

THE THIRD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND

Its Origin and Progress

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THE ORIGIN OF THE PROPOSAL

It was at a meeting in Glasgow on 29th November 1944 that Mr. James G. Kyd, c.B.E., then Registrar-General for Scotland, suggested the desirability of having a Third Statistical Account of Scotland. He made the suggestion in a lecture to the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow. He had been encouraged to make the suggestion by his friend Mr. George P. Laidlaw, o.B.E. (later Sir George Laidlaw). Mr. Laidlaw at that time was Chairman of a Department of Health for Scotland Committee on the Distribution of Housing in Scotland and a member of the Executive Committee of the Scottish Council of Social Service. The Scottish Council had been concerned for some time with the problems of community life in the smaller towns and in the rural areas of Scotland, and had published a short social survey of Hawick. Mr. Laidlaw brought Mr. Kyd's suggestion to the notice of the Scottish Council of Social Service and on 22nd December 1944 Mr. Kyd attended a meeting of the Council's Executive Committee of which Sir Hector Hetherington was Chairman. On the 2nd of February 1945 the Executive Committee decided to set up a Committee to examine and report on the suggestion that a Third Statistical Account of Scotland was desirable. The Committee was made up as follows:—

Mr. George P. Laidlaw, Chairman
Sir Hector Hetherington
Professor Alan G. Ogilvie
Mr. J. M. Erskine
Mr. A. J. Belford
Mr. R. F. Pollock
Mr. F. C. Mears
Mr. J. G. Kyd
Mr. James Cunnison

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Between 26th February 1945 and 2nd October 1945 the Statistical Account Committee met on four occasions. At the October meeting the draft of a Report prepared by the Secretary with the help of memoranda prepared by individual members of the Committee, including Professor Alan G. Ogilvie, Mr. James Cunnison, and Mr. J. G. Kyd, was submitted and generally approved.

The Executive Committee of the Scottish Council of Social Service received the Report on 9th November 1945 and approved of it. A Memorandum based on the Report, with a Foreword by Sir Hector Hetherington, was published in January 1946. It was circulated among the bodies likely to be interested.

THE MEMORANDUM OF JANUARY 1946

A summary of the main features of the Memorandum are of interest as showing what the first Statistical Account Committee had in mind.

After a note on the origin of the proposal and on the earlier Statistical Accounts the Memorandum states why a Third Statistical Account is desirable in these words:

“The present is a time of great social and economic changes. If these changes are to take place with the minimum of upheaval and disruption, there must be an understanding of the best way to make them serve the well-being of the communities they affect. The preparation of a Third Account of each local community in Scotland would strengthen the understanding of its growth; how its industries have developed; how it has built up its social life; and how its traditions have been handed on from generation to generation. Each Account would take stock of special assets and difficulties, and would enable comparisons to be made between the existing state and that of a hundred years ago, or between communities that are similar in some respects, and would include a summary of sources of information. This would be of great advantage to those concerned with local government, with local social services, and with town and country planning; and would help to show the relation of local to national problems and difficulties.

While the primary purpose of a Third Statistical Account would be social, it would also be a permanent record of

important aspects of Scottish life which would be of great value to the historian.”

The next section of the Memorandum dealt with Areas of Study. It pointed out that the area of study of the earlier Accounts had been the Parish. For the Third Statistical Account it was suggested that in general the area of study should be the Parish. This would be modified in the case of cities and large towns where the urban areas as a whole would be more convenient areas of study than the Parishes of which they were composed. The view was also expressed that it was desirable to show the relation of the Parish to its geographical setting and that Parishes which form a part of a geographical area with similar physical characteristics should be grouped together for the purpose of physical description. Such groupings would also be of value where Parishes had common features in their history, public and social services, and their industries.

The next section of the Memorandum is entitled “Content of Each Account”. Each Account was to be based on the following headings:—

1. The Physical Basis
2. History of the Local Community
3. Population
4. Public and Social Services
5. Housing
6. Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce
7. Way of Life.

The only references to the County is under the heading “Public and Social Services” where, referring to the Public Services, it was stated that:

“As most of these services are administered for areas larger than the single Parish, consideration would require to be given to the desirability of their being dealt with in Group Studies or County Studies”, and, referring to the voluntary social services, it was stated that:—

“It will probably be necessary to deal with these subjects both in Parish Accounts and in Group and County Accounts to show how local associations are related to wider areas.”

A final section is devoted to “Machinery”:

“To carry out such a large enterprise, careful consideration would require to be given to the kind of machinery that would be necessary. It would be essential to secure the co-operation of a large number of people in every Parish and Burgh in

Scotland who would be willing to give freely of their time to the study of their communities. It would also be essential to provide these local people with expert guidance and direction regarding the kind of information they might collect and how best they could gather it."

