

culpability of parish medical officers for such failures and finds that they were caught in a catch-22 regarding their very limited contracts and their very heavy actual workloads.

One drawback of Price's organization is that the significance of medical negligence comes into view late in the book. Price has a powerful argument to make about how the poor law produced a system of organized neglect. The dispassionate parsing of "negligence" within contract and administrative law in early chapters sits incongruously with the urgent and appalling consequences of these arrangements presented in later chapters. Furthermore, Price clearly follows the lead of many academic historians in deliberately avoiding the narrative aroma of scandal and melodrama, even though this is how the Victorian public itself often framed the abuses of medicine and the poor law. The stereotype of the callous and inattentive parish medic was well established by the 1860s. While Price abundantly shows why the medical neglect trope was unfair and misplaced, he has little to say about the trope's public consumption or about how the scapegoating of doctors eventually gave way to other forms of criticism. (Price hints that the environment was significantly different by the 1890s, but this is not explored in any great detail.) Given the arcaneness of poor law administration, this book will appeal almost exclusively to specialists in welfare and medical history. *Medical Negligence in Victorian Britain* nonetheless is a noteworthy and meticulously sourced contribution to the social history of medicine and the Victorian poor law.

Matthew L. Newsom Kerr
 Santa Clara University
mnewsomkerr@scu.edu

KATHRYN RIX. *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880–1910*. Studies in History. Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2016. Pp. 290. \$90.00 (cloth).
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Britain's political landscape was transformed by three reforms passed by Gladstone's second ministry between 1883 and 1885: the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act (1883), the Third Reform Act (1884), and the Redistribution Act (1885). In recent years, historians have moved away from interpreting these reforms as the dawn of "modern" politics—characterized by centralization and national campaigns—and instead see them as accelerating changes already underway. In *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England*, her first book, Kathryn Rix adds a new dimension to post-1885 British politics by studying electoral agents, the "hidden workers" of the Liberal and Conservative parties who were a product of reform and shaped its consequences. Before the 1880s, agency work had largely been valuable supplementary income for solicitors. These solicitors, however, were gradually superseded by full-time agents who worked the constituencies year-round. This process was partial, uneven, and incomplete by 1910, the terminus of the book. But by this date, agents had become a firm fixture of British politics. Rix carefully untangles the professionalization of politics that agents represented from processes of nationalization and centralization, which, as Jon Lawrence and others have argued, belongs to the period after 1914. It was the local nature of politics that explains the agents' uneven spread, as both Liberal and Tory high command resisted imposing agents on the constituencies.

The rise of the agent is explained by the complex legal landscape created by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act, the demands of politics in the age of the mass franchise, and the expansion of political competition to include all manner of local elections. Indicative of the agents' increasing workload was the expansion of the handbook of electioneering, *Rodgers on Elections*, from a single-volume, 799-page door-stopper in 1880, to 1,799 pages in two-volumes in

1885, and 2,579 pages in three volumes in 1894. Agents—professional or otherwise—needed to be conversant with, at the very least, the 1872 Ballot Act, the 1854 and 1883 Corrupt Practices Acts, the two minor amending Acts of 1885 and 1895, and around 30 case laws by 1895. For voter registration, agents also required knowledge of a further 188 acts or part-acts of Parliament, more than sixty registration forms, and, by 1897, around 600 registration appeals. Election law, however, was just the one part of the agents' business. Agents were also responsible for the management of local elections and party organization, the organization of political education and soirees, and the enlisting of volunteers. The need for the latter was also stimulated by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act, which imposed strict spending limits on candidates, introduced stringent punishments for breaches, and outlawed paid canvassers (who had been brazenly used as a cover for bribery in the 1880 election). Some agents were also expected to be good speakers.

Who were the agents? It depends where one looks. In the strongest section of the book, Rix draws upon biographical information of 199 agents to delve into their social, educational, and occupational backgrounds and their professional aspirations. Rix's collective biography is a dense wealth of information that is worth reading through more than once. What emerges strongly is the sheer variety. Although many agents had legal training, and others were drawn from the professions, a significant number came from working-class backgrounds. Despite this diversity, Rix identifies several commonalities, such as their improving status, geographical mobility, and rootedness in their communities. Although Rix weaves into her narrative many short pieces of biographical information, the collective biography would have been strengthened if a handful of more detailed biographies were included.

A great strength of the book is Rix's use of the agents to reassess broader themes of British political culture. In chapters 4 and 5, for example, Rix argues that the perceived cultural differences between the two parties have been overstated. The prevailing stereotypes are that the Liberals were pious kill-joys and the Tories were narrowly concerned with the "pleasures of the people." Rix shows that Liberal agents worked hard to counter the Liberal's sober image and that Tory agents engaged in political education. In the last two chapters of the book, however, we begin to lose sight of the agents. Chapter 6 considers candidate selection, which was, we are told, "not an area where agents played a major part" (173), and the final chapter is largely taken up with a discussion of electoral literature. These chapters are not without insight, but they fit poorly with the book's otherwise tight focus on agents. Indeed, they suggest that a more comprehensive history could have been written. These quibbles aside, this is an excellent book. It is the authority on electoral agents, a compelling history of electoral culture, and a demonstration of the rich rewards of studying the backroom mediators of political change.

Josh Gibson
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford
josh.gibson@lmh.ox.ac.uk

SHERENE SEIKALY. *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. Pp. 258. \$21.89 (cloth).
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The central theme of Sherene Seikaly's *Men of Capital* is Palestinian society in Mandatory Palestine. The key argument of the book is encapsulated in its final two paragraphs: