

Monica Clough: An Appreciation

Monica Clough, the northern historian who died in the spring of 1999, possessed an irrepressible curiosity over a remarkable range of historical enquiry. Her erudition and enthusiasm were known especially in the Highlands. At her death, letters of appreciation flowed from the furthest points of the globe, registering a sense of loss of an historian of the warmest generosity.

Monica Clough was a woman of at least three worlds. She had a personal knowledge of the last days of the empire in India, of Scottish commerce, and of modern historical and literary scholarship. She will be celebrated as an historian of Scotland and notably of the Highlands which she loved with a passion second to none. She seemed to know every dressed stone, every flower, every third cousin, and how to prepare a nourishing nettle broth too.

Born in South India in 1922, Monica Francis was educated in England, returning to India in 1939, where she married Julian Clough and raised a family in Calcutta in the turbulent years of the war and its aftermath. In 1953 the Cloughs finally left India to live in Dunblane and while her children entered universities Monica waited for the revolution in higher education. She was already in 1966 engaged in journalism editing for the next twenty years the stylish house Magazine of James Finlay and Company, which was full of rich reading. When the new University was established at Stirling, she seized the moment and joined the first cohort of students, mostly half her age. With her extraordinary background and famed social graces, Monica Clough immediately became a formative figure in the university community. Four years later she graduated with a First in History, the prelude to a new career as free-lance historian. This proved as creative, and more adventurous, than it could have been if she had stayed within the walls of a university. When she moved from Dunblane to Milton by Drumnadrochit, she continued her lecturing and writing. She gave talks to a remarkable array of audiences not only in Scotland but in North America, South

Africa and Australia. As well as the enduring memories of her sparkling historical lectures, she has also left a fine corpus of writing.

Monica Clough's journalism amounted to an insider's view of Scotland's trade with India and a chronicle of the life and times of the late Raj. She cultivated a special knowledge of Kirkman Finlay, the overseas trader and civic leader in early 19th century Glasgow. At the end of her life she was preparing entries for the *Scottish Dictionary of Business History* and the *New Dictionary of National Biography* in which her passion for business networks and personal connections made her the perfect contributor. She also enjoyed the larger perspective, best displayed in her panoramic outline of Scottish history, *The Field of Thistles, Scotland's Past and Scotland's Present* (Macdonald 1983) which was illustrated by the linocuts of Willie Rodger. The end of the 1980s saw a flowering of her talents. She and I wrote *Cromartie: Highland Life 1600 - 1914*. (Aberdeen University Press, 1990), based on the family archives at Castle Leod which, typically, she identified as a remarkable source for a longitudinal study of a great highland estate. Moreover she took over the most difficult tasks, where the seventeenth century hand-writing was least legible, where the evidence was particularly fragmentary and where genealogical entanglements were most bamboozling. It was the longest-distance collaboration in Scottish history, and the happiest too.

Two Houses (Aberdeen University Press, 1990) Was an unusual study of the mansions of the Cromartie family, at New Tarbat in Easter Ross and Royston in Edinburgh. It was packed with what Monica called 'rivetting' detail especially of early modern medical practices in Scotland. She took particular delight in 'the gabble of words' by which the concoctions and potions employed by local physicians were prescribed. Her book was a keen insight into the social mores of a wealthy provincial household and displayed her intuitive feel for social networks and personal interconnections in their cultural contexts. She possessed a marvellous grasp of the nuances of social status and relationships.

MONICA CLOUGH, 1922-1999

Beyond the big house, Monica Clough always sought 'the peat reek' of the croft and 'any authentic voices from the generations of tenants of the Cromarties estates'. Hence the pleasure she had in re-publishing the works of Colin Macdonald in a splendid edition called *Life in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Aberdeen University Press, 1991). She had a remarkable understanding of local knowledge and how the strands were woven into the social web. She wrote some notable contributions to local history of the north including essays in John Baldwin (ed.), *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland* (1986) and *Peoples and Settlement in North-West Ross* (1994: both published by the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, Edinburgh) and, at the time of her death, she was writing an important essay on the Lovat estates. She became a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and also of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Monica Clough was a public historian whose work was valued within and beyond the Highlands. Her sheer versatility was revealed in the edition of the very rare novel of the days of Warren Hastings, *Hartly House Calcutta* (first published in 1789, new edition with an Introduction by Monica Clough, London, 1989). This was probably the first Western novel written about India, greatly enhanced by her sensitive Introduction and the delightful explanatory Notes. In her Afterword she recollected the last years of British India, pointing out that 'if you were prepared to look, particularly in dingy back streets [of Calcutta] there were the artefacts of the eighteenth century everywhere'. She spoke of *Hartly House* as an 'exploration the real India.' Monica Clough's own exploration of the real India and the real Scotland is now concluded but she would certainly have wanted the quest to continue.

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