

Book Reviews

The English and Their History, Robert Tombs, Allen Lane, 2014

One of the most enjoyable, and thought-provoking, history books I have ever read, all 891 pages of it. The book is only approximately chronological as Tombs takes the reader right up to the present with events that are still influential. So, to some extent, it is a series of essays. Tombs, who is professor of *French(!)* History at Cambridge, has a delightful light touch and there is much to amuse and sometimes laugh out loud at. And it is the only history book I have ever read which recommends *1066 and All That*.

Married to Bhutan, Linda Leaming, Hayhouse, 2011

The book focuses on the decision of the author to reside permanently in the small, land-locked country of Bhutan, after visiting the country previously and falling in love with the nation and its residents. In my opinion, Linda is an absolutely terrific author, publishing a book which really helps to provide justification for a nation we generally know very little about.

Linda discusses in great detail the spiritual and Buddhist aspects that have helped her fall in love with the country- the spiritual buildings, the figureheads of religion in Bhutan, the meanings behind the 'thanka' paintings that many Bhutanese grow up becoming an expert in creating, and the overall importance of freedom, happiness, and serenity. Indeed, Bhutan become better-known to the public many years ago when the Government announced that the happiness and well-being of its residents was far more important to the Government than engaging with Big Businesses and becoming part of a Globalised world. Linda also discusses the education system, which she has become involved in, and the spiritual aspects and importance of Love, which she found seemingly by fate, in Bhutan.

Linda promotes Bhutan as a place to visit and live in if you crave a peaceful life, beautiful scenery at the tip of a hat, and if you are fed up of the tightly-packed schedules we are so used to living that are based on times, appointments and meetings- indeed, in Bhutan, I found out much to my pleasant surprise that, if you do have an appointment, as long as you arrive between 24 hours before or afterwards, this is absolutely fine. No way would this happen anywhere else!

I really do recommend this book for anyone with an interest in: Finding out more about places, religion and spirituality, Buddhism, education, and Love! You can also view more about Linda's work at: [Married to Bhutan](#) *Liam Wright*

Small Is Beautiful: A study of Economics as if People Mattered, EF Schumacher, Blond and Briggs, 1973

I have just been re-reading E F Schumacher's 'Small is Beautiful'. I enjoyed it as much as when I first read it over thirty years ago. For someone like me who is deeply suspicious if not despairing of most big things today – big money, big corporations, big

government, people who think they are big and, yes, even 'big society' – this book is a wonderful tonic.

Take the sub-title. Here is an economist who believes in the supremacy of people over statistics, and the 'cardinal virtues' over materialism. He doesn't shrink from confronting the sacred cows of economics – ever-increasing wealth and endless growth – which few politicians dare to question, whatever the ultimate effect on the planet and the environment we inhabit.

What he writes still appears startlingly modern. Much of it could have been written during the past year, rather than forty years ago.

It seems to be out of print now, but copies are available on the internet. It certainly deserves a reprint. *Ron Clarke*

Climate change books

Climate Shock – the economic consequences of a hotter planet, Gernot Wagner and Martin L Weitzman, Princeton University Press, 2015.

Highly rated by the *Financial Times* this book by two eminent economists sets out in stark terms what the future will look like if the planet continues to warm up. In order to make the economics accessible, the authors adopt a punchy, jokey, tabloid style and format, which I have to say I found rather wearing. Nevertheless, the book is brief – only 152 pages of main text – and authoritative. I recommend it.

2071 – The World We'll Leave Our Grandchildren, Chris Rapley and Duncan Macmillan, John Murray, 2015.

Chris Rapley is Professor of Climate Science at University College, London. He is also an adviser to the BEACONS Guides to Climate Change. Duncan Macmillan is an award-winning playwright. They collaborated to make current knowledge on climate change into a play, Directed by Katie Mitchell and starring Prof Rapley, that was put on at the Royal Court Theatre, London and Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, in 2014. This is the book of the play. Despite being very brief, it is marvelously comprehensive and both highly readable and thought provoking. Strongly recommended

The Age of Sustainable Development, Jeffrey D. Sachs. Columbia University, 2015.

A world-renowned economist and special adviser to UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon this beautifully produced book is a definition of what sustainability means, a comprehensive description of where we are now and a pointer to what needs to be done. I have great respect for Dr Sachs, but I have to say that I found the book a little too comprehensive and I wearied of the sheer volume of facts. I found his earlier book, Commonwealth more enjoyable.

