questioned four times a year over whether they shunned the use of newly-imported slaves. Eighteen years later, in 1761, that Meeting, and the one in London, adopted an enforceable ban on Quakers trading in slaves (but not owning them).

Carey does not explore the later translation of ‘discursive structures’ into popular advocacy and parliamentary action, because those are questions beyond his remit. Still, having traced the contours and texture of Quaker debates, it seems a shame for the book not to consider how far the development of political anti-slavery campaigns was contingent on the process he traces; in other words, was Quaker exceptionalism vital to the concept of abolitionism? The final few pages touch on these questions with characteristic care and intelligence, but a separate conclusion might have developed the larger points that Carey shies away from. In resisting teleology, he holds back from a bolder historiographical intervention. When academics are too often over-ambitious in pressing their argument and promoting their own achievements, this author is maddeningly restrained. Nonetheless, his book will be essential reading for those studying or researching the history of anti-slavery in the Anglophone Atlantic world.

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Vagrancy in Law and Practice under the Old Poor Law, by Audrey Eccles (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012; pp. 249. £50).

Previous research has produced numerous papers on vagrancy but this is the first book to offer a full-length study of vagrancy law in practice through and beyond the eighteenth century. Audrey Eccles’s research in the Quarter Sessions and other administrative sources of six counties (Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Lancashire, Middlesex and Westmorland) is used to great effect to show how the vagrancy laws were applied and extended in attempts to ameliorate deficiencies in poor-law provision, as well as being an alternative to dealing with petty crime not covered by existing statute law. During this period, parliament passed legislation that increasingly penalised the vagrant—for example, making corporal punishment mandatory for those convicted. However, the sentence was rarely carried out. Eccles’s analysis not only highlights the role of parish politics in coping with the cost of relieving the poor and processing vagrants, but also demonstrates tensions between constables, JPs, parishes, county authorities and parliament in administering vagrancy law.

The opening chapter offers an in-depth history of vagrancy law from the reign of Edward III in the fourteenth century to the New Poor Law of 1834, but the effects wrought by both the 1700 and 1744 Vagrancy Acts in the six aforementioned counties provide the main focus of the book. The second chapter explores the processing of those held for vagrancy and outlines problems, often arising from administrative errors and county-specific procedures. Dissenting voices are heard, such as the constables who, out in all weathers, often at personal risk and with little remuneration apart from expenses, are shown to have been often less enthusiastic than the courts in
carrying out the ‘onerous and thankless’ task of processing vagrants. Indeed, constables were not the only representatives of authority who were prone to adapt the application of vagrancy law. An important theme in Chapter Three (which supports Peter King’s work on the remaking of law by Justices at the local level [Crime and Law in England, 1750–1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins (2006); rev. ante, cxxiv (2009), 443–5]) was that many perceived abuses of ‘Vagrancy Law in Practice’ were creative and sensible attempts by magistrates to plug gaps in the legal provisions for poor travellers, those with no legal settlement, and military personnel and their families, as well as those who fell sick or ‘laid in’ on perfectly reasonable journeys. Eccles also demonstrates how plebeians manipulated the vagrancy law to take advantage of its passing system to subsidise and expedite their return journey home. The next two chapters expand further on the politics of parish and county by highlighting the importance of categorisation, since the costs of removing persons deemed to be vagrants were recoverable by the parish from the county authorities from 1700, while removing paupers was charged to parish accounts. Attitudes to poor, sick travellers are assessed in detail, as is the versatility of vagrancy law in its application to ‘undesirables’—such as those caught playing banned games or betting, tinkers, and travelling sellers.

