

Her intention, Pavla Miller tells us at the end of this long and wordy account of gender, the family, politics and economic change in Western Europe has been to ‘redraw maps, sharpen questions, provoke debates’. It is hard to know what to say in response to this. She has read very widely in the secondary literature but makes no use of primary sources. This might be acceptable if there was some proper conceptualization of her subject to make sense of a disparate literature. Unfortunately, in so far as this is attempted, it is profoundly unconvincing. Perhaps there was a transformation of patriarchy in this period, perhaps there were several, but this book, it has to be said, does not in any significant way advance our understanding of these things.

Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen’s collection is a very different matter. Masculinity is becoming all the rage, now it has been realized that this is perhaps the last great undiscovered field in History. There is an atmosphere of heady discovery and a group of younger historians are riding the new bandwagon with skill and enthusiasm. The authors have done well to bring many of them together here. Their volume, containing pieces by eight others besides contributions and an introduction by themselves, is a rich harvest. The most deeply researched piece is a case study of male honour, with David Turner seeking to redress the balance against studies of female honour in this period. This neat essay, elegantly presented, shows effectively how rumours and charges of sexual misbehaviour could be used, in the context of factional strife, to erase dignity and undermine claims to respect. There are two other rather specific pieces. Philip Carter argues that sex was an important but not exclusive aspect of James Boswell’s adult
identity, portraying him as a man able to reconcile multiple manly personae. Karen Harvey explores the male body as a site of construction and debate, focusing on a group of texts which share a satirical use of rather inexplicit metaphors to portray the genitals. She characterizes the style of this material, which is illustrated nicely in the book, as one of ‘learned bawdiness’. Her suggestion that, validating male bodies, it served to reinforce feelings of masculinity in readers seems warranted. Hers is a fascinating essay. Three other pieces take a broader canvas. Elizabeth Foyster draws upon a wide range of prescriptive sources to examine the problematic issue of anger. She argues that it was seen more specifically as a male characteristic in the eighteenth century than it had been previously and that at the same time there was pressure on men, allied to the new concept of civility, to control their anger. Men, she believes, were often left bemused and they remained so until Victorian stoicism gave them a clear marker. Jeremy Gregory provides a perceptive analysis of the congruence among the clergy of certain ideals of masculinity and of religious behaviour. He points out that much of the prescriptive material on male behaviour was written in a religious context, indicating the scope for extension of the analysis he has written. Much that he has identified links with and foreshadows Victorian clerical manliness. Robert Shoemaker looks at reforming male manners in a carefully considered essay which draws upon archive work of his own and some also by Tim Meldrum. Material on male insult in the London and Middlesex courts is brought into play in an argument which connects the decline of insult with new prescriptive standards of civility.

Alan Bray’s essay on ‘The Body of the Friend’, like all his published work, is pioneering and, if it sits oddly in a volume which begins chronologically in 1660, it should nevertheless be welcomed warmly. It is a deeply pondered account of a scheme of gender symbolism and body language which throws an intense light on upper-class society between 1500 and 1660. In this period male friendship found a particular kind of expression which was only possible before the invention of sexualities. Foucault has taught us how to understand the invention of sexualities and the way it made it possible to label kinds of sexual behaviour as perverted and to construct ideology to support such identifications. Bray might in fact have spelt out this Foucauldian context since it makes sense of his case that 1660 to 1800 was the time when homosexuality as a state of being was becoming unacceptable and unintelligible to the majority. Thus the scheme of male physical bonding that Bray is concerned with was almost dead and gone when the period of the book opens, as he is the first to admit. He relates this to changes in the living arrangements of the great house and these are certainly relevant, but there was surely deeper change at the level of mentality which is more fundamental. How the English withdrew from male physical intimacy is surely one of the great unworked themes of social history. Bray makes an exciting start on it here, but more could be done and the history of masculinity would be strengthened in the process.

