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*Seven Households: Life in Cheshire and Lancashire, 1582-1714
, and: Capital and Innovation—How Britain Became the First
Industrial Nation: A Study of the Warrington, Knutsford,
Northwich and Frodsham Area, 1500-1780 (review)*

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Book Reviews

Seven Households: Life in Cheshire and Lancashire, 1582-1714. By Charles F. Foster. Northwich: Arley Hall Press, 2002. 248 pp. Price hbk. £19.95/RoW Airmail £28.00; pbk. £11.95/RoW Airmail £18.00;

Capital and Innovation—How Britain Became the First Industrial Nation: A Study of the Warrington, Knutsford, Northwich and Frodsham Area, 1500-1780. By Charles F. Foster. Northwich, Cheshire, Arley Hall Press, 2004. 373 pp. Price pbk. £16.95; RoW Airmail £23.00

If you take the time to look around any bookshop or peruse the books sold on-line you will invariably come across a substantial local or regional history section which would suggest that such books are very popular. In the case of Charles F. Foster's two detailed studies of Cheshire and Lancashire it is easy to understand why. In the first of these works, Foster has offered the reader a rich insight into the daily lives of four Cheshire families (the Jacksons of Hield, Aston by Budworth; Warburtons of Arley; Dockwras of Aston by Budworth; and Leicesters of Tabley), and three families from Lancashire (the Fells of Swarthmoor Hall; Lathams of Scarisbrick; Shuttleworths of Smithills and Gawthorpe). In the second book he further explores the industrialization of the north-west of England, particularly in Warrington, Knutsford, Northwich and Frodsham. Indeed, in these extremely readable and excellently researched volumes, Foster does what he sets out to do, namely to "unlock the door onto a vanished world." In the finely illustrated *Seven Households*, he uses household accounts to show how these rural communities were transformed from their reliance on agriculture to centers of industrial development and commerce. The study of the Fell family is naturally of particular interest to readers of *Quaker History* and provides coverage of how the Swarthmoor estate and the Fells' businesses interests were managed, but Foster does not dwell on the impact that George Fox had upon the family and the community.

Instead he shows how the accounts kept by Sarah Fell throw considerable light into the mundane but essential activities that kept the estate and the local community together. They illustrate the size of the farm and the farming techniques used, the staff employed, the costs of employing them and their places of work. Occasionally other interesting facts are highlighted, such as the payment in February 1677 for the weaning of a child by a wet-nurse, the close inter-community relations, legal arrangements made by the family after the death of Thomas Fell, and their wider business interests and Quaker networks, especially among those who became family members through marriage. As Foster is keen to point out "their shared interest was the Society of Friends, most of whose members seem to have

been engaged in national and international business" (137). There is also a detailed commentary about the textiles they either produced themselves or bought at market. Given the predilection for simplicity and plainness among the early Friends it is noticeable that in the 1670s the Fells made some purchases which other members would have thought extravagant. In many respects the contrast between the families in this book is quite revealing. It shows on the one hand the gentry holding fast to the economic traditions of the past, while the lesser gentry, and particular the yeomanry, embraced new enterprise and enjoyed their new found wealth. The Quaker Fells, as Foster demonstrates, were certainly part of this process.

The second volume provides further evidence of the economic buoyancy of Cheshire and Lancashire from the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. Again this volume is based on a notable array of family and estate papers, local accounts, tax and hearth returns and assorted ephemera. The volume, as before, is richly illustrated and considers the redistribution of wealth, occupational change and legislation that affected these communities. It also demonstrates how the areas emerged as thriving early modern business "enterprise zones," particularly in the salt, sail-making and linen manufacturing industries, and how they cooperated to ensure that their profits were maximized locally and nationally. They also created a "business culture" that stretched from Europe to the Far East and incorporated the trans-Atlantic trade. In the forefront of such developments were the Quaker Hough, Chorley and Forthergill families. Offering some contextual information for the origins of the Society of Friends, kinship groups and the commercial acumen of members, Foster shows how these "geographically mobile" and innovative families established business networks in and around Warrington and elsewhere. Moreover, as he points out, "there is no doubt that the Quakers made a large contribution to the technical innovation in manufacturing which was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution" (266).

There are, however, some problems with the two books. The wider issues of industrial change and commercial/entrepreneurial progress in a national context are rather glossed over, and the financing of such endeavors, notably the growth of banking and credit in the early modern period, is generally ignored. Despite these reservations the two studies do offer considerable reflections on the advent of industrial and commercial activity, and there is a wealth of information to be mined for a deeper investigation into these Quaker communities and these particular families in the north-west of England.