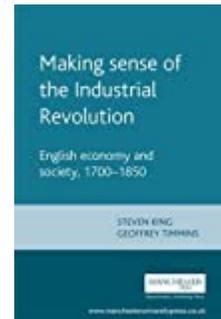




**Steven King, Geoffrey Timmins.** *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution: English Economy and Society, 1700-1850.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. xiii + 402 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-5022-0.



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The idea that socio-economic change was more pronounced in the 150 years after 1700 than in any preceding or succeeding era of equivalent length is periodically challenged, but not in this book whose authors appear entirely convinced of the existence of the industrial revolution. Steven King and Geoffrey Timmins might, at first sight, be judged unlikely bedfellows, yet their partnership, founded on a complementarity of knowledge and expertise, works surprisingly well. King, prolific investigator of 'micro demography' and Timmins, a historian of the industries of the north of England, have created a refreshing perspective on an industrialising world. Taking the 'long view' and drawing on evidence of a widely felt contemporary sense of change, they conclude that the period from the early eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century was one of discontinuity. In some ways, therefore, this work contributes to the 'rehabilitation' of the industrial revolution initiated by Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson several years ago.

The book is structured in three parts, each of which is informed by innovative thinking - both their own and that of other historians - in the field. The first section juxtaposes contemporaries' perception of what was happening around them and historians' interpretation of the same events and experiences and explains why various historiographies of several 'industrial revolutions' co-

exist. The regional dimension of economic expansion is considered in some detail both as a means of engaging with important recent work and to provide a context through which to understand the purpose of the substantive chapters that follow.

There appears to be slightly less novelty of approach in the second part of the book which suggests approaching the huge area of historical enquiry that is subsumed within the notion of industrial revolution within the context of economic infrastructure. The conventionality is only superficial, however, and although the broad themes in this section are familiar, the authors suggest creative ways in which readers might engage with well-worn issues and sources. The overall approach, however, is neither dogmatic nor overly directive. The discussion on change in technology and the organisation of production emphasises the range and variety of innovation and its regional distribution. The following chapter on finance bravely takes the reader through a balance sheet and suggests conclusions that can be drawn from it. Some old favourites, in unfamiliar guises, are revisited. The agricultural revolution is repackaged, quite effectively, as 'the feeding of the industrial revolution'; and supply and demand becomes 'sellers and buyers.'

In the third section there seems to be more repackaging, but in fact the revisionism is more profound. It

is here, in the last part of the book, that the authors' individual research interests and findings play a key role. An ambitious attempt to explain complex demographic issues, for example, exposes the reader to a more sophisticated exploration of the significant consequences of population growth and mobility such as the challenge to family and household survival and relations between the generations. Through such discussion, the reader is prepared for a chapter which revises prevailing views on the impact of the industrial revolution on the form and function of English families and households, emphasising the variation within and between regions, and concluding that the family could mediate the impact of change in the socio-economic sphere as well as simply react to it; and another which explores the changing economic structure of the household through an examination of budgets, diets, wages, family incomes and household expenditure. In effect this is a refined recasting of the standard of living debate, identifying individuals and groups as gainers and losers, and pointing out the unexceptionable yet rarely illustrated fact that the well-being of any person or family would vary over time both because of life course changes and as a result of fluctuation in economic activity and occupational opportunity. The authors usefully emphasise the importance of understanding cycles of accumulation and dissipation experienced by the often or sometimes poor.

Although the extent of the unknowns make convinc-

ing conclusions difficult, King and Timmins rightly point out that the question of how people make ends meet is essential to our understanding of what the industrial revolution meant to those that lived it. The final substantive chapter provides a comprehensive treatment of the built environment, which further conveys the contemporary sense of disjuncture and discontinuity, this time through the growing scale, changing appearance and increasing proximity of housing, factories and other edifices. The analysis of a contemporary diary, providing further evidence of a widely felt experience of change, provides the focus of the concluding chapter.

The authors make no claims for completeness, indeed are transparent about the gaps, yet this book is impressively comprehensive in scale, scope and analytical range. The work is explicitly aimed at a student readership, yet even old hands will be informed. Its key strengths are: firstly the way in which primary source material is integrated in the text and with which students are encouraged to engage; secondly its emphasis on the region which permeates the text; and thirdly—though this is slightly over-done—its commitment to understanding how contemporaries perceived and understood the changes going on around them. King and Timmins show that there is plenty of life in the industrial revolution as a subject for investigation, debate and edification. The industrial revolution is clearly responding well to treatment but is not yet out of rehab.

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