

A HISTORY of the SCOTTISH PEOPLE

OVERVIEW 1450-1840

Hugh Ouston



This is the Overview. Including the Overview, this set comprises 6 PDFs. The others are:

Chp1 1450-1540, Chp2 1540-1603, Chp3 1603-1689, Chp4 1690-1760, Chp5 1760-1840

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INTRODUCTION

The early modern history of Scotland is bracketed by two royal excursions across the border with England. In 1513, King James IV of Scotland led a great army, drawn from every part of his kingdom, to a terrible defeat at the hands of an English army at Flodden. In 1822, King George IV, the tenth monarch of the united kingdoms of Scotland and England, visited Edinburgh in a kilt and flesh coloured tights to take part in a stage-managed piece of public relations. Flodden belongs to a period in history which we find hard to recognise at the start of the twenty-first century, let alone understand. George IV's visit is altogether familiar, part of a world which we still inhabit. Since 1822, the broad outlines of the political, religious, constitutional and cultural life of Scotland have not changed fundamentally, however much argument there may have been about the details. Those outlines had been established in the previous 350 years. Early modern history is vital to the identity of Scotland. The contrast between the two royal expeditions of 1513 and 1822 highlights the changes that took place during the period. It also highlights the continuing themes - political, religious, socio-economic and cultural - of Scottish history between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.

POLITICAL CHANGE

The most obvious political theme is the relationship between Scotland and England. In the late fifteenth century the independence of Scotland from its only land neighbour was well established. From James III to James V there was an internal conflict between parties supporting a French and an English alliance.

The growth of Protestantism proved to be the decisive factor in favour of England. The Treaty of Edinburgh in 1560 ended the 'auld alliance' between Scotland and France, but this only became apparent as Protestantism took wider root in Scotland, as James VI grew into the most successful of the Stewart monarchs and as he eventually inherited the throne of England too.

The imperial experiment which James started in 1603 had a very mixed fortune, tangled with ecclesiastical disputes and economic problems, over the subsequent century of civil war, restoration and revolution. The Union of Parliaments of 1707 has been presented as a logical completion of the conjunction of Scotland and England, but in fact it was a response to increased difficulties in their relationship, in the economic, constitutional and diplomatic spheres, as expressed through an unprecedentedly independent-minded Parliament in Edinburgh. The Scottish Church, law and education had become more different from those of England in the course of the seventeenth century and this was recognised by their continuing independence after the parliamentary union.

Though the political life of Scotland in the eighteenth century was dominated from London, her social and intellectual life retained a different quality. When George IV visited, Scotland was a country which was conscious of, at last, benefiting from the Union, by sharing in the world expansion of British influence. It was a country which remained also conscious of its distinctive cultural, religious and political traditions..A second great political theme of the period is the relationship between the monarchy and the people of Scotland: who held political power? Between the fifteenth and nineteenth century the political power of the state increased to an enormous degree. James IV had to meet his Parliament frequently, to be seen to dispense royal justice, to lead his court and his army, to maintain some of the distance of monarchy from subjects. All of these were nominally the responsibility of George IV too, but in every case the context had changed utterly.

Late medieval kings had to travel round Scotland to be seen to establish their authority over the localities. During James VI's reign the central institutions of the state became an effective medium of royal government. After 1603 the monarch could call on the resources of a British state but Scotland itself became a locality which might challenge them. After 1707 the unwillingness of the state to permit dissidence or alien cultures within its frontiers was reinforced by the government in London. Though the machinery of the state changed its nature over the period, its dominance of the political life of Scotland increased irresistibly. How did the machinery of the state change?

The fifteenth century Parliament was a council of nobles, churchmen and burgesses - the 'three estates' - but personal contact and kinship formed the actual sinews of political power. In the sixteenth century administrators and lawyers gained some independence in running the country on the King's behalf. The interpersonal skills of James VI were able to extend the monarch's power over his nobility, his localities and his institutions and thus fulfil the potential of the Stewart monarchy. In fact, James VI made use of Parliament, Privy Council, exchequer, Court of Justiciary and above all taxation to redefine the nature of state power.

