Benjamin Roberts, *Through the keyhole: Dutch child-rearing practices in the 17th and 18th centuries, three urban elite families.* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998.) Pages 223. £45.00.

By utilizing personal documents such as diaries and letters, Roberts reconstructs the way in which three Dutch merchant families from different cities brought up their children during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He wishes to establish what the practice of bringing up children was, to investigate and explain the objectives of parents, and to compare child-rearing over time. The behaviour of each family is traced over three generations so that the author can attend to both change and continuity in child-rearing practices. The research is directed specifically towards a solution of the historiographical debate on parenting behaviour in the past, trying to decide whether, in Roberts’ terms, the black or white legend is the more correct.

After reviewing the secondary literature and the areas of contention, and introducing the families and their world, Roberts examines the physical nurturing of small children from pregnancy and childbirth through infant feeding and childhood illness. It was mainly fathers who supplied the information on these matters, and it is clear from Roberts’ research that child-delivery was not an exclusively female affair. Babies were normally breastfed by the mother. If a wet nurse was employed this was usually because the mother could not feed the baby herself, and the nurse invariably resided in the home. Parents were not only concerned whenever a child was ill but also did all they could to ensure that health was restored.

A separate chapter studies affection between parents and children, concentrating on three transitions in the parent–child relationship: arrival of infant, death of child, and departure from home. Roberts sensibly concludes that although affection is a biological constant, its expression has been culturally and socially constrained. In the Netherlands, expressing affection in the eighteenth century was
regarded as comparable with exercising authority. There were close sibling and parent–child bonds and, at least for city elites, the conjugal family did offer an emotional haven. Parents were heartbroken at the death of a child, but mourned an older child more than a young infant.

Roberts then explores the moral and cognitive upbringing of children. Raising children in morality was a dominant theme for early modern Dutch pedagogical writers. Beginning at birth, the parents were to weed out vices and cultivate virtues, rearing above all else a devout child. It was hoped that spiritual well-being would help ward off other vices like drinking. Because women were to be the primary imparters of virtues to young children, parents were particularly concerned about the moral upbringing of their daughters. Roberts considers the topic of academic education in three age groups: children under ten years of age, education of those above the age of ten, and university education. Girls usually ended their formal education between the ages of 10 and 12, though by the eighteenth century intellectually gifted daughters had more freedom to pursue further learning. The most popular choice of a degree for young men was a law degree, usually followed by the Grand Tour, although this was declining in popularity in the eighteenth century.

Roberts uncovers no significant changes in the physical, affective or moral rearing of children in his urban elite in the two centuries studied. Parents, though, were likely to alter the way in which their children were educated according to current fashion. Roberts concludes that his final picture of Dutch child-rearing practices is white with touches of grey.

The author adopts a workmanlike approach in this book: he reviews the evidence in his chosen sources on pre-selected topics, generation by generation, interprets it separately, and wraps up each section with a conclusion. Roberts has discovered some wonderfully detailed letters: one remarkable document contained information on a woman’s contractions and dilation during labour, as well as the weight of the newborn. His conclusions are eminently reasonable. But in light of recent work in cultural history, on such themes as language or representations of identity, the book’s method seems outmoded. The work lacks an overall argument and, though points are raised, they are often not developed. The English is awkward and there are too many errors in word usage, several affecting comprehension. I am still puzzling over what is meant by ‘Huijdecoper…was dafted at the idea’ (p. 154). This is a carefully researched, sensible examination of the Dutch case and how it relates to the wider context of European child-rearing, but it holds few surprises.

LINDA A. POLLOCK
Department of History, Tulane University
Migration has been a feature of human history for millennia, but since the late nineteenth century it has become a truly global phenomenon. Both of these volumes are timely: Gungwu's because it emphasizes the world-historical importance of migration processes; Blotvogel's because it raises questions that are at the heart of an increasingly integrated Europe.

