

INTRODUCTION

Lindsay Paterson

The coming year will be a watershed, both for Scotland and for *The Yearbook*. For Scotland, the general election, depending on its outcome, could be the most important since 1945, determining fundamental features of the country's development for the next half century. For *The Yearbook*, too, changes will mark a radical departure after 16 years of publication. The current edition is the last in the present form: from July 1992, it will be superseded by a new quarterly, *Scottish Affairs* (of which more shortly). Such occasions seem to call for some retrospective appraisal.

The Yearbook was founded by Henry Drucker and Michael Clarke in 1976, along with the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland which has remained its home ever since. The occasion for the launch was the prospect of an imminent Scottish Assembly: "Scotland is alive and exciting", they wrote, having noted that, so far as the Scottish constitution was concerned, "there are many possibilities: the status quo is not one of them."⁽¹⁾

We ken noo. But, as Owen Dudley Edwards points out in his contribution to the present volume, "those of us whose words do not look foolish on matters devolutionary after a quarter century's lapse are either very fortunate or very banal". The striking thing about Scotland 1992 is that there is a real sense of an uncompleted agenda. We all got it wrong in 1979; intervening social and political change has forced us to look for a second chance. As a newcomer to the editor's chair, and therefore as a relatively objective outsider, I think I can reasonably say that, without *The Yearbook*, our understanding of these changes, and of the new Scotland that has been emerging, would have been much impoverished.

The Yearbook has, first of all, traced Scotland's experience during that time, an experience shaped overwhelmingly by 12 continuous years of a Conservative government which throughout that time has struggled to gain political legitimacy here. The basic but crucial task of simply recording what has been happening has been guided by a small and reliable group of editors. Henry Drucker was joined by Nancy Drucker between 1979 and 1982, they were succeeded by David McCrone from 1983 to 1987, he was joined by Alice Brown in 1988, 1989 and 1991 and Alice Brown and Richard Parry produced the 1990 edition. Some key features of the record-keeping have remained constant during that time – notably Chris Allen's bibliography of writing about Scotland, Hamish McN Henderson's unique (and witty) account of Scottish

legislation, John Bochel's and David Denver's record of Scottish elections, and Allan Macartney's and later David McCrone's tracking of Scottish opinion polls. Helen Ramm has been the production bedrock on which this record has rested.

Beside the basic records have been definitive articles discussing the fundamental changes that have been reshaping Scotland. *The Yearbook* has recorded the growth of new industries such as electronics, tourism, services, and North Sea Oil; and it has documented and discussed the effects of the decline of the old. The steadily increasing economic relevance of the European Community has provided as important a background as the industrial policies of the Conservative government. *The Yearbook* has recorded also the enormous social problems which these changes have brought or exacerbated – for example, unemployment, low pay, homelessness, and enforced migration; but it has clarified also the social changes which are re-creating Scotland – the involvement of women in the workforce and other areas of life hitherto dominated by men, the growing affluence alongside the growing poverty, and the rapidly expanding participation in education.

The Yearbook has never, however, been only a matter of record or debate about current concerns. As David McCrone and colleagues have observed elsewhere, “one of the remarkable features about Scottish social analysis is that normal institutional demarcations are often ignored. There is not, for example, a sociological debate about Scotland and a historical debate about Scotland, but simply a debate about Scotland's social development”.⁽²⁾ *The Yearbook* has reflected this debate, with articles which draw on historical, cultural, or other perspectives; and it has, pre-eminently, reflected the absence of barriers in Scotland among government, politics, journalism, freelance writers, and academia. It could hardly be otherwise in a small country (especially one with few academics that pay any attention to her affairs); the result has, again, been that *The Yearbook* has not only reflected Scotland's reaction to 16 years of social change, but also has contributed to that change by providing a forum.

In our own way, then, we have been part of the cultural flowering which in the early 1980s emerged as one reaction to the debacle of the referendum. The present volume reflects not only some key further aspects of the various social changes which previous volumes have recorded, but also seeks to chart the re-emergence of that old agenda which Drucker and Clarke started by addressing.

