

## An Interview with Sir Tom Devine

*Sir Thomas Martin Devine and, Kevin J. James with contributions from, Gavin Hughes, Andrew P. Northey, Dylan Parry-Lai and Wilda Thumm*

In August 2023, Professor Emeritus Sir Thomas Martin Devine of the University of Edinburgh engaged in a conversation with three recent MA graduate students—Andrew Northey, Dylan Parry-Lai, and Wilda Thumm—and one current MA student, Gavin Hughes, at the University of Guelph.

**Kevin James**—Sir Tom Devine is the most illustrious Scottish historian of our era. A singularly prolific scholar who has borne witness to and been a critical agent in remarkable evolutions in the field of modern Scottish history, Sir Tom has held the most distinguished chairs in his field. His profile in scholarly circles is matched by his reputation as a public intellectual. He is recognised internationally as a trailblazer in the study of Scotland’s global imprint. The *Review* welcomed Sir Tom to join us in conversation, and he suggested that postgraduates and recently graduated postgraduates lead the discussion—a signal of Sir Tom’s strong interest in and support for nurturing emerging scholars and new scholarship in the field.

**Dylan Parry-Lai**—Hello, Sir Tom, thanks again for your time today. The first question I have for you today is about your identification of the 1960s to the 1990s as the ‘golden age’ of scholarship on Scottish history. Do you see a similar golden age in the historiography of the Scottish diaspora in the last twenty years, perhaps nourished by your contributions to that field? And if so, what are the changes in this field that you believe have influenced this growing interest in the impact of the global Scottish diaspora?

**Sir Tom Devine**—That is an excellent question with which to start our conversation. It seems to me clear enough that in the last couple of decades or so, studies on the Scottish diaspora, empire, and slavery have been more innovative, insightful, and fresh than those on the domestic history of Scotland over that period. It is too soon to describe this, however, as a new ‘golden age’ in the historiography; that will be a

perspective for later scholars to decide as they reflect on the last few years of the published literature. I have been enormously impressed by recent work on the Scottish factor in Canada, eighteenth-century India, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Caribbean during the age of slavery. There has been much less coverage, however, of two of the most important migrant destinations for Scots, namely England and the USA.

It would also be helpful to have more thematic and problem-orientated work in addition to the country-wide and regional research which has so far dominated the field. We need also to see the diasporic experience of the Scots in comparative context with other European and British ethnicities to make salient what was distinctive or similar about the Caledonian factor in relation to them. So perhaps it is not yet quite a 'golden age' in the historical study of Scotland beyond Scotland, but certainly it is 'gilded' in parts: plenty of opportunities therefore for the next generation of scholars in that field to explore!

The surge of interest in that area of Scottish historiography has been conditioned by a number of influences. These have been partly international in origin and impact, such as the effect of globalization and the scale, nature, and political significance of worldwide emigrations in the new millennium in fashioning the contemporary research agenda of scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Historically, Scotland has been one of Europe's leading sources of emigrants for several centuries in terms of per-capita departures. As international interest in emigration grew, it was likely that historians of Scotland and of the Scots abroad would therefore become more involved in the field. I suspect also that so extensive and intensive had been research on the domestic history of Scotland from the 1960s to ca. 2000 that perhaps scholars were likely to be looking for new intellectual pastures rather than those already well cultivated.

Certainly, having published the *Scottish Nation 1700–2000* in 1999, which had harvested the conclusions of scholarship on the mainly domestic history of the nation since the 1950s, I myself was looking for new challenges. I did certainly find them in diaspora and empire studies. One of the most exciting aspects to that change of direction was that it allowed me to bring the Scottish factor into the sophisticated historiographies of other countries around the world and, at the same time, be influenced by their research-based historical literature—very, very stimulating. For more recent scholarship, of course, we cannot underestimate the importance of the controversial subject of Scotland and slavery, long neglected and bristling with key questions.