The move of the court to London in 1603 refocused the attention of landowners and politicians and eroded the personal links on which effective royal government of Scotland had depended. It was, however, only after 1625 that the government of Scotland became more of an afterthought to Charles I, which is why the reformed Kirk was able to set itself up as an alternative mouthpiece for the people of Scotland. Yet political influence continued to be linked to landownership. This was demonstrated in the reliance of the Covenanters on the Lords of the Congregation to challenge royal policy, in Charles II's use of the Lords of the Articles to control the agenda for Parliament, even in the management of the extinction of a newly vocal and independent Parliament in 1707.

After the Union of Parliaments, the political life of Scotland became even more detached from the monarch. The eighteenth century saw its increasing dominance by the professions and the gentry. The reduction of the Hanoverian Kings to political passivity in England was magnified in Scotland by their absence. By 1822 King George IV's visit was manipulated not for political or even social ends but as a cultural statement. The political terms of reference had changed utterly; within a decade, the dominance of property as a political currency began to crumble with the first reform of Parliament. Another important theme in Scottish early modern history is the relationship between the Gaelic and English speaking parts of the kingdom, which from the late fifteenth century was essentially a tension between the Highlands and lowlands.

Already by 1513 the political independence of the Highlands was curtailed. In 1493 James IV had ended the Lordship of the Isles, the strongest alternative source of power to royal authority. However, the Stewart monarchs continued to use powerful families, notably the Gordons and the Campbells, to maintain their control over the half of Scotland's population which still spoke Gaelic. This policy exacerbated a troubled century of clan warfare. James VI found that he had to re-establish political, social and religious authority over the Gaeltacht once again by the Statutes of Iona in 1609.

The assimilation of Gaelic into English culture was not rapid or easy, however, and the continuing cultural and religious divisions between the two were exploited during the civil war (by Montrose) and at the removal of the Stewart sovereigns in 1689 (by Dundee). The economic and social structures of the Highlands and lowlands were less different than used to be thought. However, any possibility of a peaceful cohabitation of different cultures within one nation was destroyed by the Jacobite manipulation of Gaelic and Catholic loyalties in 1715 and, more particularly, in 1745.

The stirring up of the Highlands in the rebellion that led to Culloden provoked the united British state to use the most brutal form of assimilation: military repression combined with cultural destruction by statute. The very success of this was celebrated by the kilt which George IV wore in 1822, an icon of a tradition which no longer threatened the establishment. The parades in his honour made Scotland look like a 'nation of Highlanders', it was complained, a point whose irony, given the conflicts between English and Gaelic-speaking Scotland over the previous 400 years, has remained relevant ever since.

RELIGIOUS CHANGE

It is impossible to disentangle fully the political and the religious history of Scotland in the early modern period. However, the change in the dominant religious loyalties of Scotland between the fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries is so obvious as to make a history in itself. What we have to be particularly careful of in this area is to avoid reading the history through the eyes of the victors.

In 1513 James IV went to his death fighting on behalf of the Holy League, a diplomatic alliance organised by the Pope. James operated in the context of a single European Church: he had hoped to lead a Christian crusade against the Turks; he had suffered excommunication by the Pope. The religious history of Scotland continued to unfold in a European arena as the Church fractured. The accessibility of the bible and of Protestant ideas from Europe to the literate classes led to a revolution in expectations which the attempts of the Church in Scotland to reform itself could not satisfy.

The Reformation of 1559-60 was a political revolution but it was based on an ideological one. The two great questions that concerned Scots over the next two centuries were thus defined: what to believe and how to organise the Church and define its relationship with the state. The question of what to believe is always relatively impervious to historical research, but by the late sixteenth century the dominant religious ideology of the elite was Calvinism. The use of the catechism in that period helped to make successive generations of ordinary Scots increasingly loyal to the reformed faith, as did the cheap bibles produced from the 1630s. Questions of ecclesiastical organisation were harder to solve.

The single issue on which the political classes were consistent was resistance to Catholicism - despite the persistence of Catholic worship in parts of the Highlands at least. This resistance to Catholicism runs through the story of Mary Queen of Scots, of the Union of the Crowns, of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688-9, of the Union of Parliaments, of the Jacobite rebellions. The last century and a half have changed this aspect of Scottish identity, but from 1560 to 1840 the touchstone of Scottish political history was that it was a Protestant country. The question was: what kind of Protestantism?.

