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## Book reviews

James Collett-White ed., *How Bedfordshire voted, 1735–1784: the evidence of local documents and poll books* (Boydell Press, Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society vol. 90, 2011). xvii+305 pp. ISBN 978-0-85155-077-0. £25 (hardback).

This is the third volume in a series which makes available for the general reader a series of documents concerned with the elections held in Bedfordshire since 1685. This volume deals with the period between the fall of Walpole and the general election of 1784 in which William Pitt the younger secured a majority of 120.

The book describes the way in which local and national issues interacted to determine the outcome of the nine elections during this period in both the county and the borough of Bedford. The most important interest group in the county at this time was that surrounding the fourth Duke of Bedford and his family. However, as Collett-White says, 'politics ... were dominated but not controlled' (p. 256) by the ducal interest. Opposition to the Duke was more obvious in the town of Bedford, where the Corporation was frequently hostile, than in the rural hinterland of the county.

Like most publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, the book consists of transcripts of a set of relevant documents, with a commentary by the editor. Clearly, students of local and national political history will find a great deal in these documents to interest them, and it is at them that the book is primarily aimed. However, careful readers will find a wealth of information here about the social and economic structure of the town of Bedford, and its economic fortunes during the reign of George II and the first half of the reign of George III.

In particular, the book includes numerous lists of the businesses and chief inhabitants of Bedford, such a list of the 'publick houses at Bedford' in 1747, voting lists for the 1747 election, and a list of payments made to individuals by the Duke of Bedford at the 1747 election which includes details of what some of the payments were for. There is a list of the poor inhabitants of the town which received gifts from the Duke in 1747 which can be linked to other contemporary lists, a list of those who contributed towards the construction of Shire Houses in 1751 together with the amounts they paid. The most extensive list is a complete transcript of the county poll of 1774.

The Freemen of Bedford who were entitled to vote in Borough elections included many who lived away from the town, and the book includes a list of Freemen living in London who were canvassed for the Parliamentary election of 1767. This list includes not just names and addresses, but in many cases gives details of their occupations, and their political allegiance. Data of this kind open up the possibility of exploring social and commercial networks through time and over space.

There is, therefore, a wealth of information here to interest the population historians of this part of England. To find such information by searching the catalogues of local archives for individual documents would be difficult and so time-consuming that it is doubtful that the reward would be worth the effort. To have the documents set out in a coherent order in a single volume transforms the economics of research and opens up the possibility of painting a very rich and detailed picture of the social, economic and demographic history of Bedford and its county.

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R. Collingwood, *Shawbury: the people and how they lived 1538–1725* (Little Logaston Woonton Almeley, Longaston Press, 2011). viii+144pp. ISBN: 978-1-906663-59-9. £10 (paperback).

As a county, Shropshire is well served by village studies such as those of Myddle (D.G. Hey, *An English rural community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1974) and Highley (G. Nair, *Highley: The development of a community 1550–1880* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1988), but this book, which examines the history of Shawbury in the early modern period, shows there is still much to be gained from further local study. Chapter 1 introduces Shawbury, a village eight miles north east of Shrewsbury, and the surrounding topography of the north Shropshire Plain considering soils, land use and the process of drainage and improvement with reference to contemporary observers. Subsequent chapters are thematic in approach. Chapter 2 describes the church and its administration before discussing the impact of the Civil War.

Chapter 3 will be of interest to population historians because of its examination of the demographic history of Shawbury. Utilising the Lay Subsidy for 1525, the Religious Census of 1563, Hearth Tax of 1672 and Compton Census of 1676, as well as churchwardens' accounts, it reconstructs population trends. It is estimated that the parish's population increased from 280 in 1525 to 600 by 1672, after which it remained static at between 500–600 until the early eighteenth century despite an excess of births over deaths, largely as a result of a high-turnover of landholders and emigration of landless poor to the towns for work. An annual average of only two marriages took place, and the average age of marriage was 31.4 for men and 26.7 for women, the late age of marriage having the effect of limiting family size to 3.1 children and the average length of marriage to 19.9 years. There was no evidence of any significant outbreak of disease or pestilence during the period studied. In terms of migration, the mean annual turnover of landholders was 10.2 per cent, of which 3.5 per cent occurred within families, whilst 5.3 per cent and 1.4 per cent were with surnames known or new to the parish. Between 1633 and 1711 only 15 per cent of holdings stayed in the tenure of one family, with the average length of tenancies being 11 years. Entry fines were higher when viewed in relation to inventories, it being suggested that this led tenants to borrow money which they could not afford to repay, hence the turnover rate.

On the basis of the Lay Subsidy, the Hearth Tax and inventories, it is clear that marked polarities of 'Wealth' (Chapter 4) existed and links are made with previous village studies. For instance, Shawbury was not only less wealthy than Terling (Essex), but also more polarised, there being one very wealthy person and a substantial body of craftsmen, lesser husbandmen and labourers. Analysis of the Hearth Tax indicates that there was an increase in the number of cottager and labouring households but that, significantly, the number of yeomen, husbandmen and craftsmen fell by 1672. Even within Shawbury parish there was a difference in the number of one hearth households by township. Again, inventories have been used to assess wealth, suggesting that the community's composition consisted of a few wealthy gentlemen, gentlewomen and yeomen, with many less well-off husbandmen, craftsmen, landless labourers and poor whose situation worsened in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. While this pattern is usually explained by larger farmers expanding the size of their holdings at smallholders' expense, there is no evidence that farm size increased, the amount being paid to the lewn remaining the same. Findings are contextualised in relation to existing studies of inventories, records suggesting Shawbury was less wealthy than surrounding market towns. There is discussion of the household goods recorded in inventories. The significance of credit in the community is also considered, it being found that whilst the mean and maximum amounts lent increased, the percentage of creditors decreased. Lastly, debts and ready money are briefly discussed.

Chapter 5 focuses on 'Agriculture', the character of the farming economy being mixed, although there was a tendency towards livestock rearing and dairy production. The occupational status of the population is outlined in 'The Society' (Chapter 6). In addition to those employed in agriculture, there were craftsmen and labourers involved in industrial activities including forges, paper mills and textiles. Churchwardens' accounts list carpenters, blacksmiths, rope-makers, glaziers, masons, tilers, thatchers and daubers. The enforcement of law and order through the court leet is examined with crimes typically found including affray, slander, financial disputes as well as miscellaneous nuisances. Food and drink is explored, providing insight into that which was grown and consumed by the people of Shawbury. Also a brief account of schooling and the inhabitants' leisure activities are highlighted which included reading books, bowling, fishing, hunting, music and needlework.

The parish's provision for 'The Poor' (Chapter 7) is outlined, evidence from Shawbury complementing previous work which has considered the experience of the poor and poor relief administration. For instance, tables showing the number of poor and the payments made to them, the mean payments per capita to the poor and a comparison of overseers' payments in 1652 and 1706 provide insight into poor relief administration. Clearly evident is increasing expenditure in the seventeenth century, the overseers' lewn for Shawbury increasing tenfold between 1652 and 1707. Later chapters explore 'The Approach of Death' (Chapter 8), which provides an analysis of 180 surviving wills

for Shawbury parish for the period 1538 to 1725, whilst Chapter 9 describes how three families of contrasting economic and social status lived, namely the Corbets who were the lords of Shawbury manor; the Bickleys, a husbandman family and lastly the Sheffields, a poor landless labouring family.

This thoroughly researched book is successful in portraying Shawbury in the early modern period and shedding light on the inhabitants' lives. The inclusion of appendices with transcriptions of illustrative documents and tables showing an analysis of inventories is a helpful addition to the book. Conclusions are summarised at the end of chapters, but perhaps a synoptic conclusion would have been beneficial. Links are made to relevant historiography, although perhaps the author could have engaged more with relevant secondary literature and made greater comparison with previous studies of rural communities. Nevertheless, *Shawbury* provides a picture of life in the village during the early modern period and is a well-produced book which will be appreciated by not only a local audience but also the wider academic community.

James P. Bowen

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Brian Connell, Amy Gray Jones, Rebecca Redfern and Don Walker, *A bioarchaeological study of medieval burials on the site of St Mary Spital. Excavations at Spitalfields Market, London E1, 1991–2007* (London, Museum of London Archaeology, 2012). xx+303pp. ISBN 978-1-907586-11-8. £28 (hardback).

This fascinating publication reports on excavations at the medieval Augustan priory and hospital of St Mary without Bishopsgate (later known as St Mary Spital) in east London which were carried out between 1992 and 2007. Over 10,500 skeletons were recovered dating from the early twelfth century until 1539. A key feature of this site was the large number of mass burials that occurred in pits, many pre-dating the Black Death. The book employs the technique of bioarchaeology, 'the contextual analysis of human populations from archaeological sites ... focusing on the osteobiography of individuals and the biocultural adaptations of populations as viewed through the lens of archaeological context' (p. 16) to analyse a sample of 5,387 individuals from the cemetery. Thus, an exhaustive analysis of the skeletal remains is given alongside an extensive discussion of medieval London's social history. Comparative data from London, England and beyond are also presented.

St Mary's was one of the largest hospitals in the country and catered for the sick poor, pregnant women and children. Following proposals to redevelop the former Spitalfields Market, archaeological investigations were undertaken between 1992 and 2007 with the main phase of excavation occurring between 1999 and 2002. The first two short chapters set the scene by describing the dig, giving background details on medieval London and describing how the analysis was undertaken. Chapter 3 (124

pages) describes the results of the bone analysis in considerable detail while Chapter 4 (121 pages) 'uses documentary and archaeological evidence to investigate the environment within medieval London with particular regard to the health of the St Mary Spital population' (p. 149). There is also a short conclusion.