It was suggested that a number of pilot surveys might be undertaken.

"These pilot surveys would be prepared for a city or large town, a large burgh, different types of small burghs, and different types of rural Parishes. These pilot surveys would prepare the way for carrying out surveys covering the whole of Scotland. They would provide information about the best techniques and the difficulties likely to be encountered. They would also provide a number of sample accounts, which would make the preparation of others easier."

It was hoped that the enterprise would secure the support of the Universities.

"There might be a headquarters for the Statistical Account in Edinburgh, where the general lines of the survey would be settled and the results collated. For convenience of administration, Scotland might be divided into six regions, each region being associated with one of the Universities."

Sir Hector Hetherington, in his foreword to the Memorandum, explained that the purpose of the document was exposition not advocacy. At the same time he said the Executive Committee of the Scottish Council of Social Service was satisfied that the plan was practicable and important.

AFTER THE MEMORANDUM

During January and February 1946 Mr. George P. Laidlaw, the Chairman of the Statistical Account Committee, had meetings with the Permanent Under Secretary of State for Scotland, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Convention of Royal Burghs, the Secretary of the Society of County Clerks in Scotland; the Principals of the Universities of St. Andrews, Glasgow, and Edinburgh; and the Secretary of the Nuffield Foundation. At a meeting of the Executive Committee on 7th March 1946 he was able to report that the discussions he had had made it clear that the proposal commended itself to many people, but that there were serious difficulties which would require to be faced. The project was of a size beyond the capacity of the

Scottish Council of Social Service and was likely to require ultimately the setting up of an independent body specially commissioned to carry it through. It was agreed that the Chairman should in the first instance consult informally with the four Universities regarding the possibility of their co-operating with the Scottish Council of Social Service in carrying out a number of Pilot Surveys. The result of the informal discussion with the Universities was that in May 1946 each University was officially asked if it would undertake a Pilot Survey if the Nuffield Foundation made a grant. The Universities agreed, the Nuffield Foundation made the necessary grant, and by February 1947 all four Universities had appointed Survey Officers. The Statistical Account Committee was reconstituted with representatives appointed by each of the four Universities.

THE PILOT SURVEYS

The Universities had agreed that Pilot Surveys should be undertaken as follows:—

The County of Fife by St. Andrews—Alexander Smith,
Survey Officer.

Ayrshire by Glasgow—John Strawhorn, Survey Officer.

County of East Lothian by Edinburgh—Dr. Catherine
P. Snodgrass.

City of Aberdeen by Aberdeen—Hugh C. Mackenzie,
Survey Officer.

The reconstituted Statistical Account Committee was entrusted with the carrying out of the Pilot Surveys on the understanding that they should be carried out in conformity with a broad pattern, so that as far as practicable the volumes will be built on the same plan. The Scottish Council, through the Statistical Account Committee, provided the means for consultation between the Survey Officers and for the exchange of experience and ideas. It was distinctly understood that final editorial responsibility in each case rested with the University concerned. The Memorandum of January 1946 was taken as the basis of the Survey Officers' work. Out of the early discussions of the Survey Officers it was agreed that County Accounts in addition to Parish Accounts should be written. The Memorandum had only envisaged County Accounts covering the section on Public and Social Services, but the

Survey Officers came to the conclusion that it was necessary to provide County Accounts covering all the items mentioned in the Contents of Parish Accounts. It was argued that the County Accounts were a necessary background to the Parish Accounts and would help to shorten the Parish Accounts by dealing with subjects which were common to a number of parishes. How the Pilot Surveys were prepared is described as follows in a Report written in March 1948.

“The procedure in making the surveys of the Counties of Ayr, East Lothian and Fife and the City of Aberdeen has been for each of the Survey Officers to prepare outlines of what they considered should be included in the County sections, which comprise: The Physical Basis, History, Population, Public and Social Services, Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce. These outlines have been discussed in draft form by the five Survey Officers and an agreed framework prepared, which has been the basis for the collection of material about the County. When any framework was being discussed by the Survey Officers an expert on that particular subject was called in to give his advice. For example, on Population, the Registrar-General has been consulted, on Agriculture, Officers from the Department of Agriculture and the National Farmers’ Union have been brought in, and, in the case of Industry, the Regional Officer of the Board of Trade, the Secretary of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry), the Assistant Secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, and the Managing Director of a large distributive business. These discussions with experts have ensured that enquiries were made along the right lines and have also introduced the Survey Officers to those people locally as well as nationally, who were able to provide accurate and up-to-date information on any particular subject.