Most notably, we have a discussion of the constitutional issue itself. Iain Macwhirter, in his review of yet another turbulent Scottish year at Westminster, conveys a sense of an ensuing stasis in Scottish politics. Nothing seems to be changing (which some government people seem to regard as a sign that they are regaining ground in Scotland). But that is partly because nearly all the debate is, for the time being, over, and we await the outcome at the

general election. The real political change from the 1970s has been a remarkable shift in Labour Party attitudes; the shift has been so engulfing that Neil Kinnock would have us believe that he has been in favour of constitutional change all along.⁽³⁾ The vehicle for this change – and for the key role of the Liberal Democrats – has been the Constitutional Convention, a peculiarly Scottish institution with its clerics, its moral mission, and its rhetoric of participation combined with an inscrutable process of consensual decision-making. James Kellas places the Convention in recent historic context. Pursuing our role of recording, we also publish the Convention's (almost) final statement and (from its campaign director, Harry Conroy) its campaigning plans.

Another Scottish tradition to which the Convention has adhered is what Emma Simpson has elsewhere memorably called the “mainly manly” composition of our public bodies.⁽⁴⁾ But it has also – as Catriona Levy explains – broken with that tradition to the extent of being open to some decidedly radical ideas for women's involvement.

The current discussion of constitutional change takes place against two backgrounds. One is European, and James Mitchell directs a timely scepticism at the fashionable notions of sovereignty and subsidiarity. The other is historical. As Owen Dudley Edwards shows, we have lost sight of the extent to which limited self-government has always been central to constitutional debate in these islands. Only the rewriting of history by separatists and what we might dub unitarists has allowed us collectively to forget that. Both these pieces belong to the iconoclastic role which *The Yearbook* has played over the last decade in this mythopeistic wee nation.

Whether any of this constitutional ferment will lead to anything remains to be seen. If it does, part of the reason will, of course, be the unpopularity of the Conservative government in Scotland, and central to that has been what have been perceived to be its attacks on some key institutions of Scottish civil society. Symbolically central to the autonomy of that society in the Union has been education, and so the sensitivities towards government policies in that area have been especially acute. And within education, there is nothing more symbolically important than the Highers and the universities. So it is sometimes very difficult, in debates about their future, to separate myths from realities. Our two articles on these topics admirably do so. Shortly after *The Yearbook* is published, the conclusions of a Scottish Office committee reviewing the Higher will be released; Andrew McPherson outlines the recent and long-term background to the committee's deliberations, and explains the details of the debate about reform. Donald Withrington points out that the popularly conceived idea of what constitutes the Scottish university tradition bears a not entirely reliable relationship to the truth; there is plenty in the real traditions which Conservative politicians could latch onto.

A further reason why the constitutional debate might well lead

somewhere this time is that Scottish civil society has been developing in the last decade in ways which no-one could have foreseen. A fascinating and very recent reflection of this has been the completely unexpected role played by the new school boards. Opposed by non-Conservative parties as a threat to comprehensive state schooling, they have turned out to be anything but tame poodles of the Scottish Office or of Michael Forsyth. It seems that when Scottish society is given new voices at the moment, it speaks in surprising ways. Pamela Munn surveys the development of the boards so far, and indicates how they and the even newer councils of the Further Education colleges might develop.

Our General Section, also, deals with some of the areas that have remained central to social and political change in Scotland in the 1980s. Stewart Asquith looks at the Children's Hearing System on its 21st anniversary, and finds another way in which we should be ignoring the rest of the UK and looking to the rest of Europe for our comparators both political and academic. Marion Ulas explains the role of the social work service in administering the unsatisfactory Mental Health (Scotland) Act of 1984; it is unsatisfactory for that familiar old reason, that it was introduced in a hurry at the tail end of a session of a parliament which rarely has enough time to debate Scottish affairs properly. Peter Williamson discusses the changes in the management of the Scottish Health Service – like the educational changes, an important source of government unpopularity. And Mike Danson and Greg Lloyd investigate one response to industrial decline – the introduction of Enterprise Zones.

