

represents. Dempsey and his subjects may have lived relatively unimportant lives compared to the subjects we traditionally associate with portraiture in the nineteenth century (the aristocracy, royalty, politicians), but the greatest achievement of Hansen's work is that, two centuries later, he has made these forgotten lives significant.

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MARTIN JOHNES. *Christmas and the British: A Modern History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. 295. \$102.60 (cloth).
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Is there anything distinctive about the British Christmas? Martin Johnes, reader in history at Swansea University, seeks to argue that the festive season brings out the fundamental decency that he sees as characteristic of British society. He does so with a welter of statistics but without any comparisons with the way that Christmas is celebrated in other European countries or in the United States.

Johnes presents six headings under which the British Christmas can be explored. First, significantly and perhaps unsurprisingly, comes the consumer Christmas; second, the family Christmas; then category-crossing rituals of Christmas including cards, decorations, Christmas trees, Santa Claus, food and drink. The religious aspects of the holiday are relegated to the fourth chapter, "The Spirit of Christmas," which also covers charity and goodwill, hypocrisy and humbug, and nostalgia. Fifth comes "The Communal Christmas," a catch-all chapter taking in local communities, music, broadcasting, film, pantomime, and a section somewhat bizarrely titled "Scotland and Ethnicity," reflecting the very different way that Christmas has traditionally been celebrated north of the Anglo-Scottish border and briefly discussing the way that minority ethnic groups in Britain have regarded it. The final chapter, on officialdom and Christmas, takes in safety and crime, the workplace, holidays, and state interference.

The tone of the book is somewhat breathless with an almost constant barrage of statistics and anecdotes from across the twentieth century. There is a rather striking absence of material or discussion about more recent trends—nothing, for example, about the rise of the round-robin Christmas letter, the development and significance of email greetings and electronic Christmas cards, or the noticeable tendency of the queen's Christmas broadcast to be much more overtly Christian in tone and message over the last ten years or so. There are few facts and figures for the current decade, although one of the more intriguing is a claim by Birds Eye in 2013 that many people are replacing sprouts with peas as the vegetable accompaniment to their Christmas dinners. Why this should be—or why it might matter—is not discussed.

In short, there is more description than argument or analysis in this book, but Johnes does advance the claim that Christmas has helped ensure that Christianity retains its relevance in a secularizing society. I am not convinced that the evidence he produces fully supports this thesis. A survey in 2010, for example, found that there were 5,363 different designs of Christmas cards on sale in major British supermarkets, of which less than 1 percent had a religious theme. Statistics also continue to highlight declining church attendance and although Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services do still attract more worshippers than do any others, they have not bucked the overall trend of decline. Significant shifts in Christmas church attendance toward Christmas Eve afternoon and evening services and away from Christmas morning, and

recent analysis of the motivation and expectation of Christmas churchgoers, are largely ignored by Johnes or treated in a brief and rather peremptory manner. Indeed, given the fact that Johnes presents stemming the secularization of British society as one the main functions of Christmas, it is curious that he does not devote much more space and attention to analyzing and exploring church attendance, the changing pattern of Christmas services, and other aspects of the religious and specifically Christian dimension to the season.

Somewhat strangely, Johnes writes almost entirely in the past tense, as though Christmas celebration has somehow now come to an end and is entirely a historical phenomenon. This seems at odds with the overall thesis of the book, and it is a pity that Johnes does not allow himself some closing reflections on the current state of the British Christmas and how far it still underlines and embodies the fundamental values of decency that he sees as so important. Maybe he is himself overwhelmed with the nostalgia that he rightly sees as one of the key elements in the spirit of Christmas.

In the introduction, Johnes writes, “if there is a big idea in this book, it is that Christmas, just as Dickens had tried to convince people, is a good thing” (xvii). In the conclusion, he lists four main functions that the British Christmas has fulfilled over the last one hundred years: economic benefit in terms of generating significant levels of spending; stemming the secularization of society by ensuring that Christianity still had an inescapable public profile; constituting an integrative experience by bringing people closer to their family, friends and neighbors, community and compatriots; and making people happy. A rather romantic, Dickensian, rosy glow pervades the book as a whole, perhaps justifiably, but it might have been good to have acknowledged and cited more critical voices (both religious and secular) about the British celebration of Christmas and not to have set out with quite such a preconceived Dickensian agenda that it is a good thing.

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ANDREW KELLETT *The British Blues Network: Adoption, Emulation, and Creativity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. Pp. 263. \$75.00 (cloth).
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Andrew Kellett’s *British Blues Network: Adoption, Emulation, and Creativity* examines the impact of African-American bluesmen on white (male) British teenagers in 1950s and early 1960s England. Carefully researched and well supported by case studies and extensive end-notes, this cultural history complements other work in the growing body of study of English society and identity through popular music.

Mutual fascination with each other’s culture between Britain and America goes back centuries, but the phenomenon accelerated in the years after World War II. Having lost its predominant political and economic place on the world stage, Britain regained influence culturally, especially in America, through the so-called “British invasion” from 1964 onwards. Britain exported music, fashion, and European cultural sophistication that the United States readily embraced, returning the favor as American film and popular music had strongly influenced British popular culture in the 1950s. Key to the 1960s phenomenon were Britain’s indigenous rock and roll musicians—not the American rock-and-roll imitators of, for example, Larry Parnes’s venerable stable of the late 1950s, who were fashioned after Elvis et al., but rather next-generation musicians inspired by recordings of African American bluesmen—*rara avis* usually accessible only haphazardly via film, precious records acquired from US servicemen,