Remote islands such as St. Kilda and Mingulay in the Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland, once inhabited but now deserted, have long captured the imagination of travellers and readers for they are poignant reminders of once thriving and self-sufficient communities whose way of life is now lost to us. The island of Scarp, lying to the west of Harris in the long chain of the Outer Hebrides, now belongs to that group. Inhabited as recently as 1971, it now lies deserted. *Hebridean Island: Memories of Scarp* is an exceptionally informative account of life there in the early years of this century, before the technology of the modern age had touched it and drawn its people into a wider world.

The author, the Reverend Angus Duncan, spent his childhood on Scarp where his father was the schoolmaster but most of his adult life on the mainland; that distancing perhaps allowed him a clearer perception of the culture than either the native inhabitant of the casual visitor could attain. His work is comprehensive and immensely informative. Every detail of the methods and skills necessary for survival on a small, rocky, windswept island on the edge of the Atlantic is described with remarkable clarity. The thirty chapters are short but dense and deal with all aspects of island life: the landscape and its flora and fauna; the harvesting of sea and land; the making of Harris tweed; the games the children played; the long folk-tales recounted for evening entertainment; the customs observed at weddings, Hallowe’en and Hogmanay; and the beliefs in charms to heal the sick and dreams and portents pertaining to death. The Sound of Harris figures prominently in Duncan’s work as it did in the minds of the people. He recalls the voices of returning islanders calling for the ferry on summer evenings and winter nights, and describes the expertise of the
mend as they launched their boats from exposed shores in stormy weather.

The author’s son, A. Duncan, edited his father’s publications and added excellent material written by authorities in their field. Allan MacLean’s article on boat-building, for example, and a first-hand account of a wedding and a reiteach- (a ceremony of betrothal, a custom in the islands until the 1950s at least) are invaluable additions to the book. But these appendices would, I felt, have been better located at the end of each relevant chapter, while one was still engaged in the topic. Chapter 20, for example, describes the school and the education system. The appendix to it provides fascinating excerpts from the school log-book compiled by the schoolmaster between 1883 and 1901 but no indication is given of this at the end of Chapter 20. Yet these excerpts give vivid glimpses of the reality of school life. On the 4th of April, 1884 the schoolmaster records that the older boys were absent, collecting seaweed to fertilise the fields; on August 22 the school was closed as the children were needed to drive the lambs into enclosures separate from the sheep; cutting marram grass on the main island and ferrying it across the Sound of Harris for thatching the houses explained the absence of many of the boys on December 5th while severe snowstorms, lack of shoes, shortage of fuel to heat the schoolroom and serious illnesses also disrupted their education. One can understand the editor’s reluctance to interrupt the stream of Duncan’s prose, but I feel that giving pertinent information while the reader is still engaged in the topic would have been advantageous.

The editor’s selection of photographs enhances the book considerably. Particularly pleasing are those by Robert M. Adams, the noted Scottish photographer, who visited Scarp in 1937. His views of the island capture the beauty of sea and sky and record a way of life now gone: the neatly-thatched houses overlooking the Sound; the interior lit by firelight; the spinning-wheel alongside the hearth; the seating that so often witnessed the ceilidh
or evening social hour. Some of the black and white photographs also reveal the starkness of the landscape and the effort in launching and hauling up boats where no jetties existed. In contrast to these photographs, those taken in colour in 1995 show the incredible and unexpected beauty of the island in fair weather.

In addition to the appendices and photographs the editor has provided two maps, a bibliography and an index. The maps are not as helpful as they might have been since the print is too small to allow most readers to interpret the place-names. A useful addition would be a map showing Scarp in the context of Lewis and Harris to give a clearer indication of the relationship of Scarp to Amhuinnsuidhe Castle, the seat of the landowner, and to the immediate surroundings. Printing problems mar a part of page 109 where the words in whole sentences are fused together. But these are minor problems. The book concludes with an excellent list of reference books and an index that is comprehensive and accurate.

