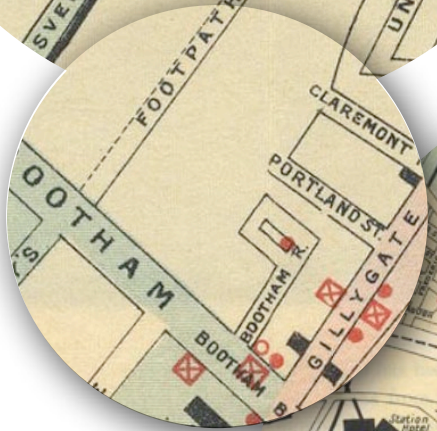


RESEARCHING THE
MODERN SOCIAL
HISTORY OF YORK



CURB
CENTRE FOR URBAN RESEARCH

York is one of the most researched cities in 20th century Britain. This tradition owes much to the role of Seebohm Rowntree in using the city as a site for a pathbreaking study of poverty in 1903. This study was followed up on several occasions during the 20th century. All these studies have left behind a plethora of remarkable source material on household composition and characteristics. In addition, archaeologists have also shown enormous enterprise in revealing the housing characteristics of 20th century York. These detailed sources create the potential for a remarkably full social science history of the city, where a detailed examination of the changing circumstances of individual households can shed light on the social change 'on the ground'. However, these records have never been systematically exploited, and their scope and scale remains uncertain

During 2011-12, the University of York funded a small project to conduct a feasibility study of linking household records as a platform to a larger project which would conduct a major study of the city during the 20th century<initial project outline>. The project members were Mike Savage and Rowland Atkinson from the Sociology Department and Chris Renwick and Mark Roodhouse from the History Department. Ben Jones was hired to extensively explore the archival holdings and has produced a report on the sources which is available online <Ben's report>.

The intellectual underpinnings of the project were fourfold. Firstly, there was a shared interest in how we can use social science sources – such as the Rowntree household survey - as historical data, in ways which allow innovative studies of social change by taking advantage of the unusually detailed information which such sources contain. Part of this interest lies in the potential to rethink the role of the Rowntree influence on York through a detailed examination of his records in order to further contribute to an analysis of his role as pioneer researcher and also as industrialist and city leader. We are also keen to make these sources more readily available not only to researchers but also the general public.

Secondly, the project members are all interested in examining the relationship between housing, neighbourhood and social inequality, and see the data from this project as permitting an unusually detailed account of how these facets are interweaved in the 20th century. Part of our interest is to see if different records can be linked so that we can trace longitudinal patterns of poverty and social mobility within the city.

Finally, the project is interested in how we can see social change in York as emblematic of broader national trends, so drawing attention to the mundane, provincial aspects of change which are often neglected. We see ourselves as highlighting York not in the usual fashion, as Roman, Viking, and Medieval town, but as a fascinating 20th century city, which holds fascinating insights for social scientists and contemporary historians alike.

As Ben Jones's report shows, there is indeed huge potential for record linkage using city records. Our aim is now to seek larger scale project funding to take this project forwards. We will be happy to hear from anyone with thoughts and responses to this project material