

Sveinbjarnardottir. Like Svalbard, the site is documented in Icelandic records and the initial aim of the excavation was to locate the extent and nature of archaeological remains at the site. A palaeoenvironmental sampling programme was undertaken at the site of the post-medieval farm allowing the identification of 'activity areas' within the building and giving an indication of the farm's immediate local environment.

A series of rescue excavations at Bressastadir, the official residence of the Icelandic President, provided valuable environmental evidence for trade patterns which are discussed in 'Site, Status and the Palaeoecological Record'. Of particular note was the great number of grain beetles found, indicative of regular importation and perhaps strong trading links with the Scandinavian core and the European continent.

Finally, Greenland. Thomas McGovern in 'Bones, Building and Boundaries' gives a masterly and very readable account of the growing debate over the nature of Norse Greenlandic society during the Middle Ages and its development from chiefly Viking period prototypes. His discussion of the evidence for subsistence economy is wide-ranging and deals with zooarchaeological evidence, archaeofauna, architectural evidence and the phenomenon of the 'cash hunt'. Concluding that, while Greenlandic subsistence economy was clearly related to Iceland and the rest of Scandinavia in several respects, it was radically different in others, for the basic unit of survival was not the independent farmstead but the interdependent local community headed by one or more of the large farms.

Although this volume makes no pretence to give a comprehensive coverage of settlement and subsistence in the North Atlantic region it has, nonetheless, done much to draw together many interrelated strands of Norse and post-Norse activity. The traditional concepts of 'marginality' and 'peripheral location' are, in many cases challenged and redefined. The book will prove valuable, not only to those primarily concerned with economy and environment, but to all those interested in Viking, Norse and Medieval archaeology.

Anne Johnston

John Gifford (ed.), *The Buildings of Scotland: Highlands and Islands* (Penguin Books, 1992). 683 pp., 125 halftone illustrations, £30.00.

The fifth volume in the *Buildings of Scotland* series, John Gifford's *Highlands and Islands* is a tired successor of a style and tradition established over thirty years ago by Nikolaus Pevsner. As a single volume it is a monumental accomplishment, but it is work which is inherently flawed in concept, content and presentation. Having said this, it is not without its value, but the positive gains of such a volume must be weighed along side its negative features and judged accordingly.

It is a bold editor who chooses to approach the study of the buildings and architecture of an area equivalent to a little over one third of the geographical landmass of Scotland in a single volume, let alone expand his scope to encompass both the Northern and the Western Isles. One could argue, as Gifford does, that the volume neatly covers the administrative divisions of northern and western Scotland. After all, the administrative framework was the guideline set down by Pevsner in the 1950s. But here we are faced with a situation created by the straitjacket of editorial convention. The chief problem is that use of the Highland Regional Council area, plus the three Islands Councils, creates a territory that contains internal variations in geomorphology, geology, social structure, culture, economics, politics and history, such as are

encountered in no other district of Britain. It would not be so bad if Gifford gave proper credence to that fact, but his alphabetical treatment of the component districts, plus the similar treatment of locations within these districts, creates an image of bland sameness that nothing in the foreword serves to counter. This is, perhaps, best illustrated by the placing of Orkney between Nairn and Ross and Cromarty Districts. Surely one of the greatest characteristics of the vast swathe of Scotland north and west of the Mounth is its incredible internal diversity. Orkney and Ross and Cromarty are worlds apart in character and history, but in this volume all is blended into a pallid whole.

Much of the above criticism could have been deflected had the volume contained a satisfactory foreword and introduction. Here, too, we are to be disappointed. The foreword is little more than a series of personal acknowledgements culminating in a single paragraph which attempts to set out the editorial framework of the volume. From this one important point arises: there has been considerable selectivity in material for inclusion. The selectivity has been directed particularly at archaeological sites and monuments, for, as the author states, 'the huge quantity of these in the area would have transformed the volume from a Buildings of . . . to an Archaeology of . . .'. As a result, we are presented with a selection of the better-known archaeological sites and monuments, such as, for example, the stone circles of Callanish or Stenness and the chambered cairns of Camster and Maes Howe, but not the extensive settlement systems at Aultnamain in Easter Ross. The criterion for inclusion is certainly not accessibility: the chambered cairn on Vementry (the only one of several prominent Prehistoric features on the island included in the volume) is one of the least publicly-accessible sites of its type. Selectivity of any sort, however, is going to attract criticism for one reason or another. Thus, where there was such a vast range of archaeological material available for consideration, surely it would have been better to draw a line at some chronological divide and sidestep the issue rather than produce a list for inclusion which appears to be based on subjective values. The results of such subjectivity are particularly telling in the Medieval period, for the earthwork fortifications of the Middle Ages, key symbols of the penetration of the Highlands by the agents of Scottish kings based in the alien world of the lowland plain, receive only cursory treatment. The important ring-work at Auldearn, for example, is dismissed in half a sentence in the description of Boath Doocot, while the larger and more prominent site at Cantraydoune in Strathnairn is omitted altogether.

