Module outline

In the century and a half between 1680 and 1835 there was a remarkable transformation in the social life of Britain as a predominantly agricultural country became one of the most urbanised in the world. This course offers a stimulating introduction to urban history as a distinct sub-discipline and shows how town life benefits from special study. It examines the social, cultural, economic and demographic factors behind the Georgian ‘urban renaissance’ and considers its various manifestations with special emphasis on the physical, geographical and spatial aspects which were so important to contemporaries and which provide such a wonderfully rich visual record still visible in many towns. The analysis of urban life is informed by consideration of social classes, gender, urban government, social order and the rise of a consumer society using a range of sources including surviving buildings, newspapers, novels, government records, maps and illustrations. Special attention is given to the social, economic and cultural importance of London, and to the musical, artistic, theatrical, educational and associational aspects of Georgian urban-centred life.

Learning outcomes

a) Subject-specific skills

By the end of the module students should have:

• Acquired a detailed knowledge and informed understanding of the characteristics of the Georgian urban transformation, the reasons why it occurred and the effects that it had upon the development of English economy, society, and culture.

• Gained an understanding of the key concepts, theories, and historiographical debates as they apply to the study of the English town in the period between 1680 and 1835.

• Analysed and discussed critically a wide range of source materials.

• Constructed extended written and oral arguments supported by relevant historical evidence.

b) Key skills

By the end of the module students should have:

• Developed further their written and oral communication skills.

• Developed further their IT skills.

• Developed further their ability to analyse quantitative data.
3. Development and Assessment

This module develops and assesses the following subject-specific skills in the manner set out below:

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<th>Skill</th>
<th>How developed</th>
<th>How Assessed</th>
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<tr>
<td>To read, analyse, and reflect critically and contextually upon historical texts and other sources materials</td>
<td>Through preparation for seminars, minor assignment, and essay(s).</td>
<td>Minor assignment Essay(s) Examination</td>
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<td>To develop an understanding of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing and interpreting the past, and of comparative perspectives on the past</td>
<td>In seminars, and through preparation for seminars and essay(s)</td>
<td>Essay(s) Examination</td>
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<td>Gather and deploy appropriate evidence and data to develop and sustain historical arguments</td>
<td>In preparation for, and delivery of, seminar presentations, minor assignment, and essay(s)</td>
<td>Minor assignment Essay(s) Examination</td>
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This module develops and assesses the following skills outlined in the University’s learning and teaching strategy in the manner set out below:

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<td>IT</td>
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Assessment and Learning Methods

Assessment: This module is assessed through coursework and a 2-hour examination. The coursework consists of a minor assignment (1,500 word) and either one or two essays (2,500-3,000 words). NB. 15-credit students submit one essay and 20-credit students submit two essays.

Teaching and learning: learning is based upon preparation for, attendance at, and participation in 10 weekly seminars. Each seminar will contain an introduction to key topics, themes, and debates. Discussion, most of which will be student led, will then centre upon interpretation of secondary and primary materials. Each session will, in a practical sense, also be devoted to the development of different historical skills. Every student will be required to undertake background reading and/or detailed analysis of source material by way of preparation for each seminar.

Week 1: Introduction: Georgian Society, Urban Growth and Demography

In the first week I will be giving you a general introduction to the 18th century and some of the key themes and issues which we will be addressing during the term. We will consider why urban history benefits from special study and some of the things that distinguish the town from the country. In preparation for this seminar you will be required to have completed background reading on the subject of urban growth and demography. The seminar will begin with a presentation from me, then a discussion. In future weeks I will still be providing an introduction to the week’s topic, but students...
will also be requested to take it in turns to prepare short presentations on particular topics. I will allocate groups of students for each week. A list of primary sources is given for every seminar and the presentation should be based on these: discussing them as sources in the light of the topics outlined in the introductory material and in the secondary reading. These presentations are collaborative and are intended to improve your oral presentation skills and to think critically about historical sources and how they are used. Additional material for discussion will also be circulated in class and ALL students will be expected to participate.

PREPARATORY BACKGROUND READING EVERY WEEK IS ESSENTIAL.

Suggested reading material for each week is listed below. Items marked with an * are likely to prove useful background for the entire semester and should be consulted most weeks, even if not explicitly listed each time. The basic text books for the course are Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840* (1999) and Joyce Ellis, *The Georgian Town* (2001). You are strongly advised to buy a copy of one or other as it will offer an introduction to the topics being studied each week. You will also find Peter Clark ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol.2 (2000) an invaluable work of reference.

