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Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840?1970

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Susan Barton's book lives up to its promise of providing a new and fuller analysis of the ways in which working-class people were able to enjoy holidays away from home, mainly in the 'age of the railway', but with reference also to the tramping artisan tradition that predated the railways, and to the early years of the 'package tour' as it emerged in its airborne Mediterranean incarnation during the 1950s and especially the 1960s. She is at pains to emphasise the energy, agency and initiative that working-class tourists displayed, whether as the architects of their own opportunities or as consumers, on their own terms and with their own agenda, of the offerings of travel capitalists. The book is organised according to a broadly chronological structure, but each chapter develops a recognisable theme. We are taken from the tramping artisan as tourist and the early railway excursions, through the Great Exhibition of 1851 as stimulator of popular tourism (the best chapter), to the development of unpaid popular holidays, the complexities surrounding the gradual emergence of holidays with pay (in which the role of the Holidays with Pay Act of 1938 is placed in longer-term perspective and cut down to size), the growing (but largely unfulfilled) pretensions of the state to intervene in holiday provision and organisation during and after the Second World War, and, in a brief but stimulating final chapter, to the phenomenon of working-class 'Brits abroad' in the post-war generation. Primary sources consulted, over and above newspaper sampling, reminiscences, humorous sketches and travel writing, include parliamentary, trade union and Board of Trade papers, the records of local committees for the organization of visits to the Great Exhibition, the archive of the Workers' Travel Association, and

oral history interviews from established collections, supplemented by others conducted by the author. This is a genuinely pioneering book, which fills a gap in the existing literature while contributing in a distinctive way to debates on issues ranging from living standards and popular consumerism to politics and labour history. There is no doubt that it should be widely bought and consulted. The critical dimensions of the commentary that follows should be read against this positive overall assessment.

Dr Barton's first substantive chapter, 'No Grand Tours', presents a rather uneasy combination of popular travel before the railways, including emigration and going 'on the tramp', with the organisation and impact of early railway excursions. Discussion of emigration and the 'tramping artisan' is perhaps apposite in reminding the reader that the lower strata of society were not immobile before the coming of the railways; but emigration is a more complex subject than is suggested here, and there is more than sufficient work in print on migration flows in pre-industrial and early industrial England to make such commentary redundant, especially as nothing is said about internal migration within England as a general theme, or about migration by choice rather than necessity (except in the case of footloose artisans). 'Betterment migration' has a long history, while the popular aspects of pilgrimage, and popular customs of repairing to spas and coastlines for health and pleasure, are not incorporated into the argument.(1) On the other hand, the discussion of the rise of seaborne excursion traffic to Kentish resorts along the Thames estuary in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is highly relevant, as contemporary comment makes clear that London artisans as well as shopkeepers were among those present, but it would have benefited from use of John Whyman's exhaustive research on this topic.(2) When the chapter moves on to the nature and significance of early railway excursions, it is refreshing to find the heroic role of Thomas Cook as pioneer and innovator, which is so often accepted uncritically at the firm's own valuation, coming under sceptical scrutiny. Some attention is given to earlier and parallel initiatives, including the work of Friendly Societies and other popular voluntary organisations as excursion organisers alongside paternalist factory owners; but more might have been paid to the rival travel agents who were already emerging in the 1840s and 1850s, such as Stanley and Marcus in Lancashire, or the grocers and tea dealers who turned excursion agents in the 1870s. Their role, like that of national firms such as Frame's, has been obscured by the tendency of Cook's in-house historians to write off the competition, and by the absence of surviving archives, or of their imaginative use for public relations purposes, to match those of Cook's.(3) The role of a kind of early 'virtual tourism' might also be considered in this context: how many of the new London experiences of 'otherness' described in the context of the Great Exhibition, for example (p. 67), could be acquired or anticipated in provincial towns, at least in rough simulacrum, by frequenting travelling fairs and exhibitions at home?(4)

