Denise Kenyon, *The origins of Lancashire*. Manchester University Press. 1991. xii + 202 pp., 32 figs, 10 plates. £35 hardback; £12.95 paperback. ISBN 0 7190 3277 6 (hardback); 0 7190 3546 5 (paperback).

The origins of Lancashire is the first book in a series on Origins of the shires. Despite the title, it is not supposed to be about the origins of Lancashire as a county, but rather a general survey of the area from prehistory to 1200. The publisher's blurb says that it is aimed at 'anyone interested in the history of the North-West, as well as serious students of early medieval England'. Its failings are partly that the concept of the book is at fault and partly that the author has not delivered the goods.

There are two main problems with the brief. First, the area was not a coherent territory until Lancashire took shape in the twelfth century: it constantly requires a wider geographical frame of reference which is provided only fleetingly. Second, evidence of all types is exceedingly sparse: there is simply less to say than about almost any other part of England. The temptation for any author would be to strive for an over-confident explanation of human activity in a region and at a period about which (hand on heart) we know next to nothing. Dr Kenyon has fallen for that one, and made other obstacles for herself. Mostly, she goes at a gentle jog through familiar terrain. The chapter titles tell it all: 'Environment and land-use', 'The first millennium BC', 'The Romans in the North-West', 'Lancashire under the Anglo-Saxons', 'Anglo-Scandinavian Lancashire', and eventually 'Parish, barony and shire: the emergence of Lancashire'. A plain book plainly written under those headings would have been useful as a guide to current scholarship.

Because the timescale of the book is so long, the evidence that does exist requires a formidable array of skills: geomorphological, palaeobotanical, archaeological, toponymic, and documentary are only the major disciplines represented. The author's expertise seems to be in archaeology and place-names; she is often disarmingly naive with written sources and historical times generally.

There are other barriers. First, Dr Kenyon cannot resist jargon. What are 'xingas' (p. 82)? The phrase 'strong thread of continuity of exploitation of certain natural resources and communication nodes' (p. 24) is not an isolated example of an unclear thought badly expressed. Second,
she can be caught napping over secondary sources. The lost coin hoard from the Harkirke (not 'Hakirke') at Little Crosby (p. 112) is known from an engraving of thirty-five pieces, not 'three hundred or so'. If anyone succeeds unaided in tracking down the source listed as 'Lewis, P. (forthcoming)' they will find that it does not suggest, as claimed on p. 99, that the battle of Hwaelleage in 798 was somewhere other than the universally accepted location of Whalley. Thirdly, as the last example also illustrates, she leavens conventional wisdom with less orthodox suggestions drawn from her own work and that of others. Sometimes she is simply reckless. For instance, she argues repeatedly that Heysham was an important place in very early times, well before St Patrick's chapel was built, on the basis that the 'bird's head' stone found there was 'perhaps' part of a bishop's throne. 'Perhaps' is a dangerous word when there is so little evidence, since it means that any explanation goes.

The book fails to meet its difficult brief for either of its intended audiences. It cannot be recommended to general readers because its scholarship is simply not careful, consistent, or reliable enough. It will not satisfy serious students because the accumulated perhapses do not add up to any new interpretation of the early history of the region.

University of Liverpool

C. P. Lewis


This volume represents the first fruits of P. H. W. Booth's 1977 proposal that the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire should publish texts from the major categories of Cheshire sources in the Public Record Office, few such records being available in print. We are already familiar with the accounts of the civic chamberlains of towns such as York. Here, however, we are offered an edition of the 1361–2 account of the chamberlain of Edward the Black Prince, earl of Chester, the official who stood between the earldom's receiver-general and its local officials such as the reeve of the manor of Shotwick or the forester of Delamere forest. The earl's chamberlain of Chester had responsibility for both Cheshire (the text and notes for the county being provided by Mr Booth) and for Flintshire (the section provided by Dr Carr).

