

The University of Glasgow is to be congratulated for publishing this fundamental volume as a hardback, in these unenlightened paperback days, ensuring that it can remain sound long after the current reader has disintegrated!

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Scottish Monasteries in the Late Middle Ages. By Mark Dilworth. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995. Pp. vii + 102. £12.95. Paperback. ISBN 07486 0527 4.

This is a very satisfactory account of monastic life in Scotland, so far as it is recoverable from surviving sources, in the sixteenth century, by which we are to interpret “the late Middle Ages”. Apart from the bibliography, we should have benefited from an account of what these sources are (where they exist) and how far there is dependence on local public records. At the beginning of the century Whithorn still had its register from which transcripts were made, but for Galloway generally we are thrown back on R.C. Reid’s *Wigtownshire Charters*.

With the material before him, the author had to ask himself questions to which it provided answers. What sort of prelate is found in charge? What was the quality of monastic life? How wealthy were the monastic houses and how numerous were their inhabitants? How far were they related to national institutions? How did they meet the crisis of the Reformation? A general introduction on the monks and canons regular involved is usefully provided. I wonder if the Cistercian link of the first Premonstratensians is really the most illuminating thing about them: their main idea was to provide word and example. However, this chapter on the whole sets the scene well for what follows.

The next chapter examines the replacement of abbots by commendators who were less harmful in Scotland than elsewhere, which modifies received opinion: none were laymen, though few were priests. The Cistercians were fortunate in their system of visitation from Cîteaux, though we know little of the visitation of Thomas Fassington in 1506 and a decade or so later we are told of his troubles with Archbishop Forman, but not of the fact that he was chaplain to

the duke of Albany. There was apparently little in the conduct of monks that was downright scandalous, though hardly an evidence of genuine fervour despite some continuous efforts at self reform. The sources of monastic wealth are explored; rents, in cash or in kind, revenue from appropriated parishes with unfortunate consequences for the parish system, especially in Scotland, where the level of appropriation was so high. In discussing the “portions” enjoyed by individual monks, there is a reference to “and perhaps pittances”. There is no perhaps about it at St Andrews, where we hear of a “master of pittances” as an official and where a Pittance Book is extant in the University Archives.

In the final chapter we learn of several monks and canons becoming ministers and readers in the Reformed Kirk. Mr John Fyfe is listed as one of them who became a Protestant refugee about 1534. Knox does not identify him with any canon of St Andrews or inhabitant of St Leonard’s college as does Calderwood. One is led to suspect that there is confusion with Mr John Fethy, as Mr John Fyfe was no canon, but a secular chaplain in St Leonard’s church whose appointment to the post of sacrist in the college is recorded in 1550. His chaplain’s post he seems to have held till 1562 when he demitted it, reserving to himself a life-rent. His accounts as sacrist hardly suggest heresy. One must assume that Knox may have intended to write “Fethy”. Donald McCarny and William Forman are thought by the author not to be Protestant, merely heretical: hardly likely to be true of McCarny who could easily pick up “English opinions” in Dumfries, where he is found in January 1540 (*Protocol Book of Mark Carruthers*, ed. R.C. Reid, SRS 1956, no. 79).

A fine colour plate of St Andrews cathedral priory adorns the binding, but the plates elsewhere are disappointingly unclear, insufficiently described, and, two plates, Dryburgh and Jedburgh have been confused.

The book is a lucid, judicious and meticulous presentation of the subject, with the maximum of information included in a relatively small space and one looks forward to an even more detailed history from its author where monastic libraries and almonries, for instance, could have ampler treatment than was possible here.

John Durkan