



JAMES

VI *and* I

COLLECTED
ESSAYS BY
JENNY
WORMALD



EDITED BY
MILES
KERR-PETERSON

FOREWORD BY
DIARMAID
MACCULLOCH



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Foreword

Jenny Wormald (1942-2015) embodied the forthright spirit of that No Mean City in which she was born and raised. Glasgow schooled her right through to post-graduate level and the first part of her academic career; it was at the University of Glasgow that she undertook her doctorate, and there indeed she met her two successive husbands. Her life's work of writing and teaching generously displayed those qualities on which Glaswegians are apt to congratulate themselves. What still remained the second city of Empire in her childhood prided itself on its cosmopolitan outlook: Jenny's remoulding of Scottish history revelled in demonstrating Scotland's place and significance in a wider world. Perhaps her brisk intolerance of lazy thinking and genteel evasion could have been fostered elsewhere, but the Clyde afforded a wide thoroughfare for that formation.

In a city whose modern history has been structured around religious polarisation, Jenny committed herself while a university student to Roman Catholicism. Her Catholicism did not include especial esteem for many members of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, past or present, and her fury was particularly engaged in her last years by the actions of the Scottish Catholic Church authorities regarding the future care of Catholic archives. She became prominent in the campaign waged by

historians against what was happening, all the more formidably for her inside knowledge of how Scottish Catholicism functioned. My email exchanges with her from that time sparkle with her strictures on eminent churchmen, worthy of comparison with the finest flytings of the Scottish Renaissance; prudence suggests that they should still best be left unquoted. At the nadir of that sorry affair, she told me that she even contemplated a return to the Church of Scotland, but ultimately thought better of it.

Such unclericalist faith made for an admirable and entertainingly astringent balance in Jenny's construction of Scotland's past: John Knox suffered the lash of her tongue as much as defenders of the old religion. She enjoyed pointing out that this monumentalised hero of the Scottish Reformation 'had in his earlier career been remarkably indifferent to the Scottish earth, preferring the English' while busily building a promising ecclesiastical future in England during the reign of Edward VI. This was the beginning of a clear-eyed reassessment of that obsessively self-fashioning cleric that continues to inspire later historical generations.¹ In her first book, Jenny paid tribute to her adoptive parents for their encouragement 'to realise that Protestants and Catholics should never be judged as "right" or "wrong"'.² There are Catholic historians, whose writings shout 'Catholic' at the reader line by line, and there are historians who are Catholics. Jenny placed herself emphatically in the latter category. She ignored narrative shibboleths that had sustained Scottish Catholics in nursing their wounds from a beleaguered past, but, equally, she energetically hacked away at rival versions of the national story designed to massage different egos.

Scottish identity has thus been inescapably moulded by its contentious religious history; as late as the twentieth

century, the tribal religious allegiance of historians has often determined the way in which that history has been told. Across the chasm of the Reformation, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian or Scottish Episcopal searchlights shone their different beams on the medieval Scottish Church, and likewise lit up the contours of what happened after the Reformation with radically contrasting versions of chiaroscuro. Regardless of these partialities, the course of events was so very unlike Reformation in the kingdom beyond Scotland's southern border, particularly in the Scots' lack of deference to the wishes of their successive reigning monarchs. The Scottish Reformation has disconcerted the English, let alone the continuing separate existence of a nation that not only provided them with a ruling dynasty in 1603, but which also preserved its distinctive self-consciousness when the two national Protestant elites struck a deal in 1707. This inconsiderately individual past was best relegated to a few side-glances, alongside the big news of England's rise to greatness and to what it liked to see as its starring role in the resulting United Kingdom.

The enormous condescension of Westminster or Oxbridge posterity has not been without its Scottish allies from Walter Scott onwards when framing an historical narrative for the northern realm. Intent on engaging the interest of visitors spending their time and holiday cash in Scotland, many writers did not resist the temptation of emphasising the picturesque (which characteristically meant the violent and apparently lawless) in Scotland's past. The net effect was to suggest a Wrong but Wromantic polity which as far back as the Angevin era had just been waiting for the instruction in good government provided by neighbouring

England in order to find Scotland's road to Victorian productivity and prosperity.