Extracts from the chamberlains' accounts have appeared in print previously. In 1910, volume LIX of the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire included translated extracts from chamberlains' accounts and related documents from the years 1301–60, including both Cheshire and Flintshire material. Translated extracts from the Flintshire accounts were published in a far more satisfactory form by the Flintshire Historical Society in 1913 (vol. III) and 1928 (New Series, vol. II), whilst in 1938 a newly discovered chamberlain's account for 1301 was published by the
Lancashire and Cheshire Society (vol. XCII). Here we are offered for the first time a Latin text and translation of an entire account.

The 1361–2 account includes the chamberlain’s charge for which he had to render account, including the arrears of officials from the two counties, the issues of the city of Chester, issues of manors, townships and forests, forest fines, prizes on trade, issues of the sheriffdom of Chester, judicial fines, issues of the escheatry of Cheshire, issues of the towns, manors and sheriffdom of Flint, and various other miscellaneous payments. The chamberlain then received a discharge for customary alms payments to religious houses, for fees and wages paid to officials, for miscellaneous costs (such as parchment and messengers), for various building works (including Chester castle and the Dee mills), for the money paid to the abbot of Vale Royal as a gift from the Black Prince, and for various other expenses. Finally, the chamberlain received various allowances and exonerations and accounted for liveries of money made by him, and a remainder for the following year was established.

There are two main reasons for publishing an edition of any text. The first is the hope that this particular document will be cited by historians in the future. The second, and equally important, motive is to attract attention to this general category of records in order to encourage their use and to explain to future researchers how these sources were compiled and the advantages and drawbacks of employing them. Inevitably, given that it is simply one chamberlain’s account of many, this edition of the account for 1361–2 is more likely to achieve the second aim than the first: how often does one see a citation of the single royal Memoranda Roll for 1326–7 which has appeared in print compared with references to the complete series of medieval Patent and Close Rolls which are available? It is certainly to be hoped that the high standards of this edition will encourage historians to make greater use of this source in the future. The editors provide an excellent guide to how the chamberlain’s accounts were compiled and audited and how their structure differs from the more familiar ‘common’ or ‘Westminster’ form of accounts. Anyone who will ever have to use a medieval account would benefit from reading this introduction. The editors also supply useful biographical notes on over 150 people from the two counties who appear in the text, along with lists of the surviving accounts of the chamberlain from Chester from 1301 to 1374 and a list of the dates of audit of the accounts from 1349 to 1374.

Finally, unlike many editions of medieval sources which seem to become fetishistic ends in themselves, Booth and Carr never forget that primary sources ‘do not by themselves constitute history’ and that they are important only as means to the goal of writing ‘secondary’ historical works. The editors thus provide us with an excellent survey of the economic, social and political context within which the account was produced, outlining the administrative structure of the earldom, describing the local economies and discussing the maintenance of order.

Particularly fascinating is the account of the growth of the myth of Cheshire’s ‘Great Rebellion’ of 1353 from its birth in a passage in Knighton’s chronicle through a seventeenth-century antiquarian to its fully-blown development in the works of twentieth-century historians.
Reviews

such as Hewitt and Barraclough. If a fact is 'an opinion agreed upon by the experts' then this supposed revolt against the Black Prince's financial exactions was, until recently, a 'fact', one authenticated even by the Oxford History of England. Yet, as Mr Booth has shown, the existence of this revolt has no basis in the historical sources. Everyone, from philosophers of history to local historians will find something of interest in this excellent addition to the publications of the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.

