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## Book Reviews

T.M.Devine (ed.), **Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection**. *Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.* xvii + 260. Illus + map. Paperback, £19.99, ISBN 978 1 4744 0880 6; **Legacies of British Slave-ownership Data Base** <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

Scotland's involvement in and relationship to slavery has long been hidden in full sight. Several Jamaica Streets were evidence of wealth made in the sugar and tobacco trades and few Scots, reading his biography, do not breathe a sigh of relief when Robbie Burns decided not to take the manager's job on a plantation – the type of job which tempted many young Scots to wealth or an early death. This valuable collection of essays draws together the wide variety of work done in recent years to explore the many aspects of Scotland's links with slavery that need to be set alongside the 'enlightenment' contribution to the abolition of chattel slavery, and Scotland's reputation as the 'abolitionist nation'. Devine warns that Scotland's status as a subaltern nation struggling for self-respect against subordination makes slavery an awkward fit.

The nature of the Atlantic slave economy gave the merchant economy of Glasgow a central place in this story. Equally important were the minor gentry and younger sons of the landed tempted by possibilities of wealth. Many of the material objects of the plantation economy were stamped 'made in Glasgow' and due weight is given in these essays to the Glasgow contribution. That being said, these essays provide important context for anyone trying to understand eighteenth and nineteenth century Edinburgh. At the same time, a knowledge of Edinburgh suggests that the exploration and debate of Scotland's place in the slave economies should not be left to Glasgow and the minor gentry. William Fortescue's article in this volume of *BOEC* and several of the chapters in Devine's collection show two roles played by Edinburgh. It was an information exchange for those who wanted to control the small but important black population of Scotland. Information about black servants and slaves who had 'escaped' was to be gathered by lawyers, goldsmiths and others

based in the capital. There was some evidence of 'slaves' offered for sale in the city. Edinburgh was also important as the theatre within which the legal, moral and religious legitimacy of slavery was argued out. The law courts, the growing civil society of the late eighteenth century and an active print culture were all proved crucial. Iain Whyte's essay shows that this was an especially Scottish contest. William Robertson, Presbyterian and historian, had argued that slavery was against the principles of Christian faith and rejected the notion that English law had any relevance in Scotland. In 1778, such arguments led to the release of Joseph Knight. Lord Braxfield, no friend of liberty, was amongst those who followed this argument to vote for the black servant's freedom. By 1830, the minister of St George's Church simply saw slavery as a 'sin'. At the same time, George Combe, the phrenologist and leader of radical thought, like Henry Duncan, promoter of working class savings, were happy to see a gradual approach to abolition. Catherine Hall tells the story of Archibald Alison. His progress as a Tory lawyer was brought to an end by the Whig politics of the 1830s. He turned his energies to books and a series of essays for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in which he expressed his opposition to any emancipation of black slaves, as well as to the French Revolution, Parliamentary Reform and Trades Unions. Again Edinburgh was the theatre in which such views were promoted and contested.

Those who wish to explore the links between Edinburgh society and slavery rarely have the evidence available for Glasgow and the west. This makes the *Legacies of British Slave-ownership Data Base* especially important. When slavery was eventually abolished in 1833, some £20 million was set aside to compensate slave owners, a strategy to reconcile the condemnation of slavery with the rights of property. As Nicholas Draper points out in the Devine collection, this led to an astonishing bureaucratic exercise, in which the claims of 45,000 individuals to the ownership of 800,000 in the condition of chattel slavery were recorded. Of these around 3,500 were absentees, in other words mostly resident in the United Kingdom. Those involved in compiling the University College Data Base have

identified over 350 of these as resident in Scotland. The data base is a model of clarity and accessibility. There is no charge for access. In most browsers a search for 'UCL slavery' will bring up the relevant links. The user is offered a full account of the background to the information. Those who compiled the data were interested both in making a contribution to understanding the Caribbean but also to following the money, - the legacies. The evidence from the claims records has been linked to other sources, notably wills and directories. A variety of search facilities are provided.

