
Introduction:

**The production and dissemination of
knowledge in Scotland**

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Education and learning have traditionally been areas in which the national specificity has been promoted and asserted in Scotland and apparently with good reason since for roughly three hundred years starting just before the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Scottish population could claim to be the most thoroughly educated in the world. This achievement was the consequence of the nation's love affair with the transmission of basic knowledge through schooling and intellectual inquiry which started with the Reformation and culminated in the Scottish Enlightenment.

The founding myth of Scottish education is enshrined in the plan set out by John Knox, among others, in the *First Book of*

Discipline (1560). The principle the book set out was to found elementary schools in every parish, secondary schools in larger towns, and to continue to support the universities (there were already three in Scotland at the end of the fifteenth century and five by the end of the sixteenth century). School attendance would be compulsory but the Reformers envisaged help for the poor through the kirk sessions, and achievement based on scholastic ability rather than the ability to pay. Church and religion played a central role in education in Scotland over the following centuries with the churches in Scotland running parish schools and dictating a narrow curriculum which was often ideology-ridden. However, the Scottish Enlightenment, an essentially secular movement, promoted the study of disciplines that went beyond the limited selection that prepared for the ministry and thus encouraged formal study for the professions.

With knowledge not only being disseminated through the school system but also through public libraries, mill schools, Sunday schools, night schools etc. the obsession with learning spread and paid off. The observable results were encouraging. In the nineteenth century, accounts of the superior numeracy and literacy if not intellectual achievements of the Scottish peasantry, however impoverished, abounded. *The Statistical Account for Scotland* in 1826 reports:

However humble their condition the peasantry in the southern districts can all read and are generally more or less skilful in writing and arithmetic, and under the disguise of their uncouth appearance [...] they possess a laudable zeal for knowledge ... not generally found among the same class of men in other countries in Europe.¹

¹ James Currie, 1880, quoted by Sir John Sinclair, *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland: With a General View of That Country, and Discussions on Some Important Branches of Political Economy*, 1826

Similarly, in an address to the House of Lords in 1869, the Duke of Argyll emphasized the levelling influence of universal access to elementary schools:

It is the universal custom all over Scotland that men in very different classes of society should be educated together in the parochial schools. You will have the children of the poorest labourer sitting beside the children of the famer who employs him, the children of the clergyman of the parish, and even in some cases of the landed gentry, sitting on the same bench and learning from the same master the same branches of instruction.²

In the 1882 essay "The Foreigner at Home", having noted that "England and Scotland differ ... in law, in history, in religion, in education, and in the very look of nature and men's faces, not always widely, but always trenchantly", Robert Louis Stevenson goes on to observe that in England:

The dull, neglected peasant, sunk in matter, insolent, gross and servile, makes a startling contrast with our own long-legged, long-headed, thoughtful, Bible-quoting ploughman. A week or two in such a place as Suffolk leaves the Scotchman gasping. It seems incredible that within the boundaries of his own island a class should have been thus forgotten. Even the educated and intelligent, who hold our own opinions and speak in our own words, yet seem to hold them with a difference or, from another reason, and to speak on all things with less interest and conviction.³

The explanation for the startling difference that Stevenson perceives can be ascribed in large part to differences in levels of education and attitudes to learning — differences that Scots for

² Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 194, p. 294 - Dec 10th 1868 - Mar 23rd 1869.

³ Stevenson, Robert L, and Jeremy Treglown (ed). *The Lantern-Bearers: And Other Essays*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1988, p. 167.

generations had held and would continue to hold as an essential source of national distinctiveness. Thus the history of the national system of education has consistently been a source of much pride and, perhaps, a certain amount of mythologizing.

In reality, it took an enormous amount of resolve to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the school system and it appears that for many years the majority of children left school with no more than a basic literacy and a grounding in the Bible and the Shorter Catechism. "It may well be" write Grant and Hume, "that education in Scotland was more widespread than elsewhere, was less class-ridden and more open to the talents, and may even have embodied some notion of a broad-based education for personal development; but some caution should be exercised to avoid overstatement."⁴ There was quite clearly a link between educational opportunity and social welfare with some very real regional and social differences in access to education and attainment. Access to learning was not straightforward for children living in inner-city industrial slums nor for the Gaelic-speaking children of the Highlands.⁵ School could be a dehumanizing, dispiriting experience with a Calvinistic emphasis on extreme discipline and a joyless pedagogy reliant on rote learning. The didactic, petty dominie reigned supreme in the teacher-centred classroom and reform was long in coming, with the use of corporal punishment surviving well into the 1980s.

T. C. Smout in his *A Century of the Scottish People* considers Scottish education as a form of social control citing the thoughts of Thomas Malthus on the issue:

⁴ Grant N. and Walter Humes, "Scottish Education, 1700-2000" in Scott, P H. *Scotland: A Concise Cultural History*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Pub, 1993, p. 360.

