

# **Scottish History and Scottish Folk**

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Inaugural Lecture  
Chair of Scottish History and Literature  
University of Glasgow  
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Let me begin by expressing the immense sense of honour that I feel to be appearing before you on this occasion at this great university. May I also express my sincere thanks to all who, throughout the years, played any part whatsoever, whether they were aware of it or not, in my eventual appointment at Glasgow. I thank them now since they may not wish to be thanked at the conclusion of this lecture. I left Scotland after the referendum of 1979 to escape troubled budgets, increasing layers of bureaucracy, creeping anglicisation and internal colonialism. I return to find all of these in place, if more so, with the additional complication of an aggressive competitive ethos intent upon generating league tables, fostering inter-institutional rivalry and fragmenting the world of universal scholarship. It may be a sign of the times, though I hope not of the future, that the first official communication I received on arriving at Glasgow, was a letter inviting me to take early retirement. It therefore seems desirable to present the following lecture before it is too late and this I do with thanks to all for attending.

'There are two histories of every land and people' asserted the late Calum Maclean - 'the written history which tells what it is considered politic to tell and the unwritten history which tells everything'.<sup>1</sup> Calum's words first truly impacted upon me in the late 1970s. First I wondered if his statement was true or if it just sounded as if it should be. Secondly I was already uneasily reacting against the document-fixated, empirical, von Rankean approach to Scottish Historical Studies so steadfastly cultivated, not to say demanded, by the late Professor Gordon Donaldson at Edinburgh. Obviously documentation was, and would remain, indispensable to historical investigation, but perhaps what was required was the scrutinisation of different types of 'document' and different types of evidence. Thirdly my studies of the covenanting era had suggested that we were not focussing on the complete picture. It was all fine

and well to concentrate on the developing constitutionalism, and indeed civic humanism, of the covenanters who I still believe to have pioneered a practical political approach to the unprecedented problems which beset them, but there was something wrong with the context. You do not read very far into the covenanting sources without realising that beneath the layers of covenant and contract there is a vast undergrowth of unbelief, a *mentalité* which happily accommodates premonition and prodigy, fairies and phantom armies, drums at midnight and blood on the moon.

Even as the covenanters articulated their noblest aspirations they were burning women for entering into a diabolical pact - a covenant if you will - with the devil. Throughout the seventeenth century and with increasing frequency during the Age of Enlightenment that useful pejorative 'superstition' is used in exactly the same way as the Romans employed *superstitio* - to mean somebody else's belief. What was the nature of these beliefs and how did they inter-act with the distinctiveness of the Scottish historical process?

A fourth concern arose from my studies of the earlier period of Scottish history which were leading to the inexorable conclusion that many so-called acceptable (really meaning respectable) texts, impressively edited, and sometimes translated, noting all variants and with critical commentary, were in reality nothing more, nor less, than an assemblage of oral sources. Historians have tended to display massive snobbery about the vernacular while venerating the classical languages. For example in 1222 the folk of Caithness had a disagreement with their bishop. They attacked him at Halkirk 'like wolves against the shepherd, degenerate sons against their father and satellites of the devil against Christ the Lord: stripped him of his proper vestments, struck him, stoned him, wounded him to death with a double-sided axe and roasted him to death in his own kitchen'.<sup>2</sup> This account was enshrined in an episcopal letter to the pope; had it appeared in one of the sagas, those great prose narratives composed in Old Norse, and circulating in the oral medium before being committed to vellum in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we may suspect that the details would have been disputed. The methodologies used to investigate the historicity of the Icelandic sagas (which contain a good deal of information about Scotland as part of the North Atlantic world in the Middle Ages) are the same as those used in examining the historical value of the ballads,<sup>3</sup> which have also been assiduously ignored by mainstream historians. The point was well made by John Carrick, last century, in his massively popular book on William Wallace, comparing the venomous comments of contemporary English chroniclers made of his hero as opposed to the traditional accounts preserved by Blind Harry's poem - 'we do not see that a great

falsehood, told in the classical language of ancient Rome, should be entitled to a larger portion of public faith than a lesser one set forth in the more modern *patois* of Scotland'.<sup>4</sup>

A number of authorities had already indicated the potential which reposed in the study of the Folk at large.<sup>5</sup> In Canada, to which I was fortunate enough to flee in 1979 in search of perspective on my native land but which really did turn out to be, as John Buchan had warned, an extension of Scotland, I was privileged to teach a much wider range of histories - British, Celtic, European, and North American particularly with reference to the impact of the Scottish diaspora - than had been required at Edinburgh. It soon became apparent that scholars worldwide shared a certain uneasiness about traditional approaches to the past which ignored tradition.<sup>6</sup> An increasing amount of literature was also appearing in Britain on the history of the subordinate classes, though not much on Scotland, excluding the invaluable contributions by Chris Smout and Christina Larner, at least for the early modern period.<sup>7</sup>

This, then, is the Scottish Folk of my title - the Folkways and Folk Culture, above all the Folk Belief, of the people who never get mentioned. But a secondary intention is to consider the relationship between Scottish History and the Scottish People. Who or what is Scottish History for? What is the role of Scottish History in schools? Have we as academics parted company from our audience? Has our past been surrendered to the heritage industry, or worse, to Hollywood and its pale shadows in Cowcaddens and Queen Margaret Drive? Such questions, quite fortuitously, are strangely appropriate given the circumstances in which the chair of Scottish History and Literature at Glasgow was founded.

The idea originated with William Freeland editor of *The Evening Times* and a founder of the Glasgow Ballad Club. In approaching the Burns clubs to secure funding, he recruited the keen Burnsian, William Wallace editor of *The Glasgow Herald*, who established a committee and brought in Sir William Bilsland, Lord Provost of Glasgow. Their joint efforts raised £4800 from contributors at large, as well as from the Burns Federation, the Scottish Patriotic Association and the Saint Andrew Society, including some members in New York. Since the funds, in the time-honoured tradition of Scottish caniness and thrift, fell well short of the target of £20,000, the committee then promoted the Scottish Historical Exhibition of 1911, the profits from which permitted the appointment of Robert S. Rait to the chair in 1913.

On the occasion of his inaugural lecture in 1892, Richard Lodge holder of the first chair of History at Glasgow, made a strong plea for the study of Scottish history. 'To every man (and soon he

would mean every woman as well) the history of his native land must always be of pre-eminent interest and importance<sup>8</sup>, and he attempted to teach some of the Scottish variety himself. Nonetheless Freeland and Wallace were concerned that Scottish history and literature had no distinctive place in the curriculum of 'the most important and most progressive of our Scottish Universities'.<sup>9</sup> *The Herald* anticipated that Rait would attract not only undergraduates but 'the increasing number of mature students who crowd to every public lecture on this subject' and, in a perceptive line, it suggested that the increased desire of Scots to study the history of their own country was due to the fact that 'it is at once the most aristocratic and the most democratic of all histories'.<sup>10</sup>

Less convinced was that well known harbinger of innovation and radicalism, the Glasgow University Senate. The St Andrew Society protested Senate's insistence that students must take the course in General European History before proceeding to Scottish, contrary to the wishes of the founders and the general public. Senate believed (and similar sentiments have often been expressed around the halls of academe) that the prescription of the general course first would remove any tendencies towards 'parochialism, picturesqueness and defective perspective'.<sup>11</sup> In the end though, public opinion won out; it was agreed that students could take General and Scottish simultaneously. To a degree difficult to comprehend today, in 1913 the community at large actually cared about what Senate said and did.

At Rait's inauguration the Principal observed that the chair owed its existence to 'a very remarkable manifestation of what might be called national consciousness and a national zeal for the highest education'. Robert Rait, later to be principal of Glasgow himself, was even more outspoken. 'Why', he asked, 'was there a professorship of Scottish History at Glasgow?'

Not by the insistence of any University Commission or Government Department, not even by the gracious wish of any munificent benefactor, but because the people of Glasgow and the West of Scotland willed that such a chair should be. A universal demand, based at once upon love of country and upon the intellectual interest in neither of which had the Scot ever been wanting; an enthusiasm which feared no difficulties and shirked no labours - these were the founders of the Chair.

'It might be said', he concluded, 'that the universities had fallen behind the nation in their recognition of Scottish Studies'.<sup>12</sup> Thus was established the People's Chair of Scottish History.

The campaign had been fiercely contested. It was launched in the pages of the *Glasgow Herald* on 1 January 1907 the year of the two hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Union, 'a very far from perfect union of the peoples'.<sup>13</sup> Many of the arguments *pro* and *contra* the desirability of the chair remain astonishingly fresh and relevant ninety years later for they were part of wider debates both about the place of Scottish history in the school curriculum and that concerning the responsibilities of the universities, in this case specifically Glasgow, to the society at large which sustained them.