The Reference Section contains our usual features on opinion polls (David McCrone), Scottish legislation (Hamish McN Henderson), and recent writing about Scotland (Chris Allen). Richard Parry casts some light on who does what in the senior echelons of the Scottish Office; the last time *The Yearbook* published such an account was in 1980, when the editors expected that it would provide a guide to the departmental responsibilities of a Scottish Assembly. The fate of Mr Parry's new description is one of the many questions that might be settled before long.

If one thing is clear politically it is that the Scottish electorate remains at best sceptical about John Major, as the opinion polls show. By the time *The Yearbook* is published, we will know at least something more about these attitudes, because either a general election or the Kincardine and Deeside by-election will intervene (a by-election which no-one who had followed Alick Buchanan-Smith's principled career can welcome). In a sense, though, the constitutional future of Scotland is already fairly clear. Any outcome of the general election other than a majority Conservative government is almost certain to produce a parliament. Any Conservative government faced with persisting unpopularity in Scotland would (given what we have heard since Margaret Thatcher departed) probably do something too. So the only outcome which would lead to no change would be a significant rise in

Conservative fortunes in Scotland; and, as Iain Macwhirter points out, that at the time of writing does not seem likely.

In any case, no outcome of the general election will end the need to continue to debate Scottish issues regularly and in depth. It is to react more effectively to prospective changes that we have decided to convert *The Yearbook* into a quarterly, to be called *Scottish Affairs*. It will appear first in July 1992, and thereafter every three months. Part of the July issue of each year will continue to play the annual-review role which *The Yearbook* has had: it will contain reviews of the year's activities, and will be accompanied by an expanded Reference Section. (Further administrative details – including how to subscribe – are in an advertisement at the end of this edition of *The Yearbook*.)

The main reason for the change is to allow us to engage more immediately with current debates. The copy deadline for *The Yearbook* has been late summer for publication in January, and, as the downfall of Margaret Thatcher showed for *The Yearbook 1991*, that is a potentially embarrassing gap. The copy deadline for the new journal will, in contrast, be three or four weeks. *Scottish Affairs* will also carry a wider variety of types of article. Over the year as a whole, it will continue to have at least as many long articles (6,000 words) as each edition of *The Yearbook* has had, but in addition there will be several shorter ones (1,500-2,000 words) which should allow a genuine debate to develop.

We also intend to deal with a wider range of subjects. The title has been chosen to be deliberately general: anything that might particularly interest Scotland will be included. Like *The Yearbook*, *Scottish Affairs* will be open to all points of view. There are three directions in particular in which we intend to develop new writing. The first is towards international affairs, including most importantly the position of small nations and regions of Europe. The second is towards a cultural and historical analysis of Scotland's current development. And the final is towards a fuller understanding of Scottish business, in the interests of fostering a constructive dialogue between business people themselves and the surrounding society which (in the terminology of one large multinational company) gives them their licence to operate. Because the overall annual length will be about 60% greater than *The Yearbook*, this expansion can be achieved without getting in the way of maintaining the key roles of recording and analysing current affairs.

Thanks are due, in this moment of transition, to all the contributors to and editors of *The Yearbook* over the 16 volumes; and my own thanks are particularly due to this year's contributors, to my co-editor David McCrone, and to Helen Ramm for her editorial assistance. But to end with that (as is customary) would be too much like a valediction. So I will end instead by inviting all our contributors – and new ones too – to use *Scottish Affairs* as an opportunity to display what Henry Cockburn would have called the continuing

Scottish Government Yearbook 1992

Scotch passion for discussion.

Lindsay Paterson, Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, Edinburgh University.

September 1991.

References

1. MG Clarke and H M Drucker (1976) *Our Changing Scotland*, pp.15-16. Edinburgh: EUSPB.
2. "Introduction" in D McCrone, S Kendrick, P Straw (eds) (1989). *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*, p.7. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
3. *The Scotsman*. 29 August 1991, p.11.
4. E Simpson (1990). "Breakthrough imminent for women in Scottish politics?" *Radical Scotland*, 44, p.9.