**Dylan Parry-Lai**—I noticed that here, in my lit review during the course of my research, is that a lot of the current diaspora scholarship seems to focus on examining the Scots in this region, the Scots in this country, and their impact, and less on engaging with the idea of how it shaped Scotland.

**Sir Tom Devine**—I agree with your statement in large part. There is, however, at least one exception: the impact of slavery-derived capital, profits, industrial raw materials, and markets on the Scottish economic miracle ca. 1760–ca. 1830, as analyzed by yours truly and some others. Interestingly, last century there was much more interest among Scottish economic historians on how the colonial trades shaped Scotland. A debate raged in the literature in the 1970s and 1980s on their significance for Scottish development. Major figures in the field at that time, such as R. H. Campbell, Rowy Mitchison, and Christopher Smout, were notably very skeptical and championed the ‘enclave’ theory, which minimised their effects on the internal economy. A brash young historian called T. M. Devine vigorously challenged this thesis of his elders and betters in his first book, *The Tobacco Lords* (1975), and in a series of journal articles and book chapters.

**Dylan Parry-Lai**—It actually segues into my next question, which centres on these darker themes of Scottish history and its relationship to a Scottish nationhood. How has the reinterpretation of the role of Scots in Empire fit into the current perception of Scottish-led settler colonialism and its relationship to the Atlantic slave trade? Something I know that you touched on in your very first work.

**Sir Tom Devine**—Publications of the last two decades or so on Scotland’s role in the empire, impact on Indigenous societies through emigration, and the slave-based transatlantic colonies have transformed conventional and uncritical (even naive) views held by the Scottish people about their modern history. There has been a radical transformation in the beliefs of ordinary folk, politicians, the media, and education at all levels in this respect. The nation now has a more balanced, mature, and convincing history in these spheres. It is a remarkable example of how academic research can change entrenched (false) beliefs among the citizenry, and I think very much for the better.

**Wilda Thumm**—I wonder if I could start just with a little follow-up question for you. You spoke about the outflow of research from academia. How is this doing in terms of flowing down into curriculum in primary and secondary schools. Is it keeping up?

**Sir Tom Devine**—I have to give a presentation at a book festival in November, and I was thinking of one of the things I might say. The question I wanted to answer is: How did Tom Devine, who gave up history at the secondary school level in second year, eventually spend his life researching and writing and teaching on the modern history of the Scottish people, both home and abroad? And really, what I’m implying to you is that when I was at school, and I think my generation and perhaps the next generation would agree with me, history was regarded as a relatively boring subject with a strong emphasis on narrative.

My father was a schoolteacher, and he graduated from Glasgow University in the 1930s, and I could recognise the narrative approach that was taught to my father in the 1930s in the kind of stuff I was getting from teachers also trained at the University of Glasgow in the 1950s and early 1960s, but since then there's been an enormous revolution in seeing change. I know that not simply because of my own children, but because of my grandchildren, one of whom is actually going back to the same university where I was an undergraduate to study law and history this coming year. And there's no doubt that, leaving aside the other advances toward more sophisticated approaches to the teaching of history, the teaching of Scottish historical studies, and not least the teaching of Scotland outside Scotland, is now absolutely a centrality. This is another example of the academy, in this sense, the works done in the academy and the research output of people in the universities, affecting the minds and interests of the young, and of course, that's the next generation—possibly politicians.

**Wilda Thumm**—Having explored emigration and immigration as themes in Scottish history over the course of your career, have you seen the balance of interest in these two themes change? And if so, or if not, why would that be?

**Sir Tom Devine**—There is little doubt that has occurred. In the last quarter of the last century, as an integral part of the extensive work carried out at that time on domestic economic and social history, several key works were published on Irish Catholic and Protestant migrants who were by far Scotland's biggest immigrant group in the nineteenth century. Other migrant ethnicities also attracted much research, such as Italians, Lithuanians, and Jews. After the Great War, however, large-scale immigration from Ireland and Europe significantly declined. By the 1920s, most migrants were from England, and that is a pattern which has continued to the present day. Gradually, the pre-1914 migrations attracted less attention, in part because they had already been well studied. By the 1950s, the era of the 'New Scots' had begun with inward movement from South Asia, Hong Kong, China, Africa, and by the 1980s, Poland and other central and eastern European countries. But these new migrations did not stir the interest of historians to any significant extent.

