General editor's introduction

In this groundbreaking work, the very distinguished international and interdisciplinary team of contributors assembled by Peter Borsay and Jan Hein Furnée undertake a comparative study of leisure cultures in urban Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The collection covers a broad span of countries and a wide variety of leisure activities. It sets out to trace the interconnections between countries and cultures, to identify the processes of continuity and change, and to place the leisure activities in their wider social, economic, political and spatial contexts. While recognising the importance of gender, the volume also seeks to reintegrate the ideas of class and social status that have tended to be downplayed since cultural history displaced social history as a dominant trend in historical writing. We are taken on an exhilarating cultural tour from Stockholm to Istanbul via Bath, Brussels, Brighton and Biarritz as well as the more familiar destinations of Paris and London. En route we stop off at art galleries, theatres, opera houses, salons, race tracks, sports grounds, public parks, promenades, coffeehouses, restaurants, pleasure grounds and spas. The whole collection is a rich mix that addresses all the key questions laid out by the editors, provides much food for thought and points the way forward to future research.

Jeffrey Richards