University of Manchester

S. H. Rigby


Medieval Cheshire has attracted the attention of several distinguished historians this century, especially those with an interest in its special position as a 'county palatine' and in the interaction of administration and society. As part of T. F. Tout's ambitious and pioneering investigation of the administrative history of medieval England, his daughter Margaret Sharp, in a deservedly famous thesis (Manchester Ph.D., 1925), inaugurated the modern study of the county during the century and a half after it came into the Crown's hands in 1237. Then, in 1951, Geoffrey Barraclough, while at the University of Liverpool, published his succinct study of the earldom and county palatine of Chester and their constitutional relationship with the English Crown. In 1983 Michael Bennett shifted the focus significantly towards social questions, concentrating on the pivotal place of the gentry and taking the north west — Cheshire and Lancashire together — as his broader canvas. Yet none of these writers ventured far or often into the fifteenth century, and it is Dr Clayton who, in a highly informative book based on her Liverpool Ph.D. thesis of 1980, now sheds considerable light on Cheshire in the age of the Wars of the Roses. Her aim is expressed in modest terms — 'to consider how and by whom the county palatine of Chester was governed and administered during the later Middle Ages' — which conceal the sophistication and originality of her assessment of the Cheshire gentry's role in preserving law and order during a particularly disturbed generation.

There is much that is peculiar about late medieval Cheshire before Henry VIII abolished such quasi-independent franchises in 1536: its distance from Westminster, adjacent to the frontier and peering into Wales, its palatine status and differences in administrative structure from other English counties, and its non-representation in parliament. There is consequently a strong temptation to regard its history as sui generis. Perhaps inevitably in writing a thesis, Dr Clayton was tempted, and the unusually rich surviving archive of Cheshire's financial and judicial administration is a powerful temptress. Yet, as Dr Bennett was aware, the gentry of the north west, capped in the fifteenth century by the prolific and influential Stanley brood, are better viewed as a community
straddling the Cheshire–Lancashire border and, one might add, the border to the west between Cheshire and Flintshire and north Wales. Comparisons between Cheshire’s administration and that of other of the king’s dominions in the later middle ages — north and south Wales, Ireland, even Gascony — help to elucidate administrative functions and officers’ duties, and some of Cheshire’s administrative practices may have been adopted in other dominions in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Moreover, the study of Cheshire in this period raises important issues which (as Dr Clayton is aware) preoccupy historians of other counties and English regions: the interlocking influences of nobility and gentry, the existence (or otherwise) of a county community, the degree of self-government enjoyed by communities and their dominant families, and the extent to which the county court was a political and social, as well as a judicial, forum. Dr Clayton’s treatment of Cheshire periodically makes significant contributions to resolving these issues.

The book has two parts, the first providing a context for the second. The opening chapter usefully discusses the available documentary sources, most notably records produced on the chamberlain’s authority in the exchequer at Chester and by the county court; regrettably, there is only a hint given of the riches available among private family archives. A chapter on the nature of palatine government seeks to stress Cheshire’s ‘unique’ administrative structure, as reflected especially in its exemption from conventional royal taxation; yet the crown had ways of exploiting the county financially, through mises and other customary demands, that were not quite as ‘arbitrary’ as Dr Clayton implies (p. 62). For all the administrative differences between Cheshire and other English counties, its independence of central rule may have been more apparent than real, as the Cheshire gentry who made extravagant claims in their petition to Henry VI in 1450 realized, and as became clear when Edward IV’s Council in the Marches of Wales extended its authority in the 1470s and Henry Tudor asserted his kingly power after 1485. A third chapter offers a detailed chronological survey of the part which Cheshire and its prominent families intermittently played in the political upheavals of the mid-fifteenth century. It is striking how individuals and families managed to survive practically every crisis and quickly became reconciled with new regimes, and how the Stanleys, by a combination of fancy footwork, self-interest, and prudence, were able to exploit political rivalries at the centre and military confrontations in the provinces to consolidate their own position in the north west (and at court) and emerge as the only truly dominant resident aristocratic house in fifteenth-century Cheshire. Dr Clayton weaves, a little uneasily perhaps, between judgements on England’s fall into disorder in mid-century and record evidence which suggests little that was abnormal in the tenor of everyday life. Can there have been a ‘complete breakdown of government in the palatinate for several months’ in 1460–1 (p. 93) when the records are merely silent and the Cheshire exchequer and county court quickly resumed their business? Those who believe that the issues at stake in the Wars of the Roses were viewed by English people with indifference or detachment will find good material here.
The last two chapters break newest ground. Fifteenth-century Cheshire was a gentry-centred society in which clerks and merchants, even nobles, played a muted role. Dr Clayton illustrates this in detail — perhaps too much detail, as is the way with books closely derived from theses — with a chapter on office-holding in the palatinate from justices and chamberlains down to commissioners and jurors) and another on the gentry’s role in maintaining law and order through jury service and the making of peace bonds. Offices and officers are familiar territory. What is less obvious is the reason why senior sinecure offices were eagerly sought by influential gentry, especially the ubiquitous Stanleys: fewer duties and frequent absences need not make offices less influential or less attractive. In the localities, however, it was a corps of 500 gentry (headed by as few as ten knights at any one time) who kept society stable by a complex web of public service on juries and personal agreements carefully recorded and enforceable by financial penalties and bonds; they were a self-regulating oligarchy of stolid landowners. This must surely have been a feature of English (and Welsh) society generally, but ‘The Cheshire records provide us with the largest and most complete set of bonds for any area of the country in the medieval period’ (pp. 240–1). As a system, it did not eliminate crime or gentry involvement in it, but it did control crime and sometimes prevented it. The English Crown may have been developing its powers for centuries past, but the foundations of its monarchy were a series of mercurial provincial societies like that of Cheshire. Dr Clayton’s book has important conclusions to offer in this regard.