Useful websites:

- [http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/johnson/exhibition/](http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/johnson/exhibition/) - this is a catalogue of trade tokens, and other advertising media used by shopkeepers, many from the eighteenth century.

- [http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Chron/index.html](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Chron/index.html) - chronology of events, publications, performances, discoveries in the eighteenth century

- [http://collage.nhil.com](http://collage.nhil.com) - this website, run by the Guildhall Library of the City of London, allows you to search their collection of prints, watercolours, maps and plans - a great resource.

- [http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/collections/crace/](http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/collections/crace/) - this website and the one below take you to collections of topographical drawings, including many urban and street scenes

- [http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/collections/topdrawings/](http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/collections/topdrawings/) - another website for topographical drawings, including many 18th century urban scenes.

- [http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/etext.html](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/etext.html) - will take you to many electronic texts of eighteenth-century literature and is searchable by author.

- [http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/) - the proceedings of London’s Old Bailey online, an invaluable resource for studying criminality, poverty or social control in 18th century London.

Primary Sources:

Statistics on population in Mitchell and Deane (eds), *Abstract of Historical Statistics*

Secondary sources:


Peter Clark (ed.) *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1995) - introduction and essay by Clark


*M. J. Daunton, Progress and Poverty. An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1995), esp parts II and IV.


A. E. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth* (Cambridge, 1987) esp. chs. 6, 7 and 9.


**Week 2: The Middling Sort**

In this session we will be looking at the role of the ‘middling sort’ in urban society. The middling sort were growing rapidly in size and number during the 18th century, and we will be considering their culture, lifestyle and values and addressing the question of when we can actually start speaking of an urban ‘middle class’. What distinguished the middling sort from those above and below them and what gave them a common sense of identity which could overcome differences of religion, politics of simply locality? What role did religion play in the life of the urban middling sort? How active were they in the urban political culture?
Presentations:

1. How have the terms middling sort and middle class been utilised by historians?
2. With reference to the sources, what do these tell us about the values of the middling sort?

Primary sources:

Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1725)

Secondary sources:


H. M. Boot, ‘Real incomes of the British Middle Class, 1760-1850: the experience of the clerks at the East India Company’, *EcHR*, 52 (1999).


Alan Kidd and David Nichols (eds), *The Making of the British Middle Class. Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (1998), esp intro and chs 1 and 2.


Leonard Schwarz, ‘Social class and social geography: the middle classes in London at the end of the eighteenth century’ in Borsay (ed.), The Eighteenth-Century Town and also in Social History (1982).


Week 3: Urban Government

Having looked at who the ‘middling sort’ were, their occupations and their cultural life we will now look at their involvement in urban government. Urban government in the 18th century was informal and decentralized and has often been caricatured as excessively oligarchic and corrupt. Quangos and sleaze were as much a feature of eighteenth-century local government as they are today. However, despite this, most towns were arguably better administered by the end of the 18th century than they were at the start. We will be looking at the structures and institutions through which urban society was governed, who the governors were, what people expected of urban authority and how expectations changed over the century. By the end of the century the rapid growth of the manufacturing centres was posing unprecedented challenges, and we will look at the attempts which were made to respond to the process of urbanization. One of the most telling criticisms against urban government in this period was its closed oligarchic nature - we will be considering why it was that oligarchy was so prevalent and the ways in which it was challenged.

Presentations:

1. What form did the government and administration of English towns generally take in the 18thc?
2. What sort of criticisms were levelled at town governments and especially at the corporations?

Primary Sources:

Report of the Royal Commissioners on Municipal Corporations, PP (1835) (ask in library in official publications
Chinnery (ed.), Records of the Borough of Leicester (the library also has records for a number of other towns in the local history section in the basement, e.g. Nottingham, Oxford, Liverpool, Manchester Court Leet, Lewes, Beverley ...).

Secondary Sources:


*Peter Clark and Paul Slack, English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700 (1976) esp. ch. 9


Paul Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman (1990), esp ch. 4.

---, *Statutory Bodies for Special Purposes* (1922), esp ch. 4 ‘The Improvement Commissioners’.
(The Webbs are intimidatingly bulky. Use the index and skim read to pick up on specific points rather then reading them cover to cover.)