When a historian from New Zealand and I edited *New Scots: Scotland's Immigrant Communities since 1945*, published in 2018, only three historians were numbered among the fifteen contributors. The great majority were social or political scientists. I think there are two reasons for this relative lack of interest. First, as discussed earlier in this interview, there has been the competing allure of emigration and imperial history. Second, modern immigration to Scotland has not triggered political and social controversy in the way it did in earlier times and does so presently

to such an extent south of the border. In part, this is because it is on a much smaller scale than the movement into England. Indeed, the current policy of the Scottish government is not to reduce but to increase immigration. An additional factor is most migrants (they much resent the use of the word ‘immigrants’) are white people from the professional and skilled classes of England.

**Wilda Thumm**—That brings me on to something. When you wrote on the development of Irish and Scottish studies, you quoted Marc Bloch on international comparisons. Can you speak to the influence of non-Scottish scholars on your perspectives and work?

**Sir Tom Devine**—Yes, I would be very pleased to do so. Even from my undergraduate days, I have been much influenced by non-Scottish scholars. In the 1960s, there was a significant expansion in the number of students in the ‘ancient’ universities and, at the same time, the foundation of new institutions. I was educated at Strathclyde, one of the latter. The History Department there had recruited a number of young historians with PhDs from English universities whose training meant they were at the cutting edge of the discipline of economic and social history. For them, it was easy to transfer their research interests from English to Scottish topics, especially since so many of the important issues north of the border had hardly been touched by scholars. It is no exaggeration to say that generation of academic migrants inspired me to become a historian of Scotland.

The English factor in Scottish economic and social history was particularly influential at Edinburgh and Strathclyde. It is one of the unwritten and, indeed, ironic stories about the origins of the golden age of modern Scottish historiography. Afterwards, when I became a university teacher and researcher, I started to read widely in the works of the Annales School in France and learned much from the approaches of legendary figures such as Bloch (he was a prime factor in my growing interest in the application of the comparative method to history), Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, and other giants. Their ideas were influential especially in my studies of peasant societies in both the Highlands and Lowlands, attempting to consider ‘small country history’ in a broader context and eventually also in trying to apply the concept of *histoire totale* to the analysis of Scotland’s modern history.

**Wilda Thumm**—We are going to move on to something that was alluded to earlier: that of issues of statues and other forms of commemoration are deeply controversial in Canada, as they are in Scotland. What lessons can historians learn from the debates over Henry Dundas in both countries, and how do you envision historians will look at these debates in the future? I understand the future is not your era, but we’re going to prevail on you to have a little peek.

**Sir Tom Devine**—These controversies have been deeply challenging for historians of Canada, Scotland, England, the USA, and some other countries. For the first time I can remember in my career, to a significant degree, the professional role of academic historians and their conclusions on important subjects have been publicly challenged by activists, journalists, and politicians who are often very keen to propound alternative narratives to those of trained scholars. In Edinburgh, for instance, the kangaroo court, which sat in judgement on Henry Dundas before the text of the erroneous plaque was composed and placed at his monument, consisted of city councillors and activists. No historian was a member of the group, and no historian was consulted during the process which took place. In addition, despite some members of our profession speaking out loudly in the media about ‘bad history,’ that plaque remains to this day at the monument. It remains to be seen whether the recently published historical research<sup>1</sup> on Dundas and slavery abolition will influence opinion in Toronto City Council on its renaming controversy about Dundas Street.