What do I feel is missing? A greater sense of the poetry and song that was so integral to Hebridean society, and a greater sense that this was a Gaelic-speaking world. Although the Reverend Duncan was fluent in both languages, his essays were written for English publications. Some effort has been made to overcome this problem, however. Margaret MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh has provided Gaelic translations of some of the rhymes and riddles known to the children. And, in the delightful story of a letter sent by a young girl from the summer shieling to a male cousin of the author’s, we read the familiar passage from The Book of Ruth, written by her in the Gaelic version and beginning: “Na h-iarr orm t’fhagail, no pilltinn o bhi ‘gad leantuinn/Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee.”

The Reverend Angus Duncan gives us in meticulous detail a record of a way of life now gone, a way of life that was changing
even as he was coming to manhood. That he respected and loved the community and its values is clear from his memoirs, and his clear and moderate prose style conveys that better than the flights of fancy too often indulged in by writers less knowledgable about these islands and their people.

Joan Noble
University of Victoria


The first in Altamira’s series of Scottish baroque music, this recording presents perhaps James Oswald’s best-known and original music, *Airs for the Four Seasons*, first published in London in 1755, and then again in 1756 with an optional second violin/flute part. Inexplicably, the liner notes to this recording attribute the date for the *Airs* as 1747, the year in which Oswald may have written the theatre music for Alfred as well as a year in which Oswald was engaged in the early stages of his The Caledonian Pocket Companion, a 15 volume, multi-edition collection of Scots folk tunes published from 1745 through to about 1770. The liner notes are slightly inaccurate as well in noting Oswald’s birth date (1711 not 1710), as well as in getting the title of his piece right. The *Airs* take the form of 48 brief trio sonata movements for violin or flute and basso continuo, written in four groups of twelve, each named after a different flower—the Auricula, the Polyanthos, the Lark Spur, the Bachelor’s Button, the Columbine, the Honeysuckle, and so forth. The form of these trio sonatas is original to Oswald and, as the liner notes state, the “character of the flower and the medical usage of the day are represented musically and colourfully throughout the collection.” The tunes are notable for their brevity, their melodic accessibility, rhythmic punch and swing, and their lyric
sensibility.

Played here by soloist, Jane Murdoch on violin, supported by a continuo group consisting of John Constable, harpsichord, Christine Jackson, cello, and Christopher Laurence, double bass, the Airs are given a strong reading. Murdoch, a native of Glasgow and a member of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, plays a period violin, a Gabrielli (c. 1760) that contributes a distinctive baroque tone to the recording, though frequently the playing by the ensemble as a whole is a trifle foursquare for music written by Scotland’s primary composer in the “style galant.” Lutenist Paul O’Dette’s playing of a set of seventeenth-century anonymous Scottish tunes on his Robin is to the Greenwood Gone (Elektra Nonesuch 9 79123-2), albeit music that antecedes the Airs by over a century, is a useful reminder of the tonal and rhythmic quirkiness that makes Scottish renaissance and baroque music so attractive and distinctive. Throughout, the continuo playing is discrete and elegant, though clearly the classical dimensions of Oswald’s style are foregrounded over the folk sources of his melodies.

Oswald’s significance for Scottish and English music resides in his unique combination of so-called Scottish (i.e. folk music) and classical (i.e. art music) idioms, one of his many achievements being the introduction to London of the Scottish “snap,” a distinctive rhythmic device popular in London circa 1760-1790. The blending of Italianate style and fiddle-playing technique with Scottish folk tunes is one of the more improbable hybrids of late baroque music, but is more than convincing in aesthetic and technical terms. Murdoch’s performance leaves little doubt as to the aesthetic effectiveness of placing folk melodies in a so-called classical context. If anything, the folksiness of the melodies contributes to their spontaneous grace at the same time as the formal, classical structures of the trio sonata give an added musical depth and texture to the melodies.

