PERSPECTIVES ON THE 'GOLDEN AGE'

The 'golden age' of Scotland has been a focus for historical study for a long time. Historians have looked at the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from the point of view of social and economic change, cultural achievement and the political framework in which these achievements were set. Analysis of this broad picture is now provoking new approaches to the accepted view of accelerating industrialisation, social stability and high intellectual achievement.

Among the questions being asked are: Was the Scottish political system as monolithic as it appeared under the control of Henry Dundas and his successors? What impact on society and the practical problems facing it did the 'high Enlightenment' make? Were the Highland economy and society more flexible and quick to evolve than has previously been argued? How rapid and concentrated were the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation? How universal was agricultural improvement? How interdependent were the processes of agricultural improvement, industrialisation and urbanisation and how can they be dated and collated? How diverse were the Irish immigrants of the early nineteenth century and how well did they integrate into their host society? How did the political attitudes of different social groups differ? Why did political reform lag behind that of England despite the social pressures from the 1790s onwards? Why did the churches respond so slowly to new social and economic circumstances?

The change in emphasis in historical writing on this period is marked. It is no longer seen as a period of simple confrontation: lowlander against highlander, immigrant against native, industrial against manual worker, improver against traditional rural society, revolutionary sympathiser against a reactionary establishment. As usual in
history, close examination reveals a more interesting and complicated world, where each generation in each part of Scotland was responding to unique circumstances with compromises which reflected the tension between the new and the old.

**POLITICAL CHANGE**

Late eighteenth-century Scottish politics were dominated by landowners. Henry Dundas operated the political system from 1775 to 1805. By 1796 he had built up control of almost all of the 45 Scottish MPs and delivered their support to Pitt the Younger. Dundas was able to do this because the landed electorate was smaller than in England and because he could provide careers for sons of the gentry in the churches and universities of Scotland. He also had the gift of opportunities in India and latterly in the expanded army and navy during the French Wars. This was the period when Scotland became an enthusiastic partner, if not in Britain then in the British Empire. More subtly, Dundas succeeded in soothing fears about the number of 'parchment' or fictitious voters created by the aristocracy to ensure their control of county MPs. He also used the creed of 'civic virtue' to encourage aristocratic support for economic development.

The Dundas system was a domestic form of enlightened absolutism, corrupt but patriotic. The challenge to Henry Dundas' political system was a combination of local and international issues. In 1792, government refusal to examine the corrupt electoral system in the burghs provoked riots and the burning of effigies of Dundas. The context was the French Revolution and particularly the popularity of Thomas Paine's 'Rights of Man'. By the end of the year there were political reform societies in towns across the lowlands, following the example of the Edinburgh 'Society of the Friends of the People'. The government reacted by encouraging rival loyal associations.

The middle classes were frightened by more radical disturbances whose symbolic 'trees of liberty' were planted even in places like Auchtermuchty and Fochabers. The Friends of the People lost support. Their leader, Thomas Muir, was sentenced to transportation to Australia in 1793. Middle-class reform had been quashed because of its association with popular radical unrest. Economic distress and political action did not join forces until after the end of the French Wars in 1815. Handloom weavers facing wage cuts and cotton workers striking against conditions in mills did protest in 1820. Three weavers issued a proclamation of the 'Provisional Government of Scotland' and others led a march from Glasgow towards Carron, ended by troops at Bonnymuir. This was not a serious challenge to the establishment, who took the opportunity of the 'Radical War' to remove the threat of reform by physical force.

The Dundas system came to an end for different reasons. Henry Dundas' son, Robert, fell in 1829 due to the unpopularity of the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act. Middle-class agitation for reform had begun to re-emerge in new publications such as 'The Scotsman' and the new 'Edinburgh Review'. After Napoleon was defeated in 1813, Whig political activity gained confidence. However, it was not until 1830 that Earl Grey formed a Whig government which enabled Scotland to participate in the 1832 Reform Act.
The Scottish Act was largely the creation of Francis Jeffrey and Henry Cockburn, who regarded it as heralding a new age. It did extend the franchise from one in 125 to one in eight, but this was only the level enjoyed by England before the Act. It did give urbanised Scotland a more balanced representation but its main purpose was to preserve property as the basis of representation. In this respect, it was still only a change of degree rather than in the currency of political power.

