

Local history and place

Michael Thompson published in 1974 a history of Hampstead:¹ Lawrence Goldman recently considered the book 'as full of fascinating details and historical byways as is the place itself'.² When researching Kentish Town, people suggested to Gillian Tindall that 'surely the only places whose local history is worth going into in depth are 'interesting' areas – 'historical' ones like Hampstead or Greenwich, or York or Bath'. But she wrote, in 1976, that 'in an accredited "historical" area ... what is still hidden has been so fully documented already by a series of scholars, plagiarists, bandwaggoners and chatterboxes, that little discovery remains to be done ... Books on areas like Hampstead are legion.' Tindall subtitles her book 'The history of one London village', which she 'has taken as a subject, not because it is special but because it is archetypal'.³

Local history is not usually concerned with comparison: it seeks to know how this particular place became what it is. (Equally, histories of London – or indeed Britain – take the location for granted.) The sense of place, Thomas Gieryn proposes, is because it is *remarkable* (his emphasis), held through experience and shared record.⁴ A place has 'spatial form and social content' – and each will affect the other. Place is people's interpretations as well as the physical aspects themselves. And while the boundaries for a place provide its definition, these boundaries may be contested in the definitions of others. The identity of place comes from internalisation of interactions with 'the outside'.⁵

Similarly, the meanings of a place and the criteria for valuing place may differ both between individuals and between groups. The ways that perceptions of place can be influenced are also varied – perhaps by a symbol, such as on a transport map, perhaps by association with events in media reports, perhaps by public authority jurisdictions. It is not just about scale – a 'local history' may be small or large – a house, a street or the several points on a railway line.⁶

Connotations from the past transform space into place: the past can explain buildings and open areas, giving them context such as in architectural history. Gieryn proposes three requirements of place: a geography (ranging from armchair to region) expressed through location, height and climate; a material form that may be natural or humanly created; and an investment with meaning and value through people and cultures over time. Place 'sustains difference and hierarchy' by 'routinizing daily rounds ... and segregations', feeding

¹ Michael Thompson, *Hampstead: building a borough, 1650-1964*, London, 1974.

² Lawrence Goldman, *Michael Thompson* <history.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2017/08/professor-michael-thompson>

³ Tindall, 'Fields beneath':14-18.

⁴ Thomas Gieryn, 'A space for place in sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology* 2000;26:463-496.

⁵ Identities 'formed by the juxtaposition and co-presence of particular sets of social relations' are 'forever open to contestation': Doreen Massey, *Space, place, and gender*, Minneapolis (USA) 1994:167.

⁶ See Gillian Tindall, *The house by the Thames*, London, 2006. Jerry White, *Campbell Bunk: the worst street in North London between the wars*, London 1986. Gillian Tindall, *The tunnel through time*, London 2016.

into the complementary value of identity. Place may also have an active effect: in discussion of 'urban agency', there is the idea that form can contribute to peoples' experience and indeed values.

Robert Lewis has argued that there is an 'appeal' of a suburb's physical layout and homes which attracts people living and working there, creating a 'network of relationships bound up with a particular setting':⁷ the same as the nineteenth century squares and terraces that were the ambition for the new middle classes of Camden Town. Similarly, there is debate on how physical form and people's perceptions affect behaviour, such as either public service or criminality; and how social norms and proscriptions affect people's experience of place.⁸ Nevertheless, the theoretical discussion of place is not usually linked with local history.

The purpose of the local history is both to demonstrate uniqueness and to place the record within a more general framework. David Dymond describes how the local historian, after reviewing previous work and describing both primary and secondary evidence, can 'change the focus from the personal and local to the regional and national (and back again) ... and draw her own conclusions'.⁹ Local history happens in many places – the studies of Georgian Edinburgh New Town and Drumcondra in Dublin complement those of Summerson's London. There can be extension by comparison – Shane Ewen, in a recent student text on urban history, includes India for the post-colonial studies that have widened British history;¹⁰ or local case study can be set within a multi-country study, opening new areas for comparisons.

All these differing histories can be drawn into reconsideration of London history. The authors of popular histories take up others' work and synthesise it into new formats, taking a mixture of topic and place. The London's west end is understood through the development of the aristocratic estates and sovereign land such as the Royal Parks; London's east end is described for its overcrowding resulting from waves of migration through the docks. The north of London has Hampstead and Highgate as villages and suburban development between. More can be learned of these – now – inner suburbs to balance the presentation, to reflect more broadly the range of London's places and people.¹¹ The idea of a general pattern may be drawn from a particular example; and the individual report may be all that is left. But in some places there are separate bits of information that are viewable together in a new light. And these may link the local area to wider national and international perspectives. For example, the growing interest in local history from the 1960s led to changes in planning law and greater investment by local authorities in area conservation.

⁷ Robert Lewis, 'Comments on urban agency: relational space and intentionality,' *Urban History* 2017;44(1):137-144.

⁸ Dolores Hayden, *The power of place: urban landscapes as public history*. Cambridge (USA) 1995.