The current vogue for studying diasporas (international communities of common ethnic inheritance), as well as the growing post modern emphasis on globalization, suggests that Gungwu may have hit more than one target. His impressive collection of authors (Curtin, Weiner, Cohen, Zolberg, to name just a few) offer a probing series of essays that repeatedly emphasize the crucial issues in migration history. By offering a mixture of approaches – historical, theoretical, legislative and contemporary – this volume leaves the reader in no doubt as to the importance of the subject or the expertise of the contributors. One of the key migration issues of the modern age has been the way in which unrestricted population movement only really came to be questioned when the colour of the migrants' faces began to change from white. Racism continues to be strong in our perceptions of the utility of migration. The treatment of Chinese immigrants in Britain and America at the turn of the last century, and the legislation aimed directly against them, still echo strongly in the treatment of would-be migrants from Asia, South America and Africa today.

Europe's response to migration on the eve of the millennium is the subject of Hans Blotvogel and Anthony J. Fielding's large and impressive volume of essays. The collection is part of a multi-volume series, funded by the European Science Foundation's programme on 'Regional and Urban Restructuring in Europe'. The majority of the 14 chapters began life as presentations to this study group. As well as providing valuable case-studies of a wide range of themes, regions and problems, the individual contributors also attempt to weave their work around the book's central aim, namely to explain the relationship between socio-spatial mobility and economic restructuring.

The book is organized around four main themes. The first section provides an interesting conceptual discussion (in two chapters) of the interplay between population, economy and spatial factors. A useful analysis of the reasons for inter-regional migration is found in Sture Öberg's analysis of movement between local labour markets. The second section contains what are called 'empirical overviews'. Here the contributors consider the historical background to contemporary migration within Europe as well as the broad geographical and economic factors that underpin the rest of the work. A recurring theme here – as in other sections – is the gulf that separates the rich and the poor, whether in towns, localities, countries or regions. While the most extreme contrasts are truly global – say, between Britain and Bangladesh – there are also enormous disparities within a purely European framework, for example, between Scandinavia and Greece. The
third section links well into this idea of regional differentials by considering the role of economic development and occupational restructuring in Europe’s peripheral regions, places such as western Ireland, Portugal and the sparsely populated Nordic regions. The fourth section then considers Europe’s core regions – Italy, Germany, Holland and Britain (but, inexplicably, not France).

One of the most interesting revelations of Blotvogel’s collection concerns the performance of densely populated urban centres. Benko and Lipietz have argued that ‘the regions that are winning in countries that are winning are megalopolises’. This line of thinking is reconsidered and affirmed in Dunford and Fielding’s essay on London and the South-east, which demonstrates the very significant extent to which the South-east has won, while the UK has lost, over the past two decades or so. By contrast, the successes of other European countries – for example, France and Germany – have been founded upon a much greater degree of multi-regional advancement, with many towns and cities seeing considerable improvements in economic prospects and social life over the same period.

When we consider the balances between population, economy and migration, it is clear that Europe faces a challenging future. Recent years have seen a rising resistance to new waves of immigration, even though the regional differential between capital investment (for example, in London and Frankfurt) and labour availability (in post-industrial blackspots) has grown, with government grants and other incentives failing to redress the regional imbalance. Since 1992 Europe’s frontiers have been virtually closed, yet the demand for access has increased, whether from former colonies in Asia and Africa, from poorer areas of Europe (not least the former Communist bloc) or from refugees fleeing war zones (such as Kosovo). Moreover, if fertility rates are declining and populations are ageing, who is going to do the manual work of the future?

DONALD M. MACRAILD

School of Social and International Studies, University of Sunderland


This splendidly produced volume, the latest in the British Academy’s series ‘Records of Economic and Social History’, contains the letters and diary of a local schoolmaster in South Cave, a village of some 900 souls situated on the south-western edge of the Yorkshire wolds, about 11 miles west of Hull. The few letters are very incomplete and comprise just 30 pages of the text. The real value of this volume lies in Robert Sharp’s diary, which is nearly complete for the period from May 1826 to June 1837, with the major exception of the year 1828. The diary was sent in instalments, together with the letters, to Sharp’s son, William, who worked in London, and clearly one important function of the diary was to keep William informed about daily life in South Cave, in an effort to cement the paternal–filial bond. Robert Sharp was 53 years old when the journal commenced and 64 when it was broken off, and his declining interest in it is visible in the cursory entries for
the later years. In their introduction the editors speculate that this reflects Robert’s growing awareness that his son’s interest in the account of events back home was waning too.