In view of what has been said so far in this review, Hitchcock and Cohen’s introduction must be regarded as deeply disappointing. It is not the moment to propose grand schemes or lines of interpretation in the history of masculinity. We can take this point. But an introduction which discusses three themes in relation
to masculinity – sex, honour and separate spheres – and which really has nothing to offer in the way of constructive comment even about them simply lets down the volume. Many will remain unconvinced by Tim Hitchcock’s claim that a ‘culture of sexual restraint’ between 1660 and 1750 was followed by ‘a growing popularity for penetrative reproductive sex’ after 1750. Honour is hardly relevant since it was being replaced by civility and manners after 1660. The concept of separate spheres has been killed almost stone dead by Robert Shoemaker, Amanda Vickery and others. The editors seem ill at ease with the historiography: it is surprising to find them maintaining, for example, that Lawrence Stone’s account of gender relations in this period ‘retains wide currency’. Even more surprising is their total failure to reflect on the contributions to the volume given that they are so stimulating and provide so much scope for reflection. What should we make, to take just one example, of Gregory’s view of the masculinity of the clergy in comparison to Turner’s view of it in his case study? Above all the editors fail to assess where we might have got to on the issue of change. We can accept their point that there is no simple linear model for this, but it is limp to talk merely of ‘contradictory story lines’ and a ‘fundamental conundrum’ presented by the state of current research.

It is John Tosh, above all, who puts the editors to shame. His very important concluding piece offers numerous leads that they could have taken up. As it is, it stands as Introduction and Conclusion rolled into one, taking the subject of masculinity by the scruff of the neck and asking where we are and where we go from here. Tosh’s survey is exhilarating: he considers masculinity and the class structure, finding a good deal to question in the formulation of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, which leaves him with a ‘fundamental unease’. He has fascinating things to say about men in the domestic and public spheres, which are now of course much more fully spelt out in his book A man’s place. He is largely positive about the work on sexual difference associated with Thomas Laqueur, seeing this in terms of its importance in emphasizing the relational aspect of gender. Then, most critically of all, he raises the third item on his agenda which he admits is hardly off the drawing board. This is gender and identity, or, as some may prefer, selfhood. Here, surely, is the key area for real advances in our understanding. For gender in modern terms is about identity; in early modern terms it was not. This book is about masculinity on the pivot of two mental worlds. There is nothing in it about Locke, or Rousseau, or indeed on the Enlightenment as a whole. That intellectual context, Tosh’s remarks apart, is almost wholly lacking. But that context must be essential, for gender history must surely relate fully to intellectual history as well as to social and economic and political history. We are getting some idea of just how complex gender history is; now we have to map it much more fully into total history. This volume takes us some way and contains enormous promise for the future.

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The so-called ‘mortality transition’, whose origins in Europe date to the later nineteenth century, represents one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of our species. Before it, life expectation at birth was generally below 40 years and often fell below 30, whilst infant mortality was rarely under 20 per 1000 and sometimes well over 300. In contemporary western societies the corresponding figures are close to 80 years, and less than 10 per 1000. But the transition involved more than just a decline in overall levels of mortality. There were also two sets of structural changes. One of these, the replacement of infectious by non-infectious causes of death, is well known and understood, but the other is less familiar and remains to be fully explained. This is the substitution of social class for geography as the major determinant of differences in the length of life. Before the transition, wealth seems to have bought remarkably little by way of systematic advantage in the face of mortality. In fact, in England the elite seem, if anything, to have had higher mortality than the general population. What mattered most was the sort of place in which you lived. Marshy, low-lying, country districts could be very unhealthy, but the mortality map was dominated by a stark urban–rural contrast; in eighteenth-century England the capital’s infant mortality ran at around twice the national average for many decades. But as overall levels of mortality declined, so this ‘urban penalty’ disappeared, and a systematic socio-economic gradient emerged in its place.

