

In conclusion, this is a fine book that betrays its careful scholarship and erudition with a wonderful lightness of conceptual and linguistic touch. That there are absences and points of analysis that not all historians will be entirely comfortable with is inevitable in a book dealing with such a vast subject in so few pages. That it provokes many questions is a testament not therefore to any flaws but instead to the sheer scope of Randall's intellectual endeavour. Indeed, although *Riotous Assemblies* deals with many complex themes, it is so clearly written that it will make an ideal first-stop resource for undergraduates. One hopes therefore that not only does it stimulate further research into the cultural and political underpinnings of protest in Hanoverian England, but also that it stimulates Oxford University Press to publish a paperback edition forthwith.

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Keith D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006. xiv + 541 pp. £60.00. 0 521 86292 2.

Keith Snell has a gift for making explicit what, I would suggest, many historians feel instinctively about the lives and experiences of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poor. His *Annals of the Labouring Poor* became the seminal work on the subject soon after its publication in 1985, and has remained so ever since. I first came across it as a postgraduate student and vividly remember the impression that here, beneath the exhaustive research and the rigorous charts and tables, was a degree of empathy that elevated it far beyond other demotic histories I had read. As Professor Snell publishes a second, and equally weighty, volume on the lives of the poor, the question of whether he can achieve that blend of intellectual rigour and genuine empathy a second time looms large.

*Parish and Belonging* is, in many ways, a very different book to *Annals*. Although they cover some of the same ground, and share much the same structure (both are collections of overlapping essays, rather than attempts to construct a single narrative) they attempt – and achieve – very different things. Where *Annals* was an exercise in meta-history relying in large part on a micro-source (settlement examinations), *Parish and Belonging* is the exact opposite: an attempt to explain the enduring influence of 'localism' using a wide variety of different, often national, sources and approaches. Three of the chapters, on local xenophobia, rural marriage patterns, and gravestones and local attachment, will be familiar to readers, having had previous lives as journal articles. Others, on settlement and local belonging, and on out-door relief under the new poor law, pursue themes closely related to his work in *Annals*. The remainder, on the establishment of new parishes in the nineteenth century and on the place of parish overseers after 1834, provide further evidence in support of his central thesis: that 'localism', a sense of belonging based on

an attachment to a specific locality, survived as the keystone in personal and communal identity in England and Wales for most people until at least the last decades of the nineteenth century, and that the parish remained at the heart of that local attachment not only physically, as the administrative centre of people's lives, but emotionally too.

The most impressive thing about this volume, and it is very impressive indeed, is that it demonstrates beyond question that the parish remained a vibrant force, culturally as well as economically, way beyond the supposed sounding of its death knell in 1834. Using the copious and still underused papers of the various commissions, boards and institutions of the new poor law, he clearly illustrates a number of important conclusions: that the great majority of relief (around two-thirds in 1875) was given out of doors, and that as a result most paupers remained economically attached to their parish of settlement after 1834; that changes to the settlement laws in many ways strengthened, rather than weakened, parish attachments; and that local parish officials remained central to the implementation of the poor law until their abolition in the early twentieth century. The remaining chapters, although persuasive in themselves and useful in strengthening the argument for parish 'localism', lack the urgency of those relating directly to the poor law. This is understandable given his own demonstration of the poor law's continuing influence on the economic and cultural life of Britons during the nineteenth century; but it is also, in part, the result of the book's piecemeal structure.

Other caveats remain: for example, the author's reliance on folkloric anecdotes to support his thesis of 'local xenophobia' seems to me to diminish an otherwise sound argument, and some of his assertions relating to inter-parish hostility, including that relating to exogamous marriage, seem a little overwrought and less than convincing. But given the breadth of his coverage and the continued strength of his ambition, Professor Snell inevitably lays himself open to his critics, just as he did with the publication of *Annals*. Overall, *Parish and Belonging* is an important and timely collection from a historian whose empathy and intellectual rigour clearly remain fully intact: it will be very interesting to assess its impact in another twenty years.

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The Wortham Research Group, edited by David Dymond, *Parson and People in a Suffolk Village: Richard Cobbold's Wortham, 1824–77* (Wortham, Suffolk, 2007), xiv and 264 pp. ISBN 978-1-905111-05-3. Available from N. Smith, Wortham Publications Ltd., Honeypot Farm, Long Green, Wortham, Diss, IP22 1PW, UK. smithhoneypotfarm@talk21.com. Price: £19.99 (+ £5.86 UK postage, or £12 from overseas).

This superbly produced and fascinating book is unique. It is comprised of the short essays by the Reverend Richard Cobbold on his poorer parishioners at Wortham, north Suffolk, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, alongside his watercolour paintings of