

Gottfried, Robert S. *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290-1539*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Pp. xvi, 313

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study of the Gorbals, that a significant degree of residential integration of the social classes survived until very late in the nineteenth century. A.A. Maclaren's discussion of the Aberdeen bourgeoisie between 1830 and 1850 contributes to that inexhaustible topic, the interaction between class and religion in Victorian Scotland, but does not add fundamentally to his widely-cited monograph. Hume's study of the impact of transport on Scottish towns in the nineteenth century rounds up some disparate material effectively enough but contains no surprises, except in that the peculiarities of Scottish urban structures are largely effaced. J. Butt's study of working-class housing 1900–1950, on the other hand, stresses divergences from the English pattern, even in the public sector. Using material derived from a systematic analysis of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, Butt establishes strong continuities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of housing quality, despite increasing public involvement in the building and financing of urban housing after the First World War. Above all, the tenement system survived a number of attempts to break it down, preparing the way for a spate of high-rise building in the 1950s and 1960s. Butt thus brings his readers to the very threshold of contemporary urban Scotland without disrupting one of the book's major continuities.

Of course, this batch of essays is far from exhaustive, and we may look forward to further collections from the same editors. On the whole, their formula works well, with geographers and historians addressing themselves to compatible questions but setting up an interesting methodological counterpoint. In a future volume, perhaps, architectural historians and political scientists might be allowed a place, with social history perspectives developed at greater length. However, as Artibise and Stelter have shown, there is plenty of room to correct the balance once an enterprise of this type is under way. Gordon and Dicks deserve our encouragement in their valiant effort to make a world readership take Scottish urban history more seriously at last.

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Gottfried, Robert S. *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290–1539*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Pp. xvi, 313.

Any historian is the prisoner of his sources, and none more so than the medievalist. In *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290–1539* Robert S. Gottfried explains that he originally intended to recreate the nature and texture of the lives of the inhabitants of this prosperous East Anglian regional centre during the late Middle Ages. As so often happens in medieval studies, the sources here tell tantalizingly little of

people, and propel the scholar inexorably toward institutions. But Gottfried has skillfully extracted far more than one might expect from the irregular and sometimes hazy data available.

Gottfried sets out first to delineate the geographic, economic and political parameters of Bury life. He then goes on to work at an assessment of population size and trends, based partly on the rentals of St. Edmunds Abbey and royal subsidy lists, and partly on wills. He follows this with a closer study of the economic structure and functioning of Bury and its region, and a look at the character and careers of some of its elite. Overarching and infusing all this is the perennial struggle for economic and political power between the city and the great Abbey of St. Edmunds.

Whether individuals or institutions, the lords of medieval cities by their very nature had to be conservative: their rights and powers rested on traditional obligations, and they had little to gain from expansion or change and much to fear from civic political development. St. Edmunds had given Bury its initial importance, and made it a focus of commerce and concourse for a wide area. But the very prosperity it brought made increasingly independent burgesses impatient of tutelage and less dependent on the Abbey as a market. Gottfried's excellent topographic study of the town shows the progressive desertion of buildings nearest to the Abbey, and the decay of the Old Market near its gates in favour of the newer Great Market, mirroring this decrease in subservience. This is complemented by a lucid explanation of Bury's position as a regional market and the rise of its importance as minor metropolis of a leading cloth producing region, quite apart from its relation to the Abbey.

Gottfried uses a combination of quantitative and deductive method to analyze his material. The quantification, with illustrative graphs and tables, makes for considerable elucidation and precision in dealing with the changing patterns of the wool and cloth trade of the town, and of the relative wealth of Bury and its inhabitants. It is somewhat less satisfying in the author's study of Bury's demography. Gottfried argues that Bury's population, repeatedly devastated by the plague and other epidemics in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, also suffered from drastically reduced fertility rates and survived only through sustained immigration. This is a fairly familiar picture for late medieval towns, but the degree of fertility reduction for which Gottfried argues is startling. Gottfried draws his evidence largely from wills, and he assumes that all a testator's surviving children will be mentioned in his will. Based on this data, he finds less than half of all testators leaving even one son, and an average of only 37 per cent leaving a daughter, with something under a quarter leaving more than one child. English medieval wills are far from complete guides to family size, however. Daughters were normally given a "portion" at marriage, and often received no further inheritance; the discrepancy in the sex ratio Gottfried gives surely reflects this. Similarly,

