Twin Cities in Past and Present: Two Day Conference

26-7 June 2015

Papers are invited for a weekend, two-day Conference on Twin Cities to be held at the Manchester Centre for Regional History, Manchester Metropolitan University on 26-7 June 2015.

For the purpose of this conference, we are defining the term twin cities to embrace two sorts of relationship: either nearby urban entities that arise separately and then subsequently grow into each other; or nearby urban places which begin as single entities but are subsequently split into two by legal or other enactment, normally the imposition of an international (or occasionally federal state) border by international treaty. The first type is far more common than the second, though the treaties following the First and Second World wars in Europe for example, or those determining the US-Mexican border, produced twin cities in significant numbers. Twin cities are interesting for their own sake – there are around 90 popularly and/or legally so classified (ie 180 twinned urban places) across the world. They are also important because, in many respects, they anticipate and have even been superseded by relationships arising within and between entities in the now-ubiquitous conurbations (including tri-cities and quad-cities) of the present-day world.

The aim of the conference is to begin to explore four interlinked themes:

1) how and why twin cities arise historically, the circumstances under which they sometimes merge, and why they so often stay separate even though the reasons for continued separation may seem to have substantially faded;

2) the external relationships in terms of dominance, subordination or equality; and conflict, co-operation or indifference, that arise between twin cities in social, economic and political terms, and how these change over time in the wake of more general conurbanisation, interventions by national and/or state governments and other factors that might seem to erode urban autonomy;

3) how and to what extent means are formulated for negotiating or even controlling these relationships, and by whom – councils, civil associations, service deliverers, central/state governments et al.

4) the internal impact upon each community of the other in a twin-city relationship in terms of identity and civic consciousness, institutions, social, economic and political structures.

An important point of focus will be on Manchester and Salford, partly because they are most adjacent to the originators and partly because they seem in important respects archetypal, even extreme, examples of a twin-city relationship. However, we would very much welcome offers of papers or participation from people with experience of other twin cities, or other very adjacent communities, in Britain (eg Newcastle and Gateshead; the Potteries...), mainland Europe, North and South America, Asia (including particularly India when twin cities appear to occupy a special place in urban planning decisions) or elsewhere.

We would welcome participation both from academics, especially with backgrounds in urban history, politics and sociology, and from anyone with practical experience of twin-city relationships – local historians, politicians, civil society activists, service suppliers, local business people;
magistrates, policemen and interested citizens. Since this is a substantially unexplored field, and the consequent purpose is as much to discover as to reveal what little is known, we anticipate that discussion will be as important as paper-giving.

Expressions of interest preferred by 12 December 2014; suggested papers and brief synopses by 28 February 2015. Quality permitting, we would expect a publication to arise from this conference.

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