Each of the three books under review here is concerned with one aspect or another of this process. Early modern cities experienced the urban penalty in an exaggerated form, generally recording a surplus of burials over baptisms. Understanding why, however, has been hampered by difficulties with the sources. Before the era of civil registration demographic studies generally have to rely on parish registers, or on pre-aggregated sources such as Bills of Mortality. Aggregated data have their uses, particularly in the study of short-term fluctuations in mortality, but can tell us very little about the underlying level of either mortality or fertility. Nominal record linkage, usually in the form of family reconstitution, is very helpful in this respect, but it is also immensely time-consuming and, for technical reasons, its coverage is substantially restricted to the study of fertility within marriage and of pre-adult mortality. Chris Galley applies both of these approaches in his study of early modern York. A well-chosen and rewarding topic for demographic investigation, the city was in the top tier of England’s provincial urban hierarchy. As an arch-diocesan centre and base for the Council in the North, it was a genuine regional capital of a kind otherwise unknown in England, whilst economically it functioned as a market centre for its surrounding hinterland. Galley estimates that York’s population grew from around 8000 in 1550 to a peak...
of about 12,000 in the 1670s. After this stagnation set in until the latter decades of the eighteenth century. Using aggregate data from the city’s 23 early modern parishes, he finds a pattern of natural increase at the beginning of the period, giving way to a burial surplus which had become entrenched by the later seventeenth century.

A partial reconstitution of registers from the two parishes whose records are of sufficient quality yields pre-adult mortality levels which were severe by English standards, falling between London’s and those found in smaller settlements elsewhere. If mortality was high it was also, like London’s, relatively stable in the short term. York was insulated from the severe subsistence crises afflicting northern England in the earlier decades, and was relatively successful at avoiding plague epidemics – the outbreak of 1604 being a conspicuous exception. Here, as elsewhere in the country, mortality rose in the later seventeenth century, but Galley undertakes some ingenious calculations using the reconstituted mortality rates in order to demonstrate that this alone cannot explain the onset of natural decrease. Instead, he argues, later-seventeenth-century York had expanded to the limit of what could be supported by a marketing function alone. Failing to develop new economic functions, and having already lost much of its earlier administrative and judicial importance by the 1660s, the city suffered a contraction of economic opportunity, so that opportunities for marriage also contracted, and the birth rate fell. This is an attractive and intrinsically plausible argument, but it is open to two objections. First, it is inevitably hazardous to combine reconstitution results, based as they are on a very small fraction of the city’s population, with aggregate totals from the city as a whole. Furthermore, the graph of annual baptism totals looks quite stable in the later seventeenth century, which is hard to reconcile with a falling birth rate unless there was more population growth than the author is willing to concede. Galley’s conclusion must thus remain provisional pending a detailed study of marriage and fertility as such. Unfortunately this will be a very tall order given the available source material.

England’s urban penalty persisted into the later nineteenth century. By this time England was heavily urbanized and so the story of mortality decline in this country is chiefly one of improvements in towns and cities. For more than a generation now work on this question has been dominated by a – sometimes polemical – debate between supporters and opponents of the late Professor T. R. McKeown, the former arguing that resistance to disease was boosted by improved diets stemming from economic growth, and the latter that progress in public health reduced exposure to infection. The argument has mainly been couched in terms of national aggregates, or individual cities, with little by way of international comparisons. Jörg Vögele sets out to remedy this in a comparative study of the ten largest English and German cities. The results amply vindicate his choice of approach. Following an introductory review of sources and methods, the book falls into two main sections. The first charts mortality levels and trends whilst the second reviews the potential sources of improvements: namely economic growth, housing, sanitary reform and action by the medical profession.

Mortality was generally higher in Germany than England. The urban penalty was also more severe at its peak, but it began to decline at an earlier date than it
did in England. By 1914 it had effectively disappeared, so that there was little difference in the specifically urban mortality of the two countries. Vögele is fair to both sides of the McKeown debate but comes down in favour of improvements in water supplies and sewerage as the primary explanation. He also attributes an important secondary role to changes in popular attitudes to health and disease, a process in which, he believes, the medical profession may have played an important part. This stress on the importance of improved personal hygiene and the ‘culture of cleanliness’ is well taken, but his accompanying characterization of earlier popular attitudes as essentially passive and fatalistic may raise eyebrows among English social historians.