William Smart, Professor of Political Economy at Glasgow, lamented the absence of Scottish economic history. This he thought anomalous since elsewhere the study of history generally began at home; to prove his point he surveyed the teaching of national history from Oxbridge to the United States, to Scandinavia, Russia, Bohemia, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Belgium, Germany and France and, needless to say, he found Scotland sadly lacking. The purpose of the proposed chair would be to promote research and teaching, to cultivate rigorous research methodologies and to provide 'a meeting point of similar and cognate studies carried on outside'. With reference to the last-noted, by subjecting Scottish history 'to the dry light of modern scientific criticism', it would be rescued 'from being the plaything of national passion and sometimes parochial prejudice'.

It would take too long even to run over the subjects calling for co-ordinated study. The old Scottish constitution, the Church and its changes, the charters and chartularies, the economics of the medieval as well as of the relatively modern period, the factors of race and geography, the coming of the Celt, the Lowlander, and the Norseman; the social, industrial, and political evolution; the archaeology and the art, the literature of the vernacular, the warfare, the sea history, the organic development of tribal, royal, feudal, and burghal institutions; the old domestic life, the influence of England, the alliance with France, the European side of the Scot, the share of the Scot in European scholarship, the balance-sheet of the Unions of the Crowns and the Parliaments, the attempt to estimate the contribution of Scotland to the common stock of the Empire - the field is almost limitless.

Limitless or not, it was not a bad prescription, and some of it has still to be attained, but what is to be noted is the absence of parochialism; Scottish history was to be outward-looking and internationalist, as it has continued so to be in its eponymous

department, as well as in the departments of Political Economy and Economic and Social History.

A leader in the *Herald* was strongly supportive - not surprisingly since William Wallace, the moving spirit behind the campaign, was editor of the paper - observing that it was axiomatic that 'a man is unfitted to deal with political and social questions, and has shut himself out from ennobling and vivifying influence, if he does not know, and know well, the story of his native country'. Echoing Smart - collusion may reasonably and legitimately be suspected - the commentator opined that 'adequate knowledge of our country's history is essential to an enlightened patriotism as distinguished from noisy chauvinism'. George Eyre-Todd, the noted literary historian and critic, just happened to write to the paper on the same day: - 'Nowhere else in Europe, probably, are ethnological, philological, social and economical, as well as political, lines of development so clearly traceable as in the history of Scotland'. Even the late Principal Story of Glasgow was trotted out to condemn 'as a sort of burlesque' the failure of Scottish universities to recognise Scottish history and literature.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly its backers wished Scottish history to be a graduating subject. They also insisted that the course should be broader than that offered by the Fraser Professor at Edinburgh, Peter Hume Brown, who was confined to the medieval period since the wording of the original bequest had been botched, and in those days universities scrupulously observed the wishes of the donor. Glasgow would also consider the Reformation, the seventeenth century, the Union, and indeed beyond for, 'as a matter of history it needs no demonstration that the history of Scotland remained separable after 1707'. In addition Glasgow would include Scottish literature and in that respect it would be unique.

The Chair would, while filling a great gap in our educational system, put an end to a long-standing anomaly in the University life of Glasgow, for it is indeed a remarkable anomaly that while the country has always so notably maintained and cultivated the sense of nationality that distinguishing trait of the public spirit has hitherto failed to reflect itself in the historical teaching of our University.

To Scotsmen - women apparently did not figure in their plans - Scotland and Scottish history were 'a possession, an education and an inspiration'.<sup>15</sup> Yet, despite their rhetoric, these men were not nationalists; rather they were motivated by 'enlightened patriotism', which included teaching the University of Glasgow its business. Predictably not all shared their enthusiasm and some - reasonably

enough - were positively alarmed at the prospect of lay interference in university affairs.

Professor D. J. Medley of the History department went public to remind people that Scottish was part of general history and that the former was likely to prove 'a narrowing intellectual influence . . . the history of our own country is, after all, but part of the wider history of the world, and should be carefully related to this wider history'. He felt 'sore' that the proposal should be made 'by a purely outside body and vented through the public press . . . without the slightest attempt to ascertain' what the existing department of history was actually doing.<sup>16</sup> A battery of heavyweights, including Richard Lodge, who was by now at Edinburgh, as well as assorted scholars, principals and headmasters, was recruited to flatten Medley and his supporters. At the root of the debate was the notion that universities ought to provide a knowledge of Scottish history for future schoolteachers. As the *Herald* solemnly warned, 'those are blind readers of the signs of the times who do not see how the development of the schools is bringing ever nearer a complete reorganisation of the University system', thus uncannily exemplifying the role of the Press as long-term prophet. In 1907 the *Herald* truly was a Glasgow newspaper. It thought that the city had a peculiar claim as a centre of Scottish research.

It lies in a region whose associations include the dim legends of an irrecoverable past, the birth of the Scottish past and the imperishable glory of beginning the heroic struggle for Scottish independence . . . Something in the atmosphere seems to make it congenial to antiquaries, archaeologists and historians'.

No doubt that atmosphere was affected by the massive pollution of industrialisation which forced them to seek refuge in their West End libraries! Lodge's asthma, after all, forced him to seek the cleaner air of Edinburgh in 1899. Leader writers did not pull their punches nor blush at their rhetoric.

A Scotsman's first duty is to know his native land . . . a small field mastered is better than a smattering of wider knowledge; no subject is more likely to rouse his dormant faculties than what lies nearest to his life and home. What the heart grips tightest the intellect will most quickly absorb and memory longest retain.<sup>17</sup>

Thus W. S. MacKechnie the medievalist and constitutionalist, whose name is today commemorated in the premises of the department of medieval history and who clearly did not shirk from meddling with his close colleague, Medley.



There was widespread condemnation of the Glasgow School Board when it voted against the establishment of the chair (because its chairman was English some muttered). Professor Medley, as a member of the board, played a predictable role, claiming that Scottish history was not ignored in his department; the annual gold medal for the prize essay was generally awarded for a Scottish topic while he himself devoted the last lecture of his course to Scotland. There was, in any case, insufficient Scottish history to fill up a lecture course, the subject being far too limited, since it was 'a history of some three hundred years'.

Surely it was far more educative for the ordinary individual to be taken to a big, broad, and general subject - where they were dealing with the great elemental forces, where their minds were being widened by the knowledge of what a large place the world is, and how long a time the world has existed.

Furthermore the university was not a place for the training of teachers; 'it was a place for a liberal education'. The campaign to establish a chair was not an educational movement, it was a 'sentimental movement'. The Herald gasped in disbelief at Hedley's latter remarks.

It may be that only a curriculum of liberal studies is worthy of University recognition, and that students of divinity, medicine, law, and pedagogy should be excluded, because their studies have a practical aim. But it is too late in the day to take up this position.

It pointed to the broad base of an arts degree as a counter to parochialism. 'It is for the University authorities to put their house in order, and not to hamper the general school education of the country by a too antiquated organisation'. None other than 'Duns Scotus' wrote to the editor to say that 'if this is the conception of Scottish history actually entertained by the Professor of History in Glasgow University there could be no more conclusive argument for the urgent necessity for founding a Scottish chair'.<sup>18</sup>

The debate of just over a year, as recorded by the Scottish History and Literature Chair Committee, had been opened by William Wallace.

. . . the movement . . . is non-controversial, non-aggressive, rationally patriotic, and, above all things, educational. The belief of the Committee is that the best guarantee of the Scottish citizenship of the future being directed to the attainment of wise and noble patriotic ends is a full and accurate knowledge of what has been achieved by the Scottish citizenship of the past. The national Universities are clearly destined, by their own energy and initiative, aided by that pressure of outside public opinion that finds expression in legislation, to become, to an even greater extent than they have yet been, the centre of education.

That same debate was effectively closed by Principal T. M. Lindsay, who believed that no arguments could be brought against the chair 'save of the merest pedantry'.

A thousand influences of time and place have helped to make us what we are, and we must know something about them if we are to know ourselves. Granted that many of them do us no great good, tend to cramp rather than to expand the character, make us hard rather than sympathetic, we must learn what they are ere we can set ourselves to correct them. For the most part what comes to us Scotsmen from the past of our country is the best of our belongings. It forms the common life and that mutual neighbourly trust which keeps a nation united; as its differences and even quarrels give it life and movement . . . What may be expected from a Professor of Scottish History is to describe the makings of the Scottish nation, to make us see the ebb and flow of its life, the impulses which have moved it, the aims which at different periods have inspired it, and the gradual development of characteristics which, educated in national crises, have combined to form the national character.<sup>19</sup>

Smart and Ramsay between them laid out a programme which might daunt the most dedicated of chair-holders, but it could be contended that some of the topics which they specified were those which most alarmed their critics, as in some quarters they apparently continue so to do, since such subjects as patriotism and the national character were and are, to say the least, potentially volatile and not easily investigated using the tools available to the British empirical school. The superiority of English history was then, as now, mistakenly assumed, and the international approach

favoured by the Scots denied. For the Medleys of this world to be English was to be British in a way that to be Scottish was not. What historians wish to destroy they first describe, hence the charges of narrowness, parochialism, chauvinism and sentimentalism levelled against Scottish history. At the same time, if the pro-chair camp is to be believed, their opponents showed themselves to be lamentably out of touch with Scottish public opinion, which demanded more Scottish history in schools, and expected a greater degree of sensitivity and responsiveness from the universities.

