This book sets out to appeal to that tricky purchaser, the ‘serious layman’, and as such covers a great deal of ground in an appealing and easy-to-read manner. It is well-printed and bound (for a paperback) and the copious illustrations are about the best I have seen in a book that is not just a ‘picture book’, yet the £14.95 price tag would be modest enough on a book of far lower production standards.

On the other hand, the text and the captions exhibit numerous errors, some of them of a worrying kind. That Thomas Creevey should be spelled like that on page 128 and as Creevy on page 129 is neither here nor there. But on page 3, the author not only makes the common error of thinking that copperas has something to do with copper (it is in fact ferrous sulphate heptahydrate, used inter alia in the tanning industry and in writing inks) but goes on to explain how the (imaginary) copper was used. This is the sort of thing which shakes the reader’s faith in the writer.

Similarly, there are mis-descriptions of what is shown in photographs: on page 144 the bridge said to carry Howard Street (actually Great Howard Street) over the Leeds and Liverpool Canal is in fact the lift bridge which carries Regent Road over the Stanley Dock entrance. Less explicable still, on page 271, the gates of the ‘Philharmonic Dining Rooms’, Liverpool’s most splendid and distinctive pub, are described as the gates of the Philharmonic Hall — another of Liverpool’s most splendid and distinctive buildings, but in a totally different architectural style. It is inconceivable that the author could have been responsible for this last; it must be a ‘system error’.
That is only a sample of a possible long list of gripes. In the light of these, can the book have any merit? In my view, it can and it does. It sets out to paint a big picture – comparable in scope with John Belchem’s 500+ page Liverpool 800, and it mostly succeeds. I am a maritime historian, so I should spot where the author has mixed up the first and the second Mauretania (page 323), but he is able to cover areas of which my ignorance is profound, whether in the medieval period or on the football field. And there is much that he has got right: at the time of the first edition (1990), very few people knew that Robert, not George, Stephenson designed the Rocket or that the other young prodigy, Joseph Locke, played any significant part in the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. These and other updates have been taken on board in this, the third edition.

There has been rather a cult of claiming ‘firsts’ for Liverpool, some of them doubtful. Aughton, if anything, understates some of the innovations. Liverpool’s Old Dock was not even close to being the first wet dock in the world, but it was the first commercial one, and similarly the Sankey Navigation was the first industrial dead water canal. The Liverpool Overhead Railway was neither the first overhead nor the first electric railway, but it was the first to be both.

But the compilation of quiz questions is not the purpose of this book. In terms of broader considerations, I felt that there could have been a few more references and that the bibliography was not only a bit elderly but also rather thin. To have a chapter on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway without including R.H.G. Thomas’s 1980 work on the subject seems remiss and there has been a lot of important recent work on the slave trade. The notes are thin, but again we must bear in mind the target readership, which probably has a pretty low boredom threshold when confronted with oceans of footnotes in small type. A substantial merit mark to set against this is the extensive and, at a few random dips, accurate, index.

The appendix on Liverpool street names is an interesting and unusual feature which contains a large amount of information, some of which (like the burning down of the Goree Piazzas in 1802) is not included in the main text. In some cases, the connections need a little explanation: Gower Street leads to Duke’s
Dock, so it seems likely it was named after Lord Gower, principal beneficiary of the trust established by the duke’s will, rather than Sir John Gower (1675-1709), Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, during whose lifetime the site of the future Gower Street lay well out in the river. Whichever is right, a bit more information is needed here.

In the end, this is a book intended to be read for pleasure and it presents a good story, well told.

Adrian Jarvis, University of Liverpool


Lancashire towns, especially those connected with the cotton industry, are often seen as an undifferentiated group, characterised by their mills, terraced houses, town halls and football teams. In many ways, Blackburn forms the archetype of this strand of urban-industrial development – a single-industry town whose fortunes rose and fell with that of the cotton industry. Yet, as Beattie is at pains to point out, each town is unique, its development shaped by a particular combination of internal and external factors. In this impressive survey of Blackburn’s distinctive history, he traces its development over the last 250 years or so, identifying the period 1750-1914 as crucial in shaping the identity, environment and fortunes of the town. Unsurprisingly, this ‘long nineteenth century’ is afforded most space in the book, the preceding period being skipped over rather lightly, when a fuller discussion of the early textile industry and especially the rise of fustian production would have provided a more rounded context to the subsequent and dramatic changes. Nonetheless, across seven chapters, Beattie provides a thorough account of a town shaped by its key industry. In terms of the economy, he highlights the boom and bust nature of the cotton industry and the low-wage economy that it engendered. Cotton structured the political complexion of the town, with a powerful industrial bourgeoisie and an essentially conservative working class with limited appetite for radical action. It also shaped the townscape and social structure of Blackburn,
although, unusually, the elite are seen as unwilling or unable to create a strong cultural-civic infrastructure in the town. Popular protest was sporadic, which Beattie links to the conservatism of the working class, and educational standards low, a product of the easy access to work for both sexes and the low wages paid. The possibilities for leisure and recreation grew as the nineteenth century progressed, but so too did the divide between elite and popular pastimes. Finally, the dominance of a largely Anglican local elite is seen as important in limiting inter-denominational rivalry, although again there seems to have been considerable apathy on the part of the working classes. In the last three chapters, these same themes are traced through the twentieth century – a period when earlier growth and dynamism was sharply reversed as the cotton industry went into sharp decline and during which the built environment of the town was transformed through factory closures and successive programmes of urban renewal.

Whilst he clearly has a strong affinity with Blackburn, the author avoids sentimentalising the past. Indeed, the picture that he presents is far from flattering. The town emerges from the pages of this book as a place that has always been unable or unwilling to develop beyond the cotton industry or to escape from its legacy; its inhabitants were poorly educated and irreligious and they remain amongst the most deprived in the country; and its political and civic leaders had little apparent ambition for their town. What is less clear, however, is how and why Blackburn differed from its neighbours or from other industrial towns across the north of England. It would be wrong to expect detailed discussion of other places, but we surely need to have some understanding of the regional context in which Blackburn rose (and fell) and the interlinkages which this engendered. How did its factories complete with or complement those in Burnley, Bolton or Oldham? What role did inter-town rivalry play in the construction of civic infrastructure?

Throughout, Beattie presents an honest picture based on an impressive amount of detailed research – not least in terms of the pictures, all of which are accompanied by useful captions. And yet there are some odd gaps in the analysis. For instance, repeated reference is made to Blackburn’s ‘shopocracy’ – itself a strange term to deploy, since the town does not appear to have been
controlled by a petit bourgeois of shopkeepers, as happened in eighteenth-century Wolverhampton — but there is little discussion of retailing or the service sector more generally. This omission is all the more surprising, given the growing importance of these activities in all large towns and cities through the nineteenth century and also their centrality to many twentieth-century redevelopment schemes. Moreover, whilst Beattie shows a good general awareness of historiographical trends and certainly draws on these to inform his analysis, there is little attempt to link this history of Blackburn to current debates on urban and industrial change. In effect, he presents a very traditional version of urban history. Perhaps this is expecting too much, or rather the wrong thing, from this type of book. Certainly, Beattie is far from being merely descriptive; rather, he presents an excellent and compelling analysis of perhaps the archetypal cotton town.

Jon Stobart, University of Northampton


Twenty years ago, the study of the Irish in Britain had not yet experienced the growth, both in terms of the volume of published research and the increasing sophistication of approach, that it has attained since. A very large proportion of the studies that appeared in the interim has been concerned with individual towns as the key space in which Irish integration or social and economic alienation occurred. It comes as something of a surprise, therefore, that the history of the Irish in Liverpool — the iconic entrepôt for nineteenth-century Irish migrants — has not until now found an historian to chart in full the social and economic experiences of this group over a long period. This is not to say that the Irish in the city have been overlooked. On the contrary, Frank Neal’s pioneering and extremely valuable book on sectarian violence (as perhaps the best example of the earlier work) analysed the impact of the newcomers on the city around the time of the Great Famine and followed through the theme of communal violence to the early twentieth
century. However, John Belchem’s new book builds on a number of earlier studies (including those by Belchem himself) to attempt an integrated portrayal of the dynamics of Irish life in the city that acknowledges the significance of sectarianism without being constrained by that particular frame of reference.

In seeking to explain the dynamics of migrant community life in terms that go beyond the familiar divisions, he emphasises the importance of ‘Irish agency’, claiming that though often poor and the objects of native antipathy, the Irish played a part in making their own history. They re-defined Irishness to suit their own needs and their changed (and changing) situation, fashioning ‘an ethnic affiliation which performed at first protective and defensive functions against disadvantage, disability and discrimination, but then became increasingly assertive’ (page 28). The key to this development lay partly in the volume of migration to the port and the size and the social diversity of the resultant Irish community relative to Irish communities in most other British towns: ‘Micks on the Make on the Mersey’ introduced a dynamic that was sometimes absent, or attenuated, elsewhere. There were enough Irish resident in the port to make leadership of the ethnic group an attractive proposition to an emergent middle class.

In this ‘ethnic enclave’, a cohesive culture of collective mutuality developed. Belchem charts the complex web of migrant networks that established ways of mutually supporting kin, clan and a variety of other newcomers who integrated into the self-help culture, sustaining Irishwomen and men in the disorienting circumstances of the courts and backstreets of Liverpool. Such developments could take very different forms, ranging from the informal female-dominated networks of street or neighbourhood culture to the more male-dominated formal friendly societies. While the primary function of such networks was to provide sustenance in times of need, they also performed other leisure functions, including tea parties and dinners, the celebration of festivals and the elevation of public displays of Irishness. Such activities provided occasions for the cementing, often re-invention, of Irish migrant identity.