Some of the most interesting parts of the book are concerned with national differences in the context and motivation of reform. Here Germany had a number of advantages, since the structure of urban politics placed power in the hands of those whose self-interest favoured improvements in water supplies and sewerage. The country also benefited from a relatively large corps of trained officials and technical experts, and from an interventionist tradition of policing which was less bound by private property rights than was the case in England. Rather surprisingly, however, the author is reluctant to credit his country’s reform process with a greater degree of success than England’s. German cities were able to benefit from English experience, and to import English experience and expertise, whilst – in contrast to England – the most pro-active cities were often those which had fewest health problems to start off with. In general, it is salutary to note how restricted was the role played by specifically medical concerns and personnel in the reform process, especially in its earlier stages when mortality was still very high.

The persistence of the urban penalty in a country with generally low mortality, by contemporary standards, underlines the importance of spatial variation in Victorian English mortality. As the authors of the Atlas of Victorian mortality point out, the range of life expectations at birth between Registration Districts in 1851 was over four times as great as the difference between the national figures for 1851 and 1901. This Atlas exemplifies the detailed attention to spatial difference that has characterized Woods’ extensive publications in a field he has largely made his own. The maps and diagrams are very well presented, but much of the labour in a project of this kind stems from the problem of changes in geographic boundaries and so necessarily goes on behind the scenes. In the accompanying text Woods and Shelton come down broadly in favour of the ‘exposure’ side of the debate on the reasons for mortality decline whilst arguing that tuberculosis underwent a spontaneous reduction in virulence, an explanation that struck this reviewer as rather unlikely given the apparent evolutionary age and stability of the tubercle bacillus. It is, presumably, the authors’ otherwise welcome emphasis on the relatively modest extent of mortality decline before 1900 which explains the absence of maps devoted specifically to the latter topic. Their absence is the Atlas’s one major deficiency, but it is not one which detracts greatly from the volume’s overall value as a reference and teaching tool.

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Those who open this book expecting to find a discussion of Scottish society, in the sense that most historians of the past 30 years have used the term, will be disappointed. Those interested in the changing conceptions of the state and in its operation will, in contrast, find much to digest in this substantial monograph. This is very much a view from above, seen through central (and a few local) institutions. ‘The peasantry’ appear only as taxpayers or lawbreakers, the poor hardly at all. The defence Goodare would offer is that the social basis of the Scottish state in his period is extremely narrow. Yet even the aristocracy is treated as a ‘problem’ for the state. This is, in many ways, a very conventional political history. The approach, if not the interpretations, are reminiscent of the solid if traditional scholarship of Gordon Donaldson. Goodare is more at home with Acts of Parliament, politicians, and the Privy Council than he is with merchants or witches – to mention just two groups who have been discussed in recent politico-social studies of seventeenth-century Scotland, but who appear hardly at all in this survey. Chapter 6 (‘Religion’) is principally about ecclesiastical justice and political theory, for Goodare’s interest is in the relationship between church and state in the pursuit of order and discipline rather than in the changing nature of religious belief. Goodare sees no simple linear progression in political development, but an alternating balance between ‘absolutist’ and ‘Covenanting’ phases in which crown and parliament were ascendant. This is a book about the changing structures of authority in a small European state which focuses on governance and governing rather than the experience of being ruled. It relies almost entirely on printed central sources. A more accurate title would be ‘Perspectives on state formation: the case of Scotland, 1560–1625’. Although Chapter 10 does look forward into the early eighteenth century (and includes a useful perspective on the Union of 1707 which stresses earlier political convergence rather than raking over the tired debates about economics and mortality) the author seems happiest in James VI’s reign.

