



Simon Naylor. *Regionalizing Science: Placing Knowledges in Victorian England.* Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century Series. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010. xiv + 245 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85196-636-3.



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A New Regional Geography of Victorian Science

Simon Naylor's book offers a fresh and surefooted exploration of the changing geographies of scientific culture in nineteenth-century Britain. The focus on Cornwall allows Naylor to investigate a neglected region and enables him to examine in a novel way the spatial reorganization of Victorian science. All of this is achieved in seven relatively short but sharp chapters. After a theoretically orientated introduction, the first two chapters outline the precursors to the vibrant scientific culture that developed in nineteenth-century Cornwall and flesh out the economic and institutional activities that made that culture possible. The remaining chapters concentrate in turn on geological, zoological, botanical, antiquarian, and meteorological science. This ambitious survey of five scientific disciplines is consciously skewed toward the field sciences. Naylor does not purport, then, to offer a comprehensive survey of all scientific activity in nineteenth-century Cornwall but provides instead a carefully crafted analysis of how Cornwall and its natural productions were mapped, measured, counted, and classified by several generations of fieldworkers. Along the way we learn

much about the relations between science and local civic society and about how science was made relevant to and shaped by a wider public.

Each story of how Cornish men and women and other resident observers contributed to individual disciplines is unique and contain many fascinating subplots. But Naylor also skillfully nests these discrete narratives within a larger plotline. For Naylor, the motives, methods, and meanings attached to taking the measure of Cornwall's natural and human history tracked a general shift from a curiosity about the county for its own sake to an interest in Cornish field sites driven more than anything else by a concern with wider scientific relevance. Quite clearly, Naylor suggests, studies of Cornwall's natural history and archaeological remains were increasingly influenced by scientific standards and research questions imported from elsewhere. More often than not, that elsewhere was a London-based scientific authority. The outcome, as Naylor puts it, was a view of Cornwall stripped of its parochialism and assimilated into a wider set of comparative regional studies conducted according to global

procedures (p. 180). Some of Naylor's most acute observations in this regard are made in reference to maps that helped constitute Cornwall as a precisely defined area susceptible to standardized scientific scrutiny. This precision and uniformity came at a cost, eroding the locally defined fieldwork practises of Cornish chorographers like William Borlase. The ultimate result was the marginalization of more idiosyncratic studies of Cornwall's natural and human landscape, a cultural decline that echoed the disappearance of the native Cornish language a century earlier.

At times this meta-narrative threatens to overwhelm Naylor's opening argument that science is not, in fact, a placeless activity shorn of local particularities. Arguably, this simply reflects the growing capacity of centralized bodies to discipline and regularize the conduct and content of scientific activity in Victorian Cornwall. Naylor does, however, identify some of the harder-to-detect reverse currents created by local obstacles. Here again, Naylor's accounts of scientific maps of Cornwall are particularly effective. For example, Naylor shows how geological maps of Cornwall were used to justify elite, landed desires to implement the economic and moral ideas of improvement (p. 62). Naylor is also good on the ways in which local scientific achievements became strongly colored by civic pride. This is most apparent in the fight to save the first order meteorological station established in Falmouth by the Meteorological Office, regulated by the Royal Society and run by the

Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society (RCPS). The threatened closure of the Falmouth Observatory in 1883 was successfully resisted by the RCPS and by the Cornwall-born astronomer John Couch Adams, among others. This victory found full expression in the laying of a foundation stone for a new observatory building, an event surrounded by the trappings of civic ceremony and widely reported in local newspapers. Here first-order meteorological science carefully policed by metropolitan authorities was used to serve local political and cultural ends.

Regionalizing Science sets its own creative course between idiographic description and nomothetic generalization, and provides a sophisticated and empirically grounded new regional geography of scientific culture in the nineteenth century. Beyond the richly detailed evocations of Cornish science its wider relevance to historical geographers and historians of science is not in doubt. Naylor's monograph is one of several produced in recent years by historical geographers concerned with the geographies of scientific knowledge, institutions, and practices from about 1700, a trend Naylor himself has done much to encourage. His monograph is a very welcome addition to this now well-established area of scholarly inquiry. It also sits very nicely within Pickering & Chatto's Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century series, and is testament to a long-standing and productive conversation between historical geographers and historians of science.

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