The most original section of the book (at least for those familiar with Belchem’s earlier work on the Irish in Liverpool) is
that dealing with leisure culture. In particular, the discussion of how ‘negro minstrels’ and black-faced actors occupied a key part in the commercial leisure culture of the Irish points to the strategies by which a despised ethnic group could elevate themselves in their own eyes by looking down on others by ‘blacking up’. In contrast to the American context, whence the motif came, the performance of ‘negro minstrels’ allowed the Irish to be located squarely as ‘white’ – in contrast to how they were seen by some contemporary commentators – while at the same time establishing their distinctive Irish identity. This research opens up a field of enquiry in British social history that so far has been neglected – that of how ideas of racial difference were internalised in mass leisure culture rather than being simply the province of arcane anthropological debate or displayed in caricatures in magazines that had little impact on mass culture.

A significant portion of the book deals with political life. This is an abiding theme in the history of the Irish diaspora from the nineteenth century onwards, spanning the period of the confederates and the 1848 revolutions, the revolutionary Fenians and their gun-running in the 1860s and 1870s, the mobilisation of Irish voters in Liverpool in favour of Home Rule from the 1880s and responses to the Irish ‘War of Independence’. Belchem provides a convincing portrayal of ‘Nat-Labism’ (‘a pragmatic blend of ethnic, confessional and class interests’) to describe the constellation of forces that came together in Liverpool-Irish politics to ensure that the national question was rooted in the local demands of Irish voters in the city. This culture appears to have been more successful than in most other British cities and ensured the election of the only Irish Nationalist M.P. for a British constituency, T.P. O’Connor, over four decades. However, from the mid-1920s the social and economic underpinnings of this political formation were eroded. The challenges of the inter-war depression changed the dynamics at work in a specifically Irish community, while the coming of the welfare state and major changes in slum-clearance and housing policy undermined the community networks that had previously sustained a distinctive sense of Irishness in the city.

The author is well versed in the theoretical debates about migration, ethnicity and diasporas, and these clearly inform the
way he approaches his subject. Yet, ultimately, the true worth of this book lies in its deep engagement with an impressively wide range of primary sources. Some parts of the analysis of the book will be familiar to those who have read the author's many articles on the Liverpool Irish, but there is much more here than a retreading of familiar material. The book is a coherent new analysis that introduces some new areas of discussion into the way we understand the Irish in Liverpool. It is an important contribution to Irish migration studies and is a valuable case-study in British social, economic and political history of the period. It includes some evocative photographs that, in themselves, illustrate the multi-faced nature of Liverpool Irish history.

Paul O'Leary, Aberystwyth University


As someone who has been intensively studying the history of rural south-west Lancashire for 15 years now (albeit in a slightly earlier period), it is something of a confession to state that the writings of M.E. Francis were entirely new to me when this book arrived. M.E. Francis was the pen name of Mary Elizabeth Blundell, the widow of Francis Blundell of Little Crosby. After her husband's untimely death, she turned to writing as a way of supporting herself and her young family and published novels and short stories regularly from 1892 to 1930. Now a largely forgotten author, she was likened in her own day to Elizabeth Gaskell - she might just as well have been likened to Thomas Hardy. With the benefit of hindsight, we might also compare her to Flora Thompson. Francis was not as skilful a writer as Gaskell or Hardy and did not achieve the same levels of circulation or fame. However, in common with both, she wrote fictionalised accounts of events based upon her own observations, unlike Flora Thompson whose approach was avowedly more autobiographical. Nevertheless, a full and detailed analysis of her writings on rural society in Lancashire, Dorset, Wales and her native Ireland is long
overdue. If this publication of one of her early collections brings her writings to the attention of a new audience then it will have done a valuable service.

The book’s identity is somewhat enigmatic. First published in 1893, it comprises twelve short stories that collectively add up to rather more than the sum of their parts. Little Crosby, synonymous with paternalism, Catholicism and insularity since the seventeenth century, is here represented as the village of Thornleigh and although there is no plot that would make the book into a novel, there are pivotal characters such as the priest and the squire whose presence and influence are threaded through the text. The book shares similarities with a collection of journalistic observations such as Walter Greenwood might write, recording snippets of people’s lives, rather than an anthology of purely fictive short stories. It is certainly not a collection of short stories in a conventional sense, but a series of biographies, observations on incidents, mundane events and the day-to-day struggles of local families. Indeed, much of it does not read like fiction at all, and yet it is not conventional ‘evidence’ either.

The short story ‘Politics’, for instance, is, like the rest of the book, written in the past tense. It records the impact of the change of the squire’s political persuasion from Liberal to Conservative. The literary form is one of a dialogue between a Mrs Walsh and the narrator and could easily be mistaken for oral testimony. However, the focus is insular and domestic, providing not a commentary on the external political context, but rather a humorous look over the village characters and events associated with this shift of allegiance. The focus is not on the Home Rule question, but the flowers decorating the barn for a political meeting which few men attended, the colour of Radical Red’s nose and the unfailing loyalty of the villagers to the squire: ‘when the Squire clapped his hands, we clapped ours, but we was glad when he stopped’ (page 67). This is a simple, unthreatening, unpolicised and unquestioning peasantry where the men did not engage in the political process and the women, it seems, were merely interested in the spectacle. It is no wonder that Francis has a reputation for promoting a utopian vision of society.

We must remember that Mary Blundell was of a higher social class than many of her characters and although she wrote
with compassion and sympathy, we must question how much she truly understood of the lives of the labourers and aged poor. Her social distance may well be the cause of the slightly twee style with which she wrote. Although her characters suffer poverty, misfortune, accident leading to incapacity, heartache, loneliness, treachery, decrepitude, death and old age, the stoic forbearance of the salt of the earth peasantry living under the watchful and protective care of the priest and the paternalistic squire gives her tales a romance and a morality that might not always have been shared by the people whose lives she was depicting. In the respect of virtue winning out over adversity, Francis’s writing shares a certain quality with other Victorian literature such as Linnaeus Banks’s *Manchester man*, where good always prevails. Certainly, Francis’s optimistic version of rural life and the social relations of the countryside are at odds with the few autobiographical accounts we have of rural smallholders and labourers in this period.

One of the problems with Francis’s vision of rural society is her lack of awareness of the rural economy or of domestic economy. The focus is very much on home life and on manifestations of the family, and manual labour is largely absent from the book, except in the sense that people leave home to go to work in fields and return from those fields to the domestic sphere. So the rural economy and the context of local strategies in the face of national agricultural depression, the emerging unionisation of agricultural labourers and the prevalence of itinerant labourers are all largely absent from the book. However, such things can be researched elsewhere through conventional material. The real value of Francis’s work is in the evocations of the domestic environment, the pragmatism and strategies applied to relationships and household structures, and the way in which she portrays lives dominated not by momentous events and earth shattering ideologies, but by the mundane and commonplace.

To review a work of fiction is something of a novelty, and as ‘evidence’ I am unsure how to approach this book. I do not intend to speculate on Francis’s motives for writing – was this meant to be ‘evidence’, was it propaganda of the landlord class, was it merely to be read for pleasure? Perhaps the book is all three, but as ‘evidence’ it is clearly problematic. However, on the strength of this book, and despite its problems, I have become both a fan
and a collector of her work. This edition has an extremely helpful and informative introduction by R.W. Taylor, providing biographical information on the author, and also reproduces the engravings from the first edition which add not only to the stories but to the evidential content of the book. I would with all sincerity recommend this book to anyone with an interest in rural society in this period and await the publication of a detailed academic analysis of her writing, especially one that focuses on the thorny issue of the factual basis of fiction.

Andy Gritt, University of Central Lancashire


This is another successful publication from Windgather Press, adding a new and welcome addition to their series on the ‘Landscapes of Britain’. The North West has received far more limited attention than other regions of the country within academic writing and publications, despite archaeological discoveries in the last two decades that are suggestive of a locality with a remarkably distinctive archaeology from prehistory through to the medieval and late medieval periods. As with many regional studies, it is quickly apparent from Nick Higham’s book that the varied topography, landscape and natural geography of the region have played a crucial part in moulding the settlement, subsistence, communication and trading patterns over time. Figure 4 offers a useful, visual account of the natural topography, demonstrating the expanse of peat moss lands that would once have served medieval communities as a resource, but equally acted as a topographic limitation to both settlement and movement. In addition, the marginality of the landscape – coastal, inundated with in-blown sands, marked by large expanses of moss and marsh, as well as the fluctuating political frontier status of the North West – make this a distinctive part of Britain: a region shaped by its relationship with the coast and Irish Sea, its role as a port and access point to the Atlantic sea-board.
The relatively recent archaeological discoveries within the North West, of prehistoric and Roman period activity and settlement such as the enclosures at Irlam, Greater Manchester and Mellor, Lancashire, have re-stimulated interest in a landscape that, not very long ago, was considered a virtual unknown – heavily wooded with limited, sparse and widely spaced settlement. This is a volume that focuses upon the medieval period. Although frequent reference is made to the pre-Norman settlement and landscape, the discussion remains a supporting aside to the main body of research which deals with medieval Cheshire and Lancashire. This is tantalizing and not wholly satisfactory – there is a sense that the pre-Roman, Roman and early medieval archaeology of the North West is to an extent related to, and responsible for, later activity, settlement and organization, whether ecclesiastical or secular. The relationship, for example, between the surviving -eccles- place-names and a putative surviving British church are acknowledged but not explored. Of relevance here are the finds of Roman grave slabs at Eccleston, up-river from Chester and close by the remarkable excavations at Heronbridge (an extensive late Roman settlement and industrial complex extra-mural to the small Roman town of Chester). In addition, the slowly emerging and yet convincing evidence of long-term settlement traditions and strong population continuity in the North West could have been explored more fully in relation to the possible late survival of British Christianity. Excavated sites such as Irby on the Wirral suggest continuous occupation at farms and settlements lasting from the late Iron Age and Romano-British periods through to the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. By Domesday, Higham describes the North West as a sparsely populated and heavily wooded region, with large parishes reflecting a low density of inhabitation. The communities of an earlier era seem to have been equally as bounded by topography and woodland, leading perhaps to a continuity of settlement at particular foci over time and precisely the type of populated landscape and environment that might result in long-lived religious beliefs, in this instance Christian traditions and a surviving British identity.