The Lancashire 'cotton towns', the 'first industrial society' and later the first working-class consumer society, played a crucial part in the development of the popular seaside holiday.(5) Dr Barton is aware of this, but her treatment of it is not always secure, and her comment (p. 101) that, 'For a real mass market to develop, holidays with pay were essential', is simply not applicable to this setting. This is, as she shows elsewhere, the area where the custom of 'Holidays without pay' (chapter 4) had its origins, based to a large extent on the protection and extension of established spring and summer holidays through orchestrated absenteeism, and on the collective accumulation of savings through the year in 'going-off clubs'. The latter arrangement was reported as early as the 1820s among the so-called 'Padjamers', artisans and small farmers from East Lancashire who visited Blackpool in carts and riding pillion on horseback to bathe in the August spring tides, a phenomenon Dr Barton mentions indirectly (as reported in passing by Richard Ayton in 1813) but does not discuss.(6) She is right to highlight Oldham as a pioneer of such societies ('thrift of a sort, but not the right sort', as a contemporary remarked) in an industrial setting, but the current lack of similar evidence for other cotton towns does not prove the absence of the phenomenon there. The attempt to identify Oldham Chartists with the holiday club tradition is also unduly ambitious, especially as the author accepts John Foster's version of Oldham's economic and social structure and popular politics in the 1840s without acknowledging the lasting controversy over fundamental issues of social structure and the use of evidence that followed the publication of *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* in 1974.(7) Nor is Dr Barton able to prove her suggestive but speculative genealogy through the savings clubs for the Great Exhibition of 1851 (if in Oldham, why not in Sunderland?), and this was a commonsense way of organising savings anyway, which was also applied to Christmas and other predictable occasions for 'lumpy' expenditure.

Oldham's local 'picnic clubs', based on public houses, were thought by local contemporaries to be the likeliest model. The savings club phenomenon, as it grew and spread across late Victorian Lancashire (with payouts of at least £228,000 in Oldham in 1906), was based not only on the workplace but on a spectrum of popular organizations from the pub to the chapel and Sunday School and from the sports club to the political society or the local Co-op, illustrating the remarkably ecumenical appeal of the seaside holiday in drawing communities together in shared pleasures, although they were also divided over where to go and how to spend the time and money.(8)

As to the staggered Wakes holidays that were the basis for this preparation, it is misleading to present them (p. 74) as straightforward commemorations of the parish saint's day. Robert Poole has shown that many were recently invented traditions, often with a commercial basis associated with promotion by publicans, while by the 1840s the replacement of earthen by stone floors in parish churches had removed the direct religious element from the processional rushbearing ceremonies that were part of the genuine traditional survivals. Nor, on the other hand, did many travelling fairs come to rest at the seaside in the summers of the late nineteenth century: the overwhelming majority continued on their existing circuits.(9) The transmutation of local traditions like those described, however recently invented, into commercial seaside holidays depended above all on working-class spending power, and Dr Barton tends to underplay the extent of cotton Lancashire's competitive advantage in this regard. Contrary to the impression given here, the West Riding textile districts were significantly slower than the 'cotton towns' in generating enhanced real family incomes and extended days off in the late nineteenth century;(10) and the problem is compounded by the assumption (p. 110), following Elizabeth Roberts's mistaken conjecture, that adult male wages in the 'cotton district' were unusually low. This is flatly contradicted by E. H. Hunt's careful analysis of regional wage variations, which shows male wage rates in the 'cotton towns', occupation by occupation, as among the highest in Britain.(11) On the other hand, the suggestion (on p. 79) that the cotton weavers' unions obtained agreement in 1906 to 116.5 recognised holidays per year, rising to 136.5 in 1914, gives even these assertive organisations, busily seeking the enforcement of the closed shop in those years, credit for more power than they could ever have imagined; and on p. 110, correctly, the days are revealed to be hours. That the weavers' unions were interested in extending holiday entitlements at this time, however, is of great significance in itself.