It is customary on the occasion of inaugurals to mention predecessors in the chair. One of the earliest publications of the distinguished historian, Robert Sangster Rait, whose personality shines through in the passage above quoted on the occasion of his inaugural, was on the history of the University of Aberdeen. His *Scottish Parliament before the Union of the Crowns* (1901) was eventually expanded into his magisterial *Parliaments of Scotland* (1930) which he dedicated to 'the University of Glasgow and the Company of the Founders of the chair of Scottish History Therein'. He also published a history, *Scotland* in 1911, a book on the union with A. V. Dicey, and several historical and literary studies of the reign of James VI. His great hero was Sir Walter Scott, warmly commending the latter's 'scrupulous desire to be just to the beliefs and prejudices of others'.<sup>20</sup> In 1930 he demonstrated loyalty to his north-eastern roots when he contributed a foreword to Ord's *Bothy Songs and Ballads*. John Ord was Superintendent of the Glasgow Police Force; Rait commended the 'living picture of Scottish rural life' which Ord's collection presented, 'absolutely sincere and free from any form of affectation'.

Food and drink, work and play, lovers' happiness and their tragedies (here and there their comedies as well) echoes of fairy tales and of civil war, the little incidents of daily life which vary with changing social custom - all of them things that might easily disappear and be lost - are here preserved with pious care in this Book of Remembrance.<sup>21</sup>

J. D. Mackie held the post from 1930 to 1957. He once observed that historians must beware their own bias - 'the ingrained bias is part of the personality and it is the personality of the scholar which gives life to dead documents and dry bones'. If that is so then one can only draw the corollary from Mackie's own writings which, in so far as I have consulted them, are bland beyond belief. But there is humour there too and friends who knew him remark on his fondness for droll stories. A quite wrong-headed passage is gratuitously included in a lecture on 'The Archaeologist and the Historian', which is warmly commended to Professor Chris Morris

and his fellow dirt-delvers since it shows that archaeologists are much more likely to arrive at wrong conclusions than superior historians. Consider the following:

It is extremely easy for (the archaeologist) to go wrong. For example. Suppose by some accident of television you saw me in bed at night wearing pyjamas, and then you saw me again in the evening wearing a lounge suit and in a picture house. And suppose that was the only evidence you had about me at all. You might conclude that I always wore pyjamas and went to bed at night, which would be correct. But you might also conclude that in the day time I got up and dressed and spent the day at the pictures. Which would be wrong. The archaeologist hasting over vast periods of time with insufficient evidence is quite likely to make wrong deductions from the little evidence he has.<sup>22</sup>

Such sentiments emanated from a professorial generation which was omniscient and which considered every thought worth recording. Remarkably enough Mackie's best known work was on English history though his incredibly drab *History of Scotland* has been for too long readily available.<sup>23</sup>

George S. Pryde, an altogether more modest man, held the chair from 1957 to 1961 having worked throughout his career in the shadows of Rait and Mackie with both of whom he collaborated. He seems to have been condemned to rewriting the history of modern Scotland for various publications right through until his death, since versions of the same thing appeared at different places and at different times. The confident nationality and national consciousness of 1913 had given way by the 1930s to fears about Scottish nationalism, the aspirations of which he attempted to refute in *Scotland* (1934) which he co-wrote with Rait, and in his publication on the Treaty of Union. His book of 1934 is still worth reading, especially the chapter on Scottish culture which shows a deep knowledge of contemporary literature; for example he distinguishes Lewis Grassie Gibbon as the outstanding novelist of the age whereas a literary lecture series in Edinburgh the previous year barely mentioned him.<sup>24</sup> But Pryde had, I think, the common touch. Departmental sources tell me that when his office was cleared after his death there was found among his effects a Partick Thistle scarf! - totally appropriate for the first true modernist to hold a chair of Scottish history.

And then, in 1962, along came the *enfant terrible* of the discipline, Archibald Alexander MacBeth Duncan. He will hold forever the record for longevity - thirty years - in office. Master of

the aphorism and acerbic wit it was Archie who wrote of Geoffrey Barrow's *Robert Bruce* - 'If Edward I is blacker and Robert I whiter, than grey, the reader will react enough to dull the author's sometimes stark colours; nonetheless to anyone fed on a diet of 'the English Justinian' this would be an invaluable purgative', and who ventured the opinion that, 'the dullness of E. W. M. Balfour-Melville's *James I* is moderated only by its unimaginative brevity'.<sup>25</sup> I do not know whether, Mackie-like, Professor Duncan favours particular night attire or, indeed, whether he owns the Thistle colours, but it is to him we are indebted for his massive study of medieval Scotland and the *Acta* of Robert Bruce, as well as the present strength of the Department of Scottish History, which is quite simply the best in the country.<sup>26</sup> Dauvit Broun in Medieval, Jim Kirk in Reformation, Colin Kidd in Enlightenment and Intellectual, and Irene Maver in Urban and Twentieth century,<sup>27</sup> together with Douglas Gifford and his colleagues in Scottish Literature, constitute a team of which any university would be proud. Undergraduates and postgraduates are part of that team while the department is a member of both the School of History and Archaeology and of the Postgraduate School of Scottish Studies. The University of Glasgow certainly cannot be accused in 1995 of falling behind in recognising the importance of Scottish Studies.

But tae oor tale . . . Although what follows is intended to offer an alternative view of Scottish History it is by no means to be construed as an attack upon the use of more familiar sources. Rather the aim is to provide a broader conceptual framework and to highlight the gulf between elite generated documentation and popular perception and reception.

To James Hogg's journal *The Spy* (No. 50) one J. C. Robertson contributed an article on 'The Decay of the Lyrical and Ballad Poetry in Scotland' (1811). Therein the author deplores the circumstance that 'the simple lays of our ancient bards' have been superseded in his own day 'by the vilest trash'. He attacks ballad hawkers as well as low and debased listeners.

If ballads and songs can no longer be made the channels of morality and patriotism it is surely at least in the power of those who should exert some care over the public manners to prevent them from being openly prostituted to the subversion of these important purposes. Magistrates should silence the venders of such nonsense, smut and blasphemy.<sup>28</sup>

*Plus ça change!* The songs of one's own youth are always more edifying and uplifting than the abominations created for one's progeny. Similar complaints about the ballads had been made since their first appearance in the acts of the parliament of Scotland.

Balladeering was indeed a dangerous occupation. In 1579 two poets were hanged at Stirling for libelling the Earl of Morton. 'They were baith weel beloved of the common people for their common offices' and their executions generated another ten or twelve similar libellous ditties. Some twenty years later James VI ordered that Francis Tennant should 'have his tongue cuttit at the rute' and then be 'hangit' for composing pasquils which allegedly libelled the king. James' long arm even extended as far as Poland to secure the beheading of John Stercovius, a native of that country who had published *A Legend of Reproaches Against the Scottish Nation*. In 1618 Thomas Ross, then studying at Oxford and doubtless driven out of his mind by the heady atmosphere of the place, penned a libel against the Scots. He was returned to Scotland where his right hand was struck off before he was beheaded and quartered. John Ray, the naturalist, on a visit in 1661 remarked that the Scots could not endure to hear their country or countrymen spoken against.<sup>29</sup> There was therefore in all likelihood public support for the harshness of royal action but were such fears - about the dangers of such compositions - well-founded? The answer must be positive.

This is not the place to enter into the problems of ballad scholarship but it is clear that the genre provided an excellent medium of satirical and social, as well as political, criticism. When the ballad of 'Johnie Armstrong'<sup>30</sup> noted that its eponym had 'asked for grace at a graceless face' the implication existed that it was not just James V but potentially any monarch who had acted, or would act, treacherously. There is much evidence in the ballads of social superiors being outwitted. There is some discussion too, both implicit and explicit, on the theme of incest which I take to be a popular counter-blast to the kirk's well known and much articulated obsession with the subject. There are several ballads about abduction, some of them like Bothwell's abduction of Mary Queen of Scots, planned and complicitous, and so defiant of social convention. A number of values and attitudes are to be recovered from a ballad such as 'Lamkin', perhaps the most horrific example of the genre in the entire Child corpus. Lamkin, despite his docile name, is a murderous mason who has not been paid by Lord Wearie for certain repairs and who is intent upon exacting horrendous vengeance while the laird is absent; he is a man of the New Age who exacts blood in lieu of money, a primitive accumulator pointed firmly in the direction of the future. Others had killed for such well understood values as love, honour, the obligations of kinship, parental duty or compulsory revenge. Lamkin is a rank materialist. He recruits the services of a 'fause nourice' or nurse (specifically a wet-nurse) who admits him to the castle where he cold-bloodedly murders Lord Wearie's baby son and wife. The two villains even debate whether they should catch



the wife's blood in a basin, an image which recalls sacramental blood as well the peasant practice of bleeding animals to make mealie puddings, combining the ritual and the domestic to gruesome effect.