Higham argues for a major change across the Conquest, with marked increases in population and obvious settlement
growth, both changing the previously widely dispersed settlement pattern. The discussion of the medieval agrarian landscape is particularly informative and illustrated with many useful visuals. The author suggests that by 1300, cultivation was pushing into the more marginal aspects of the landscape such as the moss lands, whilst the discussion of Liverpool – demonstrating the substantial re-organisation of land into extensive open fields – shows how such land organisation survived until a relatively high point of industrialisation in the eighteenth century.

There is much detail within chapters 3-7 for those wishing both to understand the development of the North West landscape and to read the changes within it. The discussion of regional styles of building technique using a range of surviving structures is useful, highlighting as it does, the persistent and conservative tradition of timber building construction existing locally into the late medieval period (page 155). As a native of Cheshire, the moated sites of the North West have always intrigued me as an under-exploited resource. Their ubiquity, for example within the hinterland of Chester, and on occasion their apparent multiplicity within individual parishes (Bruera has at least two relatively unexplored moated sites), hints strongly at their use by the gentry as a means of establishing status and identity within the county. They are a monument type generally and collectively considered to be constructed within the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Nick Higham stresses the great difficulties with the dating and chronology of these monument types, but the remarkable radiocarbon dates from Timperley Old Hall indicating pre-Norman, Anglo-Saxon activity deserve to raise the question of whether this monument type deserves more extensive archaeological investigation. Although the moats are not artefact rich, much could be learned from a campaign of field survey and excavation of both proper chronologies and evidence of timber building construction techniques and building function. Higham points to both the regional variation in the adoption and use of this settlement type, and the often waterlogged conditions allowing timbers and thus timber building plans to survive.

The discussion of boroughs, markets and fairs is focussed quite heavily on Chester, although the roles of smaller towns and wiches are considered. There is an absence of discussion of Meols,
which although mentioned briefly on page 165, is then discounted because of the limited knowledge of the site and the recovery of finds in the nineteenth century in less than satisfactory archaeological conditions. Meols has now been the subject of extensive research by David Griffiths, Rob Philpot and Geoff Egan and the artefactual profile offers evidence for precisely the type of proto-urban site, with a late prehistoric origin, functioning throughout the Roman and medieval periods as a beach market or trading site, that Higham discounts as non-existent in the region. The report on Meols has, of course, just been published and so the full findings were not at the author’s disposal; however, for readers interested in the trade and exchange networks and marketing from the early medieval and later periods, the report offers much new evidence and re-interpretation. There is also limited discussion of the role of some of the Dee-side settlements along the Wirral shoreline as small ports or quaysides. The discussion concentrates on Chester, emphasising its nodal importance as a port of consequence connecting the North West with the Irish Sea. The silting of the Dee over the second millennium resulted, however, in the gradual shift of the navigable and accessible shorelines changing and transforming the significance and functions of smaller settlements such as Shotwick, Burton and Neston. Again, too little of the foreshore archaeology along these parishes – now remarkably fossilized within pasture – has been mapped or explored.

In the final chapter, the author examines the ecclesiastical landscape of the North West. Here he acknowledges the apparent continuity of belief and the British church beyond the late Roman period, but argues for a major change across the Conquest. More discussion of the value and significance of some of the early Christian sculpture would have been welcome here – not least in its demonstration of a series of early ecclesiastical foci set within large and extensive parishes which would have supported the author’s assertions (see, for example, Neston and West Kirby). Some discussion or acknowledgement, too, of the apparent early Christian site on Hilbre Island and its potential connection or pairing with the church site at West Kirby (which like Heysham has a hogback indicating continuity into the Viking Age) would
have offered further support for the analogies made with Holy Island or Whitby.

These comments are somewhat unfair, of course — there is at least another book to be written on the early medieval North West and one more on the long-term settlement pattern and change in the region from prehistory through to the medieval period. The first millennium A.D. is used here by Nick Higham to set the background for a more detailed account of the post-Norman scene and his coverage is thus brief and forms only a basis for a more extended and detailed discussion of the medieval landscape. The main chapters are informative, well-referenced and offer much to students of both the North West and medieval settlement research. This is, in addition, a well illustrated account, with 77 illustrations and a centre-fold of 12 colour plates. The text is substantial and wide-ranging and the bibliography comprehensive. The volume is a welcome addition to published research on the North West and provides an informative and stimulating read.

Sarah Semple, University of Durham


A Cornucopia of Captivating Conviviality, packed with song and dance, novelty acts, special guest turns, side-splitting banter and audience participation, for your sincere unmitigated enjoyment and delight…

My father seems to have spent most of his pre-war years as a patron of ‘the Palace’ at Preston; David Hindle’s copiously illustrated and highly readable account of the emergence of the music hall in Preston begins to explain why. Retiring from the police service in 1992, the author has made an important, if varied, contribution to local studies. A lifelong conservationist and ornithologist, he is in addition the author of Grimsargh: The story of a Lancashire village (2002), and this volume follows his earlier Twice
nightly: An illustrated history of entertainment in Preston. This breadth is at once apparent in a short book that combines historical analysis with popular presentation, in which a wide range of readers will find much to interest and inform. It is perhaps significant that both Betty Driver and Sir Tommy Finney provided prefaces.

A preamble sketching the social development of nineteenth-century Preston is followed by a brief historiography identifying the deeper issues ‘for our complete edification’ seemingly underlying our social pleasures. Charles Dickens soon makes his appearance (quite rightly, since these performances were real highlights in the town’s social calendar), but the familiar if depressing link of Preston and Coketown is perhaps less than complete. On his fact-finding visit, the great man could only despair, ‘I shall get nothing here!’ – we all know that feeling. Similarly, Shakespeare’s links with the town of the North End is yet still some way from being widely accepted.

These warm-up acts over, the reader is soon plunged into a detailed (and it must be said, delightful) analysis of the development of the Victorian and Edwardian music hall tradition in a respectability-obsessed Lancashire town. The reader is transported from the rowdy (but one suspects interesting) beer shop singalongs in smoky back rooms to the sophistication of the purpose-built theatre-halls which had emerged in Preston by 1914. The transition of the King’s Palace ‘from ugly duckling to beautiful swan’ is taken and explored as one case in point.

The colourful overtones of a popular style of presentation, freely interspersed with personal observations, should not detract from a very solid historical analysis built upon extensive newspaper sources. Mr Hindle’s grasp of this material is impressive and he demonstrates once again just how significant these sources can still be. The increasing availability of our local newspapers on the Lancashire libraries web-site is a real marvel to those of us who have for so long chipped away at the fragmenting volumes of crystallising pulp. Concentrating on the formative period, this study is an expanded and more strongly focussed account than that given in Twice nightly, though there are occasional areas of overlap.

The selection of illustrations is worthy of mention in its own right. In addition to the usual press cuttings and theatre plans,
the book boasts a creditable selection of theatre bills, song book covers ("It's a bit of a ruin that Cromwell knocked about a bit", sung by Miss Marie Lloyd) and a selection of nine of Edwin Beattie’s celebrated Preston watercolours. Among a workmanlike collection of contemporary photographs, the author treats us – Joseph Livesey would think shockingly – to the line of ‘dancing girls’ at the Preston Hippodrome in the thirties.

Perhaps here at last is the explanation of why my father and thousands of others spent so many of their early years in the palaces of Preston!

David Hunt, Leyland


Janet Hollinshead has written a superb short book about Tudor Liverpool, which will appeal not only to those with an interest in the city, but to urban historians in general and also to teachers. Its relative brevity is not a cause for regret, but rather part of a successful strategy that makes its contents accessible at many levels and which most local histories could learn from. The excellent illustrations, which include colour photographs, line drawings of vanished scenes and very clear maps, are an essential part of the mix, and the publishers deserve high praise for including so many. Indeed, it is produced well in every respect and the price makes it affordable. The author is deeply familiar with the sources and the connection with reality that that brings is confirmed with reproductions of documents, as well as frequent citations of detailed evidence.

Another cause for praise is that it determinedly focuses on Liverpool as it was then, rather than seeing it as a stage in a growth curve leading more or less inevitably to the highpoint in 1900 or so, and essentially writing about the history that it ought to have had. The sub-title is the key to the importance of this: Hollinshead repeatedly stresses that it was a town in miniature and also makes clear that while the sixteenth century did see some changes, there
was little or no growth. In 1600, as in 1500, it was a collection of seven streets with a population of only around 500 people, a chapel of ease, a tidal creek that gave it a harbour, a ruinous castle, a royal charter that allowed a few civic institutions to function, two members of parliament, but very little else to provide substance to this apparently impressive facade. As a result, the local gentry and aristocracy played a dominant role in its affairs, especially in determining the M.P.s sent to London, normally without reference to local interests. A virtue of its dwarf character is, of course, that the intimacy of Hollinshead’s approach is possible without interfering with the bigger picture – the merchant community was always only a handful of individuals, for instance.

