

= Scottish society in the early modern era =

Scottish society in the early modern era encompasses the social structure and relations that existed in Scotland between the early sixteenth century and the mid @-@ eighteenth century . It roughly corresponds to the early modern era in Europe , beginning with the Renaissance and Reformation and ending with the last Jacobite risings and the beginnings of the industrial revolution .

Scotland in this period was a hierarchical society , with a complex series of ranks and orders . This was headed by the monarch and the great magnates . Below them were the lairds , who emerged as a distinct group at the top of local society whose position was consolidated by economic and administrative change . Below the lairds in rural society were a variety of groups , often ill @-@ defined , including yeomen , who were often major landholders , and the husbandmen , who were landholders , followed by cottars and grassmen , who often had only limited rights to common land and pasture . Urban society was led by wealthy merchants , who were often burgesses . Beneath them , and often in conflict with the urban elite , were the craftsmen . Beneath these ranks , in both urban and rural society , there were a variety of groups of mobile " masterless men " , the unemployed and vagrants .

Kinship was agnatic , with descent counted only through the male line , helping to build the importance of surnames and clans . The increased power of the state and economic change eroded the power of these organisations , and this process would accelerate as the government responded to the threat of Jacobite risings by undermining the power of clan chiefs in the eighteenth century . The Reformation had a major impact on family life , changing the nature of baptism , marriage and burials , leading to a change in wider relationships , sacramental status and burial practices and placing a greater emphasis on the role of the father .

Limited demographic evidence indicates a generally expanding population , limited by short @-@ term subsistence crises , of which the most severe was probably that of the " seven ill years " of the 1690s . The urban centres of the burghs continued to grow , with the largest being Edinburgh , followed by Glasgow . Population growth and economic dislocation from the second half of the sixteenth century led to a growing problem of vagrancy , which was responded to by a series of Acts of Parliament that established what would become the " Old Poor Law " , which attempted to ensure relief for the " deserving " local poor , but punishments for the mobile unemployed and beggars . The patriarchal nature of society meant that women were directed to be subservient to their husbands and families . They remained an important part of the workforce and some were economically independent , while others lived a marginal existence . At the beginning of the period women had little or no legal status , but were increasingly criminalised after the Reformation , and were the major subjects of the witch hunts that occurred in relatively large numbers until the end of the seventeenth century .

= = Social structure = =

= = = Aristocracy = = =

Early modern Scotland was a hierarchical society , with a series of ranks and marks of status . Below the king were the great magnates , who by this period were no longer a feudal nobility , whose power was based on territorial landholding , but an honorific peerage , and land had become a commodity to be traded . They were headed by a small number of dukes (usually descended from very close relatives of the king) and a larger group of earls . These senior nobles formed the political classes at the beginning of the period : sometimes holding major office , holding a place on the king 's council and taking part in the major crises and rebellions of the period . They considered themselves the king 's " natural councillors " and were also the heads of a system of local patronage and loyalty . This was often formalised through bonds of manrent that set out mutual obligations and allegiances .

Under the magnates were the barons , who held increasingly nominal feudal tenures of which an

important vestige was the right to hold baronial courts , which could deal with both matters of land ownership and interpersonal offences , including minor acts of violence . Also important were the local tenants @-@ in @-@ chief , who held legally held their land directly from the king and who by this period were often the major local landholders in an area . In this period , as feudal distinctions declined , the barons and tenants @-@ in @-@ chief merged to form a new identifiable group , the lairds . This group was roughly equivalent to the English gentlemen . Just as the magnates saw themselves as the king 's natural counsellors , so the lairds advised and exerted influence over the dukes and earls . The lairds were often the most important individual in a local community . They ran baronial courts , acted as sheriffs @-@ depute , sat on local assizes and were called in as private arbitrators . In the course of the sixteenth century they would acquire a role in national politics , gaining representation in Parliament and playing a major role in the Reformation crisis of 1560 . As a result of the Reformation and the creation of a Presbyterian Kirk , their position in local society was enhanced . They often gained the new status of elder and greater oversight of the behaviour of the local population through the disciplinary functions of kirk sessions .

= = = Middle ranks = = =

Below the lairds were a variety of groups , often ill @-@ defined . These included yeomen , later characterised by Walter Scott as " bonnet lairds " , often owning substantial land . The practice of feuing (by which a tenant paid an entry sum and an annual feu duty , but could pass the land on to their heirs) meant that the number of people holding heritable possession of lands , which had previously been controlled by the church or nobility , expanded . These and the lairds probably numbered about 10 @,@ 000 by the seventeenth century and became what the government defined as heritors , on whom the financial and legal burdens of local government increasingly fell .

