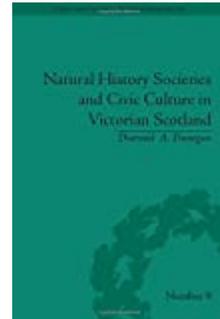




**Diarmid A. Finnegan.** *Natural History Societies and Civic Culture in Victorian Scotland.* London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009. xi + 254 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85196-658-5.



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## “Breezy braes and wimplly burns”

In 1886, Edinburgh naturalist Symington Grieve longed for his naturalist field club, which filled his mind with “walks to breezy braes with wimplly burns, or to rugged mountain-sides with their wild cascades.” In urban cities like Edinburgh, he stated, “we live like caged birds” (p. 52). Grieve’s impassioned desire to be outdoors reflected a widespread movement in Scotland that witnessed hundreds of amateur naturalists taking to the highlands, fields, and lochs to document the national character of the country’s flora and fauna. Many of the original bird mounts, mineral deposits, insect collections, and portraits of leading members continue to adorn contemporary natural history museums in many Scottish towns—e.g., Perthshire Natural History Museum and the Paisley Museum—providing a glimpse into the heyday of Victorian natural history that struck the nation. As an integral part of Scotland’s regional past, what role did amateur natural history societies, museums, and outdoor fieldwork play in shaping Scotland’s wider civic society? How might one study the intersections between provincial civic culture and scientific practices in nineteenth-

century Scotland?

Diarmid A. Finnegan tackles some of these questions in his thoughtful book, *Natural History Societies and Civic Culture in Victorian Scotland*. Finnegan, who has been at the forefront of contextualizing the production, circulation, and dissemination of scientific knowledge, follows a series of exciting works in the historical geographies of science that question varying fieldwork and museum practices, together with issues of power, truth, and authority; and the role of national and provincial natural history societies.

Finnegan’s book provides fresh insight into the links between science and citizenship in Scotland. By conceptualizing a “subscriber science”—a term to denote “associational” or voluntary science in contrast to professional science—Finnegan’s aim is to take seriously the rise in Scottish natural history societies during the nineteenth century, and to broaden their function in the wider spheres of town, community, and country. Through his research, Finnegan reveals how the establishment of

Scottish natural history societies overlapped closely with civic interests in the country, creating an emphasis on a "healthy civil society" through natural history fieldwork, public museums, and urban improvements. Here, members of Scottish field clubs viewed natural history fieldwork as improving physical and mental health during a time of growing anxieties over degeneration from urbanization, industrialization, urban poverty in Scotland, and, I would add, empire. Important features of civic natural history included an emphasis on "self culture," "character building," and self-advancement. William Jolly, in the opening address to the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club in 1876, stated that scientific fieldwork made "better business men," demonstrating the importance of civic science to Scottish commerce and economic enterprise (p. 35).

An important contribution of Finnegan's work is his reliance on empirical research and the archives. By meticulously examining the founding dates of over forty natural history societies in Scotland, Finnegan uncovers how two-thirds of the organizations were established after the 1870s, which he illustrates wonderfully in a table and a map of "the location of Scottish natural history societies, 1831-1900" (p. 29). Finnegan outlines three overlapping trends in the founding narratives of these organizations: their importance to national and university scientific progress, the benefits of scientific fieldwork to society at the local level, and the impact on education, economic prosperity, and town improvement.

Finnegan's empirical work also includes content analysis of obituaries (chapter 4) to understand the representational practices in memorialization. Adapting Dorinda Outram's work on eulogies as an effective literary form to represent a public image of the "man of science" and Stephen Shapin's notion of "characterology," Finnegan examines the various images of exemplar naturalists that circulated among Scottish natural history societies, and investigates the ways in which these representations mediated discussions about the place and practice of Scottish natural science in a provincial and non-elite setting. His research reveals four characteristics of Scottish naturalists' representations: muscularity in fieldwork, wide sympathies, sociability, and public spiritedness. Here, natural history was implicated in "self culture" and exemplars of an ideal citizen. Such representations or "portraits" included photographs of the intrepid Francis Buchanan White in his tweed kilt-suit and Balmoral bonnet on an excursion of the East of Scotland Union of Naturalists' Societies; and Colonel H. M Drummond-Hay with a mounted stuffed Goldeneye

to illustrate his role as curator of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science. Many of these images circulated in proceedings and transactions, impressing on its members and the local community particular forms of citizenship.

According to Finnegan, Scottish women also played an active role in these societies, challenging popular conceptions of muscular masculinity at the time. As "lovers of nature" (p. 112), some men adopted a "Christian manliness" characterized by devotion, kindness, and nonviolence in their natural history pursuits. "Lady members" (p. 111), on the other hand, pursued nontraditional gendered activities such as outdoor fieldwork, mountaineering, and active membership in Scottish natural history societies. The Stirling Field Club, for example, maintained the highest percentage of women members (35 percent from 1878 to 1881) (p.113).

As a geographer, Finnegan pays particular attention to the regional differences between natural history groups in Scotland. Here, he introduces the term "geography of disciplinary affinity" to highlight clusters of specialisms among these societies. For instance, the Natural History Society of Glasgow was an important center for ornithology, while geology was pursued predominantly by the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club. Such specializations helped to secure scientific credibility through certain practices and lines of inquiry, but also aided in fostering connections to wider international, scientific networks. Furthermore, organizational identities appeared in the published outputs of its members.

Finnegan's work provides the basis for new questions such as the role of the British Empire in shaping Scotland's provincial natural history cultures, especially as numerous Scottish explorers, military officers, traders, and missionaries were instrumental in advancing imperial science. For example, Drummond-Hay, who is featured predominantly in the book for his involvement with the Perthshire Natural Society, served with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment (Black Watch) and collected numerous natural history specimens in Corfu, Malta, and Bermuda. Did Drummond-Hay's experiences in empire influence his natural history practices back home in Scotland or his ideas of "native" birds and fish in Perthshire County? An attention to the life geographies of some of the members would add greatly to Finnegan's analysis.

Furthermore, his book also opens up questions regarding the influence of Scottish natural history networks on colonial cultures of science in different parts of the British Empire, especially in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, themes already opened up in

John M. Mackenzie's *Museums and Empire* (2009). For instance, Montreal emerged as an important scientific center in British North America due largely to the contributions of the Natural History Society of Montreal, whose membership boasted many Scottish colonists. Many of these members emphasized the importance of civic natural history to the moral and physical improvement of society. Scholars interested in mapping Scottish natural

history networks to other parts of the globe would therefore benefit from Finnegan's work.

Diarmid Finnegan's *Natural History Societies and Civic Culture in Victorian Scotland* is a valuable contribution to the histories and geographies of science for its special attention to the sites, practices, and personalities involved in Scotland's natural history movement.

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