Appeasing the saint in the loch and the physician in the asylum: The historical geography of insanity in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, from the early modern to Victorian eras


Abstract

This thesis examines the historical geography of lunacy in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Using a wide variety of sources, the objective is to construct an expansive picture of the manner in which those labelled as "mad" were treated and managed in this peripheral region of mainland Britain, from the Medieval Period to the late-Victorian period. The scope includes Medieval Celtic manuscripts, nineteenth-century folklore collections, Lunacy Commissioners' reports, Sheriff Court records, asylum case notes and various other documents besides.

These sources open windows on a variety of vocabularies, writings, stories and proclamations through which madness was socially constructed, and then substantively treated, in this remotest of regions. In effect, the thesis sets regional folklore, as a way of accessing the "traditional" worlds of Highland madness from the "bottom-up", in counterpoint to the likes of Lunacy Commissioners reports, as an instance of the "modernising" of these worlds through medical-institutional means from the "top-down". The interlocking binaries here are to an extent then scrambled by exploring different dimensions of this interaction between "bottom-up" and "top-down", charting continuities as well as breaks in attitudes and practices, and thereby constructing a tangled picture of how the Highlands have come to tackle this most challenging of human conditions.

The account that follows is thoroughly informed by the historical, social and spatial context of the Highlands, always recognising that madness and its responses must seen as indelibly placed, contextually shaped and 'read' through the region. While the historiography of madness and psychiatry has already considered the Scottish Lowlands experience from various angles, the Highlands have remained all but untouched and their archives unopened. This thesis begins the task of addressing this serious lacuna.
Loch Ness, in the Highlands of Scotland. At the head of the loch is the monastery at Fort Augustus. A.F. Kersting. In the northwest, the Hebrides, the Shetland Islands, and other areas, the soil is poor and rocky, and cultivation is possible only at river mouths, glens, and coastal strips. On the west coast of some Hebridean islands, however, there are stretches of calcareous sand (the machair) suitable for farming. Aviemore Centre is located in the centre of the village only 200 yards from the rail station and bus stop - a great place to start exploring the Cairngorm National Park. Find out more. Fort William Centre. Scotland's Highlands and Islands, which includes the Outer Hebrides, Moray Speyside and Aberdeenshire, have been named a top 10 region in Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2019. The prestigious global accolade encapsulates the area's fantastic natural scenery, attractions and experiences. Discover scenic road trips, island hopping, city life and more.