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Book Review: The Rise of a Victorian Ironopolis: Middlesbrough and Regional Industrialization

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This latest offering from the 'Regions and Regionalism in History' series, a source of several works of interest to the urban historian over the past decade, provides a timely analysis of the demographic, economic and social developments that underpinned the rapid growth of Middlesbrough as a major iron manufacturing centre in mid-Victorian Britain. Consistent with Professor Yasumoto's earlier work on industrialization, urbanization and demographic change in Leeds, this thoroughly researched study makes use of an impressive array of sources in providing a detailed quantitative analysis throughout. The narrative of the planning and emergence of Middlesbrough found in Chapter 1 will be familiar to those versed in the history of the town, yet is complementary to existing work in its detailed statistical representation of these developments, gleaned from impressive exploration of sources including the papers of the Owners of the Middlesbrough Estate, poor rate books, improvement acts and charters. In doing so, Yasumoto identifies a number of developments of interest to the urban historian including the emergence of urban institutions and, through astute exploitation of financial records, the shift from earlier dominance of local affairs by the Owners to tripartite governance in the 1870s, consisting of the municipality, the Owners and the ironmasters. The importance of the ironmasters in the town's economic organization is apparent in the next chapter, concerned with agglomeration, productivity and markets. Through discussion of the numerous trade organizations that emerged to support industrial expansion, including the Chamber of Commerce and employers' organizations such as the Cleveland Ironmasters' Association, the importance of regional manufacturing networks as mechanisms for consolidating trade circles and weathering economic downturns is shown.

While the first two chapters might loosely be considered narratives of the Rise of a Victorian Ironopolis, the two chapters that follow, dealing with demography and urban growth and the Cleveland iron and steel industries' labour market, are dominated by tables and graphs with accompanying explanatory text of their contents. The first, with a strong reliance on census enumerators' books, presents a meticulous longitudinal migration profile of the town showing the potential of computer-aided record linkage in facilitating comparisons with other boom towns in Britain, the Continent and across the Atlantic. Changes in age structure, comparisons with population increase, in-migration and out-migration in other areas, as well as detail of birth, marriage and mortality rates, show convincingly the centrality of migration in Middlesbrough's industrial expansion. The differences that existed across socio-economic groupings, interactions within the community, similarities with industrial conurbations elsewhere and even the relationship between migrant persistence and criminality are explored. In a similar vein, the following chapter explores various facets of Middlesbrough's youthful, male-dominated labour market. The role that print media, kinship and workplace networks played in aiding the recruitment of skilled workers and managers, coupled with analyses of marriage patterns, birthplace of offspring, accommodation of migrants, trade union supported mobility and the migration patterns of two selected individual migrants, all help to provide an insight into the links that facilitated the development of the town's workforce and determined interactions within it. In laying stress on the manufacturers' reliance on importing skilled workers into Middlesbrough owing to the lack of training and education provision fit for developing an indigenous labour force, Yasumoto contends that this contributed to the steel industry's failure to match the boom generated by the earlier iron industry. The final section of the book investigates the medical services available to victims of industrial accidents, taking the form of a case study of the major hospitals serving the town – North Ormesby Hospital and North Riding

Infirmary. The emphasis on the divergent nature of the two institutions' financial support base and management structures up until the 1900s is particularly salient to urban history's recent concern with governance and contestation of urban space. The juxtaposition of the working-class-dominated North Ormesby Hospital, heavily reliant on workers' subscriptions, with the North Riding Infirmarium, developed as a 'means through which the Cleveland local elite might extend its role in regional governance' (p. 187), is particularly intriguing.

Yasumoto's undoubted passion for both Middlesbrough and its demography shine throughout. However, the copious tables and datasets limit the ability to project a central narrative or argument, whilst the diversity of topics discussed sees the work essentially form a collection of essays. Nevertheless, in covering areas as diverse as urban growth, business organizations, labour markets and the contested terrain of medical provision, Victorian Ironopolis is sure to have broad appeal to urban historians researching a range of topics.

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