

## REVIEW:

**Alexander Lindsay, a Rutter of the Scottish Seas. An Abridged version of a Manuscript by the late Dr. A.B. Taylor, edited by I.H. Adams and George Fortune. National Maritime Museum, Maritime Monographs and Reports, No. 44, 1980, 64pp. illus. No price quoted.**

When King James V of Scotland embarked on his expedition to the Western Isles in 1540, he was engaging in a military and political exercise without precedent for several hundred years. With sixteen ships, including the French-built 'Salamander' given to him by the King of France, James was finally attempting to impose centralised government on his troublesome subjects in the Isles, such as Donald Gorm of Sleat who met his death in 1539, the year previous to the expedition. With 3,000 men or more, such a fleet required the best equipment and sailing aids available at the time.

Alexander Lindsay's rutter or set of sailing directions is unique for many reasons. It is the only rutter of its kind which covers the whole coast of Scotland, and contains over 200 items of information and advice about tidal streams, times of high water, havens, soundings, and so on. The rutter was originally written in Scots; although the original version has not survived, three English versions, and three French versions of a translation by Nicolas de Nicolay, cosmographer to the French King are in existence. The only version at present in Scotland is in the Balfour Collection in the National Library of Scotland, and this 'Balfour text' was the one selected for this study.

Lindsay is described by de Nicolay as 'an excellent pilot and Hydrographer', mentioning that Lindsay acted as pilot to James V when he undertook his expedition in 1540. It seems likely, then, that the rutter would have been used during this particular voyage. It may, indeed, have been drawn up with the expedition expressly in mind.

The late Dr. A.B. Taylor was, of course, passionately devoted to early maps of Scotland, and his studies on place-names, such as those of St. Kilda and Cape Wrath are particularly well-known. As secretary of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies (1968-70) in its formative

years, he had a considerable influence on the development of the Society. This monograph on Lindsay's rutter is typical of his careful and measured scholarship.

The monograph itself, attractively edited by Dr. Ian Adams of the Department of Geography in Edinburgh University, and Dr. Taylor's friend and collaborator, Mr. George Fortune, is typical of the series which the National Maritime Museum has been producing since 1970. It has a number of excellent illustrations, including a reproduction of a page of the original Balfour Manuscript, various maps and charts of the sixteenth century, and a few evocative photographs of important features of the Scottish coast mentioned in the text of the rutter, such as the superb whirlpool of Corryvreckan, and the spectacular Point of Stoer in Assynt. Short chapters are devoted to James V's expedition, contemporary ships, instruments for coastal navigation, and a note on the tradition of compiling rutters.

The contents of the rutter itself run to only nine pages, yet the text abounds with fascinating references to features of the coasts of Scotland. The Caithness coast is given some extra prominence – 'in the middes of Pethland Fyrth betuixt Dungisbe and Orknay there is a great daunger causit be nepe tydis whiche is called the Boir. To avoid the daunger ye sall mak your cours from Dungisbe northwest till you come north to est from Stroma', and the risk of passing through Corryvreckan are such that 'if schippis do enter thair is no refuge but death onlie'.

This is a most attractive publication, dealing as it does with an aspect of the history of Scotland which has up till now been largely unknown to the layman. The editors have done justice to Dr. Taylor's painstaking work of many years, and are to be congratulated for producing this monograph. It is warmly recommended. No serious student of Scottish maritime history should fail to read it.

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