Against this depressing and frustrating background, how should historians respond? They are not politicians or decision-makers, and if recent events are any guide, seem to have little political clout in influencing important matters of policy. In Edinburgh, for example, current investigations into the historic connections of both the city and the University to slavery are chaired not by a senior historian well versed in the field but by an activist and former scientist with no historical training who has shown during the Dundas affair to have been of questionable impartiality in his judgements. What compounds the problem is that not very many of our colleagues have been willing to speak out in the media and condemn such aberrations. Indeed, it is possible that my generation, as a result, might be judged by historians of the future as guilty of *trahison des clercs*—betrayal of the scholars—by not protesting in more effective fashion and in larger numbers, publicly naming and calling out ‘bad history’ when they see it. At the end of the day, all we have is our research skills and time-honoured fidelity to seek the truth, no matter the cost.

The Dundas controversy has been depressing, but it has also shown how ‘bad history’ can indeed be professionally exposed. Angela McCarthy, Professor of Scottish and Irish History at the University of Otago in New Zealand, through detailed research and forensic analysis in several recent articles published by the peer-reviewed journal *Scottish Affairs* (EUP), has shown beyond reasonable doubt that Henry Dundas’s actions were not the cause of delay in the abolition of the British slave

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<sup>1</sup> In September 2023 the Scottish media revealed to an astonished world that the plaque had been removed in mysterious circumstances. The controversy rumbles on as this goes to press.

trade. Her work is a model of its kind and has therefore publicly humiliated Edinburgh City Council and those who supported its flawed decisions during this sorry affair.

**Gavin Hughes**—I have a follow-up in your response to Wilda. Your response noted that in the last two or three years, there's been a great deal of degree of erroneous history produced. Is there any advice you would have for young scholars of Scottish history not to make similar mistakes that you've identified?

**Sir Tom Devine**—There might be a misunderstanding here. I was referring to journalists, commentators, and people voicing opinions on social media without any or not much knowledge, not to academic historians. There are a tiny but vocal number of the latter on both sides of the Atlantic who have dishonoured the profession by their assertions and rhetoric on issues of public controversy, but for the most part, the problem with our colleagues is that they have been too silent on these matters.

**Gavin Hughes**—How has 'empire' framed the analysis of Scottish history, and has it been to the exclusion of a wider analysis of Scott in America or in the informal empire?

**Sir Tom Devine**—The imperial dimension was mainly ignored, except by pioneers like John Mackenzie, until the later twentieth century. Even my own book, *The Tobacco Lords* (1975), despite focusing on commercial connections with the American colonies, was not explicitly set in any 'imperial' context. From around the 1980s, the imperial factor in modern Scottish history became fundamental, as the remarkable extent of the Scottish role in the greatest territorial empire the world has ever seen or will see became increasingly apparent. The aphorism 'England ruled the empire, but Scots actually ran it' dates from that period. Soon, it became clear that every nook and cranny of Scottish life was penetrated, directly or indirectly, by the imperial factor. Inevitably, therefore, the historiography reflected that major influence to the detriment of analysis of the 'informal' empire and the USA, as you suggest. It is also important to remember, however, that there are only a relatively small number of Scottish historians with interests in Scotland abroad in our universities. Too much cannot be expected of them in terms of coverage!

**Gavin Hughes**—Besides this study of diaspora, do you think that scholars at centres of Scottish history outside of Scotland bring unique perspectives to Scottish history compared to scholars located in Scotland?

**Sir Tom Devine**—I do not think they have distinctive advantages in terms of quality of research. Equally, however, with the internet and the communications revolution, they are not necessarily at a disadvantage.

Historians of Ireland resident in North America and Australasia have long produced works of importance on domestic Irish history. So also should it be with Scottish centres, such as Guelph, on domestic Scottish history. The late Eric Richards, who was based in an Australian university for most of his career wrote important books on modern Highland history. He could therefore be regarded as a kind of role model for what I am suggesting.

**Andrew Northey**—How do countries such as Canada and Scotland explore their full histories, balancing negative elements, such as slave trade and Indigenous residential schools, with other more positive elements of their national experience?