As South Cave’s schoolmaster and the son of a shepherd, Robert Sharp offers a view of village life from a different social perspective than that of the more familiar parson-diarists. As well as teaching, about which he says remarkably little, Sharp supplemented his income with a variety of jobs in the local community, for which his literacy and level of education made him invaluable. He regularly acted as land surveyor, a task which had him out measuring fields in all weathers. He was the local tax assessor and collector and sub-distributor of stamps. He was accountant to the overseers and highway surveyors, and clerk to the local friendly society. He transcribed official documents, drew up lists of jurors, voters and militia, enumerated the census and was frequently asked to write letters for his less literate neighbours, such as quit notices from farmers to their tenants. Sharp and his wife also kept a grocery shop for several years, but did not find it profitable.

Sharp was therefore at the centre of the public life of his village, and well positioned to know the character and affairs of most of its inhabitants. His observations in this regard partly relate to life inside and outside the local pubs. The levels of drunkenness and noisy street brawling must have depressed someone whose house was in the centre of the village, and whose greatest passion was to sit in the evening in front of his fireplace with a book to read. Farmers’ talk of harvests and prices, burglaries, thefts of crops and livestock, poaching, rural poverty, illegitimate births, local suicides, transatlantic emigrants and travelling salesmen also feature in the pages of the journal. Sharp also never fails to mention the ‘rustic amusements’ at the annual village fair, the horse, ass, wheelbarrow and foot races, the ‘blobbing for oranges’, the travelling shows.

None of this is particularly remarkable in itself, although it does offer social historians an opportunity to analyse Sharp’s discourse and the kinds of knowledge he constructed about his neighbours. What gives his diary another dimension, however, is the way Sharp used it to voice his opinions about events far beyond the confines of South Cave. A liberal with reformist leanings, Sharp was an avid, if critical, reader of Cobbett as well as of The Times. In the circumstances in which he found himself, he could only express many of his views privately in the pages of his journal, or at most among a small circle of like-minded friends. For Sharp, the local farmers were the ‘great Leviathans’, seeking only to maximize their profits at everyone else’s expense. Sharp was for free trade and against the corn laws, the game laws and enclosure. His remedy for rural poverty was to provide a smallholding for the landless labourer and to put an end to the ‘monopoly of land’. He was also strongly anti-clerical. Sharp had nothing but disdain for the ‘prattling parson’, and most of the sermons he had to endure, sitting amidst his pupils from the National School, brought forth a venomous outburst in his diary. He supported religious toleration at a time of considerable anti-Catholic sentiment among his neighbours. He signed petitions against slavery, was a bullionist and an underconsumptionist in his political economy, and yet he was no radical. He was not much interested in the progress of the reform bill in 1831–2; he was
unsympathetic to those prosecuted after the Swing riots; and he was hostile to O’Connell and to the Hull radical leader, James Acland.

Long known to local historians, this volume makes this interesting diary available to a much wider field of social and economic historians. As well as an introduction, the editors have provided useful appendices on local dialect words, biographies of those mentioned in the diary and a list of works cited by Sharp himself.

ROBIN PEARSON
School of Economic Studies, University of Hull

K. D. Reynolds, Aristocratic women and political society in Victorian Britain.

‘A great lady or a factory woman are independent persons – personages’, observed Lydia Becker; ‘the women of the middle classes are nobodies, and if they act for themselves they lose caste!’ Several scholars have thought Becker’s scepticism about the relevance of the ‘separate spheres’ amongst the British upper class fully justified, but her view has not been much investigated. In her book Women and marriage in nineteenth century England (1989), Joan Perkin drew attention to the comparatively liberated lifestyle enjoyed by many upper-class wives in the Victorian period; and Pat Jalland’s Women, marriage and politics, 1860–1914 (1986) suggested something of the partnership that existed between politicians and their wives, though her focus was on a later period and included upper-middle-class families. K. D. Reynolds’ analysis of the experience of strictly aristocratic women during the period between the 1830s and 1880s is, therefore, a valuable contribution to knowledge; it offers, moreover, a vigorous challenge to the notion of ‘separate spheres’ and is packed with enlivening examples and perceptive observations.

