New Perspectives in British Cultural History
New Perspectives in British Cultural History

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

ROSALIND CRONE AND DAVID GANGE

This book derives from a conference on British cultural history held at the University of Cambridge in December 2005. The conference was intended for graduate students and early-career researchers working in the “sub-discipline” of cultural history. These scholars came from across a wide range of disciplines in the arts and sciences, from history and literature to music, natural science and design. While their papers were based on their current research and findings, these were used as a platform from which to discuss the direction of British cultural history and the potential career implications for choosing to work in such a field at this particular moment in time. The conference and this book, New Perspectives in British Cultural History, thus emerge at a key moment: at present, the field of cultural history, particularly its practices, methods and contribution to our understanding of the past, has come under substantial review and criticism. Perhaps paradoxically, at the same time it is evident that an increasing number of scholars across the humanities describe themselves as “cultural historians”.

As many theorists, reviewers and historians have pointed out, cultural history is not an especially “new” field. For example, the study of past cultures gained momentum during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries as, with the birth of “nationalism”, a very real desire to provide a sense of history and identity to new nation-states in Europe surfaced. Furthermore, interest in past cultures continued during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries with the publication of several substantial works of scholarship, including Jacob Burckhardt’s Kultur der Renaissance in Italien (1860), Johan Huizinga’s Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen (1919) and (most notable for British history) G.M. Young’s Victorian England (1936). But there is no denying that the “rediscovery” of cultural history during the late 1970s and into the 1980s was a great watershed. And it was this movement that was of particular importance to the study of Britain’s past.

1 See, for example, Peter Burke’s discussion of “classic cultural history” in Burke, What is Cultural History? (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 6-19.
From the late 1970s, academic departments on both sides of the Atlantic began to experience a general “cultural turn” across a wide range of disciplines, from history and literature to social sciences such as politics, sociology and anthropology, to economics, architecture and design. They built on the achievements of influential centres for “cultural studies” that had already begun to emerge in Britain during the 1960s, perhaps most famously the “Birmingham School” at the University of Birmingham. By the late 1980s, the term “New Cultural History” (NCH) was coined to describe the impact of this movement on the study of history. Although NCH was largely a North American phenomenon, cultural history did, to some extent, flourish as a sub-discipline in Britain too. Most importantly, the studies and theories produced by adherents to the NCH profoundly altered the study of British history. In particular, many social historians, former followers of the “new-left” history pioneered by E.P. Thompson, moved into this new field through a desire to inject more imagination and creativity into the study of past societies. Cultural history presented an opportunity to plunge even deeper into the lives of ordinary people, offering the potential for a richer study of human experience in the past.

In their new investigations into the cultures of the people, historians began to apply useful methods and theories from outside the traditional discipline of history. Cultural anthropology, especially in the form of the theories of Clifford Geertz, had a tremendous impact on the study of the past, as did sociology and literary criticism. As Peter Burke writes, through such influences, historians were encouraged to adapt “their methods of ‘close reading’ to the study of non-literary texts, such as official documents, and indeed to the study of ‘texts’ in inverted commas, from rituals to images.” Since the late 1970s, the sub-discipline of cultural history has incorporated a wide range of interests, from the representation of various themes and subjects to the reception of those by historical audiences, from the study of language and signs to that of performance. While traditional historians wrote about systems of thought, cultural historians have sought to investigate the history of practice, to uncover past mentalities.

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2 As the movement was described by Lynn Hunt in Hunt, ed. The New Cultural History (Berkeley, 1989).
5 See, for example, Roger Chartier, Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1988).
Now, arguably, thirty years old, the “New Cultural History” is hardly a “new” phenomenon any more. As evident in the historiographical and review columns of many academic journals, the first decade of the twenty-first century seems to mark an appropriate moment for reflection upon its results, especially the contribution that its proponents have made to the study of British history. Over the past thirty years a wide range of studies have been published. Many are exceptional, imaginative investigations that have brought cultures and practices previously thought to be of marginal importance onto centre stage, demonstrating their key impact on society. But, amongst these very good works, a significant number of poor, rather haphazard studies have also entered the public domain, which appear to have been of limited value and that have contributed very little to our knowledge and awareness of patterns of change and continuity in British history. Thus, understandably, a substantial and fairly valid critique has emerged, questioning the methods of cultural history and, in particular, drawing attention to the rather undisciplined approach that has come about.

