Book Reviews

The Historic Architecture of Scotland by John G. Dunbar. Batsford, London 1966. Pp. 268, 208 photographs, 199 plans, 1 map. 105s.

The purpose of this book is succinctly defined by its author as an attempt to provide 'a general introduction to the historic buildings of Scotland as they exist today'. The survey begins with the Celtic Church and ends—for reasons that are never very clearly stated—in 'the beginning of the Victorian era'. In effect, Mr Dunbar is primarily concerned with the period from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century when Scottish architecture had its most characteristic identity. At one end he shows how simple native forms and borrowings from the common architectural stock of early medieval Europe grew into 'a distinctively national style', and at the other how this tradition eventually related itself 'to the development of British architecture as a whole'. Thus the book has a defensible unity of content, though this might well have been elucidated more explicitly at the outset.

After the brief historical introduction the plan of the work is analytical, the buildings being arranged under seven type headings. The first of these deals with 'Castles, Towers, and Palaces', a study that is extended, rather awkwardly, beyond the medieval period to include seventeenth century 'courtyard houses' like Drumlanrig (as 'stemming directly from the castles of the later Middle Ages') and eighteenth-century 'artillery fortifications' like Fort George (as the later representatives of a series originating with the introduction of gunpowder into European warfare in the fourteenth century). From this section the author moves to the 'Lairds' Houses' or 'residences of lesser landholders of the later sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries'. If the isolation of this particular group seems rather arbitrary at first sight, Mr Dunbar provides persuasive reasons for giving them separate treatment. This section is, indeed, one of the most original and illuminating of the whole book. It is followed by a study of the bigger 'Country Mansions' of the period 1600–1840 when conditions of life were more settled, estates larger, and buildings increasingly designed by professional architects. Once again, this is an admirably lucid and scholarly account, covering much new ground in remarkably brief compass.

The fourth section, entitled 'Abbeys and Churches', embraces the whole range of ecclesiastical architecture from the primitive structures of the Dark Ages, through the Abbeys and Cathedrals of the Middle Ages, to the buildings of the Reformed Church. This daunting task is accomplished with commendable skill and enlivened by some apposite comment, particularly in the discussion of later medieval developments. Here,

although 'the native ecclesiastical style cannot be said to possess great aesthetic merit . . . its directness of form and frankness of expression give it an attraction of its own'. At the same time the author scarcely does justice, either in his text or illustrations, to the most notable architectural product of this period, the immense and stately churches of the greater burghs. Burgh architecture—in its secular aspect—forms the fifth section of the book. 'Contrary to popular belief scarcely a single urban building of medieval date now remains in Scotland', but it was from this period that the burghs derived the street plans that formed the setting for the splendidly distinctive buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These buildings are now receiving belated, though not always discriminating, recognition, but it is still insufficiently appreciated that as great merits are to be found in the burgh architecture of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To this architecture Mr Dunbar provides a discerning introduction that gives due credit to the achievements of local architects in the smaller towns as well as to those of the more celebrated designers in the great cities.

At this point, it is possible to feel, the book might well have concluded, and any additional space employed to enlarge the scope of these major sections. Instead, it continues with two further sections, on 'Industrial Architecture' and 'Small Rural Houses, Farms, and Villages'. One can sympathise with the author's desire to pay tribute to the 'inventive genius' of the great engineers who embellished the eighteenth and nineteenth century scene with works of undoubted architectural significance, however practical their intention, and to draw attention to the 'architectural legacy' of the Industrial Revolution. But the discussion of 'buildings of traditional character' in the countryside moves out of the realm of architecture into social history. Their inclusion has presumably been prompted by Mr Dunbar's concern to make the reader aware of the whole field of Scottish construction when he is led, as the author hopes, 'to go out and look at buildings for himself'.

The book is pleasantly printed, the argument of the text being amplified by numerous excellent plans. In the half-tone illustrations the desire for comprehensiveness has produced an effect of quantity rather than quality, but this was perhaps difficult to avoid in a work of this kind. Taken as a whole, it is by far the best single-volume survey of Scottish architecture yet published, deliberately not a specialist study but a scholar's book written for the intelligent general reader, from which all who are interested in the subject must derive both benefit and pleasure.