'O scour the bason, nourice,  
and mak it fair and clean  
For to keep this lady's heart's blood  
for she's come o noble kin.'

'There need nae bason, Lamkin,  
lat it run through the floor;  
What better is the heart's blood  
o the rich than o the poor?'<sup>31</sup>

Parts of this ballad, which repays much more detailed study than is possible here, are almost Shakespearean in their intensity. The notion that there was no difference between the blood of noble and commoner would have sufficed to have the ballad banned. The ballads are still long overdue serious historical attention despite Principal Ramsay's sage observation that,

few countries have such store of ballads, country rhymes, and sources of like kind to disclose what the commonalty thought and felt. No historian worth his salt would neglect them. If State papers reveal the designs of politicians, the ballads tell what the people thought about things - a matter quite as important, if not more so.<sup>32</sup>

Not only ballads were perceived as being seditious: so too was most folk culture. There is a long and dispiriting history of the outlawing of various assemblies and festivals right through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, skirmishes in the prolonged war for Scotland's pagan soul which had gone on since the days of Ninian and Columba. Thus in 1608 the long established Beltane horse races at Peebles were banned through fears of violence; so was maypole dancing at Dalserf, Gilmerton and Roslin. Five years later the Hunting of the Cheviot, the theme of one of the oldest ballads but still a physical celebratory re-enactment, was outlawed on the same grounds. There was an element of the carnivalesque<sup>33</sup> in all of these activities as there was in assemblies of apprentices or university students; the latent violence in carnival has been well studied throughout Europe. Illegal assemblies were a perennial worry to the authorities all the way from the conventicles to the great awakenings of the later covenanting era. The Gordons of Gight inspired the creation of the Society of the Boys in 1606. The 'Whilliwass' of 1615 resonate with organised banditry like some of the societies of thieves in England or France. Those smitten with the

'Stewarton sickness' of 1630, or affected by the Sweet Singers of Boness in 1681,<sup>34</sup> were also deemed by the authorities to be assembling for potentially subversive purposes.

The most sinister of those who reputedly congregated by night in secret places were, of course, the witches who paid a terrible price for their alleged association. We have an excellent study of the Scottish witch-hunt by the late Christina Lerner<sup>35</sup> of this university but more requires to be done. Carlo Ginzburg has recently pointed out in *Ecstasies* that historians have failed to confront the actual testimony<sup>36</sup> of the witch trials and he is right. Bessie Dunlop of Lyne in Ayrshire was accused of witchcraft in 1576. Her testimony is remarkable, most notably perhaps because it dwells not upon the devil, or even on witches as such. Bessie received regular visits from one, Tom Reid, who had allegedly died at the battle of Pinkie twenty nine years earlier. She first met him after she had 'new rissine out of gissane [child-bed]'<sup>37</sup> when he predicted that her new-born and her cow would die but that her sick husband would recover. When Tom subsequently asked her to renounce her faith she refused, though 'she should be riven at horse-tails'. She later resisted Tom's entreaties that she should visit Elfame or Fairyland. Despite their differences he told her of certain cures for humans and animals and gave her the ability to recover stolen property. Once she saw a group of riders disappearing into a loch to be told by Tom that they were 'gude wichtis that wer rydand in Middil-zerd',<sup>38</sup> in other words the fairies, since 'wicht' in this context is a supernatural being, rather than specifically a witch; it was to be the terrifying period of persecution which transformed all 'wichts' into 'witches'. In this remarkable case Bessie's fairy beliefs resulted in her execution for witchcraft.

The notorious episode of witches allegedly conspiring in the death of James VI at North Berwick also generated much testimony which can be used to exemplify the folk belief of the period.<sup>39</sup> The most detailed case of all concerns Isobel Gowdie of Auldearn, in 1662, who claimed that she belonged to a coven, who knew the devil as 'Black John', who visited the queen and king of fairy, who could assume the shape of a hare and who provided the most circumstantial information on Satan-inspired cures and curses. Robert Chambers was in no doubt that in the cases of Bessie and Isobel the explanation was simple hallucination, 'the consequence of diseased conditions'.<sup>40</sup> Today post-deconstructionist historians would be less confident of such emphatic and simplistic diagnosis, assuming that all texts have meaning, however elusive, and regarding the testimonies as keys to the mindset of the past.

Nor should we ever forget the true horrors inflicted upon these unfortunate women. Torture was liberally applied. The voices of Andrew Melville, James VI himself or those much cited architects of

the National Covenant Johnston of Warriston and Alexander Henderson, should long ago have been drowned by the shrieks of the tormented yet as great an authority as Gordon Donaldson barely mentioned witches in his much-admired study of sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland.<sup>41</sup> According to some notes kept by the Earl of Haddington in 1608 there were reports that women taken at Broughton as witches were,

put to ane assize and convict, albeit they persevered constant in their denial to the end yet they were burned quick (alive), after sic ane cruel manner, that some of them deit in despair, renuncand and blasphemand, and others half-burnt, brak out of the fire, and was cast in quick again until they were burnt to the deid.<sup>42</sup>

Such a quotation confronts the essential violence of early modern Scotland which historians have all too often failed to acknowledge or else have totally ignored. Women and men were scourged, branded, mutilated, placed in jugs or stocks, hanged, burned, beheaded, hung in chains or occasionally broken on the wheel. There is an argument for labelling the period an Age of Cruelty rather than an Age of Faith.

In addition to the base misogynism at the root of the witch-hunt there can be little doubt that women were the victims alike of patriarchal society and of Pauline prejudices implicit in the Reformation. It is therefore truly remarkable that there is evidence, not only that women were possibly the main transmitters of the ballads - those potentially libellous and seditious compositions - but also that they were frequently the instigators and originators of riot. Such women undoubtedly exhibited much more bravery than their male contemporaries.

Consider that in 1615 the unheard-of transpired - a female riot in Burntisland! The queen's chamberlain had sent 'precepts of warning to remove'. When the officer and his assistant appeared at the mercat cross with his precepts he was, much to his astonishment, 'assailed by a multitude of women, above ane hundred, of the bangster Amazon kind' and 'maist uncourteously dung off his feet and his witness with him, they all hurt and bloodit, all his letters and precepts reft frae him, riven and cast away, and sae staned and chased out of town'.<sup>43</sup> The women of Burntisland thus initiated a long and honourable tradition of female political protest, particularly with reference to summonses of removal and rent strikes. In 1624 the number of women attending baptisms was limited by Aberdeen Town Council. Two years later the 'rascally women' of Paisley attacked their unpopular minister, Robert Boyd of Trochrigg. They not only upbraided Mr Robert with opprobrious

speeches and 'shouted and hoyed him, but likewise cast dirt and stones at him' and forced him to flee to Glasgow. In 1628 women of recusant sympathies in New Abbey (Kirkcudbright) similarly drove out the minister and schoolmaster.<sup>44</sup> There was thus considerable precedent for female initiatives in the prayer book riots of 1637, not by any means the last time in the seventeenth century that they so acted.

One could be forgiven for concluding that Scottish men found themselves in retreat in the course of the seventeenth century. Many were outraged when the Duchess of Lauderdale, with thirty or forty other ladies, sat in Parliament House to hear the commissioner's speech, 'a practice so new and extraordinary that it raised the indignation of the people very much against her'. The dour and credulous Lord Fountainhall deliberated on the sumptuary laws. What vexed him was the question of whether men were being unjustly punished when their wives flaunted the law by wearing fine apparel. If husbands were made liable, he observed, then '*obviously* (my italics) many wives to affront their husbands or otherwise be avenged on them, would break the law of purpose'. A similar problem arose with husbands whose spouses absented themselves from church so forcing their husbands to pay a fine. Council took the remarkable line that it was never the king's intention that his 'weel-affected subjects should be ruined by the mad and wilful opinions of phanatick wives without any fault of their own'. It was judged that it was not in the power of a man to persuade his wife to attend church notwithstanding all the endeavours he used to that effect.<sup>45</sup> When the going gets tough the tough get going.

