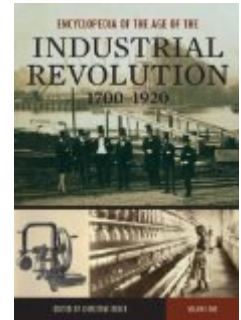


Christine Rider, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Age of the Industrial Revolution, 1700-1920*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007. 604 pp. \$225.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-313-33501-3.



Reviewed by Stephen Roberts

Published on H-Albion (April, 2008)

This is an ambitious undertaking. To put together an encyclopedia of technological, economic, social, and political change over two centuries across several continents requires a great deal of consideration and planning. The parameters of the encyclopedia need to be defined. Inevitably there is going to be almost as much omitted as included. Inevitably the editor is going to select topics and decide on the word limits for contributions according to his or her own perception of what is and is not important. Thus, Christine Rider does not see a place for a separate entry on, say, Richard Arkwright of Cromford (though James Watt and other engineers are all present and correct) and accepts contributions on newspapers and temperance which tell their stories almost entirely from a U.S. point of view.

But what are the strengths of this encyclopedia? I turned first of all to my own area of expertise, Chartism. I found a sensible and accurate essay by Christopher Frank. This is complemented by a useful piece, also by Frank, on the London Working Men's Association, though room might perhaps have been found for the Chartist Land

Plan, a direct response to industrialization. The vast majority of the 158 mini-essays that make up these two volumes are in fact clear and thoughtful summaries. Some contributions are indeed excellent--Rider herself on Thomas Malthus, Jane Weiss on Charles Dickens, Lana Thompson on the disparate topics of Communism and gin palaces--and Thomas Aiello does a good job in disentangling Fourierism. One of the great pleasures of dipping into encyclopedias are the nuggets of interesting information that are retrieved--I was fascinated to discover that the term "decibel" is a tribute to Alexander Graham Bell!

I have read all of the contributions in these volumes relating to Britain, and a handful of others. I cannot comment on the accuracy of entries on, say, the industrial revolution in Austria-Hungary or Henry Ford, but they seemed fluent enough. Of the British topics, I found only one entry that was inadequate--a muddled account of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union by Mark J. Crowley which does not mention Robert Owen or indeed the GNCTU much but offers some not wholly accurate observations on Chartism.

(There are also some odd recommendations for further reading).

The second volume includes an extensive selection of documents. I am not convinced that these, hard-going as some of them are, will be widely read. However, there are, for those interested enough to investigate, useful extracts from, for example, Luddite literature and the writings of Henry Mayhew. In truth this space could have been better used addressing the heavy weighting towards U.S. experiences that characterizes the encyclopedia.

Students will find that this encyclopedia provides clear and up-to-date summaries of many important topics. They should be gratified if they find it in their libraries. It will certainly also be useful for scholars, and certainly deserves the two inches it occupies on my bookshelves.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion>

Citation: Stephen Roberts. Review of Rider, Christine, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Age of the Industrial Revolution, 1700-1920*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. April, 2008.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14385>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.