GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Emigration has long been central to Scottish historical identities. Yet it is only in comparatively recent times that historians have sought to illuminate a phenomenon that has often been associated with powerful emotions, myths and polemics. Through intensive and highly sophisticated research on the social and economic, political and cultural aspects of migration, the field has now become central to a new Scottish historiography which seeks to place the history of Scotland within its wider contexts. Marjory Harper's work, starting with an important and detailed study of emigration from northeast Scotland, has been influential in developing these studies.

In this book she examines emigration in the years between the two world wars of the twentieth century. Until recently, this seemed to be the neglected era in migration studies, but increasingly scholars are turning their attention to the period. Marjory Harper seeks to place the Empire Settlement Act of 1922 in its proper context. If this act appeared to herald a period of more intensive state involvement in emigration, much discussed but never implemented in the century before the First World War, in fact its implementation was at best only half-hearted and fraught with much controversy. The tradition of voluntarism, promoted by the large number of agencies involved in migration, continued in much the same mould as in Victorian and Edwardian times.

The great strengths of the book lie in the remarkable range of sources the author has used, the light shed upon a variety of voluntary agencies, the hesitant nature of much state involvement, the character of emigration propaganda, and the tensions and strains that all this activity placed not only on relations with the dominions but also on local and national politics. They also reside in the extent to which she has been able to survey the experiences of fishing, crofting and agricultural communities of the highlands and islands, the northeast and the borders as well as the industrial populations of the central belt. The arguments for and against migration lay at the heart of the political process in the 1920s, and they were reflected in the reactions of the press, the churches, philanthropists, social commentators and politicians in the period. But, above all, migration was about people – individuals caught up in economic forces beyond their control who were persuaded to seek a form of exile in order to carve out a hopefully better future. Individual experience is at the core of this study, for we hear many emigrants' voices talking of the character and consequences of emigration, of successes and failures, and of hopes and disappointments.

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Diasporas invariably have powerful effects on their core populations. Scottish nationalists have long hoped that former migrants – particularly those settled in the United States and Canada – would play their part in the struggle to bring state and nation back into alignment. Cultural nationalists have also sought inspiration from overseas communities. Clan and other Scottish associations continue to have an extraordinary number of branches in North America, Australasia and elsewhere, and the role of such exchanges and interactions in the maintenance and development of Scottish identities remains of considerable concern. All those interested in the effects of these connections on Scottish politics, social analysis and literature will find much of interest here.

John M. MacKenzie