Her theme, broadly, is that at this level of society women participated in an active partnership with men. Even their homes could hardly be sheltered havens from the outside world because they formed part of the public as much as the private sphere. Women’s involvement in the management of a large household was not just an expression of their domestic interests but represented part of the public show of the family’s status. Some aristocratic husbands deliberately involved their wives in management of the estates on the assumption that they would be obliged to take over one day, and when they were away in London or occupied by Cabinet office, the business could be carried out effectively. In a chapter focusing on churches and schools, Dr Reynolds argues that the role of the aristocratic lady differed from that of her middle-class counterparts in that her higher status and financial resources put her in a position of authority. In particular she enjoyed a share of church patronage, in the building of new churches, in the founding of schools and in their day-to-day operation.

The discussion of women’s work in philanthropic organizations will come as no surprise to most readers, but when the analysis moves from largely local charities and personal philanthropy to national philanthropic causes such as the anti-
slavery movement the pattern takes on a different significance. Dr Reynolds gives much space to the activities of Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, whose public role in anti-slavery clearly represented an invasion of the political sphere; as such it attracted criticism for demeaning womanhood. Though Dr Reynolds cautions historians against seeing mid-Victorian ladies simply as precursors of the later women’s suffrage movement, one cannot miss the continuity in that much of the later anti-suffrage case was clearly based on earlier evidence that some women enjoyed a good deal of political influence and of an indirect and irresponsible kind.

The heart of the book lies in three chapters which focus on the political roles of women: electioneering, political hostessing and employment in Queen Victoria’s household. Dr Reynolds emphasizes how acceptable and appropriate it was for an aristocratic woman to undertake election work provided that it was in a constituency in which a family interest was involved; one wonders, however, how much evidence runs the other way – surely some women declined to be dragged into what was in this era a sordid affair of drink, bribery and pressure, in some of the medieval boroughs especially? Did some women tackle elections in extremis, that is in the absence of suitable males? The suggestion here is that the involvement of women changed over time in that it declined in the generation most affected by the 1867 reform act, before resuming in a more institutional form later in the century; this seems plausible, though in view of the limited sample it is not clear how far it can be substantiated.

In a lively discussion of political hostesses Dr Reynolds very fairly observes that as the political world was by no means closed to them, the aristocratic ladies could not share the middle-class woman’s need for the vote. This, however, leaves one to explain why such women as Lady Frances Balfour (daughter of the Duke of Argyll), Lady Selborne (daughter of Lord Salisbury), Lady Aberdeen or Lady Carlisle became such suffragists. The political hostess is a wonderful subject and the chapter dealing with the topic is full of fascinating material, though the author admits it remains difficult to demonstrate the nature and extent of the influence exerted by these women. To judge from a rare first-hand account of some brief attendances at a succession of hot, crowded (and mildly vulgar?) functions it is not easy to accept the claims made for their political importance. It is also significant, as Dr Reynolds points out, that the major and successful political hostesses tended to be Whigs. Disraeli bemoaned the lack of Tory hostesses in 1870, but as this was not long before his great electoral triumph one sees this as further indication that their importance may have been exaggerated. If this chapter raises as many questions as it answers it is nonetheless a useful stimulus to further research. Indeed the volume as a whole succeeds not only by illuminating the neglected period of women’s history prior to the emergence of organized suffragism, but also by demonstrating the tremendous scope for research that still exists amongst the family papers of English aristocrats.

MARTIN PUGH

Department of History, University of Newcastle

173

With important articles and essays in several journals and books, Jon Lawrence has firmly established his reputation as one of today’s most interesting and exciting scholars of British popular politics. *Speaking for the people* offers a re-elaboration of some of the author’s well-known work together with much new analysis. The book is in three parts. The first discusses methodological and historiographical questions, and criticizes some alternative interpretations of Victorian radical politics. The second contains a detailed case study – Wolverhampton, 1860–1914 – and presents the author’s own interpretation of the rise of early Labour. Finally, the third part criticizes the notion of ‘party’ and the legitimacy of party politics in late-Victorian popular culture.

*Speaking for the people* is chiefly a study of popular attitudes to parties and the latter’s claims to ‘represent’, or ‘speak for’, the people. This is best illustrated in the central part of the book – the Wolverhampton case study – with its perceptive and innovative analysis of the electoral metamorphosis of plebeian allegiances from hegemonic Liberalism, first to Toryism and finally to a competition between Labour and Conservatives, within the general parameters of the same popular political culture. Thus Lawrence’s thesis involves the rejection of the notion of ‘modernization’ and of ‘linear and progressive’ interpretations of political change, at least seen as a movement towards ‘the taming of the popular’ and an ever more organized and bureaucratized mass politics.

