

Book Reviews

demographic information, opening up new and exciting issues of debate. We are now able to chart, with some confidence, the chronology of population change from the Black Death to the present day. Analyses of shifts in age-specific mortality, age at marriage, maternal mortality and a host of other demographic variables are helping to enrich our understanding of the past and to throw new light on the interrelationships between demographic, social, economic and epidemiological changes. Many questions remain to be explored and answered, and the subject of population history will continue, into the next century, to be as stimulating and tantalizing as ever.

This edition aims to bring together in a coherent and readable manner some of the main findings and debates which have stemmed from the prolific outpouring of scholarly work on the population history of Britain and Europe. While many of the original studies remain highly technical, this volume is ideally suited to students and non-specialist readers. It contains five extremely well written essays covering English population change from 1348 to 1991; some essays also contain information on Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and one encompasses north-western Europe. The essays, however, are not new. Readers familiar with the series *Studies in Economic and Social History* will immediately recognize that four of these essays have been published before—one as long ago as 1977. The original individual paperback books (of roughly 80 to 90 pages each and currently priced at £6.95) have always been popular with students and are still widely available in libraries and bookshops.

John Hatcher's excellent piece on 'Plague, population and the English economy, 1348–1530' was first published in 1977 and has not been altered in this edition. According to the editor: "the basic trends which it proposes have largely been confirmed by subsequent work, and the demographic processes underlying the trends remain subject to debate". Michael Anderson's essay on 'Population change in north-western Europe, 1750–1850' was originally published in 1988;

R A Houston's chapter 'The population history of Britain and Ireland, 1500–1750' and R I Woods' 'The population of Britain in the nineteenth century' were published in 1992. The only new, and very welcome addition is the essay by Michael Anderson on 'British population history, 1911–1991'.

While this collection provides a useful synthesis for students and non-specialists, it is a great pity that the original essays have not been up-dated to include recent material and references. This will be disappointing for readers who are looking for the latest ideas on a topic or who are expecting a good introduction to current discussions in population history. Omissions from the bibliographies of key works published in the last ten to twenty years will prove especially frustrating.

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G Melvyn Howe, *People, environment, disease and death: a medical geography of Britain throughout the ages*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1997, pp. xx, 328, £50.00 (0-7083-1373-6).

The first version of this book, *Man, environment and disease in Britain: a medical geography through the ages*, was published in 1972 and appeared in paperback in 1976. In this, the "revised and restructured edition", the chapter headings are the same, except for an additional "retrospect and prospect" in this new version. Most of the original maps, graphs, and tables have been retained, and some new ones added. The result, however, falls short of bringing the book up to date. Either the author is unaware of, or chose not to include, a great deal of important historical work which has appeared in the quarter century which separates the two versions. Thus, the section on the increase in the population of Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (p. 141), where the author cites the papers of Griffith (1926) and McKeown and Record (1962), he neither mentions nor shows awareness of the

canonical work of Wrigley and Schofield, *The population history of England* (1981). The section on the decline in infant mortality in this century (p. 237) about which so much has been learnt in the last twenty-five years, is hopelessly inadequate. Instead we get a brief statement of numbers and precious little analysis or discussion.

The author shares with Mr Gradgrind an intense love of facts and lists. Rivers can be polluted, he says, on page 62, and he proceeds to name twenty-four rivers which contained water of “poor to bad quality” in 1985. In the section on ionizing radiation, instead of discussing the dangers of nuclear power and the very difficult problem of interpreting clusters of diseases which has attracted so much attention, he lists the names and locations of fourteen British nuclear and reprocessing plants. How much of a hazard are these plants, and what is the evidence? We are not told.

There are sections for which the kindest word is banal. Believing, as all the inhabitants of these islands do, that the weather affects their health, much space is devoted to maps of rainfall, sunny days, foggy days, air masses and mean temperatures. More facts. Lots of them. But there is also a comic map (fig. 3.6) which purports to show in *exact* detail which areas of Britain are “very bracing”, “bracing”, “average”, “relaxing” or “very relaxing”. Since the author admits that “bracing” and “relaxing” are qualities that cannot be defined or measured I am astonished it was published. Another paragraph, cited because it conveys so much of the character of the book, deals with the effect of wind on health: “Winds can impair acoustal [*sic*] comfort. The noise they generate (‘unwanted sound’) causes degrees of nervous irritation even if it is merely audible. Gales and hurricane-force winds cause structural damage leading to injury and loss of life from collapsing buildings, crashing trees, overturned motor vehicles and motor cycles” (p. 23).

In many sections—for instance table 12.1 on ‘The main causes of death at the end of the Victorian era’, for which no source is given—

there are good reasons for doubting the author’s assertions. Distrust increases as one encounters numerous errors. Many are slight and if they stood alone could be ignored, but collectively they come close to the intolerable. There is no such word as “acoustal”, even if we can guess what he means. The definition of perinatal mortality (p. 238) is badly wrong, the significance of perinatal mortality is not explained, and the values for perinatal mortality given in the text are meaningless without specification of place (England and Wales? Scotland? Britain? the UK?) or year. The definition of incidence (of disease) is wrong (p. 271); the organism involved in peptic ulcer is *Helicobacter pylori*, not *Helicoblaster* (p. 223); Osler is misquoted on p. 231 and on the same page comensal [*sic*] has two ‘m’s. The tragedy of haemophiliacs infected with HIV was not due to blood transfusion (p. 250) but to the fact that factor VIII was derived from pooled plasma. “The Pox” was not a synonym for smallpox (p. 274) but for syphilis, the “Great Pox”. To define “psychopaths” as “persons suffering from an emotional disorder” (p. 236) is about as wrong as it could be.

This is only a sample of the errors. And yet the sad thing is that buried along with the misunderstandings, the banalities, and the errors (slight and not so slight) there is much of a factual nature that is of great interest—as long as one remembers that there are times when, at least as far as detail is concerned, the author cannot always be trusted.

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D Aichele, M Golte-Bechtle, *Was blüht denn da? Wildwachsende Blütenpflanzen Mitteleuropas*, new revised edition, Stuttgart, Franckh-Kosmos, 1997, pp. 447, illus., DM 29.80 (3-440-07244-4).

Werner Rothmaler, *Exkursionsflora von Deutschland*, Bd 1: *Niedere Pflanzen*, eds Rudolf Schubert, Horst Herbert Handke and Helmut Pankow, pp. 811, illus.; Bd 2: