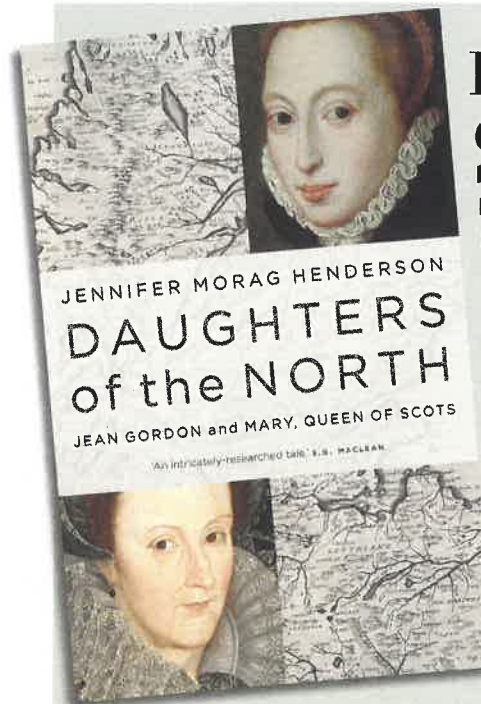


Cover to cover

A look at the latest Scottish books by **Megan Amato**



Daughters of the North

BY **JENNIFER MORAG HENDERSON**
SANDSTONE PRESS
£24.99

★★★★★

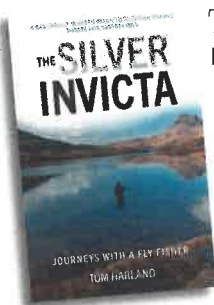
'Unlike Mary, Queen of Scots, Jean and the Gordon family never lost touch with what was happening in the north of Scotland.' A quote that succinctly sums up this utterly absorbing, gratifyingly dogged and impactful investigation of one of the most powerful women in 16th-century Scotland.

Due to Mary Stuart's untimely death, the monarch is one of the most romanticised figures in Scottish history, inspiring works of fiction depicting her life and eventual beheading ordered by her own cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. However, less rendered is Jean Gordon's story; one filled with much of the turbulence caused by Mary's actions over her 25-year reign – including Jean's marriage and later divorce from the Earl of Bothwell at the Queen's bequest.

“An utterly absorbing, gratifyingly dogged and impactful investigation

Mary's (and her mother, Mary of Guise's) role in the Gordon family's misfortunes, we are walked through the complicated history that led Jean and many members of her family (who were among her staunchest supporters) to survive and regain power.

Henderson has expertly captured Jean's resilience in the face of continuous personal and political upheaval thanks to her powerful family, three marriages and, of course, Mary, Queen of Scots' ill-fated reign. However, this isn't only an account of the once Countess of Bothwell and the Gordon family. It's the story of Scotland at the time, the powers that were shaping it, and the ever-growing shift from Catholicism to Protestantism. *Daughters of the North* is an essential addition to any individual keen to learn more about this country's eccentric history along with the extraordinary woman who out-survived her Queen to witness a dramatic transformation.



The Silver Invicta
BY **TOM HARLAND**
POLARIS
£17.99

★★★★★

I envy writers who can put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and effortlessly write beautiful prose – more so when it's a work of non-fiction. Harland appears to have this particular gift, turning his anecdotes of fishing on Scotland's rivers and its lochs into evocative stories that almost read like poetry.

In fact, I read *The Silver Invicta* as I would a love story, finding myself deeply invested in Harland's relationship with Scotland's waterways and the fish swimming within. Each of his angler's tales is full of sentiment, bursting with vivid details that bring the natural world to life and complete with both the joys and trials and tribulations of his adventures.

It has been some years since I last fished (in Canada's lakes and rivers) with my father, but Harland's eloquent storytelling has me longing to put on some waders and cast my own line. Well worth a read, angler or not.



Elizabethan Secret Agent
BY **TIMOTHY ASHBY**
SCOTLAND STREET PRESS
£24.99

★★★★★

Every family has an urban legend of a famous or influential historical figure in their lineage (if my grandmother is to be believed, we are 'related' to Alexander the Great) but not all of us are lucky enough to not only have record of them but have access to enough history to write 311 pages about it.

Timothy Ashby has drafted an engrossing account of his ancestor, William Ashby, mapping the heightened tensions between Scotland and England during the 16th century, each country's individual and combined relationships with France and Spain, and the political figures making moves in the light and shadow.

Ashby's story reads like a spy novel, full of personal and political tension and almost unbelievable details that wouldn't be out of place if it were told on the big screen.



