



## Conference Reports

### **The XVIIth Session of the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape, Trinity College, Dublin, 10–14 September 1996**

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Some 41 delegates attended the seventeenth session of this conference in Dublin, organized by Fred Aalen and Mark Hennessy at Trinity College. The themes covered in the main part of the conference included 'Ethnic diversity in the landscape', 'Changing perceptions and uses of land resources through time' and 'Theoretical and methodological aspects of interdisciplinary landscape research'. Speakers on the first day addressed the first of these themes, with strong representation by Scandinavian participants. Gabriel Bladh (University of Karlstad, Sweden) spoke of the Finnish community established in central Sweden in the seventeenth century; Venke Olsen (Saupstad, Norway) described the Finnish sauna as a typical expression of Finnish culture in north Norway and Birgitta Roeck Hansen (University of Stockholm, Sweden) discussed the medieval Finnish influence discernible in northern Sweden. Relict features of early Norse law, normally now referred to as *udal law*, have given rise to numerous claims concerning rights to foreshore and salmon fishing in Orkney and Shetland, and Michael Jones (University of Trondheim, Norway) described other Norse cultural influences, linguistic and legal, which lasted in these areas into the nineteenth century and later and which provided a mental landscape which has preserved a local Orkney and Shetland identity within a predominantly Scots context. Tina Peil (University of Stockholm) discussed the varied ethnic composition of the Estonian islands. Also in this section, Mark Hennessy (Trinity College, Dublin) examined evidence for the changing degree of interaction between the Anglo-Norman colonists and Gaelic natives in the medieval period. Finally, Hans-Jürgen Nitz (University of Göttingen, Germany) looked at circular green hamlets as expressions of Slavic influence in eastern Germany.

As might be expected in a gathering of historical geographers, there was a strong response to the second suggested theme of the conference with a substantial number of speakers choosing to discuss marginal and uncultivated regions: the human impact upon the landscape of the Faeroe Islands was discussed by Karl-Erik Frandsen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark) and Rolf Guttesen (University of Copenhagen) presented the evidence for an ancient territorial boundary on the islands. Upland landscapes figured in the papers of Colin Thomas (University of Ulster, Coleraine), speaking of the transformation of the Alpine economy and landscape in Slovenia, and, in a second paper, of the effect of changing attitudes and economic pressures upon the uplands of Wales. Angus Winchester (University of Lancaster) explored the ways in which upland resources were controlled through the institution of the manorial court and the responses made to changing social, economic and environmental conditions;

Della Hooke (Cheltenham and Gloucester College) looked at the changing exploitation of seasonal pastures in southern Britain in the medieval and later periods. Changing land use in a wetland environment (North-Brabant in the Netherlands) was the theme chosen by Karl Leenders (University of The Hague, Netherlands). Patrick O'Flanagan discussed the degradation of forest landscapes in Iberia, Ian Layton (Umeå University, Sweden) changing land use in the Lule valley of northern Sweden, and Ulf Janssen (University of Stockholm) the impact of the early modern iron industry on the rural economy of Värmland, Sweden. Fewer speakers discussed cultivated regions, although Sylvia Seeliger (University of Portsmouth) drew attention to the role of enclosure by formal and informal agreement in Hampshire and Panagiotis Doukellis (Ionienne University, Greece) discussed the antiquity of cultivation terraces in the Cyclades.

Changing perceptions of landscapes formed the themes of Robin Butlin's (College of Ripon and York) discussion of the marginal wetlands of the Fens, and of Eileen O'Rourke's (Cranfield University, Bedfordshire) examination of changing social identities in the Mediterranean–Pyrenean borderland; Karoline Daugstad (University of Trondheim, Norway) spoke of the summer farm landscape which became a symbol in the nineteenth-century romantic period of Norwegian culture but was later scrutinized more closely for scientific purposes, including today's concern with environmental management. Harriet Emerson (Trinity College, Dublin) showed how different groups of people had different views of the 'green' economy in north-east Scotland.