Studies of individual corporations, court leets and parishes include:
Sir Francis Hill, *Georgian Lincoln* (1966)
Jan Stovold (ed.), *Minute Book of the Pavement Commissioners for Southampton, 1770-1789* Southampton Record Society (1990), esp. introduction.

**Week 4: The Geography of Urban ‘Improvement’**

One of the major responsibilities of urban government was the upkeep of the environment and the physical fabric of the town. Many town centres today still retain eighteenth-century features - often the most attractive part of the town. In this session we will look at urban architecture, the building process and the whole concept of ‘urban improvement’ which was so important to contemporaries. Where did the money for improvement come from, who was responsible for erecting these buildings, what kind of principles influenced the style in which they built, and what kind of statements were being made and how did these change the geography of the Georgian town?

Presentations:

1. Illustrating with examples such as Bath, show in what ways the physical nature of most towns changed between 1700 and the early 19th century?
2. How important were economic factors in urban ‘improvement’?

Primary Sources:

---, *A Description of Bath* (repr. 1969).
Secondary Sources:


Kerry Downs, *The Georgian Cities of Britain* (1979)

Joyce Ellis, *Georgian Town*, ch.5.


Week 5: The Rise of Urban Consumer Culture

Last week we considered the architectural importance of the market place and its centrality in urban planning. This week we will be thinking more about the centrality of the market, shops, and the rise of a consumer society in the 18th century. We will look at the rise of shops and ‘shopping’ as a past time, the spread of luxury goods, the use of advertising and the evolution of what we would recognise as a modern consumer culture. Then as now, women were particularly associated with shopping and consumption, and we will explore the implications of the growth of a consumer culture for women in the 18th century. Not everyone was delighted at this burgeoning consumerism and the debate on
‘luxury’ (the corrupting effects of tea, coffee and imported fashions) formed the subject of many a tract and sermon.

Presentations:

1. What was the consumer revolution and how did it effect different social groups
2. What kind of criticisms were levelled at the new consumerism and on what basis?

Primary Sources:

Fanny Burney, *Evelina*
Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*
Adrian Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern of Nottingham*, Thoroton Society (1980).

Secondary Sources:

Week 6: The English ‘Urban Renaissance’

One of the most important concepts in the recent historiography of eighteenth-century towns is that of the ‘urban renaissance’. Urban culture became much more attractive, varied and exciting in the 18th century and was of course inextricably bound up with the consumer culture we examined last week. In this session we will be looking at the cultural manifestations - the theatres, assemblies, concerts, clubs and societies, newspapers and books, as well as the physical fabric. The most obvious illustrations are to be found in the ‘leisure towns’ of the 18th century like Bath - but how far did other towns comply with these fashions and how generally applicable is the concept of a cultural renaissance to 18th cent towns as a whole?

Presentations:

1. Discuss the importance of commercialised leisure for 18th-century towns.
2. How important were clubs and societies and other forms of social activity in the transformation of the town?

Primary Sources:


Leicester Journal (1812) microfilm in library: look at the advertisements.
Travels of Carl Philipp Moritz in England in 1782 (1795 repr. 1924).

Secondary Sources:

See also his article on the Restoration town in Glassey (ed.), Reigns of Charles II and James II
*Mark Girouard* *The English Town* (1990).
Sir Francis Hill, *Georgian Lincoln* (1966)
*A. McInnes, The Emergence of a Leisure Town: Shrewsbury 1660-1760’, *Past and Present*, 120 (1988). See also the debate with Borsay in the same volume.

**Week 7: The Labouring Classes**

The vast majority of the population both urban and rural comprised the labouring sort. In this session we will be looking at what life was like for the lower sort of people in towns: their occupations, standard of living and past times. Was there a distinctive popular urban culture? Did standards of living increase or decrease, and what difference did the factory system make? What happened to those who failed to balance on the knife edge of subsistence? How successful have historians been in uncovering the experiences of the labouring classes in eighteenth-century towns? What sources are available for use?
Presentations:

1. How have historians tried to measure the standard of living of the Georgian labouring classes and what has this shown?
2. What did the Bristol Corporation of the Poor and other such bodies try to achieve and how successful were they?

