

Scottish Women: A Documentary History, 1780–1914. Edited by Esther Breitenbach, Linda Fleming, S. Karly Kehoe and Lesley Orr. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2013. 352pp. NZ price: \$139.00. ISBN: 9780748640164 (hardback).

Some 18 years ago *My Hand will Write what my Heart Dictates* redressed the gender imbalance of New Zealand's historical narratives, presenting New Zealand women's experiences in their own words by drawing predominantly upon letters, diaries and journals written by women in New Zealand in the nineteenth century. While *Scottish Women: A Documentary History, 1780–1914* (a companion volume to *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*)¹ does likewise for Scottish women, the emphasis is marginally less on utilizing only sources written by women, and more on representing a broad range of Scottish women's experiences in the long nineteenth century (1780 to 1914).

Though the volume could be read simply as a collection of primary sources that are interesting and useful in themselves, every source, every section, every chapter and the collection as a whole are so thoroughly introduced and contextualized that the volume could very nearly be read without reference to the sources at all. While this degree of contextualization could have felt forced and dry, it works to great advantage here and the reader is left in no doubt as to the social environment in which sources were created or how they fit in the larger narrative of nineteenth-century Scotland. Sources written by women with entries in *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* are noted throughout so readers can further put the source into context.

The introduction outlines the focus and aims of the volume, before going on to lay out the themes of the various chapters, essentially offering the historiography of the themes and addressing the major issues and the general ways in which women were involved with those issues within each theme. Included here is a section on 'Education, Arts and Literature', a theme not covered directly in the volume because it surfaces in other sections and has been examined in other volumes in greater depth than some other themes. In the section regarding locating and interpreting sources the editors are needlessly apologetic, given the depth of the volume as it stands, noting that the collection focuses on the 'long nineteenth century' due to their own interests and expertise, and that the majority of the sources selected are located in Edinburgh and Glasgow 'given our own locations and the location of the National Library and National Archives'. This acknowledgement that there are valuable sources to be found 'within local libraries, archives and museums, as well as in privately held papers' is useful; however, coverage across Scotland and across every theme is so thorough throughout the volume that it certainly is not noticeably worse off for this focus on sources found in Edinburgh and Glasgow repositories. The introduction goes on to give a somewhat formulaic, yet effective, overview of each chapter, the types of sources chosen for each section within those chapters and what those sources can tell us.

Each of the editors has taken responsibility for individual chapters, with Fleming in charge of Chapters Two and Three. As is also the case in every other chapter in the volume, 'Bodies, Sexuality and Health' speaks to much more than the chapter title suggests. Section One, 'Looking the Part', includes a delightful broadside regarding a cross-dressing 'female footboy' who very nearly married a young lady

in the house she was ‘footboy’ in; ‘behaving and misbehaving’ examines not only such sources as a report from a hospital that treated VD, but also excerpts from, for example, publications dealing with the differing sexual appetites of husbands and wives; Section Three, ‘In Sickness and in Health’, includes home remedies for women to cure illness in their home, and an excerpt from a diary describing the day-by-day treatments and pains of breast cancer in 1830. Chapter Three, ‘Hearth and Home’, examines ‘women’s experience within a variety of household roles and living conditions’ (p.20). A detailed excerpt in this chapter about laundering clothes is a good example of how these sources bring the lived experiences of women into full light; while an explanation of the laundry process could tell a reader it was a long and hard chore, this excerpt brings the full ordeal of it to life better than any secondary account of it ever could.

Across the six sections of ‘Work and Working Conditions’ Breitenbach very thoroughly covers a wide range of occupations held by women (and children), including those that history tends to remember as being male-only trades, such as mining. In ‘Crime and Punishment, Immorality and Reform’ the emphasis is, perhaps inevitably, on prostitution and reform, but Kehoe is careful not to neglect other areas of women’s experiences within the broader theme. Orr’s chapters on ‘Religion’ and ‘Protest and Politics’ include a good number of poems by women, as well as five of the seven Gaelic sources featured in the volume.

Perhaps of most obvious utility to scholars of New Zealand history is the final chapter, ‘Empire Experiences and Perspectives’. Breitenbach has managed to cover a good range of women’s experiences across the British Empire, with two New Zealand sources in the mix. Most impressive in this chapter is the move away from a focus on migrant experiences to also examine ‘travelling the Empire’ and ‘perspectives on Empire and colonial rule’.

One not-to-be-underestimated feature of this volume is that the excerpts are not too long. The editors have captured the essence of longer sources without needing to include the full source. Likewise in their selection of sources the editors have been representative and indicative rather than exhaustive in their coverage of themes and sub-themes. While the sources are all gems in themselves, they will also serve those new to these areas of research to identify the types of evidence that might be found in these types of sources, and where to look to find such evidence, as well as how sources such as poems and songs (for example) can be used as evidence for a given argument. In the introduction to the volume the editors note their hope that it will ‘stimulate further research’ (p.1). I have no doubt that it will do that, and that this excellent collection will become widely referenced.

REBECCA LENIHAN

Victoria University of Wellington

NOTES

1 Elizabeth L. Ewan, Sue Innes, Sian Reynolds and Rose Pipes, eds, *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007