The conflicts of the seventeenth century largely derived from the differences over Protestantism. James VI posed as a godly prince and managed to avoid alienating his subjects over the forms of worship and the organisation of the church; his son failed to do this and provoked an apparently united resistance in the Covenant of 1638. The 20 years of civil war and the republic which followed shattered this unity and created a staggering number of policy shifts by the Scots, whose only consistent theme was the desire to make Presbyterianism the dominant form of Church organisation in Britain.

In fact the return of the monarchy in 1660 led to a return to Episcopalianism, which was resisted in varying ways and in some areas more than others. Even when the country appeared to be united in wishing to remove the pro-Catholic James VII in 1689, the different ecclesiastical parties were vying for the new King's ear. This time Presbyterianism won, but by the middle of the next century its nature was again changing with the rise of the 'moderate' wing of the Kirk

and the secession of others. In 1822 George IV visited a nation whose population remained totally Christian, but whose established church was neither universal or united. Within two decades it had fractured again and it had no relevance for most of the new immigrants to Scotland from then on.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

The contrast in Edinburgh between the remains of the Flodden Wall, encircling a burgh still medieval in layout and social organisation, and George IV Bridge, part of the continuing expansion of a commercial, manufacturing and professional city, points up the social and economic changes between 1513 and 1822. Yet the changes since have been more radical; it is the continuity which is striking, at least until the middle of the eighteenth century. The social structure of the country remained hierarchical as feudalism gave way slowly to an economic relationship.

The nobility's dominance of the localities was based on landownership, though the network of connection and influence in the lowlands did not differ so very much from the clan structure which only became dominant in the Highlands in the disturbances of the sixteenth century. The other socially defining unit was the parish, both before and after the Reformation; it was through parishes that Sir John Sinclair collected his information for the 'Old Statistical Account' in the 1790s. The moral and spiritual duties of the impoverished late medieval priest were continued by the reformed Kirk ministers. By the seventeenth century they were salaried professionals with a doctrinal and educational role. In the eighteenth century, many became active in the secular intellectual life of Scotland.

But the basic relationship between Christian population and Christian pastor remained the same until the urbanisation of the nineteenth century. For Scotland remained a rural country - 90% of the population worked on the land before 1600. Burghs were tiny - only Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh had 5,000 inhabitants - and dominated by the skilled craftsmen who met the few specialist needs of the population and, in larger burghs, the merchants who served those of the wealthy. The Scottish population began to grow in the late sixteenth century, a fact most keenly felt in the towns, in the form of increased numbers of poor. However, the proportion of the population living off agriculture remained much the same, as did their susceptibility to famine and war.

The famine years of the 1690s mark a turning point: the loss of life was medieval in its scale but the consciousness of the disaster and contemporary attempts to improve cultivation were modern. During the eighteenth century the 'agricultural revolution' - new crops, rotations, enclosures, long leases, new technology, a shift of population out of the countryside - spread slowly through Scotland, though some areas remained 'unimproved' in 1790. The development of agricultural improvements banished the spectre of starvation, allowed the accumulation of profit to stoke the economy as a whole and made possible the economic 'take-off' which by the 1830s had made Scotland an industrialising as well as a wealthy country. By then the growth of the first mills and factories and the expansion of mining had altered the typical way of life for many people in

Scotland towards wage labour, a shift which was soon to be confirmed by accelerated urbanisation and the invention of the railway.

Before 1600, trade with other countries was very limited and subject to the destructive forces of weather and war. England and France were major trading partners because they were political friends and foes. However, it is remarkable how far flung Scottish international connections were in travel and settlement, particularly across the North Sea to Denmark and Flanders, Poland and Germany, Sweden and Russia. Throughout the period, Scots continued to visit and migrate to these countries as scholars, pedlars and mercenaries and in this way the economy of the Scottish people stretched far beyond the shores of their own country. Though the seventeenth century saw a growth in trade, and the wealth and prestige of the merchants who carried it out, Scotland did not benefit from the colonial expansion of England. The disaster of the Darien venture, Scotland's attempt to imitate England, was a major factor in the acceptance of the Union of Parliaments which enabled her to participate in English expansion. At first there was little perceived benefit to balance the political loss, but by the late eighteenth century it is possible to speak of a Scottish empire, whose spoils Scots were seizing as soldiers, organising as administrators and repatriating as traders.

