**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Saville-Smith, K. J., Provincial society and empire: the Cumbrian counties and the East Indies, 1680–1829

Aldous, M. (2019). Saville-Smith, K. J., Provincial society and empire: the Cumbrian counties and the East Indies, 1680–1829. *Economic History Review*, 72(3), 1101-1103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12886>

Published in:
Economic History Review

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

© Economic History Society 2019. Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
This work is made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

K.J. Saville-Smith, *Provincial society and empire: the Cumbrian counties and the East Indies, 1680-1829* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018. Pp. xvi+296. 8 figs. 1 map. 6 plates. 2 tabs. ISBN 9781783272815 Hbk. £65

The long 18th century has provided a rich seam for study of continuity and change within the British economy and society. The dramatic effects of industrialization and the growth of international trade have been widely analysed. Within the debates on economic development, empire, and social mobility, Cumbria, a predominantly rural county in the far North West of England, has not featured widely. Saville-Smith's book addresses this neglected corner, by identifying and tracing the lives of over 400 Cumbrian individuals who sojourned in the East Indies over the century in a variety of roles. The author seeks to examine the impact of these encounters within a diverse set of historiographies: the economic and social development of Cumbria, the history of the East India Company (EIC), the emergence and renaissance of provincial towns, and social dynamics of the gentry and middling classes.

Of course, one may conclude that Cumbria has not featured widely in these debates for good reason. As a predominantly rural county industrialization was late and limited, although coastal connections provided links to the Atlantic world. A cursory glance would suggest continuity more likely than change. Yet, concerns that wading through a county history may offer much detail but limited wider interest are quickly assuaged. Indeed, the book should prove interesting to a range of readers as the sources and analysis are well connected to wider debates. Demonstrating the provincial origins, motivations, and deployment of the returns from the East, offers scholars of the EIC, imperialism, and global trade, useful micro-foundational insights into the motivations and effects of imperial encounters. Whilst the book plays strongly into debates on the development and relative importance of provincial interests and experiences, as opposed to those of the national and metropolitan.

Chapter 2, in particular figures 2.1 and 2.2, neatly establishes Cumbria's relevance and importance for these debates. These show trends that point to a persistent and systemic engagement with global trade and empire. Analysis of the county origins of EIC appointments and licenses in 1801, reveal that in relative terms, those of Cumbrian origin were considerably over-represented amongst these ranks. Similarly, the absolute and average number of appointments per decade also significantly increased across the 18th century. Whilst it is well known that the EIC's Directors and Chairman were widely distributed in terms of geographic origins, the identification of this growing and persistent regional trend neatly opens up the questions, why were Cumbrians predisposed to go East? Subsequently, what impact did this lengthy engagement with empire have on these individuals and the county?

The author addresses these questions through serious and systematic archival work, drawing on numerous sources to identify 421 Cumbrian men and 23 women sojourners. Comprehensive appendices provide their names, positions, place and date of service, and names of mother and father. A multitude of other sources including EIC records, bodies of correspondence, wills and inventories are used in a variety of ways across four thematic chapters. Chapter 2 provides context, in particular identifying the geographic and familial origins of the sojourners. Interesting network analysis shows interconnections between gentry and middling mercantile

families, whilst potted biographies of individuals show how familial links to the East developed over time.

The remaining three chapters examine the motivations for these careers (Chapter 3, Why go to the East Indies), how they were enabled (Chapter 4, Passage to India), and the impact of these encounters (Chapter 5, Returning and Returns). The role of family and kinship networks are at the heart of the book. The decisions to go East, and subsequent expectations about outcomes, whilst often economic in nature, were underlined by family motivations; whether enhancing, redeeming or escaping them. Having made the decision to go, the routes to the East were shaped by kinship networks linking Cumbria, London and India. They provided financial, material, reputational, and emotional support to those leaving and returning. Being Cumbrian opened doors and smoothed passages. Within these networks the role of women as confidantes, partners, and sources of financial and material support, was notable. Chapter 5 completes this analysis, showing how familial networks created economic, political, social and physical legacies in the county from returns remitted from the East.

The author certainly justifies the decision to examine this neglected region, and the Cumbrian encounter with the East provides interesting new perspectives on a range of debates. More generally, a piece of scholarship is a success if the sources and analysis stimulate the readers' interest to find wider applications. The author provides useful discussion on opportunities for comparative county level analysis. Whilst opportunity for further longitudinal study could arise from further analysis of how the human capital and networks created through these encounters persisted and shaped later developments.

Queen's University Belfast

MICHAEL ALDOUS