R. G. CANT

The Place-Names of Birsay by Hugh Marwick (edited by W. F. H. Nicolaisen). Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen 1970. Pp. xi+135. 24s.

It is very unusual for a book about place-names to be as attractive in appearance as this one. The dust jacket, with its evocative drawing of the Brough of Birsay at high tide,

combines with the bold, spacious print to give a sensation of aesthetic pleasure which is not as a rule one's first reaction to a book entitled 'The Place-Names of x'. This is a beautifully produced book, and is in marked contrast to the economical format of Hugh Marwick's two earlier books on Orkney place-names, printed in Kirkwall in 1947 and 1952. The second of these is *Orkney Farm-Names*, a book of fundamental importance, now difficult to obtain. If Aberdeen University Press could be prevailed upon to reprint *Orkney Farm-Names* (and perhaps *The Place-Names of Rousay* also) in the attractive format of *The Place-Names of Birsay*, this would be a great service to Scottish place-name studies, and would be much appreciated by everyone in Britain and Scandinavia concerned with the history of Norse settlement in the British Isles.

The aspect of the material in this book which most impresses an English student is its linguistic homogeneity. About 90 per cent of the names are Norse. A few comparatively recent names are English, and a very few may be pre-Norse. The implications of this should be considered in the context of the perennial problems of why one language supersedes another, and whether the imposition of a new language and a new set of place-names implies numerical superiority on the part of the new settlers. These problems lurk behind all etymological studies of place-names, but they have as yet received only the most superficial and perfunctory consideration from philologists and historians in the British Isles. There can be little doubt that Orkney was well-populated before the Norsemen came, but we know most of the famous prehistoric sites by their Norse names, not by the names in use among the builders of Maes Howe and Skara Brae, nor even by the names used by the people of the brochs, who were much nearer to the Norsemen in time.

The place-names of Birsay, and the place-names of Orkney in general, must be considered primarily as a great collection of Norse nature- and settlement-names. Much valuable work could be done on the specialised local development of some Old Norse words. Hugh Marwick was well aware of this. *Orkney Farm-Names* has a final section entitled *Chronology* in which he discusses the particular Orkney use of such terms as *kví*, *setr*, *skáli*. The last is especially interesting. In Orkney it means 'hall', and the names Skaill and Langskaill are recognised by archaeologists as denoting places where substantial Viking stone-built dwelling-houses are likely to be found. Elsewhere, however, the word means 'a temporary hut or shed', and this is the only definition given in A. H. Smith's *English Place-Name Elements* and in E. Ekwall's *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*. In addition to marked differences of significance in Old Norse elements as between Orkney and other areas of Norwegian settlement, there is the interesting problem of why certain words are used in one area and not in another. To take one example, Old Norse *þveit*, which gives Twatt in Orkney, does not occur in the Isle of Man. Since it appears to have been a woodland term, its absence from the Isle of Man is less surprising than its presence in Orkney, where trees must have been at least as rare. Old Norse *skáli* does not occur at all in Man, either in the special Orkney sense 'hall', or with reference to the many mountain shielings which

are known to have been in use in the Norse period and for which it might have seemed the obvious term. Old Norse *kví*, which is one of the commonest elements in Orkney settlement-names, is barely evidenced in Man. The reasons for these discrepancies are not obvious, as the Norse occupation of both countries is considered to have taken place at much the same date. It is true that Man has a great many Gaelic names which may have displaced Norse names, but there is no reason why names containing *kví* and *skáli* should have been systematically Gaelicised while other Norse elements are still well represented. The accident of familiarity with Man and Orkney has made this reviewer aware of the contrast between them; acquaintance with the Hebridean material would probably make the position still more complex.

