

Scottish Life and Institutions: Then and Now

In the course “Scottish Life and Institutions: Then and Now” we dealt with Scottish living and housing conditions and political and medical developments in different centuries. Dr Reitemeier gave us an overview over the historical developments up to the 19th century and in contrast, Mr Tuschinsky gave us an idea of Scotland in our modern time. In the following, I would like to focus on Dr Reitermeier's class which I took group wise in the first week of our Edinburgh Summer School 2013.

In order to get a first impression of what Edinburgh looked like in terms of the landscape as well as living and housing conditions, we were supposed to read historical travel reports about Edinburgh by different people from different centuries. We had had a guided tour by bus on which we recognized many aspects we had already read about in the travel reports and we compared and discussed our findings in class. Afterwards, we took a look at historical maps to see how Scotland and Edinburgh in particular changed regarding landscape and urbanization over centuries.

After having read about living and housing conditions in Scotland in earlier centuries, we had the great opportunity to experience ourselves how it felt like by visiting historical houses such as John Knox' House, Gladstone's Land and The Georgian. Furthermore, we visited a guided exhibition on the Jacobite Rising in the National Museum of Scotland. The guide gave us useful background information and a detailed description of the Jacobite Rising in the first half of the 18th century. The guide, an elderly man, wore his clan tartan as many Scottish people have a very strong national and cultural identity, which can be seen as a result of political development in the earlier centuries. After the exhibition we had the opportunity to explore Scotland in different periods of time in the National Museum of Scotland.

Moreover, we were introduced to the history of medicine in Scotland from the 17th to the 19th century. So in that session we talked about the Burke and Hare murders among other things. William Burke and William Hare were accused of having committed a series of murder in Edinburgh and afterwards selling the corpses to Dr Robert Knox for his anatomy class. However, great achievements were made in that time in terms of the knowledge about the anatomy of human beings, which came along with medical treatment in general.

All in all, we were given a more or less realistic insight into the living and housing conditions as well as into political and medical developments in the past centuries and did not only learn theoretical basics but we also had the opportunity to see and experience the topics ourselves. Therefore, the course is definitely recommendable, for

“Tell me, I' forget
Show me, I'll remember
Involve me, I'll understand”
~ Unknown author ~

Report by Nurcan Akcam