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James Gilhooley, **The Edinburgh Recorder: Spotlight on the Personalities, Properties, and their Fire Insurance Policies from 1720 to 1840.** *Edinburgh: published by the Author, 1990, pp. 675, 10 maps. Paperback £75.00.*

Among the questions that have engaged social historians of Edinburgh's Old Town, there has long been the matter of 'the democracy of the common stair'. Did this social phenomenon, this neighbourly mixture of classes, in fact exist or was it a utopian ideal conjured up in the imaginations of historical writers with little or no hard evidence to support it?

It has been Mr Gilhooley's achievement in *The Edinburgh Recorder* to provide material for the complete answer. His starting point was his realisation of the fullness of the records of the Edinburgh Friendly Fire Assurance Company from 1720 to 1840, which survive in the Scottish Record Office. Painstakingly Mr Gilhooley has transcribed every entry and arranged them in four sections to provide an alphabetical list of policy-holders and their families, a chronological list of all policies and their values, and a geographical list of all properties covered in the Old Town; all this is supported by contemporary maps.

The work of transcription must have been a mammoth task, all the more amazing in that it follows so quickly on Mr Gilhooley's publication in 1988 of *A Directory of Edinburgh in 1752* (Edinburgh University Press). But the present work is much larger and fuller. Where the earlier book provides a frozen picture of Edinburgh poised in one year on the brink of plans for a New Town, this new study gives us a motion picture of Edinburgh in course of change – from the old burgh of 1720, still dragging its feet slowly out of history, to the situation in 1840 when many families had removed to the New Town and social degeneration in the Old Town had set in.

This book will be most useful to the demographer, to the historical geographer, to the genealogist and to the social historian. Take for example the entry for John Monro. He was a merchant and had a house and shop in a timber tenement on the north side of the Canongate; he married, we are told, Mary Greenlees and had two children, Mary and Robert. Or take Lucca Tagonelli, described as an alien from Naples, who lived in Aitken's Land at the top of Leith Wynd in 1798, just one of the many foreigners resident in Edinburgh at this time, many of whom seem to have been makers of barometers and clocks.

The list of individual lands and closes, such as Hangman's Land or Geddes Close, are essential signposts to the location of Edinburgh addresses and are especially useful when taken with the maps provided.

But how far was the 'democracy of the common stair' an established fact? Residents in Cant's Close may provide a sample: a professor, a druggist, a WS, a surgeon, a glover, a footman, a shoemaker, a mantua-maker and a tailor. It seems to be truly illustrated over and over again that the social mix traditionally supposed to have existed in Old Edinburgh really existed. **BASIL SKINNER**

Iain Gordon Brown, **Building for Books: The Architectural Evolution of the Advocates' Library, 1689-1925.** *Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989, pp. xx + 273, illus. £29.50, 0-08-037968-0.*

Patrick Cadell and Ann Matheson (eds), **For the Encouragement of Learning: Scotland's National Library, 1689-1989.** *Edinburgh: HMSO, 1989, pp. xii + 316, illus. £25.00, 0-11-493483-5.*

'The Lawiers Library, which alone does so much honour to this Country, and is increasing daily, has not a suitable apartment.' In this comment of 1752 the whole history of the Advocates' Library is summed up – the development into a national resource and its continuous struggle to secure adequate accommodation. Formally established in 1689 by Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, the Advocates' collection acquired the privileges of a copyright library in 1710 and from that moment the flood of acquisitions increased faster than the imagination of the Advocates in regard to their needs for space and shelving.

Dr Brown, Assistant Keeper in the Department of Manuscripts in what has become – since 1925 – the National Library of Scotland, has fully researched and presented the history of the older institution. The resulting study, *Building for Books*, is not only excellent and interesting but is indeed gripping and not untouched by shafts of cynical humour.

As Dr Brown's story unfolds it becomes a wonder that the Advocates' Library survived at all. We read of threat by fire and threat by damp, and of frequent resort simply to piling books upon the floor. Starting in Parliament Close the Library was soon accommodated in part of what is now the Laigh Parliament Hall. The following century saw its gradual extension to take

over the Burgh's lumber rooms and the rooms originally occupied by the Registers and Records of Scotland. At the same time physical conditions were improved at the hand, Dr Brown tells us, of Alexander McGill, architect, and William Eizat, wright, the latter fresh from his work for the Earl of Hopetoun.

From 1808 a grand new plan got under way that resulted in the creation for the Advocates of what is now the Upper Signet Library. Dr Brown first explains the earlier proposals by Robert Adam for approximately the same site, and then leads us into the extraordinarily uncomfortable situation wherein Robert Reid, perhaps the most celebrated architect in the post-Adam generation, designed the exterior of the building, while the commission for the interior was given to William Stark, whom Sir Walter Scott greatly respected and who died in 1813.