The general arrangement of the introduction reads oddly. After a (?too) brief description of Topography and Building Materials, we are presented with a comprehensive eight-and-a-half-page essay on the Prehistoric, Pictish and Viking Highlands. From this we launch straight into Medieval Churches followed by Post-Reformation Churches, the latter clearly the author's own special area of interest, then onto Mausolea and Monuments. The intention is presumably to preserve a religious theme and to separate the ecclesiastical from the secular materials which follow. In the next section we jump back to Castles, Tower Houses and Palaces, and so on through Country Houses down to Industrial Monuments. Individually, each section comprises a good stand-alone essay, but placed together they fail to achieve any kind of soundly-structured flow. Certainly, as an introduction, the component sections give an outline of the building history of the region, but they give no real idea of how that building history came about. Without an historical narrative to set the whole into context, the essays become practically meaningless exercises.

The main substance of the text is generally good, with mostly concise descriptions of the subject. On occasion, the entries go into elaborate detail which the surviving remains perhaps do not warrant – the fort at Fort William being a case in point – or understate to a remarkable degree, but this is a minor problem. The chief criticism, however, must lie with the technical

layout of the gazetteer, particularly as regards provision of illustrations and plans. In terms of quality there is no flaw in the photographs selected, but their being bunched together in the centre of the volume detracts from their value. In the present day and age with computer setting of texts and scanning-in of illustrations, there is no bar to placing photographs alongside the text to which they relate, and any architectural guide is seriously weakened when it is done otherwise. As regards building-plans, there are simply too few, and the use of block outlines with no differentiation shown between phases of building in the one structure detracts from their value and does not help clarify the text as they should. It is a pity, too, that incomplete plans have been used in some cases. At Fortrose, for example, the plan of the south aisle of the cathedral – misleadingly labelled as being the whole cathedral – fails to give any indication of the scale of the original structure and misses out the equally-substantial sacristy, the undercroft of which was part of the original thirteenth-century building-scheme.

In conclusion, it must be said that *Highlands and Islands* is a disappointing volume. Certainly, it is no match for either the RIAS *Illustrated Architectural Guide* series, or the new-style Royal Commission district surveys. Having set itself up in the past as a quickly-produced, non-academic and affordable alternative to the Commission's output, it must be said that the *Buildings of Scotland* series has failed to move with the times. Adherence to outdated editorial constraints has handicapped this series and it must be asked if further productions in this format are merited. For the series to continue to serve any useful purpose in a world awash with technically more competent and physically manageable alternatives, it is time for a radical rethink before the next volume hits the shelves.

Richard D. Oram

Elizabeth Beaton, *Ross and Cromarty. An Illustrated Architectural Guide* (Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, 1992). 112 pp. + c.250 photographs and drawings, £6.95.

Elizabeth Beaton's contribution to the RIAS series is a worthy successor to the excellent Fife and Orkney volumes which precede it. Compact and light-weight, but by no means shallow, it provides an invaluable introduction to the architectural heritage of a district which spans the north of Scotland. Her approach to the area, working in a circular pattern through the component sub-regions, preserves the flavour of the country in a way which other studies do not, highlighting rather than underplaying the contrasts between the fertile 'lowland' east and the rugged, 'highland' west.

The introduction is brief, following the style laid down by Charles McKean in the first volume of the series, and makes it clear that this is an architectural guide rather than an all-embracing historical/archaeological one, thus steering well clear of some of the pitfalls which have plagued other recent studies of this region. In general terms, 'architectural' seems to describe the structures of the historic period, but the outstanding examples of Early Christian sculpture from Ross are included. Otherwise there is no consideration of archaeological sites and monuments and only brief notice given to historic monuments with little or no physical remains. This may be criticised as selectivity, but surely it is better to establish a clear basis for inclusion rather than produce an imbalanced volume.

In terms of technical content the guide cannot be faulted. The juxtaposition of text and illustrations gives an immediacy lacking in other architectural guides, enabling it to be used truly as a handbook. The illustrations are small, but generally clear – the digital process of