Perhaps the loudest and most seismic of these attacks within the academy in Britain (and some would even say surprising) was launched by Peter Mandler in the first issue of the promising new journal of the Social History Society, Cultural and Social History. Mandler listed the inherent methodological problems that he believed had begun to plague the practice of cultural history, including scholars’ insistence on studying at a very deep level fairly unrepresentative “texts” and an obsession with “othering” as historians have invariably (and way too uncritically) embraced the concept of constructing identity against a so-called Other. The solution Mandler proposed was to inject discipline into the study of cultural history, to adopt a more rigorous methodology in order to prove and justify claims made about past societies, much like the style of method used in the social sciences.6 Debate unfolded in the pages of Cultural and Social History, as the cultural historians assessed the attributes and weaknesses of his tirade against the discipline.7 The merits of Mandler’s article and the criticism it attracted can be discussed at length. What matters, however, is that concern over the future practice of cultural history exists. As relatively new scholars in this field, perhaps this marks an appropriate moment to air some of our thoughts about the past progress of the sub-

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7 For example, see Colin Jones, “Peter Mandler’s ‘Problem with Cultural History’, or, Is Playtime Over?”, Cultural and Social History, 1 (2004), pp. 209-215, and Carol Watts, “Thinking about the X Factor, or, What’s the Cultural History of Cultural History?” Cultural and Social History, 1 (2004), pp. 217-224.
discipline, to explain the nature of this current critical juncture, and to express some optimistic hopes for its future.

First, from its “re-emergence”, the practice of cultural history has been dramatically influenced by other parallel twentieth-century movements in thought and theory, most notably the “linguistic turn”, and the results have not always been favourable. With its emphasis on the importance of language or discourse in the construction of societies, the “linguistic turn” did much to encourage the development of the sub-discipline of cultural history. However, during the 1990s especially, the increasing focus on the use of language in descriptions and analyses of the past has not always had a beneficial result. The practice of problematising key terms regularly used by historians, such as “class” and even “culture” (to name just two), has arguably gone too far. The use of a number of terms has become contentious and difficult. Historians are expected to provide detailed definitions and justifications for their use, or else are forced find relatively “unproblematised”, and perhaps unsuitable, alternatives. Both options are not always necessary or constructive.

Under such pressures and influences, cultural history, as a sub-discipline, has become increasingly self-conscious and shy, even, at times, quite disordered. For example, certainly since the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been a growing tendency to examine very minor cultures within societies. While many of these are significant studies, drawing our attention to alternative patterns of thought and practice in the past, a large number, with their particularly specialised focus, have attributed too much importance to their subjects. This is especially evident when these historians fail to place their research within the wider, historical context and relate their findings to larger, parallel movements that were in motion at that time. The popular practice of “deconstruction” has flagged similar problems. The deconstruction of “texts” is a valuable process and very inwardly rewarding for scholars. However, there is a growing trend to cut this exercise short by leaving such “texts” in fragments, thus providing little insight into their overall meaning and contribution. In sum, cultural historians seem to be in retreat from their original “raison d’être”, to achieve a greater understanding of past societies and historical change and continuity by adding a much needed cultural layer to the analysis.

Finally, the interdisciplinary nature of cultural history has come under the spotlight, and for several important reasons. Greatly influenced by the “cultural turn”, many scholars across the disciplines in the Arts and Sciences refer to themselves as “cultural historians”; despite their lack of historical training. But the interdisciplinary character of cultural history is very much a double-edged sword. On the one hand, this multi-disciplinary community is a very significant source of strength. There is so much that these scholars, with their specialist knowledge of artefacts and “texts”, bring to our understanding of past cultures.
Their work offers new approaches and methods as well as presenting a different perspective of the role on culture in society. Yet, on the other hand, interdisciplinary studies have also been shown to be a point of weakness. As disciplinary boundaries have been dismantled, in their wake we have seen the emergence of some very undisciplined approaches to historical research.