While it is easy to sympathize with these views, and to appreciate the concrete, empirical work on which they are based, it is less easy to agree with Lawrence’s analysis of the historiographical context. It has been said of John Maynard Keynes that he ‘created’ classical economic theory in order to shoot it down. The present reviewer is under the impression that Lawrence has indulged in the same sport with his own straw man – the ‘triumphalistic’ narrative of ‘party and class’. Far from being ‘triumphant’, both concepts have been subjected to severe scrutiny for many years, and have now lost much of their original appeal. As far as class is concerned, it dominated the 1970s more than the 1990s, which saw the rise of the notion of ‘the people’. Likewise, the centrality of ‘party’ has been questioned at least from 1992 by Lawrence himself (in *Currents of radicalism*), and – more recently – by a number of other scholars, including Patrick Joyce and James Vernon. In short, if there is any ‘triumphalistic’ narrative nowadays, it is the narrative of ‘the people’ and the rituals of spontaneous, ‘communitarian’, popular representation.

Such narrative is at its best in Lawrence’s book, which offers a sophisticated analysis and rich reconstruction of local contexts and changing allegiances. While *Speaking for the people* is – in many respects – a splendid achievement, one wonders whether Lawrence has gone too far in his crusade. Perhaps at this stage we need some rehabilitation of parties as electoral machines and political organizations whose aim is the mobilization (rather than the representation) of popular opinion. Vernon and Joyce may have a point when they argue that
electoral machines limit or ‘discipline’ popular liberty. However, if politics (even popular politics) is not just about voicing opinions but also about pursuing policies and, hopefully, political power, the need for party machines in representative democracies can hardly be questioned. Historically – as Moisei Ostrogorski and Robert Michels pointed out at the beginning of the twentieth century – such a need was most acutely felt by democratic or socialist movements, which were the first to develop mass party organizations. The reason is quite simple: while conservative groups have generally been able to bank on the private means of their own members and to exploit their control of established institutions, radicals and democrats have had to compensate for their comparative financial poverty and institutional marginality by means of organization. From this perspective the ‘caucus’ – in both its versions, American and British – was the ‘inevitable’ outcome of an extended electorate and the existence of a plurality of competing pressure and interest groups. It is tempting to suggest an analogy with the market place: parties can be regarded as the electoral equivalent of what trade unions are in industrial relations. Like trade unions, they also can be seen as limiting ‘popular liberty’, and indeed they are coercive structures, but what are the alternatives?

In Lawrence’s view, however, the early Labour party was different. It evolved through an almost natural process, by stages, from previous forms of popular politics. First artisans and factory workers deserted the Liberal party, once they had seen through the elitist tricks of the caucus wire-pullers. Then they moved into a ‘libertarian’ Tory party, perceived as more respectful of popular notions of liberty, representation and ‘the politics of place’. Later, this process of gradual liberation culminated in the formation of the Independent Labour party, itself a ‘spontaneous’ projection of community life and working-class awareness (pp. 115–21) rather than – like the old Liberal caucus – the product of bourgeois machinations. Nevertheless, old plebeian conservatism survived and indeed continued to thrive: Labour was no better able to undermine it than Liberalism had been before it. Despite this proviso, it is to be wondered whether Lawrence manages to escape the risk of replacing the old ‘triumphalistic’ narratives of party and class – which he dislikes so much – with a sort of ‘post-Gramscian’ teleology of proletarian emancipation, qualified by a post-Thatcher awareness of the persistence of popular Toryism (pp. 122–7). While he celebrates a rather romantic notion of ‘the politics of place’ and an equally illusory ideal of the democracy of ‘the open public meeting’ (p. 164), he is not interested in exploring an area whose problematic existence he clearly recognizes (pp. 254–7): namely, the common ground between the Labour and Liberal party machines. For ultimately the question of party was not a clash between popular ‘spontaneity’ and the ‘caucus’, or between ‘communities’ and ‘elites’, but the competition between what were – in most aspects – two rival types of ‘caucuses’. Each was exclusive, ‘elitist’ and ‘authoritarian’ in its own way, though the one may have been more dominated by trade-union bosses than the other.

E. F. BIAGINI

Robinson College, University of Cambridge