**RELIGIOUS CHANGE**

The Presbyterian Church continued to undergo splits and dissent in the later eighteenth century. The Kirk was dominated by Moderates, based largely in Edinburgh and in the General Assembly. The intellectual contribution of Moderate ministers to universities and schools included an active tolerance that in the long run allowed the Kirk to slip from representing the nation to representing the establishment. In the Highlands it vied openly with the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge for the moral high ground of a Presbyterian mission. After 1754 the SSPCK was less overt in its attacks on Gaelic, and by 1792 it ran 150 Presbyterian schools in the Highlands.

Even after the establishment of 150 Presbyterian schools in the Highlands, full coverage of the Hebrides was achieved only when Gaelic Schools Societies were established after 1811. As a result Catholicism in the Highlands remained weak; by 1800 even its patronage by landowners was fracturing. In 1799 the government felt so little threatened that it endowed a Catholic seminary in Aberdeenshire.

The advance of the established church was, however, undermined by the 'awakenings' which swept various parts of the Highlands throughout the eighteenth century. These encouraged support for evangelicals and eventually for the Free Church after the Disruption in 1843. Even more than in the lowlands, the Highlands saw a social split between the strands of Presbyterianism. Churches were slow to respond to the challenge of the cities. Factory workers and miners often remained outside the influence of the parish system. Not until the 1820s and 1830s was there talk of improved poor relief and education, and even then action was slow to follow.

Church extension into the inner cities began to attract funding only in the 1830s; by that time dissenting Presbyterians and Catholics outnumbered the established church in Glasgow. New factories and mines had attracted huge numbers of immigrants to the western lowlands from the Highlands and the Hebrides. The number of Irish immigrants presented an even greater challenge. By 1831, 18% of Glasgow's population were Irish, although they did not develop a collective Catholic identity until later. Indeed many Irish weavers were Protestant. By the 1830s, however, the Orange Order was well established in the southwest. The Orange Order was first imported in 1800 and may have been grafted on to the Covenanting tradition.
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, agricultural improvement became the norm rather than the exception across most of lowland Scotland. New crops, rotations and methods of enclosure were imported from England. The Scottish contribution to the agricultural revolution lay in technological inventions such as Small's plough, Meikle's threshing machine and Bell's reaper. Above all, field drainage allowed improvements to spread to heavy soil.

The rise in productivity was the result of two changes in attitudes by both lairds and tenants. The first was a belief in the benefits of new methods; this is the period when the sense of contrast with the past became overwhelming. The second was a new efficiency in the use of manpower and horsepower, which delivered a doubling of output per worker between 1760 and 1840. The new quantities of food brought to market could sustain a bigger population and above all the greatly increased numbers of town dwellers. Machines had not yet replaced the farm labourer; agriculture remained by far the biggest occupation in Scotland. Steam threshing machines were not to be introduced until the 1870s.

Agricultural improvement, however, did alter radically the patterns of rural employment. The class of subtenants was almost eliminated; some became tenants while others, who had no land to work, lived purely by selling their labour. Employment patterns were more varied than before, depending on the size of the farm and the crops grown. Big farms employed hired hands and women as bondagers on yearly or seasonal contracts. Smaller farms with less capital could still be worked by tenants while labourers living in bothies were used elsewhere.

By 1840 the standard of living of all groups in rural society - their diet, their clothing and their accommodation - had risen out of all recognition. Tenants built fine new houses and filled them with comfortable furniture, while keeping the servants physically separate. Farms with a range of buildings replaced the scattered fermtouns. Skilled hands, such as ploughmen, could afford good clothes and some luxuries. For most cottars housing did not change in size though it might be more substantially built. Bothies were often squalid. There could still be lean years as well as good, especially during the French Wars of 1793-1815.