The book is immaculately produced (as is usual for this series of publications). It contains over 400 figures and tables which provide illustrations of the dig and report the results. The authors do not shy away from discussing the technicalities that are involved in skeletal analysis, but for those of us who are not archaeologists the chief value of this volume will be in what the various discoveries can tell us about the social history of medieval London. Space precludes a full discussion of the results, but it was interesting to discover the population's poor dental health (total tooth loss was c.12 per cent, a further 10 per cent had caries and other dental problems were commonplace). Only two cases of leprosy were discovered, but joint diseases and fractures were frequently observed. Evidence for TB and other non-specific infections was discovered and a small number of skeletons showed signs of scurvy (four) and rickets (five). Interestingly some skeletons exhibited symptoms of syphilis with carbon dating revealing that these predate the voyages of Columbus and represent some of the earliest instances of this disease yet to be found in Europe. There is also evidence that much of the population suffered significant periods of stress during childhood and adolescence which may be ascribed to dearth or serious illness. A lengthy discussion of the pre-plague burial pits, which contained a larger proportion of subadults than the other burial types, suggests that famine was likely to have been responsible for at least some of these deaths.

While there was a slight excess of males over females in the sample, less than 20 per cent was subadult and only about one per cent infants (p. 28), both considerable under-representations given that perhaps a half of all deaths in London during this period would have been under 16 and perhaps a quarter infants. Such differences probably tell us something about those who were admitted into the hospital and the fact that unbaptised individuals were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground. Amongst the infant burials, a large proportion were likely to have been stillbirths which testifies to St Mary's work as an early lying-in hospital. While chapter 4 contains a wide-ranging discussion of the social factors that influence the health of a population, it also hints that there is still more that can be done with these data. The height of each individual was recorded and this evidence provides an important source for a period when such data are difficult to obtain. Likewise, there is further scope for more comparative analyse with other populations. Overall this volume reports on a remarkable achievement and represents an important addition to the academic literature, providing rich evidence that no historian of medieval Britain can afford to ignore.

Chris Galley

Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman eds., *The land question in Britain, 1750–1950* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2010). xiv+281pp. ISBN 978-0-230203-402. £60 (hardback).

This excellent volume of essays sheds much light on an area of British history which, despite the efforts of a number of scholars—some of whose work appears in the book—remains somewhat marginalised as a topic of historical research, particularly in its urban dimensions. Readers of earlier work by Paul Readman and Ian Packer will be familiar with many cultural and political aspects of the ‘land question’ in late Victorian and Edwardian England, and of course there is a large literature on the sometimes violent upheavals of late nineteenth-century Scotland. This book attempts to set the heyday of the land question in a longer context, with interesting chapters on the earlier nineteenth century and the period after the First World War.

The first three chapters consider aspects of English land and its history in the first half of the nineteenth century (despite the book’s title, there is little on the eighteenth century). Ian Waites examines representations of the pre-enclosure countryside, focusing on the artist William Turner of Oxford and the working-class writer Thomas Miller. Waites shows how the comparatively rare depiction of common fields both documented changing practices and social relations in the countryside and expressed defiant opposition to their impact. It is unfortunate that the illustrations have not reproduced well in this chapter. Kathryn Beresford discusses the ideological meanings of the word ‘yeoman’, which played an important role in constructions of ‘Englishness’ in the first half of the nineteenth century. Malcolm Chase places the well-known Chartist land plan in the context of the wider history of the movement’s involvement with the politics of land. Chase reconciles two apparently contradictory strands within Chartism—the critique of landed property and the enthusiasm for smallholdings—by emphasising the importance of access to, rather than ownership of, land. All of these contributions are worthwhile additions to the literature on the culture and politics of land in this period.

The main focus of this book, however, is on the period from the 1860s to the First World War, and eight chapters concern this turbulent time in the history of land in the British Isles. Usefully, all three countries of mainland Britain are examined: as Philip Bull points out (p. 126), land politics could be ‘a filament that linked together the politics of the four countries of the United Kingdom’. This recognition allows the contributors to offer a nuanced understanding of land, as a contribution to ‘four nations history’. Having said this, the land question in Ireland is not considered directly in the book, although Bull’s chapter examines the impact of Irish land politics on Britain, and incidentally contains a very clear explanation of the main issues in Ireland. Matthew Cragoe reports the parallels that were often drawn with Ireland by land reformers in Wales, but shows that the situation was not really comparable: land ‘agitation’ was politically important, and could be inflected with nationalistic discourse and sentiment, but it lacked the dramatic scale of its Irish counterpart. Ewen A. Cameron, in the chapter on Scotland, emphasises the

importance of the lowland land question in Scotland, which has often been marginalised in a historiography that focuses on the Crofters' War and other outbreaks of highland discontent. In particular, he notes, there were controversies regarding the complex issues of entail and hypothec, and, as in many parts of England, the operation of the Game Laws.

One of the strengths of this book is the prominence that it gives to the urban land question in England. Roland Quinault—in a chapter specifically on London from 1880 to 1914—and Ian Packer both focus on this aspect, which was usually less politically controversial during the late Victorian and Edwardian period, but could sometimes hit the headlines, as when Lloyd George embarked on his urban land campaign in 1913. Moreover, it was important in the context of other political issues, notably unemployment, as Packer shows.

The other chapters in the middle of *The land question in Britain*—by Anthony Howe, Anthony Taylor and Paul Readman—consider the evolution of the politics of land from the mid-nineteenth century to the Edwardian period. Howe traces the political thought of Richard Cobden and the 'Manchester School', explaining the 'theoretical confusion' (p. 77) and other factors that prevented the Anti-Corn Law League, and subsequently Cobden himself, from advancing an effective land reform programme. As Taylor shows, after Cobden's death the land reform banner was carried by his brother-in-law, the economic historian J. E. Thorold Rogers. Taylor emphasises the importance of Rogers's historical works in shaping the politics of land later in the nineteenth century, while Readman notes the influence of Gilbert Slater and the Hammonds, in a period when historians often had considerable political influence. Readman shows the wide appeal of peasant proprietorship—and the continuing pull of the ideal of the 'yeoman'—including for Tories, in the Edwardian period, locating this within a more general shift in the contours of Conservatism.

The last three chapters in the book deal with the politics of land in the twentieth century. John Beckett and Michael Turner argue that the importance of the large volume of land sales after the First World War may have been exaggerated: sales were high at some points before the war, and some of the post-war movement probably reflected the quietness of the wartime land market. However, the purchase of many holdings by tenants did represent a significant change in the way Britain was farmed in the 1920s. Clare Griffiths considers the Labour Party's commitment to land nationalisation, which was often resolved upon but was never a priority and, more importantly, never seemed a practical policy. Finally, F.M.L. Thompson addresses the 'strange death' of the land question in the twentieth century, arguing that many of the aims of land reformers were met, 'often indirectly and inadvertently rather than through any particular reformist success' (p. 261). Aristocratic power—which was intimately bound up with the politics of land, as the Chartists and many subsequent reformers had often emphasised—was economically, politically and socially weakened in the twentieth century, and land reform seemed increasingly irrelevant.

*The land question in Britain* is a fascinating book, dealing with one of the most important yet still often overlooked themes in modern British history, and doing so with a welcome concern to give proper prominence to the experience of Wales and Scotland. I felt that Scotland, in particular, might have been given more space within the book: after all, it has around a third of Britain's land area, and its land politics have sometimes been more violent than in Wales or England. The book is well edited, though with some typographical lapses (for example, 'Tony' instead of 'Tory', p. 190). There are some pleasing idiosyncrasies. One reviewer of Readman's earlier monograph has noted that he 'may well hold the distinction of introducing the word "bum-sucking" to public discourse' (Ian Packer, *Twentieth century British history*, 20 (2009), p. 258, citing Readman, *Land and nation in England*, p. 69). With Cragoe, Readman can now be credited with the overdue public recognition of the role of pubs and curry houses in stimulating historical research. As the editors note in their acknowledgements, discussing modern British history brings 'burdens' which can be made 'more bearable by the presence of alcohol' (p. x). Not all the land reformers discussed in the pages of this book would have agreed with this, but the sentiment would probably appeal to William Cobbett, and doubtless to many of the 'yeomen' whose cause he championed.

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Jacqueline Eales and Andrew Hopper eds, *The county community in seventeenth-century England and Wales*, Explorations in Local and Regional History, Vol. 5 (University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield, 2012). xix+145pp. ISBN 978-1-907396-70-0 £14.99 (paperback).

If Alan Everitt's original concept of the 'county community' was like an earthquake under the historiography of the English Civil Wars, this volume represents a mere tremor. Nor can it really be considered a true after-shock of Everitt's work; rather, the edifices of national political consciousness and culture have long been repaired by scholars such as Clive Holmes and Ann Hughes. Instead, this is an attempt at fracking by a group of today's scholars, hoping to dislodge something useful from deep under the historiographical ground, and in the process slightly displacing the odd reconstructed building. The volume originated, perhaps inevitably, as a conference; from the essays presented it was undoubtedly an interesting one, but not one that will redefine the field.

After a useful historiographical overview by Andrew Hopper, the opening chapters by Jacqueline Eales and Jan Broadway make interesting points, but never really dig deep enough. Eales returns to Everitt's Kent, where she argues that his focus on the gentry left political debate among the remainder of Kentish society, perhaps most importantly the clergy, overlooked. Petitions from the county show considerable engagement, even radicalism. They also suggest that there was something akin to a 'community' of Kent, but it was a community divided against itself. Broadway looks at two county histories, of



Cheshire and Warwickshire, from the 1650s and finds differing responses to the conflict of the previous decades, but a general desire to ignore it, or paint it as some kind of aberrant negation of true values of gentility.

The most successful chapters are those of Ian Warren and Lloyd Bowen, which both focus on the gentry. The latter, after chastising Everitt for referring to Wales as if it were an English shire, notes that Welsh counties were relatively new, and had been imposed from outside. They were instruments of control by the English state, created by Westminster statutes in 1284, 1536 and 1543. And yet, they do appear as legitimating entities among the discourses of the Welsh gentry. But they were only one of a set of physical and imagined spaces which might be invoked at any one time, from the *cwmwd* and *cantref*, through the shire, to the Principality itself and even, at times, the idea of an ancient, greater 'Britain'. The use of the language of county, as with other localist discourses, depended on contingency. It was all to do with 'strategic choices'. Warren, meanwhile, describes a growing historiographical consensus that, by the end of the seventeenth century, a national gentry culture was ascendant, founded as much on good taste and metropolitan sociability as on local power. But, as Warren points out, there were still elements of provincialism, from the suspicion of French influence at court under Charles I and Charles II to the figure of the fiscally conservative, fox-hunting Tory squire of the post-revolutionary age. Thus there was a national gentry culture, but it was one which often spoke an explicitly localist language. It was, indeed, not necessarily a metropolitan culture, and it could exhibit a profound suspicion of the influence of London. That said, the relationship between capital and country was highly paradoxical. As Warren puts it, 'rural independence was asserted in order to claim prestige in a metropolitan political forum; prejudice against city life was fomented within a highly London-centric literary culture' (p. 75).

