Review


These books offer two different approaches to Scottish history, one global, the other local. While both broadly centre on Scotland, with an emphasis on events from the eighteenth century, their approaches to the period are very different. Dr Plank’s book deals with the consequences of the 1745 uprising in an imperial context. Instead of taking the standard approach of viewing the events solely in the confines of the British Isles, he has followed the careers of several officers from Cumberland’s upper echelons as they took their experiences from defeating the Jacobites and applied them to posts throughout the Empire. Dr Martin’s book offers a survey of the socio-economic and political changes in an important county town and royal burgh, with an emphasis on the modern period. Both illuminate eighteenth century Scotland, whether through the mechanics of imperial ambitions or the struggles to hold onto burgh privilege in a changing world.

Plank argues that the 1745 uprising was a turning point for the British Empire, as it instilled a new zeal for advancing British civilization, and provided new resources of settlers and soldiers from the Highlands to aggressively push forward imperialism. He has achieved a wonderful synthesis of narrative and scholarly analysis, deconstructing the fluid views and roles of the Highlanders as the Empire spread and encountered other groups of ‘savages’. The book is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the response to the Jacobite crisis, with the first two chapters analysing the concepts of ‘rebellion’ and ‘savagery’ in a Jacobite context. Criminal prosecution and military retribution are discussed, setting the tone
for the conduct of Cumberland’s officers in later campaigns further afield. Chapter three sets the 1745 uprising in its imperial context, discussing the reactions to perceived Jacobite conspiracies in Ireland and North America.

The second part of the book describes the complex relationships between Cumberland’s army and the wider world. Chapter four looks at Cumberland’s army in Scotland, while chapters five and six look at his army in the Mediterranean and North America. The careers of Cumberland’s leading officers, such as Bland, Blakeney, Cornwallis, Loudon and Wolfe are followed as they applied their experience from subjugating Jacobite (and Hanoverian) Highlanders in Scotland to new groups of savages on the peripheries of Gibraltar, Minorca, Nova Scotia and New England. Emphasis is put on the role of the Highlanders in the Seven Years’ War, and how this altered their reputation from savage to soldier of the Empire.

Dr Martin’s book, which is based on her PhD thesis, ‘Cupar, Fife, 1700 – c.1820: a Small Scottish Town in an Era of Change’ (University of Dundee, 2000), takes a very different approach to Scottish history, by focusing on the development of an important royal burgh and county seat; a local history approach to Scottish urban history. Though the book is predominantly centred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it covers Cupar’s inhabitation from the medieval period, when in 1213 the town became a seat for the Sheriff of Fife, to the modern day, as commuter culture and automobiles lead to increased traffic congestion on the town’s High Street.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters. The introductory chapter establishes Cupar’s geographic setting in Fife, setting the scene for understanding its importance to the county. Four chapters take a chronological approach. Chapter two consists of a survey of the medieval town. Cupar was made a royal burgh in 1326 and the privileges of this encouraged the town’s merchants and craftsmen. The burgh’s legal functions as a county town, and the institutions of castle and church in the town network are discussed in detail. The third chapter gives a brief description of the early modern period, while chapters eleven and twelve consider Cupar from c.1820 to present day. Medieval burgh laws and the coming of the railroads bookend the real strength of this book: the thematic discussion on the socio-economic and political structures of eighteenth century Cupar.

Chapters four and five cover the economy and occupational
structure of Cupar. A picture is painted of a market town, with an important linen industry and financial and legal services offered to a substantial hinterland. The structures of corporatism and guild control are discussed, though the infamous craft riots of the sixteenth centuries are mentioned only in passing. The socio-economic role of women in the burgh is well covered. The interdisciplinary approach taken in chapters six and seven highlight Dr Martin’s knowledge of archaeology. The built environment is explored through the use of maps, showing how the street layout changed. A discussion of the architecture highlights what has been lost and what has been gained over the centuries of development. Material culture is assessed through an analysis of surviving testaments from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. Education and politics are covered in chapters eight and nine, while poor relief, social control and public services are dealt with in chapter ten. These broad topics are a vehicle to illustrate the improvements of the modern age: from literacy and increased ownership of literature, to increasingly co-educational schooling; from the small victories of burgh rights over controlling noble provosts to the end of council-fixed bread prices in 1815; from the removal of town gates to acts providing a police force and sustained street lighting.

The socio-economic and political changes in Cupar from the medieval period up to the present day are well illustrated and make for a fascinating read. Set in its wider context of Scottish history, with the improvements under David I, the turbulence of the war with England, the Jacobite threats, changes in transportation or the world wars of the twentieth century as a backdrop, Dr Martin’s study of an important and under-researched burgh takes a micro-approach to events which affected the entire country, and the rest of the Empire.

These two books deal with Scottish history through divergent approaches: the global and the local. Whether socio-political history told from an international point of view or urban history told from a local history point of view, it is clear that Scottish history as a discipline is continuing to produce high quality work with a broad appeal. In a post-imperial world it is easy to view Scottish history as divorced from Britain’s former colonies. Dr Plank’s book redresses this imbalance by viewing the Jacobite crisis as formative for the Empire as a whole. With fresh primary research and a very readable style, Plank’s transatlantic approach has much to offer to a subject which has fascinated historians
since the events took place. Dr Martin’s book shows that Cupar, though less formative to the imperial ambitions of the period, can also offer a deeper understanding of how our modern world developed, by bringing to light research on one of Scotland’s smaller urban centres. In an increasingly global society, it is fitting that our historiography follows suit, though to further our understanding, we must not forget the localities which experienced the events first hand.

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