There were 110 individuals linked to Edinburgh through address information. There is no evidence to argue that the prosperity of the Edinburgh economy depended on slavery or that the compensation was crucial to key infrastructure, commercial or industrial projects. The data base does provide considerable evidence to show that compensation and slave income was important to a minority of individuals. William Pulteney Alison, Professor of the Institutes of Medicine at the University, well respected public health and poor law reformer and brother of Archibald, diligent anti-abolitionist contributor to *Blackwoods*, took home £4,082 as a trustee. Amongst those making claims a third were women. Edinburgh was a comfortable place for many female-headed households, especially in the New Town. A portion of these were supported by compensation and the Caribbean. There were many lawyers and several directors of banks. Anyone making an enquiry into Edinburgh society in the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries will find it worth running their list of names against this data base. Iain Whyte's much valued book *Send Back the Money* traces the vexed relationship of the Free Church and the slave states of the USA. If this data base had been available to him, he might have identified two members of the secular leadership as major beneficiaries of compensation. The Marquis of Breadalbane shared £6,630 for the 379 enslaved people of the Hope Estate in Jamaica; Francis Brown Douglas, advocate, received almost £3,700 for one estate in St Vincent and a share of the compensation for a second.

R J Morris

Jerry Brannigan and John McShane, with illustrations by David Alexander, **Robert Burns in Edinburgh: An Illustrated Guide to Burns' Time in Edinburgh.** Glasgow: Waverley Books, 2015. 207. Illus. Paperback, £9.99. ISBN 978 1 84934 171 4.

The periods spent by Robert Burns in Edinburgh constitute collectively one of the great episodes in the history of Scottish literature and culture. The tale of how the 'heaven taught ploughman' from rural Ayrshire took the capital of Scotland, and the epicentre of the Scottish Enlightenment, by storm - to become in the process one of its brightest sparks - is one of perennial fascination. Burns's Edinburgh visits captured the good town's imagination at the time; and the story has held fast in the memory of the city ever since. All biographies of Burns rightly have much to say on the Edinburgh periods, as does all critical writing on the poet. Thus we all know something of those heady days.

To write a book specifically about the visits of Burns to Edinburgh was an excellent idea. The authors of this work have adopted the modern 'guidebook' form (with maps and practical details), describing and discussing the people and places Burns met and frequented. Brannigan and McShane are to be commended for having attempted to carry to fruition a very good concept with partial success. It is certainly attractive, the illustrations are numerous and pleasing and it is great value for money. Everyone will learn something from its pages. However it is not well written, it contains numerous errors of various kinds, and, above all, its form is confusing and repetitive. A 'guidebook' to the place, time and people was needed; but this does not live up to the promise or the requirement.

The plan is that of a walking tour of Burns's Edinburgh, following a route that starts more or less in the heart of the New Town then winds in a sort of snaky spiral through the former St James's Square area, the Calton, the Canongate, up and down the High Street and Lawnmarket, and so to George Square and the South Side. Sometimes the headings are those of places; sometimes they are those of people who lived in those airts; sometimes they are both, with poems and songs inserted here and there. This leads to overlap and repetition. There is no index, and the

table of contents makes clear how intertwined are the places and the people. There are some seven principal sections under which the individual topographical localities (buildings, streets, monuments, etc.) and their denizens are arranged.

