

context, the authors make a point of highlighting the potential pitfalls, particularly for those seeking to avail of the accounting records that form such a large part of the database. ‘Accounting numbers’, they warn, ‘have an aura of certainty but readers – historians in particular – should not assume that they are “objective”’ (pp 15–16). Likewise, readers are warned that the agency perspective that underpins much accounting information often means that ‘Business sources – including financial statements – are not necessarily faithful representations of the past’ (p. 16). These are important caveats, reinforced by the authors’ long experience in using accounting information for archival and other purposes.

Chapter 3, ‘Potential uses of business archival sources for the local historian’, points to the many imaginative ways in which these sources can be employed. Using various illustrative case studies, the authors show how topics ranging from the impact of customers’ credit ratings on business decisions to the books used in eighteenth-century hedge schools can be informed by a keener understanding of these archives.

The real usefulness of the book, however, derives from the databases presented in the detailed appendices. These list business records available in N.A.I. (appendix 1) and P.R.O.N.I. (appendix 2). Each entry gives a catalogue number, the name of the source organisation, the industry sector to which they belong, the local provenance, the period covered, as well as a very useful summary of the data and types of materials available (ledgers, accounts books, and so on). While most sectors (manufacturers, professions, breweries, and so on) are well represented, it is both interesting and telling that comparatively few records have been lodged by accountants and auditors.

This book will become an indispensable resource for anyone seeking to appreciate the nature and range of the business, accounting and governance materials available in Ireland, as well as their potential for informing not only local but national histories. Part of the excellent Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History series, it is concise, well written, informative and insightful. Crucially, given the nature of the material, it is well indexed.

PHILIP O’REGAN

*Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick*

ULSTER LIBERALISM, 1778–1876: THE MIDDLE PATH. By Gerald R. Hall. Pp 272. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2011. €55.

Gerald Hall’s ambitious study seeks to move beyond ‘the polarized frame of Irish history’ and to trace the development, over the long period 1778–1876, of Ulster liberalism, ‘a political tradition ... in which neither nationalism nor unionism was the foremost consideration’ (pp 11–12). In seeking to address such a complex topic over a lengthy chronological period, readers might be forgiven for fearing that Hall has bitten off more than he can chew; he has, however, largely succeeded, producing a book that, while necessarily selective, is both wide-ranging and nuanced. Aspects of his story have, of course, been addressed before in the work of scholars such as A. T. Q. Stewart, Finlay Holmes and Frank Wright. But while drawing on this scholarship – although, curiously, not on Stewart’s seminal M.A. thesis on the transformation of Presbyterian radicalism – Hall’s is an original and thought-provoking contribution to the existing literature, which successfully establishes ‘a more complete context for Ulster liberalism’ (p. 15); this applies in both confessional and geographical terms. Hall’s study encompasses both Catholic and Presbyterian liberalism, and moves far beyond Belfast, the focus of much existing work in this area, to examine developments in a range of Ulster localities, including Coleraine, Derry, Enniskillen, Newry, Newtownards and Strabane.

Drawing on a range of primary-source material, including pamphlets, manuscripts and an array of regional newspapers, the study is chronologically structured, and comprises four

broad-ranging chapters. Taken together, these chapters trace the emergence and development of Ulster liberalism from the era of the Volunteers through to the mid-1870s, by which point the liberals' attempts to construct 'common public spheres' were becoming increasingly frustrated by changing confessional realities – realities that rendered 'the simple solidarity of creed ... easier to recreate and maintain than more complex relationships' (p. 181). Stated thus, Hall's narrative might seem pessimistic. But while this is so, his examination of the Ulster liberals' attempts to forge a political middle path reveals a more complex and widespread political culture than has hitherto been appreciated, and addresses an engagingly broad range of themes. Two areas in particular stand out. The first concerns the Ulster liberals' roots in the Volunteering movement of the 1770s and 1780s. Engaging with the work of Stephen Small, Hall identifies a 'nascent liberal' (p. 21) discourse among the languages employed by the Volunteers in Ulster, and breaks new ground in tracing the degree to which this form of liberalism was influenced by the 'Scottish school of sociology that developed in the writings of David Hume, Adam Ferguson and John Millar' (p. 28). While Whigs and classical republicans thought in terms of 'an ancient constitution that ought to be preserved', this strand of nascent liberalism thought in more evolutionary terms and 'came to emphasize the role of social developments in political history' (p. 28). Equally striking is Hall's original discussion of innovations in local government, the most notable being the town commissions, which Ulster liberals used, from the mid-1820s onwards, 'to mount a surprisingly widespread, prolonged and effective challenge to the traditional, conservative order in the Ulster towns' (p. 106). Such challenges were not always successful, but nor were they always unsuccessful, and Hall's examination of this area, and his later discussion of the politics of municipal reform, brings to light a range of local conflicts 'played out in places rarely disturbed by politics' (p. 159).

While largely persuasive, there are some areas in which Hall's analysis may be questioned. His dismissal of the liberals' engagement in broader British political issues, such as the Queen Caroline affair, is a case in point. Arguing that involvement in such events 'neither created enduring voluntary associations nor significantly affected institutions of government', Hall chooses to focus instead on the liberals' 'broader strategy of challenging the social and political authority of the landed élite' (p. 69). It is, however, possible to view the two processes as closely related. Certainly, this was the case in Belfast, where the town's reformers utilised a series of 'British' causes célèbres to provoke head-on confrontations with Belfast's oligarchic corporation. Likewise, the study rather underplays the extent to which reformers continued, particularly in Belfast, to deploy the discourse of classical republicanism in the 1810s and 1820s, and it would have benefited from a sustained discussion of the Belfast Academical Institution, arguably the most significant institution established by Ulster's liberals in the first half of the nineteenth century. These points aside, *Ulster liberalism* remains an important contribution to the literature on nineteenth-century Ulster politics, and can be read with profit. The volume is crisply written and, save for the omission of journal titles in footnotes listing journal articles, well produced: it is to be hoped that it succeeds in attracting a wide readership.

JONATHAN WRIGHT

*School of Histories and Humanities, Trinity College Dublin*

FREE PASSAGE: THE REUNION OF IRISH CONVICTS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN AUSTRALIA, 1788–1852.  
By Perry McIntyre. Pp xxiv, 344. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 2011. €60.

This is a frequently fascinating and very well-researched book looking into what has been, to date, a neglected aspect of the history of Irish emigration to Australia. Unlike previous studies, this book focuses on a relatively small number of emigrants: those convicts who applied for reunion with their wives and families who had remained in Ireland. The book