A convenient way to study the culture of the folk at large is to investigate attitudes towards, and ideas about, the life cycle in pre-industrial communities. The culture of the elite was exclusive since participation required special knowledge or equipment such as literacy, Latin, uniforms or weapons. There was also, however the culture that was open to all irrespective of class or position, that basic culture which can be defined as that which everyone (or almost everyone) took for granted. The life cycle thus represents the interstices which are part of the shared human experience since, to state a truism, everybody experiences birth (usually someone else's though some claim to recall their own) and death, while there is usually some overlap of episodes in between, such as childhood, courtship, marriage and disease. Such investigation is fraught with difficulty because it is frequently impossible to confidently distinguish people's thoughts and beliefs since the latter were preserved by the minority elite rather than by the non-literate majority. Furthermore much academic history is predicated upon recognition, upon a kind of mindset shared by the past and the

present, whereas, in truth, our ancestors' outlook on their world was very different from our's. Yet the attempt is worth making because if we do not understand the worldview of the past we have very little chance of comprehending the impact of historical events upon the people of the past, whenever and wherever that past existed. As Lord Monboddo put it, 'a reader who believes that men have always been the same in all ages and nations, that we now see them . . . will disbelieve all ancient history, sacred as well as prophane'.<sup>46</sup> In certain respects the Scottish past *is* a foreign country and they *did* do things differently there.

Present in everyone's life was the Calendar which demanded a relentless round of ritual and observance, prescription and prognosis. Festivals such as Hogmanay, Candlemas (1 February), Pasch (Easter), Beltane (1 May), Midsummer, Lammas (1 August), Michaelmas (29 September), Hallowe'en, Martinmas (11 November) and Yule, to name the more prominent, involved community participation in various rituals and observances to ensure the prospect of prosperous seasons, healthy crops and livestock, and communal, as well as, individual well-being.<sup>47</sup> Most of these occasions involved the baking of special bannocks or cakes, ceremonies of propitiation often involving fire, the collection of special plants and the re-enactment of certain activities. They afforded opportunities for prognostication and the reading of portents. Such festivals had been under attack long before the Reformation yet they survived the best (or worst) efforts of the Kirk, in some cases well into the nineteenth century. Complicating the picture is the human capacity for revival and what has been called the 'invention of tradition', a powerful weapon in the armouries of certain Scottish neo-constructionists as well as of certain contributors to the volume of the same name.<sup>48</sup> What is required is a close study of which festivals were observed at which periods, of what exactly they involved and the functions which they fulfilled.<sup>49</sup>

Birthing was understandably an anxious time not only on the part of mothers who stood a fair chance of failing to survive the experience but also because of fears for the safety of the child who might be snatched by the fairies and a changeling substituted. Scraps of iron, bibles and the benedictions of midwives were recognised defences, but when changelings were detected the consequences could involve ordeals for, or even the deaths of, the infants concerned. Although some material survives in older (mostly nineteenth century) antiquarian volumes there is, as yet, no modern study of the subject for Scotland, nor, for that matter, is there one of childhood.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere historians have battled about the absence, or otherwise, of affective relationships between parents and children, but strangely for a country such as Scotland, apparently so thirled to clans and kindreds, there is not even a history of the family - as

opposed to histories of families, lamentable examples of which abound.<sup>51</sup>

No topic is an island and that of families merges effortlessly with the landscape of courtship, sexual relations and marriage. Once again, although the evidence is relatively abundant, be it derived from ballads or literary sources, from legal record or law commentary, legislation or kirk session, Scottish historiography is deficient.<sup>52</sup> Hopefully we shall soon have histories of illness, disease and famine to set alongside some pioneering studies of diet.<sup>53</sup> Old age has not so far attracted its Scottish historian,<sup>54</sup> though death, as might be expected is better served, with its myriads of rituals, observances, prophylactics and premonitions.<sup>55</sup> The hoary joke about the cemetery being the dead centre of the community is actually correct; it was known as the 'howff', the meeting place, a kind of public park. There wapenshaws, or weapon parades, were held, as were courts, and often it was the place where punishments at whipping posts, or in the stocks, were administered. There are references to graveyards functioning as bleachfields or as places to dry hides while traders and hawkers would set up their booths. Since most early schools were in churches the pupils used the graveyard as a playground shared with grazing livestock. In the 1680s there were complaints that women and children were using the churchyard of Greyfriars, Edinburgh as a public convenience abusing the said 'kirkyaird by filth and excrements'.

A number of precautions had to be taken when a person died. Reflective surfaces were covered and windows and doors were opened to allow the spirit of the deceased to depart; the body was carried out of the house feet first so that its late inhabitant could not find its way back. Any animals in the house were locked up or killed, cats being regarded as particularly unlucky. Numerous customs surrounded wakes which particularly disturbed the authorities because the drink, food, music and entertainment available on those occasions attracted many folk, who were 'little or nothing concerned in the defunct'.<sup>56</sup> Coffins and gravestones were rarely used before the eighteenth century and the reformers even denied the scriptural authority for funerals though public opinion forced them to relent. A further complex of conventions accompanied the corpse to the graveyard and eventual burial. Even these did not conclude matters for the deceased might return as a spirit and there was an annual opportunity for communion with the living on the day of the dead, Hallowe'en.

It's the nicht atween the Sancts and Souls  
When the bodiless gang about,  
An' it's open hoose we keep the nicht  
for ony that may be oot.<sup>57</sup>

Virtually every area of human activity was scrutinised and attacked by the the church, often in alliance with the state, in the period between 1500 and 1800 from recreation and sports to music, dancing and the culture of the taverns, as well as such aspects of unbelief as magic, fairies, prophecy and second sight. Abundant evidence survives in the records of the kirk sessions<sup>58</sup> which contribute to Scotland's fortunate circumstance that it is an ideal laboratory for the study of cultural history in a comparative context, considering not only the cultures of lowland, Gaelic, and Norn, Scotland but the wider context of Britain, Ireland, Europe and beyond. The great encompassing metaphor for the attack on popular culture was the witch-hunt which embraced all the beliefs, customs, recreations and assumptions - 'from the cradle to the grave'<sup>59</sup> - of which the authorities disapproved. And yet, despite such massive effort, the folk culture survived into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, surely one of the true paradoxes of Scottish history and one which awaits its serious investigator.

To return to the question posed above - who is Scottish History for? David Hume rejoiced that he inhabited the 'the historical Age and this the historical nation'.<sup>60</sup> Scotland is still, more than most, a self-consciously historical country. It is virtually impossible to open a newspaper without coming up against an historical topic. But in the post-modern world historians do not, nor should they have, a monopoly on information about the past. We have long co-existed with the *literati*. In the aftermath of the Scott phenomenon Heine remarked, 'Strange whim of the people! They demand their history from the hand of the poet and not from the hand of the historian. They demand not a faithful report of bare facts, but those facts dissolved back into the original poetry whence they came'.<sup>61</sup> Such demand is not yet satisfied, as the rivalry between literature and history continues, so that the literary associations of a place often obliterate the historical ones. Scottish History is now being double distilled through such media as computer disks, ever more upbeat museum displays, state of the art exhibitions, the stately homes industry, the National Trust, Historic Scotland, societies specialising in re-creation and shops specialising in the retrochic, not to mention radio, television and movies. Many of the foregoing seem to be wilfully concerned with virtual non-reality. In the next few months we are promised an Irishman playing Rob Roy, whose wife will be impersonated by King Kong's former girl friend, while an Australian American will take on the role of William Wallace who will ensure victory at Stirling Bridge by dispensing with the bridge. There are rumours that Hollywood is casting its destructive eye upon the Loch Ness monster and (yet again) on Jekyll and Hyde.<sup>62</sup> These movies are likely to make a greater impact upon the Scottish

consciousness than any number of books and articles emanating from those who are least favoured as a source of information on the Scottish past, those pathetic specimens right at the foot of the information heap - namely academic historians. Make no mistake about it! If the designation of 'doctor' or 'professor' appears before someone's name the automatic assumption, in this country, is that such a person will be boring and we frequently are. It is thus fortunate that the mantle of the *seanchaidh* has been taken over, in Glasgow at least, by the taxi drivers. En route from the airport recently I was picked up by an individual that I at first mistakenly thought to be quite taciturn. On being given the destination, Scottish History, University Gardens, he nodded and concentrated on negotiating the M8. Around the turn-off to Govan he suddenly volunteered the thought that I probably knew something about 'this History business', which I modestly acknowledged might be the case. 'Some awfy things happened in History ye know'. I grunted assent. 'Yon Henry, wi the eight wives, he did wan o the worst things I ever heard o in History'. 'What was that?' 'He turned a his subjects into protestants!' Silence seemed the diplomatic response. About a week later I was in a taxi going out to Hamilton when the cabbie confided that one of his favourite writers was Studs Terkel. When I replied that he was one of mine too he screeched to a halt beside the M74 and engaged in an animated discussion about Studs' various publications. On reaching our destination he again launched into an enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable critique of Terkel's use of oral history. On finally leaving the cab which had been stationary for about fifteen minutes I handed him a tip which was promptly returned with the words, 'I couldna possibly take a tip frae a guy who's a fan o Studs Terkel'.<sup>63</sup> Shortly thereafter the subway was down and I frantically hailed a cab since I had to catch a bus at Buchanan Street Bus station. On the way I quickly discovered that my driver was an authority on Robert Bruce whom he had evidently researched assiduously since boyhood. Once we stopped he went on talking as I contemplated the wretched bus pulling out for Dumfries. 'There is a big problem with the sources on the Battle of Bannockburn, you know'. 'Yeah?' 'Most o them are written in Cyrillic!' Which goes to show that one enthusiastic cabbie can do far more damage than ten boring university lecturers.

