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INTRODUCTION

The continued success of our society has led me to ponder on why we get hooked on history. My own experience may not be atypical. At school I was generally put off by history: Australian history tended to be explorers, early settlers and aboriginals and British history tended to be reform bills and corn laws. But there were occasional flashes of excitement to be found for a young boy. Ancient history was filled with great battles, assassinations, adulterous wives and every human vice and triumph. The British in India was pure excitement: tremendous heroism, evil mass murders, rebellions, holy men, women throwing themselves on funeral pyres and endless colourful maharajas. So my interest in history survived the best efforts of my school to stamp it out. At university I found the fascination of nineteenth-century Europe — politics and international intrigue — something that fitted in with my then love of politics, and although philosophy took most of my time and enthusiasm, an enjoyment of history became well ingrained.

Then I suppose the second strand of the origins of my interest in history came in. Everyone at some stage in their lives takes an interest in their ancestry. With most, this goes little further than what our parents and grandparents did and who they were. I had the extraordinary good luck, as I see it, to know my ancestry a lot further back. So, although my grandfather and indeed my great-grandfather seem to have led lives which were not particularly inspiring to their descendants, going further back provided a whole range of interesting characters. Knowing about a lot of ancestors gives one something to choose from. One can ignore the disasters. Then I found that some of my ancestors were mentioned in some history books, usually in footnotes or appendices of very scholarly tomes, but that started my interest in Scottish history. Having embarked on reading Scottish history I found it had other virtues apart from a personal family connection.

Scotland experienced all the major historical experiences of the rest of Europe: feudalism, dynastic struggles, invasion, struggles for independence, civil strife, the Reformation, industrialisation and agricultural revolution, immigration and emigration, colonising and party politics. But Scotland had five great advantages for studying these phenomena of world history. Firstly, it is small, so the material is more readily assimilable. Secondly, it was more literate than most European societies during much of its history — for example in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even more clearly in the eighteenth century, it probably had the most literate peasantry in the world, so that voices can be heard which are heard in few other countries. Thirdly, its isolation makes it easier to examine one trend or one movement without having to disentangle many other movements or developments crowding in from neighbouring societies. Fourthly, its very traditions and its cultural habit of family connections or clanishness give a surprising continuity and social, if not economic, stability which makes the impact of new beliefs or

attitudes easier to see. Fifthly, it has not suffered those dramatic changes of government and rulers or those frequent massive changes of population or boundaries, which have characterised so much of the rest of Europe. Even the Act of Union of 1707 did not remove the identity of Scotland, although serious efforts to do so were made. So our Society is made up as much by those who love history as those who love Scotland.

In this issue we are pleased to be able to include the Geoffrey Ferrow Memorial Lecture delivered in 1995 by Dr. Janet Hadley Williams. Our Vice-President, Conrad Ozóg is specially qualified to write on the Scots and the Poles, having been born in Scotland of partly Polish ancestry. Matthew Glozier's paper is an example of the fine work being done at Sydney University by post-graduate students under the guidance of our long term supporter, Associate-Professor Sybil Jack. I am also personally flattered that the editorial committee has chosen my paper on George Wishart.

Malcolm D. Broun
President