The final chapter, by David Appleby, is largely historiographical, picking out evidence from recent work on Restoration local government to argue for a centralising tendency post-1660. County elites, fearful for property and of religious radicalism, were forced to cooperate with the central government in its attempts to increase taxation (through the Poll and Hearth Taxes), military control (through the lieutenancy), and religious uniformity. It was, says Appleby, a 'post-conflict culture' which would be 'instantly recognisable to those studying the aftermath of more recent conflicts' (p. 124). Well, perhaps: this comparative aspect is left unexplored. The main conclusion is that after 1660, 'the harder local communities tried to pretend that life had returned "to normal", the more apparent it became that much had changed'. This is surely correct, but change was not always of a centralising nature: the abolition of the conciliar courts, for example, and the general retreat from the kind of intrusive social policy initiatives of Charles I's Personal Rule, argue for a subtly different narrative of government to the centralising one presented here.

The book is nicely illustrated and affordable, though some of the pictures seem pretty decorative. Overall, it is not an unworthy addition to the literature on seventeenth century

government and gentry culture, but nor does it shatter the earth. Perhaps this, more than anything, is evocative of what has become of the 'county community' hypothesis.

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Roderick Floud, Robert W. Fogel, Bernard Harris and Sok Chul Hong, *The changing body: health, nutrition and human development in the western world since 1700* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011). xxvi+431pp. ISBN 978-0-521-70562-5. £20.99 (paperback).

A growth of interest in the changing dimensions of human bodies in the past has been one of the most significant features of the past three decades of research in economic and social history. Anthropometric historians have made key contributions to debates ranging from the working-class standard of living in nineteenth-century Britain, the antebellum American slave economy and the economic development of the Hapsburg Empire. Although the methods and findings have been by no means uncontested, the sheer volume of work examining the heights—and, to a lesser extent, the body weights—of past populations demonstrates the widely perceived value of the insights that can be gained from anthropometric evidence into aspects of human welfare in the past. Landmark interventions have included the work of Nobel prize-winning economic historian Robert W. Fogel and other scholars on the heights of American slaves, and Roderick Floud, who with two colleagues published *Height, health and history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), throwing new light on the 'standard of living debate' in modern Britain.

In *The changing body*—which is part of the 'New Approaches to Economic and Social History' textbook series published by the Economic History Society—Floud and Fogel have teamed up with Bernard Harris and Sok Chul Hong to produce what is claimed to be an 'accessible introduction' to anthropometric history. It is an unfortunate fact that this area of research requires a flair for statistical technique that is not shared by all those who claim to be economic and social historians. The authors have been as helpful as possible, relegating much of the technical detail to appendices and thereby making the reader's task much easier than has been the case in some other publications in this field. As such this book, alongside earlier review articles by Bernard Harris ('Health, height and history: An overview of recent developments in anthropometric history', *Social History of Medicine*, 7 (1994), 297–320) and Richard Steckel ('Stature and the Standard of Living', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 33 (1995), pp. 1903–40; 'Heights and human welfare: recent developments and new directions', *Explorations in Economic History*, 46 (2009), 1–23), represents a helpful introduction to anthropometric history and its application. It also suggests some potential areas of future research.

Two ideas underpin the book. The first is widely, though not universally, accepted among economic historians: that the height of a population is an indicator of its well-being, and

that changes in average heights over time can tell us something about changes in the standard of living. Height is a measure of 'net nutritional status', and is correlated with life expectancy and many other variables. The second important idea is the concept of technophysio evolution. This describes the relationship between human physical development and economic growth, which are seen as synergistic. A particularly important chapter of *The changing body* considers industrial change in England and Wales since 1700 in the context of the food supply per capita. Using a number of sources, the authors calculate the availability of calories, showing that, after 1850, the number of calories per capita exceeded the amount required for heavy manual labour. Prior to this there was a steady, unspectacular and uneven increase between 1750 and 1850, but in the first half of the nineteenth century it seems likely that many people were not able to undertake demanding physical work due to a deficiency in available nutrition. The changes charted in this chapter also have implications for debates on the reasons for the decline of mortality in nineteenth-century Britain, as well as the widely discussed issue of intra-household resource allocation. Other chapters in the book deal with continental Europe and the United States, again focusing on technophysio evolution and its implications.

Anthropometric history has barely featured in *LPS*, partly because of the issue of data. Most available information on historical heights comes from military sources or relates to convicts, and this is not particularly helpful for the historian who is interested in a particular locality or region. Local sources may, however, cast light on some issues such as urban/rural differences in the standard of living, and it is possible that school records and other local sources will be found to contain useful data for local historians. It is clear that *The changing body* is not a local or even a regional study, but its findings are of wider importance in understanding processes of historical change, and as such are worthy of all historians' notice. While by no means uncontroversial, it is clear that anthropometric history can help to explain the marked changes in the appearance and well-being of populations during the past 300 years, and this book is the best attempt yet to explain how and why these changes have come about.

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M. Hicks ed., *The fifteenth-century Inquisitions Post Mortem: a companion* (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2012). xviii+253pp. ISBN 978-1-84383-712-1. £50 (hardback).

This companion guide to the fifteenth-century *Inquisitions Post Mortem* (IPMs) provides a fascinating and detailed insight into this series of under-used medieval records. The volume comprises 12 chapters contributed by historians who have worked closely with these sources, including those involved in the most recent phases of the calendaring process and in the current open-access digitisation project. Their contributions stem from papers presented at a conference held at the University of Winchester in 2010.

The IPMs were part of an enquiry process into landholding, initiated by the crown upon the death of feudal tenants. The first chapter by Hicks provides a useful outline of the process, highlighting the uses and potential of these sources to historians. Their purpose was to enable the crown to keep track of its feudal rights and take advantage of any potential financial profits from them. The inquisitions required local juries to report on the landholdings of deceased tenants, what parts of those landholdings were held of the crown, the value of the lands, and the identity and age of the heir. If the heir was under-age, the crown had power over their guardianship and the administration of their estates until they reached the age of majority. The IPMs have long formed the basis of manorial descents and genealogies outlined in volumes of the *Victoria County Histories*, and Hicks highlights other ways in which historians have used them to examine the political, economic, and social history of medieval England.

The progress of calendaring the IPMs since the nineteenth century is examined in the chapter by Cunningham, who shows how changing levels of resources and motivations behind the different phases of the calendaring process have resulted in the volumes produced to date. The recent phase of this process, directed by Professor Christine Carpenter, has provided the most comprehensive calendars. The inclusion of extents within these volumes increases their utility, and the current digitisation project will open yet more avenues for analysis and investigation to a wider audience.

The chapter by Carpenter shows how IPMs can be used for more than simply constructing gentry biographies, and how the inclusion of extents allows for detailed analysis of estate management and land settlements among lesser landowners. Questions over the reliability of extents and valuations are examined by Holford, who demonstrates that these elements of the inquisition process should not be disregarded too hastily. Dyer goes on to show how IPMs and their extents can illuminate structures of land holding, provide descriptions of estate buildings and evidence of urban holdings, as well contribute to our better understanding of the chronological processes of medieval village desertion. Yates examines in more detail the variability and changes in land use over time through detailed comparison of IPM data for Berkshire with that obtainable from feet of fines.

The chapters by Hicks and Parkin illustrate the implications of the inquisition process for families and their heirs. Hicks examines the complex ways in which land was transmitted to heirs via the provisions made for surviving widows and widowers, often resulting in long delays before heirs were able to take full possession of their inheritances. The chapter by Parkin focuses upon the problems of protecting interests in land when an heir was deemed to be mentally incapable in the eyes of the law. In such cases a death was frequently concealed by relatives for as long as possible to try and prevent lands being taken into the hands of the crown. This contrasts well with the chapter by Noble which examines the various routes through which the crown were usually informed of the deaths of tenants, and the involvement of heirs in initiating the process to more quickly obtain possession of lands. These chapters clearly demonstrate particular issues surrounding

inheritance and the inquisitions process through qualitative examination of the IPMs and with reference to specific example cases.

The chapter by Oeppen, Poos and Smith demonstrates what can be achieved through more quantitative analysis of the data contained across all of the inquisitions. Through a re-analysis of data linking the deaths of tenants to their proofs of age this chapter provides revised estimates of male life-expectancy for tenants-in-chief. Importantly, and of particular interest to readers of *LPS*, these estimates suggest better levels of male life-expectancy derived from IPMs than those previously calculated by Russell in 1948.

The full inclusion of information from the IPMs in the more recent calendars also allows for other forms of historical analysis, including the history of the inquisition process itself. Holford further demonstrates in this volume how the inclusion of jurors' names has enabled analysis of the involvement of the local 'middling sort' and their importance to the inquisition process in Berkshire. However, the calendaring process is still subject to some criticism, particularly as regards place-name research. Calendaring conventions advocate the use of modernised spellings within the text, with original spellings confined to the index. Padel argues here that divorcing the two pieces of information makes place name development difficult to trace, and does not allow potential misinterpretations to be easily identified. As Padel suggests, the current project aimed at digitising the calendars and making them searchable online will hopefully help in resolving such issues.