The seven streets actually produced only an H plan; trade was tiny and based around a small fleet of small ships and mostly restricted itself to the Irish Sea. There were experimental contacts with more distant destinations, but they largely withered after slight initial success, though an appendix listing slave ships based in the port shows one trade which would later grow exponentially and bring a kind of fame many would gladly do without. Its only obvious lasting gain by 1600 was independence of Chester for customs purposes and a near monopoly on the handling of the military traffic to and from Ireland, a function shown to be not without its problems for so small a place. If the Mersey had silted hopelessly by 1620, or some catastrophe had overwhelmed the small settlement, no-one would now be looking back mourning the missed opportunities of later years.

At this stage, to think that Liverpool would challenge London as a port and surpass it in some respects, would have been beyond hubris. It is refreshing to find a local study willing to relish such humble pie by seeing it as an opportunity. For the historian, the existence of the town’s ancient charter marks it off from most important nineteenth-century northern boroughs and the fact that it functioned after a fashion throughout its existence is much rarer than that. Combine that with its tiny size and the existence of town books detailing its administration is almost miraculous. Its civic institutions mostly dealt with very parochial concerns, often in a very direct way, such as calling out all available people to work on repairing the harbour after a bad storm. That they could function at all is a wonder and seems to be due to the nature of being a
port, with the range of formalities that had to surround such trading activities.

The honesty of the book does not belittle the achievement of later years, but makes it all the more remarkable. The historian cannot fit this into a typical story of urban growth, but must seek special reasons why it was both possible and achieved. That is a major contribution to recognising the most remarkable aspect of northern urban history, its lack of solid foundations as late as 1600. The urban initiatives of the late medieval period had proved feeble in the extreme, mostly more feeble than Liverpool in fact, and very few would ever play much part in turning the north into one of the most densely populated areas of the world. No other part of Europe has a similar story of radical rebirth, yet the urge to fit into existing models leads all too often to selective blindness in the face of a story historians of many northern towns ought to relish.

The chapters are organised to form a systematic and thorough survey of the town’s social and economic history, subdivided in places for extra clarity. This is what will make it so useful for teaching purposes on urban history courses, whether Liverpool itself is seen as significant or not. The only lack I can really identify is a chapter making explicit its place in the north-western urban hierarchy, such as it was, and more particularly, its relations with rival ports. Chester is mentioned regularly, but mostly in passing, so even here a more organised account would be beneficial. Warrington gets only six brief references, whereas Foster has asserted that it actually was the landing place of the majority of cargoes dealt with by the Liverpool-based customs officers in the seventeenth century. As long as ships could reach it up the Mersey this is not surprising given its vastly superior natural communications, especially to the south. As the lowest crossing point of a major river, it is the classic location of a formidable rival to a creek near an estuary mouth. In addition, the intricacy of the Irish Sea as a trading area before 1800 is becoming ever clearer, with a multitude of small, rival ports that quite suddenly coalesced into an organised system of coastal traffic feeding the dominance of Liverpool as an entrepot. This was achieved partly through the rapid migration of merchants and foreign trade to the Mersey,
which itself helps to explain the apparent explosion of growth in Liverpool.

There is thus only one possible conclusion to this review – go and buy it if you have any interest in the North West in this period or in the foundations of its later growth.

*Steve Caunce*, University of Central Lancashire


Life for the Preston millworker throughout the nineteenth century was notoriously difficult. Child labour, a cavalier attitude towards factory machinery, appalling housing and sanitary conditions, cyclical unemployment and perpetual struggles against wage cuts blighted the lives of the operative class. Yet despite the misery and exploitation, the Preston millworkers refused to be beaten. J.S. Leigh’s new history investigates the lives and struggles of the Preston mill hands, from the origins of the town’s cotton industry to the cotton famine of the early 1860s. The author’s obvious pride in his native town and for his resilient ancestors is evident throughout and it is here where the strength of the book lies. While placing events in Preston within a broader regional context, Leigh tells the story from the perspective of the Preston factory hand, at times breaking up the narrative with stories of local figures like Andrew Rydding, a member of a clandestine spinners’ committee, who was unfairly dismissed and later in a fit of madness exacted his revenge on his former employer (page 21). Leigh’s extensive local knowledge is demonstrated by the inclusion of bracketed descriptions informing the reader of what building stands on a specific site today. Such pointers, combined with the carefully chosen illustrations, allow the reader to take an imaginative leap into the lost urban, industrial landscape of nineteenth-century Preston.

While academic historians have investigated the Preston ‘ten percent’ strike of 1853-54 (see H. Dutton and J. King, *Ten percent and no surrender*, 1981) and the impact of the cotton famine on
the Lancashire textile trade, Leigh’s long chronology and focus on a single town gives this book enduring value. The story concludes with the American civil war and the blockade on cotton from Southern ports. The subsequent cotton famine (1861-65) and the widespread distress in the cotton manufacturing areas focused the nation’s attention on Preston and the saintly stoicism of its millworkers. The contemporary view, confirmed by tributes from Abraham Lincoln and William Ewart Gladstone, lauded the Lancashire mill hands for their principled opposition, despite immense suffering, to slave-produced cotton. Yet as Leigh convincingly argues at the close of the book, the truth was more complex. In reality, the sympathy of many Preston operatives lay with the South and it is plausible that the Preston cotton workers felt that their own oppression was akin to that of the African slave. For Leigh, Preston’s role in the cotton famine was primarily another episode in a long tradition of industrial and political struggle.

Not only does Leigh cast doubt on the Lancashire operatives’ selfless devotion to the emancipation of the plantation slave, he is careful not to sentimentalise the past. The disastrous consequences of factory labour and the impact of near starvation conditions on the health of workers are relayed with unflinching detail. Today’s reader, like nineteenth-century contemporaries, will be shocked by the accounts of deformities and injuries suffered by the factory hands (page 27). The only thing which mars this work is the lack of an index and an occasionally careless bibliography which omits several publication dates. But this is a minor aside for what is an excellent, painstakingly researched local history. Leigh brings to life the stories of working people who strove for something better and does indeed do justice to the thousands of millworkers ‘whose memories were never written down’.

Janette Martin, Universities of Leeds and York

This volume is a translation of Alice Cooke’s Latin transcription of the Whalley Act Book published by the Chetham Society in 1901. It maintains the society’s tradition of publishing scholarly works, texts and calendars of relevance to the historic counties of Lancashire and Cheshire. The team involved in this translation were former students of John Harrop and Paul Booth’s ‘Latin for Local History’ course at Liverpool University; the project began there and is the culmination of eight years’ work. The original transcription was checked and the editors are satisfied with its quality; the translation itself is described as ‘fairly literal’ although place names have been modernised. The English text found in the original has not been modernised. No comment is offered here on the quality of the translation or transcription.

The period covered by the Act Book (1510-37) is one of considerable interest best illustrated by the absence of sessions between 18 September 1536 (just days before the Pilgrimage of Grace) and 3 October 1537 (by which time the Duke of Norfolk had subdued the commons). The final three (of a total of 82) sessions were held by royal authority after the abbey’s dissolution. Any signs of failing monastic authority are not reflected in the way the cases are handled. The various officiating ‘commissaries’ arbitrated, doled out justice, ensured the intents of wills were followed and generally safeguarded spiritual well-being. The relationship between northerners and the monastic was uniquely symbiotic and herein lies the true value of this important publication.

The Act Book records the concerns, behaviours and misdemeanours of ordinary people living in the impoverished forest areas of east Lancashire. For many, the church courts were a source of accessible, low cost justice otherwise denied them and, such was the trusting relationship between judge and judged, that decisions around unpopular demands such as tithes or church maintenance were grudgingly accepted. In only one case (page 193)
was payment of a tithe refused. Church fabric became decrepit but the intent to repair was present, even though action did not necessarily follow.

The majority of the cases concern illicit sexual activity of one form or another. A disproportionate number of these were in Pendle, but it cannot be discerned whether this is due to higher levels of immorality or a greater propensity to report such activity. Cases were heard, penances set and performed and spiritual welfare maintained. In general, these were effective mechanisms of social control and repeat offending was unusual.

The commissaries sometimes demonstrated acts of startling pragmatism. For example, Henry Hertley imported 20 packhorse loads of oats from Craven (West Riding of Yorkshire) on a Sunday. Others who worked on a Sunday were commanded to recite the full rosary, but Henry was told to carry two packhorse loads of slate stones to Downham church. At the same session, some day-labourers who had been ploughing Robert Varley’s land during Easter week, two of whom had a cart and another a horse, were also told to carry slate to Downham church (page 87). The skills and resources of Henry Hertley and the day-labourers were utilised and Downham church got the materials for its new roof.