But this new library had one great disadvantage – remoteness from the 'subterranean' book rooms already established. To surmount this problem the Advocates sold their grand new hall to the Writers to the Signet and commissioned a long rectangular new building on ground leading out towards the new George IV Bridge. This part of the story is particularly confusing and Dr Brown has painstakingly examined the source material relating to the work of W. H. Playfair and others, and has sorted out a path through what amounted to a series of bungled opportunities. The need for continued open access to the city's 'Lock-up House' was one problem, and the loss of an important frontage to George IV Bridge, taken for the new Sheriff Courts, was another. Not until the birth of the National Library of Scotland was this essential exposure achieved.

Dr Brown's history stops short of the inception of to-day's National Library. But his book provides a valuable and pioneering study of the building needs of a great library and is most satisfyingly equipped with illustrations, maps and plans.

The story of the later National Library as well as the earlier Advocates' Library is embraced in the volume of essays *For the Encouragement of Learning*, a festschrift of essays contributed by various members of the staff. They are richly varied, commencing with a study-in-depth of the origins of the Advocates' collection by the late Ian Rae and ending with a post-1925 history by Dennis Smith. Between these milestones are studies of the manuscript and foreign book collections and of the period as Librarian of David Hume. One of the most interesting essays is that

by Alastair Cherry on 'Special Collections'. Here we meet, for example, the Newbattle and the Rosebery collections and the Bute collection of plays, and above all the Crawford collection deriving from the Biblioteca Lindesiana. This book of essays is not built for light reading and its illustrations tend to be spasmodic, but for bibliophiles and for all who take a pride in one of Edinburgh's leading resources it is an essential and rewarding volume. *BASIL SKINNER*

Andrew G. Fraser, **The Building of Old College: Adam, Playfair and the University of Edinburgh.** *Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989, pp. xv + 384, illus. Cased £45.00, 0-7486-0121-X; paperback £25.00, 0-7486-0124-4.*

Dr Fraser's book *The Building of Old College* gives us an immense and useful volume which not only fills an important gap in the history of the University of Edinburgh, but provides a commentary on significant events in the growth of the city of Edinburgh.

An introduction in the form of a prologue describes the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the new university, traditionally referred to as Old College, in 1789. The scene is set in a meticulous way. He gives a careful analysis of the existing eighteenth-century and earlier buildings by referring to the well known view of the ceremony drawn by David Allan, and methodically unravelling the building history and use of the various buildings. A résumé of the history of the relationship between Town and College gives us an insight into the political and business life of the time, with the role of the Freemasons in the ceremony singled out for particular attention. The conditions in which the professors, janitors and staff lived while all these building operations were undertaken are fascinatingly described.

Robert Adam and the building of the South Bridge scheme introduces the reader to the architect of the new university. We are told that the plan for the South Bridge provided by Robert Adam was seen by the Town Council as too ambitious and ornate for the class and financial background of the citizens who were likely to be involved in acquiring the properties. The brilliant and wily Lord Provost, Sir James Hunter Blair, balanced perfectly his duties between his position as Lord Provost, his banking affairs and his work as an MP, to draw together his skills in thwarting Adam's desire for grand architecture, by recommending that usefulness and profitability should

be the objective. His *Proposals* appealed to the Town Council, as they could be achieved without direct financial input from the Town. This must have been very frustrating to Robert Adam, one step behind as he tried to take over the South Bridge scheme and by so doing gain the commission to build the new university. If he had succeeded the new South Bridge would have been complementary to the new North Bridge and his Register House, completed just before his death in 1792. Although Adam must have been acutely disappointed at the lack of respect for his scheme, he was well paid for his work, and his ambition to design the new university was finally achieved.

The core of the book concentrates on the two principal phases of activity in 1789-1804 and 1810-1840. The full background to these years is given. The political and social intrigues of the University and the Town weave in and out of the history of the building activities and the financial frustrations as the source of money to complete Adam's splendid design dried up. The invitation in 1810 to Robert Reid to complete the design was finally defeated by the time it took for public finance to come through. The story of the competition in 1815 is well told, and William Playfair's winning entry produced the University building we know today. The only substantial addition was the large dome designed by Sir Rowand Anderson and completed in 1887.

The book is impeccably researched and there are excellent illustrations that are well selected and produced. A large number of plans and elevations help to make the many schemes intelligible to the layman. It is packed with information from many sources, from drawings, estimates, letters and memoranda; everything the historian of Edinburgh needs to know has been drawn together, giving the reader the opportunity to appreciate fully the complexities of the building activities. Lively and informative notes make interesting reading on their own account.