When sufficient material has been collected, one of the Survey Officers has prepared a draft of that particular section which was then circulated among his colleagues and to experts. The draft was made the subject of discussion at one of the regular meetings of the Officers. The County Accounts have now reached the stage when quite a number of drafts have been dealt with in this way.

The Survey Officers, in making their surveys, have had the advice and assistance of various Departments in the University. For example, in the case of Ayrshire and Aberdeen City, the sections on the Physical Basis are being prepared by the members of the Geography Departments. While each University

has editorial responsibility for its own survey, a measure of uniformity has been assured by the regular consultation among the Survey Officers both with regard to frameworks of individual sections and the common discussion of drafts.

With regard to the accounts of local communities the procedure has varied from County to County. In the case of Ayrshire, a set of very full statements of the kind of information which should be collected for Local Accounts was prepared and sent to all ministers, schoolmasters and others within the County. At the same time Committees were set up in the 14 burghs and in a number of the parishes to collect material. Where Committees were not set up, an individual, usually the parish minister or the schoolmaster, was made responsible for collecting material. So far, a large amount of material has been gathered in this way and accounts of several parishes have been prepared. In the case of East Lothian and Fife a shorter statement was prepared and the Survey Officers picked local people who made themselves responsible for collecting material. This procedure is working satisfactorily.

In order that the tradition of the two previous Statistical Accounts might be maintained and comparisons drawn, sets of the Old and New Statistical Accounts have been split up and re-bound in Parishes, the Old with the New, and these have been put in the hands of the local investigators."

By the end of 1948 there was anxiety expressed in some quarters at the length of the County Accounts in the three County Pilot Volumes. It was felt that they were tending to overshadow the Parish Accounts which were the essential feature of the Statistical Account. At a Conference at Dunblane of members of the Statistical Account Committee and the Survey Officers the conclusion was reached that for the future volumes of the Third Statistical Account, County Accounts should be retained, but that their length should be restricted.

PREPARATION AND EDITING OF PARISH ACCOUNTS

At the beginning of 1947 it had been thought that the Pilot Surveys would be completed in two years' time. By the end of 1948 it was clear that this was an over-hopeful view. There were difficulties in obtaining local authors for the Parish Accounts. The Survey Officers required to give far more time to editing local accounts and even to writing them than had been originally contemplated. It became clear that if there was

difficulty in obtaining Parish Accounts where there was a full-time Survey Officer the difficulties would be greater where these had to be obtained by means of letters written from an office in Edinburgh. In October 1948 it was agreed that Mr. Kyd should endeavour to obtain as many Parish Accounts as possible from all over Scotland. On his retirement he devoted practically full time service to the task of discovering parish writers and to urging them to prepare Accounts along the lines suggested in the Memorandum of January 1946. The results were disappointing not so much in quantity as in quality. The late Dr. Henry Meikle read a number of the Parish Accounts and advised that it would be impossible to contemplate publishing them without editing. With a view to easing the final task Dr. Meikle and Mr. Liddell Geddie edited a number of the Parish Accounts.

THE FINAL PLAN FOR THE COUNTIES

It had been agreed that no final plan could be prepared until the four Pilot Surveys were published. There were further delays due to publishing difficulties so that it was 1953 before the Statistical Account was able to suggest a plan. The Pilot Surveys had shown (a) That the preparation and writing of Parish Accounts, if they were to be of the quality desired by the Statistical Account Committee, required the help of University staffs. (b) That each University should have a senior member of staff to co-ordinate the work of collecting and editing the Parish Accounts. (c) The County Accounts in the Pilot Survey volumes were more detailed than was necessary. In June 1953 Mr. J. G. Kyd (who succeeded Mr. George P. Laidlaw as Chairman of the Statistical Account Committee in October 1949 and continued as Chairman till October 1956) along with Mr. Laidlaw and the Secretary met the Principals of the four Universities in June 1953 (Professor Knox was at that time Acting Principal of the University of St. Andrews). At that meeting the Principals of the Universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh undertook that their Universities would be responsible for editing the Parish Accounts in their area and for the preparation of County Accounts. The Scottish Council of Social Service would maintain a central administration and deal with questions of publication.

THE CITIES

The Account of the City of Aberdeen was one of the four Pilot Volumes. The Account of the City of Glasgow was made possible by a grant from the Corporation of the City of Glasgow and will be published shortly. Progress has been made with the writing of the City of Edinburgh Account by the University of Edinburgh and St. Andrews University has undertaken responsibility for the publication of the Account of the City of Dundee.