By 1840, however, no one engaged in farming was sentimental about the past. Cotton dominated the first phase of the industrial revolution in Scotland, but the social and economic impact of its rapid expansion is not so obvious as it once appeared. What accounted for its dramatic expansion? Two million people lived in Scotland in the 1830s. A population growth of about 50% between 1770 and 1820 had provided both increased demand and cheap labour. Two other factors help to account for the economic take-off. The success of industries such as linen, tobacco and the cattle trade provided the capital for growth. They also provided the enterprise, expertise and expectation of growth. Scotland was therefore well able to take advantage of the new technologies of weaving and spinning, both imported from England.
The skilled linen weavers of Paisley and Glasgow switched to cotton in the 1770s and 1780s as the price of raw cotton fell and that of raw flax rose. Spinning mills, like the first great factory at New Lanark in 1786, sought cheap labour and water power. By 1795 there were 95 mills in Scotland; by 1839 there were 192, half of them in Glasgow. As with agriculture, Scottish inventions such as the scutching machine and the powered mule improved on imported technology. It is tempting to think of this period in terms of the advent of the cotton factory and a new labour force, which worked in conditions of almost military-style discipline. In fact, the textile industry was organised as much around the smaller-scale weaving shed or even domestic handlooms as the large-scale cotton mill for much of this period.

In the eighteenth century weaving remained dominated by skilled handloom operators who often worked in villages rather than towns. Their strike in 1812, however, failed to prevent a long decline in their wages and status as they lost out to machinery. Among spinners, new technology was also resisted and the status of skilled workers defended until the strike of 1837. The factory was very gradually becoming a recognised working environment in Scotland. There are many other measures than cotton to gauge the economic growth of Scotland after 1760. The linen industry continued to expand, trebling its output by the 1820s. The woollen towns of the Borders eventually made use of the new textile technology. Textiles dominated the economy, employing workers in a rough proportion of six in cotton to three in linen and one in wool. Related industries such as dyeing and printing also grew.

The need for bleaching powder resulted in the biggest chemical works in the world at St. Rollox in Glasgow. Paper-making can be seen as a measure of economic expansion: by the 1820s output was 30 times what it had been in the 1740s.

Among primary industries, coal mining was stimulated more by the needs of the Improvers’ limekilns than by factories, at least until the spread of steam power in the 1820s. The coal industry was held back by technological problems of drainage, ventilation, timbering and firedamp as pits became deeper. Ironworks on the model of Carron were set up in the 1780s at Muirkirk, Tollcross and Cleland but again expansion was limited until well into the nineteenth century.

Scotland had two major advantages: cheap and plentiful supplies of raw materials such as coal and blackband ironstone and low wage rates. In industries as diverse as coal mining or printing and bookbinding, wage rates in Scotland were on average between 10 and 20 per cent lower than in England. Scotland had always had industrial labourers, working from home for merchants or as apprentices to craftsmen. What had happened by the 1830s was an enormous expansion in the numbers of workers rather than a universal change to a factory system. The cotton industry brought urbanisation and factory employment to only a small proportion of the Scottish workforce. These were to be the consequence of the rise of heavy industry from the 1840s. However, the cotton mills did introduce new conditions of work for new groups of people. Large numbers of women and children were employed.
Expanding industries attracted immigrants from rural poverty in Ireland and the Highlands. The factory environment brought physical and medical dangers, though these were worse in linen than in cotton mills. Often the physical disruption of family life was the price that had to be paid for good wages. Long hours were spent thirled to machines and eventually the most radical change of all came about, the measurement of working time by mechanical not natural rhythms.

Colliers were the next most numerous group of labourers after agricultural and textile workers. Their conditions of work were distinctive in several ways. Most were bound as serfs to the mine owners until the emancipation of 1799, when both they and salt workers gained limited freedom. Even after 1799, miners were often kept in debt by the 'truck' system of credit and many women worked underground as bearers on their husband's account. Children also went below from an early age, which was to be the main object of concern of a Royal Commission in 1842. The physical dangers of mine work were little improved by technology before 1840.