University College of Swansea

Ralph A. Griffiths


The spread of the idea of ‘doing’ history instead of just reading it from history departments in universities and polytechnics to colleges and schools over recent years has increased the need for clear, simple, subject-based guides to source material locally available. Nothing can be more irritating to the hard pressed archivist/librarian than wandering sixth formers or undergraduates who want to know what there is on the nineteenth century for a project they have to do. At the same time, archives (and archivists) can appear forbidding, and the consultation of calendars, handlists and indexes is a skill which it takes even the graduate student time to master. This topic-based guide to sources, published by the Merseyside Archives Liaison Group, is therefore much to be welcomed.

Public health is a good choice of topic with which to begin. As Adrian Allan (that least forbidding of archivists) points out in a clear, informative introduction, public health in the nineteenth century, and for much
of the twentieth, covered a wide range of social issues beyond drains and disease. Child welfare, housing, mental health and a good deal of medical treatment, apart from the limited amount provided by the voluntary hospital, came within its remit. His introduction sets the theme in context, providing a useful account of the vagaries of local government reform between 1848 and 1974, and pointing to ways in which other sources, like local newspapers, can enrich the evidence to be found in the collections listed here.

Introduction over, the Guide proceeds archive by archive. Liverpool Record Office with thirty-two pages naturally dominates but there are useful listings for smaller archives and local studies libraries including Knowsley, Sefton, St Helen’s and Wirral as well as the Merseyside Record Office, Liverpool University, the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, and the Liverpool Medical Institution. Two appendices provide a note of relevant holdings in the County Record Offices at Preston and at Chester. Holdings are listed with their call number in most cases. Printed and secondary material of relevance is separately listed as are holdings of photographic material. The address, opening hours and any regulations of the repository are provided. Contact is made easy and cross-referencing simple. Presentation is clear and binding robust. It is inexpensive. Every school, college and university library in the north west and every local historian with nineteenth- or twentieth-century research interests should have a copy.

The Group would welcome ideas for future topics in the series. ‘Education’, ‘Religion’, ‘Labour’, or ‘Transport’ would seem obvious; ‘Women’ or ‘Living Standards’ less so and perhaps difficult to collate. One suggestion from the ignorant – can the listing be put on computer disk? The younger generation appears happier with screens than with screeds.

