

might have allowed the reader to judge how (a)typical Islay was in its wider context. Nevertheless, this is a comprehensive, interdisciplinary and largely successful study of a complex history, and is recommended.

Glasgow Caledonian University

ANNIE TINDLEY
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Exploring Environmental History: Selected Essays.

By T. C. Smout, Pp. 248.

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Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. £60.00.

Amongst the most profound reinventions in any academic career was that made in the 1980s by Chris Smout, at that time Professor of Scottish History at the University of St Andrews. Already established as one of the foremost authorities on the social and economic history of modern Scotland, he redirected his expertise from that field into what was then a research area with which few historians in Britain had as yet begun to engage; environmental history. The result has been a second career—mostly developed since his retirement over twenty years ago—the output of which has a contemporary significance which far exceeds the not inconsiderable importance of his earlier work and which has served as a spur for the emergence of environmental history as a distinct field of academic endeavour in Scotland in the last decade.

This volume—a selection of his essays on a range of environmental history topics—highlights the themes and issues which have been of the greatest interest to him. Some reflect his very public private passion for bird-watching, others are stimulated by questions which arose from his involvement with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) during its formative years in the early 1990s. All are interconnected, with certain elements emerging and re-emerging like symphonic motifs through the various chapters. Energy resources and their management figure prominently (Chapters 6–8), as do philosophical notions of ‘green’ or environmental consciousness (Chapters 2 and 13), but the strongest motif is woodland. Four of the papers wholly (Chapters 3–5 and 9) and three partly (7, 8 and 10) concern Scottish woodland history, a subject to which Professor Smout has made an outstanding contribution. This work, for its dispassionate, de-romanticised discussion of what is often an impassioned, over-romanticised issue, should be compulsory reading for Scottish Government environmental policy-makers, their NGO equivalents, enthusiastic ‘reforesters’, and land-managers. But, as its author recognises, dismantling myth amongst the academic and the professional communities is (relatively) easy (Chapter 9); it is spreading that awareness of the mythologising to the wider public that is hard.

While there has been some revision of earlier papers (especially Chapter 2) there are some peculiar omissions—still no place for Percy Unna and his contribution to ‘wilderness’ conservation—and some areas where newer research challenges his interpretations. This latter is perhaps sharpest with regard to the bleak commentary on Icelandic energy supply in comparison to that on Scotland and Ireland in Chapter 7, where the vision presented is of early mismanagement and rapid depletion of available resources to create a fuel-impooverished culture struggling on the margins of survival throughout the medieval and early modern periods. The myth within that over-generalised image, however, has been exposed by geoarchaeological and historical research over the last decade (e.g. by Andy Dugmore, Tom McGovern, Ian Simpson and Orri Vesteinsson to name but a few of the leading scholars). This has radically

reshaped our understanding, revealing instead that Icelanders recognised early the impact of their profligate misuse of the available resources and adopted a range of sustainable fuel-management strategies to optimise what remained available. The crisis when it came was the consequence largely of climate change and the plunge into the unstable conditions of the Little Ice Age from the mid-fourteenth century, coupled with a collapse of the traditional economic regime, which rendered the established fuel-supply regimes no longer sustainable. The Icelanders, after a brief paroxysm of profligacy during the heady days of apparent resource abundance, had made efficient use of the 'hand dealt by Nature' but came unstuck when Nature changed the rules. And that point itself is one which Professor Smout underscores repeatedly in his discussions: human agency has played a key role in environmental change—and not always with negative consequences—but many changes traditionally attributed to anthropogenic factors, especially woodland decline, are more attributable to long-term climate change.

Although Iceland, Ireland and Denmark recur as comparators most of the papers focus on Scottish circumstances or wider issues of particularly Scottish concern. This collection, however, is not 'an environmental history of Scotland; it is instead a prospectus for an emerging discipline. It highlights both to established researchers and to students the potential of the subject as a tool for reinterpretation or revision of traditional models for some of the great perennial themes in Scottish history—deforestation, Improvement, Clearance or emigration—and also as a mechanism for reaching a more informed understanding of current circumstances and the future consequences of decisions being made now. Throughout the text there is a showcasing of the very real achievements of interdisciplinarity and calls for greater dialogue between the historians of the environment and the environmental scientists, ecologists and professionals who work intimately with the environment in its widest sense. Neither the historians nor any of these others can achieve individually what can be secured through collaborative and integrated research. This is the two-stranded sub-text that runs in places subliminally and elsewhere overtly throughout these essays. Disciplinary compartmentalisation is obstructive and disabling but is no less so than the perpetuation of the Nature/Culture division which frames so many facets of our relationship with the environment of which we are part. That sub-text makes uncomfortable reading for both the overly dehumanised science-led environmental management regime which at times informs Scottish environmental policy-making and also the misty-eyed romantic or misanthropic radical environmentalists who currently represent the most vocal alternative. In the growing debate over future environmental choices, these essays constitute a powerful corrective to the extremes on both sides.

University of Stirling

RICHARD ORAM
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Ulster-Scots Writing: An Anthology.
Edited by Frank Ferguson. Pp. xv, 527.
ISBN: 9781846820748.
Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008. £50.00.

Two names in Frank Ferguson's subtle and searching introduction provide interesting bookends to this important project: John Milton and Edna Longley. Milton is there as occasional influence, but also as a key figure in the regicide debates of 1649, with which this anthology opens, when he railed against