There is often a rewarding amount of detail. The case of John and Agnes Bulock (1514) is one such case. Agnes (nee Hoghton) had been married to John Bulcock against her will. Agnes wanted a divorce and cited cruelty as the grounds. She refused to consummate the marriage and was beaten, forcing her to flee to Yorkshire. After a few difficult hearings, Agnes was sent to a ‘safe place to live and dwell with Nicholas Robynson’. The final outcome is not recorded. During the case, however, Agnes produced evidence of the great pressure her uncle and his friends exerted on her. One witness admitted he was very intimidating but when he saw how upset Agnes was, he pulled away and removed himself from the whole affair. Agnes’s friend Katherine recalls her saying, ‘Alas, Kateryne, I am undone, For myne Frendes wole nedes compel me to have John Bulcok, and by myne trouth I had lever dy then have hym, For I never loved hym ne never wyl do. And so I pray you ber me record hirafter, For I wol never tary with hym when I am wedded’ (pages 59-72).
There is a wealth of testamentary evidence for the period that suggests young women had little say in their choice of marriage partner. In the humblest of families, the wishes of the parents or guardian were influential and usually prevailed. Yet Agnes, a young woman, almost certainly illiterate and from a family that was at best of the middling sort, entertained notions of romantic love. Her expectations of marriage included emotional warmth, sentiment, affection, perhaps even passion and the intimacy associated with these feelings. These higher level emotions are often subjugated to the harsh realities of life and it would be interesting to discover where Agnes’s beliefs originated. Was ‘love’ a topic of conversation among the young women in these sparsely populated areas? Were Arthurian tales disseminated around a fire’s dying embers at night? Had Agnes associated with some noble family who had the security and time to indulge their romantic fantasies? Almost every page of *Life, love and death in north-east Lancashire* has some incident that feeds the reader’s imagination and invites speculation of this sort.

The editors have presented the volume well. The reader is always aware that these are the real voices of real people. The footnotes are aimed firmly at the experienced but are neither alienating to the novice nor patronising to the practised scholar. Nigel Tringham has provided a useful introduction to early sixteenth-century church courts (pages 1-7). John Swain has supplied a comprehensive and very informative introduction to the economic and social background to the Act Book (pages 9-38), no doubt utilising research for his own work, *Industry before the Industrial Revolution* (Chetham Society, 1986), to which he has added a section entitled ‘Society in the Act Book’, which is a scholarly analysis of the scale and scope of the cases with appropriate explanation and contextual interpretation.

Appendices consist of an undated session of the court, a useful list of the courts and visitations, a ‘draft proxy’ of no relevance to the Act Book but present in the original and a similarly incongruous deed, the will of James Shackleton (1537) and a memorial to Alice Cooke who transcribed and edited the original Latin manuscripts.

This sort of material is under-represented among the texts available to social historians of the later medieval and early modern
period. The book will be of considerable value to students of the period and those interested in the history (and decline) of the church courts. It is a must for all dedicated local historians and should adorn the bookshelves of family historians.

Roy Price, University of Central Lancashire


This book is an excellent £5-worth and packs a lot of detailed information into a small space. Anybody who is interested in the rise of the port of Liverpool, British urban history or the Industrial Revolution in its widest sense should have a copy.

Despite the damage caused by bombing during World War II and the often mediocre rebuilding that followed, the impression made on the visitor by the architecture of its Victorian and Edwardian heyday is still so overwhelming that the townscape of Liverpool can seem to belong to a single historical period. The earlier story of the city’s rise at the expense of Chester, and its links with its hinterlands of Cheshire and south Lancashire on the one hand and with Africa and America on the other, are familiar enough in outline. However, despite numerous documentary studies, there has been a shortage of concise, popular works that show the accompanying evolution of its topography and make clear the links with the growth of its trade and prosperity.

Drawing on a variety of sources of information, the present book does just that. The core of the work consists of a series of specially drawn maps showing the street plan at different periods (1207-1539, 1540-1659, 1660-1713 and 1714-70) and the positions of known contemporary buildings, accompanied by gazetteers giving more detailed information. This section is preceded by an introduction to the city’s history, ordered chronologically and then by topic. There is also a selection of historical maps, topographical paintings and photographs of recent archaeological excavations.
The original H-shaped layout of the medieval town (Chapel Street, Tithebarn Street, Water Street, Dale Street, Oldhall Street, High Street and Castle Street) survived largely unaltered until the later seventeenth century. Thereafter, there was rapid expansion eastwards: first south of the castle to the Pool and also east of the former, with the laying out of Lord Street and the reclamation of land at the head of the Pool; then with the building of the Wet Dock (overlain by the present Canning Place) and the laying out of Paradise Street–Frog Lane/Whitechapel through the reclaimed land, leading to the creation of much of the street plan that we are familiar with today.

Also of interest to urban historians familiar with Weber’s antithesis of classical ‘consumer’ and medieval and later ‘producer’ cities is the rapid rise of pottery and glass manufacture in Liverpool in the early eighteenth century and its equally rapid disappearance by the end of that century in the face of competition from other, more specialised production centres. Students of Roman cities take note!

A few things could have been done better. Bibliographical references in the text could have been given using the Harvard (author-date) system or with superscript numbers referring to footnotes; the regularly sized numbers in parentheses referring to endnotes are distracting. By contrast, numbers in the text cross-referring to gazetteer entries would have been useful, as would clear indication of the few surviving pre-nineteenth-century monuments. Some of the historical maps could also have been printed closer to the relevant text, again with appropriate references. If there are detailed errors of fact in the text, the present reviewer must leave it to others to point them out.

The first edition of this book was published in 1982, albeit with a narrower chronological scope (1207-1727). Archaeological excavation, extremely rare at that time, has subsequently taken place at an increasing pace and has increased awareness of the city’s past form; this, together with the award of the Capital of Culture 2008 title, has clearly motivated the production of the new edition.

Thanks to this book, the next time we walk around Liverpool it will be easier to see another dimension to the city. The
Merseyside Archaeological Society is to be congratulated on a useful production.

Peter Carrington, Chester Archaeology Service


This is a spirited little book. I read it at a single sitting, with much enjoyment, and I also learned from it. It is not a systematic piece of academic analysis – the author is a novelist, poet and literary biographer – and there is an air of randomness about the organisation and references that suggests a research method mainly fuelled by profitable accumulation from second-hand bookshops, helped out from time to time by reading in libraries as well as by conversation and personal reflection. There are no footnotes, but a selective and sometimes eccentric bibliography is provided.

The main themes of the book involve identities and representations: what it is to be a Scouser and the ways in which Liverpool and its inhabitants have been depicted, mainly in writing, since the early eighteenth century. The chapters seem to be assembled in no particular order and shift direction disconcertingly in midstream, as when an extended reminiscence about Southport’s sea bathing lake gives way to some reflections on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s experiences of Merseyside and a discussion on the architecture of St George’s Hall and the Albert Dock. The ground covered includes discussion of the slave trade, Liverpool’s ‘invisible’ ethnic minorities (including the Welsh and Irish but not the Scots or Manx), labour disputes, poverty and opinions about its causes, slums, humour, the impact of casual labour and unemployment and the ‘heritage industry’, including the World Heritage Site and Capital of Culture designations. The author’s views are sometimes open to challenge: he probably gives too much weight to the economic influence of the slave trade, for example, although he finds some eloquent passages to quote in support of his views, and he is certainly too optimistic about
Liverpool’s current respect for its historic built environment, while showing suitable cynicism about retail therapy as panacea.

The most valuable aspect of the book is the range of voices and perceptions to which it introduces the reader. Some, like Defoe, Fiennes or Hawthorne, are predictable and their texts well-thumbed; others, such as James Hanley and George Garrett, are well worth resurrecting. But the book would certainly have gained from wider readings among the historians of Liverpool, especially the recent ones, as brought together in John Belchem’s Liverpool 800. It is staggering that Belchem’s work over the last decade has escaped Murray’s attention, especially when we consider that he devotes a chapter to ‘Scouse’ language and identity and so many of his themes are explorations of what Belchem has called ‘Merseypride’. This is only the most arresting of several gaping holes in the bibliography. The book does perhaps try to have its cake and eat it, seeking a measure of academic respectability while opting out of academic rigour. But it certainly repays, and rewards, the modest effort involved in reading it.

John K. Walton,
Institute of Northern Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University


It might, at first sight, appear contradictory to consider a local history of science; surely one of the defining features of science is that it is of universal applicability. Yet, all science has to be carried out somewhere and the nature of that somewhere could have a bearing on the science that is done there. These issues underlay this special edition of the journal, suggestively discussed in the opening contextual article by the editor. Pickstone offers a masterly overview of the development of science in the Manchester region, indicating two different aspects to the issue – the contribution of scientists who happened to be in Manchester to scientific and technological understanding, and the extent to which it was Manchester itself that helped to define the science
that was done there. It is not brought out quite so explicitly, but the indication is that the former aspect predominated in the early modern period whereas in the heyday of its role as the centre of industrialisation, the nature of the city did very much influence the science done there. By the early twentieth century, however, as the industrial north began a long and painful decline, so did scientific eminence fade and knowledge become more internationalised, albeit contributed to by Manchester-based luminaries.

A diverse range of articles pick up on these themes, covering a wide time span and set of topics, and dealing with scientific discoveries, technological innovations, the political role of scientists and some of the ways in which science and technology is communicated to the general public. In a rough chronological order, Allan Chapman begins with a study of the network of seventeenth-century astronomers located in Lancashire and West Yorkshire who made fundamentally important observations on the transit of Venus, recently celebrated at the last incident of the phenomenon in 2004. Moving on to the early nineteenth century and high industrialisation, Richard Hills of the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry offers an account of the numerous innovations made by the leading Manchester engineer Richard Roberts. Two central articles take on the question of local and national science. Graeme Gooday considers the work of several Manchester physicists who contributed to the developing science of meteorology. Joseph Baxendale was appointed as astronomer to the Manchester corporation in 1859 to establish Greenwich Mean Time for Manchester before the advent of the telegraph and used his position to study meteorological phenomena. His work was taken up by Balfour Stewart at Owens College to help in weather forecasting and then developed into a more academic study of atmospheric conditions by his colleague Arthur Schuster. This article offers a model of how local, amateur investigations were gradually superseded by academic science of international applicability. A similar tale is recounted by Tim Cooper's study of how research work at Metropolitan-Vickers' Trafford site acquired a tradition of pure physics research during the inter-war period.