For many who may use this book as the walking guide the authors intend (there are modern maps, though they are not detailed enough) the number of errors will not necessarily be a serious bar to enjoyment or basic instruction. But there are a good many mistakes of all kinds, the result of too hasty, journalistic writing and inadequate proof-reading. Mrs Cockburn, née Rutherford, was never 'Alison Cockburn Rutherford'; the hoyden Jane, Duchess of Gordon, née Maxwell, never bore the surname 'Alexander'; the entry to Sciennes Hill House is not in 'Hill House Place'. Typographic or spelling mistakes include 'Roseberry'; General 'Monk'; the painter 'Colum' Smith instead of Colvin Smith; 'James Bow' rather than James Brown, architect of George Square. Errors of historical fact and over-simplistic explanation of the political and cultural background do the book no favours. The first paragraphs of the section entitled 'Political Background' contain a series of highly questionable statements. The authors are wrong about the social structure of the tenement as defined by floor- level (p. 142), and unclear about Scottish legal office-holding or terminology (notably p. 135). 'Indian Peter' Williamson is in fact the one pointing in the Kay caricature showing him with James Bruce of Kinnaird - who does not make the gesture (p. 139). Jean Lorimer (the 'Lassie wi' the lint-white locks') was not the author of a version 'The Flowers of the Forest' (p. 186): the authors here mean Jean Elliot. Allan Ramsay the painter had not 'retired to Dover': he simply had the misfortune to die there after a Channel crossing in 1784. And so on.

More serious is the lack of clarity: one frequently has to stop to think 'During which Edinburgh visit did such-and-such an event occur?', or 'When exactly did Burns get Jenny Clow pregnant?' It would have been very helpful to set out precisely when Burns arrived and when he left on his several visits - three in number, but with various comings and goings - perhaps by adding a chart of dates and listing the places at which he boarded in the city on those various occasions. I was completely thrown chronologically on pages 152 and 168. Sometimes the guidebook structure can be unintentionally misleading. Thus we find an

interesting and well-illustrated section on Alexander Nasmyth's York Place house and studio, only to discover that Burns never sat to the artist there, but rather in Wardrop's Court off the Lawnmarket.

Much is crammed in, whether entirely relevant or not. The floor-by-floor progress through the Burnsiana in the National Portrait Gallery leads to a long digression about a newly- identified version of the iconic Nasmyth portrait of the poet which may or may well not be autograph. (It looks to me like a later copy and it is, frankly, not very good.) This so-called 'Shaw Portrait' is discussed repetitiously at several other points. The lengthy treatment of Sir James Shaw himself is uneasily located where the walking tour reaches Regent Road because he was a major funder of Thomas Hamilton's Burns Monument on the flank of Calton Hill. One is tempted to go hunting for the statue of Shaw illustrated, only to find that it is in Kilmarnock! There are two pages on David Hume and his mausoleum when the only possible (though tenuous) link with Burns is that Hume had allocated his Advocates' Library salary to the blind poet Thomas Blacklock; and it was Blacklock who, more than thirty years later, encouraged Burns to come to Edinburgh to bring out a revised edition of his poetry. The collection of The Writers' Museum is discussed, but perversely the great Burns holdings of the National Library are not even mentioned.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed a book that is well-intentioned and admirable in its conception. It served to remind me forcibly of what a remarkable episode Burns's several visits, taken together, make in the history of Edinburgh's Golden Age. If the story told here is not as clear as it might be, or if the people and the places are rather mixed up, and if we find ourselves treading on the same ground twice or even more frequently and meeting the same characters repeatedly, then maybe it does not greatly matter. The book will give pleasure, and it can be read to some profit by many who may be free of detailed criticism. All such will gain instruction on a walk in the company of the enthusiastic authors, who themselves tread in the doubtless occasionally unsteady footsteps of Rabbie through 'Edina, Scotia's darling seat'.

*Iain Gordon Brown*

Louise Settle, **Sex for Sale in Scotland: Prostitution in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1900-1939**. *Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. 224. Illus. Paperback £19.99. ISBN 978 1 4744 2931 3.*

This new addition to the still relatively small number of books relating to Edinburgh's history in the modern era is an attempt to outline the changing social relationships and control structures that governed sex work in Scotland's Central Belt in the years before the Second World War. The book has its origins in Settle's doctoral thesis, and in recent articles by her in academic journals, which in turn find their roots in the fine work done in the field of British sexual history in the last four decades, to which Settle's book brings new approaches and techniques. Significant amongst these is the extensive use of databases and digital mapping (with the assistance of Edinburgh's Professor Richard Rodger).