RELIGIOUS CHANGE: THE CHURCH UNDER PRESSURE

The picture of a church in terminal decline in the century before the Reformation is a classic example of historical hindsight and some of it is misplaced. We should try to describe the Church dispassionately, pointing out its vigour and its weakness, the faults and strengths in its structure and its role, its attempts at improvement and the areas it left dangerously untouched.

The few hundred 'higher clergy' had noble connections and provided most royal administrators. This included bishops and heads of monasteries, abbeys and nunneries. Though monasticism had declined in popularity, there was new building going on, for instance in Jedburgh and Melrose, and new friaries and nunneries were still being set up, such as the Franciscan nunnery at Sciennes near Edinburgh in 1517. The Observant Franciscans, a stricter version of the order, founded in Europe in the 1440, came to Scotland in the 1450s; by 1520 they had established a dozen new friaries, all in towns. The more that is learned about the religious orders, the more obvious it has become that sweeping generalisations about their condition, such as the charge that they were just 'property owning corporations', do not stand up to detailed scrutiny. Some abbots tried to raise standards; other religious houses had fallen away from ideals about property or chastity and some were even closed. There was criticism of the system of 'commendators', which could divert the income from a religious house. But commendators were not laymen, as is often thought. Many of the early examples were bishops, extending their power base.

But the most serious flaws in the monasteries probably stemmed from the crown's use of its right of nomination of priors and abbots. Both James IV and V provided in this way for many royal favourites and bastards.

The education system proved unable to provide Scotland with an educated parish clergy. University degrees were rarely available to the ordinary parish

priest. It was the lack of an effective parish clergy that undermined the Church most disastrously. The problem was less the quality than the poverty of the incumbents. It has been calculated that 86 per cent of parishes had all or part of their income appropriated, to other parts of the Church, such as universities or monasteries. Their inadequate incomes were eroded by inflation and attempts to alleviate their plight, by obtaining payments from their congregations for services or by accumulating benefices, made matters worse. In many places, the parishes were staffed by an underclass of non-beneficed clergy, such as curates or chaplains. The poor repair of many churches was another symptom of the poverty of parishes.

The quality of the people's religious faith can never be determined, but there is no reason to equate it with misgivings about church organisation. On the contrary, it can be argued that the Catholic Church was in greatest danger when there was a contrast between the needs of the people and the ability of the church to fulfil them. There is evidence in the late fifteenth century of positive developments - at least by those who could afford to demonstrate their support of the Church. They built new collegiate churches, endowed hospitals, and rebuilt burgh kirks. Guilds or individuals paid for new altars, and there was a renewal of popularity for pilgrimages, plays and processions. The later fifteenth century also saw new religious cults, which also suggest that piety rather than cynicism was the prevalent mood amongst the laity. The cult of Christ's Passion took various forms. And there was a new emphasis on both Mary as mother of Christ and the Holy Family. Bishop Elphinstone's Aberdeen Breviary (1508) brought together a host of native saints, such as Columba, Ninian and Margaret, as well as new, exotic foreign ones.

There were some signs of alternative religious opinions, especially among the increasing numbers of literate small landowners and wealthier burgh dwellers. Unlike England, where explicit links can be traced between late medieval heresy and early Protestantism, there were only a few Lollards in the late fifteenth century, and they seem to have been confined to Kyle, in Ayrshire. Natural trading links with Europe led to acts passed from 1525 onwards against the import of Lutheran books. By the early 1540s, the authorities began to worry about 'sacramentarians', who held radical views about the eucharist. And from then on there were frequent enactments against heretical English books, rhymes and bibles, which must have been that of William Tyndale. The combination of links with Europe and access to Protestant works, especially those in the vernacular, raised expectations of the Church. These were ultimately to prove disastrous for it.

In the 1530s there was a major onslaught on the Church but it came from the King, who took advantage of the Pope's embroilment with Henry VIII to demand crippling taxes. The Church tried to pay meet these by disposing of its property as hereditary feus; resulting in a new class of landed proprietor with a greater security of tenure. This gave it ready cash but, in the longer term, impoverished it and weakened it in the face of the new demands. Feuing had a huge impact on the social structure of Scotland by creating a new class of landed proprietor - the feuars.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

The overwhelming majority of the million or so inhabitants of Scotland in the late fifteenth century worked on the land. Land was used as monastic estates, royal hunting forests or monastic sheepwalks. A huge proportion of the land was waste, too bitter or damp for cultivation. The cultivated land was divided into baronial demesne and peasant holdings leased from the landowner and arranged in small units round a 'toun' in the lowlands or a 'baile' in the highlands. The system of landholding in the lowlands has been described as 'feudalism tempered by kinship' while in the Highlands it was 'kinship tempered by feudalism'.

