

## **Book Review**

by Diarmid Campbell, Kilmelford

**KINTYRE INSTRUCTIONS** The 5th Duke of Argyll's Instructions to his  
Kintyre Chamberlain. 1785-1805

Eric R. Cregeen & Angus Martin, The Grimsay Press

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This admirable book is in content a sequel to the late Eric Cregeen's 'Argyll Estate Instructions' published by the Scottish History Society. However, publisher, format and style are different and the commentary richer in detail. The original Instructions themselves were far less meticulous than those for the islands. So the Instructions and Chamberlain's responses transcribed by Cregeen, were far more rudimentary, but with each here illustrated more fully by Angus Martin's commentary and enriched by his meticulous local researches. Angus believes that the Kintyre Instructions were less detailed than those for the islands due to the management of Kintyre lands having already continued for many years. Also, to quote Martin, 'Kintyre estate was in a more advanced state of improvement, the tenantry less disaffected and the crofting system still-born.'

Angus agreed to undertake the amplifying and publication of Cregeen's transcriptions and his notes on them, at the request of Eric's widow, Lily Cregeen who holds custody of his unpublished papers. What is enjoyable is how the sometimes stark Instructions have here been illuminated by enlarging upon the places and characters mentioned. The result is that even the sometimes balder landscape of the western side of Kintyre becomes vivid with personalities and events. The whole of the old Kintyre peninsula, below Skipness and Clachan, comes alive in a fresh way.

All this is explained in the Preface by Martin. He gained permission from the Scottish History Society to reprint the relevant parts of Cregeen's introduction to the earlier work. This gives the setting of the Argyll family. While the role of the Argyll family had long been to represent their people nationally, through the centuries this had grown into responsibility for the nation, meaning that their lives were lived where those duties could best be played out. The remarkable 5th Duke, who as a young man had enlisted, trained and commanded the Argyll Militia during

the 1745-46 emergency, was passionately interested in improving conditions among those people for whom he was responsible. While he could not have visited each farmtoun himself, given his wider responsibilities, he doubtless gained an understanding of the condition of those for whom he was responsible during that early experience. While improving production could augment his income, if it did not merely result in a growth of population who ate up the improvements as was at times the case, his Instructions show a love of life and a far greater hands-on style than any predecessor.

This first introduction by Cregeen is adapted to the present volume and is followed by Angus' own (second) introduction, a very full, readable and useful essay of 27 pages, including illustrations. While the instructions and responses are necessarily crisp, Angus give here the heart of the matter, the life of those who lived and made their homes in Kintyre before and up to that time. To say more would dilute the pleasure of the reading.

This is followed by the Instructions and Chamberlain's responses themselves. In those days a Chamberlain on the Argyll lands, in some cases known as a Bailie elsewhere, was an estate manager or Factor. There are few if any mentions of 'crofts' in any documents for any area of Argyll before the late 18th or early 19th centuries, that name for a smallholding was later taken to mean the dispersed rental holdings designed for later 'improvements'. In a similar way the idea of an 'estate' or managed land had not existed earlier but evolved during the 18th century. Those who had been granted or inherited lands set tacks (senior tenancies) to their junior kinsmen or the more educated among their neighbours and left them largely on their own to manage those lands. These tacksmen were surrounded in their farmtouns with the people who saw themselves as belonging to that land and who in turn rented their patch of land from the tacksmen. So until the 18th century, the term used for a large holding or grant of land had generally been 'lands' rather than 'estate' - two very different concepts. The Argyll family were the first to get rid of the tacksmen during the 18th century, seeing them as no longer necessary in their earlier role as the officers of their communities when needed for defence. This may partly have resulted from the lack of military experience among the tacksmen who led the Argyll militia in 1745-46. Since the Civil Wars of the 17th century, their generation had been at peace. The idea was to take over the direct responsibility for the people and the management of the lands so as to forward improvements. The

economic motive for the change was to be paid rents directly from the tenants without the tacksmen as 'middle men'. Sadly, this move eroded the social and cultural links between the various levels of the community, since most tacksmen had been literate and had easier access to the Chamberlain, Bailie or to the laird or even Argyll himself at times. For good reason the tacksmen and their families were known as 'the middling gentry' and without them only the minister and perhaps the schoolteacher were literate in the days before general schooling. So through the 18th century, what had been 'Lands' were changing to managed 'Estates.'

The Instructions and Answers are listed under the dates of the Instructions. Each item within an Instruction is numbered and the Answers follow those numbers. Angus Martin has numbered footnotes to both Instructions and Answers where he has a comment. He chose to list each Instruction and Answer first, in the order transcribed by Cregeen, leaving his footnoted comments to follow in the later section of the book. I have to admit that I found this a little difficult, since to read both involves keeping fingers in two parts of the book. But I suspect that he felt obliged to keep Cregeen's transcriptions intact on their own, rather than mixing those with his comments. While Instructions and Answers run from page 37 to 79, Angus' comments, numbered as footnotes, are the main body of the book and run from page 80 to 197 including illustrations.

While this book is highly valuable for those with any interest in Kintyre, the depiction of social life that results from the introductions and the comments will enlarge most people's understanding of Highland life in general. Angus Martin's text is enjoyable and lucid.

The book is well illustrated with photographs and Langland's 1801 map of Kintyre.

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