

--> **Voir l'erratum** concernant cet article

Reader, W.J. *Bowater: A History*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Pp. xv, 426. Tables, figures, maps, illustrations. £25 and \$49.50 (U.S.)

Olaf Janzen

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gle . . . then practices clearly cannot be explained within a theory of structures" (p. 201).

As a critical assessment of the major social theories claimed by urban sociology, the book is an unqualified success. Quite apart from the fine substance and writing, Saunders is to be commended for "respecting" work to whose perspective he does not subscribe by assessing it in detail and presenting it in its most sophisticated formulations. He is to be commended also for taking thoughtful stands on some difficult and controversial epistemological issues. One could criticize the book for several reasons. The alternative epistemology for urban sociology, the Weberian ideal-type "dualistic" approach which is argued to avoid tautology, is not as well developed as are Saunders' criticisms of other perspectives. The theoretical basis for the proposed ideal types is not clear. Finally, there seems to be the same confusion for which Saunders castigates human ecology in his designation of social consumption, local government and competitive politics as both processes *and* their observable outcomes. It is a pity, furthermore, that Saunders has labelled his book as a search for a new urban sociology, for much of what he says is common to other disciplines. One could also criticize his focus on Castells' writing as a means to criticize Marxist explanation: though Saunders deals with it well, much criticism of Castells has been made elsewhere; it is unnecessary to dwell on it to the exclusion of a large Marxist literature which has tried to build upon Castells' work rather than just replicating it. None of these points detracts from the quality of the book as the critical review it claims to be.

An advanced undergraduate honours class whose students have some background in the assessment of urban theories might make good use of this book. But I suspect that its concern with epistemology will place it more generally on graduate reading lists. That concern makes the book relevant to any course or discipline in which there is interest in explaining urban change. I recommend it most highly.

Ruth Fincher
Department of Geography
McMaster University

NOTES

- 1 Andrew Sayer, *Theory and Empirical Research in Urban and Regional Political Economy: A Sympathetic Critique*. Urban and Regional Studies, Working Paper no. 14. (Brighton, U.K.: University of Sussex).

Reader, W.J. *Bowater: A History*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Pp. xv, 426. Tables, figures, maps, illustrations. £25 and \$49.50 (U.S.).

The Bowater Corporation is a British multinational organization particularly active in North America and significant in the Canadian setting as the founding agent and dominant corporate force in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Born a century ago as a modest wholesaler of paper, it has in recent decades become involved in many activities, including the manufacture of products as diverse as drainage pipes and fine furniture. A merger in 1973 with the commodities trading firm of Ralli International doubled its sales volume, so by 1979, total sales of the Bowater Corporation measured nearly £2 billion. Yet, for all that diversity and trading activity, the Bowater Corporation remains firmly identified with the production and sale of paper and paper products, especially newsprint.

Bowaters' first venture into manufacturing was the paper mill at Northfleet, near London, England. It had been built in consequence of a decision in 1924 to take advantage of a rapidly rising demand in England for newsprint (itself caused by a fierce circulation war among the national newspapers of the Fleet Street press barons). From the manufacture of newsprint, the firm expanded into the production of wood-pulp in England, and then overseas through the acquisition of pulp and paper mills in Scandinavia and Newfoundland, as well as of vast timber leases in Newfoundland. This growth, completed in 1939, was governed by a perceived need to protect Bowaters' British operations by reducing its dependence on independent suppliers of wood and wood-pulp. The Newfoundland expansion, however, was also encouraged with an eye towards penetrating the lucrative American market. That penetration began during World War II with sales of surplus newsprint produced at the Bowaters mill in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, and led eventually to the construction of pulp and paper mills in the United States itself, in the 1950s and 1960s. Bowaters' gradual diversification into other kinds of paper—and forest-products in the 1960s was similarly designed to protect the Corporation, only by then the perceived risk came from an overdependence on the newsprint industry.

Responsibility for practically all of these decisions rested with one man — Eric (later Sir Eric) Vansittart Bowater, grandson of the firm's founder. It had been at his insistence that the firm went into newsprint manufacturing, and it was in response to his initiative that the firm became a vertically integrated operation, and then a multi-national one. Most importantly, Eric Bowater singlemindedly engineered this aggressive expansion through heavy borrowing, trusting in a steadily growing market and the sheer will and force of his personality to keep the company's creditors docile. In short, the history and character of the Bowater Corporation seemed to be given shape by this one man.