The overall experience of 'cotton Lancashire' suggests that here at least, the suggestion ascribed to Foucault (with some creative extension) that the coming of the factory constituted a 'rupture' that transformed the relationship between work and leisure might work rather well in this context, despite Dr Barton's expressed scepticism (p. 75). But 'cotton Lancashire' was certainly distinctive and different, and the additional examples of holiday savings clubs that Dr Barton has enterprisingly unearthed in other parts of the country do not affect this issue. But to suggest that (p. 91) the Southend and the Kent coast resorts had difficulty in establishing a summer season by the 1890s goes too far in the opposite direction: concentration into August Bank Holiday week, and problems of extending breaks beyond the week-end otherwise, set these resorts at a comparative disadvantage compared with the coasts of Lancashire and North Wales when dealing with the popular market, but that is not the same thing. To regard Scarborough as an exclusively 'genteel' resort, on the other hand, is to underestimate (with Harold Perkin) the strength of working-class demand from the West Riding of Yorkshire, which was not enough for Scarborough to challenge Blackpool, but more than sufficient to sustain extensive provision of popular amusement and accommodation in the central and northern areas of this complex resort.(12) Working-class Lancashire accents were also being heard in Devon resorts such as Torquay, and Welsh ones at Ilfracombe, by the end of the nineteenth century, when growing numbers of the 'better classes' were already fleeing to the continent in search of a more refined environment.(13) It is important to keep a grip on such distinctions of time and space.

Beyond the significance of wages and free time for the development of working-class holidays, Dr Barton rightly draws attention to the importance of transport and accommodation. In the former case, the railways deserve their star billing, but there is room for further exploration of their policies regarding excursion provision. The Lancashire and Yorkshire, for example, began its life with unusually favourable policies towards excursion providers, but became less encouraging from the mid-Victorian period when its facilities

were being stretched by burgeoning demand at inconvenient seasonal and week-end peaks; and it was not until the threat of competition for traffic to key destinations began to emerge from the 1880s, coinciding with the growing evidence that popular tourist traffic was not going to be an ephemeral fad, that it became hospitable to trippers again and invested in expanded facilities for them. The viability of most working-class excursion traffic depended on the availability of superannuated rolling stock that was stored in sidings, or used on menial duties, for the rest of the year. Cattle wagons were resorted to as late as 1872. Such a *modus operandi* did not appeal to the accountants of the Beeching era, which helps to explain the rapid demise of the seaside excursion from the mid-1960s.(14) More might also be said about the great multi-train annual excursions associated with firms like Bass's brewery at Burton on Trent, which issued booklets listing the attractions at the destination for employees and advising them on how to enjoy the trip; while the mass exodus from the Great Eastern Railway's Stratford works, using free travel passes for the annual August holiday, had its counterparts at other railway centres like Swindon and Crewe, helping to boost working-class holiday crowds at resorts from Weymouth and Weston-super-Mare to Rhyl and Morecambe.(15)

As to accommodation, it is disappointing that Dr Barton has not filled an obvious gap by taking the history of the seaside landlady into the twentieth century and beyond Blackpool, which is a conspicuous omission in my own work.(16) The landlady, in these pages, is mainly an inflexible and obstructive element who needs to be supplemented or outflanked by the progressive new developments of the plotland settlement, the caravan site and the holiday camp, before being upstaged by the new concrete hotels of the Mediterranean package tour, with their balconies and swimming pools. Her relationship to the 'means of accommodation', an unduly ambitious inter-war concept, is never clarified. But interesting new material is provided on socialist, trade union and Co-operative holiday camps, on the role of the Co-operative Holidays Association and Workers' Travel Association, and on the self-build initiatives and early caravan sites that sprang up wherever cheap land was made available, with a much fuller Lincolnshire dimension being added to the Essex and south coast initiatives that are familiar from the work of Ward and Hardy. We need a research project on the cultural history of the caravan site, especially in the post-war generation. But it is not at all clear that these developments filled a niche at the bottom end of the market, below the cheapest of the landladies, especially in the years before the Second World War. The use of a car was necessary to enjoy many of the 'plotland' shacks, and informal bed and breakfast provision in the fishing quarter or back streets of Hastings, or an occasional high-season doss-down in what Mass-Observation called a 'Kippax' in Blackpool (a private house that took in visitors very informally at the height of the season), would have been cheaper than most of the holiday camps, perhaps especially the early commercial ones that tended not to leave records and are understandably given limited space in these pages.(17) Here and in dealing with the 'plotland' settlements, which were often (as Dr Barton points out) highly individualistic and territorial in their ethos (although they could also engender feelings of solidarity and shared pleasure across families, and band together effectively against external enemies), we lose touch with the book's intended focus on 'working-class organisations', and are reminded that individuals were capable of organising their own holidays and infrastructure, even at this level.(18) The valuable reminder of the enduring importance of staying with 'family and friends', a hidden and generally forgotten element of the holiday experience, reinforces the same point.

