Book Reviews

An Archive Approach to Oral History by David Lance. Published by the Imperial War Museum and the International Association of Sound Archives, London 1978. £1.50.

This admirable monograph by the Keeper of Sound Archives in the Imperial War Museum has been written in response to the growth of interest in oral history and to the proliferation of sound recordings which we have witnessed in recent years. The author's primary concern is with the magnetic tape-recording which results from the oral historian's investigations, and he aims at impressing the importance of this new kind of archive material on the reader as well as to offer guidance to those engaged in creating and preserving it. Within the limited space of this short work he has achieved these ends very effectively. No oral historian and no institution possessing a sound-archive should be without it.

Most of the problems which the oral historian is likely to meet are dealt with. Whether he is discussing how to design a project or such technical matters as choosing and working a recording machine, Mr Lance writes lucidly and with a strong sense of the practical. His advice and suggestions will prove of immense help both to the beginner and to the more advanced worker. They represent the distillation of his experience in directing numerous projects for the Imperial War Museum. A Select Bibliography appended to the text enhances its value.

'Access and use are the life-blood of collecting institutions.' In this memorable phrase Mr Lance expresses the archival roots of his thinking. For him academic research has its place but there must also be a broad approach to collecting, to ensure that the image of a past society or group is not broken into a series of highly specialised views. He sees the main end of collecting as the multifarious uses of the recorded material which an institution can make possible—radio broadcasts, exhibitions, school lessons and other publications. The sound-recordings must therefore be well stored and easily accessible. These requirements bring him to a discussion of the practical problems of the sound-archivist: transcribing, cataloguing and indexing, access, copyright, preservation and use. These are topics which are of equal concern to the documentary archivist, but Mr Lance concentrates on the problems that are specifically those of the sound-archivist. He draws here on the expertise of his colleagues. Roger Smithers and Laura Kamel provide an excellent chapter on cataloguing and indexing. Some of the methods worked out by the Imperial War Museum, and cited here, should prove most helpful to institutions now grappling for the first time with the care of sound-recordings.

The writer accepts that recordings must be transcribed if the information they

contain is to become generally available, but he stresses the primary importance of the recorded voice. The policy that his museum has adopted is to provide adequate transcripts which make no elaborate attempt to reproduce every nuance in the recording. Mr Lance argues that people should be encouraged to go to the original source since it contains much more than the transcript does and adds a more human dimension to historical facts. This and much else in this short monograph show Mr Lance to be not only a skilful guide through the pitfalls and complexities of oral history but a sensitive historian who has learned much from the experience of listening to what history has meant to those who lived it.

E. R. CREGEEN

Devolution by Vernon Bogdanor. Oxford University Press. 246 pp. £5.50; paperback £2.95.

The author, a politics don at Brasenose, has produced a closely-reasoned study of devolution, which, though it appeared too late to be of much use at the Referendum, will be invaluable as a guide and reference book for all interested.

It begins with a discussion of decentralisation as against the centralising forces of technocracy and corporatism and as an attempt 'to humanise the state.' The question of Home Rule is treated historically in regard to Ireland and the difficulties which proved to be too much for Gladstone. Some kind words are said about the Northern Ireland experiment which had the potential for good in it if the politicians had not wrecked it; the chapter on Scotland produces some dubious statements but he shows clearly how unsatisfactory the present arrangements for governing Scotland are, with too much overloaded bureaucratic secrecy, and there is a good analysis of the position and history of the three British parties on the whole question (the SNP are mentioned only as all-or-nothing men watching for every chance on the side-lines). Plaid Cymru are given the deserved compliment of having thought out a philosophy of nationalism, in which the SNP lags behind.

A searching scrutiny of the Devolution Acts shows up their serious and self-contradictory flaws, especially in the financial arrangements 'which conflict with the political aims of devolution, will counteract tendencies leading to a dispersal of power and prevent the Acts from being final settlements of the constitutional issue'. The author himself favours devolution as a step to the cessation of class-confrontation and party in-fighting and to a federal system which has succeeded well enough elsewhere. This is a book most decidedly to be closely studied, for if there is one thing certain in our political future, it is that the devolution is here to stay and that the problem of Scottish (and Welsh) self-government can no longer be sidetracked, despite the apparent stalemate of the Referendum and the subsequent election. They merely polarise the issue and indeed give time for the serious thought the Nationalist cause so badly needs to expend on it. Bogdanor's book makes an invaluable contribution.

DAVID MURISON

Books Received

Some of these books may be reviewed later in Scottish Studies

- Fletcher of Saltoun, Selected Political Writings and Speeches, edited by David Daiches. (The Association for Scottish Literary Studies. General editor, David Buchan). Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1979.
- West over Sea. Reminders of Norse Ascendency from Shetland to Dublin by Jon Leisfall, translated by Kenneth Young from the Norwegian Vest i Haver. Thule Press, Shetland 1979, 159 pp. £4.95.
- Shetland's Living Landscape. A Study in Island Plant Ecology by David Spence. Thule Press, Shetland, 1979. 152 pp + 40 photographic plates. £6.50.
- To the Greenland Whaling. Alexander Trotter's Journal of the Voyage of the 'Enterprise' in 1856 from Fraserburgh and Lerwick, edited by Innes MacLeod. Thule Press, Shetland 1979. 74 pp. £3.50.
- Bible Chasherick yn Lught Thie. The Manx Family Bible. Shearwater Press, Isle of Man 1979. £12.75. (A reproduction of the 1819 Manx Bible, with an introduction by R. L. Thomson.)
- Gaelic Dictionary. A Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language. Gaelic-English. English-Gaelic by Malcolm MacLennan. Acair, Stornoway, and Aberdeen University Press 1979. 614 pp. £14, soft back £6.90. (A photolithographic reproduction of the 1st edn., 1925. MacLennan based his Dictionary on the pronouncing Gaelic Dictionary by Neil MacAlpine. He retained what he felt was useful, and also gave it an etymological element. He widened the regional range and incorporated a considerable number of words from current speech that were not recorded in other dictionaries. His work could easily be understood by learners yet was detailed and extensive enough to meet the needs of native speakers, teachers and scholars.)
- Fargher's English-Manx Dictionary by Douglas C. Fargher, edited by Brian Stowell and Ian Faulds. Shearwater Press, Isle of Man 1979. 894 pp. £26.
- The Dalhousie Journals, edited by Marjorie Whitelaw. Oberon Press, Canada 1979. 212 pp. £7.95. (George Ramsay, 9th Earl of Dalhousie, came to Nova Scotia as Lieutenant Governor in 1816. His journals provide detail about the province of Nova Scotia in the early 19th c.)
- Two Dance Collections from Friesland and their Scotch, English and Continental Connections by Joan Rimmer. Frysk Ynstitute oan de Ryksuniversiteit to Grins 1978. 159 pp.
- Horsepower and Magic by George Ewart Evans. Faber and Faber, London and Boston 1979. 222 pp. £6.95. (Descriptions of farms where horses are beneficially used today, and where the traditions of older horsemen have not died out but have been passed on to a younger generation in only slightly attenuated form. The author says the book is 'essentially a plea for conserving and increasing the stock of working horses as a reserve against possible disastrous decline in energy resources; and for recording the traditional lore connected with the heavy horse, empirical lore that has accrued over many centuries and which has therefore historical and anthropological as well as severely practical value'.)
- The Crown and the Thistle. The Nature of Nationhood, edited by Colin MacLean. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1979. 160 pp. £5.