Conditions at the great lead mines of Wanlockhead and Leadhills were as bad as those at the coal and iron workings. More and more Scots were living in towns. Though they were still a minority, from 1800 Scotland was one of the most urbanised countries in Europe. Glasgow grew by ten times between 1760 and 1840, some smaller burghs, such as Paisley, by even more. This growth was made possible by the increased productivity and reduced employment opportunities in the countryside. All towns, especially the ports, were centres of exchange which grew as trade grew, but those which grew fastest were also centres of manufacturing industry. Soon it would no longer be true that the small town was the characteristic environment of Scots industrial workers.

Various kinds of employment attracted migrants from the lowland countryside, from the Highlands and, increasingly towards the end of the period, from Ireland. Paisley was overwhelmingly a cotton town. Dundee and Arbroath were linen centres. Kilmarnock had a more varied industrial base. Greenock's population was swollen by her role as an immigrant port. Glasgow itself was a huge centre for textiles, both in factories and in homes. Its inhabitants demonstrated the problems of urbanisation most clearly: many of its 'tradesmen' were employees of workshops or outworkers; unskilled labourers or casual employees made up a quarter of the population. The standards of living of all Scots improved steadily up until 1790 as the cost of food rose more slowly than wages.

During the French Wars the reverse was true for less skilled workers. From the 1820s the situation again improved. Against this broad picture details varied hugely. Unemployment after the Wars increased a sense of insecurity, especially as the old system of poor relief was inadequate for the problems of mass unemployment. Those who had migrated to towns also missed the support of the Church and opportunities in education. Urban families were faced with poor housing and sanitation and, from the 1820s, a significantly increased risk of consequent diseases such as typhus.

Before 1840 only parts of Scotland faced the combination of social problems caused by the industrial revolution. Much of industrial development as yet was taking place in rural and often quite remote areas, such as in Lanarkshire, rather than in the older
cities. However, the advent of steam-based technology, in particular J.B. Neilson's hot-blast smelting process, had already begun to accelerate the concentration of industrial activity round coalfields.

The links between landowners and the professions had become well established at the end of the seventeenth century. Both these social groups flourished during the next century and a half; indeed the link between them formed the backbone of Scottish society during the Enlightenment period. The term 'middle class' is a loose definition of a very wide spectrum of occupations, growing more numerous and more various. It covered lawyers, ministers, merchants, university and schoolteachers - but also successful craftsmen and tradesmen. With industrialisation, the owners of factories and works gained wealth and status.

With the expansion of the Empire, many Scots earned a fortune abroad and brought it home. Providers of luxuries like books and clocks benefited from the spread of affluence. In towns like Perth and Elgin a mixture of professional and commercial families formed a middle-class elite and built houses appropriate to their status, assembly rooms to meet in and academies for their children. These suburbs, a new kind of elite housing, are still obvious today. It had always been easier to travel between the 'peninsulas' of settlement in Scotland by sea than by land. From the middle of the eighteenth century there were attempts to alter this. Turnpike trusts were established but the quality of the roads they built was variable.

The first stagecoaches between Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1749 took twelve hours. There were few north of the Tay until 1800 when the bridges and roads built by Telford and other engineers transformed communications in the Highlands. The first railways evolved from colliery wagon ways. The Dalkeith and Edinburgh line was opened in 1826 but the first to use steam power was the Monkland and Kirkintilloch line in 1832. The first attempt to build a canal between the Forth and Clyde failed in 1773 but the canal, a remarkable feat of engineering, was completed in 1790. It was extended to the coal and iron deposits of Monkland shortly after. In 1822 the Union Canal extended this system to Edinburgh and by the 1830s it was carrying 200,000 passengers a year. Other canals were of local economic importance, especially the Inverurie-Aberdeen and Paisley-Glasgow canals. The Crinan and Caledonian Canals, of 1801 and 1822, were never so commercially successful.

