Miles asks why. As he says, editorial tradition takes for granted the answer to his question. But what he suggests as a more interesting project is an edited version of the earlier, corrupt editions that might have thrown light on changing scholarly editorial work on and reception of the Brontë sisters. The Branwell Brontë edition is, he says, weirdly specialised, with no interesting publishing history. Yet it is presented as a scholarly edition that assumes either a value to the writing itself or an offered insight into the minds of the sisters. Miles is sceptical. As a snapshot of current editorial practice he concludes from it that the discipline of editing is in a state of flux.

But it is clearly alive and well in Canada.


This is a new edition of McCusker’s previous 1992 research tool, an historical commodity price index for use as a deflator of money values in the economy of the United States. It can be used to convert American prices from as far back as 1665 to their comparable value in today’s dollars. It is, therefore, a consistent commodity price index extending over most of the history of the United States. In the Introduction McCusker looks at the theory and practice behind the construction of historical price indices, including their uses and limitations and, as is undoubtedly necessary for most users of this book, gives step-by-step instructions with examples on how to make conversions from past prices to today’s values. The prices, of course, begin with colonial currency and so there are tables of London exchange rates for British continental colonies 1649-1775, as well as British commodity price indices from 1600 to 2000. Currencies include American Revolutionary War currency, federal and state currencies, and silver dollars. There are depreciation tables for four state currencies 1777-1781: Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and elsewhere some examples of Massachusetts and New York Colonial currencies. There is a concise table showing periods of expansion and contraction in the United States economy between 1665 and 1853, trough to trough and peak to peak.

There are, of course, limitations to the real values behind the converted amounts, chiefly based on external factors, as McCusker’s
examples indicate. In figures, a house costing $10,000 in 1953 should have cost $42,000 in 1987, and by the same calculation should have cost $3,100 in 1860. Clearly the user of these indices needs additional information for specific cases.

McCusker explains how the user might keep the reference tool up to date by obtaining the monthly and annual consumer price figures compiled by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and its British equivalent.

The book ends with a really useful bibliography of electronic resources, a list of American and European postal addresses to contact for archival information on primary documents, and an extensive, twenty-page bibliography of printed materials and resources.

As a reviewer of the 1992 edition wrote, it made him “a happy fool at the calculator.” It is an invaluable reference to turn to again and again.
