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Book Review: Working Class organisations and Popular Tourism

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Susan Barton, *Working Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005.

Références électroniques

Mohamed Chamekh, *Susan Barton, Working Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005.*, © 2012 Quaderna, mis en ligne le 11 février 2016, url permanente : <http://quaderna.org/?p=511>

Susan Barton, *Working Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005.

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This book shows the way the working class holiday and popular tourism developed in the United Kingdom. Barton explains the phases which the working class quest for the right to a holiday went through, as well as the role played by the working class organisations in helping workers acquire this right.

Barton stresses key elements such as the early forms of artisan travel before 1840, or the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was a major manifestation of workers' agency and organisation. For later periods, she emphasizes the passage of the Holiday with Pay Act in 1938 and she ends by discussing state intervention to plan for workers' needs after the Second World War, and the rise of British holidays abroad in the 1950s and 1960s.

Barton's book starts with the days of the tramping artisans, around 1830. This was a tradition of organized workers, especially apprentices, who used to migrate to different parts of the country for work purposes. Almost all trade societies adopted this system with the exception of occupations which were local. Under this system, the artisan who wished to find a job elsewhere received a document, commonly known as a 'blank' or 'clearance' that proved his membership of a trade society. This document was used to get accommodation, dinner, a tramp allowance and, when possible, work, in another town¹.

She then looks at The Great Exhibition of 1851 in which works of culture, industry and new technologies from different parts of the world were displayed. The Crystal Palace, the venue for this exhibition, attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors and the workers managed through their organizations to be part of this audience.

In both parts, the tramping artisan and the Great Exhibition, Barton focuses on workers' agency, and the way they arranged for their transport and accommodation. Barton traces the development of popular tourism to these early forms of travel and considers the package holiday, mainly because of the role of exhibition travel clubs in arranging the workers journey to the Great Exhibition, as an offspring of this era. Her book analyses the role played by organisations like Friendly Societies, Mechanics Institutes, Saving Clubs, and Trade Unions.

The first half of the twentieth century was dominated by rail traffic, and saw the passage of the Holiday with Pay Act (1938), which was fully implemented after the Second World War. The right to a holiday and later to a paid holiday was the culmination of a long struggle which took around a century.

In the later parts of the book, the author examines the involvement of the state in planning for the needs of holidaymakers after the passage of the Holiday with Pay Act and the beginning of the package tour to the Mediterranean in the 1950s. The holiday abroad was a major change in the history of working class as this holiday came within the financial reach of workers. Here Barton again emphasises the role of Trade Unions in helping workers spend a holiday abroad.

¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Tramping Artisan", *The Economic History Review*, 3/3 (1951), 299-320, p. 299.

Susan Barton has charted more than a century of working class continued interaction with the employers and the state in order to secure, organise and defend paid holidays. "It is the intention of this work", Barton stated, "to examine what the working class and its organisations did to achieve holidays independently of middle class patronage." (p. 3)

Barton goes beyond the question of the struggle for holidays and shows how workers arranged their holidays in a twentieth century fashion. This was the case with the tramping artisans and the 'documents' they used for travel which were akin to the modern cheque book or the arrangements for the journey to the Great Exhibition which were similar to the twentieth century package holiday.

To the work of previous authors, such as J. A. R. Pimlott² (1), James Walvin³ (2) and John K. Walton⁴ who have written about the working class seaside holiday, Susan Barton adds a new dimension by underlining the role of the workers and their organizations.

Barton has made use of a wide range of primary sources including, minutes books, records of the Board of Trade, travel writings, Trade Union records, newspapers, travellers' letters, newspaper reports, diaries, proceeds of local committees, handbills, circulars, ... that she pieces together to come up with a monograph of a collective experience.

This book will be useful for students of social history, cultural history, the nascent tourism history and partially labour history.

² J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday: a Social History*, London, Harvester Press, 1976.

³ J. Walvin, *Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday*, London, Allen, 1978.

⁴ J. K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort. A Social History 1750-1914*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1983; *The British seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000; "The Demand for Working-Class Seaside Holidays in Victorian England", *The Economic History Review*, 34/2 (1981), 249-265.