

Many of the remaining articles consider the effect of analogy on the form of place-names and are of particular interest to place-name scholars but readers from other academic disciplines would also find translation rewarding. There are summaries at the end of each article in either English or, less frequently, German, to assist the reader. The volume, and the series of which it is a part, is to be warmly recommended.

Doreen Waugh

***A Salmon for the Schoolhouse – A Nairnshire Parish in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by John Love and Brenda McMullen, Canongate Press (Edinburgh, 1994), 151 pp., 13 b/w plates, £8.99 pbk.**

This book is No. 3 in *Sources of Local History*, a series of studies sponsored by the *European Ethnological Research Centre* and is the edited nineteenth-century diaries of Robert and Elsie Thomson.

Robert seems to have kept a diary from his early days, but Elsie only started hers in 1882 and this complements her husband's account of school, kirk and family life in the rural hinterland of Nairn. Ardclach parish was certainly rural, but it was no backwater, and was neither isolated from nor ignorant of happenings in the wider world.

Some years before Robert Thomson was appointed as dominie at Ardclach, the clear pure voice of Jenny Lind, the Swedish nightingale, had been heard in the little kirk, accompanying the precentor as he led the congregation in their Sabbath praise. There were visitors from Canada and Australia and the local newspapers then carried national and international news.

Robert came from Aberdeen and taught at Cawdor before being appointed to the state or public school at Ardclach in 1874. Rural depopulation, as evident then as now, led to the closure of Ardclach and Robert and Elsie moved 1km across the Findhorn to Ferness. There they remained until 1900. Elsie died in 1901 and Robert in 1923. Robert was predeceased by his son, a distinguished doctor, who died in 1915. Father, mother and son all lie together in Uddingston, far from the Findhorn they all knew and loved.

Robert was a keen and competent naturalist and was the author of *The Natural History of a Highland Parish*, a book still used as a reference. His diary is filled with descriptions of animals, insects and flowers, but Elsie's entries are perhaps more interesting, as she was a shrewd observer of humanity, but was not judgemental in her comments.

Elsie notes how on 20 May 1890 at 10 p.m. a rough-looking stranger came to the door looking for accommodation. After some hesitation 'we gave him our best bedroom'. The stranger tells how he gifted eight sovereigns to the poor of the Free Kirk but was refused shelter. He then gave the established minister a like sum but was again refused accommodation. Over supper the stranger revealed that he was a graduate of King's College, Aberdeen and now a successful Australian bushman. He left a couple of gold sovereigns to give the local bairns a treat. Elsie merely comments 'I was glad that I gave the poor man a bed.'

In addition to the diaries of Robert and Elsie the editors have added an *Essay on the County of Nairn*, submitted by Robert to the Fine Arts and Industrial Exhibition at Nairn in 1884 where it was 'Highly Commended'. The style and content are that of the *New Statistical Account* and is a valuable update on the publication of fifty years earlier.

Also included is the *Arctic Lecture* by Robert Thomson, junior; delivered to the Nairn Literary Institute on 13 October 1886, being an account of Robert's voyage as a ship's surgeon to the Greenland whale fishing on the *Resolute* of Dundee. The *Resolute* was a technologically

advanced ship with a compound engine and a feathering propeller. Although strongly built to withstand great pressure she was eventually gripped by the ice and, in Robert's vivid words 'grasped as in the throat of a mighty shears'. Fortunately, both the *Resolute* and Robert survived so that over one hundred years later we can read of the slaughter of white whales and, in the next line or so, of the multitude of uses to which an eskimo woman puts her sealskin hood.

The book is a treasure house of information, with all three contributors; husband, wife and son, presenting wonderful word pictures of the triumphs and tragedies of life in a nineteenth-century parish and, contrastingly, the grander vistas of the cold and cruel Arctic.

It is interesting to see from the Introduction that nineteenth-century lairds vied with each other to establish schools. Would that such a spirit of enlightened competition existed today. It is a drawback though that the maps do not adequately complement the introduction. Reference is made to the school at Knockandhu and it is shown in the illustrations (although the spelling is wrong) but its location is not on any of the maps. The Index too is not very comprehensive. For example, Australia, Canada and Calcutta are all mentioned in the text, but are un-indexed. The loss of the *Quetta* is indexed as page 54: it should be 65.

Despite such minor defects, the book is a good example of a local history study which deserves a much wider readership than that of Ardclach or Nairn. I commend it to all students of local history and also to the general reader.

Ian Keillar