

and Music in London's Suburbs, and: A

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Provincial Organ Builder in Victorian England:

William Sweetland of Bath, and: The Provincial

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 ***Far from the Fashionable Crowd: The People's Concert Society and Music in London's Suburbs, and: A Provincial Organ Builder in Victorian England: William Sweetland of Bath, and: The Provincial Music Festival in England, 1784–1914 (review)***

Charles Edward McGuire

Victorian Studies

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Charles Edward McGuire (bio)

***Far from the Fashionable Crowd: The People's Concert Society and Music in London's Suburbs*, by Alan Bartley; pp. xviii + 303. Newbury, Berkshire: Whimbrel Publishing, 2009, £17.50.**

***A Provincial Organ Builder in Victorian England: William Sweetland of Bath*, by Gordon D. W. Curtis; pp. xvi + 307. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011, £65.00, \$124.95.**

***The Provincial Music Festival in England, 1784–1914*, by Pippa Drummond; pp. vi + 304. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011, £60.00, \$114.95.**

These three volumes examine aspects of English music that are well-known and referred to in passing within biographical literature on Victorian music but not usually discussed otherwise. In each case, the study at hand is either the first major exploration of the topic (*Far from the Fashionable Crowd* and *A Provincial Organ Builder in Victorian England*) or the first consideration in some time (*The Provincial Music Festival in England*). All rely primarily on a consideration of periodical sources from the local and national press rather than archival sources, and each suffers from the author's inability to contain the information within a stable or convincing argument. They are all accessible social histories; none contain any substantial analysis of music.

Gordon D. W. Curtis's volume is clearly a labor of love. Those lacking a thorough understanding of organs and organ construction will find the first four chapters interesting but the remainder of the book daunting. The volume is primarily a contextual discussion of organs built and refurbished by William Sweetland's company. Curtis has clearly done a good deal of research to uncover the significance of Sweetland's work, but he has been hampered by the ravages of time: information that once might have been more widely available has now disappeared. The book is divided into two parts: one titled "Sweetland's Life and Work," the other a "Gazetteer" of Sweetland's organs, arranged geographically. The "Life and Work" section contains a short biography, discussions of other organ builders in Bath, and descriptive chapters on Sweetland's

business history, his inventions for the organ, and a few exemplary instruments. The most useful chapter in the book for the non-specialist is a description of the repertoire played [End Page 750] on Sweetland's instruments (particularly for the opening or premiere concerts of the newly-constructed or refurbished organs). Less useful is an introduction that highly simplifies the musical life of Victorian Britain during Sweetland's life: Curtis presents an idiosyncratic view of the important elements of the century, clearly revealing that he has not consulted many of the books published by Ashgate on the era. The "Gazetteer" section of the volume will be useful to organ specialists wishing to track Sweetland's approximately three hundred instruments. When possible, Curtis gives commissioning and use dates and specifications; frequently, however, the information is paltry and speculative, either because Sweetland's organs have now disappeared (as in the case of the organ at Yate Church in Gloucestershire) or because they have been refurbished so heavily by other organ repair and manufacturing firms that Sweetland's original work can no longer be reconstructed (as in the case of the organ at Winforton Church in Herefordshire).

Whereas Curtis at times is working with too little information, most of Alan Bartley's *Far from the Fashionable Crowd* shows that he has too much. Bartley's work analyzes concert music in London's suburbs from the 1870s to the 1930s. His book is the first detailed scholarly consideration of such important organizations as the People's Concert Society and the rational recreation concerts put on at South Place. Bartley contextualizes these offerings for the working classes by comparing them to similar concerts organized in solidly middle-class suburbs such as Hampstead, Woodford, and Surbiton. At times, it is difficult to ascertain his argument, except that music was plentiful and prevalent for most classes, and that all of Greater London's population during this time had access to performances of the same predominantly Austro-Germanic chamber music repertoire. One of the most maddening aspects of the volume is that Bartley speaks in general terms based on what is obviously...

with the goal of enabling British design to compete with Continental imports, and leading to the establishment of Schools of Design, including the Manchester School of Design in 1838 (House of Commons, Report from the Select Committee of Arts and Manufactures [1835], 375-377).

The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857: Entrepreneurs, Commodities and the Public is essential reading for anyone studying the history of exhibitions, the history of the arts in Manchester, the history of collecting in the United States, or the history of Victorian cultural enterprise. Yet it also provides valuable insights into the development of art history as a discipline that will be of interest to a much broader range of scholars.

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Yale Center for British Art

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