University of Manchester


The grocer ‘Deals in Tea, Sugar, Coffee, Chocolate, Raisins, Currants, Pruens, Figs, Almonds, Soap, Starch, Blues of all sorts etc.’ This description from R. Campbell’s *The London tradesman* of 1747 could equally have been applied to T. D. Smith’s in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. T.D.’s was indeed a ‘traditional grocer’ and this booklet, which is a splendid example of how enterprise and traditional higher education can complement each other, provides a revealing portrait of a Lancaster business family. Largely written by undergraduates as part of an enterprise initiative, it is delightfully presented and a good read.

It is also very much a celebration of the (small) businessman as hero. T. D. Smith’s may not have produced a Prime Minister, but this family of grocers in a medium-sized county town certainly made their mark. The
founder, T. D. Smith himself, was a talented entrepreneur well able to spot a niche in the market and more than ready to use family connections to establish his business. The business spanned three generations: by 1961 no family member was willing to lead an increasingly precarious enterprise, but senior employees were helped to continue the business for a further twenty years. Yet in that century, successive members of the Smith family had, as well as running the business, been leading lights in Lancaster politics and voluntary services and had been presidents of the National Federation of Grocers’ Associations.

For the business historian, the meat of this booklet is in chapters 2 to 4. Chapter 1, about the Smith family and its connections in the farming communities of the Lune Valley, is hard going at times but worth persevering with in order to get an impression of the importance of family connections for an aspiring young businessman in the middle of the nineteenth century. Equally important to T. D. Smith was his involvement with Methodism, which both enabled him to gain a sound commercial education and to relate to the business community of Victorian Lancaster.

The T. D. Smith story is a classic of successful entrepreneurship. T. D. learnt his trade, both selling and skilled processing of groceries, through an apprenticeship in Lancaster and a spell with a high-class grocer in Bolton. His early years as an independent trader were hard. Lacking capital and dependant on his family for labour, he was also denied access by his competitors to the best buying markets. So he looked for and found a new niche in the grocery trade, delivering goods to families outside an eight or so mile radius from Lancaster. Initially he concentrated on the area where he had family connections and used local farmers as part of his delivery network. By the late 1870s, deliveries represented around a third of his turnover.

T.D. was innovative in other ways. He took a great interest in his premises, expanding and refitting them in the 1890s. Recognizing the nature of competition from multiple grocers and local shops, he began to develop a network of branches in the Lancaster suburbs from the late 1880s. By the early 1900s there were six such branches. But his keynote remained quality and service. Free delivery to customers remained a hallmark through the first half of the twentieth century, as did the availability of a range of speciality goods and, in particular, special blends of tea (up to thirty-two different blends at one time) and freshly-roasted coffee.

The business which had once employed just T.D.’s sister and an errand boy had over eighty staff by the time of its centenary celebrations in 1958. It remained, however, a fascinating mix of traditional and innovative. The traditional was represented by the product range; the continuation of processing as well as selling of goods; and the quality of service, including chairs for customers and biscuits for their children. The innovative aspects of the business included the growth of carefully targeted advertising in the inter-war years and the meticulous organization of a delivery system throughout north Lancashire and beyond which guaranteed every customer a visit from a traveller on a set day and delivery on another.
Both world wars saw hard times. But recovery from the 1914–18 war was not paralleled after 1945. Retailing was changing dramatically in the 1950s. The abolition of retail price maintenance affected profit margins while the growth of supermarkets — anathema to the service mentality of the Smiths — stole customers. At the 1958 centenary dinner F. B. Smith (grandson of the founder) was cautious about the future. And rightly so: in 1961 the family involvement ceased and in 1981 T. D. Smiths (Lancaster) Ltd, the successor firm run by some of the senior staff, ceased trading. The history of a family grocer was at an end, but some eighty or more years after the trade press had first propagated rumours of the demise of the family grocer.