As in most of Western Europe, cultivated land was arranged as open fields and individuals worked a complex pattern of scattered plots of various sizes. Rent was paid largely in kind as well as service, though money did circulate generally. It is likely that much of the laird's land was worked by paid, virtually landless, 'cottar' labour and that feudal obligations by wealthier 'husbandmen' had a largely symbolic function by this period. Most of the latter held land either 'at will' (by verbal agreement) or by written lease for between a few years and life. Some were 'rentallers', with possession confirmed by a copy of the entry in the proprietor's rental book. This form of ownership could be inherited. Many tenants might expect to pass on holdings by 'kindness' to their kin. Holdings varied in size and tenants are recorded negotiating the expansion or consolidation of their holdings. Wealthier peasants may themselves have employed labourers. Rural society was less strictly stratified at all levels than in many other countries, which may have reduced the amount of social stress. Long rigs running up and down hillsides were worked with heavy ploughs and oxen teams. There were also compact holdings, either survivals of previous landownership or new intakes. There is scarcely any evidence regarding local variations in husbandry or differences between demesnes and peasant holdings. Some wheat was grown; the eating of wheaten bread was a mark of social status. Oats and bere (four rowed barley) constituted the main arable crops, along with peas, beans and some flax and hemp. There is little evidence of any rotation. The great monastic houses and also other landowners ran huge flocks of sheep, whose wool accounted for half of Scotland's exports for much of the medieval period. This trade was, however, declining by 1500. There is evidence for a renewed expansion of arable farming at this time, for instance in the introduction of the term 'outfield'.

The most important aspect of rural life was its continuity. There was no sign of improvement in agricultural systems or techniques. This is not to say that there was no change, but it was defined by external factors - poor weather or animal disease in the short term and war and pestilence in the long term. Continuity was also supported by the lack of change in ownership of land by nobility and gentry, by the geographical restrictions on settlement patterns and, most importantly, by the lack of civil war or major social unrest. Indeed, these last two benefits placed Scotland favourably compared to much of Europe between 1450 and 1540.

The biggest change in rural society was brought about by the feuing movement, especially from the 1530s, when large amounts of Church lands were feued to pay royal taxes. Feu ferme was hereditary and paid for by a lump sum and

annual duty, which inflation ate into in due course. Over half of the feus went to sitting tenants or minor lairds who acquired a new security of revenue. The main social effect of this was a further expansion of the influence of the lairds and small landowners, thus broadening still further the pyramid of landownership. A side effect was rack renting by outsiders who had bought feus. For the church, the feuing of its lands was a major factor in undermining its authority at a period of religious tension.

Even the largest towns in Scotland - Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh - had populations of only a few thousand by the sixteenth century. Most towns were much smaller, having only a few hundred inhabitants. Houses could be densely packed but few were built of stone. Backlands were occupied by poorer housing. Public buildings - churches, friaries, tolbooths - could be found, though in many smaller towns only the church or the tolbooth - and the castle if there was one - were on any large scale.

The institution of the burgh was well established by the 16th century, in the form of both royal burghs and burghs of barony, each of which had particular trading rights. The Convention of Royal Burghs was set up in 1487 to deal with issues of common interest; by then the burgesses had been recognised for more than a century as the third estate of Parliament. Within the burghs, guilds were well established as institutions which regulated commercial activities and also financed urban improvements, supported the church and impoverished members and provided social entertainment.

The distinction between the craftsmen and merchants was often artificial. Most merchant guilds were made up of both kinds of burgesses. However the dominance of merchants in local government was steadily established, paralleled but not threatened by the first craft incorporations from the 1470s. Urban craftsmen mainly worked for their local market, as smiths, tailors, tanners, bakers and brewers. Towns were the marketplace for their wider hinterland over which they often had extensive control. Wealthier townspeople often bought land in the surrounding countryside.