A contrasting discussion by Mary Jo Nye looks at the rival positions taken by eminent Manchester-based scientists, Michael
Polanyi and Peter Blackett, on the social and political responsibilities of science. This theme of the wider public significance of science continues in the final few articles, focussed on the public representation of science. In a sequence of vignettes, Sam Alberti discusses the collection, analysis and display of scientific objects – a snail shell, two mummies and a piece of moon rock – from the mid nineteenth to late twentieth centuries, bringing out the increasing emphasis on professionally-controlled science and also the way in which the objects were defined and altered by the study and scrutiny to which they were subjected. Finally, a review of a new exhibition at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry brings us back to the original issues. Francis Neary is not entirely complimentary, suggesting that the contribution by scientists based in Manchester to major scientific discoveries is brought out quite well. This is not the same, however, as considering the extent to which Manchester made a difference to the kind, or even the nature, of the science and technology that was being done there. The articles in this volume range across both themes, but it would have been interesting to have brought out and analysed the differences between these two things more fully and more explicitly.

Keith Vernon, University of Central Lancashire


*Liverpool and transatlantic slavery* is a collection of ten original essays first presented at an international conference held at the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool, in October 2005. As the editors point out, the inspiration for this volume was the 1976 publication of *Liverpool, the African slave trade, and abolition*, edited by Roger Anstey and Paul Hair, also based on an earlier conference and concerned primarily with the role of Liverpool in the slave trade. (Although not at the conference, I was added as co-author with Herbert S. Klein for one of the papers.) These essays helped to define a number of key issues in the then emerging study of
slavery and the slave trade and even 30 years later several remain frequently cited. The current volume represents an excellent tribute to the earlier book and provides an excellent set of studies on topics related to Liverpool, the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in Africa and the Americas. As the editors note, there are two methodological principles that go beyond the earlier book, a greater reliance on quantitative methods (there are 37 tables and 4 figures) and computer datasets (particularly the transatlantic slave trade database) and more attention to the ‘cultural and human context’ of the enslavers and the enslaved.

The editors’ introduction divides the papers into two groups. The first five relate to ‘the organization and efficiency of the Liverpool slave trade’ and the second five deal with ‘the human and social outcomes of the slave trade, including opposition to it’ (page 4). They conclude their brief summary of each essay by stating, accurately, that various new data sources are drawn upon, that the role of human agency is featured and, more generally, that all fit into the developing trends in the historiography of the slave trade.

The development of Liverpool’s domination of the British slave trade from 1740 to 1807 is analyzed by Kenneth Morgan, who focuses on the locational advantages, including defence, the industrial developments of their hinterlands and also the flexibility of its businesses in dealing with African and American ports. Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson (one of the three co-editors) deal with what they describe as African agency, here mainly the role of Africans as sellers in the slave trade. They point out that ‘the supply of captives, for sale to European carriers remained essentially under African control’ (page 50), and it is important to examine the nature of credit provision to Africans and commercial relations. Little is said, however, about prices, terms of trade and the question of what happened to the goods flowing into Africa. Steven Behrendt uses the slave trade dataset, in conjunction with muster rolls, to examine various questions about the nature of the slave traders’ crew, including where they were from (most were from the local area) and monthly wages (higher than elsewhere). Using the basic slave trade dataset plus Naval Office records, Lorena Walsh examines the limited slave trade from English ports of origin to the Chesapeake, with Liverpool slavers being a
relatively minor contributor, but also involved with some trade in other communities. Unlike the slave trade with the West Indies, this trade was ended by colonial legislation just prior to the American Revolution. The final paper of the first group, by Melinda Elder, is an examination of the relation of Liverpool with Lancaster and other areas of the hinterland. Discussion includes labour migration to work in the slave trade, the ownership of slave ships and the outfitting of these vessels.

In a detailed analysis of quantitative data to answer a major cultural issue, the origins of slave culture, Trevor Burnard utilizes the slave trade dataset, the records of the Royal African Company and his own new sample of probate inventories from Jamaica to examine the ethnicity of slave imports. In a different conclusion from other recent studies, he argues that ‘randomization’ of slave imports meant that the ownership pattern was somewhat dispersed, meaning a need to recreate a ‘culture’ by slaves with diverse backgrounds. In the longest essay, David Pope prepared a dataset on Liverpool slave merchants to discuss their backgrounds, the value of their estates and, with other local sources, examines how profitable was the slave trade and what the investors did with their money. The basic sample is of 201 merchants in the period 1750-99. He concludes that most come from a middling background and that being in the slave trade did not guarantee wealth. There are interesting studies of marriage patterns and occupational choice, but his careful conclusion is that ‘clearly, wealth was acquired through investment in the slave trade, although with a few exceptions not to an extraordinary degree, as is implied by Eric Williams’ (page 186). Pope also points to the diversity of financial interests by Liverpool investors. The extent of Liverpool’s involvement with the slave trade and other forms of commercial and manufacturing activity is surveyed by Jane Longmore, using various local records. She argues that ‘it is undeniable that the slave trade was an important part of the economic life of the late eighteenth-century port’, although ‘it is clear that the slave trade was far from being the only source of commercial profit in Liverpool’ (page 231). She further contends that the ‘impact of the slave trade may have been far greater on less affluent citizens’ (page 236), some whom may have lacked the flexibility to move into alternative commercial ventures.
In the one essay with a relatively small Liverpool component, Suzanne Schwarz (the second of the co-editors, Anthony Tibbles being the third) studies the background to the origins of the Sierra Leone Company in 1791 and details the mixture of economic, religious, humanitarian and ideological motives. Her basic sources, the company reports and the journals of Zachary Macauley, are used to detail, in particular, the expectations of abolitionists for the contribution of the colony. Brian Howman concludes the volume by describing the role of abolitionism in Liverpool, clearly an unpopular minority position, although he claims 'the support for abolitionism in Liverpool has been largely underestimated' (page 293). Attention is given to William Roscoe, Edward Rushton and two women poets, Eliza Knipe and Mary Birkett.

Overall this is an extremely successful volume, with strong and informative articles. They present much new data analysis and draw heavily upon a variety of archival sources. The editors have clearly provided readers with an excellent scholarly sequel to the 30-year-old volume published by Anstey and Hair.

Stanley L. Engerman, University of Rochester


One of the most interesting developments in the historiography of the British involvement with slavery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been a linking of transatlantic slavery – where the British were perpetrators – with enslavement on the Barbary coast – where the British were often victims. The extent of Mediterranean captivity was considerable, equalling the Atlantic slave trade until the middle of the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, the numbers of Africans shipped across the Atlantic far surpassed those European captives sent into enslavement in North Africa, but the latter form of slavery was not minimal. Perhaps 1,250,000 Christian European captives
languished in captivity on the Barbary Coast between 1530 and 1780.

Some of these captives, as Linda Colley has told us in *Captives* and in *The ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*, were British. Their experience meant that they had an intimate involvement with the institution of slavery, not as slavers but as enslaved people. But, in an exquisite historical irony, that experience did not make them sympathetic to the ordeals of other unfortunates pressed into slavery but encouraged them to use their intimacy with North African slavery to develop more aggressive forms of enslavement in the New World. The British were outraged if they were made slaves because they felt that such things should not happen to free-born Protestants. But slavery was a perfectly acceptable condition for non-whites and non-Christians. Consequently, they did not draw the lessons from their observations of the horrors of white Christian enslavement on the Barbary Coast that come automatically to modern observers. Britons being enslaved by the dreadful Turks was a horrific crime; Britons enslaving Africans and transporting them in terrible conditions to the Americas was a valuable addition to burgeoning transatlantic commerce, with the people involved in this commerce worthwhile citizens.

Given the nature of seafaring and maritime commerce in the eighteenth century, it is inevitable that some of those people involved in the transatlantic slave trade might get caught up in captivity in North Africa. One such person was Captain James Irving, a Scotsman who sought (and made) his fortune as a surgeon on slave ships sailing out of Liverpool in the 1780s and 1790s. In May 1789, he was shipwrecked on the coast of Morocco, seized and put into captivity, of a milder kind than that experienced by the African slaves he cared for on slave ships, for eighteen months. Fortunately for posterity, Irving kept a journal of his ordeal. In addition, we have records of 40 letters relating to him and his younger cousin and namesake detailing his career in the transatlantic slave trade between 1786 and 1791.

Suzanne Schwarz presents these letters and Irving’s account of his shipwreck and enslavement, in a carefully edited volume, along with an extensive and first rate commentary on Irving’s career. This is the second edition of Irving’s diary and correspondence. It is much revised, containing significant new
material, notably an original and expanded version of Irving’s captivity journal. Schwarz has also made effective and extensive use of the transatlantic slave trade data base to fill out details about the slave ship journeys in which Irving participated. The result is an exemplary edition that will be useful for scholars, students and, not least, for people interested in the history of Liverpool and its interactions with the wider world.