This booklet represents a most useful contribution to Lancashire business and family history. The economic historian may be a little disappointed that there is not more analysis of the Lancaster economy in the mid-Victorian period and in particular how T. D. Smith fitted into the overall structure of retailing in the town. The general reader might also have welcomed a map of Lancaster, showing for example the central retail area of the town and the location of T.D.’s suburban branches. But it would be wrong to end on a carping note. The fortunate survival of records, and in particular the autobiography of T. D. Smith found in 1981, has made possible this extremely valuable study of a not untypical high-class medium-sized town retailer of the Victorian period. More such studies are need to help our understanding of the service sector in the last 100 years. It is to be hoped that this booklet will stimulate other students to seek out business records of retailers and treat them in a similarly preceptive fashion.

Chesterfield

Ian Mitchell


The political career of Richard Durning Holt was, on the whole, a flop. In Appendix Two of this edition of his diary, there is a useful enumeration of the parliamentary elections which he contested as a Liberal. In his native Liverpool he lost West Derby twice before becoming M.P. for Hexham in 1907, a seat which he held until 1918. But he never gained ministerial office, and had to watch men whom he judged less able than himself given the preferment which he felt was his due. After 1918 things went from bad to worse. Holt spent much of the next ten years scurrying around the north of England, carpet bag in hand, seeking, with indomitable optimism, that increasingly rare amenity, a safe Liberal seat. Eccles in 1918 was ‘awful – worse than I had expected’ (p. 60) and Rossendale in 1922 ‘very disappointing’, the more so because ‘up to the very last moment [we] thought we had done much better’ (p. 74). If North Cumberland initially presented itself as a better prospect, it was correspondingly ‘a great disappointment as we thought we had won’ in 1923 (p. 78), while 1924 proved ‘most disappointing’ (p. 81); and the by-election there in
1926 was a supernumerary setback since ‘we deluded ourselves into the belief that we were going to get much nearer’ (p. 91).

Why, then, publish the diary of a wealthy Liverpool shipowner whose sister-in-law (Beatrice Webb) kept a better one? The wholly convincing reason emerges in the course of Dr Dutton’s admirable edition, which gives enough of the text of the original (now held in Liverpool City Library) to convey its significance and its flavour. For Holt is important not for what he did so much as what he represented. He was one of the purest examples of an unreconstructed Liberal businessman, capable of endowing a commitment to Free Trade which was personally profitable with the high moral principles innate in his Unitarian pedigree. Holt’s diary conveys a nice blend of worldliness and naïvety, which helps us reconstitute the cultural milieu of his kind of Liberalism. Thus in 1901 he writes of ‘our own views of simple Christianity which I believe to be the true basis on which to establish the community’, notably ‘the belief that what God wants of man is that he do right’ (p. 6). This was no bleeding-heart creed of social reform but a tough-minded individualism which gave Holt his one real moment of political fame. It was the ‘Holt Cave’ which voiced backbench opposition to Lloyd George’s 1914 Budget – ‘really a combined remonstrance by businessmen and some survivors of the Cobden-Bright school of thought against the ill-conceived and socialistic tendencies of the Government finance’ (p. 31).

Holt’s antipathy to Lloyd George burgeoned during the First World War. ‘All the old principles of the Liberal party have been virtually abandoned by its leaders – even Free Trade’, Holt recorded in 1916; and the ‘infamous conspiracy’ which made Lloyd George prime minister hardly improved matters. Yet, all the while, the shipping business kept on ‘flourishing marvellously’ and returning ‘remarkable results’ which provoked ambivalent reactions in Holt. ‘No wonder those who are suffering severe loss through the war are casting envious eyes on the shipowners and other small classes who are making great profits’ (pp. 45, 47). Lloyd George’s Coalition Government notoriously received support from hard-faced men who had done well out of the war; but Holt was never tempted to join them. Indeed his post-war diary reads as a litany of protest against Lloyd George – ‘no real knowledge of history or political principle, vain, spiteful, treacherous, untrustworthy and dishonest, the man is evil’ (p. 76). Holt was dismayed at the Liberal Party readmitting ‘a rascal and liar’ to its leadership (p. 81). Little wonder that Lady Oxford (Margot Asquith) received Holt so cordially in 1927: ‘I like you – you hate Lloyd George so thoroughly’ (p. 97). Though Lloyd George, in the end, had no other political home but the Liberal Party, Holt too, for different reasons, felt that ‘there is no place for some of us except in a Liberal party’ (p. 92). Yet his nephew, writing in 1988 in the preface to this edition, may have a point in surmising that ‘if he were alive today, Uncle Dick would be giving full support to the present Conservative government and Prime Minister’ (p. x). At any rate, Dr Dutton deserves congratulations for making accessible this illuminating case-study in the politics of economic liberalism.