Why are we waiting? Nicholas Stern, MIT Press, 2015.

Somewhat less optimistic than he was in *Blueprint for a Safer Planet*. I found this book hard going. Lord Stern's conclusions, in the final chapter are worth reading, but this book is full of impenetrable, and to me irrelevant, economic theory. Furthermore it has all the signs of having been written in great haste with much that has been cobbled together from lecture notes, the didactic style of which I found increasingly irritating. He sees the greatest challenges facing humanity are the avoidance of catastrophic climate change and the elimination of mass poverty. He doesn't question the science and sees the stopping of the use of fossil fuels as fundamental, entirely accepting that 450ppm of CO₂ will keep the global temperature rise since pre-industrial times below 2 degrees Celsius. And he is optimistic about technologies such as Carbon Capture and Storage becoming feasible. But he believes passionately that we must start now.

Atmosphere of Hope, Tim Flannery, Penguin, 2015.

Having read an article by him in *New Scientist* recently, I was looking forward to how he thinks such actions as making rocks more carbon absorptive or growing more seaweed might be the answer to extracting CO₂ from the atmosphere. In fact most of the book is a summary of climate change and climate science punctuated by far too much about the iniquities of the Australian government under Tony Abbott, now irrelevant since Abbott was ousted by his colleague Malcolm Turnbull in September 2015. His views on climate change are the opposite of Abbott's. When Flannery does get to extracting CO₂, he is much less optimistic than I had thought. A good book but not in the class of his superb *Here on Earth*.

Lucky Planet, David Waltham, Icon Books UK, 2014.

Although about whether there is life elsewhere in the Universe, the argument is of considerable relevance to the climate change debate. Waltham outlines all the special conditions which have to be exactly as they are for life to be possible. His conclusion is that, despite there being billions and billions of other suns with planets, the combination of factors is so unlikely that the chances of these conditions occurring elsewhere is small, and that we probably are alone in the Universe. Given that climate change threatens these essential conditions, the book is relevant to climate change discussion. And there is indeed quite a lot about climate change directly, including the observation that the threat is not from increased carbon dioxide directly but from the effects that small rise in temperature will have on other factors such as ice caps, water vapour and cloud cover. The book is well written and challenging. I enjoyed it.

Windfall, McKenzie Funk, Penguin, 2014.

The splendidly named Mr Funk is an American journalist. Subtitled 'The booming business of global warming', the book examines a wide range of responses to the possibility of continuing temperature increases. He personally travelled to all he describes. These range from increased demand for independence in Greenland to rich

nations and individuals buying up large tracts of land in poor countries and sudden high demand for the Netherlands' expertise in building sea walls. Parts are disturbing. I didn't know that India has built a fence 2,100 miles long entirely surrounding Bangladesh in order to prevent Bangladeshis fleeing into India when the rising sea level renders Bangladesh uninhabitable. As our own Emma Crump can confirm, no official in either country will tell you about it and you will be turned back if you try to visit it. Funk managed by subterfuge to get to it on the Indian side but was arrested within minutes. Parts are also very funny. He joins a Canadian Army expedition to an uninhabited island in its far north only to be held up by a boatload of elderly tourists who actually manage to disembark faster than the military. The account is hilarious. He writes very well and the book is thoroughly enjoyable as well as being deeply thought-provoking.

Global Crisis – war, climate change and catastrophe in the seventeenth century. Geoffrey Parker, Yale 2014.

A 700-page history of the world in the 17th century in which one catastrophe after another is related to global cooling of, on average, one degree Celsius. The first history book I have read which connects events with climate. Convincing and not a little frightening.

Climate Change – a very short introduction. Mark Maslin, Oxford 2014.

Prof Maslin is an acknowledged expert on climate change. It is certainly well written and packs a remarkable amount into a short space. Nevertheless, I do have some quibbles. There are very many excellent diagrams and charts, but sources are generally not given. And there is little acknowledgement that not all climate scientists agree on all aspects of their science. Furthermore, he describes the 'Climategate' scandal of 2009 as if no rational person can doubt that Professor Phil Jones was completely innocent of the charge of altering data to fit his theory. Worse, Maslin actually quotes astrophysicist Professor Richard Muller as supporting this view, when in fact in his excellent book 'Energy for Future Presidents' (see 34 above) Muller demonstrates clearly how Jones misused the data in a way that I believe cannot have been accidental. But it is true that Muller, who set up a team to conduct independent research, did conclude that the broad conclusion that global warming is happening and is largely caused by human activity is correct.