From the outset, Jenny's work challenged this cosy nexus of assumptions about Scottish history: her Glasgow doctorate focused on the nobility, who were generally the anti-heroes of traditional narratives, but looked at them in a new light. This was possible through her rigorous and systematic reconsideration of a category of primary manuscript source scattered but relatively abundant by Scottish archival standards, the 'bonds of manrent': agreements on service between greater and lesser members of the landed elite during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Insofar as previous historians had considered these bonds, they had generally done so through a conceptual framework of 'feudalism', with the implication that neighbouring England had done a better job of escaping such incitements to seigneurial lawlessness because of its precociously crafted system of royal justice centred on Westminster. By contrast, Jenny argued that the flexible relationships created by bonds of manrent were an effective way of managing a society based on clan and kin; moreover, the more effective monarchs of Scotland were those who exercised their rule with due consideration of this reality. Scottish medieval government had worked, in its own terms – despite the debilitating effects of a state of war provoked by England in the late thirteenth century, in formal terms ending only a quarter-millennium later. In fact, it might be argued that Scottish government in its diversity worked better than the English system, particularly during the fifteenth century, when England for a considerable period seemed to be degenerating into a failed state.

The demands of family and early-career teaching delayed the implications of this major reassessment reaching a wider audience: but the 1980s witnessed a dazzling succession of Jenny's publications. It also saw her move universities from Glasgow to Oxford, which was both a lions' den of Anglocentric historiography and home to many friends delighted to welcome such a stimulating colleague. Later she would be rejoined in Oxford by her second husband Patrick, another brilliant historian and teacher, who equally stylishly remoulded his chosen field, Anglo-Saxon England. First in 1980 came a *Past and Present* article that set out the implications of Jenny's doctorate, 'Bloodfeud, Kindred and Government in Early Modern Scotland'.³ The following year, the *New History of Scotland* series offered Jenny the luxury of presenting her decade's worth of reflection on these conclusions in a fresh and comprehensive portrait of Scotland during a long sixteenth century, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470-1625*. Now Jenny's exhilaratingly athletic prose and wit were unleashed for the entertainment and instruction of a public way beyond higher education. Her brief for the book from the editors meant that she could now present her considered views on the sequence of Stewart monarchs who coped in their own fashions not merely with the complexity of their realm, but with the European-wide Reformation from the 1520s. This would lead to Jenny's classic biography of the unavoidable *Mary Queen of Scots*.⁴

To describe *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure* as revisionist would be inadequate. The royal star of courtly France, Kirk o' Field, Lochleven and Fotheringhay had been afforded a longer and more incident-filled career than England's King Richard III to enable detractors or partisans to digest her into villainess or tragic heroine.

Jenny made Mary considerably more interesting than either of these extremes, and more also than the subject of a judicious sixth-form essay with its 'on the one hand . . . on the other hand'. In Wormald's stark judgement, notwithstanding due human sympathy for the dilemmas, muddle and good intentions of a female Renaissance monarch, her Mary exhibited the sorry spectacle of 'a queen regnant reluctant to rule'.⁵ Around the queen prowled a variety of men who were only too pleased to have a go at ruling, and despite Mary's considerable talent for fascinating males, she had no idea how to stop them. Hence her throwing away all the advantages of her position, which might have aided the large number of her subjects opposed to the imposition of Protestantism in stopping the Scottish Reformation in its tracks.

Jenny experienced the intimacy of biographer and subject to the unusual extent of claiming that the spectral monarch, affronted at the unvarnished portrait in the biography, on one occasion made a lively attempt to push her downstairs. In the wake of that (characteristically unsuccessful) initiative, and after Jenny's prolonged historical exchanges with colleagues and an engaged public, the subtitle of her revised biography from 2001 is significantly broader than the original. Yet *Politics, Passion and a Kingdom Lost* still sounds the tocsin of defeat, echoed sonorously in the last thoughts of the text: Mary 'should have her new beginning as a model for those historical figures whose allotted role was beyond their own attainment. That is tragedy enough.'⁶

Queen Mary's best gift to her kingdom was her infant son James, who in the course of time outwitted uncongenial male attempts to educate or manipulate him and became one of the most successful and creative monarchs in

Scotland's history – with little doubt, the Scottish king with the largest quotient of brains down the centuries. His reputation in the second realm that became his home from 1603 has never been as high as in his first. That paradox fascinated Jenny, and led in 1983 to one of her most influential and closely argued short-length studies, 'James VI and I: Two Kings or One?': the product of at least six years of thought and revision.⁷ Appropriately, the first version had been presented in a seminar at Queen's University Belfast; for James died in 1625 a king three times over, Ireland being his third realm (we may lay aside the English delusion that its monarchs also ruled France, sustained till 1801).

