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Foster's "Seven Households: Life in Cheshire and Lancashire, 1582 to 1774" and "Capital and Innovation: How Britain Became the First Industrial Nation; A Study of the Warrington, Knutford, Northwich and Frodsham Area, 1500-1780" - Book Review

Sylvia Stevens  
*University of Sunderland*

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FOSTER, C.F., *Seven Households: Life in Cheshire and Lancashire, 1582 to 1774* (Arley Hall Archive Series, 3; Northwich, Cheshire: Arley Hall Press, 2002), pp. xviii + 248. ISBN 0-9518382-3-7, Hardback, £19.95. ISBN 0-951832-2-9, Paper, £11.95.

FOSTER, C.F., *Capital and Innovation: How Britain became the First Industrial Nation; A Study of the Warrington, Knutsford, Northwich and Frodsham Area, 1500-1780* (Arley Hall Archive Series, 4; Northwich, Cheshire: Arley Hall Press, 2004), pp. xvii + 373. ISBN 0-9518382-4-5, Paper, £16.95.

Both obtainable from Arley Hall Press, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6NA.

In these two volumes, which conclude the Arley Hall Series, Charles Foster examines differing lifestyles in the pre-1774 counties of Cheshire and Lancashire, and the development of a business society in the north-west. Previous studies focused on rural life and farming in Cheshire in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Using account books, *Seven Households* investigates the lives of members of seven families from Cheshire and Lancashire, representing a range of households who had capital, from the upper gentry through to those who got by on small sums – Warburtons from Arley, Leicesters from Tabley, Jacksons of Heild, Dockwras (George, not a Quaker) in Aston by Budworth, Shuttleworths of Smithills and Gawthorpe, Lathams of Scarisbrick, and the Fell family in remote Furness. It is important to the case that Foster is building up concerning the formation of business culture that those

below upper gentry are described partly in terms of how they held their land. The Fells and Shuttleworths, as copyhold tenants (nearly as unrestricted as freeholders), came between the upper gentry and those who held their land on leasehold terms.

Norman Penney's edition of *The Household Account Book of Sarah Fell of Swarthmoor Hall* (1673-78) has been used as the principal source for the Fells. Comparing them with the Shuttleworths, studied over 1582-1621, Foster reckons that in matters such as the payment of farm servants in kind and money, the Fells continued practices followed by the Shuttleworths some 80 years previously. In their conduct of business he finds them seizing their opportunities, well abreast of the time. The detailed descriptions of their farming practice, their making and buying of textiles, running of the forge and their trading ventures to Bristol and elsewhere, expand upon the information embedded in Penney's notes, place the account book in the context of lives that overlapped, and make it accessible to a wider readership.

Sarah Fell's account book has been used because it is the only one that Charles Foster has found by a 'freeholder' family in the north-west. It was not selected as typical, nor could the Fell-Fox family be described as typical of most Quaker families. It is an extremely valuable book to have survived, but its denominational association gives Quakers a prominence they might not otherwise have and becomes a factor in interpretation. Charles Foster concludes from the marriages of Fell daughters to businessmen from a far distance that business was 'at the heart of Quaker culture'. He goes on to suggest the use of a secular vocabulary for the consideration of Quaker values rather than the religious framework in which it was cast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The difficulty with that is that readers may give what is written a twenty-first-century interpretation and make modern assumptions. The Fell women had exceptional opportunities to meet men from a distance, including merchants. There were few gentlemen among Quakers in this period.

Through the descriptions of these households, whose inhabitants and activities are brought vividly before the reader, Foster reveals how the area was moving out of self-sufficiency and developing into a wide-ranging and diverse market economy. He emphasises the varying ways in which the households adapted to these changes. Upper gentry improved their houses and estates, while members of the other two groups embraced the new trading opportunities.

In *Capital and Innovation* he takes a long view of the process whereby the north-west was transformed from being an area where self-sufficiency prevailed into a market economy, eager for business and innovation. He argues that legal changes regarding customary tenancy in the sixteenth century, followed by inflation, led to a major and lasting redistribution of wealth, to the benefit of small farmers. Inheritance patterns and types of lease reinforced this trend, enabling the development of a culture favourable to business. There were, he contends, more large estates belonging to major landed gentry in the south and east. Their culture, which sought to maintain the estate as a priority, exploited natural resources on the land but shunned trade, sought and gave patronage, and spent to maintain position, was predominant. It would be unreasonable to ask this author for a parallel study based in the south, a need he acknowledges. The book ends with some examples drawn from the south and east, including a comparison between declining Bristol and rising Liverpool, and a

brief look at Europe, but the result is that a polarised model emerges. A consideration of changing attitudes to reciprocity over the period might have provided a context.

This is a complex project combining economic and cultural investigation. The case for the north-west is grounded in the area and archives that the author knows well. The detailed analysis in the area of the four towns appears convincing with regard to the redistribution of wealth. I have not researched the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in depth, so refrain from commenting on the assumptions of probability that have to be made, or on typicality. One can draw much from its presentation and in-depth examples, whether or not one accepts the argument fully. Charles Foster's business experience gives him valuable insight into how small businesses became creatively involved in innovation and adaptation. When he uses his knowledge to suggest possible financial situations and outcomes he is careful to include appropriate caveats. In other matters, for example literacy, he sometimes slips into a generalisation that leaps too far.

The suggestion is made that, as families who worked for a living in the north-west grew wealthier, they became more independent, an attitude shown in their openness to Puritan religion and to the Quaker challenge to authority and rank. In saying this Foster is pointing to a state of mind within which Anglican, Dissenting or Catholic attitudes to work could interplay (although Catholics do not feature in this study). How one might identify and interpret this independence in relation to the development of business is as open to debate as the Weber thesis.

Quakers have a prominent place among the in-depth studies of the business society that was forming over 1650–1770. The eighteenth-century Hough family and their connections in the Warrington area, principally the Fothergills and Chorleys, are the subject of one chapter; two Quaker families feature in the account of sailcloth manufacturing around Northwich from 1556–1773, and there are some additional references. Foster is interested in these people for their shared standard of conduct and their networking. The chapter on the Houghs is particularly interesting, not only for the details of their finances, but also for the indication of activities and friendships outside the Quaker circle. Thomas Hough was a commissioner of the Weaver navigation. From the perspective of Quaker studies, Warrington stands out as an eighteenth-century focal point that could contribute to the understanding of many different aspects of Quaker history. Ian Seller's recent history of Warrington accords the Quakers a lesser place. Readers may like to add to Foster's modern references work by Ann Prior and Maurice Kirby.

There is another potential language puzzle in this chapter. It relates to the discussion of equality. For example, how is one to interpret that Quakers (who worked like everyone else primarily to provide for their family) 'banded together to succeed in business so as to gain a way to a better world'?

There are some small points for future editions: the history journal is *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*; the phrase 'Inward Light' would be used at this period rather than 'Inner Light', and it would be very useful to have a list of manuscript sources at the head of the bibliography. Numerous maps and illustrations enhance both books.

Sylvia Stevens  
University of Sunderland, England