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Liberties and Identities in the Medieval British Isles.

Edited by Michael Prestwich. Pp. viii, 225.

ISBN: 9781843833741.

Boydell & Brewer, 2008. £50.00.

Boydell, Brepols, Brill and Ashgate continue to serve medievalists well as outlets for edited collections and proceedings, ground on which Scottish publishers seem hesitant to tread. This valuable volume brings together ten papers around the topic of lay and ecclesiastical liberties, mostly those within border regions of the British Isles from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. There is an additional focus on the allied themes of their interaction with local and external—usually royal—authority and their resulting complexities of identity over time.

The main points of interest for scholars of medieval Scotland will be Keith Stringer's excellent comparative overview, Cynthia Neville's further thoughts on Anglo-Scottish Border law and private justice and Alexander Grant's double-essay on baronies and regalities in Scotland. The first of these papers makes a compelling case for the continuity of importance of liberties as allies rather than natural resistors of the crown or state, 'power-sharing' in local government and justice. This was particularly so in pre-1300 Scotland where royal government, in contrast to *Quo Warranto* England, was much less intrusive and dependent on lay and ecclesiastical magnates. This rather neatly tees up Grant's systematic and useful statistical survey of Scottish franchises in a carefully developed discussion which underlines the predominant role of holdings in *liberam baronum*, free barony, as 'alternative agencies for the maintenance of local government' (p. 175).

As Grant's methodology illustrates, about 46% of Scotland's medieval parishes lay within provincial earldoms and great lordships, smaller baronies or ecclesiastical liberties. The majority had remained intact since pre-'Normanisation' and thus respected by successive Scottish monarchs who created sheriffdoms to fill in the jurisdictional gaps (often out of former royal thanages, a point persuasively illustrated in map form). Just as interesting, if perhaps more debatable, is the argument that about 36% of medieval parishes estimated to be embraced by regalities (to the exclusion of royal officials and briefs but not the king himself or military summons, customs and taxation) included a further twenty-five known to be created *ca* 1312–1404. The latter grants saw the post-Wars Bruce and Stewart kings use such liberties to set up and strengthen key supporters and family members in new localities in lieu of exiled or defunct lords (e.g., Thomas Randolph's grant of the Moray earldom, later reduced for the Dunbars). These later patronage regalities (and many smaller contemporary grants of barony) were surely a very different beast, depending on the noble grantee in question potentially very much a service extension of the crown. Grant does rightly point out the lack of fourteenth and fifteenth century parliamentary complaints about franchises in preventing lawlessness: nevertheless, the estates did often charge individual regional lords whose titles and thus ancient liberties pre-dated 1312. Overall, there is much food for thought here and prompts to detailed local case studies: what happened over time, for example, where barony or regality liberties were also held by men appointed as neighbouring (or remote) sheriffs or justiciars? How did jurisdictional boundaries, practices and identities change as a result?

Professor Neville's paper illustrates the *de facto* liberty, nature and practices of the Border marches. She shows that cross-border dispute settlement was lifted out of the jurisdictions of the royal sheriffdoms they affected and resolved by the

customs of private justice – *compromissio*, oral testimony, decret and assythment (compensation in kind or cash). However, this is also nuanced by the longer-term consequences of such effective arbitration which saw English and Scottish march wardens pursuing offenders in common law or royal courts (where these same nobles often held office) to recover the costs of compensation initially met out of their own purse or more generally requiring Crown support in enforcement.

The remainder of the volume involves focussed case studies reflecting this theme's importance in English historiography since the mid-twentieth century. Henry Summerson's paper on justice in Northumberland *ca.* 1200–*ca.* 1500 includes data on seasonal livestock thefts, forgery of Scottish specie and the large expatriate Scottish community in this fluid border zone. Matthew Holford's study of the liberty of Northamptonshire highlights another reiving zone at once challenged and strengthened in its local jurisdiction and identity by Scots, the English crown and bishops of Durham. Melanie Divine and Claire Etty provide surveys of the feudal traditions of the honour of Richmond and the lawless activities of vilified 'surnames' in Tynedale and Redesdale respectively. Michael Prestwich examines the 'pragmatic' interaction of commissioners of array with liberties within the northern counties of England. Max Lieberman and Beth Hartland provide Welsh and Irish case studies: the former an assessment of why certain lordships on the Somerset marches struggled to maintain liberty status; the latter a survey of the fate of Ireland's seven great lay liberties in the face of Edwardian/Dublin confiscation.

In sum, this is a rewarding and coherent collection. Interested readers should also now seek out Holford and Stringer (eds), *Border Liberties and Loyalties: North-East England c.1200–c.1400* (2010), also reviewed in this issue.

The University of Stirling

MICHAEL PENMAN
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Border Liberties and Loyalties: North-East England, c.1200–c.1400.

By M.L. Holford and K.J. Stringer. Pp. xxiv, 456; illus.

ISBN: 9780748632787.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2010. £90.00.

The seal of King Alexander III joins that of Bishop Bek of Durham on the cover of this ambitious book about the north-eastern corner of the medieval English realm. The absence of a symbol of English royal authority silently announces the co-authors' goal of addressing the 'workings of political life in the English Borders'. This is the second major volume, following Michael Prestwich's *Liberties and Identities in the Medieval British Isles* (2008), to emerge from collaboration between the universities of Durham and Lancaster. The present book consists of two parts, one on ecclesiastical liberties (Durham, Hexhamshire and Tynemouthshire, in five chapters), by Dr Holford, and the second on secular liberties (Tynedale and Redesdale, in three chapters), by Professor Stringer. The introduction and conclusion are co-authored.

While there is an undeniable Anglo-Scottish dimension to this study (the dynasties of Bruce and Balliol are considered in Durham, of Comyn in Tynedale and of Umfraville in Redesdale), an initial observation concerns the choice to frame the analysis around the theme of the border. When half the chapters concern the liberty of the bishopric of Durham, and when Durham's outlying members of Northamptonshire and Islandshire are excluded from analysis in part *because* they were 'exposed to unique pressures by their position on the Scottish