younger sons among the propertied classes often fail to appear in their fathers' wills, possibly because earlier provision had been made for them as well. The fact that the wealthiest men in Bury mention the largest number of children may well indicate not that they had more children but only that they were rich enough to divide their legacy, while lesser men could not afford to. In sum, while there are indications that fertility rates dropped, the degree to which they did so is debateable, and the possibility remains that the basis of the population's decrease and long-delayed recovery lay in sustained mortality of the young, the potential parents, through repeated epidemics.

Gottfried has also reconstructed the careers of some of Bury's fifteenth century elite. Their successful, prosperous lives and their smooth-running corporate and fraternal networks are in sharp contrast to the narrative of violent fourteenth century revolts against the Abbey with which Gottfried concludes. It would have been well to have known of these tremendous hatreds somewhat earlier on in the book, for surely those comfortable merchants and rentier monks we have encountered did not forget them. And what, if any, were the wider connections and shared interests that enabled the rebels to smuggle a kidnapped abbot to Brabant and conceal him there for months? *There* is evidence indeed for the ties to London and the Low Countries which Gottfried has noted in the cloth trade. It would seem that Bury politics were significant enough for these commercial associates to involve themselves in considerable risk.

Robert Gottfried has provided a comprehensive and highly readable picture of a late medieval English town thriving when most others were faltering, and has used an effective mixture of techniques to explain why it was Bury which succeeded. In doing so he has written a book valuable for the insights it provides into some of the major questions of economic and civic life of the period.

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Bobrick, Benson. *Labyrinths of Iron: A History of the World's Subways*. New York: Newsweek Books, 1982. Pp. 352. Illustrations, endnotes, bibliography.

Benson Bobrick was born and educated in New York City and so it is not surprising that he should regard subways as both important and fascinating. Bobrick saw

the remarkable fact that a large and increasing proportion of the world's population had come to travel every day in tunnels and underground. The degree to which this

development was regarded as normal I found very surprising. Quite simply, I wanted to know how it had all come about (p. 9).

The result is an admirable introduction to the history of tunnelling and subways which combines the history of ideas, engineering and urban studies.

The obvious fact that a subway is underground has two very important consequences. First, it is linked to the older and much wider stories of tunnelling and a variety of underground activities including transportation and mining. Associated with these are a number of ideas, images, stereotypes, attitudes and fears which re-emerged and had to be dealt with before the modern subway could be accepted. The second important feature of a subway is that its construction and operation present very real conceptual, construction and operating problems not shared by surface transportation systems.

Labyrinths of Iron begins with the widespread pre-nineteenth century tunnelling which was associated primarily with mining and to a lesser extent transportation and military operations. It was also a very crudely developed empirical pursuit often characterized by one or more of prison labour, inhumane working conditions, simple hand tools and explosives (after 1613), danger and high rates of death or debilitating injury. The images of the underground were uninviting or worse and any subway proposal and system would have to cope with both public fears and technical problems.

The prodigious growth of nineteenth century commercial and industrial centres created hitherto unknown concentrations of population, extreme overcrowding and environmental degradation, as well as varying degrees of dysfunction in what passed for urban transportation. The nineteenth century was also a glorious era of inspired engineering. Marc Isambard Brunel, one of the most brilliant engineers of the day, turned to the problems of boring in soft ground which, unlike hard rock, is too weak to support itself when tunnelled. The combination of a great deal of work, determination and Brunel's invention of the tunnelling shield made the opening of the Thames Tunnel possible in 1843. It had taken 18 years and only went 1,200 feet but it was the first successful subaqueous tunnel and it led the way for many others. Magnificent and much praised achievement that it was, the Thames Tunnel also had its critics and detractors and Bobrick successfully presents a cross section of opinion.

One of the important results of the Thames Tunnel was that "it introduced tunnels — particularly transportation tunnels — into the urban environment as a solution to traffic congestion" (p. 87). The remainder of the book gives a fascinating and detailed account of how major cities turned to