**Sir Tom Devine**—It should be second nature to professionally trained academic historians to consider both light and shade in their national histories. If they do not do so, they will be punished in reviews of their published outputs. I also believe that once their research leads the way, the rest of the educational system in due course will follow as well as the media. This has certainly happened here on Scotland and slavery.

**Andrew Northey**—How are politics and the professional becoming entwined?

**Sir Tom Devine**—This process has challenges for historians but, ironically, it is a reflection of the fact that history and the findings of historians about the past do matter, not only to politicians but to other opinion formers. This is hardly surprising since our discipline helps to construct the social memory of nations and peoples.

**Andrew Northey**—What challenges have you faced as a professional historian exploring areas of controversy?

**Sir Tom Devine**—As a scholar, if you write, comment, or publish on controversial issues, especially on those which attract public and media interest, you have to develop a very thick skin! In my own case three examples come to mind. First, in 2020, I edited a collection of essays titled *Scotland's Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland*. In it, I discussed the age old anti-Irish Catholicism of Scotland, its origins and nature, and how prevalent it was at the start of the new millennium. The book attracted some popular (not academic) criticism from both sides of the religious divide, perhaps predictably from Protestants but also from some of my fellow Catholics who accused me of exaggerating the beginnings of decline in anti-Catholic bigotry in the country—the victim mentality, not surprising after generations of discrimination. Later authoritative studies showed there was some substance in my analysis. In 2015, the Scottish Government's independent Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism reported that 'only remnants' of sectarian attitudes



and behaviour now remained, and that they had been in decline for some considerable time before then.

Second, my book *Independence or Union: Scotland's Past and Scotland's Present* was published in 2016. It attracted much interest but also a fair deal of hostility from Unionist sources because it was in the public domain that I had voted for Scottish independence in the 2014 referendum. Inevitably, therefore, my impartiality on the subject was questioned in some quarters. In fact, major press reviews of the book concluded that the historical analysis was not influenced by my political sympathies at that time, and I had kept to the principles of our trade in the analysis of complex matters. The volume then went on to sell very well, both at home and abroad.

Third, there was the recent and most troubling experience of all, which still lingers with me to this day. It concerned responses to what I and others considered to be the basically erroneous plaque placed at the foot of the monument to Henry Dundas in Edinburgh, blaming him for ensuring the survival of the British slave trade in the 1790s. A senior Professor of Historical Sociology at Edinburgh and I, who publicly opposed the text on the plaque as 'bad history,' were denounced on social media by a well-known social activist and Black Lives Matter campaigner of Jamaican heritage as 'racists' and 'part of a racist gang.' The accusation was, of course, entirely nonsensical but, according to legal advice received, was also unambiguously defamatory. Despite that, I took no action. There seemed little point in making a martyr out of a villain, which, given the public mood in the aftermath of the terrible murder of George Floyd, seemed very likely to happen.

What was also deeply troubling about this affair, which was widely covered in national media, was the extraordinary public silence from most of the academy in Scotland about this brazen attack on scholarly freedom of thought and speech. Nor, it seems to date that the public standing of the individual who had vilified us has in any way been diminished as a consequence of his baseless but damaging accusations to those whose only commitment was the seeking of historical truth. I am sure that future historians who might consider this period and the patterns of behaviour both within universities and Scottish society in general at the time will find it relatively easy to explain why they happened, but I expect I will be long gone before that occurs.

However, much more gratifying were articles in the newspapers and periodical literature together with contributions from the general public in social media and letters to the press. Overwhelmingly, they contained ringing denunciations of the perpetrator of the defamations and were firmly supportive of the stance taken by my colleague and myself in the controversy. Those helpful responses fortified my belief that it would not be appropriate to go down the legal route in order to protect my reputation

from vilification; much more rewarding and enduring was to win the victory in the court of public opinion rather than in a court of law. (For an assessment of this affair by distinguished journalist John Lloyd, a contributing editor of the *Financial Times*, see ‘Enlightened advocate or the great delayer? Henry Dundas’s complex relationship with slavery,’ *PROSPECT*, 3 March 2022.)