Governmental worries over the future despoliation of the coastline, when room had to be found for the additional hordes of holidaymakers that were expected to be unleashed by the Holidays with Pay Act of 1938, were clearly based on the assumptions that the landlady was not enough and/or not appropriate, that some form of collective provision and state oversight was going to be necessary, and that, left to itself, a free market in holiday accommodation provision would result in an endless sprawl of disastrous, uncontrolled plotland style development, in defiance of the accepted norms of public health and planning. What may appear remarkable, in this context, are the limited actual impact of the 1938 Act, and the even more limited extent of government intervention in the holiday market in the immediate post-war years. Dr Barton's valuable analysis of the genesis and impact of this Act confirms Alice Russell's argument that paid holidays were already spreading to large numbers of workers during the inter-war years by non-legislative means, while the provisions of the Act itself were very narrow in terms of consecutive days off and of the groups in the labour force to which it applied, and the intended consolidating measure envisaged for the 1940?1

parliamentary session was never carried through.(19) These important points emerge from the discussion but would have benefited from greater emphasis and development. The worries expressed to and by government are reminiscent of the unfounded fears about the descent of barbarian hordes on genteel resorts and unprotected coastlines that accompanied the Popular Front's holidays with pay legislation in France in 1936, but they were real enough at the time.(20) They were much less pressing than in the French case, because of the familiarity of a working-class presence at most seaside resorts since the late nineteenth century, and the practical problems, in terms of transport as much as accommodation, arising from the concentration of holidaymaking into a few short weeks were of more immediate concern. Wartime efforts to reduce such pressures by encouraging 'holidays at home' were recognised as mere stopgaps, and ineffectual ones at that, under special circumstances.(21) But it is surprising that government intervention in the domestic holiday market, even under the post-war Labour government, amounted to so little, although it is even more surprising that a seaside New Town was actually proposed and seriously discussed in 1949 (p. 191).

There were, of course, many more pressing legislative priorities at the time, and retrospective justification for the lack of direction can be found in the failure of the predicted crisis to materialise, suggesting that existing provision was already coping adequately in its own way. But this does invite examination in greater depth of the reasons for the mismatch between fears and outcomes in this respect. The work of David Matless on the construction of 'national' landscape values and of imagined threats to them, in the context of the rise of a planning ethos, would be an important starting point, and (as Dr Barton suggests) the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 probably made more impact on restricting the spread of plotland settlements and holiday camps than any policies targeted more directly at the popular seaside, although controls over caravans were to prove more difficult to enforce.(22) It might also be argued that developing fears about the over-exploitation of coastline might have been a supplementary influence on the failure of the state to promote British tourist attractions internationally in the inter-war years and afterwards, although the conspicuous neglect of the seaside in this context was almost matched in other fields, and the reluctance to identify tourism promotion as a legitimate field for state activity and expenditure was entirely consistent with other contemporary priorities.(23)

The role of government in the post-war generation was much more directly effective in limiting the accessibility of cheap continental holidays than in encouraging or controlling domestic tourism. Dr Barton provides useful discussions of the role of the Board of Trade in protecting flag carriers and restricting the growth of charter flights in the 1960s, of attempts to protect the balance of payments by limiting tourists' foreign exchange, and (entertainingly) of some of the unintended consequences of such policies.(24) She overestimates the importance of the working-class package holiday to the Mediterranean before the mid-1970s, if Demetriadi's calculations carry conviction, and she probably underestimates the extent of popular overseas travel before the Second World War, when (for example) working-class holidaymakers from northern England were already in evidence at Ostend, while Spain's north-west coast was becoming accessible to white-collar workers (at least) by steamer from English ports, and cheap cruises constituted an itinerant version of the package holiday that reached down to similar social strata.(25) On the other hand, Dr Barton's use of the Workers' Travel Association archive adds a valuable extra dimension to the story of popular holidays abroad, although the numbers involved seem to have been very small and the tale is at times a little tangled in the telling.