The study of place-names has two aspects. There is need first of all for the detailed regional studies, representing many years of devoted labour, of which Dr Marwick's works are outstanding examples. Then there is infinite scope for collation of the regional studies, which may, by isolating what is peculiar to each region from what is general to them all, open up the way to a new understanding of the conditions of settlement in each area. For the moment we need a great many more regional surveys, particularly for Scotland, where the coverage is much more uneven than it is in England. That some of us are thinking, however tentatively, in terms of comparison between different regions is partly due to the influence of Professor W. F. H. Nicolaisen, the editor of the work under review. By establishing the Council for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland Professor Nicolaisen encouraged place-name students to take a much wider view than was formerly considered appropriate. But this wider view is only possible if the material is made available by people working on small areas. We need many more scholars of the calibre of Hugh Marwick to make all the Scottish material available, and we need a reprint of his most important work, *Orkney Farm-Names*. There is no reason why this should not be as attractively presented as *The Place-Names of Birsay*.

MARGARET GELLING

Schottische Sagen, herausgegeben von Christiane Agricola. Europäische Sagen, hrsg. von Will-Erich Peuckert, Band V. Erich Schmidt Verlag, Berlin 1967. Pp. 325. DM 39.

German readers should find this a very readable book. Will-Erich Peuckert, general editor of the series in which this is the first non-German collection, seems from his writings to have a real love of *Sagen*—'local legends' is the usual inadequate English translation for the term—not only as reflections of former beliefs but as literature. In his introductory volume (*Sagen*, Berlin 1965) he rightly distinguishes between *Sage*, a story told of a named individual on a defined occasion, and a mere report (*Bericht*) that in certain circumstances such and such was supposed to happen. I have pointed out elsewhere (*Scottish Studies* 11 : 14) that oral tradition has a habit of giving force to *Bericht*

by dressing it up with names and places, and this sort of dramatised belief hardly seems to me to deserve the title of story: but Peuckert's distinction ensures that most of the stories in this volume at least *look* like stories. Moreover Frau Agricola's translation specifically sets out to render the style of the original, whether dialect or the sardonic or circumstantial re-telling of a collector, as closely as possible: even Scots rhyming verse has been turned into German rhyming verse where possible. A better-qualified judge than myself tells me that this is quite successfully carried through.

To readers in this country, who may hope to find in this volume a scholarly and representative selection, it may prove less satisfactory. Perhaps on the premise, false for Scotland at least, that local legends have almost died out, the series is designed to consist of reprints from earlier collections which most readers might find hard to locate or come by. In earlier volumes these were all from periodicals, and over half the present volume follows the same pattern. Unfortunately only one series is used: *Folklore* and its predecessors. Such journals as the *Celtic Review* or the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, which often give Gaelic stories in English re-tellings or translations, have been ignored, though their contributors often knew their subject better than the enthusiastic amateurs for whose offerings *Folklore* has long, alas, been notorious. Frau Agricola has partly redeemed herself by drawing on reliable authors of the last century such as John Gregorson Campbell and Hugh Miller, but it is unfortunate that there is next to nothing directly translated from Gaelic. Valuable material has been missed from the Scots area also, since none of the publications of local societies from Dumfries to Shetland has been drawn on. The result is that few stories are represented by a version much above the standard of those scraps of folklore inserted in guidebooks to break the tedium of the author's blow-by-blow account of each village he has visited. To take a random example, the well-known Mull story of Eoghan a' Chinn Bhig (No. 43) is represented by a poor summary, interspersed with editorial explanations, of a worn-down version from Skye. Other stories, for instance about witch hares, appear in half a dozen different versions, sometimes but not always under the same heading, most of which add little to the reader's enjoyment or understanding and could as well have been simply listed in the notes.

The material has indeed not been organised on a selective basis at all, apparently: it seems more as if everything relevant in the source-books has been extracted and reprinted. It has then been roughly grouped by subject. Unfortunately the volumes in this series do not use a uniform scheme of classification: less than half the chapter headings in one volume can be found in all the others, though different volumes may contain very similar material under different headings. This partly reflects the different types of supernatural beings which are believed in in the areas concerned—a useful distinction to the student of belief, but confusing to the student of comparative folktales since, for example, as Peuckert himself points out in the foreword to this volume, in Scotland it is witches who sail in sieves, in the East Frisian Islands *Maren*: the actors are different but the action is the same. In the present volume instances of second sight are

distributed over three sections, *Seher*, *Spuk* and *Doppelgänger*. In other respects the division is not a bad one: witchcraft (*die schwarze Kunst*) and fairies in the widest sense (*Dämonen und Elben*) between them account for sixty per cent of the stories in this volume, a proportion which could stand for Scottish tradition as a whole, at least if one leaves out the more realistic historical legends, as the editors evidently do. Water-horses, which can appear in human form, are rightly included in the second category, not with dragons under *Tierdämonen*.