Both royal burghs and the old established ecclesiastical burghs of barony and regality, such as St. Andrews and Arbroath, could trade overseas. The many new burghs of barony established in the period after 1450 acted only as local service centres. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth century saw a lack of commercial development, exacerbated for many burghs by the increasingly overweening economic position of Edinburgh in Scotland's foreign trade. Indeed Edinburgh was the object of royal and baronial envy, as in the 'Cleanse the Causeway' scuffles for its control in 1520 between the Hamiltons and the Douglasses.

Foreign trade had lull since the end of the fourteenth century but recovered slowly and unevenly up to the 1540s. The lack of Scottish technological skills meant that most exports were still of raw materials. The wool trade was in steady decline. Much of the rest of trade was in hides, woollens, cloth and salmon. The Low Countries were the main trading partner, with Scottish merchants operating through the staple port of Veere. There was an established triangular trade between Scotland, the Low Countries and the Baltic. Imports included woollen cloth and manufactured goods. Imports of wine from France increased during the early sixteenth century. Attempts to limit the purchase of

luxury imports continuously failed. Bullion left Scotland to pay ransoms and confirm benefices in Rome; income from royal dowries did not match this. Successive monarchs reduced the amount of silver in the coinage so that its value against the English equivalents fell, to a third by 1450 and to a twelfth by 1603. Wages and rents rose to compensate but Scotland was spared as yet a general price rise with its concomitant social dislocation. There was little attempt to improve the economy by the royal government. However, in a stagnating economy, royal and baronial housing projects and demand for artillery and shipbuilding, did increase domestic demand for industries.

CULTURAL CHANGE

Royal patronage, especially at the 'Renaissance' court of James IV, extended the traditions of craftsmanship that elsewhere found expression in everyday contexts. For example, the ability and capacity of Scottish shipbuilders were stretched by the king's naval commissions. This was especially true of the Great Michael, completed at Newhaven in 1511. In this way the aspirations of 'high' culture trickled down to merchants, lairds and lawyers. The skills of craftsmen were being refined for wealthy patrons all over Scotland. The arrival of printing provided another way for court and popular culture to begin to connect. The buildings commissioned by James IV included great halls at Edinburgh and Stirling castles and the Chapel Royal at Stirling. Such patronage provided a stage for the highest craft skills of masons, carpenters and painters. Flemish and French masons worked on royal buildings, and their work was echoed in the architecture of religious buildings or lairds' tower houses which came to show a mixture of imported and vernacular features. The taste of religious and secular patrons for Flemish workmanship survives in imported lamps, images, books of hours, hangings, painted ceilings, tombstones and paintings, most famously the Trinity panels - an elaborate triptych showing James III and his queen, Margaret of Denmark, at prayer, flanked by their patron saints.

The new royal buildings provided the setting for a wide range of cultural activities. The court had a political purpose, unification of the nobility behind the monarchy. This was facilitated by the cult of honour, with pageants, tournaments and festivals as its highlights. These events drew on the imagery, symbolism and coded celebrations of kingship which were common in Burgundy, France and England in the same period. One of the most famous of these was the three-day tournament of the White Knight and the Black Lady, staged at Holyrood in 1508. William Dunbar's poem, 'Blyth Aberdein', celebrated the formal entry of Queen Margaret into the burgh in 1508. No less political in intent was the cosmopolitanism of the court, which spoke six languages including French, Danish and Gaelic. There was also a notable English element after James' marriage to Margaret, daughter of Henry VII, in 1503.

The court enjoyed the services of performing artists such as poets and musicians. The most famous poet was William Dunbar, who named many others whose work is now entirely lost in his 'Lament for the Makars'. In the previous generation Robert Henryson, not a courtier but a Dunfermline schoolmaster, was the most able poet. Along with Gavin Douglas in the early 1500s, an aristocratic bishop, and Sir David Lindsay, a courtier of James V, these poets

wrote in a European humanist intellectual tradition with connections to Chaucer, Villon and Boccaccio.

