

Susan Barton. *Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970.*

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Much of British historiography starts from one of two places. On the one hand, many historians focus on high politics and the country's great leaders. On the other hand, since E.P. Thompson's groundbreaking *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), many scholars trace the role of the lower orders in shaping British history. One is top-down, the other bottom-up, and the overall picture of British history, almost regardless of research subject, tends to be one of a clear class division at the expense of class dialogue.

The still-nascent literature on British travel and tourism reflects this same division, though most works approach the subject from the top. The top-down view holds that modern tourism emerged from the eighteenth-century aristocratic Grand Tour. At the same time that elite Britons felt a strong social pressure to send their young men to the Continent for several months to several years of "educational" travel, there was a virtual revolution in ideas about both landscape aesthetics and bodily health. In particular, the seaside, once believed to be a transitional space between an earthly heaven and an oceanic hell, de-

veloped into a beautiful space offering healthfulness, aesthetic beauty, and even scientific understanding.[1] After elites adopted the seaside as both a vacation and therapeutic destination, the growing middle class soon waded in as well. Rather than simply bathe in and drink seawater, the middle classes urged seaside visitors to explore tide pools, examine sea cliffs, and admire the power of the ocean. The seaside was not only a health spa, it was a classroom tailor-made to forward a self-help curriculum. Finally, according to this interpretation, first the labor aristocracy and then the masses, took to the beaches in an effort to escape the mind-numbing, spirit-crushing reality of Britain's industrial wastelands. For the workers, however, the seaside represented yet another venue for self-expression; as with middle-class efforts to promote working-class religious observance and respectability, the seaside soon offered a chance to express class difference. The boardwalk was a place to enjoy drinking, fair-like recreations, and working-class delicacies such as the newly popular fish and chips.[2]

Susan Barton challenges this view in her important new book *Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970*. Far from adopting upper- or middle-class modes of leisure, or even depending on their social "betters" to organize excursions, develop resorts, or otherwise create tourism infrastructure, the English working class was instrumental in creating its own leisure experience. According to Barton, English workers developed their own holiday desires, organized their travel companies, created holiday savings clubs to help pay for annual holidays, worked collectively to attain paid vacations, and created travel accommodations. Working-class travel evolved from the bottom up.

Barton's book is organized thematically. She begins with a helpful introduction that addresses most of the applicable literature on English tourism while also noting that her book is explicitly about the development of English tourism and pays no extended attention to Irish, Scottish, or Welsh developments. As will be noted below, despite the Anglo-centric focus, the introduction, as well as the text overall, would benefit from further acknowledgement of the growing literature on continental European travel, if not of travel history more broadly. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with exploring national tourism histories, such histories do not happen in isolation.

Building on her introduction, the second chapter notes that workers had extensive experience with both travel and pursuing leisure opportunities. Before the advent of relatively inexpensive rail travel in the mid-nineteenth century, workers moved to find employment. Artisans, in particular, observed a kind of "Artisan's Grand Tour," or "tramping," to see the country, earn a living, and develop skills. Further, during the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries, workers vigorously guarded traditional observance of Saint Monday, an opportunity to recover from weekend drinking, that was long an element

of laboring life, despite bourgeois efforts at industrial rationalization. During the nineteenth century, this long-term interest in mobility and self-determined leisure time evolved into a desire for excursion travel and a drive to attain greater leisure opportunities. There was no Foucauldian "rupture," or complete break, between pre-modern and modern modes of travel, rather there was an evolution. Leisure forms changed, but not working-class agency or desire; the development of cheap rail travel merely increased opportunity, it did not create new cravings.

In contrast to the usual narrative of early excursion-travel, Barton argues that Thomas Cook was not the first to pioneer cheap group travel--the working-class Mechanics' Institute did this, as did various Friendly Societies. Rather than single-handedly inventing group travel by promoting his famous temperance trip between Leicester and Loughborough, Cook merely copied a means of organizing excursions that workers already used.

It follows that when Barton looks at the famous 1851 Exposition in London--long assumed a pivotal moment in the middle-class effort to teach workers the art of respectable travel--she points out that workers, not event organizers, Thomas Cook, or other excursion companies, were largely responsible for the impressive working-class attendance. In contrast to the traditional narrative of 1851, the author suggests that the Mechanics' Institute was a "probable" inspiration for the Exposition itself as well as the driving force behind the organization of working-class rail excursions to Hyde Park for the show (pp. 44-45). At the same time, regional unemployment, not middle-class efforts, pushed workers to begin forming holiday savings clubs in order to help pay for trips such as the one to London.

Barton's discussion of these earliest savings clubs is one of the greatest contributions of this volume. After their development in England, such savings schemes emerged as a common means of holiday funding for workers, in England and be-

yond. Although not discussed in Barton's book, as late as the 1930s and 1940s, for example, the Irish Tourist Association, a voluntary non-statutory tourism body, used savings clubs in order to promote Irish tourism. To my knowledge, Barton's account of the early clubs in England represents the first significant history of holiday savings clubs and therefore constitutes an invaluable contribution to wider understanding of tourism development.

