

## **REVIEW: THE MAKING OF SCOTLAND**

*R. J. Morris*

Robin Smith, **The Making of Scotland. A Comprehensive Guide to the Growth of Scotland's Cities, Towns and Villages**, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001, 1024 pp, with over 250 full colour and b&w photos plus maps, hb, £40, ISBN: 1 84195 170 6

Scotland enjoyed a very specific form of millennium fever. First off was Tom Devine with **The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000**. It was a great sprawling committed essay that affirmed what was the curriculum for Scotland past under the Union. Next was **The Oxford Companion to Scottish History**, edited by Michael Lynch. It joined two other companions. The Irish had edited one for Ireland and the English had edited one for Britain. The Companion contained a labyrinth of essays, cross referenced and drawing on a wide range of authors both within and outwith the formal university world. Last and not least was **The New Penguin History of Scotland** (edited by R A Houston and W W Knox) which, multi authored, including this reviewer, presented a series of essays, which began the history of Scotland before there was a Scotland and continued with a considerable empirical density and a focus on the experience of as wide a range of people as the sources would allow. There was a 'what was Scotland' sub text running through this collection and a concern about the ways in which the Scots (and sometimes others) learnt their history. This form of national stocktaking was perhaps not surprising. More Scottish history has been written in the last thirty years than at any other time in history and the attempts to set them in some sort of order was certainly due.

Robin Smith's book is a very different form of stocktaking. In some ways it is a very nineteenth-century book. It has over a thousand pages and 1285 main entries. It measures 260 x 200 x 60 cm. It is not a trivial book nor a pocket

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book to be taken around the countryside like the late nineteenth-century Murray's Guides which Smith admires. This is not so much a labour of love as one of enthusiasm and curiosity with a *douce* but insistent political agenda that emerges in entry after entry. The author has been deeply involved in the practice and teaching of town planning. Town planners, in all their different varieties, believe and believed that intelligent, informed and trained professional people are those best able to organise the organisation of human activity across space in the best possible way. Since the mid 1970s, 'town planning' is a title little used except by those who shout tower blocks, urban motorways and down with controls. Whilst acknowledging the moment in western, not just Scottish history which was the rejection of the planner's authority, it would be as well to re-read Frank Tindall's **Memoirs and Confessions** as a reminder of the positive impact of such professional visions. This Guide is the result of running a planner's eye across Scotland. Every entry is a place name with an Ordnance Survey map reference. It runs from Abbey St Bathans to Yoker and has maps to help with location. The form is reminiscent of Francis Groome's **Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland**, the best edition of which was produced in the 1890s, and perhaps even Sir John Sinclair's **Statistical Survey of Scotland**, produced parish by parish in the 1790s. Maybe these are centennial stocktakings, but worth taking off the shelf to set alongside this Guide.

What happens when the thoughtful planner's eye runs across the landscape of Scotland city by town by village? One feature so different from the planners' ideology of the 1950s is an awareness of the depth of the historical. Smith is very aware of those who go before and ensures that the user will do likewise. Scotland's sense of itself as a topography goes back to Timothy Pont whose maps, surveyed in the 1590s, supplied the Blaeu Atlas of 1654. Only some of the Pont maps survive as a window on a distant landscape. Defoe, the sharp-eyed pre-union economic spy appears at intervals. So does the military survey of William Roy, made in the 1750s, post the 1745 rebellion. This was the first detailed account of Scotland and showed everything a military man on the march would want to know about Scotland. In the shape of Sir John Sinclair's Statistical Account, produced parish by parish in the 1790s, Scotland gained one of the first national accounts of people and resources. Alongside these are the tourists like Dorothy Wordsworth and Thomas Pennant who were more interested in aesthetics than in the substance of place.

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Smith has a very particular sense of history. This is a history driven by technology, industry and transport. Railways have an especial importance in his evaluation – 'railways, Beeching and industrial decline' are placed significantly together in his historical survey of Scotland. The 'Thatcher government's car fixation' played a central part in later changes. Smith's sense of recent history includes an awareness of the growth of the service sector, especially of universities and education, but shopping centres and hospitals also appear in entry after entry. The places in his A to Z list were produced by history and that history was closely linked to transport changes positive and negative. Dr Beeching is *diabolus ex machina* in many entries.