The charge of boredom was sometimes levelled against textbooks of Scottish History during my fifteen years in Canada. North American students found our books unreadable for the very good reason that they contain far too many place and personal names. Consider the following:



Since the new earl was 14 years of age he was entitled in law to select his own curators and it is interesting that so many Graham kinsmen figured in his choice. His curators were his cousin John, second earl of Wigtown; his two brothers-in-law, Archibald, shortly to be raised to the peerage as Lord Napier of Merchiston and Sir John Colquhoun; the remainder were Grahams - Sir William of Braco, David of Fintry, Sir Robert of Morphie, John of Orchil, Patrick of Inchbrakie, Sir William of Claverhouse and John of Balgowan. Of the Graham estates, Braco and Orchil, the two youngest branches of the family, are both in the parish of Ardoch, Strathearn; Fintry and Claverhouse are near neighbours just north of Dundee; Morphie, the senior surviving branch is four miles north of Montrose; Inchbrakie is near Crieff and Balgowan is in Methven parish, Perthshire.<sup>64</sup>

Should we be surprised if an index ends up consuming half the text? The passage quoted, and many others like it, suggest that we are often writing for Scots and only for a fraction of them at that. We must, I think, relinquish our obsession with geography and nomenclature if our books are to be translated into the likes of Italian or American.

Modern Scottish History is generally more accessible because the material tends to be more recognisable. Most countries have experienced agrarian reform, industrialisation and urbanisation. In this regard the efforts of the Strathclyde school above all must be commended for attempting to write comparative history to show where Scotland figures in the international league table. That said, it is disturbing to note that a recent book on the history of Glasgow costs £60. Even more distressing is to discover a distinguished editor of the series, Tom Devine, confiding to a journalist, 'We have tried to write it clearly. But it is meant to be a challenge as well. It is not meant to be a totally accessible read'.<sup>65</sup> A double whammy for the Glasgow punters! £60 for a not totally accessible read! Professor Devine at least is honest enough, or perhaps daft enough, to make the point publicly. However I think it behoves us all to try to make our texts more accessible. Publishers, after all, will tell us that although more books than ever before are currently being published in Scottish History, fewer are being bought. The more technical some of us become the more we tend to part company with our traditional audience.

What of content? This is a tricky area because it is closely tied in with readership as well. In Canada and the United States I was

often asked about the consistency, the continuous threads, or to use an old-fashioned term, the 'genius' of Scottish History, which is really what Smart, Wallace and Ramsay were concerned about back in 1907-8. This the profession has shied away from or has left to creative writers with results that do not please. But because we will not tackle the issue others leap in where angels fear to flounder. Here is the image of the Scots male recently reconstructed by the American historian, David Hackett Fischer. He is baleful of face, tall lean and sinewy with hard, angry, weather-beaten features; aggressive, anti-authoritarian, of indolent work habits, one who eats food normally fed to animals but which in Scotland sustains the people; partial to whisky and violence, one who prefers to abduct his women rather than to woo them, who dresses in clothes which accentuate his manhood and who carps on endlessly about freedom.<sup>66</sup> All he left out was the supposed Scottish addiction to thrift. Although there is comparatively little interest in them in this country the Scots-Americans that Fischer describes are part of the Scottish Folk also. So are Australasians and South Africans and people throughout the world who happen to claim Scottish descent. Their past is, in a sense, as much a part of the Scottish experience as of those who stayed at home.

Americans in particular, to give them their due, cannot understand that it is possible for school-children or university graduates in this country to pass through their respective educational systems without reading a word of Scottish history. There is not another country in the world which treats its own history with such scant regard as does Scotland. I have been personally told in a public forum during the last two months that it would be dangerous to teach Scottish history in schools.<sup>67</sup> Other histories are presumably more balanced and less threatening since they still have a place in the curriculum. At one time we might have thought that to expose our children to the study of the Russian Revolution or Nazi Germany would have been as potentially subversive as the ballads were once held to be, but that is apparently not the case.

The values in Scottish history which most Scots would applaud appear to be the very ones which are regarded as subversive or 'dangerous' in certain quarters. By the tenth century a distinctive Scottish identity had been forged which embraced the diverse ethnicities of north Britain - Britons, Picts, Angles and Vikings - as well as, of course, the Scots themselves who emigrated from Ireland in the early centuries a.d. Manipulation of the St. Andrew legend implied the boon of salvationism and a special status as a 'chosen people'.<sup>68</sup> The Anglo-Norman state created by the Macmalcolm dynasty in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did not ignore its Celtic roots.



The familiar, yet strangely under-investigated, Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, articulated the concept of the contractual theory of monarchy for the first time in European history, celebrating Robert Bruce as 'another Maccabeus or Joshua', while solemnly warning that,

if he should give up what he has begun, seeking to make us or our kingdom subject to the king of England or to the English, we would strive at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own rights and ours, and would make some other man who was able to defend us our king. For as long as a hundred of us remain alive, we will never on any conditions be subjected to the lordship of the English, For we fight not for glory nor riches nor honours, but for freedom alone, which no good man gives up except with his life.<sup>69</sup>

Thus two supremely important concepts were implanted in the Scottish historical consciousness - the constitutional approach to the control of errant monarchs, and the pursuit of freedom. Both ideas would be substantially reinforced by the legend of William Wallace, traditionally if not in a strict sense historically, the man of the people. Freedom, and its inversion, tyranny, became central to the rhetoric of Scottish historiography and literature.<sup>70</sup> The noble ideals explored by Barbour's Bruce and Blind Harry's *Wallace* were echoed in the chronicle tradition of the later Middle Ages, in Fordun, Wyntoun and above all, in Bower's magnificent *Scotichronicon*.<sup>71</sup> In the sixteenth century writers such as John Mair, Hector Boece, John Knox and George Buchanan ably took up these same themes. The single most important historical item in the colourful biography of Mary Queen of Scots is that she was deposed as a tyrant by her own subjects. Theories refined with reference to Mary were recycled in the opposition to Charles I, culminating in the subscription of the National Covenant in 1638. Once again Scots gave a new spin to a very ancient idea, that of a covenant or contract with God which was generally viewed in the abstract, but was now regarded as a physical entity for which individuals assumed responsibility by appending their signatures. The covenant, the concerns of which were as secular as they were sacred, inspired one of its authors, Alexander Henderson, to pen the words: 'The people make the magistrate (i.e. the king), but the magistrate maketh not the people. The people may be without the magistrate but the magistrate cannot be without the people. The body of the magistrate is mortal but the people as a society is immortal'.<sup>72</sup> Although the Covenant eventually went terribly wrong

Henderson epitomised one of the most inspirational moments in Scottish history.

Equally intriguing was the struggle for the independence of the Scottish church, in opposition to English metropolitan claims during the twelfth century, and the inestimable contribution made by a generation of talented clerics to the cause of Robert Bruce and Scottish freedom. Reformation, when it eventually came about, was 'popular and parliamentary', imposed against the wishes of the crown and stressing above all the role of 'the people'. Seventeenth century religion could indeed be described as populist and, however perverted some of their ideas have appeared to posterity, their graves provide eloquent testimony to the heroic deaths of ordinary women and men who perished for their faith. No less impressive were the experiences of the adherents of the old faith whose full story has yet to be told. Covenanting mythology would inspire, as it would fragment, the protestant church of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, climaxing in the Disruption of 1843, surely the greatest metaphor of nineteenth century Scotland as the church sought to come to terms with phenomena of the modern world such as industrialisation and urbanisation. That same mythology would become part of the cultural baggage of the Scotch-Irish who emigrated, via the Emerald Isle, to the back-country of the United States, with powerful and significant consequences.<sup>73</sup>

When Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling and Viscount Canada, formulated his vision for the vast territories on the North American continent then known as Nova Scotia, he anticipated colonies where catholic and protestant could happily co-exist.<sup>74</sup> Had he written of the area which became known as the U. S. his inspirational ideas would be familiar to every American school child, instead of being totally ignored by modern Canadians, though ignorance of the vision has not prevented the fulfilment of the dream. Although Alexander's schemes enjoyed little success the Scottish contribution to a country such as Canada was truly massive across all aspects of life and work and culture.<sup>75</sup>

Scots in general are insufficiently aware of the worldwide interest in their history. It is not just the colourfulness of clans and tartans, the romance of rebellion, or the pathos of clearance which intrigue, but such topics as the survival of identity in the face of regal and parliamentary union, the Enlightenment search for the perfectibility of humankind, the experience of agrarian and industrial transformation, the stress upon education and the concomitants of scientific and technological innovation, the genius for literature, the military tradition, and, in an overseas context, the Scottish knack of assimilation, all emanating from a tiny country

which should long ago have been swallowed up by its larger, wealthier and more populous neighbour.