The Green Lady
BY **SUE LAWRENCE**
CONTRABAND
£9.99

★★★★☆

This duo-timeline (split between the 16th century and 1980) and multi-point-of-view novel follows four women, connected by blood or marriage to the ruthless yet cursed (by Thomas the Rhymer, no less) Alexander Seton during Mary, Queen of Scot's tumultuous reign, and the woman uncovering their stories in the future. I prefer third person in fiction, but Lawrence has very cleverly used first person, allowing the reader to witness each shocking discovery and experience every moment of joy, stress, fear and grief as if it were their own.



The Unofficial History of the Beano
BY **IAIN MCLAUGHLIN**
WHITE OWL
£19.99

★★★★★

I may not have been born nor raised on this island, but even I am aware of the cultural relevance of the Beano comic and popular strips such as Dennis the Menace and the slightly sinister Biffo the Bear. Beano expert McLaughlin has delighted fans with this comprehensive history of the comic, charting 20th-century DC Thomson, eras that influenced it for better or worse and the beloved characters who made the publication so successful.



The Tick and the Tock of the Crocodile Clock
BY **KENNY BOYLE**
LIGHTNING BOOKS
£9.99

★★★★☆

If you are wondering if the book is just as delightful and entertaining as the title, it is. Wendy is a captivating protagonist who fills her loneliness with verbosity, and you can't help but root for her even in the midst of all her (sometimes harmless, other times less so) shenanigans with Cat. Boyle has written a characterful book that manages to be full of charm and humour while tackling bigger issues such as what is 'right or wrong', mental health, suicide and grief.



Golfland Scotland
BY **MICHAEL ATKINSON & CRAIG MORRISON**
OLTOMO
£24.99

★★★★★

A visually stunning and complete guide to all of Scotland's golf courses – the 'birthplace' of the sport – combined with a brief history, methodology and introduction to historic 'influencers' who popularised the sport. Golfers in this country are blessed with breathtaking landscapes as a backdrop to their game, which are highlighted in each course listing along with a few awe-inspiring images by photographer David Cannon. A hole-in-one for anyone with a love for the game.



Argonauts of the Scottish Isles
BY **ROBIN LLOYD-JONES**
BIRLINN
£9.99

★★★★★

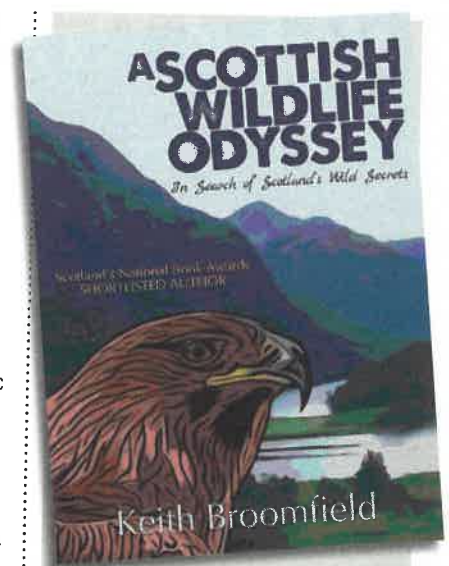
'Frolicking green waves, foaming at the crest, were not a threat but a joy.' I love kayaking but am terrified of the ocean, afraid that I'll be swallowed whole like Pinocchio. Yet, Lloyd-Jones' adventures have me itching for the salt on skin and wind-swept hair of kayaking to the inaccessible locations I've always wanted to visit off Scotland's coasts. This was a delight to read with both beautiful yet accessible writing capturing what I imagine is the essence of sea-kayaking in Scotland.



Cried Out the River for Love
BY **CHARLOTTE FAIRBAIRN**
LINEN PRESS
£8.99

★★★★★

A poetical and whimsical journey packed full of raw emotion and vivid details that bring the imaginary setting to life. I admire authors who are brave and imaginative enough to take the risk of tackling the traditional story structure in unique ways. Fairbairn has certainly done this, capturing the feeling of magic within her prose, told from beginning to end in lyrical writing and verse-like passages as she tugs at our heartstrings with themes of parental love and loss.



A Scottish Wildlife Odyssey
BY **KEITH BROOMFIELD**
TIPPERMUIR
£9.99

★★★★★

'In many ways, the rowans are the epitome of Scotland, having a stoic grip and determination that enables them to find hold on the poorest and shallowest of soils, or in rock crevices.'

I dare you to open this book up to any page, read the text with fresh new eyes and not fall in love with the way Broomfield has painted the Scottish landscape with words.

He has thoughtfully captured his rambles across Scotland, from the bottom all the way to very top in Shetland, recounting the diverse and exciting wildlife he spotted along the way. From the urban fox to the minke whale, Broomfield tells all their stories with equal enthusiasm.

A Scottish Wildlife Odyssey is among my most cherished styles of book: filled with bewitching ecological descriptions, supplemented with knowledge and facts of local wildlife that's shown rather than told and complemented by sketches of the flora and fauna. This is one of my favourite non-fiction books of the year.