The wealth of information contained in the IPMs and their value to the historian is enormous, and the progress made with the calendaring and their current digitisation contributes to making this wonderful resource much more widely accessible. The chapter authors, familiar with these documents and their uses, showcase the potential of these sources. This book has obvious appeal to those whose research interests span the fifteenth century, providing a very nice balance of insight into the inquisition process, issues relating to the methods employed in calendaring these documents and the uses to which the source materials can be put. At no point does technical detail overwhelm the clarity of the essays collected in this volume, making it accessible to a wide audience. A useful glossary is also provided. The stated aims of this work are to pool together knowledge and experience of using these documents, and to encourage their future use by others who may be less familiar with them. The clarity with which the IPMs and their uses are examined in this volume must surely enable this aim to be fulfilled, and this book does indeed act as a valuable companion to the calendars of *Inquisitions post mortem*.

Purchasers may hesitate to buy this volume at its hardback retail price, but in the opinion of this reviewer the investment is well worth making, particularly for anyone considering using the inquisitions or calendars in their research. The volume is rigorous in its academic quality, and an interesting and thoroughly enjoyable read. It highlights the

enormous potential of these records for historians and genealogists alike, and will prove an essential companion to those intending to utilise these records in their future research.

Rebecca Oakes

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Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Dying for Victorian medicine. English anatomy and its trade in the dead poor, c.1834–1929* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012). xviii+400pp. ISBN 978-0-230-21966-3. £68 (hardback).

Medical history is a subject that will forever enthral readers. The development of modern surgery and our unspoken preoccupation with our own mortality continues to draw us to the fascinating and often murky world of the pioneer surgeons. The shelves of bookshops and libraries positively groan with learned volumes on the great men of science such as Sir Astley Cooper and the Hunter Brothers while tales of the bodysnatchers continue to haunt our nightmares and entertain us in lurid works of fiction. The nineteenth century saw great developments in this area both in scientific development and in the legislation that enabled it and it is here that Elizabeth Hurren has added her contribution.

Dr Ruth Richardson's seminal work *Death, dissection and the destitute* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) opened the eyes of researchers to the social impact of the anatomy trade and yet in the 20 years since its first publication there has been comparatively little new research in this area. In *Dying for Victorian medicine* Hurren has picked up the mantle and opened a new era of socio-political study.

Hurren's writing style makes for an easy and fascinating read which gently guides the reader through her research. That is not to suggest that this is in any way a simplistic work. Hurren more than supports her work with empirical data covering the scale of the anatomy trade, its costs, personnel and even their railway journeys. Hurren's research theorises on the connections between the 1832 Anatomy Act, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and the 1858 Medical Act, focussing on the trade in corpses in London with additional chapters on Oxford and Manchester. In addition it covers many fascinating areas of research including a thoughtful study of the style of the prose of the 1832 Anatomy Act. However, it is in her quest to humanise the dead poor, the raw materials of the anatomists that this book really excels.

Hurren covers the case of Rex versus Feist, the trial of a workhouse master who had falsified burials records in order to sell the bodies of workhouse inmates to the anatomists, in admirable detail. In addition she explains the workhouse procedures for preparing the dead for burial with the adopted safety measures employed to ensure the security of the deceased. Throughout her examination of the case Hurren humanises these people who had fallen off the scale of Victorian society. Where other historians, Richardson excluded, celebrate the lives of respected surgeons or notorious resurrection men, Hurren encourages the reader to realise that the raw materials of the anatomist were real people

who lived and died and were loved by their friends and families. Where James Moors Ball's work *The Body Snatchers* endorsed the 1832 Anatomy Act, decrying the lack of recognition for Warburton's achievement notably concerning the benefit to the public, Hurren has focused on the pain and trauma that was the direct result of the Act to the nameless poor in Victorian society.

This is poignantly shown in the section on 'the faceless corpse'. In this remarkable example of pioneering forensic science the anatomist worked with the city coroner to establish the identity of a young man found drowned in the Thames, suspected of being involved in a recent murder. Hurren describes the process of reconstructing the body in some detail, an admirable piece of work on the part of the anatomist, and yet once the coroner had ruled him out as a suspect the man was unceremoniously passed to the anatomy school. There is no suggestion that the body had any value other than for dissection and his identity remains a mystery, another lost soul known only to his maker. This cold, clinical detachment provides an alarming insight into the mind of the Victorian surgeon. As a potential murderer the young man has a value to the establishment, as an unknown corpse he is only of value to the anatomists.

Harsh economic realities of funerary practice, coupled perhaps with financial pragmatism on the part of the workhouse masters, spell the fate of those paupers who died alone, their remains unclaimed by their relatives. Bereaved families and grieving parents, including those driven out of necessity to sell their deceased relatives to the anatomists, add to Hurren's tale of tragedy.

It is perhaps unfair to criticise such a fine piece of writing, however the brief foray into speculation concerning the 1888 Whitechapel murders feels unnecessary and under researched. Many worthy Ripper historians have written on the subject and theories, both sensible and fantastical, abound. There seems no need to resurrect the findings of Wynne Baxter in an attempt to tie the murders to the medical profession one more time. This book is an outstanding piece of work concerning the conditions of the Victorian poor and the impact the anatomy trade had on them, and there is no need for it to be any more than that.

There is not the time here to cover the wealth of research contained within *Dying for Victorian medicine*. Hurren's examination of the scale of the anatomy trade, the socio-economic factors surrounding the poor, especially relating to unemployed men, coupled with her conclusions on the phrasing of the Anatomy Act and even the role of the growing railway network in the anatomy trade make this book essential reading for students of social, medical or legal history. In addition Hurren draws parallels to the modern anatomy trade. Despite the development of medical science, for which we have to thank the Victorian anatomists and their forgotten subjects, much has not changed. The poor are still those willing to profit from the sale of human remains.

Al Charlton  
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Alysa Levene, *The childhood of the poor: welfare in eighteenth-century London* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012). xii+250pp. ISBN 978-0-230-35480-7. £55 (hardback).

To many commentators in eighteenth century England, it seemed that poor children ‘may well be termed, *The Children of the Public*—for in general they have not one friend in the world in the smallest degree interested in their preservation and welfare’ (Anon, *Facts and observations relating to the state of the workhouse and the poor in the township of Sheffield in 1789* (publ. unknown, 1789?), p. 7). Alysa Levene’s excellent new book on the children of the London poor addresses both of these concerns: the extent to which they could be said to have ‘friends’ (other than their parents) who were instrumental in their welfare, and the degree to which they really were the ‘children of the public’, in the sense that they were affected by official and institutional responses to their poverty. It is a book that sits at the intersection of a number of currently blossoming research strands; in particular, the history of poor children, the history of parenting, and the history of welfare (particularly institutional welfare, and especially that relating to London institutions). As such, it follows important recent work by Jane Humphries and Katrina Honeyman; Patricia Crawford and Joanne Bailey; and David Green, Kevin Siena, Leonard Schwarz and Jeremy Boulton (as well as Dr Levene’s own volume on the London Foundling Hospital). There is no doubt that in this relatively slim, but important and illuminating, book she has added considerably to our understanding of all these areas of history.

The book begins (and, in many ways, ends) with the familiar figure of Jonas Hanway, the tireless campaigner for London poor children in the ‘age of sentiment’. Following on from his work with the Foundling Hospital, Hanway’s efforts to improve both the welfare, and the prospects, of poor children culminated in two Acts of Parliament in the 1760s. These in turn led to better parish registration and, crucially, to a move away from boarding children in large metropolitan workhouses. His preferred alternative, which Dr Levene investigates in great detail in chapters three and four, was the boarding out of poor children with parish nurses at a considerable distance from London. At the heart of Hanway’s concerns was the avoidance of contagion: the physical contagion of disease and ill-health in the dirty and crowded metropolis, and the moral contagion of pauperism in the dirty and degenerate workhouse. The author tracks the results of his campaign through a close investigation of parish sources, demonstrating that his schemes for parish nursing represent ‘a watershed in the responsibility placed on parish officers for the survival and nurture of the young poor’ (p. 70). She also shows that, unlike parish nursing schemes earlier in the century, Hanway’s Act of 1767 encouraged many London parishes to implement adequate, and sometimes exemplary, checks on their nurses, organising visiting committees and regularly reporting on both the care on offer, and the condition of their charges.

Beyond her excellent and innovative work on parish nurses, Dr Levene’s wider focus in this book is the degree to which ‘changing ideologies about *childhood* translated in changed treatment for poor *children*’ in the metropolis, and whether ‘poor children [were] defined by their association with the state of childhood, or the state of poverty’ (p. 1). Accordingly,



she looks in detail at a number of related issues (largely through the prism of institutional records) such as the size and structure of poor families who came into contact with welfare bodies; how families succeeded (or failed) to make shift, given the range of official and unofficial alternatives available to them; and, more generally, how poor families and their children were affected by 'the beginning of specialisation of welfare services for children' (p. 20).

What she does not do (and, to be fair, what she clearly states is beyond her remit) is to offer a close view of the *lived experience* of poor children in the midst of these structural and changes in welfare. This is, perhaps, the only chink in her otherwise impenetrable armour. While I would fully agree that her 'aggregated view' of welfare in London tells us a great deal about 'the evolution of responses to the young poor' (p. 2), it could also be said to leave a gap in our knowledge of how the poor themselves experienced those changes. It could also be said to neglect a crucial area of interest in terms of the evolution of welfare responses: the intentions of the authorities who implemented them, and their official attitudes to poor children. Sources do exist, and are present in this study, which might provide at least suggestive answers to these questions (such as workhouse, vestry and other parish committee minutes, as well as the biographies and autobiographies of the poor) but they are used very sparingly. While this is perfectly consistent with the author's methodology, it is telling that on the few occasions where we are offered vignettes, or snapshots, of real lives from the sources (such as those of the Woods and Ford families of St Marylebone, or the recollections of Samuel Bamford and others of life in the workhouse (pp. 93, 125–6)) these stand out as being especially effective in driving home her arguments.

Notwithstanding this minor caveat, Dr Levene has produced an important volume for welfare scholars and students alike, as well as a valuable addition to the historiography of childhood and parenting in eighteenth century England. As a result of her investigations, she is able to demonstrate that, in London at least, 'ideas and expectations about pauper childhood ... altered distinctively in the eighteenth century' (p. 175). Notwithstanding differences in experience based on a multitude of factors (such as the age and health of the child, family circumstances, and access to other resources such as kith and kin networks) she concludes that 'welfare specifically for children broadened enormously in scale and scope in London in the period' (p. 177). One feels that these are conclusions—and, indeed, that this is a volume—that Hanway himself would have approved of.

