

## **REVIEW: ULSTER AND SCOTLAND**

*Ian S. Wood*

William Kelly and John R. Young (eds), **Ulster and Scotland, 1600-2000: History, Language and Identity**, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004, 189 pp., hb, £45, ISBN 1-85182-808-7.

Senator John Kerry, like every contender for the American presidency, tried to play the Irish card. Many voters indeed seemed to assume that his Catholic father and even his iconic initials JFK entitled him to do this. His surname helped too, but only until he had to make it clear that 'Kerry' had replaced the name of his grandfather, Fritz Kohn, a Czech Jew who had fled to an America which he hoped would be free of anti-Semitism. John Kerry did, however, have Irish or, more precisely, Ulster roots on his mother's side. She could trace her descent directly to an Ulster-Scottish Presbyterian cleric, the Rev. James McGregor, who in 1718 took many of his congregation from the parish of Aghadowey on the banks of the lower Bann on the hazardous journey to the New World. Like many more Ulster dissenters they felt betrayed by the Williamite settlement and the victimisation they suffered from the established and Episcopal Church of Ireland. The township they founded in New Hampshire, and which prospered over time from good farming and linen-making, was called Londonderry. Some of the original settlers had indeed manned the Maiden City's walls in the great siege thirty years earlier.

Little of this, need it be said, figured in the Kerry campaign, since it hardly matched popular stereotypes of 'Irish' roots, let alone the whole, mostly bogus, Riverdancing image of Celtic Ireland's diaspora. The Rev. Mr McGregor and his parishioners figure in one of many excellent contributions to this important new collection of essays on the Scotland and Ulster relationship edited by Drs William Kelly and John R Young. They have done us all a service because it is nearly ten years since Dr Graham Walker, in

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### *Scottish Affairs*

**Intimate Strangers**, gave us his own immensely readable and stimulating view of a seriously neglected political and cultural relationship. He makes a welcome appearance in this book, recycling but also sharpening up some of the points he made then, reminding us how, in the great pre-1914 Home Rule crisis, as staunch a Unionist as John Buchan had no problem in invoking the concept of an Ulster Protestant nation: 'They are one blood and one creed', he told an audience in 1912: 'They have such a history behind them as any nation might be proud of.'

Seventy five years on and at the height of the Troubles, some Unionists, and indeed paramilitary Loyalists, tried genuinely to re-package the idea of an Ulster nation as something that could reach out to the Catholic community too. Their efforts failed, and this collection's concern, it has to be said, is with the emergence of an Ulster defined by the Scottish Protestant impress upon it.

This is why one or two of the contributions used by the editors seem hardly to match the book's remit. Richard Finlay's chapter on 'The Politics of Language in Inter-War Scotland' says a good deal that is already familiar on Hugh MacDiarmid's espousal of the cause of a revived Scottish language but nothing on this issue's relationship to the Ulster-Scots tongue. Perhaps this is because MacDiarmid never voiced much interest in this connection and never set foot in Northern Ireland. Similarly, Alan Titley, in an idiosyncratic and at times knockabout piece on Irish and Scots Gaelic life stories in print, makes not one reference to Ulster.

The language issue is of course hugely important, with parity of esteem for Ulster-Scots written into the 1998 Belfast agreement, while Scots itself is recognised officially by the UK government under Part 2 of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. Dr David Horsburgh makes this point at the end of one of the book's best chapters on 'The Political Identity of the Scots-speaking Community 1545-1760'. This should be required reading for Irish republicans who regularly pour scorn on advocates of Ulster-Scots in **An Phoblacht** and in the letter page of the **Irish News**. Dr Horsburgh traces the vigorous staying power of Scots as a language of the pulpit, of law, administration, commerce and literature until long after the 1707 Union both here and in Ulster. It endured for longer than that as the people's tongue, vividly captured in the writings of Burns as well as the Antrim weaver poets. Its downgrading to the status of a provincial *patois* was part of the Anglicising process that came with the consolidation of the Union, in some ways a more insidious erosion of identity than the more overt attacks on the Irish language and Gaelic in Scotland.

*Review: Ulster and Scotland*

Language and dialect travel with those who speak them, and it is an interesting irony that Scots was brought to Ireland well ahead of the Plantation of the early seventeenth century by Gaelic speakers like the Clan Donald. Combining with their lordship of the Isles the rank of Earls of Antrim, they had on occasions to deal directly with the English crown and its agents in Dublin, and Scots was the medium through which they did this, employing Lowland-born scribes and emissaries for the purpose.

Population movement taking Scots speakers to Ulster, to Scandinavia, to the American colonies and to New Zealand are also covered in a central section of the book on emigration. Much of what is on offer here has the feeling of research in progress rather than necessarily completed. What comes through strongly, nonetheless, is the reality that the Plantation was only an episode in Scottish migration to Ulster, one both preceded and followed by significant population movement. In the neglected famine years of the 1690s, Scotland, in one four-year period, as Dr Patrick Fitzgerald shows us, lost 13 per cent of its still small population, with possibly 40,000 people making the crossing to Ulster.

Settling in Ulster could be temporary, especially for those whose aspirations to full religious freedom were affronted by the claims made on them by the Church of Ireland and the 1704 Test Act in Queen Anne's reign. Longer and more hazardous journeys lay ahead for them, as Drs Philips, Murdoch and Miller show us in their chapters.

The reverse process of Ulster settlement in Scotland has of course been documented elsewhere and in detail by Professors Tom Devine and Tom Gallagher, also by Dr Walker, and it perhaps takes on the appearance of a marginal topic in this book. Dr O'Cathain puts his focus on the Derry-Glasgow relationship to show a preponderance of Protestants among those from the county and the city who settled permanently in Scotland. The Orange Order and Rangers FC may have been long-term beneficiaries, but for many who made the crossing, simple survival was as hard a struggle as it was for Catholics from their county or, to the West of it, from Donegal.

Taken overall and seen as the sum of its parts, this book is a valuable addition to our knowledge of a once little-studied strand in the tangled skein that constitutes the history of our islands. Quite recently, as another contributor, Dr Michael Montgomery, points out in an excellent exploration of the language issue, an academic work on Scottish literature made not one

*Scottish Affairs*

mention of Ulster-Scots. Thanks to him and to those who have made this book possible, not least its editors, this is unlikely to happen again.

*December 2004*