

Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*.

Rainer Baehre

Volume 24, numéro 1, spring 2009

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds24_1rv02

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

0823-1737 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Baehre, R. (2009). Compte rendu de [Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*]. *Newfoundland Studies*, 24(1), 157–159.

Peter E. Pope, *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, ISBN 0807829102.

THIS OUTSTANDING BOOK by Memorial University historian and archeologist Peter Pope is the product of almost 20 years of research and writing on the early modern transatlantic trade of the fishery and the first English fishers to settle on the English Shore. The result is a major economic, social, and cultural reinterpretation of that world. Widely lauded for this significant scholarly contribution, Pope has managed to turn on its head the traditional view of “the Newfoundland plantation” as an inconsequential semi-colonial backwater and the island as a distant fishing station marked by a resolute merchant and government opposition to permanent settlement, especially following the “failed” attempts at colonization prior to 1630. Instead, Pope sees Newfoundland as representing a vital “node” in the seventeenth-century international commerce.

Pope’s approach, based, in part, on evidence secured from the remarkable archeological finds at Ferryland, chronicles and analyzes the activities of Sir David Kirke and his family, as successors to the abandoned settlement of a disappointed Sir George Calvert (Lord Baltimore). In exploring Kirke’s enterprises, the author provides compelling evidence that these commercial activities promoted instead of impeded settlement and resulted in small but permanent outposts of fisherfolk in eastern Newfoundland. Rather than viewing them as isolated from the rest of the world, he sees them as interconnected with New England, England, and the Mediterranean region through production, trading markets, and the consumption of a wide range of goods, especially wine. He provides a wealth of information on how the European and the West Country migratory fishery began and developed in the sixteenth century, extended into Newfoundland as part of international fishery, and became an “enormous” industry. In this process, Pope links macro and micro-history by contextualizing the migratory fishery within a framework of economic, political, social, and even cultural change.

He also demonstrates that a historical continuum existed from the emergence of “a vernacular industry” (by which he means one carried out beyond the direct control of the Western Adventurers which was “unplanned and undirected” though economically logical) and reached into the next centuries. There emerged the first Newfoundland planters whose descendants, at least based on surnames, remain present. Further, instead of impeding or opposing mercantile commerce as previous historians believed, the author illustrates how these early island residents became essential to the survival and success of the migratory fishery whose participants numbered as many as 20,000 per fishing season. Together they also made the “sack trade” prosper by purchasing supplies and luxury items. In reconstructing this world, Pope accordingly reinterprets class relations and suggests that they were marked more by cooperation than conflict between merchant, planter, and fisher. Together they withstood a range of indirect and direct threats, as different from one

another as the influence of European demographic shifts on the economy to attacks by the Dutch and French. During the course of this century, the island's population of a few thousand managed to foster a "distinguishable" colonial society and culture, only interrupted in the last decade of the century by French attacks and their expulsion.

Yet the above summary hardly does justice to the richness of detail, the fascinating digressions, and penetrating analyses which Pope pursues. In making his compelling case, he uses an array of colourful documentation to bring this sometimes arcane world to life and integrates archeological finds, maps, images, tables, graphs, and a glossary of terms into the discussion. In often fascinating explanations, Pope explores not only the drinking habits of Ferryland's inhabitants, but also tobacco smoking and feather bedding, in part using comparative tables of exports and imports to demonstrate how the much higher wages paid to Newfoundland fishers were reflected in their consumer patterns and social activities. To explain this world, he also resorts to occasional ethnographic analyses, such as in his section on "transhumance" where he compares the seasonal economic activities of overwintering Newfoundland residents with their Basque counterparts in Europe.

His discussion of class relations on the English Shore is also revealing. Though it was "a simple society" without direct formal political, legal, and social structures, the latter structures were present indirectly. For example, the merchant David Kirke "quietly governed," fulfilled his role as surrogate gentry, and served as magistrate. In the absence of priests, planters conducted religious services and the occasional important visitor reminded the population of their place within the empire. The master-servant relationship reinforced class distinctions between planters, "as provincial gentry," who held property and employed others, and reflected the role and status of the middling classes, in contrast to those without property and largely dependent upon them, well aware that they were only a step away from beggary. Pope explores the nature of their economic and social relationships of this hierarchically ranked and peripheral society, and how on the whole it functioned well within a system of patron-client relationships. One should add that the author also provides some insight into the settlement's religious practices, the role of women, relations between the Europeans and the Beothuk, and the dynamics of outport economics.

This study is comprehensive and well written. It is served well by bountiful and expansive footnotes, though unfortunately no bibliography is provided. To his great credit, and as several historians have pointed out, Pope's work has not only contributed substantially to a fuller understanding not only of sixteenth-century Newfoundland history, but also has provided vital insights into the history of other English Atlantic communities. He has defined and explained the importance of the island in the context of early modern European expansionism. Finally, the author has managed to reconstruct the worlds of the island's first permanent residents and to illustrate their lasting imprint. In short, he has fundamentally redefined our un-

derstanding of sixteenth-century Newfoundland history. This book is “a must read.”

Rainer Baehre
Memorial University.

Peter Coffman, *Newfoundland Gothic*. Québec: Éditions Multimondes, 2008, ISBN 9782895441267.

This book derives from the author’s 2006 PhD thesis (Queen’s University), and was the winner of the 2007 Phyllis-Lambert Prize for the best dissertation “on the subject of architecture and architectural history in Canada.” It focuses on Gothic Revival architecture in Newfoundland and Labrador as practiced during the nineteenth century by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Methodist churches and those of other Protestant denominations are not discussed, and no explanation is given for the exclusion. Domestic and secular architecture is mentioned only in passing.

Within these limits, Peter Coffman places Newfoundland ecclesiastical architecture in context, discussing the phases of the Gothic Revival in Britain, its export to British North America, and the importance of developments within the Church of England, notably the Tractarian movement. Indeed, much of this handsome book is devoted to the Anglicans, who adopted the Gothic style with much more enthusiasm and scholarship than did Roman Catholics. The result is a useful, readable, lavishly illustrated, and generally well-researched book. Many of the churches which Coffman discusses survive today as important features of the landscape, and to have their origins and histories described here is of great value.

Of particular importance are Coffman’s discussions of the Anglican cathedral in St. John’s (designed by that Victorian architectural colossus George Gilbert Scott), and of the churches designed by the Rev. William Grey, Bishop Edward Feild’s diocesan architect. These buildings clearly demonstrate the influence of Tractarian and ecclesiological thought on church design, and are as important in their own way as Bishop Medley’s ecclesiologically-correct cathedral in Fredericton. More originally, Coffman also includes the Anglican churches that preceded and followed the more well-known Feild-Grey era, as well as Roman Catholic essays in Gothic architecture in St. John’s, Trinity, Harbour Grace, Carbonear, and Woody Point.

That said, Coffman’s grasp of Newfoundland history in the nineteenth century is unsure, and he falls back on tired clichés about the place — adjectives such as “isolated,” “remote,” and “desolate” appear all too often. On page 113, for instance, he writes that outposts “were (*and indeed remain*) [my italics] far from the centres of power, sparsely populated, inaccessible, and impoverished.” Far too much reliance is placed on Archdeacon Wix’s famous *Journal* (1836), a good example of