Scotland has a rich folk tradition which occupies a crucial place in any attempt to understand its history, culture, or national identity but, unlike most European countries or Canada or the U.S.A., it has no University department (of Ethnology, Folkloristics, Folklife Studies) devoted to teaching the material of traditional culture and the methodology for analysing it. Small countries of Europe, in particular, have found the discipline invaluable in coming to terms with questions of national identity. Scotland’s lack here is an unfortunate indication of the adverse effect of a neighbouring majority culture on a minority one with its infiltration of attitudes which belittle or deny the need for serious consideration of the minority culture. Inevitably, then, given the lack of trained academic folklorists in Scotland, *The People’s Past* starts out under a certain disadvantage. Despite this (or because of it?), the book has a splendidly diverse collection of essays, by times trenchant, blunt, sprightly, articulate, countermarshous, engaged, provocative, and unfailingly stimulating.

The book grew out of talks given at the first Edinburgh Folk Festival by people from different contexts united by a common interest in Scottish folk culture. The essays follow a roughly chronological scheme and may be divided into three groups and a trio of pieces from one contributor, Hamish Henderson, who, true to form, resolutely refuses to be categorised. In the first group, the historical essays, is Edward Cowan’s learned and readable (not an everyday conjunction) “Calvinism and the Survival of the Folk” which investigates “the relationship between the kirk and folk culture during the first century and a half, or so, of Reformation” and argues that “the church at least did not succeed in suppressing the folk music of Scotland in the period under review, nor is there much evidence that it attempted to do so.” He makes a convincing case, all the more interesting for the kirk records showing unequivocally that the kirk made strenuous efforts to suppress much folk custom during the same period. Gavin Sprott’s “Traditional Music: The Material Background,” which is full of insights, focusses on the changes brought about by the agrarian revolution and what they meant in concrete terms for the life of the folk. Kenneth Logue discusses informatively “Eighteenth Century Popular Protest”, the 1725 Shawfield Riots (and I thought they happened when Clyde were relegated), the 1736 Porteous riots, the meal mobs and anti-Militia disturbances of the century’s end, and James Reed examines “The Border Ballads”, largely recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for their “expression of a society and its quality of mind.”

The second grouping has a pair of essays on the inter-relations of folk music and other artistic activity. Hugh Cheape’s “The Pipes and Folk Music” explores the various socio-cultural contexts of the pipes and makes the salutary point that though “the change and fashions of the last two hundred years may distract us into the illusion of strict divisions between pipe music and folk music,” such divisions are artificial. Duncan MacMillan’s “Old and Plain: Music and Song in Scottish Art” is a superb piece which deals with the interweaving of high and folk cultures and of different arts—painting, poetry, music. He discusses that “period of a century when popular music was absent from the imagery of the rest of European art [but] was central to that of art in Scotland”, and shows how the Scottish artists (Allen, Wilkie, Geikie, for instances) used the performers of folksong and music in their works, how they related to their intellectual climates, and how these artists, rooted in their own culture, were affected by the crippling dominance of anglicised attitudes. Particularly revealing are the widely different critical responses in England and Scotland to Wilkie’s portrait of Scott and family as a rural group, and the reception of Wilkie’s “Distrainting for Rent”. The third group, on contemporary themes, contains a pair of essays marked by their intelligence, passion, and humour from two major figures of the Folksong Revival: Norman Buchan and Adam MacNaughton. The former's
"Folksong and Protest" describes the historical evolution of protest in song before focussing on prime movers and movements of recent decades, while "The Folksong Revival of Scotland" furnishes a perceptive survey from one of the Revival's most accomplished songwriters. In the Revival, as Norman Buchan points out, Hamish Henderson "has been a central figure. Collector and catalyst, he also happened to be poet and song writer. And a protestor sans pareil." Here he provides three pieces: an essay on anecdotes and reflections, a poem with explanatory introduction, and a substantial article "The Ballad, the Folk and the Oral Tradition". In it he re-reviews The Ballad and the Folk and discourses with kenspeckle eloquence on bawdy tradition and the fascinating underground cult of the Horeman's Word.

If this book had been written by academic folklorists, what would have been the difference? It would perhaps have lost some of its fecund unpredictability. It would, however, have gained in a number of ways: in the perspective on traditional culture, for here are no essays on folk narrative, language, drama, custom or belief; in clarity of methodological approach, for folk culture and popular culture would be distinguished; and in rigour of methodology, for there would be no committing of elementary folkloristic blunders like those perpetrated by a historian, one obviously skilled in documentary sources, on pp. 109-110. Books by Scottish academic folklorists will eventually come; till they do this volume provides an invaluable collection of multifarious stimulations.

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