Such qualifications should serve to warn most readers of this journal how little there is for them in this book but they highlight how much it has to offer political historians. However often readers may disagree with Goodare’s interpretations, there is no denying that he has a lively, challenging, and sometimes original approach. Even when ploughing through what appears to be a predictable passage, readers will be arrested by a fresh slant on the topic, or taken by an idea. The comparative European discussion of governing peripheral or interstitial regions in Chapter 8 is an example. The Borders and Highlands were tarred with the same brush by James VI from the 1580s, even if the problems of governing (or pacifying) them were not the same. The analysis of political change manages to be subtle and detailed without losing sight of the big picture. Chapter 4, on finance, a topic on which it is easy to be both opaque and dull, is particularly lucid and interesting. This book does not deal with both sides of the ‘state and society’ dyad in the same brilliant way as Steve Hindle’s *The state and social change in early-*

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In 1642, as tension mounted across the country, a series of attacks were made by rioting crowds across Essex and Suffolk upon the homes, property and persons of a number of prominent individuals, causing great unease in both local and national circles. These events – and in particular the earliest and best-documented riot, against Colchester gentleman Sir John Lucas – provide Walter with a focal point for investigation into crowd action and popular violence during the Revolution.

In practice, popular violence per se takes up only a fraction of a study which ranges into many areas of political and religious culture. Walter takes the Stour Valley riots as the window into wider questions of confessional and secular politics, popular economics and crowd behaviour in the civil war era and beyond. His method is that of fine-grained micro-history, marshalling a myriad of facts relating to all aspects of the unrest and its background, in order to understand the many layers of meaning which, Walter argues, intertwined in the events of 1642.

After an initial historiographical overview, the unfolding of events is placed alongside a critical reading of the various narratives from which the bulk of our knowledge derives, focusing on the agendas and sources of the apologists responsible. Most of the subsequent text is taken up with analysis of the identity and allegiances of those involved on all sides of the conflict, and the reasoning behind the crowds’ choice of targets. It is established that Sir John Lucas was enmeshed in disputes with both the Corporation and the inhabitants of Colchester, the dynamics of which are discussed in depth. In addition to the standard reading of the riots as based in class hostility, the attacks are placed within the context of the religious movements of the era, the high politics of government and local government and law. Connections with the cloth industry – then going through a period of crisis – are examined, and partially upheld, and finally the crowd is shown to have been drawn into conflict partly via the appropriation of parliamentarian propaganda which encouraged a popular political culture and legitimized certain forms of protest.

Thus the Stour Valley riots are shown not simply to have been the product of class hostility, anti-popery, economic crisis or any other single cause, although these factors certainly featured in shaping the conflict. Walter urges us to put aside attempts to differentiate between such categories of popular motivation, and instead emphasizes the integral role of popular political sensibilities, and particularly the ‘politics of rights’, in a nuanced understanding of the actions of civil war crowds.
The subject matter of this study is fascinating, the evidence often illuminating. There is a problem, however, stemming from Walter's concentration on the smallest of details, a defining feature of his analytical and textual style which is both the greatest strength and greatest weakness of this book. Every individual, every court case or polemic debate is precisely laid before us, and rather than aiding in building up a contextualized picture of the whole situation, the tendency is for major themes to be clouded by a mass of minutiae. Walter does clearly summarize his thread on occasion, but often his argument is obscured or understated. In short, the reader – especially if unfamiliar with some of the topics addressed – is left unable to see the wood for the trees.

Footnotes, particularly to the impressive array of manuscript sources which Walter has studied, are full, although slightly marred by a tendency to place together references to disparate elements within a single paragraph. This detailed footnoting partially mitigates the absence of a bibliography, although the latter would have been a welcome addition, especially as footnotes often comprise only abbreviated source references.

