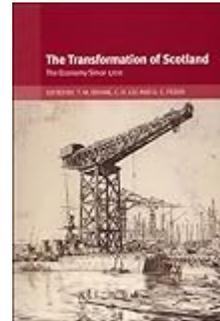


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

T.M. Devine, C.H. Lee, G.C. Peden, eds. *The Transformation of Scotland: The Economy Since 1700*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. 279 pp. \$130.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7486-1432-5; \$40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-1433-2.



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In the 1980s Scotland's general history, social and literary history was covered by a series of collective treatments, *The New History of Scotland* (eight volumes, 1980-83), edited by T.C. Smout and Jenny Wormald; *People and Society in Scotland* (three volumes, 1988-92), edited by Rosalind Mitchison, Tom Devine, Hamish Fraser, Robert Morris, Tony Dickson, and James Treble; and *The History of Scottish Literature* (four volumes, 1987-88), edited by Cairns Craig. There was, however, no cognate economic history of the country, which, as Prof. Peden notes in the introduction to the present volume, prompted the Council of the Economic and Social History Society of Scotland to suggest a collective economic history. Not only was the time politically propitious, with the passing of Scottish Devolution; also, the *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography* was completed in 1990. The new edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* was under way at Oxford, while there had been a considerable output of monograph literature and doctoral research, and the final volumes of the *Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, published between 1951 and 1988. The present volume has to be seen against this background. Tom Devine provides a hundred pages on developments between 1700-1914, and Lee another sixty pages in this section and twenty-five on the twentieth century. George Peden has twelve pages of introduction, thirty-three pages on the twentieth-century managed economy, and a brief three-

page conclusion. Does this amount to an adequate counterpart to the histories detailed above?

"Up to a point, Lord Copper," would have to be the answer. What's presented by the three professorial editors, who between them provide all but fifty pages of the text, is a reasonably adequate account of macroeconomic developments in Scotland since the Union, but not one which adds greatly to previous publishing, notably R. H. Campbell's *Rise and Fall of Scottish Industry, 1707-1939* (1980). Of the essays not by the editors, Ewan Cameron's "The Modernisation of Scottish Agriculture," covering the period 1945 to the present ought to be a model in its treatment of its subject, alert to a wide range of primary and secondary source material, academic research and political debate. This, alas, isn't typical of the contributors. Some of this thinness may be put down to the sad illness in 2003 of C. H. Lee, but the result is a distinctly mixed bag, offering interesting insights, but no really systematic analysis.

Devine's chapters are, as might be expected, a reliable guide to the agricultural and demographic background to the first phase of industrialization, 1770-1840, as was his bestselling *The Scottish Nation, 1700-2000* (1999).[1] They don't add much new, but that was not, perhaps, their intention. One or two tantalizing comparisons between the Scottish and Irish records—or with developments in con-

tinental Europe—are dangled before the reader, only to be hastily passed over. The role of the Scottish experience in the evolution of classical economics is scarcely touched on: there’s a single mention of Adam Smith, three of Sir John Sinclair (his immense *Statistical Account*, 1791-1799, goes unremarked) and nothing on the “great civilians”—the engineers John Smeaton, Thomas Telford, and John Macadam, for example.

Early in the book, Peden rightly stresses the *Zeitbruch* of World War I, in which Scotland, in the shape of the Clyde Munitions District, arguably saved the Allied cause. But in Lee’s treatment of the early twentieth century and his own “Managed Economy” essay, war appears only fleetingly. The traumatic gear-shifts of 1914-26 were to imprison much of West Coast industry not just in heavy engineering, but in specializations with had no peacetime prospects such as aircraft, heavy fighting vehicles, and escort warships. Yards and shops misshapen in this way absorbed subsidies while expelling much of their skilled labor force and frustrating the innovative bourgeoisie. Peden rightly shows how such skewed policies continued right up to the 1960s (£50 million went on the doomed Ravenscraig steelworks, ten times the sum devoted to developing light engineering capacity) but he doesn’t follow this analysis—largely preoccupied with London’s formulation of regional policy—into its implications for the Scottish market. But then there is no reference whatsoever to the consumer market—these days a huge chunk of the still badly differentiated service sector. The index gives several references to “women in

the labour force” but only one woman is cited by name, the social historian Stana Nenadic. Mrs. Thatcher figures only as an “ism.”

In all this is a disappointing book, inferior to Richard Saville’s collective volume *The Economic Development of Modern Scotland* (1985) in the twentieth century. Its adequacies—for the student will still get a reasonable idea of economic change—will probably deter any further treatment of the theme for a few years, which makes matters worse. Not only is no use made (perhaps because of time pressure) of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, but the *Dictionary of Scottish Business Biography* seems to have passed unnoticed, as do important themes like railways, dock construction, twentieth-century roads and road freight haulage, power supply, and North Sea oil. At this modest length, a survey history ought to be opening up avenues to a new generation, not standing in their light. Cameron’s contribution, easily the best in the book, shows that the new generation is raving to go. Oh that Chris Smout, that benign Anglo-Scot, could have been persuaded out of his native woodlands to sort things out with a further “Half-Century of the Scottish People”!

Note

[1.] Irene Maver, “Review of T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A History 1700-2000*,” H-Albion, H-Net Reviews, May, 2000, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=21333957377847>.

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