What is especially interesting is the dissonance in the correspondence and the journal between Irving’s startlingly indifferent attitudes to the Africans under his care in his multiple voyages from Africa to the Caribbean and his self-pitying laments for his own condition as a slave in what he considered was a brutal, uncivilised and barbarous system of slavery. He was relatively unconcerned when on a voyage on the *Jane* in 1787, 48 slaves died, announcing to his wife that ‘We have been all healthy and buried 48 slaves’ (page 85). The seamless transition between ‘us’ healthy people and ‘them’ dead slaves shows how much Irving had internalised the common British belief, evident as early as the seventeenth century and more and more apparent during the eighteenth century, that Africans were not people whose rights or feelings need to be considered. In a revealing phrase, written on shore in Tobago, Irving described Africans as ‘black cattle’. As Schwarz comments, the use of this phrase ‘powerfully conveys the way individual Africans were dehumanised and treated as objects or commodities for exchange’ (page 71). Conversely, Britons did not deserve bad treatment because they were peculiarly devoted to liberty. Indeed, the lesson Irving seems to have learned from his ‘affliction’ as a slave in North Africa was to reinforce his assumptions about European superiority and African inferiority. Given his racist predispositions, it is unsurprising that he failed to see any connection between the torments he had gone through in Morocco and the much greater and more permanent horrors that were inflicted on the slaves he carried to Tobago and elsewhere.

The problem for Irving and other Liverpool residents involved in the slave trade is that other Britons were beginning to see links between the ordeals of Africans and the occasional travails of Europeans. By the 1780s, evangelicals were starting to expand the sympathetic understanding towards other people, heralded by David Hume in the 1750s as being a crucial element of
being human, further and further away from narrow circles of kin, friends and countrymen. Indeed, sympathetic identification might even include African slaves. But such sympathetic identification with ‘black cattle’ was impossible for many people, especially those involved in the slave trade, even if, as was the case with James Irving, they were consciously Christian. The principal value of Schwarz’s excellent edition of Irving’s work is to show how for men like Irving and for most men involved in the slave trade sympathetic identification with anyone other than Europeans was inconceivable. It was inevitable, therefore, that slave traders like Irving would find the abolitionist campaign erupting in Britain while he was languishing in Morocco incomprehensible.

Trevor Burnard, University of Warwick


Throughout the nineteenth century, Liverpool, the main English port of arrival for passengers from the New World, was the subject of comment in the journals, letters and memoirs of American visitors. Their perceptions and their often lively and colourful accounts have often been quoted by the historians of a city which has attracted more than its fair share of outside comment and which has long been acutely conscious of its image. Faced by the drama of Liverpool and its life and confronted by the combination of extreme squalor and fabulous wealth, American visitors were shocked and awed in equal measure – some were repelled, others delighted, but all were fascinated. Their vivid and pungent comments must always be treated with caution, but they contribute immeasurably to our appreciation of how this vibrant place impacted upon international awareness – and descriptions by American visitors are of special relevance since, coming from a remarkable place themselves, they were well placed to judge the exceptional aspects of Liverpool. Indeed, contrast and comparison between Liverpool and New York was a characteristic of their observations.
David Seed’s new book is an anthology of the travel writing of Americans who visited Liverpool – and sometimes stayed there – between the 1780s and the beginning of the twentieth century. As Professor of American Literature at the University of Liverpool, he is well placed to appreciate the cultural context of these writings, particularly since several of the most significant commentators were novelists themselves. The book includes examples of their work, often quoted in extenso, but also has extracts from numerous less well known diarists and travellers. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American consul in the city from 1852 to 1857, has been very widely quoted and rightly so, since his observations have an immediacy and a literary quality (he was a prolific fiction writer) which makes them excellent reading. Similarly, Herman Melville, the author of Moby Dick, not only lived in Liverpool but also wrote thinly-veiled fictional accounts of aspects of the city and its people. Both writers have chapters to themselves, but the inclusion of sources which are much more obscure adds greatly to the usefulness of the compilation.

Seed’s aim is to present the full range of travelling ‘types’, from sophisticated internationalists such as Hawthorne to quiet ladies and unostentatious newspaper editors. He divides the visitors into categories – for example, diplomats and lecturers, artists and social observers – so instead of the material being arranged chronologically, it is loosely sorted according to the interests of the writers. Perhaps the most worthwhile such grouping concerns those involved, on one side or the other, in slavery or its reform, an issue which, in a city so enmeshed not only in the slave trade before the early nineteenth century but also cotton, the emancipation debate, the American civil war and the Atlantic trade through to the First World War, was controversial and politically charged.

The intended market for the book is not entirely clear. There is an eleven-page editorial introduction, providing an overview of the subject of travellers from America, and each extract is prefaced by a brief – sometimes very brief – editorial preamble. The historical element is light of touch and editorial comment and explanation modest, so that for many of the writers there is little more than an extended chunk of text which is left to speak for itself. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, but if
such an approach is adopted, it is essential to provide an effective means to navigate around the book.

Unfortunately, no such means are made available to the reader. There is no index, no list of sources and no contents page which identifies each extract in its correct place within the book – indeed, there is not even a list of the authors who have been quoted. The contents page consists merely of ten brief chapter headings and the ‘further reading’ list at the back has 29 titles and five websites: most of the latter are only available via academic institution subscriptions and the majority of the printed works cited in the list are themselves anthologies of American travel writing. There is, therefore, no bibliography, and to identify the published sources which have been used it is necessary to look at the details given at the end of each piece of quoted text – but finding an individual piece of text requires careful searching through the relevant chapters.

This is potentially a valuable book, and it is certainly a very interesting one, but it is seriously marred by the absence of the basic technical requirements which would make it accessible and user-friendly. The material is rich and rewarding, the editorial element competent though brief, and in bringing together many different sources (some of them otherwise hard to track down) it has real worth, not least as a quarry. But the publisher, Liverpool University Press, has produced a book which fails to meet the basic technical standards we might expect of an academic work and that is to be regretted.

 Alan Crosby, Preston


Books of personal recollections are a familiar genre, with a large number of such publications each year. They vary in quality and are clearly aimed at the leisure market rather than a serious academic audience, but that does not mean that the genre is without virtue. Indeed, such books collectively form a valuable stock of unique evidence, the significance of which will only
intensify as the years progress. Collectively they form a vast store of information to be mined by those in search of evidence on the social history of families and communities.

As a Boltonian with a strong interest in the history of family and community, I was only too happy to review this book. Even though some of the chapter titles were more bemusing than informative or inviting, the book develops into a meaningful insight into family life, leisure and work in the during the period 1940-65, with events played out against a backdrop of urban and suburban development and industrial decline. This was clearly a time of change as an old Bolton gradually faded and although redevelopment provided new grounds for optimism, there was a decided loss of character as bland architecture became a sign of progress.

The book follows an unexpected structure, with a weak sense of chronology and a lack of locative precision. The precise geographical location of Bill Simpson’s childhood homes, for example, would have aided interpretation of the text and added to the book’s value, whilst knowing the age of the author, the occupational background of the family, names and further details of neighbours would have assisted in locating the content socially, geographically, chronologically and economically, and in so doing would have greatly assisted future historians. This may be a problem with the way authors of such books see their purpose: to record for posterity memories of people and communities now gone and to relate them to others. Some authors may wish to set the record straight, as they might see it. Nevertheless, as a historian, personal recollections are not the final word, but raw material to interpret and to contextualise. This is not mere academic snobbery; the detail adds considerably to the content and therefore the value of the book. Some details slowly emerge and by reading between the lines, it is possible to deduce certain things about locations and social background. However, although the book is about Bolton, much of the narrative is essentially placeless — almost as if the text has been anonymised. Together, this placelessness and anonymity considerably reduce the usefulness of the book as a historical resource. Bolton may have shared characteristics with other Lancashire towns, but it was distinctive, with a unique geography, culture, economy and identity.
Unfortunately this is barely represented in this book, leaving it feeling rather incomplete.

Having said that, the book is not without its merits and some details of particular value do emerge. This is especially the case with the relating of perceptions of place within the town: ‘each person was largely confined to a radius area of about three miles...Anything further was very special, Westhoughton, Little Lever, Lostock, Tonge Moor were on the frontier’ (page 6). He comments on the relationship between the town and the surrounding, slightly alien, countryside and goes on to detail the family’s move from a central district to a new council estate which he perceived to be in the countryside. However, this move was also accompanied by the trauma of the council ‘inspection’ and the relief of passing the examination which spared them from the shame of fumigation.

This is a book that is worth reading. It is inexpensive, nicely presented and evocative. There will be those who can relate to the content through their own personal experience and memory, but this book, and others like it, ought to be read even more widely by those who are too young to remember this period. One of things I have learned in recent years is to listen intently to, and to learn from, the voices of the past. These voices record our recent social history, and form an invaluable part of the historical record.

_Andy Gritt_, University of Central Lancashire


There is an old saying that ‘God made the countryside, but man made the town’, and in big, modern cities few could dispute the sense of an entirely artificial environment. Many consequences flow from this, but to anyone interested in the past, among the most intriguing is the sense that something may remain of older, pre-urban or early urban times, sealed underground, with all the possibilities for wide-ranging fantasy that that evokes. There is also
a feeling that there may be secrets built into the ancient parts of the urban fabric, just as old houses are automatically suspected of having hidden chambers and passages. This lavishly illustrated book about Manchester’s subterranean areas and their links to the surface evokes both sensations. The strictly historical content is low, but what it does is to stimulate thought about why such matters are so fascinating to so many. It also encourages reflection on the nature of the evidence we use as serious historians to build a coherent and trustworthy account of our past, as opposed to creating and passing on the myths which so many clearly find more satisfying.