The final theme, 'Theoretical and methodological aspects of interdisciplinary landscape research', was addressed by Krister Björklund (Odense University, Denmark) who discussed network flows as an aspect of time-geography, and by Gunillia Olsson (University of Trondheim, Norway) the maintenance of habitat diversity in the Norwegian summer farming landscape. 'New nature' in 'old landscapes' and the value attributed to different environments was also the topic of the paper presented by Johannes Renes (Winand Staring Centre, The Netherlands) while Ulf Sporrang (University of Stockholm, Sweden) addressed the necessity to monitor change as a step towards preserving sustainable and diverse landscapes. Tim Unwin (Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham) attempted to explore all three conference themes, arguing that nature and culture can only be understood through the experience of the observer; the influence of personal experience, together with the way landscape descriptions might be manipulated to influence decisions, was also the theme followed by Bjorg Lien Hanssen (Bergen University, Norway). With an emphasis moving towards both the understanding and classification of European cultural landscapes, one attempt to map landscape regions throughout Europe was illustrated by Jan Meus (Arnhem, The Netherlands). This, however, showed just how much work still needs to be carried out before this most basic information is available to those practitioners and policy-makers concerned in the conservation of the European landscape.

Sandwiched between the formal proceedings were two delectable field trips, either to the west of Ireland or to regions lying north and south of Dublin. For both, the sun shone from a cloudless sky. On the West of Ireland field trip, led by Fred Aalen (Trinity College, Dublin), the effect of people on the landscape could be seen, on the first day, in the peat-covered moors of Connemara, together with the abandoned homes of people ousted by the famine and the clearances, and, on the second day, in the limestone outcrop of the Burren in County Clare—the first an area formerly used for summer grazing and the latter, conversely, a valued area of winter pasture. The different perceptions of the Burren by different interest groups was particularly evident in the latter area, illustrated by a wealth of local literature avidly purchased by many delegates (mine, together with idyllic looking photographs of Ireland's blue sea and the then

smiling landscape, has already found its way into student lectures!). The transformation of the Irish landscape through modern rebuilding was a shock to many visitors, some of whom may have experienced a sense of nostalgia for the remoteness and traditional building styles of the past, but Ireland is now very much part of the European scene. Dublin remains a gracious city and nothing has ousted Irish traditional music!

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DELLA HOOKE

### **The Third European Conference on Urban History, Budapest, 29–31 August 1996**

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For the past century, Budapest has lived through interesting times. It has fallen from imperial glory, suffered devastation in war, humiliation and neglect during four decades of uneasy Soviet rule and is now adjusting to global competition (not to mention global tourism). The outlines of this modern history are apparent in the townscape to the informed visitor. The airport minibus into the city centre passes, successively, a mile or two of owner-built suburbs which are testament to the ingenuity of local residents; through tracts of now-decaying slabs and blocks of apartments of the kind now under siege in both East and West; past Wekerle, the early twentieth-century example of municipal housing which boasts a rich array of domestic architecture inspired by Transylvanian folk tradition; into the inner districts of rental-barracks (five-storey apartments complete with typical central European courts and the specifically Hungarian circular galleries). Across the Danube, as the city centre of bourgeois Pest is reached, looms the Citadel and reconstructed Hapsburg palace-castle, symbols of Buda's earlier absolutisms, together with the Art Nouveau magnificence of the Gellert spa baths and hotel. Finally, as you disembark, there is the absurdly familiar: Macdonalds and Burger King! For those who know how to look, there is much to see and learn.<sup>[1]</sup>

Unfortunately we, and other conference participants, were compelled to cobble together such an understanding on our own initiative. Apart from a short boat trip on the Danube (without commentary) and the tourist city-bus tour, the organizers did not mount any field excursions, or provide any written material, to exploit the local urban context of the conference. Indeed, there was not even a conference session devoted to the city most delegates had come to see for the first time; the conference was, in effect, in 'anytown'. That was a pity. Why, for example, did the organizers not inform in advance the session chairs of the modules on leisure and recreation, and on seaside towns, that there was a fascinating exhibition on the visual representations of Hungary in the tourist literature of the past century in the Ethnographic Museum, a few hundred metres from the conference venue? Indeed, why was the exhibition organizer not presenting a paper at the conference? Pest was transformed in the 1890–1914 period into one of the finest Secessionist (Art Nouveau) townscapes in Europe; where did the finance for this transformation come from? What was the nature of the local representation of a global style, and who were the architects and planners involved? Budapest is going through another such transformation as the Communist city is being thrust into the capitalist world but there were no papers on the east European urban experience of 1945–1989 and, whilst there were papers on transport and urban growth

in Vienna, there were none on Budapest or Warsaw with their marvellously efficient public transport systems, the *sine qua non* of Socialist regimes.