**Andrew Northey**—My last question is this: What advice would you offer to scholars who are embarking upon research on Scottish history?

**Sir Tom Devine**—An excellent question which requires a complex answer. Some personal background is necessary in the first place to provide context for my remarks. Throughout my career I have held visiting professorships in universities across the world, including at Guelph, a very long time ago. I never had the formal responsibility of PhD supervisor in those institutions. Inter alia, my role was to give informal advice to graduate students and comment on their work. So, my experience as a supervisor of doctoral students has been confined to the UK system. My role in that capacity began in ca. 1975, and since then I have supervised nearly three dozen PhDs and masters by research to completion.

In the UK, the PhD process differs from the tradition in Canada and the USA. The award of the doctorate is exclusively dependent on the submission of a *ca.* 100,000-word thesis, completed after at least a three-year period of research and writing or longer. There is usually no compulsory coursework. The key criterion for the degree is that the thesis must be ‘a contribution to knowledge.’ The quality of the thesis is judged by an external academic expert in the relevant field who has the decisive role, internal examiner(s), and through a viva voce examination. The supervisor of the student is not involved in any way. The committee can reach the following decisions: award with minimal amendments; reference back to the student with advice to make more significant changes within a prescribed time period and then resubmit; award of a lower research degree, such as a master’s by research; or fail.

I will also try to answer the question on the assumption that the student intends to pursue an academic career founded on obtaining the doctorate, but of course, nowadays perhaps the majority of history PhDs in the UK at least choose other careers outside the academy. The intellectual and creative disciplines inculcated by a doctorate in our subject are very marketable! I know many of them who have reached the highest level in other professions: a former UK Prime Minister; senior civil servants; well-known authors; distinguished journalists and media figures; heads of national archives, museums, and galleries; leaders in the corporate world of business and commerce; and others who simply wished to carry out research in a subject they loved. My oldest PhD student was aged 81 when

he embarked on his studies. He was duly awarded the PhD without any amendments required.

So, at last to the question: What advice would I give to those embarking on historical research who envision a possible academic career? It is vital that they are fascinated by and committed to the subject that they wish to investigate, which could last for a number of years of (often lonely) study. Try to ensure that there are sufficient sources in advance of the formal start of research. Be prepared to change the subject of the thesis either in whole or in part if you are frustrated or disappointed as the research proceeds. I did so after six months, with very positive results in the long run. How significant is the topic in terms of the field—new knowledge for its own sake or critically revisiting existing perspectives on an important subject? I chose the latter. Ask the question: Will readers of the intended subject say 'so what?' or give a more positive response? Think about that. Do not be sensitive about your supervisor's critical comments. They are for your benefit and should be taken seriously. After all, he or she also has a vested professional interest in your success.

Try to develop a profile in the research community by giving papers at local history societies, historical conferences, and other universities as the research proceeds. As the research develops, and if the results are potentially interesting, consider in consultation with your supervisor whether the thesis might become a book project in due course after more work and some revision. If so, you might submit two or three articles to journals from the thesis to test the water. If they are accepted, you will soon start to become a recognizable 'name' in the field. If the topic is likely to be of public interest, develop some local media connections and write op-ed pieces and features in your areas of expertise. Universities today are very interested in the public impact of candidates' research when they are hiring.

**Kevin James**—Thank you, Sir Tom Devine, for sharing your insights, developed over many years of leadership in the field of modern Scottish history, and doing so with students, posing their own questions, at your suggestion, with illuminating and thoughtful and challenging responses. Your influence has been far-reaching—and your generosity—and we are grateful for your interest in encouraging such a wide-ranging and enriching and engaging conversation with students. Thank you.



A few weeks after their conversation, the interviewers reflected on the themes explored with Sir Tom.