Steam had already been used on the water, most famously in Henry Bell's 'Comet' on the Clyde in 1812. Highland society before the '45 was not as unchanging as once thought. However, the government reaction to the rebellion accelerated the break up of the clan system and the convergence between the economic structures of lowland and Highland Scotland. This was, of course, its intention. Legislation was aimed at breaking the clan as a social unit. As well as their perceived symbols - kilt, weapons and bagpipes - the heritable jurisdiction of chieftains was removed.

The Commission of the Annexed Estates was set up in 1755 to administer the lands forfeited by rebels. Its early enthusiasm had died away by the time of its dissolution in 1784, after which the government left the Highlands alone. However, the aftermath of Culloden had tipped the balance in favour of those landowners who saw the Highlands as amenable to the same improvements as the lowlands.
Social change in the Highlands between 1780 and 1840 seems to be dominated by the Clearances. There were, however, several different phases and forms of clearance, which varied from region to region. In the eastern Highlands the agricultural revolution resembled that of the lowlands with the removal of sub-tenants and consolidation of large farms. In the north and west clearances could be wholesale and against the wishes of the population, like that of the Sutherland estates in 1819-21. From the islands whole communities, such as Rhum and Barra, were evicted straight onto emigrant ships. The common factor, which predated the '45 in some areas, was the attempt by landowners to make their estates pay. What was destroyed over the period as a whole was the relationship between clan and chief and the sense of moral ownership of the land by the people.

Highland landlords were happy to maintain a high population before 1820 and many still felt that people were the basis of their authority. Some were recruiting for the British army and others were happy to have a large labour force. Fishing and the cattle and wool trades did well at the end of the eighteenth century. The kelp industry made huge profits and was especially labour intensive. Subdivision of land and removal of tenants to coastal districts were the responses to these pressures and opportunities. At the same time, it was found that the potato could be grown more easily and could feed more people than cattle and traditional crops.

In 1803 landowners encouraged the passing of an act restricting sea-borne emigration. The 'crofting community' was a creation of landlords in the later eighteenth century. But its position was fragile, undermined almost from the start by a rise in population. With the collapse of the kelp industry in the 1820s and a fall in cattle prices, only wool remained a viable trade. Cheviot and Blackface sheep required the glens and shielings to graze. Previously manured and cultivated land quickly lost its fertility. By the 1830s the problem was perceived as being overpopulation. The flow of emigrants increased. The potato crop partially failed in 1836-7, a foretaste of the disaster of the next decade. Many landlords had already removed themselves - by 1839 there were already 28 deer forests in the Highlands.

Emigration from Scotland to North America had been going on since the early seventeenth century. It was led at first by speculative landlords and merchants. By the 1730s, tacksmen from the Highlands were following them and from the 1760s tens of thousands per decade were removing themselves voluntarily. From the lowlands it was usually skilled workers who emigrated. From the northeast it was small farmers seeking land. This movement has to be seen alongside the migration, seasonal or permanent, from Highlands to lowlands and from country to town. Emigration was often an extension of this. At the other end of the social scale, the expansion of the Empire provided new opportunities for the gathering of wealth.

By 1840 the Glasgow merchant who had made his money in the West Indies slave and sugar trades, the laird's son who had done well in India on a job provided by Dundas, the professional soldier from a highland regiment which had fought in Canada or France were common figures in Scottish society. For every one who brought their money home, many more emigrated permanently or died abroad in the administrative, economic or military service of the British Empire.
CULTURAL CHANGE

The leading figures in Scottish intellectual life after 1760 were academics. Adam Ferguson was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1764. William Robertson followed David Hume as Keeper of the Advocates Library before becoming Principal of Edinburgh University in 1762. His expansion of the University, especially the medical faculty, was as great an achievement as his historical writing. Adam Smith was professor in Glasgow from 1751 to 1764. After his retirement Smith published ‘The Wealth of Nations’ in 1776. These men were part of a wider intellectual and social environment. This centred on the universities, especially Edinburgh, but owed much to the institution of the city itself. Clubs and societies brought together the professions, landowners and socially conservative intellectuals.

