

REVIEW: MODERN SCOTTISH HISTORY VOLS 1, 3, AND 5

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Anthony Cooke, Ian Donnachie, Ann MacSween and Christopher A. Whatley (eds) (1998), **Modern Scottish History 1707 To The Present. Volume 1: The Transformation Of Scotland, 1707 - 1850. Volume 3: Readings 1707 - 1850. Volume 5: Major Documents.** East Linton: Tuckwell Press Ltd, pbs, £14.99 each, ISBNs 1862320683, 1862320780, 1862320888, 302pp, 256pp, 308pp.

These volumes are produced by the University of Dundee and the Open University in Scotland as part of a distance-learning course on modern Scottish history. There is no doubt they will also be welcomed by the wider audience of teachers and students in full-time courses as well as by the general reader. Taken together they provide a comprehensive kit of readily available analysis, further reading and original documents. Volume 1 consists of a series of essays, each written by an expert in the field, giving an overview of the most recent findings on major topics and themes such as the Union, Jacobitism, the country's ensuing agricultural, industrial and social transitions, the contrasts in highland and lowland experience, as well as developments in politics, beliefs, and culture. Also included is a notable new area on environmental history by the H.M. Historiographer, Professor Smout. Each essay follows a similar format in encouraging the reader to interact with the text by posing questions at various points in the analysis and suggesting further lines of enquiry for the students to construct their own answers. To help in this, the associated volume 3 of Readings (also covering the period 1707 to 1850) provides a series of important articles and extracts from books not readily available for the normal reader (nor even for those with access to university libraries as the dossier of photocopies of oft-cited articles now carried by many university departments to meet student demand testifies). In addition, volume 5 provides an extensive selection of key original documents germane to each topic, these again usually available only

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for those fortunate enough to be able to visit national or local archives, with many of them appearing here in printed form for the first time. In this way the authors hope that students will be able to develop their own historical skills of weighing and analysing the evidence and arriving at an informed conclusion. In a more general cultural context, since one of the aims of these volumes is to make the most recent interpretations and interests available to a wider audience than just the academic, the quality of their analyses and the range of their source materials will go a long way, as ready works of reference, to remedying that ignorance of their own history which still dogs many Scots, and particularly Scottish commentators, noted by a previous reviewer in this journal (no.22, winter 1998, p.63).

The editors have specifically eschewed any attempt to give a detailed narrative of this period but it seemed to this reviewer that anyone coming to the study of Scottish history for the first time in these volumes might still welcome some sort of chronological table to consult in order to provide a framework within which the varying interpretations could be set. While it is commendable to summarize the different positions taken by historians on an issue in order to challenge the reader to think, the latter may also require some idea of the basic outline first in order to understand how these different interpretations can arise; especially when many of the topics have themselves been the subject of increasing investigation and analysis over the last thirty or so years with the inevitable density of material this has produced.

That apart, these essays generally succeed in the primary aim of giving readers a rounded and up-to-date view of recent scholarship and, by being open in explaining the direction wherein the writer's own views lie, in challenging the student to put their own interpretations forward. Only a few aspects can be mentioned in a short review and no criticism is intended of any not noted specifically here. Examining the Union, Christopher Whatley gives a comprehensive account of the varying interpretations and motives which have been argued between historians ever since William Ferguson's path-breaking essay on this subject appeared in 1964. Similar approaches are taken by Bob Harris on Jacobitism and Michael Fry on Politics. The source extracts in Ian Whyte's essay on Rural Transformation provide excellent and manageable material for the student to work on, giving a real feel for the detail which lay behind this radical change in Scots' lives. So, too, do the sources and guidance given by Don Withrington on Education, a topic which lends itself readily to that further local investigation hoped for by the editors of this series. A careful reading of Allan Macinnes provides a sure path through the complexities and contentions of Highland society in this age of 'improvement'. In this context of reviewing the revisionism, choosing which

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readings to select to accompany the essays and which to omit must have been a hard choice; but it might have been useful to have had some of Ferguson's 1964 essay on the making of the Union, one of the first steps in the modern Scottish historiography, with its detailed examination of motives rather than his narrative account of 1977 given here. In the same way, the seminal works on political structures and trends by John Simpson, Ronald Sunter and John Shaw might have been added to the bibliography on Politics.

It is striking how many of the various aspects examined in the transformation of Scotland in this period keep coming back to the situation created by the Treaty of Union. It determined the context in which so much of that society's administrative, legal, institutional and political activities operated. The restriction of the vote to the large landowners was not so much determined by their wealth and position as by those who made the Union deciding in 1707 to continue the feudal basis of the country's representation, thus limiting the vote to only those landowners who were tenants-in-chief of the Crown. More than this, the vote could be detached from land, sold and traded in return for favours. That is why electoral reform in 1832 represented such a turning point, to be measured not in the relative smallness of the electorate it created (at some 64,000 giving the vote now to about 1 in 38 of the population as compared with 1 in 21 in England) but, rather, in the fact that the franchise was now based for the first time on property as such and, thus, would expand with growing wealth and numbers. Irene Maver in her thorough and balanced examination of Urbanisation makes it lucidly clear that it was these particular legal structures governing town life in Scotland, something again entrenched and carried over by the Union of 1707, which determined not only broader urban social characteristics up to 1850 but also stultified any attempts to develop the representative character and administrative effectiveness of the towns.

Other questions stimulated by this series of essays concern approaches and methodologies in the fields of religion, economic and industrial change and the developments in social relationships resulting therefrom subsumed under the heading of 'class'. To take but one of these, the essay on religious developments by Callum Brown gives the reader an underlying problem as to whether religion is to be understood in terms of social forces or as the history of the convictions and consciences of ordinary men and women independently of their status or situation. Professor Smout's essay on the Cambuslang Revival cited in the bibliography suggests to this reader, at least, that belief might not be linked to class status or prevailing cultural norms. It might spring from conviction as to the centrality of Christian belief in everyday actions. In that way it could be a powerful force for cohesion

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transcending temporal barriers of rank or interest. Thus, patronage might be more than just a means of elite social control and a challenge to popular or democratic forms of expression because it represented an affront to belief, to conscience and to divine ordinance. Also Calvinism may have been even more deeply embedded in people's lives, perhaps, than has been imagined especially when, as the essay on Education shows, a very effective system of popular learning in which the Catechism was central was underway by the 1750s. Dr Brown demonstrates that by the 1800s the nature of Scottish society was being profoundly altered by the growth of Catholicism. But why should the latter be linked with Sectarianism as if part of, and partly responsible for it, if, as he demonstrates, deep anti-Catholicism long antedated Catholic revival in Scotland?

Overall, therefore, these volumes will force the student to think, especially when they have been given so many resources to build on beyond the essays by experts. In this respect, the Major Documents in volume 5 (which also cover the subsequent period from 1850 to the Present which are to be dealt with in the associated volumes 2 and 4¹) are a valuable collection in themselves. They range from the national archives such as the Articles of the Treaty of Union, to local descriptions such as comparisons of Dundee in the 1790s and 1830s, and from those available in print like Burns or Scott to handwritten material only accessible in the National Library in Edinburgh. With the coordinating volume of essays and readings altogether they provide a self-contained and valuable compendium of modern Scottish history for which the editors are to be commended.

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¹ reviewed elsewhere in the present issue of *Scottish Affairs*.