

**P.A. Sykas: Book review for: *Scottish Historical Review*, Edinburgh University Press.**

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**Stana Nenadic & Sally Tuckett (2013) *Colouring the Nation: The Turkey Red Printed Cotton Industry in Scotland c.1840-1940*. Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland. 148pp paperback, £17.99 RRP.**

This small volume blends popular and scholarly approaches for an appeal to a wide audience, but, of course, it is hard to please everyone. Academics may chafe at the tame approach to patterns divided amongst floral, figurative, animal and geometric; while the leisure-oriented reader may become restless amid digressions on foreign shipping. Nevertheless, what will be universally admired in this book is the visually-rich design, packing in over 100 images, most in colour and published for the first time.

The book treats the Scottish Turkey-red industry making extensive use of the surviving archives of the United Turkey Red Company (UTR), which was an amalgamation of the three most prominent nineteenth-century Scottish firms in 1898, continuing until 1960. Shortly after the company closed, the core of its pattern archive of about 200 pattern books was offered to the Royal Scottish Museum, and thanks to the foresight of curator Margaret Swain, it was taken intact as an archive rather than as a traditional curatorial selection based on quality, condition and representativeness. This was not without logistical problems as bindings were in poor condition, leaves redistributed, and the whole covered in thick deposits of atmospheric dust. Subsequent curator Naomi Tarrant continued to promote the archive, but it was not until this study nearly fifty years later that the material received its first detailed cataloguing. Significant portions of the UTR business archives are held elsewhere, most notably Glasgow University Archives, Manchester Archives,<sup>1</sup> and within the Board of Trade registered designs at the National Archives. Nenadic and Tuckett examined all of these and brought their major findings to this volume.

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<sup>1</sup> The book shortens this to 'Manchester County Record Office' but its full title is Greater Manchester County Record Office (with Manchester Archives). The combined archives are housed in the Central Library. Both are searched together on-line using 'Greater Manchester Lives': <http://www.gmlives.org.uk/>. However, bookings for the search room are made through the Manchester local government site: <https://manchester.gov.uk/thesearchroom>.

A weakness of the work lies in the technical understanding of dyeing and printing processes. This is not the place to find a scientific explanation of the alizarin-aluminium-calcium molecular complex responsible for the Turkey-red colouration, nor are the descriptions of discharge processing and printing matrices unassailable. However, such information is available elsewhere. The strength of the work is undoubtedly in bringing to light information found through patient sifting of company minute books and letter books, articles from the *Glasgow Herald*, and the writings of other nineteenth-century commentators, by means of well-chosen extracts integrated throughout the work.

A chapter on design and copyright reveals surprising evidence of pirating of patterns from competitor firms. Since Turkey red designers were often producing patterns based on Indian models, in the absence of international copyright protection, these were probably considered *fair game* for all. The text leaves room for further penetration into attitudes toward 'originality' in design for export markets where motifs were considered slow-changing or traditional.

The final chapters on export markets and home trade cover fresh ground and present the greatest concentration of new findings. The prominent role of Scots as merchants and shippers as well as manufacturers is amply demonstrated, and examples are given of richly detailed market information from the letters (1853-1868) of Bombay-based agents to William Stirling & Sons. The appearance of export prints in the home market due to salvage sales of shipwrecked or fire-damaged goods is shown to be more common than previously understood; and the specialist Scottish manufacture of down-quilted Turkey red cottons receives some overdue attention.

For clarity, the authors have divided the export trade by geographical region, and the home trade by furnishing and garment type. However, this has led to a tendency to treat the long nineteenth century as a single period instead of in successive historical developments. It should be noted that the date range of the book's subtitle corresponds to that of the pattern books at the National Museums Scotland, and perhaps the original intention was to limit coverage to this material. Contextualisation led the authors to look beyond that archive, and back to the eighteenth century, but as a result the book stops in the Edwardian

years. Those interested in the twentieth-century history of Turkey red in Scotland will find much of interest in the UTR Board Minute Books, now held at Manchester Archives.<sup>2</sup>

Historians will pass over a number of sweeping statements designed for the expectations of the general reader, and find that for like reasons the authors eschew the academic manner of formative conclusions. This is a book that should be read for its illuminating new evidence from an archive that has been largely hidden from view for many years. It is not intended as a definitive statement, but rather as an introduction, opening up material for further exploration.

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<sup>2</sup> The Board Minute Books begin in 1897 and the series continues until the winding up of the company: Manchester Archives GB127.M75/9/11.