**Dylan Parry-Lai**—My mind is buzzing on the back of this illuminating discussion with Sir Tom—a conversation that began with his insights into the contours of the evolution of Scottish Studies, continued with

how Sir Tom approaches his historiography, and culminated with some practical advice on how budding historians can best position themselves in the current climate of politicised historical scholarship. I was particularly stimulated by Sir Tom's hope for greater complexity in the study of the Scottish diaspora, in particular the implications for this field in shaping our understanding of modern Scottish nationhood.

It was also interesting to hear him characterise the current shift away from the 'conventional and uncritical' perspective of Scottish history, even if it does open the door to what he describes as 'bad history' in regard to the Henry Dundas controversy. Finally, I was struck by Sir Tom's call to arms for all historians to ensure they maintain a measured, balanced, and diverse approach to their historical scholarship, an attitude needed now more than ever before. What did others take away from this interview?

**Wilda Thumm**—I echo your thoughtful comments on this discussion. What a privilege it has been to have this opportunity to engage with such a distinguished scholar!

I, too, was struck by Sir Tom's enthusiasm for his work and for all scholarship. His enthusiasm is palpable, and contagious. It is inspiring to see Sir Tom's engagement with public debates. The popular press can be a ruthless and bloody forum for engagement with deeply contentious issues, and Sir Tom does not shrink from such engagement—it's very powerful. Bringing such a knowledgeable and informed voice to public debates that can often be distorted underscores the historian's duty to contribute expertise and experience to address misunderstandings about the past—and to engage with other scholars, too.

Andrew and Gavin, what are your thoughts on our experience today?

**Andrew Northey**—I completely agree with you all. This has been an enlightening experience on the complexities of research and the possible challenges of investigating controversial histories—as relevant to scholars outside Scotland as those who work in it. It was very helpful to have an international perspective on debates in Canada, including those that implicate the histories of both countries. Sir Tom's emphasis on balanced approaches and meticulous research also shows us how to engage with history's light and dark moments.

I also admired Sir Tom's honesty when discussing the hurdles of entering an academic career and the current state of the profession. As students of Scottish history trained and based outside Scotland, and operating within different institutional cultures, it helps us all to better understand how those cultures shape our own priorities and practices.

This has been an insightful discussion and provides lots to think about.

**Gavin Hughes**—I hold similar sentiments as all of you after the illuminating discussion with Sir Tom Devine. He lent a lot of time to us and gave us freedom in our questions and scope to really explore contentious issues.

I agree with you all that Sir Tom Devine’s willingness to discuss modern historical controversies provided much insight into the complexities associated with modern historical discourse. In particular, I was impressed by the approach of taking an encompassing view of historical figures and the contexts that shaped (and at times constrained) their decisions. After having this discussion, I have a greater understanding of the complexities in labelling a figure’s actions ‘good or bad’—especially under the lens of historical analysis. It is evident that some historical controversies have a degree of complexity to them that the average person may not consider.

As I have reflected on our conversation, I am particularly thankful for Sir Tom’s insights on the historian’s duty to address, and redress, historical accuracy. I came away from the meeting with a reinvigorated appreciation for our discipline and the moral imperatives attached to it. I am reminded that it is one of the duties of our discipline to limit our inherent bias and instead focus our purview to what is found in our source base.

Thanks again to Sir Tom, as well as all of you, for your thought-provoking contributions.

**Kevin James** is Professor of History and Scottish Studies Foundation Chair at the University of Guelph.

**Gavin Hughes** is in his second year of the MA program in Scottish History at the University of Guelph, and his research focuses on alcohol licensing in hospitality institutions during the First World War.

**Andrew Northey** is a recent MA History graduate from the University of Guelph who focuses on tourism infrastructure and inn culture in the Scottish border counties during the Victorian Era.

**Dylan Parry-Lai** is a recent MA History graduate from the University of Guelph, where his research examined how the networks maintained by the global Scottish diaspora in the early twentieth century shaped their identities and culture in Scotland and abroad.

**Wilda Thumm** has recently completed an MA in History, researching women’s sport in Scotland during World War I, and will start work on an MA in European Studies this fall at the University of Guelph.