Below the substantial landholders were those engaged in subsistence agriculture , who made up the majority of the working population . Those with property rights included husbandmen , lesser landholders and free tenants . Most farming was based on the lowland fermtoun or highland baile , settlements of a handful of families that held individual land rights , but jointly farmed an area notionally suitable for two or three plough teams . Below them were the cottars , who often shared rights to common pasture , occupied small portions of land and participated in joint farming as hired labour . Farms also might have grassmen , who had rights only to grazing . Eighteenth @-@ century evidence suggests that the children of cottars and grassmen often became servants in agriculture or handicrafts . Serfdom had died out in Scotland in the fourteenth century , but was virtually restored by statute law for miners and saltworkers .

Society in the urban settlements of the burghs was headed by wealthier merchants , who often held local office as a burgess , alderman , bailies , or as a member of the burgh council . Below them were craftsmen and workers that made up the majority of the urban population . Both merchants and craftsmen often served a long apprenticeship , acquiring skills and status , before they became freemen of a burgh , and could enjoy certain rights and privileges . Major sources of trade included the export of wool , fish , coal , salt and cattle . Imports included wine , sugar and other luxury goods . Important crafts included metal working , carpentry , leather working , pottery and later brewing and wig @-@ making . There were frequent disputes between the burgesses and craftsmen over rights and political control of the burgh , occasionally bursting into violence , as occurred at Perth in the first half of the sixteenth century .

= = = The poor = = =

At the bottom of society were the " masterless men " and women (who lacked a clear social relationship with a social superior , such as service or apprenticeship) the unemployed and vagrants , whose numbers were swelled in times of economic downturn or hardship . Masterless women may have made up as much as 18 per cent of all households and particularly worried authorities . In rural society those that needed relief from extreme hardship tended from the lowest ranks of rural society , including cottars , labourers and servants . Most of those who took to the

roads , around three quarters , were men . Most had a disability such as blindness , or claimed to have suffered a personal disaster such as fire or theft . Some were discharged soldiers and sailors , probably returning home or searching for work . Most tended to move around a restricted area , probably moving between a limited number of parishes in search of work and relief . For some this may have been tied to the agricultural calendar , and individuals may have moved in a circuit as different foodstuffs and work became available . Poor relief was more abundant in urban centres , particularly in the largest centres like Edinburgh . As a result , particularly in times of extreme hardship the poor would gravitate to the burghs . They could form a large section of society , with roughly a quarter of population of Perth in 1584 being classified as poor . The poor in urban society were a diverse group , the largest numbers women and most of those were widows . In Aberdeen in the period 1695 ? 1705 three @-@ quarters of the poor who received relief were women and of those two thirds were widows . The remainder were made up of servants , casual labourers , journeymen artisans , beggars , vagrants and orphans .

= = Kinship and clans = =

Unlike in England , where kinship was predominately cognatic , derived through both males and females , in Scotland kinship was agnatic , with members of a group sharing a (sometimes fictional) common ancestor . Women retained their original surname at marriage and marriages were intended to create friendship between kin groups , rather than a new bond of kinship . In the Borders this was often reflected in a common surname . A shared surname has been seen as a " test of kinship " , proving large bodies of kin who could call on each other ' s support . At the beginning of the period this may have helped intensify the idea of the feud , which was usually carried out as a form of revenge for a kinsman , and for which a large body of kin could be counted on to support rival sides , although conflict within kin groups also occurred . From the reign of James VI , systems of judicial law were enforced , and by the early eighteenth century the feud had been suppressed . In the Borders , the leadership of the heads of the great surnames was largely replaced by the authority of landholding lairds in the seventeenth century .

The combination of agnatic kinship and a feudal system of obligation has been seen as creating the highland clan system . The head of a clan was usually the eldest son of the last chief of the most powerful sept or branch . The leading families of a clan formed the fine , often seen as equivalent to lowland lairds , providing council in peace and leadership in war ; below them were the daoine usisle (in Gaelic) or tacksmen (in Scots) , who managed the clan lands and collected the rents . In the isles and along the adjacent western seaboard there were also buannachann , who acted as a military elite , defending the clan lands from raids or taking part in attacks on clan enemies . Most of the followers of the clan were tenants , who supplied labour to the clan heads and sometimes acted as soldiers . In the early modern era they usually took the clan name as their surname , turning it into a massive , if often fictive , kin group . Because the Highland Clans were not a direct threat to the Restoration government , or relations with England , the same effort was not put into suppressing their independence as had been focused on the Borders , until after the Glorious Revolution . Economic change and the imposition of royal justice had begun to undermine the clan system before the eighteenth century , but the process was accelerated after the rebellion of 1745 , with Highland dress banned , the enforced disarming of clansmen , the compulsory purchase of heritable jurisdictions , the exile of many chiefs , and the sending of ordinary clansmen to the colonies as indentured labour . All of this largely reduced clan leaders to the status of simple landholders within one generation .