⁹ David Dymond, *Researching and writing local history*, Lancaster 2016.

¹⁰ Shane Ewen, *What is urban history?* Cambridge 2016:83.

¹¹ See Peter Ackroyd, *London – the biography*, London 2000. Roy Porter, *London – a social history*. London, London 1994. Peter Thorold, *The London Rich*, London 1999. Jerry White. *London in the nineteenth century*, London 2010.

London local history studies

Theses

Croydon

CRW Cox. "Urban development and redevelopment in Croydon, 1835-1940," Centre for English Local History Thesis Collection, University of Leicester, 1970.

[Abstract: the urban growth of Croydon was influenced by its being a long-established market town.]

Camden and Lambeth

Colloms, Marian. Residential development in London in the 19th century: a comparative examination of its nature and progress within the present boroughs of Camden and Lambeth. Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1978.

Chiswick

Tracey Logan. Improving Chiswick 1858-1883. MRes in Historical Research. University of London, 2014. Logan investigated Victorian Chiswick politics through records of the Chiswick Improvement Commission, 'an experimental, amateur-led organ of government'.

Hackney

Sean Gubbins. Rhodes Town: how Lamb Farm became Hackney suburbia. Masters Thesis, University of London, 2014. Gubbins looked at the building process, the appearance of the houses and the people who came to live in a speculative estate at the edge of the village at Hackney in the nineteenth century.

Juliet Davis. The making and remaking of Hackney Wick, 1870–2014: from urban edgeland to Olympic fringe. London, Routledge 2016. Planning and development in Hackney Wick, proposing a 'new local centrality in urban edgeland'.

Lambeth

David Kroll. The other architects who made London: planning and design of speculative housing c. 1870 – 1939. Ph D, University of London, 2013. In Lambeth, the Minet estate is 'typical' for its time, as not pioneering or experimental.

Mayfair

David Brown. The impact of rivers on urban development – the Tyburn River and Mayfair in the eighteenth century. MRes, University of London, 2017. David Brown used geographical information systems to analyse how building quality was associated with proximity to the local river, the Tyburn, in Mayfair;

Pamela Taylor, Knightsbridge and Hyde, Victoria County History, London 2017.

Links the changing built environment with political and religious histories from the Restoration of 1660 until 1900 in Knightsbridge.

Regent's Park

Ann Saunders. "The Manor of Tyburn and the Regent's Park, 1086-1965," Centre for English Local History Thesis Collection, University of Leicester, 1965. From a hunting park for Henry VIII, to 'London's first Garden City under the genius of John Nash'.

South London

David Woodward. Suburban development in five neighbouring South London parishes in the middle decades of the 19th century. Ph D, University of Kingston, 2012 Sutton and Wallington were quickly expanding while, Cheam, Carshalton and Beddington, more slowly. Selective arrival of the railways and piped water increased the disparities.

Richmond

Brownlee, Mike. Economic and social change in the 19th century in south-west Middlesex and north-west Surrey: a comparative study of seven parishes bordering the Thames. PhD thesis, University of London (IHR), [Recorded talk at IHR 1 Feb 2017]

In Michael Thompson, ed The rise of suburbia. Leicester University Press, 1982:

Bromley:

Rawcliffe. A market town: the coming of the railway. In 1841, there were 178 separate landowners, but 4 people owned together two thirds. From 1845 sold off – for the railway speculations

Acton

Michael Jahn. Railways and suburban development: outer west London 1850-1900 (Acton, Chiswick, Ealing, Hanwell). (M Phil, 1971). Low-density development was characteristic of large estates whose owners could control transformation into middle-class residential districts. Railways benefited, but 'development was frequently not maintained after a relatively short period'.

Bexley

Michael Carr. The growth and characteristics of a metropolitan suburb : Bexley Borough, North West Kent 1880-1963. Ph D, University of London (LSE), 1971.

Publications

Battersea

Keith Bailey. Aspects of Battersea History 1770-1910. Wandsworth Historical Society Paper 18 2010.

Keith Bailey. The development of building estates in Battersea 1780-1914. London, Wandsworth Historical Society, 2012.

[“On closer inspection, the average Victorian suburb was the uncoordinated product of many men” p.6. Guiding minds and controlling hands were the exception... far removed from the planned streets of Bloomsbury, Belgravia and Pimlico. Describes individual developers. It was all very fragmented ownership.]

Keith Bailey. Developing Victorian Battersea: The Story of James Lord and George Todd, Junior. The London Journal, vol 40, Page 56-79 2015

Jon Newman. Battersea’s global reach: the story of Price’s candles. Mitcham, History & Social Action Publications, 2009.

[Advances in chemistry ‘to bring cheap reliable lighting to the masses’. Yet with massive importation of palm oil, and the Wilson family owners, deeply religious, brought bible classes, schools and sports to the African tribes – much like Leer Bros later at Port Sunlight.]

