildings, identifying diverse historical components of town plans. Little of this research attracted mainstream historical geographers, whose primary concern was the distant, preindustrial past, when urban populations were small and only a few major cities possessed an identifiable spatial structure. Even in Darby’s *A new historical geography of England* (1973), towns were treated primarily as points, as markets, ports, spas or places of manufacture. Their internal social geography received less attention.

The potential for urban historical geography, as distinct from historical urban geography, clearly existed. If the layout of medieval field systems was worth studying, so was the pattern of landownership and its implications for the layout of streets and buildings in urban areas. The relationship between tenant farmers and their landlords could be paralleled by that between tenant builders and ground landlords in urban areas. Enclosure and the ensuing reorganization of landownership and use generated similar legal processes and similar forms of documentation to compulsory purchase, slum clearance and the redistribution of building land in cities. Some of these connections between sources used for reconstructing the morphology of urban and of rural landscapes have been made in recent publications. But in the 1960s and 1970s, historical urban geography was practised by researchers whose approaches were more urban than historical, more ecological or sociological than cultural – disciples of the quantitative revolution, whose language and technical orientation alienated them from researchers into landscape and, as critically, from the growing army of urban historians.

Social area analysis

As urban geography became more sociological and more quantitative, so it lost favour with urban historians. Geographers were conspicuously absent from two later interdisciplinary celebrations of urban history: *The Victorian city: images and realities* (1973) and *The pursuit of urban history* (1983). In their introduction to the latter, Fraser and Sutcliffe commented that