It is difficult to understand why there should be a suspicion of such a history even though it must be confronted pluck and all, without shrinking from such aspects of the subject as may be fashionably deemed to be distasteful, embarrassing, or not politically correct; T. M. Ramsay was quite correct when he observed that certain aspects of our past may 'do us no great good'. On the other hand the filopietistic drive<sup>76</sup> which poses, in some quarters, as Scottish historiography must be consigned to oblivion once and for all and a new edifice constructed on the sound foundations of scholarship so firmly established by our predecessors. If the fear be that such study will foster self-determination it is facile to assume that a knowledge of history leads to political change and, in any case, the history of Scotland during the past three hundred years has been the history of union with England. It must be asked whether independence, in whatever form, and given that true independence is impossible in the modern world, is really such a scary prospect as it is often made out to be? Most foreign visitors that I have personally encountered during the past twenty five years - and those are of all shades of political opinion from the far right to the far left - cannot understand why the Scots tolerate the status quo. Some of us are not half so worried about the future, whatever form it may take, as we are about the present. Many of us have studied English - usually disguised under the misnomer of 'British' - history through school and university without becoming English. It is high time that, at the very least, we encourage history with a Scottish accent, in this country.

It has become fashionable of late to create centres of Scottish studies at various Scottish universities. Scottish History and Literature have been taught at this university since 1913; we are no Jockies come lately. This is the university of John Mair and Andrew Melville, of Gilbert Burnet, Robert Wodrow and Adam Smith. Six short courses of lectures on history and literature were mounted in pre-chair days, from 1910-1913, by a number of the foremost authorities on their subjects. They included Herbert Maxwell and David Hay Fleming as well as the distinguished literary critics, J. H. Miller and Gregory Smith. Another was Andrew Lang whose historical gifts were later scrutinised by both Rait and Mackie in the lecture series named after him. Professor Andrew Browning drily noted that Lang's lectures were 'remarkable for the large number of clergymen who crowded to hear the first lecture, and the small number thereafter',<sup>77</sup> but these men were the first to lay out a programme for the integrated study of Scottish history and literature. I look forward in the very near future to attending the inaugural lecture of the Professor of Scottish Literature at which

point that part of the title will be gladly relinquished by this chair.<sup>78</sup> The potential interest in Scottish Studies has never been greater. It is up to us to foster that interest as well as to satisfy it. To that end we are in contact with institutions world-wide at the present time. Right now we have students in the department from a large number of European countries, from Hungary and Iceland to Canada, the States and Japan. The 'Rose of all the World' is potentially ours; our overseas friends are examining 'the little white rose of Scotland' of their own volition and we will all be the richer for the experience.

I jalousie that the Glasgow way is to do, rather than to crow about, what will be done, but Scottish History is too important and valuable to become the subject of territorial disputes and in-fighting. We in Scottish History at Glasgow invite historians and all interested parties at other institutions, not only in Scotland, as we are prepared to be invited ourselves, to work together in advancing Scottish Studies into the twenty first century. Scottish History may be both aristocratic and democratic but at Glasgow it is to the democratic part that we most tenaciously cling. This chair, in fulfilling its responsibilities towards teaching and researching and writing Scottish History, will keep the Scottish folk firmly in mind, 'not by the insistence of any University Commission or Government Department but because the people of Glasgow and the West of Scotland willed that such a chair should be'.

## Notes

- 1 Calum MacLean *The Highlands* (London 1959) 117.
- 2 A. O. Anderson *Early Sources of Scottish History A.A. 500 to 1286* 2 vols (Edinburgh 1922) 2, 451. See also Edward J. Cowan 'Caithness in the Sagas' in *Caithness: A Cultural Crossroads* (ed.) John R. Baldwin *Scottish Society for Northern Studies* (Edinburgh 1982) 25-44.
- 3 Stephen A. Mitchell *Heroic Ballads and Sagas* (Ithaca 1991) *passim*.
- 4 John Carrick *Life of Sir William Wallace of Elderslie* (Glasgow 1840) iii.
- 5 For example Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Harmondsworth 1973); Peter Burke *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London 1978).
- 6 A random sampling might include Robert Muchembled *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France 1400-1750* (Louisiana 1985); Natalie Zemon Davies *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford 1965), *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge Mass. 1983); see also now *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe* (1500-1800). *Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davies* (eds.) Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor 1993); Carlo Ginzburg *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Harmondsworth 1980), *The Night Battles. Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore 1983); *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore 1989), *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (New York 1991); Piero Camporesi *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutilation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore* (Cambridge 1988), *Bread of Dreams. Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago 1989), *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1990), now see also *The Magic Harvest. Food, Folklore and Society* (Oxford 1993) and *The Anatomy of the Senses: Natural Symbols in Medieval and Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge 1994); Robert Scribner *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London 1987); *The New Cultural History* (ed.) Lynn Hunt (Berkeley and London 1989) - just a few examples from what has now become an avalanche of literature.
- 7 T. C. Smout *A History of the Scottish People* (London 1969), *A Century of the Scottish People* (London 1986) and many articles; Christina Lerner *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London 1981), *Witchcraft and Religion: the Politics of Popular Religion* (ed.) Alan MacFarlane (Oxford 1984), *Perspectives in Scottish Social History essays in honour of Rosalind Mitchison* (ed.) Leah Leneman (Aberdeen 1988), *Scottish Society 1500-1800* (eds.) R. A. Houston and I. D. Whyte (Cambridge 1989). On Britain generally see *People's History and Socialist Theory* (ed.) Raphael Samuel *History Workshop Series* (London 1981) and E. P. Thompson *Customs in Common* (New York) 1993. *The People's Past* (ed.) Edward J. Cowan (Edinburgh 1980 reprinted 1991) was intended as a modest contribution to Scottish cultural history.
- 8 Andrew Browning 'History' in *Fortuna Domus. A series of Lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow in Commemoration of the fifth Centenary of its Foundation* (Glasgow 1952) 53.
- 9 This and what follows is drawn from newspaper files in Glasgow University Archives, the helpfulness of whose staff is gratefully acknowledged.
- 10 *Glasgow Herald* 16.5.1913.
- 11 Glasgow University Archives *Records of the General Council* vol V p. 90.
- 12 *Glasgow Herald* 17.5.1913.
- 13 *Proposed Chair of Scottish History & Literature. Newspaper Extracts Chronologically Arranged* The Scottish History and Literature Chair Committee (Glasgow 1908) 15. This pamphlet was kindly drawn to my attention by Dr John McCaffrey who very recently retired from the department after long, valued and valiant service, and who is currently a research fellow in Scottish History.
- 14 Proposed Chair 4-11. See also 70-72 where the ploy of comparing the teaching of national histories in various European countries was repeated.
- 15 *Proposed Chair* 18-19.
- 16 *Proposed Chair* 24-25.
- 17 *Proposed Chair* 38-43.
- 18 *Proposed Chair* 44-64.
- 19 *Proposed Chair* 3, 68-9.
- 20 *In Memoriam Robert Sangster Rait* (Glasgow 1936) 8. His major publications were *The Universities of Aberdeen. A History* (Aberdeen 1895), *The Scottish Parliament before the Union of the Crowns* (London 1901), *Scotland* (London 1911), *Thoughts on the Union between England and Scotland* (London 1920) and *King James' Secret: Negotiations between Elizabeth I and James VI relating to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots* (London 1927) which he wrote with Annie Dunlop. He collaborated with George Pryde on a new edition of *Scotland* (1934) which subsequently appeared in a revised edition in 1954.
- 21 *Ord's Bothy Songs and Ballads of Aberdeen Banff and Moray Angus and the Mearns* with a new introduction by Alexander Fenton (Edinburgh 1990) Foreword.
- 22 J. D. Mackie 'The Archaeologist and the Historian' reprinted from *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society* IX Pt iii (1939) 211.
- 23 J. D. Mackie *The Earlier Tudors 1485-1558* (Oxford 1952), *History of Scotland* (Harmondsworth 1964), *The Estate of Burgesses in the Scottish Parliament and its relation to the Convention of the Royal Burghs* (St Andrews 1923) with George Pryde.
- 24 *Edinburgh Essays on Scots Literature Being a Course of Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh by members of the English Department and Others* (Edinburgh 1933) 149-73. Pryde's other major publications included *The Treaty of Union of Scotland and England 1707* (Edinburgh 1950), *Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day* (London 1962) and *The Burghs of Scotland; a critical list* (Oxford 1965).
- 25 A. A. M. Duncan *An Introduction to Scottish History for Teachers* Historical Association (London 1967) 10.
- 26 A. A. M. Duncan *Scotland The Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh 1975), *The Acts of Robert I King of Scots 1306-1329. Regesta Regum Scottorum* vol V (Edinburgh 1988). See now also his magnificent edition, with translation and notes of John Barbour *The Bruce* Canongate Classics (Edinburgh 1997). Professor Duncan also issued an important revision of W. C. Dickinson *Scotland from the Earliest Times to 1603* (Oxford 1977) first published in 1961 as vol 1 of the New History of Scotland, revised 1965. Pryde's *Scotland from 1603* was the other volume in the series.
- 27 Since this was written Martin MacGregor, a specialist in the history of the Gàidhealtachd, has been a welcome addition to departmental strength.
- 28 J. C. Robertson 'On the Decay of Lyrical and Ballad Poetry in Scotland' *The Spy* No. 50 (1811) 347-8. The University of Guelph Library Special Collections has a complete run of the journal in which the identities of the anonymous contributors are indicated by The Spy's editor James Hogg.
- 29 Robert Chambers *Domestic Annals of Scotland From the Reformation to the Revolution* 3 vols 3rd edition (Edinburgh 1874) 1.131,320-1,452-4,504-5; 2.283. Chambers' transcriptions are careless and his index hopeless but I cite his work to make the point that the *Annals* represent an incomparable compendium of information on Scottish popular culture. Furthermore they are available in most good public libraries and second hand book shops. Chambers almost always points the reader to the original sources he has used and care should be taken to check those against his version.
- 30 Francis James Child *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 5 vols (Boston and New York 1882-1898) No. 169.
- 31 Child *Ballads* No. 93.
- 32 *Proposed Chair* 68. The best book on the subject is David Buchan *The Ballad and the Folk* (London 1972) but see also James Reed *The Border Ballads* (London 1975) and Hamish Henderson's contributions to *The People's Past. The Ballad in Scottish History* (ed.) Edward J. Cowan is forthcoming (Tuckwell Press).