A Rough Ride to the Future, James Lovelock, Allen Lane, 2014.

Born in 1919, Lovelock is that rarity, an independent scientist. That is, he is not at any university or research institute. Instead he works from home where he has his own lab. The founder of the Gaia Hypothesis, he has made major contributions to many sciences. This book is partly autobiographical and partly prophetic. He believes that climate change is real and largely caused by human activity, and that it is too late to do much to stop what is happening. All we can do is prepare for change. He thinks the human species will survive but that it will be a rough ride

This Changes Everything, Naomi Klein, Allen Lane, 2014.

Very readable and impressively researched, the subtitle is Capitalism v The Climate. Although there were many facts that were both interesting and new to me, the book, as the subtitle suggests, firmly blames capitalism for climate change and sees community or trade union activity as invariably benign. The general scientific view is accepted without question.

The Age of Global Warming, Rupert Darwall, Quartet, 2013.

An immensely detailed account and, as far as I could tell, an accurate account of the political manoeuvrings over climate change, including every COP. Not for the faint hearted. The cover quotes Jon Snow as saying it is brilliant and that every climate negotiator should have a copy in his front pocket. They would need a very large pocket!
10 Billion, Stephen Emmott, Penguin, 2013.

Head of Computational Science at Microsoft and Visiting Professor at Oxford and UCL, he is clearly a very clever man and he doesn't let any false modesty inhibit him from telling us this. His 'book' runs to 196 small pages of large print, many with over half the page blank. He not so much tells us what he considers the facts to be as screams them at us. His message is one of unmitigated gloom. As private Fraser in Dads' Army says 'we are all doomed' or as Dr Emmott concludes, rather less eloquently, 'We are all fucked'. I read the whole book in less than an hour with increasing irritation at his dogmatic assertions. As someone once said of another publication: 'Not a book to be put down lightly; it should be thrown with great force'.

Population 10 Billion, Danny Dorling, Constable, 2013.

The complete antidote to Stephen Emmott, whom he clearly detests, by the Professor of Geography at Oxford. I enjoyed it, although it is a bit repetitive in places and could have done with more editing. Recommended.

Energy for Future Presidents, Richard Muller, Norton paperback, 2013.

Muller is an astrophysicist at Berkeley, California. Following 'Climategate' (see Guide One, p 27) many attacks were launched against the climate scientists responsible. These were portrayed as an attack on science itself. Scientists worldwide were asked to sign a petition asserting that there had been no misuse of research findings. Most signed immediately. But Muller decided to scrutinise the research in detail. He concluded that they had indeed been less than scrupulous in their analysis and had selected data, possibly accidentally, that fitted their conclusions. He was hailed as a denier by groups like the GWPF (see Guide One p 27). With fellow physicists he set up a research organisation, Berkeley Earth and has now concluded that the climate scientists were broadly right about recent global warming. The book is authoritative, lucid and fascinating, and one of the best I have read on energy and climate change. Strongly recommended.

A Case for Climate Engineering, David Keith, Boston Review, 2013.

Keith is a professor of Applied Physics and of Public Policy at Harvard. In this brief and well-written book he says it would be relatively cheap and easy with today's technology to cool the planet by injecting particles of sulphuric acid into the upper atmosphere. He discusses all the problems that doing so might cause and concludes that a great deal of thought is needed before attempting this. And, of course, this would only be a temporary solution, as it would do nothing to stop the build up of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Fascinating.

Sustainable Materials – with both eyes open, Allwood and Cullen, UIT, 2012.

The product of five years research by a team of young Cambridge scientists. It seeks to answer the question: Can we produce twice as much steel, aluminium and other essential materials while halving carbon emissions? Their answer is Yes; but only if we improve design to minimise emissions. Assuming no technical or mathematical knowledge at all, the authors explain simply and clearly how raw materials such as steel and aluminium are extracted and made into everyday objects from tin cans to houses. I learnt a lot about how the things we all take for granted are actually made. Beautifully produced, the many diagrams are excellent and the text both well written and frequently witty. A superb and fascinating book. And like its stablemate, David MacKay's Sustainable Energy, it is free on-line, at [with both eyes open](#). A very important book and one which I strongly recommend.

The Geek Manifesto – Why Science Matters, Mark Henderson, Bantam Press, 2012.