The courtiers wrote in Scots. Middle Scots had become the language of government, court and culture. Though Dunbar called it a 'lewit barbour tong', 'Inglis' (which needs to be distinguished from English) was a source of unity among Lowland Scottish society. This was also the period when the deprecation of Gaelic culture as 'barbarous' began. The famous tournament staged by James IV in 1508 included a defeat inflicted on Highland savages, probably a dramatised re-enactment for the amusement of the court of his annexation of the Lordship of the Isles in 1494. The oral traditions of the Gaelic bards were gradually abandoned by Lowland writers - employed if at all as an object of mockery, albeit humorous rather than vicious. The distinction between Highland and Lowland culture accentuated the division between the two societies, despite the fact that many Gaelic speakers had rich European contacts.

Cultural self-consciousness also led to an interest in Scotland's past. This was expressed in epics such as 'The Wallace', written in the reign of James III, though the first surviving edition dates to 1570. It was also expressed in didactic books on the art of government. Hector Boece's humanist inspired but largely mythological history of Scotland was published in Latin in 1527 and translated into Scots at the expense of James V in the 1530s. John Major's scholastic and more sceptical 'History of Greater Britain' was published in 1521.

Court musicians in the reign of James IV included the King's Gaelic harpist Robert Carver, who was also prominent in the next reign. He wrote a mass for six voices in 1520, probably for performance in the new Chapel Royal at Stirling. In music as elsewhere, the court was only the apex of a wider cultural achievement. A number of Scots musicians studied in the Netherlands and one, John Fethy, returned to be master of a song school in Aberdeen. Fethy's pupil Robert Black became a talented composer for the organ. Other towns had song schools to provide choristers for the churches.

Though there were a number of different kinds of schools in the towns and countryside. Song schools, gave a basic education as well as training in music; many song schools survived the Reformation. Vernacular or 'Inglis' schools gave a rudimentary education to children up to the age of seven or eight, which was when, for most, their school days ended. In grammar schools, the curriculum was taught in Latin, using standard textbooks often imported from abroad. They were usually based in burghs and trained a select number of boys up to the age of twelve. Elsewhere, there were lairds' schools. In these the children - boys and probably girls too - of the laird, his larger tenants and kinsmen were educated. The number of these schools and their pupils are unknown because they have left few records. Among the general population literacy levels undoubtedly remained low. They were at their highest in large towns where possibly one in four adult males could read. Writing was a separate skill from reading and considerably fewer could write. Universities were still seminaries for the training of the clergy. New colleges were founded at Glasgow in 1451 and at Aberdeen in 1495. At St. Andrews, which had had a university since 1412, two new colleges were founded in the first half of the sixteenth century. All of these provided an arts degree for at most a few score students a year. Further degrees were usually obtained abroad.

The greatest cultural instrument of the of the period, the printing press, was set up, under royal licence, at Edinburgh in 1507-8, though many scholars still sent work abroad to be printed. Its impact was gradual rather than immediate. It depended on the growth of literacy to provide a market and technological developments which reduced the cost of printed works. Both of these developments continued throughout the early modern period. The press was intended as an instrument of government by James IV, for cultural excellence had a national function. However it was clear from the early sixteenth century that neither royal nor church authorities could control the spread of ideas in the way they previously had. Both the Reformation and the changing relationship between monarch and people, as they unfolded through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, owed much to the printing revolution.

The growth of lay literacy was a cultural revolution as great as printing. Literacy had always been a clerical attribute and lawyers and administrators came from the clergy, although this was changing. Half of the senators of the new, central civil law court, the Court of Session established in 1532, were clerics and half were laymen. It was professional lawyers that Bishop Elphinstone wanted to produce at his new university in Aberdeen. Parliament in 1496, in Scotland's first Education Act, tried to encourage the schooling of the sons of the nobility.

By 1540, the evidence of written bonds shows that, almost invariably, nobles could at least write their own name. But some families, such as the Sinclairs of Roslin, had collected books for several generations. A few were also literary patrons; the poem 'The Buke of the Howlat' was commissioned by the earl of Douglas, while the huge history of Walter Bower, called 'Scotichronicon', is dedicated to the laird of Rosyth. Whether these estate owners and burgesses wished to emulate the king or their European counterparts or to keep an eye on business is unknowable. Whatever the motivation, literacy allowed the laity as well as the clergy to contribute to and be influenced by the same intellectual ideas - and the same religious views.

NOTES

This is the overview. Including the Overview, this set comprises 6 PDFs. The others are:

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