

Book Review

William Hartley *Lancashire Cotton Spinners: A Fortune made in the mills*, (Carnegie, 2016). 106pp.
ISBN: 139781910837, £8.99

The social history of Lancashire's cotton towns has had renewed interest recently. Here, it forms the backdrop for Hartley's study of three families, the Mannocks, Prockters, and Holdens, and their entwined fortunes in Oldham cotton spinning. Based on family records, *Lancashire Cotton Spinners* is thus of great interest for those seeking to examine the impact of the rise and fall of British textiles via the prism of familial case study.

The book covers the period c.1825-1960s, although a helpful postscript continues with later legacies. As the author suggests, there are elements of the 'unremarkable' in studying the families of Lancashire cotton owners, but this study of networks, business and economic change in a major industrial northern town, is a welcome addition to the literature.

The chapters follow a rough chronological order, focussing on key figures to develop the narrative in the early chapters, and becoming broader in the later. It is in the latter sections where the strengths of the book are clearer, and where a wider range of sources allows for both context and deeper analysis. The period after the Second World War, discussed primarily in chapters 9-13, is of special interest in revealing the human reactions to the decline of cotton. Perhaps more discussion on the inter-war period would have helped to provide more context to this.

The chapter lengths are somewhat frustrating at times, as they do not always offer scope for in-depth analysis. This is especially the case with some of the earlier sections. Further discussion and analysis of Oldham, its areas and the local economy could have added context to some of the key years in the textile industry's history. Similarly, analysis of the mills and indeed the operatives is sparse. On p.92 for example, the discussion of how operatives dealt with the Redundancy Payment Act, 1965, could have also considered the impact on the local community. However, several of the chapters, 9 for example, manage to combine the family histories with the wider story of changes in the industry with more success. The chronology is occasionally unclear, particularly in chapter 11, and some irrelevant information detracts from the overall argument, although this is a minor gripe.

A helpful family tree, glossary of terms, and discussion of the value of money are included, as are two appendices. The 69 illustrations include primary sources and images.

It is clear that Hartley has done a great deal of research both in public and family archives, as well as talking to relations of the families involved. As a book, it is not aimed at academic audiences, but is of interest to scholars seeking to personalise the fortunes of British textiles, and will clearly have interest to local and family historians. It offers an interesting, if sometimes frustrating case study of individual and familial networks, from the foundation to the aftermath of the businesses.

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