The vexed issue of Scottish folk tunes, some of which were written by Oswald (published anonymously or under the bizarre pseudonym
of Mary Queen of Scots’s secretary, David Rizzio) and passed off as folk melodies is also worth noting with regard to the Airs, for Oswald excelled in fiddle music based on the popular, folk tunes of his time. The question of authorship is further compounded by Oswald’s participation in the secret composers’ society operative in London, called “The Temple of Apollo.” Members included Charles Burney and John Reid and the Temple seems to have had as its goal the publication of Scots composers anonymously or under pseudonyms recognized only by the the Temple’s members. The point is that the attempt to understand this music as primarily a form of “folk” music may in fact be a rather spurious undertaking. Oswald was an urban, cosmopolitan composer with a strong interest in folk (or pastoral) music. The business of producing “authentic” sounding Scottish folk music may have been as much about current popular taste as it may have had to do with recuperating and disseminating authentic Scottish cultural artefacts. Thus, the occluded publishing history that is associated with Oswald’s canon may well have been part of a deliberate strategy to produce a version of “authentic” folk music that was, in fact, being composed by a contemporary, cosmopolitan composer.

Beside his activities as singer, composer, concert promoter, folklorist, and music publisher, Oswald, after his emigration to London in 1741, was appointed chamber composer to George III in 1761 (shortly after George’s ascension to the English throne), and proceeded to arrange (and possibly compose), “God Save the King” for the bells of Windsor Parish Church in 1769. His integration into the London music scene in the latter half of the eighteenth century may well have affected his compositional style, though throughout his career he published his own and others’ music in the Scottish style. The performance of the Airs offered here is recorded in the crisp acoustic of London’s Henry Wood Hall, with little excessive reverb and a wonderful clarity that allows for Oswald’s unpretentious melodic invention to shine. The recording bodes well for Altamira’s Scottish baroque series and it is to be hoped that Altamira is planning
further recordings of Oswald’s total output of ninety-six violin sonatas, not to mention his Twelve Songs Composed in the Scottish Taste, selections from The Caledonian Pocket Companion, and pieces from the Twelve Serenatas, the Six Divertimenti, as well as the attributed theatre music. In fine, this recording of the Airs is a worthy addition to the small discography of Scottish Baroque music.

Daniel Fischlin
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This guide is an invaluable reference work for anyone interested in using local history sources about Scotland. In the first two chapters, the author introduces the reader to the topic and to the Scottish Record Office. He then presents thirteen chapters which summarize the sources from the particular to the specific. For instance, chapters 3 and 4 describe sources related to home ownership, occupancy and buildings. Following are chapters which progress logically away from things domestic: Estates and Farms, Parishes, Burghs, Ports, Franchise Jurisdictions, Districts, Sheriffdoms and Counties. There are also chapters dealing with transportation, schools, businesses and recreation.

Within each chapter, Sinclair provides brief descriptions of the major sources. He instructs the reader how to navigate through the various indices and other finding aids. That this is so easily understood is a testament to the author’s lucid style. In addition, each paragraph of text is given a unique number e.g. “1.4” which is related to various subjects and record series in the index at the back of the book. Indeed, this is a book meant to be referred to;
however, it reads equally well from cover to cover, given its logical structure.

There are numerous illustrations of the relevant sources. In addition, the author quotes from the records liberally, often to humorous effect. In doing so, he makes it abundantly clear that these records document the people of Scotland, encountering public authorities for purposes both banal (such as registering a sasine) and extraordinary (such as a kirk rebuking fornicators). (On the other hand, perhaps rebuking fornicators was banal too.)

Though this guide is about archives, it is written for the researcher, not the archivist. Wearing the latter’s hat, I have one quibble. For instance, there is only as much description of the records as is required to use them. I wanted to know more about who created the records and how they were originally used. This provenance information is generally not present, though in all likelihood it is available through the various inventories and registers at the SRO. Quibble aside, this is a superb reference tool and I hope to see it (or something like it) soon on the World Wide Web.

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As its title suggests, this book is not exclusively concerned with Ulster, but is a rather ambitious comparative study of the three ‘western’ ethno-religious communities that most baffled observers
from the West for many decades: Israeli Jews, Dutch Afrikaaners, and Ulster Protestants. Despite great differences in time and place, Akenson notes that all three communities have one very significant commonality—a cultural obsession with the Old Testament. More specifically, these communities have, to a remarkable degree, been influenced and moulded by the cultural and legal code of the ancient Hebrews, and its emphasis on a unique covenant with Yahweh. Notions of the sacredness of ‘the land’, of being besieged by heathen peoples, and of being forced to endure endless denigration for adhering to the word of God, run through the cultural traditions of all three communities. This mentality, argues Akenson, also encompasses a sharp sense of right and wrong, sacred and profane, and an ‘us-them’ mentality that makes them particularly difficult peoples with whom to secure compromise. It also accounts for the inability of most outside observers to comprehend the mental framework within which these peoples move. Akenson notes the following:

It is no accident that Ulster politicians sound outlandish to the inhabitants of the rest of the British Isles. Their voices are too shrill, their warnings too stark, their vocabulary too vivid, their metaphors too rich. That is because the Ulster-Scot leaders’ rhetoric is frequently in the prophetic mode: topological speech and a highly rubricated way of categorizing the social universe are their hallmarks.

If the rest of the British Isles listens with slight bewilderment, notes Akenson, the Ulster-Scots constituency understands and responds, “as much to the mode of address as to the actual substantive content”. (p. 137)

Akenson has several points to make in his book with regard to covenantal societies, not least of which is his forceful repudiation of modernization theory. Urbanization and
industrialization do not, he insists, automatically lead to the disintegration of ethnic allegiances. In Ulster they actually reinforced them! All three societies, moreover, provide a forceful repudiation of the notion that all events of importance to modern society, and all cultural phenomenon of relevance, occurred after the industrial revolution of the 18th century. Without an understanding of the significance of the Old Testament, and the ancient Hebrew ‘covenantal grid’ in particular, insists Akenson, no explanations of their history works.

In regard to Ulster in particular, Akenson has a number of observations to make in relation to this covenantal tradition. Not least of all, the persistence of this cultural phenomenon serves to reinforce the very real, if frequently unrecognized, cultural hegemony that the Ulster Scot held over the “entire Protestant population of the north of Ireland”. (p.186) This alone explains the importance of covenantal thinking even within churches that adhere to the Arminian doctrine of free will. The 1912 ‘Ulster Covenant’ pledging all signatories to stand together, before God, in defiance against the British government’s intention to impose a Home Rule parliament on Ulster. Based consciously on the 17th century Scots covenant which had bound Presbyterian Scotland to stand as one in opposition to English episcopal encroachment, the ‘Covenant’ of 1912 was signed by almost all adult Protestants in Ulster—Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist alike.

This hegemonic hold of the Ulster Scot, notes Akenson, was reinforced by the partition of Ireland in 1920. At that time, a significant minority of southern Anglicans (largely the descendants of pre-Plantation settlers) were abandoned to their fate, leaving Presbyterianism as the majority tradition among Northern Ireland’s Protestants. The position of the Presbyterian church was enhanced moreover by the fact that Belfast, not Dublin, was its administrative centre and spiritual home. That Dublin had always been (and remained so after 1920) the Church of Ireland’s spiritual and administrative centre removed it even
further from developments within Northern Ireland itself. The geographical placement of Irish Church, and its responsibility for the temporal and spiritual welfare of its adherents within the emerging Free State, meant that it had to cultivate political arrangements with successive governments of southern Ireland. In time southern adherents of the Church of Ireland, in stark contrast to those within Northern Ireland, would come to think of themselves as unhyphenatedly ‘Irish’.

That the covenanting tradition among Ulster Protestants has declined considerably over the past century Akenson does not doubt. As elsewhere, the number of Bible readers (and particularly the number of those who ‘believe’ what they read, and who take seriously the more ominous admonitions of the Old Testament) has declined considerably in Ulster. Holidays to the continent, and relentless exposure to British and American popular culture, have all taken their toll. Not least of all, argues Akenson, there has been the questioning of the Ulster Protestants’ notion of ‘right and wrong’, and sense of fair play, dating from the time of the civil rights disturbances of the late 1960s. Collectively, Ulster Protestants have, since that time, endured a considerable degree of self-doubt. Nevertheless, notes Akenson, “several fragments of the covenantal culture still survive”. (p.264) Without understanding this no adequate explanation of Ulster Unionism is possible.

Akenson’s book is very well written and is recommended to the academic interested in both cultural history and the history of ideas. It is also recommended to those member so the general public interested in the countries in question. Akenson takes a complex historical issue and makes it not only readable but understandable to anyone even slightly familiar with the Hebrew scriptures. Well worth reading!

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