= = Family = =

There was considerable concern over the safety of children in this period , prompted by high infant mortality . The abolition of godparents in the Reformation meant that baptism became a mechanism for emphasising the role and responsibilities of fathers . Wet @-@ nurses were used for young children , but in most families mothers took the primary role in bringing up children , while the Kirk

emphasised the role of the father for older children . After the Reformation there was an increasing emphasis on education , resulting in the growth of a parish school system , but its effects were limited for the children of the poor and for girls . Most children left home for a period of life @-@ cycle service , in which youths left home to be domestic or agricultural servants , or to become apprentices , and which ended when they married and established independent households .

Marriages were often the subject of careful negotiation , particularly higher in society . Marriage lost its sacramental status at the Reformation , and irregular marriage , a simple public promise or mutual agreement , followed by consummation , or cohabitation , continued to be accepted as valid throughout the period . Women managed the household and sometimes worked beside their husbands , and although obedience to husbands was stressed , this may have been limited in practice . Divorce developed after the Reformation , and was available for a wider range of causes and accessed by a much larger section of society than in England . Because of high mortality rates , widowhood was a relatively common state , and some women acquired independence and status , but others were forced into a marginal existence ; remarriage was common . The elaborate funerals and complex system of prayers for the dead that dominated in late Medieval Scotland were removed at the Reformation , when simpler services were introduced . Burial inside the church was discouraged , causing some consternation among local lairds who wished to be buried with their ancestors . This led to the uniquely Scottish solution of adding a fourth aisle to " T " -plan churches , usually behind the pulpit , which were closed off and used for the burial of the families of the local laird . For the majority , however , burial had to be outside the church , and graveyards with stone markers became increasingly common from the early seventeenth century .

= = Demography = =

There are almost no reliable sources with which to track the population of Scotland before the late seventeenth century . Estimates based on English records suggest that by the end of the Middle Ages , the Black Death and subsequent recurring outbreaks of the plague , may have caused the population of Scotland to fall as low as half a million people . Price inflation , which generally reflects growing demand for food , suggests that this probably expanded in the first half of the sixteenth century . Almost half the years in the second half of the sixteenth century saw local or national scarcity , necessitating the shipping of large quantities of grain from the Baltic . Distress was exacerbated by outbreaks of plague , with major epidemics in the periods 1584 @-@ 8 , 1595 and 1597 ? 1609 .

The population expansion probably levelled off after the famine of the 1590s , as prices were relatively stable in the early seventeenth century . In the early seventeenth century famine was common , with four periods of famine prices between 1620 and 1625 . The invasions of the 1640s had a profound impact on the Scottish economy , with the destruction of crops and the disruption of markets resulting in some of the most rapid price rises of the century , but population probably expanded in the period of stability that followed the Restoration in 1660 . Calculations based on Hearth Tax returns for 1691 indicate a population of 1 @, @ 234 @, @ 575 . The population may have been seriously affected by the failed harvests (1695 , 1696 and 1698 @-@ 9) known as the " seven ill years " . The result was severe famine and depopulation , particularly in the north . The famines of the 1690s were seen as particularly severe , partly because famine had become relatively rare in the second half of the seventeenth century , with only one year of dearth (in 1674) , and the shortages of the 1690s were the last of their kind . The first reliable information on national population is from the census conducted by the Reverend Alexander Webster in 1755 , which showed the inhabitants of Scotland as 1 @, @ 265 @, @ 380 persons .