This book is important both in its own right, as a reading of a set of crowd actions which Walter has studied, are full, although slightly marred by a tendency to place together references to disparate elements within a single paragraph. This detailed footnoting partially mitigates the absence of a bibliography, although the latter would have been a welcome addition, especially as footnotes often comprise only abbreviated source references.

This book is important both in its own right, as a reading of a set of crowd actions which is unlikely to be challenged for depth of analysis in the near future, and for its wider implications for understanding early modern popular politics. It will doubtless be well used by subsequent historians in their quest for the broader picture. It is not, however, a stylistically easy read, and loses in animation much of what it gains in meticulousness.

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The very glue of social relations, the bonds which hold society together, are perhaps best exemplified in the systems each society develops to support and relieve its least fortunate members. As begging has returned to our streets, and the rhetoric of dole cheats has come to dominate our public discourse, the need for a more coherent and historically informed debate about the nature of those bonds has become ever more pressing. The two books reviewed here go a long way towards providing such an analysis of the forces which help to shape notions of belonging, obligation and identity, and the social attitudes which underpin them.

Lynn Hollen Lees has created the more ambitious of these two studies. She takes as her canvas the evolution of poor relief in England and Wales from the height of the period covered by the Old Poor Law to the emergence of the post-war welfare state. In a beautifully written and fully researched work, she effectively rewrites the history of social policy, eschewing the teleological and whiggish
approach of many previous scholars in favour of a more subtle and nuanced understanding. Recent historical work on the Old Poor Law in England and Wales has tended to replace the carping criticism of parochial relief first voiced during the high tide of classical economic thinking in the early nineteenth century, and reproduced in the very different context of early-twentieth-century Fabian socialism, with a more subtle appreciation of the system’s strengths. Lees takes this revisionist process one step further, presenting the Old Poor Law as a coherent system of ‘citizenship’ which effectively delineated notions of national and local identity, while at the same time binding very different social classes into a programme of mutual obligations and rights. And while at some moments she seems to present the eighteenth century as a kind of ‘golden age’ of welfare, there is no doubt that she has effectively caught the mood of recent scholarship. Perhaps her greatest contribution lies in her appreciation and delineation of the attitudes of the poor themselves. She is very conscious of the changing assumptions which underpin their behaviours, and gives them a stentorian voice. Her account of the notion that the poor have a ‘right’ to relief on the basis of a legal settlement is perhaps the clearest statement of its kind, and will undoubtedly form the basis for much future scholarship.

From a perhaps overly rosy account of eighteenth-century poor relief, Lees moves on to an innovative and very scholarly account of the coming of the New Poor Law and the development of new systems and beliefs in the nineteenth century. In many respects, the conclusions of this section are familiar from an older literature – she is particularly indebted to the work of scholars such as Poynter and Mandler. But Lees adds a new and important understanding of the very complex story of the implementation of the New Poor Law. Essentially, by stepping back from a narrow concern with the intellectual critique of the Old Poor Law and the creation of the legislative edifice of the New, and by giving pride of place to the administrative and personal records created by an evolving system, she provides a significantly new and nuanced account. She is particularly strong on the continuities that existed between the period of crisis associated with the last decades of the eighteenth century, and the first half of the nineteenth. Far from being the radical discontinuity the legislation involved would suggest, the developments Lees points to suggest a much more piecemeal and negotiated process of development in which ideology, changing assumptions about gender and the practicalities of responding to the demands of individuals were all mixed.

In Lees’ view the most significant impact of the New Poor Law lay in the reformulation of social relations and in the gradual recreation of working-class attitudes towards relief. For her, the eighteenth-century notion of a ‘right’ to relief was only gradually superseded by a growing distaste for state aid over the course of three or four generations.