Chapters 7 and 8, on the role of wartime and post-war government and the rise of the Mediterranean package tour as a popular and accessible phenomenon from the 1960s, nevertheless make a valuable contribution to an emergent and important literature. One of Dr Barton's strengths is a persisting awareness of the importance of politics (and trade unions) to her chosen themes. It is therefore unfortunate that her attempts to forge connections between the decline of Chartism, the Great Exhibition and the early development of popular tourism are weakened by a limited grasp of the existing historiography of Chartist decline. Theodore Rothstein is not enough, and a lack of contextual understanding gives rise to some over-simplified statements at this point in chapter 3, as regards (for example) the relationship between Chartism and the European revolutions of 1848, the suddenness of the transition to institutional reformism and the nature of the divisions within the movement itself.(26)

Here as elsewhere, the book would have benefited from just a few finishing touches of additional secondary reading and a more secure grasp of context. Occasional anachronisms creep in, as with 'business rate payers' on p. 182, or the tone of the citation of the *Sun* in 1967 on p. 208, which overlooks the fact that it was not yet the populist Rupert Murdoch tabloid that it became from 1969 onwards. Spelling errors include Bream (for Brean), Perpignon, and Eiffel (for the mountains, as opposed to the Tower). Tourism statistics are used sparingly, but sometimes trustingly, and some discussion of the difficulty of obtaining plausible figures for traffic flows and overnight stays would have been apposite. Comparisons of the British situation with the state sponsorship of popular holidays in Germany, Italy and Argentina in the 1930s and (in the latter case, under Peronism) afterwards, or in post-war Eastern Europe, would have given a broader perspective and provided some alternative models against which to set the voluntarist British experience, in which the state played such a small and reluctant part.(27) Questions of whether, at what point and under what circumstances workers preferred shorter hours and more leisure time to higher incomes, and how this equation might be affected by the commodification of free time and the development of holidays as a form of popular conspicuous consumption, might have been discussed more systematically, making use of the framework provided by Gary Cross in *Time and Money*, which is cited but not really used. And the limited but valuable excursions into oral history prompt thoughts about the need for more work of this kind, including oral histories of the holiday camp and the caravan holiday. But this is to return us to the many positive aspects of this book, which opens out so many questions as well as delivering some interesting provisional verdicts. It is easy to pick holes in aspects of the construction and communication of a complex story, which ramifies in so many directions; but this review should conclude by praising the positive virtues of a path-breaking, indeed, an adventurous book.

Notes

1. D. Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy* (Cambridge, 1986); C. Erickson, *Leaving England* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); *Migration in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Clark and D. Souden (1987); A. B. Granville, *The Spas of England, and Principal Sea-bathing Places* (2 vols., 1841).Back to (1)
2. *The Early Kentish Seaside: 1736?1840*, ed. J. Whyman (Gloucester, 1985).Back to (2)
3. M. S. Green, ?Thomas Cook and tourism history: a critical analysis? (MA dissertation, University of Central Lancashire, 2004); J. K. Walton, 'The social development of Blackpool 1788?1914' (PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 1974), pp. 242, 283?6.Back to (3)
4. R. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); R. Poole, 'The Lancashire wakes', and M. Judd, 'The London fairs', in ed. J. K. Walton and J. Walvin, *Leisure in Britain 1780?1939* (Manchester, 1983); and see now the resources of the National Fairground Archive, Sheffield University.Back to (4)
5. J. K. Walton, *Lancashire: a Social History 1558?1939* (Manchester, 1987), chap. 13.Back to (5)
6. William Thornber, *A History of Blackpool and its Neighbourhood* (Poulton-le-Fylde, 1837), p. 223. Back to (6)
7. J. O. Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (1974); D. Gadian, 'A comparative study of popular movements in north-west industrial towns 1830?1850' (PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 1977); R. Sykes, 'Popular politics and trade unionism in south-east Lancashire, 1829?42' (PhD thesis,