A critical apparatus as thorough as one expects from a German publication takes up the last quarter of the book. The notes are slightly disappointing: the fullest lists of comparative material turn out to refer again to beliefs rather than stories—the connection between spirits and the colour green, the Devil in the form of a black dog. But there remains, once one has found it, a very useful body of references to similar legends in Germany and elsewhere. Moreover the notes sometimes contain further Scottish versions for comparison, in summary or complete translation, which may be as interesting or better than those in the text. The index of places, which the jacket blurb calls 'meticulous' (*sorgfältig*), has already been criticised in detail in a review by Nicolaisen (*Folklore* 78:308–11). The eccentricities in the spelling of Gaelic names taken from the English sources are compounded by such remarkable misprints as 'Strathperry' for 'Strathspey', and open guesswork as to locations—'Rhynie (*wohl* Argyllshire)': this despite editorial acknowledgements to members of the School of Scottish Studies and the Editor of the Scottish National Dictionary, who could have corrected such solecisms for the asking. In the worst example Ladykirk in South Ronaldsay appears as 'Ladykirk (Northumberland)'. One can see how the mistake could have arisen by confusion between Ladykirk at Burwick (though Burwick is not named in the text), Ladykirk in Berwickshire, and Berwick in Northumberland: but this will not explain to the puzzled reader how to reach Caithness across the Pentland Firth from Northumberland.

The story of the saint and the stone boat to which this index entry refers is known to this day, and a version is in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies. The same is true of many other tales in this book, and the reader may get a false impression that Scottish legends mostly died out fifty years ago. But this is simply the result of the editorial policy and the editor's inability to translate from Scotland's other language: she herself regrets how few stories can be given in the teller's own words. Reprinting nineteenth-century collections is, after all, one way of avoiding copyright problems—though I see no acknowledgement to the Editor of *Folklore*, which has been used up to the volume for 1963. This is not the definitive collection which the title suggests: but no better one, indeed no comprehensive collection of Scottish local legends in any of Scotland's languages, is in existence. Your reviewer, amongst others, hopes to help to remedy this, but for the moment *Schottische Sagen* at least provides an indication of what could be done, a useful guide to material in *Folklore* and the *Folk-Lore Journal*, and pleasant reading for the German reader.

ALAN BRUFORD

Books Received

Some of these books may be reviewed later in *Scottish Studies*

The Spade in Northern and Atlantic Europe edited by Alan Gailey and Alexander Fenton. Ulster Folk Museum Institute of Irish Studies Queen's University, Belfast 1970. Pp. 258+33 plates. 33s.

Everyday Life of the Pagan Celts by Anne Ross. Batsford, London. Putnam, New York 1970. Pp. 224 (Illustrated). 30s.

The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain by W. F. H. Nicolaisen, Margaret Gelling and Melville Richards. Batsford, London 1970. Pp. 215. 50s.

Foreign Devils. Westerners in the Far East. The Sixteenth Century to the present day by Pat Barr. Topics in History. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1970. Pp. 131 (Illustrated).

Folklore och Filologi by Dag Strömbäck. Valda uppsatser utgivna av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien 13.8.1970. Ab Lundequistska Bokhandeln, Uppsala 1970. Pp. 306.

Sir Walter Scott, Man and Patriot by Moray McLaren. Heinemann, London 1970. Pp. 244. 55s.

Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, Essays in Anthropology, Folklore and History edited by Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story. Toronto University Press, and Oxford University Press, London 1969. Pp. 246. 72s.

Scotland in the Age of Improvement edited by N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1970. Pp. 270. 50s.

The Song Tradition of Tristan da Cunha by Peter A. Munch. Indiana University Folklore Institute Monograph Series, vol. 22, Bloomington 1970. Pp. 176. $8.