Primary Sources:

E. E. Butcher (ed.), *Bristol Corporation of the Poor: selected records, 1696-1834* Bristol Record Society, 1932.

Secondary Sources:

Joyce Ellis, *Georgian Town*, ch.3

Week 8: Public Order and Disorder: Crime, Punishment and Control

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Public Order and Disorder: Crime, Punishment and Control

Towns, and London in particular, were notorious for being centres of crime and immorality. The high density of population made problems of criminality, moral laxity and disorder even more obvious, but the machinery for dealing with them was often inadequate. Moreover urban populations were always more prone to riots and demonstrations that their more dispersed rural counterparts. We will be exploring these issues of crime, immorality and public order and the attempts to deal with them in the urban context.

Presentations:
1. Did contemporaries believe that crime and disorder were getting worse and how were criminals and social transgressors viewed?
2. What mechanisms were there for enforcing social control in the Georgian town and how effective do you think these were?

Primary Sources:

Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders
Henry Fielding, Jonathan Wilde
John Gay, The Beggar's Opera
William Hogarth, Gin Lane, The Four Stages of Cruelty, The Harlot's Progress
J. Mullan & C. Reid (eds), Eighteenth-century popular culture (2000), ch.5.
Anon, Low Life: or not one half of the world knows how the other half live (1764).

Secondary Sources:

On riot and disturbances:
Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in 18th century Britain and Ireland (1996). Esp essays by Poole, Renton and Thwaites which describe the outbreak of protests and also the authorities’ responses.
---, Hanoverian London (1971), ch. 10
E. P. Thompson, ‘The moral economy of the English Crowd’ in Customs in Common
On crime more particularly:
D. Hay and F. Snyder (eds), Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850 (1989) esp chs 1-4 and 7-8

On various strategies of control:
M. Fissel, Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol (1991) - one way of controlling the poor. See also her article ‘Charity Universal? Institutions and moral reform in 18th century Bristol’ in Stilling the Grumbling Hive.
Tim Hitchcock, ‘Paupers and Preachers: the SPCK and the Parochial Workhouse Movement’ in Stilling the Grumbling Hive.
Donald Rumbelow, I spy Blue: the Police and Crime in the City of London from Elizabeth I to Victoria (1971).
R. Shoemaker, ‘Reforming the City: the Reformation of Manners Campaign in London, 1690-1738’ in Stilling the Grumbling Hive.

On the gin controversy which particularly worried contemporaries in the early 18th century see:
Lee Davison, ‘Experiments in the Social Regulation of Industry: Gin Legislation, 1729-1751’ in Stilling the Grumbling Hive.

Week 9: London: Centre of Enlightenment or Depravity?

London was by far the largest city in England and wielded what many considered to be a disproportionate influence over politics and culture in the 18th century. The city aroused very strong feelings amongst contemporaries - you either loved it (‘The man who is bored of London is bored of life’) or hated it as the ‘Great Wen’ and source of all depravity and wickedness. There was a very powerful rhetorical critique of urban living and luxury which was generally focused upon London, and which contrasted the iniquity and depravity of city life with that of the country. We will take the opportunity this week to look at London more closely, paying special attention to some of the many printed contemporary sources which are available.
Many of the volumes which we have been using this term have focused upon London in their discussions as there is simply more evidence available and it has attracted more research, so do refer back to earlier readings.

Presentations:

1. Why was London so much larger than other towns in the 18th century and what was its impact on the rest of the economy?
2. In what ways did the unique size and character of London effect social behaviour and how was this depicted in contemporary literature?

Primary Sources:

Rick Allen (ed), The moving pageant (1998), parts I & II.
John Gay, Trivia: or the Art of Walking the Streets of London, ed. W. H. Williams (1922).
Daniel Defoe, A Tour through the whole island of Great Britain (Penguin edn) letter 5.
John Cleland, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure ([1749], 1963), various editions.

Secondary Sources:

Joyce Ellis, Georgian Town, ch.7.
Richard Holmes, Dr. Johnson and Mr. Savage: A Biographical Mystery (1993).

**Week 10:**

In many ways it would appear that local identities were eroded during this period as communications improved and the influence of the metropolis made itself felt across the country at large. But was this really the case? Did a sense of civic tradition and identity still matter in eighteenth-century towns and what role did it play in the political culture of the towns? Was there still a sense of ‘community’ in eighteenth-century towns, and on what was it based? How did the civic identity of an ancient incorporated borough differ from that of a rapidly growing manufacturing town such as Birmingham? Furthermore, how was urban identity effected by socio-cultural divisions within towns such as different religious, gender or class characteristics?