University of Manchester, 1982); and an extensive article literature, especially in *Historical Journal* since 1978 and *Social History* since 1976.Back to (7)

8. Walton, 'Social development of Blackpool', pp. 286?9.Back to (8)
9. R. Poole, 'Wakes holidays and pleasure fairs in the Lancashire cotton district, *c*.1790?1890' (PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 1985).Back to (9)
10. Walton, 'Social development of Blackpool', pp. 274?5.Back to (10)
11. E. H. Hunt, *Regional wage variations in Britain 1850?1914* (Oxford, 1973).Back to (11)
12. V. S. Pritchett, 'Scarborough', in ed. Y. Cloud, *Beside the Seaside* (1938), p. 226.Back to (12)
13. N. Morgan and A. Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside* (Exeter, 1999); F. B. May, 'Ilfracombe', in Walton and Walvin, *Leisure in Britain*.Back to (13)
14. D. N. Smith, *The Railway and its Passengers* (Newton Abbot, 1988); Walton, 'Social development of Blackpool', pp. 243?60.Back to (14)
15. D. Drummond, *Crewe: Railway Town, Company and People, 1840?1914* (Aldershot, 1995); A. Williams, *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915).Back to (15)
16. See also John Beckerson's chapter on the Manx tourist industry in *A New History of the Isle of Man*, vol. v, ed. J. Belchem, (Liverpool, 2000).Back to (16)
17. D. Walker, *Basildon Plotlands: the Londoners' Rural Retreat* (Chichester, 2001); *Worktowners at Blackpool*, ed. G. Cross, (London, 1990); Bertha Wood, *Fresh Air and Fun: Memories of Ivy House Holiday Camp, Blackpool* (Lancaster, 2005).Back to (17)
18. A. Dowling, *Humberston Fitties: the Story of a Lincolnshire Plotland* (Cleethorpes, 2001).Back to (18)
19. See also A. Russell, *The Growth of Occupational Welfare in Britain* (Aldershot, 1991).Back to (19)
20. E. Furlough, 'Making mass vacations: tourism and consumer culture in France, 1930s to 1970s', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40 (1998), pp. 247?86.Back to (20)
21. C. Sladen, 'Holidays at home in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37 (2002), pp. 67?89.Back to (21)
22. D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (1998), pp. 252?4.Back to (22)
23. J. Beckerson, 'Marketing British tourism 1914?1950' (PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2003); J. Beckerson, ?Marketing British tourism: government approaches to the stimulation of a service sector?, in eds. H. Berghoff and others, *The Making of Modern Tourism* (2002).Back to (23)
24. See also J. Demetriadi, 'The golden years, 1950?1974', in ed. G. Shaw and A. Williams, *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts* (1997), especially pp. 55?8; P. Lyth, 'Gimme a ticket on an aeroplane: the jet engine and the revolution in leisure air travel *c*.1960?1990', in ed. L. Tissot, *Construction of a Tourist Industry in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Neuchatel, 2003).Back to (24)
25. Demetriadi, 'Golden years', pp. 52?4; J. K. Walton, '"The Queen of the Beaches": Ostend and the British, from the 1890s to the 1930s', *History Today*, 51.8 (2001), 19?25; J. K. Walton, 'British perceptions of Spain and their impact on attitudes to the Spanish Civil War: some additional evidence', *Twentieth-century British History*, 5 (1994), 283?99.Back to (25)
26. J. Saville, *1848* (Cambridge, 1987); N. Kirk, *The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (1985); M. Finn, *After Chartism* (Cambridge, 1993); Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics* (Oxford, 2003).Back to (26)
27. Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1981); Shelley Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2004); E. Pastoriza, *Las Puertas al Mar* (Mar del Plata, 2002); A. Kostiainen, 'The Soviet tourist industry as seen by the Western tourists of the late Soviet period', in Tissot, *Construction of a Tourist Industry*, pp. 269?80.Back to (27)

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