Jenny's theme in reassessing King James was the problem of government familiar in many parts of Europe in the early modern period: the management of multiple kingdoms by a single individual monarch. James planned great things for the whole continent, for a peaceful international future, and for the reconciliation of its warring Christianities. Although his grand scheme never materialised any more than most grand schemes, there were intellectual and cultural fruits aplenty from those whom he encouraged or inspired in the European republic of letters. Left in the hands of his son, a true grandson of Mary Queen of Scots, triple monarchy in the Atlantic Isles disintegrated into what in 1977 English historians still habitually called 'the Civil War and Interregnum'. In this post-Wormald age, we view that archipelago-wide crisis with greater accuracy and conceptual fertility as 'the Wars of the Three Kingdoms'.

It was one of our many losses by Jenny's too-early death in her Edinburgh retirement that she never wrote the full-length life of James VI and I that could have been a keystone of all she achieved. There is a substantial glimpse

of what it would have been like in her extended article of 2004 on the king for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (chapter 1 in this volume), together with the other contents of this volume, which amount to a transformed understanding of a pivotal moment in early modern history throughout these islands. Thanks not simply to her own writing, but to the creative fresh thoughts of her students and admirers in the next generation, Scottish history has exited the kailyard and taken its place at the heart of Europe. Personal memories of her will gradually fade: her zest for friendship and festivity, her warm encouragement of young historians, and her passion and clarity as a speaker in every register from comedy to personal tragedy. There will remain the dynamic of her research and thought, setting a course for understanding medieval and early modern Scotland that is her especial gift to British and indeed international history.

Diarmaid MacCulloch

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NOTES

- 1 J. Wormald, 'Godly Reformer, Godless Monarch: John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots', in R. A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 220–41, at p. 226. For the magisterial presentation of a 'new' John Knox that appeared in the year of Jenny's death, see J. Dawson, *John Knox* (Newhaven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).
- 2 J. Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470–1625* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p. viii (I have corrected an obvious typo).
- 3 J. Wormald, 'Bloodfeud, Kindred and Government in Early Modern Scotland', *Past and Present* 87 (1980), 54–97.
- 4 J. Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure* (London: George Philip, 1987), revised as *Mary Queen of Scots: Politics, Passion and a Kingdom Lost* (London: Tauris, 2001).

5 Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: Politics, Passion and a Kingdom Lost*, p. 107.

6 Ibid., p. 192.

7 J. Wormald, 'James VI and I: Two Kings or One?', *History* 68 (1983), 187-209; and see below, pp. 75-103.

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In Miles Kerr-Peterson and Steven J Reid (eds), *James VI and Noble Power in Scotland, 1578–1603* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 194–206.

Abbreviations

ARCHIVES

BL British Library

NAS National Archives of Scotland. Now NRS, National Records of Scotland

NLS National Library of Scotland

PRO Public Record Office (now the National Archives)

TNA The National Archives

PRIMARY SOURCES

APS *The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, 12 vols, ed. T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814-75)

BUK *The Booke of the Universall Kirk: Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, 1560-1618*, 4 vols, ed. T. Thomson (Maitland Club, 1839-45)

Calderwood, *History* David Calderwood, *The True History of the Church of Scotland*, 8 vols (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842-9)

CBP *Calendar of Letters and Papers relating to the affairs of the Borders of England and Scotland*, 2 vols, ed. J. Bain (Edinburgh, 1894-96)

CSP Ireland *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland*, 24 vols (London: 1860-1911)

CSP Scot *Calendar of State Papers, Scotland*, 13 vols, ed. J. Bain et al. (Edinburgh, 1898-1969)

CSP Spain *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain Preserved in the Archives of Simancas and elsewhere*, ed. G. A. Bergenroth (London, 1862-1934)

CSP Venetian *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, 8 vols, ed. R. Brown (London, 1864-1947)

HMC Historical Manuscripts Commission



A late seventeenth-century imagining of the Gowrie Conspiracy of 5 August 1600 by Dutch illustrator Jan Luyken. James's page, John Ramsay, stabs John Ruthven, Earl of Gowrie, stepping over the mortally wounded Alexander Ruthven, the earl's brother.

(From F Maclean, *Highlanders: A History of the Highland Clans*, London 1995. Public domain)





James VI and I (1566-1625) circa 1618, by Paul van Somer. Perhaps exemplifying James's ambition to be *Rex Pacificus*, his armour is discarded to one side; he favours the ceremonial symbols of power.

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