Peter Jones

*University of Leicester*

Kathrin Levitan, *A cultural history of the census. Envisioning the multitude in the nineteenth century* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). xii+272pp. ISBN 978-0-230-11937-6. £58 (hardback).

The key word in the title of this book is 'cultural', for rather than being a history of the census itself the author argues that 'The census ... played a major role in allowing British

people to visualize their nation in new ways' (p. 147) thereby providing an important tool in national formation. Based on her PhD thesis and employing a range of sources such as newspapers, novels, publications such as James Kay's *The moral and physical condition of the working classes* (London, Ridgeway, 1832) and the census reports themselves, each of the chapters provides a case study of how the census was used to 'envision the multitude' during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Thus, after an introduction and an opening chapter on the administrative development of the census, we get discussions of how the census illuminated discussions of overpopulation, political representation, urbanisation, 'the surplus woman problem' and the British Empire. The last chapter considers challenges and alternatives to the census.

While much of the primary source material was new to me and I particularly enjoyed the discussion of the play *The Census: A farce in one act* produced in 1861 and the many references to contemporary newspaper reports, I found the book rather heavy going. It is very well-written, but the problem for me, who has used the census as a primary data source rather than as a tool to illustrate the intellectual history of the age, was that I was unconvinced by many of the arguments. Peppered throughout the book are sentences such as: 'Viewed this way, the census was taken out of necessity: to save the society from self-destruction' (p. 9); 'the census was understood as complementing and justifying the rise of the middle class' (p. 13); 'At times a means of surveillance and control, at times an instrument of control, at times an instrument of reform, the census ultimately came to serve as a justification of urbanization itself' (p. 121); and 'In the century between 1753 and 1851, the census was transformed from a symbol of despotism to a source of national pride' (p. 180). All four quotes have of course been removed from their context, but as I encountered them (and many others too), I paused, considered what they were trying to tell me and eventually concluded that the answer was not much. Likewise, the liberal use of the term 'census-taker', as in 'census-taker William Farr' (p. 10), at various points describing census enumerators, those who organised the census and those who compiled and wrote the census returns, began to grate since it seemed to imply that the census was organised and administered by a unified body of individuals whose aim was to 'envision the population', which was not always the case.

Within each chapter there is, however, much of interest. For instance in Chapter 2 contemporary issues relating to Malthus, surplus population and productivity are discussed mainly using newspapers and periodicals. Likewise, the final chapter entitled 'Challenges and Alternatives to the Census' employs a variety of sources. It provides some, often humorous, criticisms of the census, concentrating often on what it did not address rather than what it included. This is followed by a discussion of how novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Benjamin Disraeli and Charles Dickens argued that 'it was not enough to describe the society as an aggregate. Real associations would come not from statistics but from individual interactions' (p. 196). This statement lies at the heart of the

debate between the merits of quantitative and qualitative historical analysis, yet I am not sure whether in sum such evidence amounts to an examination of those who 'rejected the census, questioned its utility, or proposed alternative methods of examining the social body' (p. 14). Others may be more sympathetic to the arguments in this book, but for those wanting a history of the census I would recommend starting with Edward Higgs, *Life, death and statistics* (Hatfield, LPS, 2004) or *Making sense of the census revisited* (London, Institute of Historical Research, 2005).

Chris Galley

M.K. McIntosh, *Poor relief in England 1350–1600* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012). xiv+352pp. ISBN 978-1-107-01508-1. £60 (hardback).

Marjorie McIntosh has published books previously about the social history of Havering in Essex, and more generally about anti-social behaviour and women's work. An interest in poverty runs as a thread through all of her writings, and this has culminated in this valuable book, which is required reading for anyone interested in sixteenth-century society and social policy. It is not the first book to examine the early phases of the relief of poverty, but one of its special features is the span of time that it covers: it begins in the later Middle Ages, rather than with the Reformation or the reign of Elizabeth. Although the poor laws of 1598 and 1601 are discussed in the last chapter, the book's preoccupations lie in the earlier legislation, especially the statutes of 1547, 1552 and 1572. She also deals with the hospitals and almshouses in which the poor were accommodated; the attempts to prevent or at least manage vagrancy and begging; and the measures for poor relief that developed in the parishes. Public provision and institutions are the focus, not the arrangements made within families. Professor McIntosh was a student of W.K. Jordan, and in some ways she remains true to his belief that coherent and effective measures to relieve poverty came after the Reformation. Like him, she plays down the adequacy of late medieval charitable provision.

A thorough cataloguing of hospitals and almshouses provides the basis for lengthy consideration of these institutions. They declined in number in the early fourteenth century, but increased up to the 1520s. Almost a half of them were closed in the upheavals of the period 1536–53, but new foundations then followed. The late sixteenth-century almshouses were better managed than their predecessors, with an emphasis on the good conduct and respectability of the inmates, who enjoyed some privacy in their accommodation. They sheltered a limited number of people, perhaps five or six thousand in 617 institutions at their peak in the 1520s.

In her analysis of begging McIntosh has brought together a mass of records from court proceedings and financial accounts to show how the authorities dealt with this intractable problem. At times begging was officially authorised, and the indigent carried slips of parchment or paper letters which licensed their activities. This system was abused by those who forged their documents, and all efforts at official control were frustrated by the

frequency with which hard-luck stories were believed by kindly donors, and alms were given to the undeserving.

Almshouses made only a modest contribution to the relief of poverty, and policy towards vagrancy seems to have floundered, so much depended on the efforts in the parishes to devise a systematic approach to the problem. Legislation from 1547 onwards was moving towards a better organised collection of funds, with the institution of chests for alms, and the appointment of officials, eventually known as Collectors, to assess the resources of parishioners and to cajole and then to compel them to contribute. Other historians have seen these measures being adopted very slowly, but McIntosh seeks to show that the legislation had an effect on behaviour, leading to a growth in the proportion of wills leaving money to the poor after 1547, and hundreds of parishes appointed Collectors (precursors of the Overseers) well before the legislation of 1598 and 1601. In addition, the parishes were acting independently, and adopting new methods on their own initiative or in imitation of nearby villages. When the great Elizabethan statutes were devised, spurred by the harvest crises of the 1590s, the legislators were building on the experiences of the parishes: already in some places poor rates were being collected, and the granting of money was properly organised.

This book is the product of a lifetime's work, and has involved prodigious labours in local record offices. We can only admire the way that the evidence has been collected, and is then deployed in clear and well-framed arguments. McIntosh believes that the poor had a better deal in the later decades of the sixteenth century, because of advances in the collection of funds and the granting of alms, and in consequence the needy felt a sense of security.

Those who have worked on these problems in the seventeenth century will probably feel that this book tends to idealise motives and to exaggerate achievements, though they will have to take into account the discovery of numerous Collectors' accounts for the decades before 1598. From the perspective of the period 1350–1536, the thesis of transformation, even revolution after the Reformation, seems to overstate the case. There is much discussion in this book about almshouses and hospitals, which represent an element of continuity between the Middle Ages and modern times, but they sheltered a tiny proportion of the poor at any time. The important efforts to coordinate poor relief came in the villages, towns and parishes, and these institutions were active in the fifteenth century. The village community (which is not much discussed in this book) rather than the parish was developing ways of collecting money and dispensing charity. Just as McIntosh shows that on the ground people were thinking creatively about poor relief in the sixteenth century, so in the two centuries before the Reformation the local communities were devising remedies ahead of state policy. This can be discovered only by reading between the lines and assembling fragmentary evidence, a skill which is displayed in abundance in this book.

Christopher Dyer  
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Hannah Newton, *The sick child in early modern England, 1580–1720* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012). xiii+247pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-965049-1. £60 (hardback).

This is a fine book from a young scholar of the history of medicine. It has a brave aim, which is to bring together the history of childhood with medical history to provide a new perspective on both fields. It has to be said that in this it is largely successful; testament to thorough and wide-ranging research, coupled with a clear mode of thinking about bodies, age and disease.

There are several novelties in the book's topic and structure which make it praiseworthy. The first is its triple perspective (reflected in the chapter structure) which focus attention first on medical theories, then on parents and families' reactions to children's sickness, and finally, on children themselves. As the author points out, this attention to the family and the child patient is novel, even within the context of a move towards patient experiences within the history of medicine. It also extends the focus of the history of childhood and family relations away from reactions to death (although this does still form a major thread of discussion), and flags up the relative lack of importance of gender both in parents' and children's experiences of disease. Newton uses fairly familiar sources here (mainly diaries and autobiographies) but she does so to construct a broader reflection of disease experiences than is usual. For example, in the context of both parents and child patients, she considers the role of providence, the nature of the investment in nursing and the attention that it brought the child (and removed from other family members and duties), and the role of prayer. There is some overlap between the two sections since parents and children were inevitably concerned with similar themes, but the attempt to draw attention to experiences outside the immediately medical and outside the patient-practitioner relationship is noteworthy.

The second novelty, and the one which really made this book stand out for this reader, was the clear insight Newton gives into medical understandings of children's bodies, and particularly, the way that this can easily and convincingly be inserted into longer-standing Galenic and chemical theories of disease. As Newton points out, age is still a relatively neglected category within our understanding of medical history, especially compared with gender. Contemporaries were clear that young bodies had different humoural compositions than adults (in particular, they were warmer and moister). What Newton does is tease out what this meant for understandings about disease types and treatments. As a framework it can be used to explain why children were prone to certain illnesses, like worms and rickets, for example. She also goes on to show how it makes sense of the types of cures offered to young patients. Medical texts and doctors' case books show that children were given smaller doses of physic than adults, medicines based on fewer components and less likely to be bitter or astringent, and certain types of cure (such as purges) avoided in favour of, for example, external rubs and ointments. This goes significantly further than earlier scholars have been inclined to push the model of humoural theory in the context of the young, forming a theory of what she calls 'children's

physic'. This is summed up in the conclusion as 'a collection of medical beliefs and practices which centred around the physiological distinctiveness of the young, and their need to be "cur'd in a different manner in them than they are in other Ages"' (p. 221).