St John’s College, Cambridge

P. F. Clarke
Vaughan Robinson and Danny McCarroll (eds), *The Isle of Man: celebrating a sense of place*. Liverpool University Press. 1990. xxi + 289 pp., 55 figs, 65 b & w plates. £27.50 hardback; £11.95 paperback. ISBN 0 85323 036 6 (hardback); 0 85323 296 2 (paperback).

The Isle of Man has always been an 'outlier' to the north west of England. It belongs to the region in terms of its historical associations and economic links. For many years it was managed from Lancashire as part of the Stanley estate and during the expansion of tourism, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, close ties were established with the main market for working-class holidays in the north west. However, it has also managed to retain a degree of remoteness from mainland Britain with an independent political structure and distinctive cultural heritage, a position which has been exploited more recently by the development of off-shore financial facilities. This book attempts to convey the idea of the island's uniqueness and examines the factors responsible for the development of its distinctive character. It provides a comprehensive account of the formation of the physical and human landscapes and reviews current trends in social and economic change.

Islands offer a unique opportunity for this type of 'total' geography. Being limited in size and relatively self-contained they provide a useful framework for the integration of varying approaches and specialisms within the subject. It is possible to piece together the various elements of their environment and society to convey the essential character and personality of the locality. Because of this they are often seen as ideal 'field laboratories' for illustrating the diversity and complexity of geography and for demonstrating its contemporary relevance and application within a contained environment.

The origins of the book lie in a series of field trips organized by the Department of Geography at the University of Swansea during the 1980s. The material gathered together for these trips provided a basis for writing the book and this has been augmented by the results of recent research on the island and by inviting contributions from a number of specialists with local knowledge and expertise. By widening the net and bringing in a geologist, an archaeologist and a number of Manx officials with experience in public service, it has been possible to present a variety of perspectives on the island and piece together a comprehensive picture of its development.

However, the purpose of the study goes beyond the simple production of an up-to-date field guide to the Isle of Man. As the subtitle suggests (celebrating a sense of place) the book also attempts to develop the material as a case study for examining the essential character and personality of places. This is linked in with a continuing debate within geography about the nature of the subject and its philosophical underpinnings. The editors suggest that the discipline has lost its coherence by abandoning the common ground of the study of places and instead has become preoccupied with narrow specialisms and abstract concepts of space and process. They argue for a return to a more traditional focus on landscape and the uniqueness of places as an effective way of bringing...
together the disparate elements of the subject and improving the understanding of the real world.

In adopting this stance they are drawing on a well established descriptive tradition within the subject dating back to the earlier part of the century. Regional geography used to be concerned with detailing the characteristics of places. It identified the links between physical structure and human agency in the formation of landscape and regional identity. Much of this writing followed a familiar pattern. Descriptions started with an account of the geology and underlying structures of a particular locality, followed by details of the surface layers of the physical environment (soils, vegetation, climate) and eventually ending up with an assessment of the human imprint in the form of transport networks, urban development and social geography. Although it is claimed that this book does not represent a return to this ‘regionalism of the past’, it is essentially the approach that has been taken. The book is subdivided into four sections dealing with: 1) the physical environment; 2) history, constitution and population; 3) the island’s infrastructure; and 4) the economy. There is some attempt to link these elements together by including a brief introduction and conclusion to each section, but generally it is left up to the reader intuitively to put these bits together and acquire an overview of the island.

