

DAVID HANSEN. *Dempsey's People: A Folio of British Street Portraits 1824–1844*. Canberra: National Portrait Gallery, 2017. Pp. 262. \$64.95 (cloth).  
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In 1996, during an audit of works stored at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery's Print Room, a remarkable discovery was made. In a drawer labeled "U"—for "Unknown"—the museum's archivists discovered a portfolio containing fifty-one watercolor portraits of British "street people" in various occupations and activities. Fascinatingly, twenty-five of these paintings, as David Hansen notes, identify these people by name: "Black Charley, shoemaker"; "Thomas Archbold, fishmonger"; and "Mary (or Diana) Croker, mat woman" to name just a few. For many years, the artist who had painted these people was thought to have been George Scharf, a nineteenth-century painter of London street life. Only when the museum's curators inspected the paintings more closely did they find the signature of the actual artist: a long-neglected portraitist called John Dempsey.

David Hansen's immaculately researched *Dempsey's People: A Folio of British Street Portraits 1824–1844* is both an exhibition catalogue and a scholarly publication. It contains all of Dempsey's watercolor portraits that were found in the portfolio (plus one more that was discovered at the National Library of New Zealand) and which were the subject of a significant exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, Australia, in 2017. Hansen masterfully places both the artist and his subjects in their historical and cultural contexts while also detailing Dempsey's life story and where his work fits into nineteenth-century visual culture. Hansen conveys a wonderful feeling of a lost history being recuperated, and the dual narrative Hansen tells of both Dempsey and the street people is both insightful and extremely valuable.

John Dempsey was born in Bath in either 1802 or 1803 and died in Bristol in 1877. He traveled around various British towns and cities to paint the "local characters" of each one. Each portrait is a fascinating glimpse into the life and times of one of these characters, which often include, thanks to Hansen's extensive research and Dempsey's habit of identifying the sitter, a short biography of the subject. Take, for example, "Tommy Raeburn, the Ayeshire hermit" (c. 1830s), whose remarkable appearance made him something of a minor celebrity. And it is easy to see why: as depicted by Dempsey, Raeburn has long matted hair, a grey beard, a blue-and-white hat, and a dark blue jacket covered in patchwork. Incredibly, Hansen informs us that when Raeburn died he left an estate of £2,400, which is over £100,000 in today's money.

There is a real energy and freshness to these paintings, and we demand to know more about these characters and their lives. It is easy to understand why this project has been a labor of love for Hansen: researching these people and Dempsey must have been rewarding, and Hansen's passion for his subjects is evident on every page. In this sense, *Dempsey's People* is also the story of Hansen and an exemplary instance of practicing art history "from below." Taken together as a body of work, Dempsey's portraits provide us with a unique and valuable insight into not only the visual culture of the nineteenth century but also a group of people who were rarely painted: the working poor. Dempsey's work paves the way for such Victorian landmarks as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851).

*Dempsey's People* is one of the most beautiful and well-produced books that I have recently encountered. The pages are thick, and the full-color image reproductions are of an exemplary standard. Attractive details run throughout the book, not least the dust jacket, which, if you remove it, folds out to become a large poster of Dempsey's portrait of "Copeman, gardener, Great Yarmouth" (date unknown). Moreover, when the dust jacket is removed, it reveals an embossed image of Dempsey's "Billy the match man, Liverpool" (c. 1820s). These details are characteristic of the thought and time that has gone into the design of the book overall.

In short, the National Portrait Gallery and Hansen should be proud of the quality of this book, both from a design perspective and the substantial contribution to knowledge that it

represents. Dempsey and his subjects may have lived relatively unimportant lives compared to the subjects we traditionally associate with portraiture in the nineteenth century (the aristocracy, royalty, politicians), but the greatest achievement of Hansen's work is that, two centuries later, he has made these forgotten lives significant.

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MARTIN JOHNES. *Christmas and the British: A Modern History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. 295. \$102.60 (cloth).  
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Is there anything distinctive about the British Christmas? Martin Johnes, reader in history at Swansea University, seeks to argue that the festive season brings out the fundamental decency that he sees as characteristic of British society. He does so with a welter of statistics but without any comparisons with the way that Christmas is celebrated in other European countries or in the United States.

Johnes presents six headings under which the British Christmas can be explored. First, significantly and perhaps unsurprisingly, comes the consumer Christmas; second, the family Christmas; then category-crossing rituals of Christmas including cards, decorations, Christmas trees, Santa Claus, food and drink. The religious aspects of the holiday are relegated to the fourth chapter, "The Spirit of Christmas," which also covers charity and goodwill, hypocrisy and humbug, and nostalgia. Fifth comes "The Communal Christmas," a catch-all chapter taking in local communities, music, broadcasting, film, pantomime, and a section somewhat bizarrely titled "Scotland and Ethnicity," reflecting the very different way that Christmas has traditionally been celebrated north of the Anglo-Scottish border and briefly discussing the way that minority ethnic groups in Britain have regarded it. The final chapter, on officialdom and Christmas, takes in safety and crime, the workplace, holidays, and state interference.

The tone of the book is somewhat breathless with an almost constant barrage of statistics and anecdotes from across the twentieth century. There is a rather striking absence of material or discussion about more recent trends—nothing, for example, about the rise of the round-robin Christmas letter, the development and significance of email greetings and electronic Christmas cards, or the noticeable tendency of the queen's Christmas broadcast to be much more overtly Christian in tone and message over the last ten years or so. There are few facts and figures for the current decade, although one of the more intriguing is a claim by Birds Eye in 2013 that many people are replacing sprouts with peas as the vegetable accompaniment to their Christmas dinners. Why this should be—or why it might matter—is not discussed.

In short, there is more description than argument or analysis in this book, but Johnes does advance the claim that Christmas has helped ensure that Christianity retains its relevance in a secularizing society. I am not convinced that the evidence he produces fully supports this thesis. A survey in 2010, for example, found that there were 5,363 different designs of Christmas cards on sale in major British supermarkets, of which less than 1 percent had a religious theme. Statistics also continue to highlight declining church attendance and although Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services do still attract more worshippers than do any others, they have not bucked the overall trend of decline. Significant shifts in Christmas church attendance toward Christmas Eve afternoon and evening services and away from Christmas morning, and