This was the third in the biennial series of conferences for urban historians. For both of us it was our first attendance. Compared with the American urban history conferences, which have been running now for a decade, there is much greater historical depth and range of topics; however, not to the full extent imaginable. The dominant focus was clearly on the nineteenth century (more than 50 papers) and the early-modern period (33 papers) rather than the twentieth-century concerns which have lately preoccupied North American urban historians. There was also little interest in the medieval (only 14 papers). Consistent with this emphasis, but to our surprise, we were struck by how few non-historians were present. There were few historical geographers, no archaeologists, and few historically oriented scholars from the social sciences or urbanists from art history. If this conference is to become truly representative of research going on in European urban history more needs to be done to widen the constituency. It was also very notable that there was little reference to, and virtually no discussion of, theory, at least in the sessions we attended. Whilst we may be sceptical of the theoretical debates which appear to be nothing but navel-gazing in intent, rather than being put to work in order to make sense of urban worlds, this conference served as a warning of the dangers of unleavened empiricism.

With these provisos, the conference provided something to appeal to almost everyone with an interest in European cities. There were sessions on taxation, and the topography of medieval towns, military towns and small towns, transportation, housing, leisure, seaside towns, advertising, crime, women, foreigners, energy, neighbourhoods, health and sanitation, and central European towns. The most obvious absence (paralleled by recent American conferences) was anything on urban industry (a session on the medieval urban textile industry having been cancelled). From the sessions we attended there was much new and interesting material presented, new contacts made, and good conversations over coffee and meals. There were, of course, set-piece lectures to top and tail the conference. Heinz Schilling (Berlin) opened the conference with a stimulating review of Church and town in Europe. This proposed a series of key processes of change in early-modern towns and then analysed the ways in which these processes were worked out in Protestant and Catholic towns respectively. The Protestant revolution was visible mainly within church buildings, whereas in Catholic towns the triumphalism of Baroque architecture was as much outward as inward; both, however, were transformed as they moved towards modernity with different methods of organizing, unifying, controlling and disciplining their members. Penny Corfield's (London) closing address on the European city at the crossroads was an altogether more impressionistic piece which took the evidence of street songs as one of the bases of its argument for the interactive, cross-cultural nature of crossroads as urban meeting places.

Where the conference has succeeded especially well is in its internationalism. The 200 participants were drawn from 20 countries. Britain (24), France (23) and Germany (17) together with North America (14) predominated but there were healthily sized groups from Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden and Austria. However, the power of the English language was also very apparent. Almost all public discussion at the conference occurred in English, even when it manifestly hindered communication. On at least one occasion a German scholar who had given his paper in English was questioned by another German colleague whose English was barely adequate but who evidently felt constrained to adopt the *lingua franca*. More than 70 of the papers were given in English, despite, or perhaps because of, the international nature of the audience; French (29) and German (15) were a long way behind. In terms of the geography of

urban history, there was nearly double the interest in French topics (28) compared with British (18). Interest in German, Austrian, Hungarian and Italian cities reached double figures and almost all other western and central European countries were represented but there were few papers on eastern and south-eastern Europe. It was also very noticeable that research reported at the conference was dominated by interest in particular great cities, notably Vienna and Paris (8), London and Prague (4), Budapest and Milan (3); otherwise only Glasgow and Venice appeared more than once. Why is there so little interest in Berlin, Barcelona, Rome, Budapest, Warsaw or Amsterdam? There was a session on small towns but nothing at all on middle-rank provincial cities, and little interest in the industrial newcomers of the nineteenth century.