Naturally, small quibbles can be made of the book too. It is reliant on what is now quite an ageing perspective within the history of childhood: that is, on the literate and reflective classes with a strong emphasis on diary-keeping Puritans. It also continues to call on a historiography which emphasises a lack of investment in children in the past, which is now comprehensively refuted (as the author is clearly aware). The theory of children's physic is perhaps also a little over-blown through its continual emphasis. It would also be interesting to know a bit more about how surgery and ailments which required surgical intervention fit the humoural framework, as well as how far doctors and healers were calling on a familiar framework or extending it by the increasing observation of children's diseases. However, Newton does deal sensitively with the potential problems of the source base and its inherent skew towards those specifically interested in children. She has also made attempts to move beyond the most traditional sources, for example, using doctors' case books, and also some necessarily fairly limited, though still welcome, nods to poorer families via poor law sources and the Old Bailey.

This is a thoughtful and reflective book which will be of interest to medical historians and historians of childhood in equal measure. It does hark back to an earlier perspective on childhood and the family especially in its use of sources, but it deploys them in a novel way and across an impressive range. Perhaps its biggest achievement is making sense of a relative lack of change of time: one of the key conclusions is that reactions to illness in children stayed remarkably static despite wider changes in medicine and drug-taking. Further considerations of new disease types and illnesses which move beyond this framework will be most welcome, but in the meantime this book has much to recommend it to those interested in medical and social history.

Alysa Levene

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Philadelphia Ricketts, *High-ranking widows in medieval Iceland and Yorkshire: property, power, marriage and identity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries* (Brill, Leiden, 2010) xxii+492pp. ISBN 978-9-00418471-8. 140/ \$199 (hardback).

This highly informative book derives from the author's 2005 AHRC- and US Historical Association-funded PhD thesis, and is supported by an Eileen Power Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. It focuses on the property which 12th- and 13th-century aristocratic widows could hold, both in theory and practice, and on the control they exerted over that property. In all, 50 Icelandic widows and 25 from Yorkshire are studied, and the major aims are to place them in context and against the background of their life cycles, examining their experience over a relatively short period which nevertheless saw significant legal development and changes in family structure.

The methodology is one of comparative history, as advocated by Marc Bloch. As the author points out, a contextual approach is important because sweeping statements are too often made about widows (for example their considerable 'freedom of action'), and it is the great strength of the work that she avoids such generalisations. Indeed, it is demonstrated that the same factors that divided women—wealth and social status, existing children and potential fertility, politics, and the influence of kin—also divided widows, so that a 'universal' category of 'widow' cannot exist. Other received wisdoms are overturned; for example Ricketts concludes that far from curtailing women's agency, increased royal intervention in widows' lives, evident in grants in return for cash, actually allowed them considerable freedoms and afforded the possibility of greater control over their dower properties. Similarly, while increased adherence to primogeniture of course meant that women were less likely to inherit, Ricketts shows that in both countries daughters and sisters were consistently preferred as heirs over more distant male relatives, so that the close family unit apparently took precedence over extended kin groups.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each of which ends with a substantial, discursive conclusion. They include law/legal theory (Chapter 3), property (Chapter 4), remarriage (Chapter 5), power (Chapter 6), and identity (Chapter 7), of which the latter three are perhaps of greatest interest to readers of this journal. It is shown that although a widow's individual circumstances were key to whether or not she remarried, while a woman's perceived fertility was the main factor in Yorkshire, the probability of future progeny was less of a determinant in Iceland. Stage of life also played a role in the likelihood of a woman's wardship of her children and lands. In Iceland, children invariably remained with the mother, giving widows more control over their children's future lives and property, potentially bringing them greater wealth and social status, while in Yorkshire the only widow gaining custody of her child was past childbearing. In short, there was more possibility for influence over one's offspring in Iceland, but greater opportunity for power and authority derived from land transactions in Yorkshire. All this probably explains the fact that in Iceland the presence of children was among the most significant factors in shaping a widow's identity, whereas landholding seems to have been the key component in the self-identities of those living in Yorkshire.

Such differences justify the author's comparative approach. As she points out, had Yorkshire alone been studied fertility would no doubt be seen as the determining factor in widows' remarriages, but it may not even have been considered had Iceland been studied in isolation. Similarly, another of Ricketts's aims is to explore the effects of heightened Church influence on women and widows in the 12th century, made possible since in Iceland the impact of Church reform was probably more limited. She does this with aplomb, showing that Icelandic women do not seem to have been coerced into marriage, although in Yorkshire, where Church influence was more apparent, coercion was probably more widespread. In Iceland widows also appear to have enjoyed more sexual freedom,

due to the Church's failure to restrict extra-marital relationships. Neither did illegitimacy preclude inheritance, whereas the one illegitimate widow in the Yorkshire sample did not inherit.

If any criticism is to be made, it is the size of the sample cohort of widows, which at 25 is particularly small for Yorkshire. Nevertheless, Ricketts backs up her findings through detailed analysis of a wide range of sources which allow her to undertake the 'family reconstruction' fundamental to the analysis of widows' property, power, marriage and identity (p. 24). These include Icelandic and English legal texts (such as the Icelandic *Grágás*, and the English legal treatise *Glanvill*) and contemporary sagas such as those collected in the *Sturlunga Saga*, described as 'the indigenous social documentation of a medieval people' (Jesse Byock, 'The Age of the Sturlungs', in E. Vestergaard ed., *Continuity and change: political institutions and literary monuments in the Middle Ages, a symposium* (Odense, 1986), quoted on p. 41). In the absence of a similar English source-base, charters are mined for their detail on family, property, and the opportunities open to widows.

The author acknowledges the varying usefulness of her sources, and highlights the differences between the Icelandic and English texts—variations which she acknowledges to be 'especially significant for a comparative study' (p. 49). But the two countries were chosen for their very differences—in kinship structure, political organisation and legal framework—and this has enabled Ricketts to succeed in moving her subject forward. One criticism of recent works in the field, which over the last decade or so have similarly focused on the subjectivity of widowhood and on widows' capacity for choice, is that they often fail to make comparisons between distinct societies (see Alexander Cowan's review of *Widowhood in medieval and early modern Europe* (1999), <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/165>). In addition, Ricketts has overturned received wisdoms and continually tests the generalisations of historians, exhorting the reader to do likewise. Thus, the book will be welcomed by anyone working on women in the later Middle Ages, on kinship networks, and indeed on that period more generally. It is ideal reading for students, since there is a succinct but detailed historiography of women and widows in the introduction and a full chapter on the sources and their pitfalls, although the price may place it out of their reach. It is to be hoped that instead it will find a place in many university libraries.

Amanda Richardson  
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Paul Slack, *Plague: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). xvi + 138pp. £7.99 (paperback).

Paul Slack has written a (necessarily) short, but penetrating introduction to plague which achieves everything an introduction should and more. Slack is the natural author for this book. It was his *The impact of plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, Routledge, 1985) which moved the history of plague in Britain from a minor and neglected area into a



serious academic field. That work is a model of detailed archival and textual scholarship that uncovered the demographic, social and political history of plague in early modern England. Here, Slack takes a thematic approach to the global and comparative history of plague that provides a wonderful survey for the newcomer to the topic, while still providing food for thought to readers already well versed in the literature.

Slack's work moves from the biological to the cultural in seven chapters. The first chapter engages with the identity of plague, covering both the recent biomedical studies on plague and historical understandings of disease causation. It argues for a fundamental continuity between plague epidemics, and for the identity of early plagues with *Yersinia Pestis*. The second chapter surveys the chronology and scale of the three global plague pandemics from the 540s to the present, and is particularly salutary in highlighting the limits of our knowledge of plague in medieval and early modern Asia and the Middle East. Slack emphasises the mixed and complex causation underlying epidemics, bringing in recent work on climate shocks as well as older accounts of human interactions as explanations for pandemics.

His third chapter explores the impact of plague, focusing on the Black Death. It deflates arguments for plague causing major economic or social change and in its place emphasises the adaptability of societies to epidemics. People and societies coped remarkably well amidst even the greatest levels of mortality. In Chapter 4 Slack moves on to the problem of recovering the private experience of plagues. The chapter explores both the short term peaks of mortality and morbidity that occurred during epidemics, the perceptions of chroniclers of plagues, and the emotional responses of individuals faced by extremes of loss and suffering. The fifth chapter examines the development and globalisation of public health measures against plague, covering its rise in Italy and its exportation to the non-European world under the banner of imperial agency. The sixth turns to plague's cultural representations, drawing out the tensions between public and private interest that they reveal, and the persistence of major tropes across several centuries of literature and (more recently) film.

This is an ambitious enough agenda for an essay that fills just 138 small pages. Yet within it there are several larger claims about plague that deserve serious thought. First, Slack picks out and highlights some key areas of continuity in human responses to plague. In particular, he emphasises a fundamental tension between care and control that manifests itself in a number of areas across different epidemics and different societies. This was most obvious in the conflict over separating the sick from the well, and was sharpened by the association of plague and poverty that developed by the sixteenth century in Europe. Second, Slack restates the importance of human action in shaping the effects of plague: the variation apparent in the impact of epidemics is shaped by behaviour and by context in ways that are still only partially understood. Finally, and to my mind most interestingly, Slack offers a tentative explanation for why public health systems against plague were developed in Europe rather than China or the Muslim world. His suggestion is that the

answer lies in the relative power of religious and secular authorities. Europe's competitive nation states, and particularly its city states, possessed stronger governments that were able to dominate alternative religious models of response.

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J.M. Spicksley ed., *The business and household accounts of Joyce Jeffreys, spinster of Hereford, 1638–1648*, The British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, New Series 41 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012). 413pp+xxviii. ISBN 978 0 19 726432 4. £90.00 (hardback).