In 1989, Keith Thomas made the following comment on the position of cultural history in Britain:

In the UK, there is no such subject. There are scarcely any chairs or lectureships in cultural history, no departments of cultural history, no journals of cultural history, no conferences on the subject.\(^8\)

Certainly, over the last fifteen years or so, the situation has changed. Employment advertisements for cultural historians do appear from time to time, and not always in the discipline of history. There has been a gradual emergence of academic journals with a particular focus on cultural history in Britain, such as the *Journal of Victorian Culture* (established 1996) and, more recently, *Cultural and Social History* (2004). (Though, with its recent establishment and its firm links to the Social History Society, one does wonder if this is an attempt to bring cultural historians back into line and to impose some discipline on the subject.\(^9\)) And, not only is cultural history often offered as a descriptive category for conference advertisements, but there has been a steady stream of seminars, workshops and conferences specifically designed to exhibit the latest research in the field.

Moreover, in terms of looking forward, we have much to be optimistic about. Criticism, at times, has been harsh but necessary, and practitioners in cultural history have begun to address some of the key points outlined above. Within the last few years there has been a general realisation of the limits of the linguistic turn and cultural studies have begun to draw back from the extremes of post-structuralism. In light of this, cultural history has been offered a chance to flourish and develop. Most importantly, the retreat from the language and boundaries imposed by post-structuralist theory has meant that it has become easier for historians to share their sensitivity to contexts with literary and art historians with their sensitivity to “texts”. Truly valuable inter-disciplinary study and dialogue is just now becoming a real (and exciting) possibility. This book is, therefore, something of an experiment. On the surface, the chapters arranged into the various thematic parts (Place, Religion, Text, etc) exhibit a

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\(^{9}\) A concern shared by Colin Jones in “Peter Mandler’s ‘Problem with Cultural History’, or, Is Playtime Over?”, p. 209.
traditional inter-disciplinary structure. However, underneath is an exploration of disciplinarity, as each part demonstrates the pros and cons of integration.
PART I:
PLACE
In taking leave of Manchester, which is indeed the great heart of our manufacturing system, we may truly say that it is a city to be visited with great interest, and quitted without the slightest regret. On our political railroad we are under deepest obligations to the Manchester stokers; but Heaven forbid that we should be compelled to make them our sole engineers.¹

Such were the remarks of the journalist Samuel Sidney upon leaving Manchester to continue his *Rides on Railways* in 1851. Light and jovial in style, Sidney’s account represents one of the earliest attempts to combine antiquarian histories and anecdotal information for the recreational railway traveller. As Sidney himself promised in the “Preface”, *Rides* was designed to provide something both “amusing and instructive to travellers”². Written as a series of distinct entries, each of which contained a brief history of each town as well as a more general assessment of their character, Sidney’s tour provided remote readers with the opportunity to assess the changing urban landscape through a familiar literary format. In addition, twenty-four steel engraved plates and a railway map provided visual accompaniment to both individual entries and the tour as a whole. Sidney’s journey took him through all the major industrialising centres of the mid-nineteenth century, travelling along the new trade routes of a swiftly evolving railway system. As his itinerary indicates, Sidney’s tour belonged to an age in which not only industrialising towns, but also the

¹ S. Sidney, *Rides on Railways, leading to the lake & mountain districts of Cumberland, North Wales* (London, 1851), p. 188.
² Ibid., preface.
infrastructure that connected them, commanded national attention and evaluation. Furthermore, it was the form and scale of this infrastructure, almost as much as that of the towns themselves, which informed visual representations of provincial urbanisation.

The havoc that these new routes played with the fabric and visual appearance of many towns has been attended to thoroughly and with a variety of approaches by social historians, historians of transport and art historians. In his predominantly economic study of nineteenth-century railway expansion in Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and London, John R. Kellet concluded that they constituted “formidable physical barriers” that divided the urban realm, “freezing” and consolidating dereliction in annexed streets. More recently, in her visual history of nineteenth-century London, Lynda Nead has claimed that the railway was the “most significant player in the demolition and transformation” of the capital—a perspective also proffered by Michael Aston and James Bond who characterise early railway construction as a force for both destruction and expansion. Clearly, the destructive role of railways in reconfiguring the urban realm has been both acknowledged and interrogated. However, no historian has yet addressed the manner in which these new, clear and level railway routes constructed new ways of visualising towns, by providing new features, frames, vantage points and visual pathways. This chapter will examine the ways in which new structures, necessitated by railway construction, prompted a complex and permanent re-imaging of provincial towns throughout the early nineteenth century.