It is therefore understandable that in writing *Bowater: A History*, W.J. Reader would place Eric Bowater at the centre of his narrative. Thirteen of the book's fifteen chapters con-

cern themselves with his career. In so doing, Reader has written a very traditional business history, one which is more of a corporate biography than a corporate history. Explaining the growth and expansion of the Bowater Corporation is not the object of this book so much as it is the means by which Reader examines a fascinating, if sometimes disagreeable, modern-day autocrat (Reader likens Eric Bowater's style of management to that of a Norman or Angevin King). In this respect, *Bowater: A History* resembles another of Reader's several ventures into British business history, *The McAdam Family and the Turnpike Roads, 1798-1861* (London, 1980). Both John McAdam and Eric Bowater are portrayed, even admired, as autocratic, iron-willed and opportunistic entrepreneurs. Eric Bowater is described as "a business man of exceptional force, daring and creativeness," who would neither share nor delegate power. Such authority, combined with an almost childlike delight in ever bigger machinery ("I love the super modern in machinery," he wrote in 1949) resulted more than once in ill-advised decisions. For instance, at his "bidding," the No. 7 papermaking machine which was installed at the Bowater mill in Corner Brook during the late 1940s was built with a much greater productive capacity than the Board of Directors had planned or believed desirable. Time, however, would prove the directors right; when world markets for newsprint shrank, the enormous No. 7 machine proved incapable of adapting to the reduced demand. Consequently it would be shut down, temporarily in 1971, and permanently in 1983 with severe consequences for the local community. Similarly it was largely at Sir Eric's insistence that Bowaters bought the Mersey paper mill in Liverpool, Nova Scotia in 1956. The mill, with an annual production of 140,000 tons of newsprint, was one which Sir Eric had coveted since 1934 and apparently purchased for no other reason, since Bowaters could not provide the mill with guaranteed markets without taking customers away from mills already part of the Corporation. Reader defines the acquisition of the Mersey mill as a "triumph of personality over prudence" and, while admitting it would ultimately represent a "tactical failure" for the Corporation's expansion into North America, he insists that the expansion was nevertheless a "strategic success."

Undoubtedly such close attention to one man has value; it helps to account for the paternalism which still characterizes Bowaters' relations with lower management, labour, and the communities in which its operations are located. On the other hand, so narrow a focus severely limits Reader's examination of Bowaters' growth and operations to that in which Sir Eric was involved or interested; all else is examined superficially. Thus, while the highly profitable trade in waste paper and in newsprint to Australia early in the 1920s contributed to Bowaters' ability to shift into manufacturing, little is said about the development and organization of that trade.

Of even greater concern is the frequency with which Reader's narrative raises questions without providing

answers. For instance, no satisfactory explanation is given to account for the close relationship which developed during the 1920s between W.V. Bowater & Sons (the corporate ancestor of Bowaters) and Armstrong, Whitworth & Company. Yet the relationship was an extremely significant one, for it provided Eric Bowater with his first link with Newfoundland and with newsprint production by giving him a seat on the Board of Directors of the Newfoundland Power & Paper Company, owned by the Reid family. Precisely why young Eric should have been so honoured is never explained. More importantly, Bowaters' shift into newsprint manufacturing was made possible by the connection with Armstrong, Whitworth & Company, since the latter built the Northfleet mill and provided much of the capital. Noticeable by its absence is any reference to Armstrong, Whitworth & Company records or the corporate archives of Vickers, Inc., at Vickers House, where presumably some answers might have been found. Indeed, Reader's bibliography includes few sources which would not have been readily available in the archives of the Bowater Corporation, which commissioned this book. The rich diet of facts and figures describing financing arrangements and corporate growth cannot disguise the limited research which went into this book.

Finally, Reader's perspective is limited entirely to that of the corporate boardroom. Rarely is there any indication that more than machinery is needed to make paper. The working classes appear only twice, and then only when they forced their attention upon management in labour disputes. The first instance was the 1926 General Strike in Britain. Bowater kept the Northfleet mill open with the assistance of an armed detachment of volunteers of sailors and Royal Engineers, provided by government presumably in return for Eric Bowater's services during the crisis as Controller of Paper Supplies (we are never fully informed). According to Reader, the entire story was a "stirring episode." The second instance was a work stoppage in 1937 at Bowaters' logging operations at Robert's Arm, Newfoundland. Although the stoppage was caused in part because Bowaters would not pay more than a minimum wage, most resentment was apparently directed against the local contractor. For Reader, the significance of the event lies principally in the way in which it brought the company negotiator, H.M.S. Lewin, to Eric Bowater's attention and eventually to a seat on the Corporation Board. Reader's interest and sympathies lie completely with management. While this may be predictable, given the subject matter, and perhaps even understandable, it is also much to be regretted that *Bowater: A History* is so utterly confined to an elitist perspective.