Few account books survive from the first half of the seventeenth century, fewer still that reflect the business and household activities of women. Joyce Jeffreys' accounts are thus as rare as they are remarkable, providing a window into the business, social and family world of an early modern spinster, an animal that recent research has suggested was not as rare as was once thought. Jeffreys' precise date of birth is unknown, but can be placed between 1569 and 1583, meaning that she was at least 55, and possibly in her late sixties, by the time her surviving account books begin. As Spicksley explains, apart from the first two years covered by the accounts this was not a very profitable period for Jeffreys, but this may well have had as much to do with the disruption caused by the Civil Wars as it was a reflection of a businesswoman in her declining years.

The editorial approach adopted here is an eminently sensible one: to preserve the look and feel of the original as far as possible while at the same time rendering the content comprehensible to a wide range of readers. To achieve this capitalisation and ambiguous characters have been modernised, the text has been re-punctuated and abbreviations expanded, while remaining scriptural idiosyncrasies are helpfully explained.

Somewhat surprisingly, with just one exception, studies published to date of Joyce Jeffreys are entirely antiquarian. Spicksley's extensive introduction to the accounts goes a long way towards remedying this situation. Jeffreys' biographical details are sketchy, but are reconstructed here as far as is possible. She appears to have had strong bonds with her half siblings, the children of her mother's first marriage, she may have spent time at Hampton Court, and she possibly split her time between the Kettleby and Coningsby households, achieving familiarity with urban society in the town house of Sir Thomas Coningsby in Widemarsh Street in Hereford. From at least 1623, however, Jeffreys was living independently in rented accommodation in the parish of All Saints in Hereford. Having spent a considerable sum building her own house in the parish, she spent just three days there in 1644 before moving back to her childhood home of Ham Castle, where she spent the rest of her life.

Her business dealings were extensive. Her will reveals ownership of land and property in Hereford, Holmer, Withington, Sutton, Marden, Bodenham, Warton, Newton, Brierley,

Broadward and Leominster, and much of this was probably acquired as a result of her money-lending activities, for two of the three farms she held were related to debts owed to her. Her farming activities were mixed, and extended to include market garden produce as well as corn and cattle. But while her income included money rents and farm produce, and she also benefited from two annuities left her by members of the Coningsby family, her main source of income came from her money-lending activities, both by mortgage and loan. Of course, recent research has revealed considerable involvement in money-lending by single women and widows, but Jeffreys' activities stand out from most others in terms of their sheer scale and diversity. Among her debtors were members of the aristocracy and gentry, urban officials, professionals and a range of craftsmen and tradesmen. The great majority, 137 out of 145, were men, and the debts owed by the eight women were relatively small. These debtors appear as trading or business contacts, relatives, friends and neighbours, and were thus linked to her by a network of trust. Interestingly, no new loans are recorded after 1643, so her move out of Hereford and back to Ham Castle signaled the end of her formal credit activities. The accounts, and particularly the regular deficits they start to show during the 1640s, indicate declining fortunes, and it seems that once military conflict began she found it increasingly difficult to recover capital, while she suffered too from war damage, billeting and sequestration, providing a very stark and unusual insight into the impact of the Civil Wars on local business and economy (see, however, A. Thomson ed., *The impact of the First Civil war on Hertfordshire, 1642–7*, Hertfordshire Record Publications, XXIV, 2007).

Jeffreys' account books provide insight too into patterns of consumption, family and household relationships, religion, charity, medical practice and hobbies and pastimes. Spicksley expertly teases out Jeffreys' consumption habits, both local and in the London market, tracing a shift over time from the latter to the former. Her retinue and paid labour force were extensive, and she was deeply embedded in family and neighbourhood relationships, not least by acting as godparent to no less than 14 children. While there is no evidence of any deep or ardent religious conviction, she regularly attended services, paid her dues to support the fabric of the church and exhibited the benevolence expected of a good Christian parishioner and local notable. But, for Jeffreys, charity began at home, and she was particularly generous in extending her largesse to family members. She relied both upon medical advice literature, and the services of paid doctors as required. She participated in local fairs and civic functions, and also indulged in more solitary activities, reading history and astrology, keeping birds, dogs and cats, and smoking tobacco, while more genteel and archetypal 'female' accomplishments are rarely revealed in the account books.

Spicksley characterises Jeffreys as a woman who 'lived a full and autonomous life at the very centre of early modern society' (p. 77). Her single status was no burden to her, and while she 'enjoyed a thriving personal and commercial relationship with a large number of women of varying marital status' (p. 70), she also operated regularly and effectively in the world of men, even if she held no designated positions of power in the local

community. The extent of her autonomy towards the end of her life, however, is unclear. While Spicksley is determined to see her as independent and autonomous almost to the last, it does seem likely that her beloved nephew William played an increasing part in her daily affairs as her eyesight and memory failed in her dotage.

This edition of Joyce Jeffreys' accounts has been in the making for over a decade, and clearly constitutes a labour of love. It is an exemplary edition, and reflects Judith Spicksley's diligence, analytical skill and empathy. The appendices offer a range of additional material, including a very useful transcript of Jeffreys' will and an extensive glossary, while indexes of people, places and subjects make navigation of the accounts much easier. But random perusal is a delight too. So on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1639 she 'Gave Walter Harris for teaching William Mearick to drive a coche: 5s', and later that month 'gave ould Souche, the bonesetter....6d', also paying 10d 'For carriage of a tirkey to Mr Richard Stockwall' (p. 180). The context of these payments is not immediately obvious, but it is much clearer when on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1642 she paid 20s 'towards the biing of armor, weapons and artilery, to strengthen the citty against the Parliament' (p. 227). Jeffreys' world was in many ways an intensely local one, but one that operated too within the political and economic context of the age in which she found herself. This edition of Jeffreys' accounts brings many features of that age into clear relief, providing insights into the minutiae of the business and personal life of an impressive woman, and allowing one almost to touch the very fabric of seventeenth-century local society.

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J. Whittle and E. Griffiths, *Consumption and gender in the seventeenth-century household. The world of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012). xvii+266pp. ISBN 978-0-19-923353-3. £60 (hardback).

Consumption has emerged in recent decades as a key topic of historical enquiry, one that has spawned a huge number of books covering everything from luxury and novelty to waste and recycling. Yet this book identifies and occupies an important space in the market: the domestic realm of the provincial gentry. That this remains a largely neglected field of enquiry is all the more remarkable given the pivotal role attributed to such elites in the emergence of a consumer society and the enormously rich archival sources that survive for many landed families. Whittle and Griffiths draw primarily on household accounts kept by Alice Le Strange and her husband Hamon in the early decades of the seventeenth century. At first glance, these might appear somewhat dry and unpromising sources, but they offer a wealth of information on a wide range of topics, from shopping in London to dealing with domestic servants to organising hunts. The authors are thus mining a rich seam, within which they find some real gems.

Their approach is systematic, both in terms of the painstaking research and thorough analysis, and the way in which this is organised in the text. The introduction outlines some

key themes in the historiography of consumption, highlighting in particular the need for a more rounded view—one that includes the gifting, cleaning and maintaining of goods, as well as their acquisition and conspicuous use, and that pays due regard to the familial and gendered nature of consumption practices. Building on this, there are chapters on household management (the Le Stranges ran their own house rather than employing a steward); the acquisition of goods (where and how goods were obtained); everyday consumables (including diet, medical care and cleaning); material culture (the furniture and furnishings of the house); family life cycle and consumption (the periodic impact of births, marriages and deaths); specifically elite forms of consumption (travel, hunting and literature—Hamon and his sons were truly Renaissance men); and the employment of labour (mostly in terms of servants, but also craftsmen).

From these themed chapters emerge a number of key concerns. First is the importance of everyday consumption in the lives and household economies of the gentry. It is easy to be dazzled by the view of elites as conspicuous consumers of luxury or aesthetic collectors of artistic treasures. Whittle and Griffiths show them to have just been as concerned with mundane things like candles, provisions and domestic servants. It was these things that kept the household going day by day, and which soaked up a lot of the estate income as well as the time and attention of Alice and Hamon. Second are the varied spatial and social contexts in which the Le Strange family operated. They visited London for goods and services, and travelled to Norwich and Kings Lynn to shop and for a range of social activities, most notably those organised around the assizes (and this a generation or two before the time of Borsay's 'English Urban Renaissance'). But they were also firmly embedded in their local context: visiting neighbours, patronising local craftsmen and managing the estate. Third is the blending of formal market exchange with alternative economies of gifting, reuse, inheritance and reciprocity. These aspects of consumption are easily overlooked and a particular strength of the book is the way in which it throws much needed light onto these topics. Even so, we are left wanting to be told more about their engagement with second-hand circuits of exchange, their attitudes to inherited goods, their thriftiness, and the mutuality of gifting. Fourth is the gendered nature of consumption. This came in terms of decision-making processes (where Alice was an active voice); the work involved in consumption (shopping, cleaning, cooking), and the construction of gender identities through consumption practices. It is an explicit component of the book and pervades each chapter, although family often comes through as the key factor rather than gender. Fifth are the things that distinguished the gentry from other consumers. Whittle and Griffiths argue that, for the Le Stranges, this depended not so much on patina or the grandeur of their material culture, although the latter was clearly important and is perhaps underplayed in the analysis—not many in the 1620s could afford to spend £84 14s 4d on furnishing a bed. Rather, they were distinguished by their gentlemanly leisure pursuits. Some of these were traditional (hunting and hawking) whilst others were eye-catchingly modern (books and scientific equipment); all were dependent upon the ultimate luxury of the gentry: time.

There is also methodological interest. The household accounts are used exhaustively to produce a rich and revealing 'thick description' of the world of the Le Stranges. In effect Whittle and Griffiths have produced a micro-history of the family from which broader truths might be drawn. It is perhaps surprising then that the authors sometimes appear wary of making such generalisations, stating early on that they have 'no pretensions to identify significant shifts in consumer behaviour' (p. 6). In some respects, this sells the book short and limits its significance. Indeed, much stronger contributions could be made to the historiography of elite identity; the existence and nature of regional or local cultures of consumption; and the role of the elite in driving broader processes of consumption change. Nonetheless, the analysis is impressive and the book has much to offer the local historian as well as those interested in consumption and the gentry household.