**Railways as landmarks**

If England were not so rich in wonders of the same kind, the stranger might fancy the appearance of Stockport unique in the world. The houses of Stockport rise up the deep sides of a valley watered by the river on which the town stands. Over the whole gulf, right over the town and river, from height to height, stretches a gigantic viaduct, across which passes the railway to London...Even in England this is a striking and magnificent work. J. G. Kohl (1844)

From the 1830s onwards, railways dramatically transformed the scale and visibility of urban exchange in Britain, disrupting both the natural landscape and long-established built environments, and touching every manufacturing and

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Railways presented viewers with an entirely new subject and an equally new way of viewing the urban scene. Where locks, tunnels and the occasional aqueducts demanded by navigation networks had discreetly altered the English landscape, the monumental scale of much railway construction completely transformed the prevalent image and skyline of many conurbations. With railways came the need to tunnel through mountains, to bridge chasms, and to prevail over the natural landscape in a way that was visually conspicuous. Engineers competed in the scale of their structures, and defined accomplishment in the same terms: the longest or deepest tunnel, the highest bridge, the largest and most palatial station. The very visibility and monumentality of such structures defined infrastructural achievement in the early years of railway construction by dividing towns and constructing entirely new urban environments. J. G. Kohl’s account of the Stockport viaduct in 1842, the year of its completion, displays a familiar early-Victorian celebration of infrastructural engineering.

Numerous observers and an almost constant stream of tourist diaries, gazetteers and prints chronicled the dramatic effect that the new railways had upon the English landscape. Using this material, it is possible to observe not only the emergence of certain towns and locations upon the popular consciousness, but also the re-modelling and re-conceptualisation of previously famous sites in response to England’s infrastructural change and the new landmarks necessitated by the railway. This re-conceptualisation of a town as a result of railway construction is apparent if we contrast Joseph Farington’s View of Stockport, near Manchester, published in 1810 (Fig. 1-1), with images of the town after the completion of its famous viaduct in 1842.

Until 1842, the town of Stockport, south of Manchester, presented an apparently unremarkable vista. The main landmark and focus of images was St. Mary’s church and the market place that surrounded it upon the hill. With the arrival of the viaduct the most common pictorial formula for depicting Stockport was altered in two ways. Not only did the immense engineering project of the largest brick built viaduct in Europe become the most frequently represented construction in the town, but the position from which Stockport itself was most commonly represented changed in order to incorporate the structure. The favoured vantage point prior to the viaduct’s construction was the north-easterly position employed by Joseph Farington. This location afforded a panoramic

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view of the town proper and focused upon the historic centre of the town with its market and church.

![Image](image-url)

**Fig. 1-1** J. Landseer after J. Farington, “View of Stockport”, in W. Byrne, *Britannia Depicta* (London, c. 1810).

This preference for a north-easterly vantage point in images produced prior to the construction of the viaduct is also evident in J. Walker and W. Orme’s *View of Stockport from Lancashire Hill*, published in the *Copper-Plate Magazine* in May 1797. Here, the scene is one of urban and rural integration with a rural foreground framing an aesthetically balanced, if rather unremarkable, townscape. The only apparent evidence of a wider infrastructure is suggested by the newly-improved turnpike road which enters the view in the left near ground and the suggestion of the Mersey River, partly concealed, to the right. Although industry is present in the form of a prominent mill, it does not dominate the scene.

In response to the construction of the Stockport viaduct, the preferred vantage point moved to a place of high ground in the west, on the outer limits of the town where the majority of the historic town centre was concealed by the structure. This shift in vantage point is evident in a view of the viaduct that appeared in *The Land We Live In* (1854-6, Fig. 1-2). Whereas artists’ depictions of towns had, for centuries, been informed by the quality and style of architecture, streets and trades, the central symbol of Stockport was no longer directly connected to either its historical character or its industries. St. Mary’s Church ceased to be the town’s largest landmark as that honour fell instead to a symbol of a national programme of commercial and social integration. In
Stockport the monumental structure of the viaduct became the central feature of visual representations, thereby changing the very shape and image of the town itself.

Fig. 1-2 “Stockport Viaduct – Manchester”, The Land We Live In (3 vols., London, 1854-6), I, p. 220.