This is a book to compare with earlier surveys and stocktakings of Scotland, especially that of Francis Groome. It is also a book to use rather than to read. The first thing every reader does is to look at the places they know well. This is a nightmare for every compiler of a book of this sort. His account of Grantshouse on the A1 in Berwickshire is centred around the railway station, opened when the railway arrived in 1846 and closed by Beeching. This is fine but Grantshouse really began in 1816 with the building of the new road from Edinburgh to London. Thomas Grant, the contractor, opened a house to sell drink to the navvies and stayed. It is also misleading to attribute a local place name, Butterden, to Pont when all we have is its entry on the Blaeu map of the mid seventeenth century. It is equally misleading to attribute the closing of the local school to Beeching. This had much more to do with the declining labour force in the surrounding farms upon which the village also depends. All this can be learnt from Jim Crosbie's book which can be bought from the local post office, now a sub post office, which, despite the claim in the entry, is still open (just).

Much easier on the author is the reader who uses the book for visiting. No reference to Loch Etive, but the maps at the back lead the reader quickly to a choice of place names. No entry to Bonawe but again the index at the back has good cross reference to Taynuilt, the modern centre. This place brings out the best in this Guide with an account of the Bonawe smelter, an astonishing Highland contribution to the eighteenth-century industrial sector. It was the hunt for charcoal quality woodland that brought Lancashire capital to this location. It is worth looking at the Kinlochleven entry and the Aluminium Works of 1909 for a later example of industry coming to the resources in the Highlands (cheap power) rather than the other way around. The author's emphasis on the importance of transport is important in both

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entries. Back in Taynuilt, he brings on the full cast of Roy, Pennant and Dorothy Wordsworth before adding an account of the recent economy based upon smoked salmon, fishing and tourism.

A visit to Melrose provides a useful account of Romans and Monks and the tourist/retail services of the place. There is disappointment that he missed the visit of Thomas Pennant and did not make more of Walter Scott's importance here. Scotland more than elsewhere learns about itself from landscape and place perhaps because until recently there was no parliament to prompt a government- and state-based history. Walter Scott with his sense of landscape and place and history was a key part in this.

It is important to look at this book where it is strong, and in a sense to be led by the book. Smith provides a strong sense of a landscape of place haunted by disappearing and threatened industries but a landscape in which these features of settlement are being replaced by shopping centres, hospitals and newer industries. He makes excellent use of the pictures taken by John Hume in the 1960s and 70s and now with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. The Aluminium Smelter in Kinlochleven is there as is the Nelson's print works in Edinburgh. Like the breweries of Edinburgh and the sanitary ware kiln carriage at Kilmarnock these are lost landscapes that Scotland often forgets. The Guide leads the reader to Motherwell, Kilmarnock and Grangemouth with many accounts of the twists and turns of recent history. The Grangemouth section is dominated by the refinery and associated smells and pollution, but starts quite properly with the Forth-Clyde canal and ends with the take-over of the ICI by Zeneca and the securing of the rail link, including the recent transfer of the transport of pickle jars from road to rail. The Guide is full of this sense of significant detail in the accounts of recent change.

Going back to Francis Groome two things stand out. Smith and perhaps his readers lack the nineteenth-century appetite for figures. Groome had the tonnage of shipping, British and foreign, entering and leaving Grangemouth in the previous 50 years, as well as the width and depth of the new channel and the cost of the Public Institute built in 1876-77 for £2,100. There is also much less interest in the structure of local governance, the burgh, the parish. The importance of dominant employers and landowners has also gone. Grangemouth was in dispute with the Marquis of Zetland when Groome went to press, and Kirkcaldy was ruled by the Nairns and the other linoleum firms. Above all, civil society is much less visible. Even in utilitarian Grangemouth,

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Groome's list was formidable, the Traders Building Company, the Co-operative Building and Investment Society, the Model Building Society, the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners Royal Benevolent Society, the Young Men's Christian Association, as well as numerous and varied churches and chapels. Does the sense of the Scottish place no longer include a sense of its civil society? Does Melrose still have a branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Masonic Lodge of St John and an annual football match between the married and unmarried men, and are they as worthy of notice as they once were as part of the identity of the place?

This Guide needs using critically but its strength is that it presents a Scotland which is often hidden in more general guides. The fruitful collaboration with John Hume's photographs and the awareness of transport and economic change creates a more informed look for the Grangemouths of Scotland before rushing off for a day out in Melrose or Taynuilt.

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