- 33 See Mikhail Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington 1984) and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie *Carnival in Romans* (New York 1979)
- 34 Chambers *Annals* 1.403-4, 411, 453, 468; 2.42, 415-6.
- 35 See also Articles on *Witchcraft, Magic & Demonology. A 12-Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles* (ed.) Brian P. Levack (Hamden 1992). Vol. 7 *Witchcraft in Scotland* gathers 13 articles on the subject.
- 36 Ginzburg *Ecstasies* 2, asserts that recent studies of the history of witchcraft 'have continued to concentrate almost exclusively on persecution, giving little or no attention to the attitudes and behaviour of the persecuted'.
- 37 Robert Pitcairn *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland* 4 vols. (Edinburgh 1833) 1. 51.
- 38 Pitcairn *Criminal Trials* 1. 53.
- 39 Edward J. Cowan 'The Darker Vision of the Scottish Renaissance: The Devil and Francis Stewart' in *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* (eds) Ian B. Cowan and Duncan Shaw (Edinburgh 1983).
- 40 Chambers *Annals* 2, 285-91; Pitcairn *Criminal Trials* 3.602-615.
- 41 Gordon Donaldson *Scotland James V to James VII* (Edinburgh 1965).
- 42 Chambers *Annals* 1 420-21.
- 43 Chambers *Annals* 1 466-7.
- 44 Chambers *Annals* 1 542; 2 7-8, 19.
- 45 Chambers *Annals* 2 348, 357-8.
- 46 James Burnett *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* 4 vols. (Edinburgh 1788) 4.423-4.
- 47 F. Marian McNeill *The Silver Bough. A four volume study of the National and Local Festivals of Scotland* (Glasgow 1957-68); M. Macleod Banks *British Calendar Customs Scotland* 3 vols. (London and Glasgow 1941). Although both of these publications employ deplorably ahistorical methodologies they provide invaluable quarries of material for further research.
- 48 *The Invention of Tradition* (eds.) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge 1983). Particularly objectionable in this regard, and probably intended to be so, is Hugh Trevor-Roper 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', *ibid.* 15-41.
- 49 A start has been made by Emily Lyle *Archaic Cosmos: polarity, space and time* (Edinburgh 1990), if a not entirely convincing one. See now also Ronald Hutton *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual year in Britain* (Oxford 1996).
- 50 Shulamith Shahar *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London 1990).
- 51 See Jean-Louis Flandrin *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality* (London 1976), Lawrence Stone *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London 1977), *Family and Inheritance Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800* (eds) Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk and E. P. Thompson (London 1976).
- 52 A worthy exception is Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman *Sexuality and Social Control Scotland 1660-1780* (Oxford 1989).
- 53 e.g. A. Gibson and T. C. Smout 'Food and Hierarchy in Scotland 1550-1650' in Leneman *Perspectives*.
- 54 Georges Minois *History of Old Age From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago 1989).
- 55 Anne Gordon *Death is for the Living* (Edinburgh 1984), Betty Willsher *Epitaphs and Images from Scottish Graveyards* (Edinburgh 1996). See also Philippe Aries *The Hour of Our Death* (New York 1982) and Paul Barber *Vampires, Burial, and Death Folklore and Reality* (New Haven and London 1988).
- 56 Gordon *Death* 25 and *passim*.
- 57 George MacDonald, quoted McNeill *Silver Bough* 3, 145.
- 58 Anne Gordon *Candie for the Foundling* (Edinburgh 1992), a curious book but a useful insight into the concerns of the kirk sessions.

- 59 Margaret Bennett *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave* (Edinburgh 1992).
- 60 David Hume *Letters to William Strahan* (Oxford 1888) 155.
- 61 Quoted Georg Lukács *The Historical Novel* (Harmondsworth 1981) 61-2.
- 62 These films have duly appeared - *Rob Roy* with Liam Neeson and Jessica Lange, *Braveheart* with Mel Gibson which was, of course, a smash hit, *Loch Ness* with Ted Danson and *Mary Reilly* which was a total flop. The neo-brutalism of modern Scotland has been tackled in such movies as *Trainspotting* and *Small Faces*.
- 63 Studs Terkel *Division Street: America* (New York 1967), *Hard Times: an oral history of the Great Depression* (New York 1970), *Working: people talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do* (New York 1974), *Race: how blacks and whites think and feel about the American obsession* (New York 1992).
- 64 Edward J. Cowan *Montrose For Covenant and King* (London 1977) 8-9.
- 65 *The Herald Weekender* 25.2.1995, 12; *Glasgow* vol 1 (eds.) T. M. Devine and Gordon Jackson (Manchester 1995).
- 66 Edward J. Cowan 'Back Home and the Backcountry' contribution to 'Culture Wars. David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed; four British folkways in America* (Oxford 1989)' in *Appalachian Journal* vol. 19 No.2 (Winter 1992) 166-73.
- 67 At the Robert Burns Conference, University of Strathclyde, January 1995.
- 68 Edward J. Cowan 'Myth and Identity in Early medieval Scotland' *S.H.R.* lxxiii (1984) 111-135.
- 69 Barbour *The Bruce* (ed.) Duncan 780-1.
- 70 See Edward J. Cowan 'Identity, Freedom and the Declaration of Arbroath' in *Image and Identity. The Making and Remaking of Scotland Through the Ages* (eds) Dauvit Broun, Richard Findlay and Michael Lynch (Edinburgh 1998) 38-68.
- 71 When it is completed Donald Watt's superb edition and translation of Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* will be recognised as one of the most significant contributions to Scottish medieval history this century.
- 72 Edward J. Cowan 'The Making of the National Covenant' in *The National Covenant in its British Context* (ed.) John Morrill (Edinburgh 1990) 81.
- 73 Edward J. Cowan 'Prophecy and Prophylaxis: A Paradigm for the Scotch-Irish?' in *Ulster and North America. Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch-Irish* (eds.) H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood (Tuscaloosa and London 1997) 15-23.
- 74 William Alexander's ideas are to be discerned in *The Mapp and Description of New-England; Together with A Discourse of Plantation, and Colonies* (1630) in *Royal Letters, Charters, and Tracts, Relating to the Colonization of New Scotland and the institution of the Order of the Knight Baronets of Nova Scotia 1621-1638* (ed.) David Laing *The Bannatyne Club* (Edinburgh 1867) and *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander Earl of Stirling* (eds.) L. E. Kastner and H. B. Charlton, 2 vols *Scottish Text Society* (Edinburgh 1921, 1929).
- 75 Edward J. Cowan 'The Myth of Scotch Canada' in *Scotia and Nova Scotia: Migration, Myth and the Making of Memory* (eds) Marjorie Harper and Michael Vance (forthcoming).
- 76 See now a supreme example of the genre Duncan A. Bruce *The Mark of the Scots: Their Astonishing Contributions to History, Science, Literature, and the Arts* (Secaucus 1996).
- 77 Browning 'History' 53.
- 78 Professor Douglas Gifford was appointed to the Chair of Scottish Literature, the first in the country, in 1996.



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