The value of this approach is that it provides both a breadth of knowledge about the island and some detailed information about individual topics. Local and regional historians may well find much of interest in this study of ‘local geography’, particularly in its bringing together of the dimensions of time and space and one specific locality. The Isle of Man is presented both in an historical context – as the product of many centuries of evolution, and also in a spatial context as part of a wider region around the Irish Sea. However, the specific historical material is fairly limited. The history of the island, from the Mesolithic to the nineteenth century, is covered in twenty pages with some additional information in the chapter on the Isle of Man’s constitution. What is lacking is any substantial local history, particularly relating to the recent past. This may be because Manx historians have tended to concentrate on earlier periods, or because of the limited availability of local material. But any attempt to capture the essence of the island’s personality would benefit from a more detailed investigation of the people and events that have shaped its present character.

Nevertheless, in general this is an informative book which brings together a wide range of material and will undoubtedly provide a useful introductory guide for all visitors (not only students) to the island. It is perhaps less successful in achieving its secondary objective of exemplifying a new integrative approach to the study of geography. The argument about the need to return to a more place-centred discipline (with an emphasis on landscape) is well made but the thesis is not fully developed in the individual chapters, which are preoccupied with the detail of specific topics and do not effectively convey the ‘sense of place’. Some of the recent conceptual developments in geography relating to the analysis of ‘localities’ might have provided a more robust framework for a
study of this kind, particularly if these theoretical perspectives could be linked to the better aspects of the tradition of regional description in geography.

Liverpool Polytechnic  

Stephen Jackson


The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, the Society of Archivists, and the publishers Phillimore & Co. Ltd joined together to offer a new annual prize for the best publication by a record repository, and Caroline Williams’s volume won. Congratulations, and a ‘well done’ to the instigators of the prize too.

This is a lavish volume, on good quality paper but with only a cardboard binding. The weight and size of the paper are already weakening the binding of the review copy. There is plenty of space for users to make their own notes in this volume, and the thirty-three illustrations give it, and therefore the Record Office, an inviting appearance.

The contents are divided into three main parts: official records, ecclesiastical records, and private records; all classes are usefully seen at a glance on the single contents page. Amongst the official records, the summary list of school archives is well cross-referenced between place and school names, and indicates concisely the types and dates of records available. This is typical of other index format lists, for example of civil and of ecclesiastical parishes. There are helpful cross-references in some of the different estate collections but the index has to be used to turn up other connections. Over twenty double-column pages are used for the index of major places, persons, and subjects. What this volume does is to set out in concise form the diversity of riches to be found in the record office. It includes major collections received to the end of 1989, without promising that all of them have been catalogued and will therefore be available to searchers. It is not, of course, a substitute for the detailed lists available at the record office itself, but an excellent appetizer for those lists. Readers are told that some minor estate, family, and solicitors’ accessions have not been listed, and one wonders how minor is minor, but at least the user is alerted to their presence.

This guide will be valuable for two types of record office user: for people with no familiarity with Cheshire who want a brief guide to sources; and for resident Cheshire researchers and teachers looking for material, or for ideas for projects. It should serve as an eye-opener for those who have read only parish registers or wills or newspapers in the record officer as to the breadth and variety of the materials there collected. The county council and the record office are to be congratulated.

As a summary of the contents of a long-established office, the guide is
also a reminder of the invaluable contribution which the Cheshire office and similar county record offices in other counties have made to the preservation and conservation of records. The offices also make materials available to historians and have played a major part in the development of historical enquiries in the decades after the second world war. In the history of the seventeenth century, for example, the understanding of local and regional contributions to the causes of the civil war owes much to the advent of county record offices and the records which they have made it possible for scholars to use.

Historians take such offices for granted at their peril. Proposals to reform local government place a question mark over the continued existence of local authority archive services. The inability or unwillingness of some authorities since 1986 to maintain effective archive services must raise alarm about the lack of specific responsibility for archive services in recent draft legislation. Members of this society will serve local and regional history well if they support attempts to ensure a sound legislative foundation for local authority archive services.

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