I don't like the title, but this is an important book about how public policy frequently goes wrong because politicians, who hardly ever have a science background, misuse science either because of ignorance or dishonesty. Very readable. I recommend it.

The Carbon Crunch, Dieter Helm, Yale University Press, October 2012.

Subtitled: How We're Getting Climate Change Wrong – and How to Fix It. Oxford Professor Dieter Helm dismisses as failures all attempts so far by governments to reduce carbon emissions and proposes a carbon tax combined with a tax on carbon emitted in manufacturing what is imported. A most important and readable book.

Super Cooperators, Martin Nowak, Canongate, 2012.

The subtitle sums it up: Why we need each other to succeed. Detailed, attractively written, study of evolution and cooperation from a mathematical biologist.

It's Not Rocket Science, Ben Miller, Sphere, 2012.

The author is a physicist turned comedian. One of the best simple overviews of all science I have read, although many will consider it over-simplified. I recommend it.

The God Species, Mark Lynas, Fourth Estate, July 2011.

He introduces the concept of boundaries, which we must keep within if the human race is to survive. The climate change boundary is one, others are biodiversity, nitrogen, land use, freshwater, toxics, aerosols, ocean acidification and ozone. Much to the anger of many environmental groups, Lynas has changed his mind and no longer opposes nuclear power or GM crops. I think it is a better book than *Six Degrees*. Lynas was grilled on the BBC Hardtalk about his change of views. See interview at: [Mark Lynas interview](#)

Here on Earth, A New Beginning, Tim Flannery, Allan Lane paperback, March 2011.

Another book not mainly on climate change. Brilliant! Do read it.

Prosperity Without Growth, Tim Jackson, Earthscan, 2011.

Challenges the general assumption that growth is essential for prosperity and argues for radical change to capitalism. Highly praised by environmentalists and many others. Forward by HRH The Prince of Wales.

Getting Better, Charles Kenny, Basic Books, 2011.

A distinguished economist, he argues that for almost everyone, the world is a much better place than it was 60 years ago and that it is perfectly possible for 10 billion to live on the planet in reasonable comfort.

The Hockey Stick Illusion, A W Montford, Stacey International, 2011.

A closely argued account of the hockey stick diagram showing global temperatures relatively level for centuries until the last one when they shot up, so that a graph looks like an ice hockey stick. This result was immensely influential and featured prominently in the 2000 IPCC report. Montford relates, in great detail, how a small number of scientists challenged the research underpinning the graph. He claims it was deliberate fraud and demonstrates a conspiracy by climate scientists worldwide. The hockey stick has indeed been quietly dropped, but whether it was a conspiracy is another matter.

The Rational Optimist, Matt Ridley, Fourth Estate, 2010.

Very readable. He heaps scorn on much received thinking, including the so-called consensus on climate change. Controversial and strongly recommended.

The Plundered Planet, Paul Collier, Allen Lane, 2010.

Collier is a distinguished Oxford development economist and author of the acclaimed *The Bottom Billion*. Surprisingly, the book is more about how oil, gas and mineral wealth can be exploited without depriving the country concerned of its fair share. I found it very interesting.

Climate: The Counter Consensus, Professor Robert M Carter, Stacey International, 2010.

Describes himself as a paleo-climatologist. He is clearly an expert. Strongly sceptical. Makes much of the East Anglian affair.

Sustainable Energy – Without the Hot Air, David Mackay, UIT Cambridge UK, 2009.

This most important book is **not** actually on climate change directly but one which enables you to assess the validity of different solutions advanced. The author is David J C MacKay, FRS, a physicist and now professor of engineering at Cambridge University. From October 2009 until October 2014, David MacKay worked 4 days a week as Chief Scientific Adviser to the Department of Energy and Climate Change. This remarkable book is available for **free** on-line. Furthermore, its author continuously updates it. As its title implies, what Professor MacKay does is to cut through all the vast amount of useless or misleading information given by all sides in the climate change debate and apply the laws of physics and simple arithmetic to enable one to see what various proposals would cost and what they might achieve. He emphatically does **not** advocate anything, apart from being realistic. And there is an excellent ten page summary that I recommend downloading and which answers such questions as: How much of the UK's current energy consumption could be supplied by wind farms covering 10% of the entire British Isles? (The answer is 20%, far less than some campaigners suggest.)

Confessions of an Eco Sinner, Fred Pearce, Eden Project Books, 2009.