Settle organises her material around five key areas, beginning with the question of how prostitution was policed. The street policing of prostitution was undertaken without enthusiasm, with arrests declining over the period, although police appear to have distinguished between young 'victims' who needed saving and 'hardened prostitutes' who were considered a nuisance to society. Certain features of Scottish law – the Procurator Fiscal, not the police, decided which cases to take to court, and two witnesses were required for a prosecution – combined with the Scottish cautioning system, meant that women were given more chances to move away from prostitution before being imprisoned than was often the case in England and Wales.

The book moves on to consider where prostitution was taking place, and here Settle focusses on the locations of arrests for importuning as these are reflected in the Edinburgh Burgh Court records. The geography of importuning these describe is compared with earlier and more anecdotal accounts such as Dr William Tait's in his 1840 Edinburgh work *Magdalenism*. Although the Old Town remained the centre of Edinburgh's sex industry, Settle's study of the court records reinforces Tait's observation that prostitution was spreading into parts of the eastern and southern New Town. By the beginning of the 1930s, the bulk of arrests were taking place in the

New Town and spreading west, but Settle believes that this may merely reflect a greater effort by the police to enforce the solicitation laws in wealthier areas of the city rather than being a guide to where most actual importuning was taking place.

Settle's third area concerns the more informal regulation of prostitution through the involvement of voluntary organisations such as the Magdalene Asylums, the Women Patrols and the Scottish National Vigilance Association. The Victorian era had seen the operation of the "Glasgow System" (as originally described by Linda Mahood) in which the police cooperated with voluntary and medical institutions. The willingness of voluntary institutions to work with the post-1907 probation service and to involve themselves with it meant that a form of the Glasgow System continued to operate, albeit on a more humane basis, into the twentieth century, although the moral standards governing it remained those of the respectable middle classes.

Settle emphasises throughout the book the heavily mediated nature of many of her sources, and is cautious about just how much a particular source is capable of telling us. Her fourth area of focus, looking at who prostitutes were and what their individual experiences of prostitution might have been, brings this issue to the fore. She looks at the age range, the stated occupation and country of occupation of women as reflected in the court records and prison registers of the time. A number of case studies of individual named women are undertaken where the sources are particularly rich. Most prostitutes came from the working class, and had unskilled or semi-skilled parents: a makeshift economy offering insufficient, unreliable, poorly-paid work, and the pressures of paying for the upkeep of children, were drivers of prostitution, as was the death or desertion of a husband or breadwinner. The number of women who derived their sole income from prostitution declined over the period as new employment opportunities for women became available. Most prostitutes were Scottish, and the proportion of Irish women involved declined in proportion with the decline in Irish immigration.

The book concludes with a chapter looking into clandestine prostitution and the remarkable Kosmo Club trial of 1933. New fashions and freedoms in music, nightlife and dancing, combined with the mainstream arrival of new technology in the form of the private motor car and telephone, created

opportunities for new forms of hidden prostitution in which professional dance ‘instructresses’ in nightclubs could be ‘booked out’ by telephone. Courtesy of a taxi or the client’s own car, any illicit activity would take place away from the premises, which could thereby facilitate and profit from prostitution without running the risk of prosecution as a brothel. One of the stars of Settle’s vivid account is the Edinburgh policeman, William Merrilees, who wrote a vivid memoir in retirement and whose account Settle uses with caution – Merrilees being prone to exaggerate and amplify his role. Public sympathy lay more with the girls being “booked out” and far less with the managers of the Kosmo Club, who were despised as “white slavers”.

This is a fine and innovative first book by a young historian that breaks ground on an area of Edinburgh history that has a great deal to tell us about the changing social fabric of the city as the extraordinary twentieth century ran its course.

