SECTION 1: FAMILY HISTORY SPECIAL SECTION

INTRODUCTION:

FINDING THE FAMILY

IN HISTORICAL SCOTLAND

The history of the family, and of child upbringing and the place of women within and without the home, is so neglected in Scotland as to verge on becoming a historiographical disgrace.”¹ T.C. Smout wrote these words in 1986 and his concerns were echoed by historians throughout the early 1990’s.² As families were the basic building blocks of communities, social historians recognized the centrality of understanding family life in Scotland, to understanding Scottish society. Recent studies have begun the mammoth task of finding the family in historic Scotland. This issue of *Scottish Tradition* seeks to contribute to this process by bringing together some of the recent work done by scholars engaged in the study of the historical family.

The advancement of family history has been most successful in work done on the modern era. Family studies began slowly with publications on women such as *Uncharted Lives* by the Glasgow Women’s Group, as well as *Out of Bounds* and *World is Ill Divided* edited by Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon. These early works influenced the development of family history in Scotland and historians such as Leah Leneman realized the large gap in knowledge and began to publish prolifically.³ Recently family historians of the modern era have been able to build upon these earlier works and they have expanded their frameworks to include aspects of gender and class which bring a level of sophistication to studies of the modern family in Scotland.⁴ The articles in this issue by Andrew Blaikie, Lynn Abrams, and Ann-Marie Hughes are excellent examples of this sophisticated approach to the modern family. These articles also illustrate how much work still needs to be done to create a more comprehensive understanding of the family in modern Scotland.
In contrast to the successfully developing area of family history in the modern era, the study of the family in pre-industrial Scotland has been particularly neglected. As illustrated by Lauren Martin in her article on “Witchcraft and Family”, family historians of the early modern period are still struggling to identify relevant sources for this topic which indicates that the development of family history has been limited. Even in studies where family does appear, the focus is often on other topics such as demography. Legal studies have also fleshed out pre-industrial familial law, but the findings are limited as there is little discussion of family life. However, the topic has recently received new attention as a scattering of articles and chapters have begun to appear.

Understanding how families were formed, how they functioned, and what life was like for its members is important to advancing our knowledge of Scotland’s economic, social, cultural, legal and political history. This area of study has had a slow start, but historians have recently begun to recognize the valuable contribution that family history makes to our understanding of the Scottish past. Scholars such as those included in this volume, have begun to move the topic forward. Interest in Scottish family history among new scholars is a particularly welcome development. Examples of work currently in progress include Lauren Martin’s research on marriage and the demonic in the early modern period, Kimm Perkins’ work on medieval religious women includes the compilation of a database showing family connections, Irene Furneux works on late medieval marriage dispensations, Linda Fleming’s study of Jewish women explores aspects of ethnic families in modern Glasgow, and my work explores marriage in the Lowlands from 1560-1650. The Scottish Women’s History Network Conference is also committed to promoting the development of family history by sponsoring a family history conference to be held at the University of Edinburgh in December, 2002. This edition of *Scottish Tradition* seeks to cultivate awareness and interest in family history and to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the topic.

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Endnotes