Chapter 4 explores the rise of the seaside holiday in England. As noted above, and in contrast with the traditional narrative of English travel history, "It would be a mistake ... to imagine that the model middle-class holiday filtered down to the masses who have gratefully taken it up in imitation of their social superiors" (p. 74). Instead, as with the 1851 Exposition, workers played a pivotal role in creating their own seaside opportunities. Building on the model of holiday savings clubs developed during the exposition, workers from northwest England combined resources to create seaside holiday opportunities from the 1850s. Workers knew from long experience that the only way to attain tolerance and approval for several consecutive days' holiday during the summer months was to organize collectively. Thus, workers in Oldham (famously discussed in John Foster's account of working-class radicalism),^[3] for example, built on the pre-industrial tradition of collectively demanding wakes days and Saint Monday to insist upon holidays without pay for all workers—an insistence that bore fruit. By the late nineteenth century, demands for holidays without pay expanded beyond the northwest. In 1870 a mid-century idea of holding national bank holidays was realized with the passage of the Bank Holidays Bill. Thus, working-class agency was instrumental to creating the British institution of bank holidays.

Once holidays without pay were widely available, Barton argues in chapter 5, workers increasingly demanded holidays with pay. Initially, the

concept of paid vacations was not universally accepted among the working classes, let alone by employers. After the First World War, a growing number of workers were awarded paid vacations, but it was not until 1936, when the labor movement itself got behind the idea of paid holidays, that movement toward national legislation sped up. In 1938, the Holidays with Pay Act was finally passed, prompting the Trades Union Congress to publish pamphlets educating workers about their new rights. Workers pushed for paid holidays, and now they endeavored to show how to make the best use of them.

In chapter 6, Barton offers an extended discussion of the development of travel accommodation for workers. After the Holidays with Pay Act passed, and following the Second World War, the number of workers traveling increased dramatically, placing a significant burden on available housing. Barton's narrative begins with the poor-quality lodgings available for workers during the 1840s and then traces her subject through a fascinating discussion of the creation of holiday camps (including the famous Butlin's resorts), often using decommissioned wartime military barracks, and the evolution of caravan camps. As before, Barton effectively shows the remarkable level of involvement in housing creation by working-class organizations. Far from middle-class entrepreneurs capitalizing on an obvious market, workers were on the front lines of resort development.

Barton's last two chapters explore postwar developments. After the war, as more workers set out on holiday, the government finally entered the travel planning arena—a late arrival relative to places such as Ireland, where a statutory tourist board was in place from 1938/39, Germany where Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy) arranged low-cost holidays from 1933, and France where the Leon Blum government used tourism as a means to gain working-class support.^[4] Chapter 8 examines the impact of low-cost airline

travel and the continued role of working-class organizations in creating inexpensive travel opportunities for working-class tourists.

These last two chapters, the shortest in the book, point toward the primary weakness of Barton's text, as well as of the bifurcated perspective of British historiography mentioned above. Barton is correct to emphasize working-class agency, as are scholars who stress the top-down development of travel, because the real story probably lies somewhere in the middle. History almost always moves as a result of interaction *between* groups, not as a result of one collection of people or another, one social class or another, one political party or another. Disparate bodies, each with a unique set of interests and concerns, play a role. At the same time, the history of English tourism is probably not exclusively an English story. Barton acknowledges in the opening pages of her introduction that she has omitted any treatment of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales—all of which undoubtedly played some role in shaping English travel. Indeed, one imagines that Continental and perhaps even American developments played a role in evolving English ideas about holidays as well.

Barton offers at least one tantalizing hint of the pan-European tourism discourse that marked the interwar years (and possibly other periods as well) when she recounts the disappointing effort of Cecil Rogerson, a minor League of Nations official whose idealism saw him fired from the League. While in Geneva leading a group of British travelers visiting the International Labour Office, Rogerson had the idea of creating an international Labour Travel Association that would help create international understanding and friendship through tourism. The resulting Workers' Travel Association (renamed Galleon Travel during the 1960s) struggled to allay existing fears about travel and ultimately played an important role in promoting working-class vacations. Rogerson's organization, which extended beyond Eng-

land, illustrates the degree to which tourism development crosses borders (pp. 153-162). Is it really credible to argue that the passage of the Holidays with Pay Act was entirely the result of working-class efforts and owed little to the growing roar of pan-European political discourse that extended from Italy to Ireland and apparently covered virtually everyplace in between? [5] By focusing almost exclusively on working-class English developments, without paying attention to wider trends, Barton falls prey to the same weakness that plagues not only much of modern British history, but much of the currently existing history of travel and tourism. The story to be told here is a complicated one. What is called for is a much broader exploration that extends beyond national borders.

It is unfair to critique Barton too harshly for this one shortcoming. Her text is both well researched and well argued. By challenging the accepted top-down narrative, Barton takes a bold step toward expanding our understanding of English tourism history, while also doing a fine job of returning agency to workers. *Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970* should be of keen interest to most students of tourism history and should also draw the attention of social and cultural historians, not just of Britain but of Europe more broadly.

Notes

[1]. Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[2]. John K. Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

[3]. John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974).

[4]. Eric Zuelow, "The Tourism Nexus: National Identity and the Meanings of Tourism Since the

Irish Civil War," in *Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity*, ed. Mark McCarthy (Aldershot, Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 189-204; Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ellen Furlough, "Making Mass Vacations: Tourism and Consumer Culture in France, 1930s to 1970s," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (1998): 247-286.

[5]. Hints of such a pan-European dialogue are present in Baranowski, *Strength through Joy*; Furlough, "Making Mass Vacations"; and Sasha Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship: Europe's Peaceful Invasion of Franco's Spain* (New York: Palgrave, 2006). My own dissertation research showed that Irish tourism planners were in close dialogue with American, French, Spanish, English, Scottish, and German tourism officials. Irish planners even went so far as to suggest a leisure plan based on a Nazi model. See Eric Zuelow, *The Tourism Nexus: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2004).

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