Dr Fraser laid the foundations for some further study. He has not attempted to discuss the genealogy of the particular forms of the various designs or assess the aesthetic value of the buildings in terms of architectural history. It would be interesting to know how Freemasonry affected architectural design in practice. But these are wider issues to be looked at in a broader context.

The publication of this book is very welcome on the occasion of the bicentenary of the building of Old College; our thanks go to the author for a book that

deserves to be read widely, and to Edinburgh University Press for the high standard of production.

KITTY CRUFT

Dennis B. White, **Exploring Old Duddingston and Portobello**. *Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1990, pp. 224, illus. £12.95, 85158-299-1.*

The classic account of this part of Edinburgh has always been William Baird's *Annals of Portobello and Duddingston*, published in 1900. It is a large book enshrining a detailed history of the two areas and much that is historical gossip. Dennis White's slimmer volume, on the other hand, is a first-class exercise in the application of up-to-date research to the production of local history.

The definition and criticism of local history has changed formidably in the last generation. The parish pump and its stories have been tossed aside, and instead we have learned the merits of historical analysis based on original material, and the compilation from such sources of a fully documented history.

Dennis White has made full use of the available records. His search naturally has drawn extensively on the Scottish Record Office and the National Library of Scotland, but he has also 'discovered' and applied the material from the Abercorn Papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland – where the Hamilton of Abercorn papers have ended up.

With these sources to help him, Mr White gives us a whole series of cameos that, taken together, illustrate the story of change in Duddingston and Portobello from agricultural land to a fully developed urban community. He analyses, for example, the buildings of 1752, drawing on the records to show the number of houses, their sizes and the identities of their owners or tenants. He goes on to look at the developing road system and quotes in passing an eighteenth-century survey of the uses to which one country road was put; these include 'to go to sea-bathe', 'to get to church', 'to seek birds' nests', 'to get salt water' and so forth.

Among the most valuable sections of this interesting book is that on field studies. Here we have evidence of field-names and how they changed, and Mr White's maps and air-photographs enable us to relate in some measure the vanished fields to present day areas of housing. From 1762 the Trustees of the Great Post Road are operative and their minutes throw further light on their management of various spur roads in the parish.

Duddingston and Portobello were changing rapidly in the late eighteenth century and industries began to flourish. We do not have from Mr White as much about the potteries as we learn from Baird, but he deals thoroughly with the coal works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His main interest has always been the operation of Duddingston Mills and the litigation that resulted, and his concluding chapter deals with these and their problems of water supply.

Mr White's studies do not add up to a complete and comprehensive story of Duddingston Parish, but instead he gives us deep insight into different aspects of the parish history at different specific periods and this is valuable both in the local and a wider context.
BASIL SKINNER

T. N. Clarke, A. D. Morrison-Low, and A. D. C. Simpson, **Brass & Glass: Scientific Instrument Making Workshops in Scotland**. *Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 1989, pp. xiv + 320, illus. £25.00 from Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF (post free) 0-948636-06-8.*

The Frank Collection of Scottish Scientific Instruments in the National Museums of Scotland was acquired from Mr Arthur Frank in 1980. It is one of two important groups of instruments from this source in the Museums' collections, and this 300-page monograph completes publication of the entire holding, with illustrations and descriptions of some 174 instruments, mostly of the nineteenth century and with a Scottish connection.

While the catalogue entries comprise the lesser part of the text, every item is illustrated, there is an accurate transcription of the signature, and dimensions are clearly stated. These entries reflect the types of instrument of importance to the Scottish economy in the nineteenth century, navigational instruments being particularly well represented, together with barometers, microscopes, sundials, etc. Most of these are of the 'using' variety, and are typical of the stock-in-trade of the average retailer of the period, who quite clearly was not always the maker.

One of the great strengths of the text is its use of company and other records, but its most notable innovation is the use which has been made of the proceedings of bankruptcy cases. As a result *Brass & Glass* provides an insight into the structure, business dealings and economics of a sector of the instrument trade which has not previously been available;

showing for example that a business such as that of White in Glasgow – best known for its production of instruments to the designs of Lord Kelvin – was also trading extensively with companies in London. The characteristic interlocking nature of the trade is clearly set out in the 14-page introductory essay to the section devoted to the instruments sold by this business.