In larger towns the impact of these structures was often less dramatic. By the 1830s some towns were so famous and so frequently depicted in prints and guides that the arrival of the railway led to a diversification of urban imagery, rather than a complete redefinition of the townscape. In port towns like Liverpool, the construction of an important trade link, such as the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, provided a “new angle” from which to represent the town in pictorial and literary descriptions. In such substantial and developed towns, it was the new opportunities that the railway afforded to view the town and surrounding area, rather than the line itself, that contributed to a change in the visual representation of that town.

Prior to the construction of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the town of Liverpool had been almost exclusively represented in prints and paintings as a thin façade of waterside buildings catering to Atlantic trade. Such a perspective all but denied the social and political body of the town. Its relative youth as a substantial dockyard, in contrast, for example, with Bristol, meant that Liverpool lacked the national status of a civically mature town and was
represented merely as a place of transit and trade. Of course, representations of Liverpool from the sea continued to be produced. However, around the time of the construction of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the town was undergoing industrial expansion and a population rise of a magnitude that demanded some level of municipal regulation and therefore, political reform. Illustrations of the railway and its structures contributed to this project by providing the public with new, innovative, images of Liverpool. Some of the most famous images depicting the impact of early railways and their associated building projects are found in Thomas Talbot Bury’s set of coloured views on the Liverpool to Manchester Railway, published by the famous London publisher and print seller, Rudolf Ackermann. In 1831 Rudolf Ackermann took full advantage of the new Liverpool and Manchester railway by commissioning a total of thirteen hand-coloured aquatints of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway from the artist and engineer T. T. Bury, to be engraved by S.G. Hughes and H. Pyall. The subjects depicted in this first series included: “Entrance to the Railway at Edge Hill, Liverpool”, “Excavation of Olive Mount four miles from Liverpool” and “Entrance into Manchester across Water Street”. A second series published five months later contributed additional urban views including “Railway Office, Liverpool” and “Warehouses, etc., at the end of the tunnel towards Wapping”.

Depicting the various bridges, tunnels and cuttings punctuating the line, such as the dramatic entrance to the railway at Edge Hill, Bury’s work contributed to a revisualisation of both Manchester and Liverpool. In the case of the latter, the images introduced viewers to the town’s eastern boundary, contributing to the visual integration of the town with its land-locked counterparts like Manchester and Leeds. Structures like the Moorish Arch at Edge Hill attracted visitors and artists away from the traditional vantage points on the banks of the Mersey, to the eastern side of the town. As a result, Liverpool was increasingly depicted from vantage points that incorporated Toxteth Fields and residential areas, as well as the more traditional Liverpool subject-matter of dockyards and riverside warehouses.

**Railways as vantage points**

In addition to providing a subject for artists and prompting the reconfiguration of the urban vista in the ways described above, railways and the structures that supported them provided new vantage points from which to view

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towns and the rural landscape in between. Illustrations were increasingly produced to replicate the scenes encountered en route. Although few actually contained explicit references to the carriage itself, the inference that illustrations were “taken” through the window of a train carriage added to the perceived authenticity of the imagery.\(^\text{11}\) On the Stockport viaduct the traveller was awarded a new vantage point from which to view the town. Consequently, different buildings and streets were made visible and prominent—particularly the proliferation of increasingly larger mills along the Mersey, beneath the railway line. This new perspective also had the effect of reducing the visual impact of the town itself. A contemporary newspaper article testified to this effect:

> Looking over the parapet the spectator gazes down upon the town of Stockport, which by contrast looks comparatively insignificant…one of the arches near the river now far overtops a six-storey factory which stands close to the erection, and even the tall chimney of the building only surmounts the parapet of the viaduct by a few yards.\(^\text{12}\)

Clearly, the arrival of such immense structures challenged a pre-existing topographical hierarchy, which recognised ecclesiastical buildings, grand civic buildings and large manufactories as the signature of urban prosperity.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the evolution of transport networks permanently altered the notion of an urban prospect as it had hitherto been understood. The urban view was no longer restricted to the two-dimensionality of the “skyscape”, the façade or the birds-eye view. A new dimension of depth was introduced that not only served to alter the visual form of towns but also changed the concept of the urban boundary, its permeability and its expansion.

