

Urban History Group Annual Conference:

LEISURE, PLEASURE AND THE URBAN SPECTACLE

31 March–01 April 2011

Robinson College, University of Cambridge, UK

Call for Papers Deadline: 2010-10-29

This conference theme broadly explores the pursuit of "pleasure" in the context of the history of towns and cities. The conference organisers are interested in investigating the significance of specifically urban forms of pleasure and leisure for understanding the historical dynamics of social, economic and cultural relationships. Towns and cities have historically offered an array of pleasures to cater for ever larger concentrations of people. The types of leisure activities available to urban populations have never remained static; indeed, changing social and economic conditions have transformed popular leisure patterns over time as well as across urban space. The pursuit of pleasure, both licit and illicit, has adapted with the changing relationship between work and leisure. As working hours became increasingly rigid during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so too did leisure time. The lack of free time was further exacerbated by growing pressures on land use. Thus, the pursuit of pleasure was increasingly set aside for specific buildings (inns, brothels, theatres, music halls and, more recently, fitness centres) or clearly delineated spaces (botanical gardens, public parks, public walks, gated communities and even the internet) where access could, in theory, be carefully managed. Cities, seaside towns and holiday resorts were also developed to specifically cater for a variety of tastes and pleasures. Once it was recognised that there was money to be made out of the pursuit of pleasure, cities became intertwined with the business of leisure and began to market themselves as centres of tourism, heritage and culture.

Some issues that the conference seeks to consider include:

- What do we understand by the terms 'pleasure' and 'leisure' in an urban context?
- How has the pursuit of pleasure differed between towns and cities, across national borders and over time?
- How has leisure been regulated, managed and delivered to urban citizens? How has regulation and service delivery differed between public and private authorities?
- How has urban pleasure been produced, marketed and consumed? How has this changed in light of the rise of mass tourism and the heritage industry?
- What is the relationship between leisure and place identity? In what ways have specific leisure activities (organised sport, for example) strengthened local identities where others might have weakened them?
- How have urban identities been conditioned by their relationship with defined pleasurable spaces and/or communities? To what extent has access to these spaces led to the exclusion of particular social groups or minorities?
- What contribution has the business of pleasure made to the spectacle of urban modernity?
- In what ways can the pursuit of pleasure be theorised in an urban historical context?
- How has urban leisure been represented culturally (through literature, film, television, etc.)? Has this influenced the diffusion of specific types of leisure internationally?

The conference committee invites proposals for individual papers as well as for individual sessions of up to three papers. Sessions that seek to draw comparisons across one or more countries, or open up new vistas for original research, are particularly encouraged. Abstracts of up to 500 words, including a title,

name, affiliation and contact details should be submitted to the honorary conference organiser and should indicate clearly how the content of the paper addresses the conference theme outlined above. Those wishing to propose sessions should provide a brief statement that identifies the ways in which the session will address the conference theme, a list of speakers and paper abstracts. The final deadline for proposals for sessions and papers is 29 October 2010.

In addition, the conference will again host its new researchers' forum. This is aimed primarily at those who are at an early stage in a research project and who wish primarily to discuss ideas rather than present findings. New and current postgraduates working on topics unrelated to the main theme, as well as those just embarking on new research, are particularly encouraged to submit short papers for this forum.

For further details please contact:

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