

The evils of tea

Duncan Forbes

1685–1747

A judge, politician and Presbyterian church elder – Duncan Forbes appears a strait-laced character to the modern eye.

That he worked hard to impose a malt tax on brewers and campaigned against the consumption of brandy is little surprise.

His vigorous opposition to the drinking of tea in the 1740s nowadays seems bizarre.

Indeed, the Inverness-shire man was scoffed at the time.

Duncan, however, was not simply taking a moralistic view.

His concerns about brandy had much to do with smuggling and losses of government revenue, and he feared that tea imports damaged the economy.

Duncan was highly praised by many.

A vigorous opponent of the Jacobites, he was nonetheless noted for his compassion following their defeat.

His hobbies were of the edifying kind, such as the study of mathematics and of the Old Testament – in Hebrew.

In light of this it may seem surprising that when visiting Edinburgh he would head to Leith each Monday for a round of golf.

However, should anyone think this was just for fun, it is reported that he took the game very seriously and saw it as an antidote to the appeal of idle games of chance.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/9822.html>