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Samantha Williams, *Poverty, gender and life-cycle under the English poor law, 1760–1834* (Royal Historical Society Studies in History, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2011). xiii+190pp. ISBN 9780861933143. £50.00 (hardback).

This book puts the final decades of the Old Poor Law, the 1760s to the 1830s, under the microscope to assess poor relief expenditure, its recipients and its administrators at the local level. These years are well understood by historians as ones of growing crisis. The wars with France, harvest failures, rapid price inflation, population growth, unemployment and under-employment all contributed to rapidly rising spending on poor relief in England and Wales. It also created a climate in which the poor became increasingly problematised and the whole system of poor relief was questioned, enabling reformers to usher in one of the most controversial and debated pieces of nineteenth-century legislation, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. In the introduction to her book Williams provides a succinct and very useful overview of the dominant strands in the current historiography, and in doing so points the reader towards the central themes of her book: whether the Old Poor Law was 'generous', the operation of the 'politics of the parish', the link between poverty, gender and life-cycle, and the role that the 'economy of makeshifts' played in the lives of the poor. She pursues these through a micro-study of one Bedfordshire parish which encompassed two adjacent settlements—agricultural Campton, and its contiguous market town, Shefford. They were in the same parish but the poor law was administered separately in each, enabling similarities and differences between the urban and rural experience to be assessed. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the parish and the sources on which the study is based: overseers' accounts for Campton between 1767–34 and Shefford for 1794 and 1828, and ratepayers' books for Shefford between 1803 and 1820 which have been linked to family reconstitution records to produce a rich treasure trove of pauper and ratepayer biographies.

The following four chapters offer a careful, nuanced assessment of the evidence. The trajectory of poor relief expenditure is shown to reflect national trends, rising in three waves—the 1770s and 1780s, the turn of the nineteenth century and again after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The majority of relief outlay (about 70 per cent) went on weekly cash pensions, with cash sums and payments in kind (for childbirth, weddings, funerals, clothing and shoes, medical services and so on) being used more sparingly. Few paupers in either settlement were relieved in poor houses. Although Shefford spent less per head of population on their poor than Campton, calculated per pauper, the divergence was much less. Lifecycle poverty accounted for the majority of parish spending with most of those receiving regular weekly pensions being the elderly and lone parents (primarily widows with young children), and although relief directed to couple-headed families did increase at the turn of the century and again after 1815, it was only for specific periods of economic crises and for limited duration. Therefore contrary to contemporary critics and architects of the New Poor Law, relief to male able-bodied heads of household was never a central mechanism of the relief system. Access to poor relief was also heavily gendered: many more women than men were recipients, with old women seen as more ‘deserving’ of poor relief. This did begin to shift after 1815, especially in rural Campton, when more men and adolescent boys were granted occasional relief for unemployment (by the day or week) and a larger number of older men were given regular weekly pensions, a reflection of the tightening of the labour market after demobilisation. A system of allowances to families—child allowances, scaled relief, allowances-in-aid-of-wages and unemployment relief—was not widely used in Campton or Shefford however.

In order to cover the increased poor relief outlay over the period, the ratepayer base was extended to include many in the lower echelons of the social scale. Around a third of the population of Shefford belonged to ratepayer families, and although the middling sort was the main constituent, a significant proportion (35 per cent) was from the labouring/servant class. Their willingness to pay stemmed from the realisation that they too might have recourse to the parish: indeed a fifth of ratepayers also claimed relief at some point in their lives, sometimes simultaneously. There was also an intersection between charity and poor relief, although the majority of charitable beneficiaries were not on parish assistance. Charity emerges as an alternative but less valuable resource than poor relief, particularly in Campton, and alongside membership of friendly societies, the exploitation of common rights, neighbourhood networks and petty crime, fitted into the wider network of the economy of makeshifts. While these offered a lifeline to many families, access to some forms of self provisioning was contracting, and poor relief became ‘the central plank’ of the makeshift economy in the years before 1834.

Whilst the book is a forensic micro-history of one parish, it ranges more widely than this approach might suggest. Not only do Campton and Shefford expose similarities and differences between two neighbouring communities, the conclusions are also positioned

within the wider locality, the county, and the nation. The juxtaposition of the local and the national is neatly brought together in the figure of Samuel Whitbread, JP for east Bedfordshire and Whig MP for Bedford Borough (from 1790). He played an increasing part in the national debate, was one of the few to publicly take Malthus to task, and put bills before parliament on minimum wage regulation in 1795 and 1800, and poor law reform in 1807 (all failed). The Campton-Shefford evidence is therefore placed against both the contemporary poor law debates and the current historiography, showing how a careful reconstruction of the local can cast doubt on the conclusions of other historians and on assumptions that were widely disseminated before 1834. It concludes that the Old Poor Law in Campton and Shefford was 'relatively generous', especially in comparison to the north-west of England, and to the years after 1834.

This book is a model of local history: it is meticulous, carefully argued and is above all a human book, expertly weaving the statistical data with individual stories and life histories. It is a valuable and accessible addition to the literature on the nature of social welfare under the Old Poor Law, and one that deserves to be given a prominent place on university reading lists.

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Keith Wrightson, *Ralph Tailor's summer: a scrivener, his city and the plague* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2011). xiii+208pp. ISBN 978-0-300-17447-2. £20.00 (hardback)

This book is about one of the worst plague epidemics in seventeenth-century England, which took place during the summer of 1636 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This was an epidemic which had a devastating impact on the population of the city, claiming between 40 and 50 per cent of its entire population in that one year. Unlike many other works on early modern epidemics, Wrightson's study offers something different, in providing 'an account of a particular moment in the history of the city and in the life of a man' (p. xiii), a scrivener named Ralph Tailor who stayed in Newcastle throughout the crisis to record the last wishes of those who succumbed to the pestilence.

The preface of the book discusses the benefits of Wrightson's chosen approach to the history of Newcastle's 1636 epidemic: the study of micro-history. In the prologue, Wrightson stresses the importance of 'contextualisation' and the huge benefit of 'intensity of focus [which provides] a more vivid sense of the "lived experience"' (p. xii) of the events, choices and actions of people lost to history. The prologue then begins by looking at how the author came (by chance) into contact with the main character of the story when he came across the eloquent signature of Ralph Tailor with his 'elaborate and distinctive signature placed at the bottom of a deposition made before the Consistory Court of the bishop of Durham in February 1637' (p. 1).



Having introduced the main character Wrightson goes on to look at the historiography of plague both in England and on the continent. The author also discusses the different types of source material which have been used by historians and compares these to the sources which he uses in the subsequent chapters. The limitations of the sources which are available to English scholars of plague are also considered. Throughout this discussion Wrightson stresses the importance of using a mixture of sources ranging from ecclesiastical court records, probate documents, parish records and so on, which when 'taken together, contextualized, and where possible linked ... enable us to look again at the experience of plague in early modern England' (p. 9).

In Chapter Two the contours of the city are discussed at great length. 1636 was not known nationally as a particularly bad year for plague compared to the devastating metropolitan outbreaks in earlier years and the one which took place in 1665-6. Wrightson points out that it may have been the cold climate of this northern city which allowed Newcastle to escape 'relatively lightly in most of the plague years of the preceding generation' (p. 11). This chapter also looks at different districts in the city and the overcrowding and squalor in the southern eastern parish of All Hallows and in the infamous suburb of Sandgate where a large proportion of the poor resided. Wrightson uses hearth tax data to examine some important aspects of the city's social topography and by mapping the poorer areas of the city located in the north-west wards and south-east wards. This chapter also uses early twentieth-century photographs depicting some seventeenth-century buildings which provide some context on the contemporary commentaries of the city's layout.

Wrightson then turns to the epidemic itself which seems to have started in the eastern suburb of Sandgate. From there the disease soon engulfed the rest of All Hallows in June and July and by early August spread to St Nicholas, St John's and St Andrew's. Wrightson goes on to look at those who were affected by the plague by linking parish register information to wills and probate documents which 'fleshes out' the names contained in the burial registers. After having provided such context the author then turns to the responses of the city in Chapter 4 by looking at the role which was played by the city's magistrates. Here the role of the 'searchers' is discussed as well as the appointment of grave diggers. Some very important aspects of public health care are addressed, such as the burning of tar barrels in the streets to dispel infected air. Plague outbreaks can have devastating impacts upon local economies, but in Newcastle in 1636 this seems to have been minimal with regard to the city's coal and salt trades, which were only really impacted when the epidemic was at its peak in the summer months. The author also demonstrates that while quarantine was carried out and people and families were 'snar[r]ed up' (p. 50) in their houses, the city's streets were not deserted and people still went about their daily business, although 'the bustle of the streets and chares was much reduced' (p. 53).

Chapters Five, Six and Seven are devoted to the work of Ralph Tailor. Here the role of Tailor is examined by an analysis of the wills and documents he drew up for those who

were infected with the pestilence. In later chapters Wrightson goes on to look at the bequests and legacies which victims left to their friends and relatives. The book also looks at those individuals including Tailor who stayed in the company of those who were infected. Household goods of these victims are examined through the inventories which were drawn up by Tailor. Chapter Eleven then turns to the aftermath of the plague by discussing issues surrounding the legitimacy of plague wills and applications for inventories. Here Wrightson uses the source material to great effect and although some of the documents which he analyses are fragmentary they still help to 'vividly record the remembered experience of ... people who had endured the calamity and survived' (p. 143).

This is not simply a book about an event in one locality, it is also a book about historical source materials and their interpretation. It can therefore be recommended to both academic and non-academic readers as well as to undergraduates studying the historical sources and their interpretation. *Ralph Tailor's Summer* also provides an engaging contrast to the seminal volume on plague written by Paul Slack. However, what is particularly interesting about this study is that it challenges notions of abandonment during plague. In sum, Wrightson provides a remarkably detailed and deeply humane contribution to our understanding of the social history of plague in early modern England.

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