*James Hamilton*

Ian Hutchison, **Feeling our history**. *RNIB Scotland, 2015. x + 102. Illus. Paperback £8.99. ISBN 978 0 9934106 0 4, or free on www.insightradio.co.uk*

A book looking back on the lives of blind people in Edinburgh is very welcome. The research was carried out by volunteers using archive material to give an overview of the lives lived by some of the blind in the Edwardian period. The living conditions in Edinburgh at that time are very clearly described. The addresses of those named in the text are used to show an improvement or otherwise in their social status. Those described were generally poor, and it is likely that the conditions caused by poverty applied to the physically disabled as well as those with visual impairment.

The Register of the ‘Society for promoting reading amongst the blind’, established to enable them to read the bible, is used as a source of much personal information. The founders of the Society are not identified, but their intention was obviously linked to their Christian beliefs - their staff were referred to as ‘missionaries’. Funds were raised by

charitable subscription. The raised print first used was the ‘Moon’ system, but the Society progressed as others were introduced and eventually used Braille. Diagrams show the Moon system, but the others are only described. The teachers and their ‘lady volunteers’ obviously worked very hard, travelling great distances. Figures relating to the number of registered blind, their success rate and their income are unfortunately contained in text when simple tables would have been clearer to the reader.

The book finishes with brief accounts of ten blind people of the period using censuses, health board records and information from the Society’s register and the Blind Asylum. They demonstrate the norms of the period - large families and limited employment for any disabled members, but it does show that some blind managed to earn a living and to support a family. Unfortunately the data is stretched and supposition applied - the words ‘may’, ‘might have’ and ‘possibly’ are evident. The author has not applied basic referencing techniques to the work and in parts the sentences are unclear. Nevertheless, the book is a useful addition to the social history of Edinburgh.

*M P Collingwood*

Archie Foley and Peter E. Ross, **From Steam to Diesel: through the lens of a Scottish railwayman**. *Edinburgh: Archie Foley, 2015. 64. Illus. £7.99, ISBN 978 0 9934 0280 7.*

*From Steam to Diesel* is the result of an extraordinary chance discovery. Browsing at a collector’s fair, Portobello historian Archie Foley opened a biscuit tin on a stall to find a substantial cache of photographic negatives inside it, all in neat labelled envelopes. The photographs were of extraordinary quality – the work of a remarkable talent, and such is the monumental nature and psychological depth of the human portraits they contained that the co-author of the book, video editor Peter Ross, has been driven to make comparisons with the work of August Sander.

The city of Edinburgh has been central to the history of photography, of course, and there have been photographers of stature here before. What sets these images apart is that they are taken by a working railwayman, on duty, not by a professional

with a studio at Rock House or on Princes Street. Furthermore, and although the photographer appears himself more than once in the images, Ross and Foley's appeals as to his identity have so far failed to identify him. This is regrettable: the best photographers are remembered for perhaps five images out of the many thousands of pictures that make up a career, and there are certainly five here that stand comparison with any modern work.

The photographs themselves depict railways and railway staff in and around Edinburgh from the middle of the 1950s until the early 1960s, the final period in which the full Victorian and Edwardian railway system in the Lothians was open and working. Although Edinburgh's railways were heavily photographed and are perhaps the only segment of Edinburgh's industrial life to have been even remotely adequately researched and published, there are nevertheless significant gaps in coverage, some of which are filled here. It is particularly good to have new images of significant industrial sites such as Leith North station on Lindsay Road, the interior of Leith Central Station, and the Balerno loop line via Slateford and Colinton. There are also new pictures of the locomotive depot at Dalry Road, the complex at Slateford, and of the facility out at Craightinny. Every image has been thoroughly researched, and intelligent captions reflect the social and geographical context of each picture within the city and its environs. Some of this information was crowd-sourced by Foley and Ross at a series of public exhibitions of the images.