The linguistic hegemony of the Central European University conference halls was not quite reflected out on the streets of the city. English has only recently become the second language of the education system (replacing Russian) and most adults are unable to speak it. Those who do, however, are enormously proud of their ability, whilst those who do not appear to regret the fact. For Hungarians who are trying to secure new investment and jobs English is so obviously the language of opportunity and, for those of us with execrable German and nonexistent Hungarian, it was convenient, if unsettling, to concede to this linguistic complicity. The next conference in 1998 is scheduled for Venice, and the 2000 gathering for Berlin. We must hope that the welcome will be as friendly, the cities as fascinating to explore, and the universities as well equipped as they were in Budapest; but there needs to be a broadening of the urban historical agenda, a greater willingness to provide theoretical contexts, and more interest in place—but geographers would say that wouldn't they?

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RICHARD HARRIS  
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### Notes

- [1] The English language literature on the development of modern Budapest is meagre. Good places to start are John Lakacs, *Budapest 1900* (London 1988) and, on housing, Gabor Gyani, Budapest, in M. Daunton (Ed), *Housing the Workers, 1850–1914* (Leicester 1990). For a devastating and hilarious account of owner-construction during the communist era, see J. Kenedi, *Do It Yourself: Hungary's Hidden Economy* (London 1981).

## **International Conference on Advances in Forest and Woodland History, University of Nottingham, 2–7 September 1996**

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An array of scholars from 19 countries, two-thirds of them from outside the UK, found much common ground at this very congenial and stimulating conference, organized by Charles Watkins from the Geography Department at Nottingham to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Oliver Rackham's key book *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape*. In addition to the formal program, Watkins scheduled

ample time for informal interactions, facilitated by housing all participants in one residence hall, with a conveniently located and convivial bar. All papers were delivered in English (we English speakers should be especially careful in such situations to speak clearly and deliberately for the benefit of those who read English fluently, but may not be as comfortable with the spoken language).

Two field trips took us to woodland sites with quite different histories and current structures. We spent a half-day in Sherwood Forest viewing abandoned wood pasture, an active coppice, and conifer plantations. At the end of the conference there was a one-day trip to Wales. George Peterken led a visit to Lady Park Wood, an abandoned and variously managed coppice that he has studied in detail for two decades. He and Charles Watkins led us on a tour of the Piercefield Walks along a ridge above the Wye River, recapitulating the leisure time activities of the wealthy of the nineteenth century, who delighted in such sights as bizarrely shaped old yew trees and carefully framed views of the Wye River. Charles Watkins had also arranged for us to have a visit to see the twelfth-century timbers in the Bishop of Hereford's residence (led by the charming and knowledgeable bishop).

Most of our time, however, was spent in sessions at the University of Nottingham. Building on pioneering work by ecologists such as Oliver Rackham and George Peterken, papers in the conference addressed such questions as: what factors in the past determined where woodlands were left and/or planted? How have changes in management or other uses over the past contributed to current patterns and processes within these woodlands? What factors in the history of a woodland contribute to current species diversity? Just what constitutes a woodland, anyway? And what is 'ancient'? How have perceptions, social and economic values, and technological developments contributed to changes in woodlands? Answers to all of these questions are only fragmentary and incomplete today, and many are more or less specific to individual sites or types of vegetation, but common threads began to emerge as more sites and more perspectives were discussed. I will try to follow a few threads that seemed especially strong, and to mention some others. With 48 papers, of generally high calibre, I will not single out individual talks, but will rather focus on common themes.

Papers on the first two and a half days analysed ecological histories in 13 countries; UK, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Israel. An evening talk by Oliver Rackham presented the characteristics of wood pasture as savanna, and the importance of such wooded land for the character of the landscape.

The fourth day saw a focus on different techniques used for discerning forest history, from pollen analysis to looking at old timbers, including a discussion of some of the benefits to be gained from using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to analyse spatial patterns. The last day included a miscellany of histories and more explicitly philosophical considerations such as the social construction of nature and the importance of legal systems in affecting forest management in the past (to say nothing of the present).