The status of the intelligentsia encouraged both their writing about social change and their support for the status quo. The provincial and social diffusion of enlightened ideas was a distinctive feature of the Scottish Enlightenment. The Aberdeen Philosophical Society and the Ayr Library Society were mirrored in local intellectual clubs. Most towns had a printing press and many had a newspaper. The great works of the Enlightenment were widely read. Although the quality of education was more uneven than has been claimed, the social and intellectual openness of parish, burgh and grammar schools enhanced public receptiveness to the new ideas as well as nurturing their authors.

A common focus of enquiry in the Scottish Enlightenment was the ‘moral’ issues facing man in society. Hutcheson and Hume had addressed this and so did Ferguson, Robertson and Smith. So also did Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, whose ‘common sense’ philosophy attempted to counter Hume’s scepticism. Philosophical writing crossed the boundaries of economics, history, philosophy and sociology. It was interested in the process of historical change and took a generally optimistic view of human nature. The intellectual conviviality of clubs and societies such as the Select Society and the Poker Club was focused on similar themes.

Writers at the end of the century appealed to a wider social audience but provided less challenging answers for their readers. The best selling works were by Moderate ministers: Hugh Blair’s ‘Sermons’ and Henry Mackenzie’s ‘Man of Feeling’. The new clubs, the Mirror Club and the Speculative Society, came under pressure from the political excitement of the French Revolution. When the ‘Edinburgh Review’ was re-founded in 1802 it was a Whig paper.

Among contemporaries and historians, the scientific thought of eighteenth-century Scotland has been admired as much as the philosophy. James Hutton in geology, David Gregory and Colin Maclaurin in mathematics, William Cullen, Joseph Black and Thomas Hope in chemistry and physics all managed to combine invention with excellent teaching. Black’s discovery of latent heat led to James Watt’s work on the steam engine. Cullen’s experiments assisted the modernisation of the bleaching process. Direct links between the university and the workshop or field were in fact rare, but scientific curiosity was common to both. Many who attended Cullen’s and Black’s lectures were members of the public.
The visible inheritance of the Enlightenment can be seen everywhere in Scotland. The achievements of contemporary architecture were a consequence of both greater wealth and new ideas. Planned villages were a symbol of improvement and of the dominance of landowners. They were common in the Highlands, especially in the east, as well as across the great estates of the lowlands. Country houses were another aspect of the same process. The work of William Bruce at the end of the previous century was the starting point for William Adam - literally in the case of Hopetoun House but stylistically at Duff House and elsewhere.

William Adam's son, Robert, developed his architectural style following his Grand Tour of Europe in 1754-8, a vision of neo-classical design which was a fusion of Greek, Roman and Renaissance features. Adam’s motifs were taken up in silverware, furniture, pottery and masonry - all the products accessible to the middle classes who wished to imitate the aristocracy. Later eighteenth-century Scotland was filled with 'new towns', which reflected a new confidence and the growth of an urban middle class. James Craig's New Town of Edinburgh was only the earliest and biggest example. Here, Adam's architectural style could also be adapted to an urban context, most famously in Charlotte Square. Craig's winning design of 1767 took many decades to develop, but the control exercised through feuing maintained its consistency.

Public buildings complemented private houses. In Edinburgh, as elsewhere, there was an underlying sense of order, reflected in formal gardens as much as in the grid-like structure which was so far removed from the herringbone pattern of the old, medieval burgh. It also reflected a new middle-class desire for greater privacy. Glasgow and Aberdeen had ambitious 'new town' schemes, as did Perth and even small towns like Cupar and Thurso. In many cases it needed the new found confidence in technology and engineering to take this leap forward. In Aberdeen, Union Street was only made possible by bridging the ravine of the Denburn. In Edinburgh the arches of North and South Bridge conquered the sharp rise and fall on either side of the Royal Mile. After 1800 new towns expanded further, by which time Scottish architecture, both urban and aristocratic, was richly established.