**Presentations:**

1. What evidence is there for provincial urban identities?
2. To what degree was provincial urban culture imitative of and dependent upon London?

**Primary Sources:**

Francis Drake, *Eboracum* (1736).

**Secondary Sources:**

Joyce Ellis, *Georgian Town*, ch.6.
Evelyn Lord (ed.), *The English County Town* (2002), the various essays in here include considerations of issues of regional, county and urban identity.

See also the essay by Barry in the same volume, ‘Bristol Pride: civic identity in Bristol: 1640-1775’.


COURSEWORK

MINOR ASSIGNMENT

Exercise
Write a short piece of no more than 1,500 words in answer to the following question:

What evidence in the built environment of Stamford is there for an eighteenth-century urban renaissance?

Primary Sources

We will be going on a day trip to Stamford as part of the course in order for you to get a flavour of the architecture and layout of the town. This will be an essential part of the course and necessary for you to answer the above question.

We will travel by railway as a group on a pre-arranged date (hopefully on a weekday) in the morning, before looking round, taking some lunch and hopefully getting chance for some light refreshment in one of the fine Georgian taverns later in the day.

It will be necessary for you to purchase Stamford Museum Town Trail leaflet numbers one and three entitled respectively, *Town Trail* and *Georgian Trail* from the museum or library, which are available for only a small cost. The leaflets contain drawings of the town’s most important Georgian and pre-Georgian buildings with town street plans, architectural descriptions and datings, and we will be using these as the basis for our tour.

The buildings of Stamford.

It is also well worthwhile looking through the *Stanford Mercury*, one of the finest and most prestigious of the Georgian provincial newspapers which had, in fact, a very wide readership spread over the eastern and midland counties and further afield. For this see David Newton and Martin Smith’s *The Stamford Mercury: Three Centuries of Newspaper Publishing* (Stamford, 1999).

If you get chance then contemporary histories and directories are obviously extremely useful (for background see Roey Sweet’s *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* [Oxford, 1997]).

Stamford histories include:

Blore, Thomas, *Account of the Public Schools and Hospitals of Stamford* (1813) – in library.
Drakard, John, *History of the Town of Stamford* (Stamford, 1822) – copy in the university library.

Lincolnshire and some Leicestershire county histories and directories also include information on Stamford such as William Marrat’s *History of the County of Lincolnshire, Topographical, Historical and Descriptive*, 6 vols (Boston, 1814-16) – copy in the library.
Suggested Secondary Material

The material listed in the course bibliography is, of course, generally relevant, but if you get chance to look at nothing else as background before we go then do read Peter Borsay’s *The English Urban Renaissance* or his earlier paper on the same subject and the course textbooks by Roey Sweet and Joyce Ellis on the subject of the causes and effects of the provincial post-Restoration urban renewal. The local history collection at Stamford library is also worth a look some of which is recorded in the ‘List of books forming the local history reference collection in Stamford Library’ (Stamford Public Library, 1965) - a copy of which is in the university library.

Other works include:

Rogers, Alan, ed., *The Making of Stamford* (Leicester, 1965) – which is a collection of essays on different periods in the town’s history.
Smith, Martin, *Stamford Then and Now* (Stamford, 1992).
Smith, Martin, *The Story of Stamford* (Stamford, 1994) - this includes a gazetteer and more maps of the town.

*Stamford Official Guide* (Millennium Publishing, Stamford, 1998) - a cheaper alternative to Smith that includes a coloured map, list of important events and a short chapter on the architectural heritage of the town.


For more detail concerning the buildings see: *The Town of Stamford* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1977) – which is an inventory of all the buildings constructed prior to 1850.

ESSAYS

Choose from:

1. What was distinctive about the culture of the urban middling sort?
2. What is known about the lives of the urban labouring classes how had their lives been effected by economic and industrial change by the early 19th century?
3. How effective was urban government in the Georgian town?
4. How important was the ‘consumer revolution’ in changing the character of the eighteenth-century provincial town?
5. Was the eighteenth-century town socially unstable?
6. How helpful is the concept of a provincial Georgian urban renaissance?
7. To what degree did London exert an economic and cultural stranglehold over provincial towns in the 18th century?
8. What was the importance of clubs and societies in the Georgian town?
9. How universal was urban improvement in the period between 1680 and 1820?
10. Was there a sense of community and identity in the Georgian provincial town?