Although photographic discoveries of this kind continue to be made, they are finite by nature and it is only luck which saw these images find their way into the possession of two men who were determined to do justice to them and to their brilliant, anonymous creator. The cover photograph shows him on the platform at Leith North station, wearing a driver's cap, overalls and a tartan tie. It is to be hoped that someone recognises him and comes forward with a name: when Edinburgh finally gets its museum of photography, we are going to want it.

*James Hamilton*

Sean Bradley and Elizabeth Elliott (eds.), **The Evergreen: A New Season in the North**. *Edinburgh: Word Bank, 2014. 160. Illus. £15. ISBN 978 0 993054402*; Sean Bradley and Elizabeth Elliott (eds.), **The Evergreen: A New Season in the North**, *Edinburgh: Word Bank, 2015. 176 Illus. £15 ISBN 978 0 993054419*.

The rich history of the literary work 'The Evergreen' may be known to aficionados of Scottish literature both from the makar Allan Ramsay's *Ever Green: A Collection of Scots Ppoems wrote by the Ingenious before 1600* (1724) and Patrick Geddes's magazine *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal*, published some 121 years later in 1895-1896 by the biologist and pioneering planner. Both of these predecessor publications were, amongst other things, intended to stimulate and fuel a renaissance of enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of the rich diversity of their culture, and the community of Edinburgh and Scotland. Similarly the current projected four volumes of *The Evergreen: A New Season in the North*, published by the Old Town Development Trust, aims to emulate and develop these co-operative cultural themes as well as ask questions about just where we might be going, as Elizabeth Elliott's does in her excellent contextual article in the first volume.

To discover, enjoy, and comprehend the living world and urban environment around us is fundamental to our well-being and the present *Evergreen* publications are focussed upon the place, work and folk of Edinburgh and their future. Lest anyone gainsay such efforts one need only recall the significance of Estonia's 'Singing Revolution' to see how fundamental current local culture is to modern society.

In the first volume (2014) there is an engaging variety of poetry, articles and images interpreting Edinburgh. I was drawn towards the scholarship and illumination of Richard Rodger's '(N)evergreen', and I particularly enjoyed the novel views provided by Robert Morris's contribution on Patrick Geddes's cat, and Todd McEwan's 'Coffee Is It?' Other readers might be most captivated by the poetry, the portraits and the illustrations, in which the romance, the landscape and the inhabitants of the town are woven into the tapestry. Of those pieces I particularly enjoyed the linguistic beauty of Christine De Luca's contributions.

The slightly larger second volume remains true to the tenets of the original theme whilst expanding upon aspects of urban renewal. It was particularly pleasing to see contributions referring to Edinburgh's formerly important and impressively diverse industrial past – the potential for which was formally encouraged by the government in the nineteenth century and which finally withered in the late twentieth century. In this vein I particularly enjoyed Sean Bradley's editorial contribution and Robert Davies's photographic essay 'Development'.

Lou Dear's thought-provoking article 'The Abolition of the University' prompts reflections upon the genesis of Edinburgh's 'College', which until now I had understood to relate in large measure to the Town Council's eye for property development (of post-Reformation assets) and economic opportunity.

In 'Folk, Work and Film', Kenny Munro correctly identifies the evocative and entertaining 1935 film of Edinburgh's riding as having more to do with pageantry than tradition. As I understand it Edinburgh's common lands had traditionally been walked by town officials and any interested party

– a practice designed to preserve the community resource, but which fell into desuetude many decades before 1935.

Disquietingly, these beautifully-produced and stimulating volumes may be vulnerable to disappearing into the vast morass of rarely-seen literature about the City, simply because in this digital age the phrase 'The Evergreen' is unlikely to occur to either present or future generations as a search term for articles about Edinburgh, its community, its environment and its economy in the early twenty-first century. It is important to make material accessible, visible and easy to discover. That said I can heartily recommend reading the considered contributions of both volumes, and would defy anyone not to enjoy the acerbic and topical wit and humour of such potent pieces as 'Adventures in Austeritania' by Eddie Gibbons (2015).

*Richard Hunter*