After a tremendously strong account of nineteenth-century poverty and its relief, Lees moves on to the twentieth century and development of the peculiarly diverse and occasionally confused mix of approaches which characterized British policy during the first half of the century. She ends with a clear rendition of the various options available to modern states.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this study is the extent to which, even at
its lowest ebb during the nineteenth century, the poor law is depicted in a remarkably positive light. It is clear that while earlier generations of historians have denigrated past achievements, this intellectual smugness can no longer be sustained. The experience of the last twenty years, the gradual dismantling and pruning of the welfare state, has ensured that modern historians now look back to the Old Poor Law with a certain nostalgia, and a new tolerance for its limitations. For Lees, at least, it represents an evolving social contract which most people at most points during the last 300 years were happy to acknowledge. For her, it was perhaps the greatest achievement of the early modern English state, and its reformulation in the nineteenth century was a necessary corollary to the creation of a new democratic settlement. And if the Old Poor Law did not work perfectly, and if the New Poor Law was inherently nasty in design, if not its implementation, if the whole edifice bore unreasonably hard on those without a settlement, on travellers and immigrants, the Poor Laws still gave to the working people of England and Wales a highly sophisticated and unusual sense of community and belonging.

The peculiarity of the English and Welsh poor law is perhaps most effectively demonstrated by Rosalind Mitchison’s account of the poor law in Scotland. If Lees depicts the English experience as one of at least partial success, and limited generosity, Mitchison’s account of the Scottish poor law is uniformly dispiriting. While Scotland possessed similar laws to England, the implementation of those laws could not have been more different. While south of the border the vast majority of parishes had begun to rate themselves and to relieve the poor in a formal and bureaucratic manner by the end of the seventeenth century, in Scotland this level of provision was never achieved. Caught between the interests of landholders and the problematic politics of the established church, Scotland was left with a rag-bag system of voluntary collection and haphazard distribution. Landholders, in particular, adamantly resisted any notion of entitlement to relief on the part of the poor, while disingenuously defending voluntarism and partial provision under the guise of adhering to Christian charity. The people who suffered as a result were, of course, the poor. And while Mitchison expends too little space on their views and culture, it is clear that extreme poverty and occasional starvation was the result—a result apparently unleavened by even the most limited humanity. For Mitchison early modern poor relief was a failure, and a stark warning to modern governments. It foundered on self-interest and cruel lack of interest, and seems to have been characterized by nothing more admirable than intellectual arrogance in the face of real suffering.

This is the first modern full-length study of the Scottish poor law and its conclusions point to the wide diversity of experience found even within the British archipelago. The writing is occasionally uneven, but the book is based on 20 years of research into local and national archives and provides one of the most compelling points of comparison for the experience of other western European societies. The level of local detail is impressive, and if it lacks the broad intellectual sweep of Lees’ volume, it will nevertheless provide a necessary starting point for future work.

Together, what the two works reviewed here reflect is a growing interest in the
history of poverty and poor relief. Set one against the other, they point up the very
different experiences and systems of the communities of Britain, and by extension
those of western Europe. At the same time they challenge historians to continue
the work of comparison and synthesis, and suggest the possibility of creating a
broader understanding of the relationship between historical patterns of social
inclusion and modern concerns over both social exclusion and national identity.

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Diana O’Hara, Courtship and constraint: rethinking the making of marriage in
Tudor England. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.) Pages xii+
276. £49.00.

Readers of this journal and of Rural History will be familiar with two extremely
suggestive essays published by Diana O’Hara in the early 1990s. Her intensive and
imaginative exploitation of the depositions surviving in the archives of the
consistory court of the archbishop of Canterbury suggested both that the making
of marriage in sixteenth-century Kent was subject to a wide range of pressures
from friends, kin and community, and that the various stages in the complex and
ambiguous process of matrimonial negotiation, even between relatively humble
suitors, could be reconstructed by the study of the giving of gifts and tokens. In
analysing courtship as a process, in focussing on the sixteenth rather than the
seventeenth century, and above all in studying the middle and poorer sorts rather
than the propertied elite, these contributions not only broke new evidential
ground, but also revealed hairline fractures in the stalemate to which the debate
on the quality of affective relations in the history of the English family had been
fought.