Five common threads were especially significant. Firstly, woodlands were preserved because they were useful, and often on land where other uses such as agriculture were not as economically feasible. This makes it very difficult to relate the location of existing old woods to any factors in the current environment. For example, the cork oak woods of southern Spain lie in an area that was disputed between Castillians and Arabs from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. The location of this frontier may have impeded settlement and thus deforestation. Later, a rise in value of cork oak encouraged preservation of the woods. Most recently, interest in woodland conservation has led to

their continued preservation. The environment was appropriate for the growth of these trees, and perhaps also contributed to its status as a frontier, but without the cultural developments, the forest would most likely have been cut down as were most of the oak trees elsewhere in the region.

Secondly, past political and social mores have played major roles in the survival of forests, as well as in patterns by which their wood was used. All were used to some extent; wood was too valuable to allow it to grow and deteriorate. Only in the last century as fossil fuels have replaced wood has woodland management become less intense and unmanaged woodlands have expanded.

Thirdly, historical documents must be studied with great attention to the definitions and perceptions at the time and place where they were written. For a very recent example, savanna or wood pasture vegetation is classified as forest in Spain but not in Portugal, leading to a mistaken impression from maps that one goes from wooded to unwooded vegetation across the border (Rackham). The relationships between laws governing land use and the actual uses must be especially carefully scrutinized.

Fourthly, assigning species to categories such as ancient woodland indicators is fraught with perils when one compares one area to another. One region's ancient woodland indicators may be more common in another region's secondary forests. The continuity of woodland may be the most important factor for the continued existence of rare species.

Fifthly, local people frequently resist management decisions imposed by authorities or conservation organizations (obviously not a new concern). Several papers made clear that this is not a simple problem; sometimes the local tenants know what is best for the land, and sometimes they do not. In some cases, the 'traditional' methods of land management that maintained a system which we now value lapsed a generation or so ago, and there is no local memory of just what it was. More attention to the local tenants, both involving them in decision-making and taking their knowledge into account in the decisions, can have valuable repercussions in the success or failure of the new management.

Paper after paper made clear that the overall conclusion: we cannot deduce anything but the most recent management from the current structure of stands. So, by extension, because the residues of past management continue to affect current communities and landscapes, we must incorporate historical studies in our efforts to understand the patterns and processes in these systems. This includes not only considering the actual changes to the stands, but also analysis of why these changes took place, because this helps us to make some generalizations about the processes that must inform current management.

Few papers discussed the concept of 'natural' systems (how woodlands would function without the continued intervention of people) mainly because there are no such woodlands in the regions discussed (if anywhere). The question is of some interest, however, in establishing a yardstick for determining the extent to which we must actively manage forests to maintain some semblance of systems which we think are valuable. If we were just to abandon management entirely, what would the future hold? George Peterken suggested that forests without management are more variable over time than those with management imposed, such as coppices, which are maintained in an artificially constant state. If this is generally so, then we can see changes in management causing forests to change rapidly from one more or less steady state to another, with little chance during the change for features of the system that are not being actively managed to adjust. This would cause more extinctions than would a similar level of variability under no management. Does ceasing management lead to a similar jump in condition?

Several other issues came to mind as topics that might be covered in future meetings like this. These include the reciprocal roles of animals and forest history, landscape level analyses (especially using GIS) and the possible consequences of changing climate and fire regimes. Similar studies of tropical forests would be of particular interest. I hope that the enthusiasm and intellectual excitement of this meeting will set a standard and lead to fruitful international collaborations.

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EMILY W. B. RUSSELL

## **Tenth International Conference of Historical Geographers, 19–28 July 1998**

The tenth ICHG is being hosted by the University of Ulster at Coleraine, Queen's University of Belfast and St Patrick's College in Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Papers are invited on all aspects of historical geography, but contributions are particularly welcome on the following themes:

- imperialism and colonialism;
- representations of the Self: representations of Otherness;
- dimensions of Irishness at home and abroad;
- environmental history;
- heritage as social memory and commemoration.

An abstract not exceeding 300 words should be submitted (preferably by email) by 30 November 1997 to:

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The conference will begin at the University of Ulster in Coleraine (19–22 July) and then move on to Queen's University in Belfast (23–25 July) and St Patrick's College in Maynooth (26–28 July). Field excursions are planned to the North Antrim coast (including the Giant's Causeway and Bushmills Distillery), Londonderry/Derry City, Belfast, the Boyne Valley, south-east Ireland and Dublin.