
The publisher and author are to be congratulated for producing a valuable addition to the literature of eighteenth century Scottish life. The title, however, is frankly misleading, for this is not an account of life in Atholl, a district of Perthshire, but of life upon the estates of the Dukes of Atholl, which draws much of its source material from Lowland estates extending even to an account of coal operations at Blairingone in Clackmannanshire. As social history the book is soundly based upon record sources and the author is well aware of the limitations which such sources present, remarking that ‘getting to know more about these people is not easy. Estate records were concerned with income; in these records tenants were of interest only insofar as they contributed to that income.’ Thus an important dimension is inevitably lacking, for even when the records of two of the parishes have been added to the estate records there is still an absence of the more personal accounts. Those which do appear are not representative of the norm, but are examples of individuals who have encountered difficulties in their lives which necessitated an approach to the parochial authorities for relief or to the estate for consideration in matters of rent.

Within the limits imposed by the sources the author has produced strong evidence of a paternalistic regime in which a genuine concern for the well-being of the community is balanced against a need for revenue. Even the kirk sessions, best known for their enforcement of church discipline, could show a similar concern for their communities, using on one occasion poor funds to pay for smallpox inoculation for ‘children of such poor parents as were unable to pay for that operation.’

Anyone with an interest in eighteenth century Scotland should find valuable insights in this regional study, for among other matters it illustrates the continuing strength of support for episcopacy in Highland Perthshire even after the support of the landowners had been withdrawn after 1715. In the parish of Blair, for example, the Duke of Atholl had sustained an episcopal clergyman in the parochial charge until that year, but although the incumbent of the benefice changed and a presbyterian officiated thereafter in Blair, the ousted episcopalian minister remained in the parish and retained the support of a substantial portion of the residents until his death in 1728, when it was felt to be necessary to break that connection by discouraging the settlement of any other episcopal clergy in Blair. Evidence can be found of the growing interest in education among the inhabitants of the Highland portion of the estates during the century, an interest which seems to have developed without encouragement from the gentry. The evidence is in the form of petitions for the establishment of additional schools and indicates that before the end of the eighteenth century parents had come to believe in the value of a basic education even in remoter regions.

Estate records indicate that potatoes were cultivated for subsistence in Perthshire at an early date, again apparently without the intervention of the estate factors or proprietors, leading the author to conclude that this was the work of enterprising tenants. Such changes were however not always in the tenants interest, for in a section of the book
which might have been taken further, there is a description of small tenants being forced from their holdings and encouraged to move to the village of Stanley where their children could be placed in the new cotton mill.

The power of a proprietor and the different methods of management favoured by successive dukes over a century has been fully documented, but one of the most interesting points to emerge from an examination of ducal power is the dwindling authority of foresters and gamekeepers, whose ability to check encroachment on forest land and poaching of game proved to be very slight in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The book devotes a section to crime and the courts and brings out clearly the change which took place in Highland Perthshire in the course of the century. During the first half century violence and lawlessness was characteristic of all the lands close to Rannoch, but in the second half of the century violence had virtually disappeared, with only a single murder apparently taking place on the estates after 1747, while in place of the cattle raids by armed bands which had been so common earlier, minor thieving was the extent of the problem after 1747. Attention is also given to the Jacobite Risings which had a considerable impact upon the Atholl estates, particularly that of 1745–6, when portions of the estates like those of the neighbouring Duke of Montrose, were damaged by marauding government forces who made little distinction between tenants who had been in the Rising and those who, like the estate owners, were innocent of complicity.

The author has made effective use of the extensive Atholl records, but similar studies could profitably be attempted for other estates leading to a long overdue revision of the standard accounts of eighteenth century social history. Such studies are however notoriously difficult to complete, for while it is comparatively straightforward to reconstruct the lives of the nobility and gentry from the records which they have left, the lives of small tenants and labourers, the mass of the Scottish population, present greater difficulties. *Living in Atholl* shows both the strengths and the limitations of estate records for social historians, and the book should certainly be read alongside such other recent works as Alexander Fenton’s *Scottish Rural Life* in order to round out the picture.

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