Where local topography called for few structures of remarkable scale or design, it might be suggested that the visual appearance of a railway offered the viewer little spectacle. Yet railway lines and smaller pedestrian bridges performed a significant role in re-configuring the urban prospect. Unlike the roads and canals that preceded them, railways provided visual approaches to towns that rarely conformed to the meandering paths preferred by devotees of the Picturesque. Instead, the route of the railway was direct, straight and exclusive, thus enabling a clear view into the industrial, commercial and civic hearts of provincial towns. Along the tracks, pedestrian bridges and

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\(^{12}\) “Completion of the Stockport Viaduct”, *Liverpool Courier and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 December 1840, p. 413.
embankments provided ideal vantage points from which to appreciate these unbroken visual pathways into a town.

Fig. 1-3 General View of Birmingham (c.1855).

Fig. 1-4 A. Johnson, *Birmingham, from the Railway, Upper Saltley* (c.1855).

Two views of Birmingham, taken from the railway at Upper Saltley during the 1850s, reveal the effect that this new aperture had upon the way in which the town was framed and viewed, and illustrate the apparent popularity of bridges as viewing platforms (Figs. 1-3 and 1-4). The contrast in quality between these views, one a simple, albeit proficient, wood-engraving, the other probably engraved on steel and finer in its delineation, suggests a wide market for such
imagery across the middle and upper social spectrum. Both views depict a new configuration of the town of Birmingham as the epicentre of a visible, tangible network. To the right of the central track, in the middle distance, a second adjacent line is perceptible, providing another gateway into the industrial and commercial district. Instead of looking down on a city from a natural high vantage point such as Brandon Hill in Bristol or the hills that surround Sheffield, viewers could view a town from the same level along the route of the railway. By the same token, as well as extending the view into the urban centre, the railway also extended the visual impact of the town beyond its previously defined boundaries. Standing on its structures the viewer placed himself upon the “long arm” of the town.

![Image](image.jpg)

Fig. 1-5 “View from the top of Kilsby Tunnel”, in S. Sidney, *Rides on Railways* (London, 1851), p. 64.

A view produced to illustrate Samuel Sidney’s railway tour demonstrates how, even far from a town centre, these viewing platforms continued to attract visitors (Fig. 1-5). In this plate the town of Rugby is barely visible in the far distance. However, the opportune vantage point provided by the crest of the Kilsby tunnel appears to have been adopted as a semi-permanent viewing platform, from which spectators could follow the remaining stretch of the line as
it approached the town. Thus, miles beyond a town centre, and even beyond its outer suburbs, the presence and influence of urbanisation was visually apparent. The immediate surrounding countryside could no longer be perceived as exclusively rural, but instead as a provincial no-man’s land between regions defined in relation to their closest urban centres.

In addition to providing these new “visual pathways” into urban spaces, the railways and the structures that supported them also created a series of new screens and urban façades. Railway bridges that spanned the lines, such as those illustrated in the Saltley engravings, as well as the larger, more impressive arches that supported viaducts, served to instate some form of boundary and provide a symbolic gateway to the town. This “gateway” could be emphasised to great effect in images by the cropping and exclusion of the wider urban context.

In 1843, the accomplished engraver, lithographer, railway artist and railway photographer, John Cook Bourne, produced a number of images that demonstrate the dramatic visual impact of such structures on the urban environment. Bourne was primarily a draftsman and engraver rather than a topographical artist and after his successful railway volumes he returned to primarily technical publications. His later work focused more particularly on the technical aspects of steam travel. Nevertheless, he was certainly far from being a “merely illustrative railway artist.” Along with the drawings of Ackermann’s railway artist T. T. Bury and the lesser-known railway artist Samuel Russell, Bourne’s lithographs and literary accounts defined the image of the provincial English railway for a generation of nineteenth-century observers. Following a series of successful illustrations of the London and Birmingham Railway, published as a large commemorative volume in 1839, Bourne was commissioned to contribute a number of lithographs to accompany another

14 J. C. Bourne, A Catechism of the Steam-Engine (London, 1856); J. C. Bourne, Handbook of the steam-engine: containing all the rules required for the right construction and management of engines of every class...constituting a key to the “Catechism of the steam-engine” (London, 1865); and J. C. Bourne, Recent improvements in the steam-engine in its various applications to mines, mills, steam navigation, railways, and agriculture: being a supplement to “The catechism of the steam-engine” (London, 1869).
lavish project titled *The History and Description of the Great Western Railway*. The resultant volume is immense, comprising literary descriptions, plates, and maps. Although the first half of the book is dedicated to historical, topographical and geological accounts of the project, the main attractions were Bourne’s full-page lithographic views. Among these images were a number of views that exploited railway structures as monumental gateways to the towns they spanned.

