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“Book review – Scotland: mapping the
nation”

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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

Christopher Fleet, Margaret Wilkes and Charles WJ Withers, *Scotland: mapping the nation*, Edinburgh: Birlinn, in association with the National Library of Scotland, 2011, ISBN 978-1-84158-969-5, hardback, £30.00

Although no-one can complain of a shortage of writing on the history of cartography in these islands over the past forty years, nonetheless much of the activity has been in detailed studies rather than more general syntheses. For Ireland, there is JH Andrews's *Shapes of Ireland* (1997), which concentrates on the topographical mapping on the country; and Jacinta Prunty's *Maps and map-making in local history*, which goes beyond what might be implied by its title. Catherine Delano Smith and Roger Kain's *English maps: a history* (1999) treats the mapping of England and Wales, thematically rather than chronologically, and now we have something along the same lines for Scotland.¹

There are thirteen chapters, mostly self-explanatory: Putting Scotland on the map (which introduces some general principles); Maps of Scotland before c.1595; A kingdom and a nation depicted, c.1583-1700; Scotland occupied and defended; Towns and urban life; The changing countryside; Islands and island life; Seas and waters; Travel and communications; Mapping science (including geology and land-use); Open spaces – recreation and leisure; Popular culture; Maps at work – working with maps (a conclusion); and a Guide to further reading.

The general approach is very much that developed by J Brian Harley: maps as instruments of power, maps as social documents, and so on. It is thus more aligned with Delano-Smith and Kain than it is with Andrews. Whilst there is some merit in the theoretical approach, and there is no lack of social context – the highland clearances are merely the most notorious – it can lead to fragmenting of some stories. This is not a volume for anyone wanting a coherent account of the development of the Ordnance Survey in Scotland, and indeed discussing its nineteenth-century urban mapping before discussing that of the countryside, and that in turn before discussing the geological impulse, is reversing not only the cart but a team of horses. Nor does it really cover the development of such firms as Johnston and Bartholomew, which were Scottish enterprises with a far wider reach, similar to, say, Clyde shipbuilding. Whilst the 'great man' is an unfashionable concept in history, institutions can help to provide a framework and reference points for discussing certain types of mapping.

A paradoxical effect of concentrating on Scotland is that the nation's contribution to wider cartographic developments goes largely unremarked. It is true that Scotland is considered to be one of the best-mapped countries in the world in the later seventeenth century, but we are not given the proper, British, context of Roderick Murchison's condemnation of its topographic mapping in 1834. Similarly lacking is acknowledgement that the greatest contribution that Scotland made to the development of the Ordnance Survey was not the Military

¹ JH Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland: maps and their makers 1564-1839*, Dublin: Geography Publications, 1997; Jacinta Prunty, *Maps and map-making in local history* (Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History number 7), Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004; Catherine Delano Smith and Roger JP Kain, *English maps: a history*, London: British Library, 1999.

Map of 1747-55, but in the early 1850s, with the extraordinary convulsions that led to the adoption of the 1:2500 scale. Likewise, there is something extraordinary about John Wood's urban mapping from 1818 onwards: Scottish towns were depicted with a uniformity unique between John Speed in the 1600s and the Ordnance Survey nearly 250 years later. A number of illustrations draw on the Bartholomew Archive at the National Library of Scotland, but the light of this unique survival does not shine here as it might.

Scotland: mapping the nation is extremely well illustrated, in colour throughout – acid papers and all – and the book may well be worth its price just for the illustrations. Many are of whole maps, or of large extracts, and whereas in the past this has often been the cue for a prodigious waste of effort for a very murky result, here the fine resolution enables remarkable detail to be read even with a low-power magnifier. Many of the maps illustrated are now available on the National Library of Scotland's website, but there are many of us who still prefer to study paper rather than a screen. The printing – undertaken in China – is excellent, and that only serves to emphasise the one blemish, and one which I have previously complained of from this and other publishers: yes, detail of double-page spreads is lost in the gutters. Do publishers ever look at the printed stock? The authors, the maps and Scotland all deserve better.

Most of the illustrations have extended captions, which can be read practically as a narrative in their own right. There are examples of both 'standard' and non-standard mapping, and some which is plain quirky. For example, why are lighthouses emphasised on a naturalists' map of 1893 (p.246)? Whilst this may seem to emphasise the exceptional at the expense of the normal, no-one ought to complain at the inclusion of, for example, various types of geological and land-use mapping. One illustration is of a cover of 1820 for one of the parts of John Thomson's atlas of Scotland, which includes at the end of a list of counties in progress: 'Ayrshire and Wigtonshire are waiting until the outline of the Government Survey is procured: if this is not published soon, the Maps of those Counties will be published from the best materials to be had...' It was to be 'the best materials'.

In summary then: anyone wanting an outline guide to the development of mapping in Scotland will find this a useful starting-point, well supported by illustrations. What we still lack is a comprehensive combined history of the mapping of, and by, the whole of Britain and Ireland. Such a history needs to take account both of chronology and of recent theoretical and procedural developments, and of the claims of both national and regional and more 'imperial' approaches. I write this in no entrenched unionist spirit – better friendly neighbours than discontented housemates – but because, whether one likes it or not, a union of crowns has been largely reflected by a union of cartographies. Meanwhile, here is one of the influences for such an overarching work to take account of.

Richard Oliver