With the publication of Courtship and constraint, those fractures have become
fissures, and the history of marriage formation will never look the same again.
Those two early essays appear in revised form here, but they are supplemented
by four other brilliant studies of the role of agents, spokesmen, negotiators,
tercessors and messengers in the course of matrimonial proceedings; of the
normative geographical perimeters of courtship; of the social and cultural
assumptions about marriage ages which lay behind the actual timing of marriage;
and of the nature and value of those legacies, bequeathed by testators to
unmarried daughters, which might be interpreted as dowry payments. Cumu-
latively, these six essays persuasively demonstrate that courtship was a structured
and coherent process that took place within a wider matrix of social and economic
relationships, and that courting couples behaved according to a set of internalized
assumptions that imposed powerful constraints on expressions of romantic love
and individual autonomy. Questions of property and well-being after marriage,
she argues, were always closely regarded, and their significance, far from reducing
in direct proportion to social status, were all the greater amongst the poor ‘since
material possessions may arguably have meant more to those with less’ (p. 2).
Courtship was, accordingly, ‘too important to be left to the individual and his or
her sentiments alone’, and the moderation of the emotional temperature of relationships by proxies was widely regarded as desirable (p. 118).

By the supplementing of the sensitive reading of depositions with analysis of entries in the act books and of the provisions of some 2000 wills, the possibilities for measuring the geography, timing and material basis of courtship become all the more intriguing. Over 80 per cent of courtships involved couples who lived within ten miles of one another, but it became significantly less common over time to choose partners from the same parish (p. 129). This growing fluidity in the marriage arena from the mid-sixteenth century developed simultaneously with increases in the normative marriage ages specified in wills and with the greater social mobility within the marriage market. By 1600, the minimum age limits of marital eligibility may have been higher and generally more uniform than they had been in the fifteenth century. Throughout the period, however, normative marriage ages were much lower than actual marriage ages as revealed by family reconstitutions, suggesting that there were nubile men and women already endowed with property for some years before the age when those who married actually did so (p. 176).

The concluding study of the transmission of property demonstrates beyond question the widespread provision of dowries by parents, even those of relatively humble rank. Dowries were not only extremely common, but they also increased markedly in value over the course of the sixteenth century. Although fairly small payments (typically 40 shillings) persisted into the 1580s, the average dowry increased more than five-fold (or by at least 50 per cent in real terms) between the mid-fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries. Indeed, the fact that only particular social groups were able to afford these increasing levels of payment suggests that the polarization of wealth and status also extended into the marriage market (p. 212). The timing and incidence of household formation therefore depended not just on the accumulation of sufficient wealth through independent earnings, but also on the critical and expected provision of dowries, an expectation revealed in those numerous depositions in which financial considerations are explicitly weighed by the couple and their ‘friends’.

At the heart of this book, then, lies the paradox that although the canon law of marriage by definition enshrined the individualistic principle of consent, communal and familial perceptions of external expressions of that consent, which were decisive in contract cases, provide invaluable evidence of manipulation, constraint and even coercion. Critics will doubtless argue that the evidence is socially unrepresentative in that, although the status profile of litigants in matrimonial court cases ‘included most ranks’ (p. 13), it excluded not only the very rich but also the desperately poor. Although more systematic analysis of the status of the deponents would have been desirable, it is unlikely that it would have undermined the thrust of what is a compelling argument. Indeed, one wonders whether the poor law materials generated in the wake of the 1572 act and the indemnity bonds required of poor migrants under the terms of the 1589 inmates legislation would not have provided even more evidence of the communal constraint of courtship, both in preventing the calling of marriage banns and in restricting the settlement of prospective spouses.
Overall, then, this is a quite wonderful book, richly rewarding in its detail, insights and conclusions. It will change the way historians think about the origins of the European marriage pattern, about the popular acculturation of marriage law, about the dynamics of inheritance, and most of all about the freedom which is conventionally understood to have underpinned the making of English marriage.

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