Book Reviews

Aberdeen Shore Work Accounts
1596-1670,
Edited Louise B. Taylor,
(Aberdeen University Press, 1972)

668 pp. 10.

Preserved in the archives of the city of Aberdeen are the accounts of the officers responsible for collecting and disbursing special levies for the maintenance of harbour facilities, and this volume reproduces their records in more accessible form. Several levies were taken from ships entering the port and from their cargoes. The most important levy, the impost, was collected by the city under the authority of a royal charter granted in 1596, but other taxes appear to have been taken on local initiative without known royal sanction. Collectively the accounts afford a very useful picture of the commerce of a significant Scottish port in the seventeenth century. Some of the collectors, unfortunately, concealed the nature of cargoes entering or leaving Aberdeen by entering such vague descriptions as "merchand geir," for the taxes were based on the number of barrels carried by the vessel rather than their contents, but a large proportion of the cargoes are nevertheless described in sufficient detail to provide a comprehensive picture of the commercial activities of Aberdeen in both coastal and overseas trade for a period of 74 years.

Both importers and exporters paid the levies, so both are noted in the accounts and thus a balanced picture emerges, and the editor, in one of the most useful features of the book, provides an abstract of this information in an appendix, where she further divides the export and import details under the heads of Scottish and foreign ports so that the information is readily available to the economic historian. Perhaps the chief value of this work is that the accounts of shore works are virtually the only record of the trade of Aberdeen in the seventeenth century, for the more obvious source of information, the Customs House records, have not survived.

Many of the vessels recorded in the accounts were engaged in coastal trade between Scottish east coast ports, but there are also many entries relating to foreign trade. Aberdeen's principal connections appear to have been with Norwegian and Danish ports, Gothenburg and Danzig in northern Europe, Campvere in the Netherlands, Dieppe and Bordeaux in France, and King's Lynn and London in England. Aberdeen appears to have had no interest in transatlantic trade in the seventeenth century, for although vessels from Barbados and Virginia entered Aberdeen harbour they paid only anchorage dues and therefore landed no cargo.
Since the anchorage levy was based on the size of the ship it is possible to deduce from the accounts the approximate tonnage of vessels entering Aberdeen harbour after 1630-31 when this tax was first included in the accounts. Although large vessels, by contemporary standards, do feature in the accounts, much of the coastal trade appears to have been carried in very small craft, many of them undecked open boats. Open boats often sailed from Orkney to Aberdeen through the dangerous waters of the Pentland Firth, while there was a regular trade between Leith and Aberdeen carried in undecked boats. Fishing boats, described as such, carried cargo on occasion, and perhaps some of the other undecked boats were also fishing craft.

Although the high price of this volume might have been reduced by refraining from printing in full the accounts of expenditure on harbour works which are less significant as a historical source, there is a mass of information to be gleaned from the pages of this splendidly produced work. Historians interested in the economic history of seventeenth century Scotland cannot afford to ignore this source.

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_The Kingdom of the Scots:_  
_Government, Church and Society from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century_  

_G.W.S. Barrow,_  
_London: Edward Arnold, 1973_  
_Pp. XVII, 404._

This work consists of a number, thirteen to be exact, of Professor Barrow's articles all of which with one exception have been published before. The one exception is the first chapter which deals with shires and thanes, and was the Seton Lecture at University College, London. Professor Barrow is well known in medieval circles for his careful, meticulous and pains-taking research and scholarship. His most recent work before this one under review is the collection of the charters of William I of Scotland, a model of precision and exhaustive investigation.

Consequently the character of this work is in one sense without surprises. It reflects Professor Barrow's extremely careful work, and it does so at time to such an extent that the non-professional or casual reader may find it rather hard going. The book does not seek to tell a continuous story in the usual manner of histories, but rather takes up topics and items which are analyzed and discussed in depth. In the first part of the book the author discusses various legal developments as well as dealing with the problems of the Anglo-Scottish border. In Part II he treats the church to an examination on several fronts, probably the most interesting chapter being on the place of the clergy in the War of Independence. In the final section he deals with society discussing rural settlement, the beginnings of feudalism, the 'Norman' families and finally the
relations of Highlands and Lowlands in the lifetime of Robert the Bruce.

One might perhaps criticize the author for some omissions. For instance, in chapter one, a discussion of the Thanes of Cawdor would have been interesting, but they are only mentioned in passing. In the chapter on the clergy in the War of Independence in which he seeks to show that the clergy supported the national cause, it would have been helpful if he had dealt somewhat more with the parish clergy who were not connected with the bishops or some of the noble families. Were the clergy generally just the same as their parishioners or were they somewhat more nationalistic? Although these questions have their place, they are not of great moment. The important problem which arises in a number of these chapters is that Professor Barrow takes for granted the thesis which he set forth in an earlier book on Robert Bruce in which he insisted that the "community of the realm of Scotland" (communitas regni Scotiae) was a self-conscious entity which under Bruce fought for its own freedom and self-determination. Part of his argument in a number of cases is based on this hypothesis, but since the reviewer was doubtful of his success in proving this point in the earlier volume, he feels that it can hardly be used to prove or support other speculative conclusions.

This work, however, will provide much information for future historians in a handy form which will be easily accessible. For this reason it is an important contribution to a none-too-well known period of Scottish history.

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