Similarly comprehensive introductions, which delineate the development of the companies represented by instruments in the collection, occupy a substantial proportion of the text. A particularly welcome one, amounting to a monograph in its own right, is devoted to the Adie business in Edinburgh. This for the first time fully sets out the relationships of the members of the family and the development of the companies' activities. Starting with John Miller senior in the mid-eighteenth century and terminating with Richardson, Adie & Co. in 1943, it is now possible to assess the role of this dynasty of makers. More than any other business described in the book their work underlines the need to view Edinburgh as something much more than a provincial instrument-making centre. Here is described Miller working in support of Robison at the University, developing special-purpose levels for use in road construction and establishing himself as the leading Edinburgh maker; then as Miller and Adie producing portable hydrometers, mountain barometers, air pumps and the like.

We have the young Alexander Adie working with Leslie on the development of thermometric instruments, making prototypes for Brewster and, of course, developing his sympiesometer. This was a business which could not only make a copy of a London-made chemical balance, and the Italian Amici's reflecting microscope, but could also anticipate the latter's introduction of the polarising microscope. In 1835 the business became Adie and Son, and the relationships of Alexander and his sons John, Richard and Patrick are set out in one of the full-page business-development tables which are an important part of *Brass & Glass*.

Other sections provide a representative survey of virtually all aspects of the nineteenth-century Scottish trade in instruments, though of course not every maker is represented. Overall this is one of the most important catalogues of scientific instruments to have been published in recent years, for it gets to grips with the nature of the instrument trade in a manner which has not previously been attempted in Britain. It is well illustrated and comprehensively referenced by authors

who know their sources, and there is a good index. Most important of all it contains a vast array of newly established facts derived from primary sources.

ROBERT NUTTALL, *Strathclyde Science and Technology Forum*

Norma Armstrong and Alan White (eds), **Lum Hats in Paradise: Edinburgh City Libraries, 1890-1990.** *Edinburgh: Edinburgh City Libraries, 1990, pp. 56, illus. Paperback £4.95, 0-9000353-11-2.*

There are few things that would persuade a newly wedded couple to take on an official engagement during their honeymoon but Andrew Carnegie did just that when he came to lay the foundation stone of Edinburgh's Central Library on George IV Bridge on 9 July 1887.

This historic occasion is the first illustration in *Lum Hats in Paradise*, a pictorial record of the public library service in Edinburgh over the last 100 years. Carnegie's donation of £50,000 was crucial to the establishment of Edinburgh's public library service for, up until then, the city had only subscription libraries which were, for the most part, beyond the means of poorer citizens. In fact, as the editors point out, the Town Council had twice rejected proposals for a 'Free Library' and Edinburgh was the last Scottish city to adopt the Public Libraries Act!

The illustrations in *Lum Hats in Paradise*, all captioned with descriptive notes, cover former staff, buildings, the introduction of specialist services and computerisation. Noteworthy amongst these is a delightful shot of Leith Library with palm court embellishments in 1932, a photograph of Charles S. Minto who was the first City Librarian to have followed his entire career within the Library service, and a very charming snapshot of Daisy Carnegie whom many will remember as the library cat on the payroll in the 1950s! The editors, both senior members of staff at the Central Library, have also included a useful chronology of events.

The title comes from a combination of an enquiry about a poem, 'A New Lum Hat', and a comment from a visitor who stated that working in the library

must be 'like working in Paradise'. I couldn't agree more. SHEILA DEVLIN-THORP

Elizabeth Berry, **The Writing on the Walls.** *Edinburgh: Cockburn Association, 1990, pp. 103, illus. Paperback £5.95, 0-9505159-2-2.*

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor ... echoes of the old rhyme come to mind as one turns the pages of this intriguing study of Edinburgh's commemorative plaques. A fascinating procession of the famous and not-so-famous pass under review. Archbishops share the pages with the master plumber; musicians and inventors rub shoulders with the tobacco merchant and the architect. It is, perhaps, no surprise to note that authors predominate as a group, followed by artists, and that relatively few women have been so honoured.

Who has, and who has not, a plaque to their name is, apparently, quite arbitrary, as is the reason for the memorial – whether it marks the place of birth or death, residence or workplace or, indeed, any other connection with a building. In each instance the book gives the inscription, its location, and a short biography of the individual; often a portrait is added.

Edinburgh's plaques also embrace places and events together with the people associated with them. Those found in the Royal Mile are listed separately, as are those relating to various institutions. A final section suggests some well kent names worthy of recognition but as yet unrewarded, and empty pages are included for personal additions.

At first sight these blanks appear to be necessary as various memorials would seem to have been missed (e.g. those around the entrance to the Medical School in Teviot Place). However, the decision was taken to detail only plaques generally accessible to the public and to exclude those inside buildings and those of a purely obituary nature. Perhaps a study of these should come in the next edition?

In the meantime *The Writing on the Walls* is a welcome addition to the bookshelf. It would make an excellent gift, whether to someone already knowledgeable about the city or to someone less familiar with our past. UNA A. ROBERTSON