In conclusion, W.J. Reader's *Bowater: A History* is a study which is limited in its significance. Despite demonstrating an impressive ability to master the intricate details of corporate finance, expansion and growth, Reader has written a

history of a modern multi-national corporation which is far from satisfying in terms either of its breadth or its depth.

Olaf Janzen
Lecturer
Sir Wilfred Grenfell College
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Corner Brook, Newfoundland

Owen, David. *The Government of Victorian London 1855-1889: The Metropolitan Board of Works, the Vestries and the City Corporation*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982. Pp. xv, 466. Map, illustrations. \$25.00 (U.S.).

Fraser, Derek, ed. *A History of Modern Leeds*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980. Pp. xiv, 479. Tables, maps, illustrations. £17.50.

Gillett, Edward and MacMahon, Kenneth A. *A History of Hull*. Oxford: Oxford University Press for University of Hull, 1980. Pp. xi, 432. Maps, illustrations. \$53.95.

Three very different English cities are examined in these books but each emphasizes the Victorian achievement of city building which was, in Asa Brigg's phrase, "... impressive in scale but limited in vision, creating new opportunities but also providing massive new problems."

The provision of essential urban sanitary services was one of the great administrative and engineering problems of the nineteenth century. The study of Victorian London by David Owen is a major contribution to our understanding of the complex political and financial processes involved in the creation of the clean modern city. When David Owen, late Gurney Professor of History at Harvard, died in 1968, the book was still in draft form. Four scholars completed the work — Roy MacLeod edited the whole volume, Francis Sheppard wrote three chapters and completed two others, David Reeder prepared the conclusion and bibliography and Donald Olsen contributed the introduction. The completed work is a triumph of editorial work and scholarly collaboration.

Government of Victorian London is, in a sense, a revisionist work, restoring the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW) to a place of importance in the development of London during a critical period of growth. Historians of its successor body, the London County Council, have tended to downplay the significance of the MBW. The strong influence of the Fabians and the Labour Party in the county council affairs have emphasized the beginning of civic reform in 1889 rather than a longer and less dramatic process starting with the Board of Works.

The book is organized in two parts, the first covering the evolution of metropolitan government to 1889 while the second part discusses the operation of local government in the City and in four selected parishes. London government in the early 1850s was chaotic. The City of London, with a complex and anachronistic form of government untouched by the municipal reforms of 1835, administered a minute area of 677 acres. The population of nearly 2,400,000 in the rest of the metropolis was under the administration of three counties, 90 parish or local vestries, many autonomous paving trucks or commissions (some only responsible for a single street) as well as the Crown which was a major landlord and developer. As elsewhere, the impetus for change came from the insanitary conditions which gave rise to cholera epidemics in 1832, 1848 and 1854.

Many elements of the present form of central London were shaped by the MBW created in 1855. The Board's Engineer-in-Chief, Sir Joseph Bazalgette, designed the complex of trunk sewers and the steam pumping stations which removed the effluent from the urban area into the lower Thames. In the absence of other metropolitan authorities, the MBW took on additional functions, although its legal powers were limited as was its financial base. The Thames Embankment was constructed by the MBW as well as some well-known streets in the West End (Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road). Suburban commons such as Blackheath and Clapham were preserved as open spaces, bridges and ferries were made toll-free, some public housing was developed and the quasi-autonomous London Fire Brigade was expanded. The Board was unable to reorganize other services like water, gas and public passenger transport which were eventually controlled by special-purpose public bodies.

The MBW was an important transitional body between the earlier chaos and the London County Council. It made several major improvements despite operating in an "atmosphere of impermanence" and being tainted with a mostly unjustified "odor of corruption." In addition to the major engineering works, the Board achieved progress with the introduction of a uniform valuation or assessment system throughout London, and was remarkably successful in raising money not only for its own activities but also for the Metropolitan Asylums Board and the London School Board.

Local administration in London was in the hands of parish or precinct vestries, which varied in size from St. Pancras with 200,000 inhabitants in 1861 to St. Martin's in the Fields which had about 23,000 residents. The franchise was equally variable and generally very restricted. The City of London was one of the biggest obstacles to municipal change in the metropolis. The City Corporation jealously guarded its monopoly rights over coal duties, portorage and markets and refused to extend its ancient area. While showing the limitations of the City, Owen also illustrates the Corporation's work in building new markets to serve the metropolitan area,