Chapter Six is concerned mainly with the prosecution of vagrancy crime, paying attention in particular to the changes wrought by the 1744 Vagrancy Act. Again the theme is the versatility of vagrancy law, as Justices could use it to punish a plethora of practices from assaults on officials to victimless moral crimes. The charge of ‘idle and disorderly’ was one that was regularly used in order to punish ‘undesirables’ who may not have broken a law or been prosecutable under an existing statute. For example, on page 144, Eccles relates how a woman was convicted under vagrancy law for being no more than ‘An Incorrigible bad Woman and a Person who offends the whole of the Parish of Milborne St Andrews’. Chapter Seven outlines the variety of punishments for convicted vagrants, which, due to the multifunctional application of vagrancy law, is not surprising. Eccles demonstrates that a readiness to carry out corporal punishments such as whipping diminished through the eighteenth century and that these were often applied less than vigorously. Authorities often failed to fathom the reasons for the wandering of the poor, believing that there was work aplenty, and the penultimate chapter supports this premise by offering evidence of the causes of vagrancy in those from varied social and financial backgrounds whom misfortune had pushed into poverty.

Unconcerned with challenging established historiography, Eccles instead complements and builds upon previous research from, among others, Peter King, Tim Hitchcock and Nicholas Rogers. A meticulous style of explaining processes and applications delivers a comprehensive account of vagrancy law before the new Poor Law of 1834. Eccles pays great attention to detail and has a fine command of the sources, from which the voices of various authorities and officials are clearly heard. However, it would have been valuable to hear more from the vagrants themselves, in order to understand better their experiences of vagrancy and its prosecution. Also, there are areas that could have been more fully developed; for example, a chance to comment upon regional decreases in corporal punishment in relation to the established account of decreasing violence in eighteenth-century England is overlooked. Similarly, Eccles’s findings that the majority of Middlesex rough sleepers were female, which differs from a 1786
Middlesex sample of vagrants removed showing males in a majority (available at www.londonlives.org), offers opportunities to further investigate gender divisions in vagrancy and to make comparisons across the regions. Furthermore, a clearer quantitative presentation of the data that Eccles has accrued would allow a more detailed and nuanced comparison of the different regions. That aside, this is a valuable contribution and should be considered as essential reading for anyone concerned with the Poor Laws or vagrancy.

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British naval impressment has been a subject of scholarly fascination for a century now, and, from the beginning, the intrinsic importance of the subject has explained only a small part of its attraction. Impressment matters in the modern world, as it mattered in the eighteenth century, more for its political and moral implications than for its administrative history as a mechanism for manning the Navy. Unlike naval administration, it is still capable of arousing emotion, and indeed passion. It is characteristic of many modern treatments of the subject that they implicitly or explicitly link it to current political debates in a way which would be regarded as extraordinary and improper in any other scholarly context. Because so many historians have been more interested in impressment’s symbolic value than its practical machinery, they have tended not to study in detail what it was or how it worked. Impressment, moreover, is a good example of the general principle that nothing so effectively deters professional historians as too much evidence. If a dozen ships’ musters had survived in The National Archives, they would no doubt have been exhaustively analysed. Since there are actually more than a hundred thousand, they have until recently slumbered undisturbed.

All this is relevant to Denver Brunsman’s present book, which surveys the subject on the basis of wide reading both in published literature and in a large number of archives. His approach is broadly cultural, in the sense that he is more interested in the significance of impressment, both to contemporaries and to ourselves, than in its actual machinery. Unlike most scholars who approach the subject from this direction, however, he does know a lot about the practicalities. He fully understands that impressment was a pragmatic response to a real difficulty, an acknowledged evil which survived because the House of Commons defeated repeated attempts to replace it with some more equitable and efficient system. He claims that the real necessity of pressing arose from ‘imperial ambition’ rather than national defence, indeed that impressment was integral to ‘Empire’, but (unlike so many who deploy this fashionable term) he is quite aware that the empire of the eighteenth century was an empire of trade and influence as much as, or more than, of overseas territory. He argues that ‘Britain’s famed “manning problem”... was a crisis of its own choosing’ because there was no real necessity to keep up a merchant fleet in wartime—a position which may not convince economic historians. In fact, both explanations, that impressment was the fault of merchant shipping or of ‘imperial ambition’, are