Compared with the situation after the redistribution of population as a result of the clearances and the industrial revolution that began in the eighteenth century , these numbers must have been evenly spread over the kingdom , with roughly half living north of the Tay . Most of the early modern population , in both the Lowlands and Highlands , was housed in small hamlets and isolated dwellings . As the population expanded , some of these settlements were sub @-@ divided to create new hamlets and more marginal land was settled , with sheilings (clusters of huts occupied

while summer pasture was being used for grazing) , becoming permanent settlements . Perhaps ten per cent of the population lived in one of many burghs that had grown up in the later Medieval period , mainly in the east and south of the country . It has been suggested that they had a mean population of about 2 @, @ 000 , but many were much smaller than 1 @, @ 000 , and the largest , Edinburgh , probably had a population of over 10 @, @ 000 at the beginning of the era . During the seventeenth century the number of people living in the capital grew rapidly . It also expanded beyond the city walls in suburbs at Cowgate , Bristo and Westport and by 1750 , with its suburbs , it had reached a population of 57 @, @ 000 . The only other towns above 10 @, @ 000 by the end of the period were Glasgow with 32 @, @ 000 , Aberdeen with around 16 @, @ 000 and Dundee with 12 @, @ 000 .

= = Poverty and vagrancy = =

In the Middle Ages Scotland had much more limited organisation for poor relief than England , lacking the religious confraternities of the major English cities . It possessed a few hospitals , bede houses and leper houses , which offered confinement rather than treatment . Because so many Scottish parishes had been impropriated for some religious foundation , perhaps as many as 87 per cent , funds were not available for local causes such as poor relief . Protestant reformers in the Book of Discipline (1560) proposed that part of the patrimony of the Catholic Church be used to support the poor , but this aim was never realised . Population growth and economic dislocation from the second half of the sixteenth century led to a growing problem of vagrancy . The government reacted with three major pieces of legislation on poverty and vagrancy in 1574 , 1579 and 1592 . The kirk became a major element of the system of poor relief , and justices of the peace were given responsibility for dealing with the issue . The 1574 poor law act was modelled on the English act passed two years earlier ; it limited relief to the deserving poor of the old , sick and infirm , imposing draconian punishments on a long list of " masterful beggars " , including jugglers , palmisters and unlicensed tutors . Parish deacons , elders or other overseers , and in the burghs bailies and provosts , were to draw up lists of deserving poor , and each would be assessed . Those not belonging to the parish were to be sent back to their place of birth and might be put in the stocks or otherwise punished , probably actually increasing the level of vagrancy . Unlike the English act , there was no attempt to provide work for the able @-@ bodied poor . In practice , the strictures on begging were often disregarded in times of extreme hardship . Poor rates were very slow to be set up in the burghs , with Edinburgh the first as a result of the outbreak of plague in 1584 . It was then gradually introduced in other cities , such as St Andrews in 1597 , Perth in 1599 , Aberdeen in 1619 , and Glasgow and Dundee in 1636 .

This legislation provided the basis of what would later be known as the " Old Poor Law " in Scotland , which remained in place until the mid @-@ nineteenth century , when , faced with the much greater problems of poverty caused by industrialisation and population growth , a more comprehensive system , known as the New Poor Law , was created . Most subsequent legislation built on its principles of provision for the local deserving poor and punishment of mobile and undeserving " sturdie beggars " . The most important later act was that of 1649 , which declared that local heritors were to be assessed by kirk session to provide the financial resources for local relief , rather than relying on voluntary contributions . By the mid @-@ seventeenth century the system had largely been rolled out across the Lowlands , but was limited in the Highlands . The system was largely able to cope with general poverty and minor crises , helping the old and infirm to survive and provide life support in periods of downturn at relatively low cost , but was overwhelmed in the major subsistence crisis of the 1690s .

= = Women = =

Early modern Scotland was a theoretically patriarchal society , in which men had total authority over women , but how this worked in practice is difficult to discern . Marriages , particularly higher in society , were often political in nature and the subject of complex negotiations over the tocher (

dowry) . Some mothers took a leading role in negotiating and finding marriages , as Lady Glenorchy did for her children in the 1560s and 1570s , or as matchmakers , finding suitable and compatible partners . Before the Reformation , the extensive marriage bars for kinship meant that most marriages necessitated a papal dispensation , which could later be used as grounds for annulment if the marriage proved politically or personally inconvenient . At the beginning of the period , women had a very limited legal status . The criminal courts refused to recognise them as witnesses or independent criminals , and responsibly for their actions was assumed to lie with their husbands , fathers and kin . In the post @-@ Reformation period there was a criminalisation of women , partly evident in witchcraft prosecutions from 1563 . Through the 1640s , independent commissions were set up to try women for child murder , and after pressure from the kirk a law of 1690 placed the presumption of guilt on a woman if she concealed a pregnancy and birth , and her child later died .