Chelsea

Penny Olsen. The history of the Sloane Stanley Estate in Chelsea, 2011.

[Production for local use. Divided as history and biographies.]

Dulwich

Bernard Nurse. Planning a London suburban estate: Dulwich, 1882-1920.

London Journal, 1994;19:54-70.

East London

John Marriott, Beyond the Tower: A History of East London. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011.

Gospel Oak

Rosalind Bayley. To paradise by way of Gospel Oak: a mansion flat estate and the forces that shaped it. London: Camden History Society, 2009.

Hackney

DAVIS, Juliet The making and remaking of Hackney Wick, 1870–2014: from urban edgeland to Olympic fringe. Planning Perspectives 31:3 (2016) 425-457

[A particular urban locality considered “over a *longue durée* of more than a century”, drawing on archival records. Assesses Hackney Wick’s planning and development history in relation to London more broadly.]

Isobel Watson. Gentlemen in the building line: the development of south Hackney. [UK] Padfield publications, 1989.

[P11. “I decided that the built pattern could only be understood by reference to the individual or corporate purpose behind the development of the various estates ... and the

fragmented nature of local land ownership.” Part One describes development 1750s-1800 of houses along Hackney village – landowners including St Thomas’s Hospital and Cass charitable trusts. Part Two starts 1840s.]

Herne Hill

Milkwood Residents Association. Milkwood Estate : the story of a Lambeth community.

London: Local History Publications for the Herne Hill Society, 2009. [

[Milkwood estate around Herne Hill, south London, was built-up to create ‘decent accommodation for working people’ through a company. The land had been market gardens in the nineteenth century, fertilised by ‘night-soil’ from the Capital.]

Hornsey

Janet Owen. John Farrer: the man who changed Hornsey. London: Hornsey Historical Society, 2009.

[Farrer apprenticed to an architect, set up himself in 1877 in Moorgate and came to Muswell Hill in 1895-96. He became speculator and estate developer through to 1930, creating 1800 houses and shops in 72 roads – the redbrick gable-fronted houses.]

Ilford

Michael Heller. Suburbia, marketing and stakeholders: developing Ilford, Essex, 1880–1914. *Urban History*, 2014;41(1):62-80.

[Conclusion. Ilford’s success as a suburb was premised on a marketing strategy ... which targeted clerical workers and developed homes and an environment which satisfied their needs. All stakeholders discussed in this article repeated the same messages; it was healthy, respectable, convenient, economic and ideal for city workers.]

Islington

Sylvia Tunstall, Patsy Ainger and Robyn Lyons. Caledonian Park and its Surroundings. £5.00 + 75p p&p, Islington Society. Available from the IAHS.

[Neighbouring to Camden Town Estate – former Caledonian Cattle Market.]

Kilburn

Marianne Colloms, Dick Weindling. The Greville Estate: the history of a Kilburn neighbourhood. London, Camden History Society, 2007.

[This has a focused history of area and people, including Mortimer Road; not about the mechanisms of development.]

Mayfair

David Wixon, Alison Graham. The Berkeley Square Estate : expressions of elegance and excellence / London: Lancer Property Asset Management, 2008 200 p. hb, colour.

[Berkeley Square built on ‘four great houses’. Lord Berkeley dies 1678, and his younger wife Lady Berkeley ‘ensured that building plots were sold leasehold and, as freeholder, she was able to define the style and quality of much...]

Surbiton

Audrey Giles. The failure of a speculative builder: the downfall of Thomas Pooley of Surbiton, 1838-1844. Kingston University, Centre for Local History Studies, Occasional Papers in Local History, 2003;1:1-17.

[This paper is considered and revised by David Kennedy at <https://www.kingstonhistoryresearch.co.uk/advent-surburbia-thomas-pooley-railway-surbiton-1791-1856>]

Christopher French. The good life in Victorian and Edwardian Surbiton: creating a suburban community before 1914. *Family & Community History* 2011;14(2):105-120.

[... suburbs and suburban society have been characterised by a number of writers — including historians — as being dull, detached, monotonous, lacking in community spirit and devoid of cultural activity. The aim of this article is to challenge these negative stereotypes... The historical evidence for community life and identity in Surbiton before 1914 is provided by the existence of clubs and societies; sporting and leisure activities; participation in cultural events; support networks when necessary; multi-class activities; and enlightened middle class leadership.]

St John's Wood.

Malcolm Brown. St. John's Wood: the Eyre estate before 1830. *London Topographical Record*. 1995;27:49-68.

[Recent discovery of Eyre estate earliest known map.]

Walthamstow

Timothy Cooper. The politics of the working-class suburb: Walthamstow, 1870-1914. In Barry Doyle (ed), *Urban politics and space in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: regional perspectives*. Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 2007:160-172.

Philip Plummer. A brief history of Courtenay Warner and Warner Estate: Walthamstow, Leyton, Woodford. Walthamstow, Walthamstow Historical Society, 2000.

[Estate owned by Courtney Warner, started late c19 as suburban.]