Pearce travels to find where the stuff of our everyday lives comes from. Fascinating and a bit frightening.

A Blueprint for a Safer Planet, Nicholas Stern, Bodley Head, 2009.

Lord Stern is a distinguished economist and author of the Stern Report of 2007 that urged the rich nations to spend one percent of GNP (Gross National Product, a measure of a nation's total wealth) now, in order to avoid having to spend far more later, the opposite of Lomborg's view (above). He is optimistic about the future.

The Hot Topic, Gabrielle Walker and Sir David King, Bloomsbury, 2009.

An excellent summary from, of course, Sir David's perspective.

The Politics of Climate Change, Anthony Giddens, Polity, 2009.

Lord Giddens is a former Director of the London School of Economics and a leading economist and climate change expert. I found it rather hard going.

The Vanishing Face of Gaia, James Lovelock, Allen Lane, 2009.

Now aged 94, Lovelock is the inventor of Gaia, the theory that the entire planet can be treated as a single organism. He believes catastrophe is inevitable, carbon offsetting a joke and ethical living a scam. He is hostile to Greens, and especially to windfarms, and deeply pessimistic about climate change. He maintains that the population of the planet will be no more than one billion by the end of the century (it is seven billion now and projected to exceed nine billion by 2050). Well worth reading for some very challenging views, clearly and succinctly expressed.

What's the Worst that could Happen, Greg Craven, Perigree, 2009.

An American schoolteacher gives a simple and witty exposition of climate change. Rather too simple and witty for my taste, but everything is covered and there is a useful list of websites at the back.

Why we Disagree about Climate Change, Mick Hulme, Cambridge, 2009.

A British environmentalist looks at the more philosophical aspects of argument about climate change. Worth reading, if only for the last chapter.

Down to the Wire, David W Orr, Oxford 2009.

An analysis of how we got to where we are and what must now be done by a leading American environmentalist.

Physics of the Impossible, Michio Kaku, Penguin, 2009.

Not a book on climate change at all, but a mind-boggling '*Scientific Exploration of the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation and Time Travel*'. Very readable. I found it fascinating. Maybe the human race will survive by colonising other planets one day.

An Appeal to Reason, Nigel Lawson, Duckworth Overlook 2009.

Lor Lawson is a former Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister) and founder of the climate change denial organisation, The Global Warming Policy Foundation. However, this is no biased rant. Rather it is an entertaining and powerfully argued case against much of the prevailing consensus and the climate policies of the UK. Those who support the consensus need to be able to refute the key arguments Lord Lawson so elegantly advances in this short book. Strongly recommended.

Ten Technologies to Save the Planet, Chris Goodall, Green Profile, 2008.

The author, a friend of Mark Lynas, who describes the book as 'vital, topical and brilliantly written'. Should be read in conjunction with MacKay's Sustainable Energy.

Commonwealth, Economics for a Crowded Planet, Jeffrey Sachs, Allen Lane, 2008.

The author is Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, USA. A highly readable and comprehensive survey of both climate change and global poverty.

Six Degrees – Our Future on a Hotter Planet, Mark Lynas, Fourth Estate, 2007.

The Royal Society's Science Book of the year 2008. There is also a very interesting website with updates and a blog.

Cool It – The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming, Bjørn Lomborg, Marshall Cavendish and Cyan, 2007.

A young professor at the Copenhagen Business School, his approach has incensed environmental campaigners for several years. In a nutshell, it is that, while he agrees that the planet is warming up as the result of human activity, trying to limit CO2 emissions risks impoverishing the world and that most of our investment should be in technology and measures to cope with a hotter world. Strongly disagrees with Lord Stern, above.

Collapse, Jared Diamond, Allen Lane 2005.

Superb. A wide ranging study of why some societies collapsed and disappeared while others survived. Ability to adapt is the main reason. Will the human race learn from this? I hope so.

Our Final Century, Martin Rees, Heinemann, 2003.

A distinguished scientist's outline of the threats, including climate change, that threaten the future existence of the human race. Strongly recommended despite having been written nearly ten years ago.

Further contributions:

If there is a book you have read that has 'grabbed' you and that you would like to recommend to others – something in the general area of international development or environment – please let us have a write-up in not more than 200 words. It could be a 'classic', or it could be something recently published. The main criteria are that it should be readily obtainable, either in print or from the web, and that it should be readable for a wide audience and not too academic.

It could also be something other than a book – a film, or a DVD for instance – but it does need to be accessible.