One particularly striking example depicts Brunel’s viaduct over the town of Chippenham, where the line intersected the major urban thoroughfare of Malmesbury Road (Fig. 1-6). The visual effect of the three huge arches was not lost on observers and in his accompanying text Bourne himself remarked that despite being “extremely plain”, “its effect, as seen from the road, is particularly good”. Yet Bourne did not merely represent the visual impact of the viaduct. By incorporating figures, livestock and carts passing beneath the archways, his view demonstrates the manner in which this new aperture and threshold redefined the townscape for pedestrians as well as railway travellers. Malmesbury Road is thus illustrated in its role as a principle trade route, along which pass farmers on their way to and from the town’s market. The archway thus takes on the role of a gateway by creating a symbolic entrance to the town’s commercial centre.

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17 J. C. Bourne, *Drawings of the London and Birmingham Railway* (London, 1839); and J. C. Bourne, *The History and Description of the Great Western Railway including its geology, and the antiquities of the district through which it passes: accompanied by a plan and section of the railway, a geological map, and by numerous views, of its principal viaducts, bridges, tunnels, stations, and of the scenery, and antiquities in its vicinity* (London, 1843).

In other instances, viaducts and bridges were utilised by artists to frame pre-existing landmarks. In one particularly unusual view titled *Arch over Dean Street, Newcastle on Tyne*, printed by the local publisher John Christie around 1850, the town’s previously dominant feature is framed beneath the arch of the new railway bridge (Fig. 1-7). The scale of the bridge challenges that of the spire, yet the image presents a far from demonic image of modernisation and
commercial exchange. By aesthetically unifying these apparently disparate components of the built environment, the print presents viewers with a scene of harmony between the town’s historic prestige and its future ambitions. As this view illustrates, the physical dissection of previously unified townscape by large iconic structures did not preclude a positive representation of these new landmarks. Features such as viaducts and bridges could be employed to frame and unify, as well as to fragment, the urban scene.

The focus hitherto has been upon large monuments of infrastructural development. However, the impact of railways upon the experience and visualisation of specific towns also extended to relatively small-scale infrastructural structures. Unlike the striking isolation of rural viaducts or the dramatic re-fashioning of the skyline that resulted from prominent urban bridges and stations, these structures tended to be integrated into the urban fabric. They were, therefore, surrounded by streets, canals and thoroughfares and could often be viewed only in close proximity. A relatively low-quality advertisement for the opening of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway in 1849 demonstrates again how archways provided new routes through urban spaces dissected by the railway. Here, in a similar manner to Bourne’s view of the Chippenham viaduct, the more modest Wicker viaduct in Sheffield is depicted cutting directly across a pre-existing urban thoroughfare, creating a series of archways and tunnels for the urban pedestrian. Through the central archway, a small glimpse of the annexed townscape is visible, creating a picture within a picture and dividing the urban realm into a series of visual tableaux, each distinct and visually isolated from the next.

These visual barriers and archways, which reduced the urban vista to a series of “scenes”, were utilised to great visual effect, not only in the depiction of pedestrian streets and pavements. Just as urban viaducts divided pedestrian thoroughfares, so too did they straddle canals and other waterways. The resulting scenes were similarly disjointed and isolated. In a catalogue published to accompany a panorama of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1834, the fractural impact of such structures on views that incorporate waterways was used to great effect. In this instance, the River Irwell is represented as two distinct scenes, visible through the two equal-sized archways of the railway bridge. On the left appears a towpath with a low bridge over an adjacent canal and in the far distance is a small water-side warehouse or mill. Through the right archway a number of barges can be seen, moored alongside a large warehouse. The two scenes are completely disconnected and no aspect of either view suggests continuity with the other. In this manner, urban viaducts and bridges

19 Advertisement, Opening of the line and the proceedings at Worksop (1849). Sheffield Local Studies Library, s07510.