It does not claim to be a history book and it stems from local television programmes made to play on this fascination, not from conventional research. It is episodic rather than a single narrative and there is also no real attempt at an overview of the growth of the settlement into a town and then a city. However, the authors are at pains to stress the quality of the evidence on which each brief case study rests: in some instances, physical evidence is still readily accessible and is supported by documents; in others although nothing remains, the history is clear in the documents; elsewhere, we simply have verbal reports and tantalising photos of sealed up openings in walls that could lead to anything, or nothing. Finally, we are sometimes essentially offered fascinating stories with no verifiable evidence behind them. There is thus plenty of opportunity to practise sorting wheat from chaff, especially given the number of photographs of the remains in question.

The largely-unspoken factual basis of the book is that Manchester was built on a relatively soft but firm stone foundation which is easy to tunnel into without sophisticated machinery. Moreover, expensive structural work is not needed to keep most such tunnels open. At various times and for various reasons, people have taken advantage of this to create cellars, accessways to shops, underground canals and nuclear-proof bunkers, with Deansgate apparently a prime location. The city also lies towards the edge of the Lancashire coalfield and had coal mines operating close to the modern city centre at various levels down to great depths. Few people who now watch Manchester City’s home games probably realise that part of the heavy industrial past of their new stadium site was Bradford colliery, which apparently
became the UK’s first super pit when it was linked underground to Ashton Moss pit in 1948 and which had 1,600 mean working in it in 1965. At the time, it was alleged to have caused over £1 million-worth of damage to houses above its workings and the city was granted powers to stop expansion of workings under Collyhurst, where 1,000 new homes were to be built. The colliery ceased production in 1968.

The actual workings by now will be in a sorry state, for coal measure rocks are weak and soon crush tunnels cut through them, but in the twenty-first century we are reminded how closely linked to coal Manchester was. Industrialisation might well not have been possible without such supplies so readily available and in such vast quantities. Even now, there is still coal there – 300,000 tons were estimated to remain in this pit alone at the time of closure. Agecroft colliery, of course, worked on into the miners’ strike of the 1980s, but operated to the north of the Irwell.

The city above ground was built around and along the deep valleys cut not only by that river, but by several others draining off the Pennines and their lesser feeder streams. They all carved out substantial flood plains for themselves alongside their normal channels and so flowed well below the ground levels of the inhabited areas. The dimensions of such valleys can still be seen at Daisy Nook. As property prices in the central area soared and the watercourses themselves became horribly polluted, the temptation first to build onto, then out over, the valleys was irresistible, ultimately leading to some disappearing for long stretches. The most easily tracked case is the river Tib, which still apparently flows in a much reduced state alongside but now below Tib Street, the old pet market. More spectacularly, though, near the cathedral there are apparently substantial sections of streets and old buildings which were simply abandoned while being utilised as props for new streets that crossed the Irwell valley without dipping down towards river level at all. All this is sound history and is not overplayed for gothic horror in the Edinburgh mould.

There is also evidence cited of actual tunnels just below the surface, whose existence is generally much more shadowy, especially since wholesale central redevelopment has often obliterated the traces that witnesses claim remained some decades ago – and that makes us ask how far we can trust a handful of old
memories from teenage years? Special care is required precisely because of the prevalence of tunnel myths. Most old churches are believed to be connected to tunnels or tunnel systems, often apparently linking them to a manor house, yet investigation generally reveals at best an old sewer. I was contacted at my university recently by a reporter who had heard there were tunnels under Preston and was instantly fired by the scent of a good story. It was very plain how disappointed they were at being told that Preston’s subsoil is very poor terrain indeed for tunnelling and that banks did not in any case dig tunnels to railway stations for secure cash deliveries as he had been told they did here. Had I been less sure of the negative case, this story might well have been run anyway and ‘evidence’ for a Preston labyrinth would have been created for other people to cite as evidence that it was real.

This book rarely strays so far, being content to note down all available suggestions while scrupulously showing what evidence there is. The lengthy section devoted to William Connell, however, gets closest to the line. He was a mysterious local character who in the second half of the last century periodically hinted to reporters and others at vast personal knowledge of an actual tunnel system, not just individual entities, spreading far and wide under the city, created for unknown purposes by unknown hands. Elements of his personal history gave just enough support to lead people on, but he specialised in obscuring his meaning in a tantalising fashion. At the end of this investigation, on the basis of the evidence given here, a serious historian has to write it off – nods and winks are not enough, however much we would like the case to be proved in an emotional sense. However, I am certain that some readers will prefer the dark possibilities (in all senses) and work on the usual conspiracy theory of logic where hints are more meaningful than real proof. Why are tunnels so intriguing?

Some of the tunnels which certainly existed were linked to major transport projects of their day, such as a private post office effort for transferring mail or a Bridgewater branch canal, echoing that enterprise’s origins underground at Worsley. Indeed, the canal renaissance of the past few years has shown many unsuspecting people what an amazing network was created in and around Manchester’s factories and warehouses, with a multitude of bridges which sometimes effectively become tunnels due to the need to
run so many roads and railways over them. What is just as striking for someone interested in urban history generally, however, is the contrast of the great missing tunnel system of the canal’s rival – where is the Manchester underground railway system, as the book asks? Few conurbations round the world with the population and wealth of Greater Manchester can surely have endured such a badly integrated rail network for so long and created no underground element at all. This is not just something to regret or bemoan – it is a fascinating historical question well worth addressing when we try to understand the processes of growth in Manchester and its links with the region around it. Why has a city that could dig the Ship Canal to break a transport bottleneck in Liverpool, in the teeth of ferocious opposition from all the ports near the mouth of the Mersey, never raised the momentum to build even a small underground railway when travellers and commuters needs were so clear?

So, readers will not directly find much enlightenment of a truly historical nature in this account of Manchester’s tunnels, but it may well fascinate them, it can make us all think and it might start many arguments. If we read them with an open mind and with our critical faculties fully engaged, I would argue that there is a lot to be gained from eclectic reading.

Steve Caunce, University of Central Lancashire


Humphrey Newton was a minor gentleman unremarkable in his very ordinariness apart from the fact he kept a commonplace book which has survived to the present day. Like other commonplace books, its contents are diverse: it contains farm accounts and contracts, family history and legal disputes, medical advice and charms, building plans and poems, prayers and astrology. Taking this book as her core, Deborah Youngs has created a fascinating history of one individual: his background, means of making a living, religious beliefs and cultural life. All of this is firmly rooted
in the locality in which he lived, Newton and later Pownall, in the parishes of Prestbury and Wilmslow, in Macclesfield hundred in north-east Cheshire. The lesser gentry to which Humphrey belonged were a numerous class but have been neglected by historians. Humphrey Newton was barely above a yeoman in status. His estate at Newton contained just over 250 Cheshire acres, most of which he farmed directly. He had no manorial rights and owed rent to an overlord. Yet his family had been freeholders in Newton since at least the thirteenth century and were intermarried with the gentry of Cheshire and Derbyshire. Humphrey’s modest estate was more than doubled in size by an advantageous marriage to Ellen Fitton, who came from a knightly family and brought him a second estate at Pownall. Nonetheless theirs was a modest household of around 13 people and the Newtons’ servants were primarily employed in agriculture.

An education that provided Humphrey with the ability to read and write English, Latin and a smattering of legal French not only allowed him to keep his commonplace book but also provided him with status, entertainment and a source of income. Although he did not have a manorial court of his own, he kept courts for wealthier gentry families acting as manorial steward. He also offered legal advice and wrote out contracts for those less wealthy than himself in the local community. This was all done without any formal legal training. Most of Humphrey’s living was drawn from his estate, however. He took care to improve his land by marling, building fishponds and repairing and constructing mills. He sought to enlarge his acreage through constant legal wrangling with neighbouring lords, challenging rights and boundaries. One of his most effective manoeuvres was to establish a chapel at Newton, the design for which he noted, like much else, in his book. This provided not only a statement of his piety and a modest place of worship for the local community, but also helped him to assert his rights to a piece of common land where the chapel was located as Newton’s common.

Youngs demonstrates how Humphrey Newton’s religious beliefs were very ordinary for the period in which he lived and quite pragmatic, but also personally motivated and sincere. They focused on Jesus and Mary rather than more obscure local saints and were fired by a vivid understanding of purgatory. Humphrey
purchased pardons and calculated the total number he had accumulated to reduce his time in purgatory. He recorded visions of purgatory from a variety of sources, including one from a local man, John Newton, a draper from Congleton, which is not found elsewhere. Alongside the prayers written in his commonplace books, there were also charms to protect him from evil and deliver his wife safely in childbirth. Excerpts transcribed into the notebook, or sometimes incorporated directly into the binding, show that Humphrey was quite widely read, with interests in medicine, astrology, prophecy, history and books of manners. He also composed literature himself in the form of poetry, mostly love poems. Although these were largely formulaic, and have been described as ‘pedestrian’, they demonstrate his engagement in a local literary culture based around the alliterative style of *Gawain and the green knight*.

There is little to criticise in Youngs’s recreation of Humphrey Newton’s life and times: the book is thoroughly researched, well written and clearly presented. Despite the focus on a single individual and locality, everything is set in its wider context and extensively referenced to existing research on related topics. Humphrey Newton was a figure of no national importance during his lifetime and even within the county of Cheshire he was a very minor player. Yet Youngs’s research has created something of great importance: a vivid recreation of what it was like to live in a particular era. By narrowing the focus to a single man, this book offers a surprisingly wide ranging study of life in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century England.

*Jane Whittle, University of Exeter*