

Scottish History: The Power of the Past, eds. E.J. Cowan and R.J. Finlay;
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The remit of this rewarding conference volume is clear: 'the investigation of the power of the past to confer legitimacy upon present thought or action, and to explore the ways in which previous generations rewrote, manufactured and manipulated history to suit their own present contingencies and preoccupations'. The editors' aims are well met through a dozen essays covering a broad canvas from the twelfth century to the present day. These focus not merely on scholarly historiography but on the wider pressures and responses which prompted particular groups of Scots to recast the presentation of past events or icons in attempts to capture and sustain a compelling and empowering 'living history'.

The three medieval aspects investigated here expertly expose the precursors of our present era of political propaganda. Dauvit Broun considers the way in which Scottish clerics, countering English propaganda *c.*1301, attempted to excise the 'Picts' from, or absorb them into, the origin myths of the kingdom of the superior 'Scots'. Fiona Watson provides a revealing sampling of the ways in which the deposed King John (Balliol) was written out of history by English and pro-Bruce chroniclers, followed by later writers. These essays perhaps pose a question - is such crafting of the past all just so much academic posturing on vellum/paper for an elite audience? Does it affect the popular perception of local and national history on the ground? After all, Pictish monuments and place-names survived; when Edward Balliol returned in arms to Scotland after 1332 he seems to have made no attempt to destroy Bruce's tomb at Dunfermline (Balliol scholars had no time to write out Bruce). Steve Boardman certainly provides ground-breaking proof that early Scottish 'historians', the literate few, could pursue but abort alternate takes on the past. Late-fourteenth century interest in 'British' monarchy, King Arthur and St Margaret's connections with the dynasty of Edward the Confessor might have been used to underpin a much earlier Stewart claim to England's throne (or friendship) and a very different Scottish identity: but the more emotive history of the Gaelic Scots and 1297/1314 won out.

The early modern essays presented here similarly illustrate the difficulties of historical selectivity and 'collective forgetting'. Michael Lynch ponders the demise of the Reformation as a 'usable past': modern historians have now exposed the strong continuities of (un)popular religion after 1560, defying Knox's *History* and the reforms of the Jacobean state. Roger Mason delineates the fine-tuning of humanist historians in attempting to champion the religious purity and contractual kingship of the Gaelic origins of the kingdom to justify change in the sixteenth-century. David Allan surveys the competition of seventeenth century Scottish noble families - new and old - in manufacturing ideal dynastic pedigrees. And Ted Cowan traces the invocation of the Covenanters by Scottish political and religious reformers into the eighteenth century and beyond, lamenting the gulf between their general popularity in fiction, ballads or pamphleteering when contrasted with scholarly and state criticism: an example of 'the classic dichotomy between folk tradition and elite culture'. [But might it be interjected here that we can make too strict a distinction between elite and popular history? For example, *c.*1800-1950 several of the authors - both unionist and nationalist - of scholarly works on the Wars of Independence also wrote novels reflecting and informing popular tales of Wallace and Bruce.]

Three essays on modern Scotland continue these themes against a wider spectra of ideologies. Colin Kidd traces the (often unconvincing) bids of pro- and

anti- Union writers before 1800, of Victorian nationalists and of twentieth century Marxists to claim either the integration or the eradication of the Picts as a political model. Murray Pittock examines Sir Walter Scott's conscious attempt to integrate a pacific, romantic take on the 'cult' of Jacobitism - symbolised by tartanry and the Scottish martial tradition - with loyalty to the Hanoverian Empire. However, Richard Finlay's paper reveals the failure of the troubled George IV's under-publicised visit of 1822 (choreographed by Scott) to establish a popular cult of Scottish - essentially Highland - monarchy: Victoria, though, had genuine success in using modern communications to associate her Imperial image with such Scottish staples as Bannockburn, Jacobitism, Highland tradition and presbyterian meritocracy. Catriona Macdonald's essay focuses on how the Scottish radical tradition has been dominated by a male discourse in invoking history (from 'the land of Wallace, Bruce and Knox') thus marginalising the role of women at best to the apolitical, domestic edges of protest: again, George IV and the Queen Caroline affair of 1820 was a 'missed opportunity' for evoking Scottish women's historical achievements.

Finally, David McCrone provides a sociological and historical overview which brings together many of the volume's themes in relation to evolving Scottish identity. He emphasises, above all, the distinctively Scottish 'ambivalence' of so many of the nation's usable historical icons and events, recyclable by numerous ideologies, often diametrically opposed. However, that synthesis and this valuable collection may pose a further quandary: despite the ability of past generations to rework Scottish history, does the increasing reflexivity of historians, and our general suspicion of media and spin, mean that all of the past is now bankrupt in legitimating an agenda in the present? Hence, just as John Major faced attack for his thousand years' of British history, or Hollywood and Japanese schoolbooks incur scorn for rewriting World War II, so future Scottish causes will in no sense be able to appeal convincingly to an ideological view of the Scottish past (thus John Swinney's desire to play down *Braveheart?*), certainly not one as potent as that grasped so strongly by many nineteenth and twentieth century commentators?

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