

Reviews

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John A. Burnett, *The Making of the Scottish Highlands, 1939–1965: Withstanding the 'Colossus of Advancing Materialism'*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2011. 312 pp. £50. 9781846822414.

This monograph covers a neglected period in the history of the Scottish highlands. There have been many historical studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the period since 1965, the date of the appointment of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, has been covered from a variety of disciplinary points of view. John Burnett's aim is to examine the process of modernisation and to analyse the relationship between its economic and cultural dimensions. The central concept of modernisation might usefully have been defined in greater depth in the introduction. He sees the period of his book as the crucial one in the long term conflict between the 'old' and the 'new', the 'traditional' and the 'modern', in the development of the region. In pursuit of this objective, the book is divided into three sections. The first, entitled 'Image and Reality . . . 1745–1939', is an overly long historical introduction which covers mostly well worn ground. This means that it is page ninety-five before the book begins to address the period and themes promised in the title. This material ought to have been much reduced.

The second section, 'Governing the Highlands, 1939–1965', looks at how governments of different parties attempted to deal with the problems of the highlands and examines the role of government agencies, especially the Advisory Panel on the Highlands. There is much interesting material here but there are also two significant problems. The first is that sources emanating from the state are treated very uncritically. For example, pages 109 to 116 are given over to a very descriptive account of a White Paper issued by the Labour government in 1950. The second problem is that the government archive has not been excavated to any depth while very obscure and ephemeral items have been given great prominence. Even the long discussion of the Highland Panel, on pages 146 to 165, makes hardly any reference to the extensive files which contain minutes and papers relating to the activities of the Panel. This material can be read 'against the grain' and need not become a view of highland history from the windows of St Andrews House.

The third section of the book is more successful. It deals with 'Voices from Within' and looks at material in Gaelic and English which presents the views of the people who lived in the region during this period. One of the most useful points made here identifies the beginnings of a political history of the highlands and an account of attitudes to the state. These are interesting and helpful themes given later highland suspicions of Scottish devolution in the 1970s. Even here, however, there is rather too much reliance on a narrow range of sources such as the periodical *An Gaidheal*. There are also significant gaps in the coverage. Other than discussion of the origins of the North of Scotland

Hydro Electric Board there is hardly any coverage of the Second World War, or of the legacy of the important debates of the 1930s which set the tone for much of what was discussed in the 1940s and 1950s. There are also historiographical omissions: relevant theses by Mackenzie and Birnie and other work on industrialisation in the highlands by Perchard have not been cited. This means that much of the narrative of government policy has a rather hackneyed feel. Overall, the potentially interesting conclusions about the problematic relationship between 'economic development and cultural survival' on page 276 are not clearly articulated.

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Richard Goddard, John Langdon and Miriam Müller, eds, *Survival and Discord in Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of Christopher Dyer*, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers NV, The Medieval Countryside Series, 4, 2010. viii + 307pp. €85. 9782503528151.

This volume was conceived in order to mark the occasion of Christopher Dyer's sixty-fifth birthday. In determining the theme for this celebration of his scholarship, the editors faced the unenviable task of selecting from a body of work spanning several decades and encompassing a wide range of medieval subject matter. Nevertheless, since it is for his scholarship on the history of those who rarely figured in the historical record that Christopher Dyer is mostly known, it is fitting that this volume should focus predominantly, albeit occasionally abstractedly, on the peasantry, through the twin themes of survival and discord. Notwithstanding this tight thematic application, the contributors to this volume have produced a range of essays that manage to encompass most of the key subject matter favoured by Dyer throughout his career, whilst also acknowledging his proclivity for delving into more esoteric areas of historical enquiry usually ignored by others. This, in particular, is highlighted through Harold Fox's paper on lords and wastes. The collection of essays embraces the archaeological perspective, most notably through Astill's essay on settlement patterns. The urban environment is considered as well as the rural, with both settings being considered in Langdon's study of wages and their impact on survival. And, of great importance when considering the scholarship of Christopher Dyer, it incorporates both economic and social perspectives. In addition to the essays, there is a very useful bibliography of Dyer's work to date.

The section on survival includes a range of interpretations, as is fitting in a volume designed to highlight Dyer's varied interests. Essays range from a focus on settlement patterns, an exploration of seigneurial mentalities surrounding so called waste, and a number of studies concerned with the economy, specifically examining the overall national picture in the fifteenth century, urban credit, wages and their influence on survival, and the royal court's role in local economies. Turning to the section on discord, the themes covered naturally include local tensions and incidents of revolt. In addition to