By the eighteenth century many poorer girls were being taught in dame schools , informally set up by a widow or spinster to teach reading , sewing and cooking . Among the nobility there were many educated and cultured women . Women formed an important part of the workforce . Many unmarried women worked away from their families as farm servants , and married women worked with their husbands around the farm , taking part in all major agricultural tasks . They had a particular role as shearers in the harvest , forming most of the reaping team of the bandwin . Women also played an important part in the expanding textile industries , spinning and setting up warps for men to weave . There is evidence of single women engaging in independent economic activity , particularly for widows , who can be found keeping schools , brewing ale and trading . Some were highly successful , such as Janet Flockhart , an Edinburgh Wadwife or moneylender , who had been left a widow with seven children after her third husband 's suicide , and who managed her business affairs so successfully that she amassed a moveable estate of £ 22 @,@ 000 by her death in the late sixteenth century . Lower down the social scale , the rolls of poor relief indicate that large numbers of widows with children endured a marginal existence .

= = Popular religion = =

Scottish Protestantism was focused on the Bible , which was seen as infallible and the major source of moral authority . Many Bibles were large , illustrated and highly valuable objects . In the early part of the century the Genevan translation was commonly used . In 1611 the Kirk adopted the Authorised King James Version and the first Scots version was printed in Scotland in 1633 , but the Geneva Bible continued to be employed into the seventeenth century . Bibles often became the subject of superstitions , being used in divination . Family worship was strongly encouraged by the Covenanters . Books of devotion were distributed to encourage the practice and minsters were encouraged to investigate whether this was being carried out . The seventeenth century marked the high @-@ water mark of kirk discipline . Kirk sessions were able to apply religious sanctions , such as excommunication and denial of baptism , to enforce godly behaviour and obedience . In more difficult cases of immoral behaviour they could work with the local magistrate , in a system modelled on that employed in Geneva .

Public occasions were treated with mistrust and from the later seventeenth century there were efforts by kirk sessions to stamp out activities such as well @-@ dressing , bonfires , guising , penny weddings and dancing . The Reformation had a severe impact on church music . The Lutheranism that influenced the early Scottish Reformation attempted to accommodate Catholic musical traditions into worship , drawing on Latin hymns and vernacular songs . The most important product of this tradition in Scotland was The Gude and Godlie Ballatis , which were spiritual satires on popular ballads composed by the brothers James , John and Robert Wedderburn . Never adopted by the kirk , they nevertheless remained popular and were reprinted from the 1540s to the 1620s . Later the Calvinism that came to dominate was much more hostile to Catholic musical tradition and popular music , placing an emphasis on the Psalms . The Scottish Psalter of 1564 was commissioned by the Assembly of the Church . Whole congregations would now all sing these psalms , often using common tunes , unlike the trained choirs who had sung the many parts of polyphonic hymns .

= = Witchtrials = =

From late Medieval Scotland there is evidence of occasional prosecutions of individuals for causing harm through witchcraft , but these may have been declining in the first half of the sixteenth century . In the aftermath of the initial Reformation settlement , Parliament passed the Witchcraft Act 1563 , similar to that passed in England one year earlier , which made witchcraft a capital crime . Despite the fact that Scotland probably had about one quarter of the population of England , it had three times the number of witchcraft prosecutions , at about 6 @, @ 000 for the entire period . James VI 's visit to Denmark , a country familiar with witch hunts , may have encouraged an interest in the study of witchcraft . After his return to Scotland , he attended the North Berwick witch trials , the first major persecution of witches in Scotland under the 1563 Act . Several people , most notably Agnes Sampson , were convicted of using witchcraft to send storms against James ' ship . James became obsessed with the threat posed by witches and , inspired by his personal involvement , in 1597 wrote the *Daemonologie* , a tract that opposed the practice of witchcraft and which provided background material for Shakespeare 's *Tragedy of Macbeth* . James is known to have personally supervised the torture of women accused of being witches . After 1599 , his views became more sceptical .

In the seventeenth century the pursuit of witchcraft was largely taken over by the kirk sessions , and was often used to attack superstitious and Catholic practices in Scottish society . Most of the accused , 75 per cent , were women , with over 1 @, @ 500 executed , and the witch hunt in Scotland has been seen as a means of controlling women . The most intense witch hunt was in 1661 ? 62 , which involved 664 named witches in four counties . From this point prosecutions began to decline , as trials were more tightly controlled by the judiciary and government , torture was more sparingly used and standards of evidence were raised . There may also have been a growing scepticism , and with relative peace and stability the economic and social tensions that contributed to accusation may have reduced . There were occasional local outbreaks such as the one in East Lothian in 1678 and Paisley in 1697 . The last recorded executions were in 1706 , and the last trial was in 1727 . The British parliament repealed the 1563 Witchcraft Act in 1736 .