Allan Ramsay was the greatest portrait painter of the Enlightenment, for example in his work on members of the Select Society in the 1760s. Gavin Hamilton worked in Rome along with Alexander Runciman and David Allan. Runciman introduced landscapes as backgrounds to themes from the 'Ossian' poems and his pupil Alexander Nasmyth developed this in romantic and historical illustrations to Walter Scott's work.

Both Aberdeen and Edinburgh had flourishing musical societies from the 1760s. Native composers such as William McGibbon and the Earl of Kelly drew from contemporary Italian and German styles. William McGibbon was interested in Scottish fiddle music; his combination of Italian and Scottish influences annoyed the poet Robert Fergusson. Conversely, the great fiddle virtuoso Niel Gow was a great admirer of Corelli. Collections of folk tunes and songs appeared from 1730, reaching their climax with the 'Scots Musical Museum' to which Burns contributed so much, though the literati did not rate this side of his work highly.
The last decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth are dominated by the great figures of Burns (1759-96) in poetry and Scott (1771-1832) in the novel. The legacy left by both is uncertain, and each had a number of able contemporaries. The pressure of English on Scots increased throughout the century. The vernacular poetry of Allan Ramsay senior and Robert Fergusson was not the voice of the Anglicised middle classes. Conversely, the patriotic Scots poetry of Barbour and Blind Harry was familiar to all classes through the medium of cheap books, as were ballads and folk songs.

By the time of Burns, the division between the English and Scots languages was even starker. He was lionised as a 'heaven-taught ploughman' by an Edinburgh intelligentsia who were rushing to purge their prose of Scotticisms. He himself faltered into English in response. Burns' astonishing use of Scots created a problem: he could not be bettered by imitators and English was not yet accessible as a poetic medium for most Scots. English became a new cultural lingua franca in this period as the English-speaking world spread across the globe. It was accessible for the early Scottish novelists either because they moved to England, like Tobias Smollett, or because of their social background, like Henry Mackenzie.

Walter Scott collected ballads and wrote antiquarian epics before writing 'Waverley' in 1814 and a further 21 historical novels by 1822. Two of the strengths of Scott's novels lie in the dramatisation of recent Scots history and the rendering of Scots dialogue. J.G. Lockhart and John Galt also wrote individual versions of fictionalised social history, a genre that quickly declined by the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1830s Henry Cockburn observed that a distinctively Scottish culture was by then an attribute of the previous generation. Scott and Burns helped in different ways to preserve a sense of cultural identity but by Scott's time it was rooted in the past.

The 1820s and 1830s were the decades which saw the emergence of historical clubs such as the Bannayne Club in Edinburgh and the Maitland Club in Glasgow. The present seemed to be British but Scots felt themselves to be both more and less than British. The relationship between lowland and Highland culture in the decades after the '45 was profoundly ambivalent. It can be illustrated through the contrast between the flowering of Gaelic poetry and the Ossian legend. Eighteenth-century Gaelic poetry ranged from the Jacobite and love poems of Alexander Macdonald through the religious writing of Dugald Buchanan to the powerful natural descriptions of Rob Donn and Duncan ban MacIntyre. A common theme was the response to social change. Gaelic poets were aware that the pressures on their culture meant real change for real people which could not be compensated for in lines of romantic prose or poetry.

In contrast James Macpherson's liberal reworking of a Gaelic epic, supposedly by the blind poet Ossian, about the Celtic hero Finn, became an enormously popular icon of European romanticism. Highland society was rapidly being overrun by the artificial culture represented at Highland gatherings, which were widespread in Scotland by the 1820s. The visit of George IV in 1822 confirmed that the lowlands had taken as the essence of Scottishness their own ersatz image of the Highlands. Meanwhile Gaelic culture was withering, despite its achievements in the previous century.
NOTES

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4 1690-1760