⁵ The Scottish Society for Propagating of Christian Knowledge SSPCK opened its first school in 1711 and went on to fund and administer 134 schools throughout the Highlands and Islands.

In the case of Scotland, the knowledge circulated among the common people ... has yet the effect of making them bear with patience the evils which they suffer from, being aware of the folly and inefficacy of turbulence. The quiet and peaceable habits of the instructed Scotch peasant compared with the turbulent disposition of the ignorant Irishman ought not to be without effect upon every impartial reasoner.⁶

Higher education in Scotland has generally continued to be more comparable to continental Europe than to England in terms of ease of access and curriculum. In Scottish high schools it was considered important not to foster the over-specialization encouraged in the final years of English secondary education, and that wide-ranging approach continued in the universities. G. E. Davie's *The Democratic Intellect* (1961) alerted readers to the importance of the Scottish universities' belief in a broad curriculum, but at the same time claimed that they had become less democratic through anglicisation during the nineteenth century. It was later claimed that the very legitimacy of the Thatcher Government was challenged in Scotland as a direct result of its pursuit of policies that were seen as an attempted anglicisation of education and were not supported by the Scottish electorate.

The nation's approach to learning and knowledge transfer continues to be distinctive since education and training are matters devolved to the Scottish parliament with continuing widespread public support for the principle of truly comprehensive non-selective provision. Divergence over the very principle of access to higher education became evident with the decision to abolish student tuition fees in Scotland in 1999.

⁶ Malthus, T. R. *An Essay on the Principle of Population: Or, a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils Which It Occasions*. London: Murray, 1817, p. 555.

The maintenance of a network of high schools that are truly comprehensive and non-selective is also a sign of divergence.

Whatever the proportion of truth in the old myth of the lad o'pairs (and note that it is always a lad, never a lass) working his way up the system from school to university, taking full advantage of the excellent wide-ranging curriculum in a universal Scottish education system which has been perpetuated over the centuries as well as strictly equal opportunity for all, pride in educational achievement is quite clearly intimately entwined with national sentiment. The very existence of the myth and the pride taken in it demonstrates the role played by knowledge production and dissemination in the image that Scotland has of itself and seeks to project to the rest of the world. And there must be at least some truth in that self-image since as recently as 2014, The Office of National Statistics released figures suggesting that Scotland was the most highly educated country in Europe.

This volume reflects the myriad ways in which all sorts of knowledge have been created in Scotland not only through formal education at school and university and through books, but also informally in other places and by other means. It also considers the ways in which knowledge from and about Scotland has circulated within and outwith the country often textually, sometimes orally, be that in Gaelic, Scots or English, as well as in translation. The twelve contributions, seven in English and five in French, cover areas of knowledge that range from seamanship and crofting to philosophy and medicine and modes of transmission that include books, performance, letters, translations and explicit teaching.

In his opening piece on the use of Scots at school and at home (originally a talk delivered at the University of Bordeaux), James Robertson points out that English was the only language officially used in schools when education became compulsory for five to thirteen-year-olds in 1872. With Scots being denied any

recognised status in education, pupils were never taught to read, write or even allowed to speak Scots in the formal education system. Since then, the situation has changed somewhat and James Robertson illustrates the wealth of original and newly translated texts now available to Scottish children that can be used profitably in the classroom. Through these books, children brought up in Scotland can be given the opportunity to develop a more intimate knowledge of their own voice and start to realise their full bilingual potential.

The rest of the volume is presented in three parts, the first of which deals with Education and Learning. Ian Brown challenges the idea that the Kirk suppressed all drama and theatre after the Reformation. He suggests that the Kirk had a much more complicated attitude to theatre and in fact capitalised on a natural inclination in Scotland to perform theatrically thus anticipating the modern approach to drama in Scottish schools. In both formal and informal educational settings, post-Reformation Scotland actually accommodated styles of drama far removed from the prevailing professional models.

In his chapter on David Hume, Gilles Robel considers the circulation — both material and intellectual — of Hume's *Political Discourses* (1752). This work, which marked a turning point in Hume's career, contributed to the diffusion of Scottish philosophy and ideas across Europe. It was the first of his works to be published in French and its publishing history — with problems related to translation: the suppression of some passages, the over-translation of others, and various major differences between translations — exemplifies the nonlinear nature of the circulation of ideas.

Christian Auer shifts the focus away from Europe towards the Indian subcontinent. Scottish missionaries deployed a certain number of strategies to transmit the necessary knowledge for intellectual and moral improvement to the Indian population which was a priority for the Church of Scotland. Scottish élites in

the nineteenth century were confident that their admired education system was the symbol of a distinct identity but their discourse betrays a condescending and judgmental attitude also prevalent in the description of other societies considered inferior such as that of the highlands of Scotland.

Rosie Findlay investigates the motives behind the school strikes in Scotland in 1889 and 1911 and does this from the point of view of the children involved. The strikes were initiated and co-ordinated by children with uniform demands across the nation. The 1870 and 1872 (Scotland) Education Acts which compelled children to attend school, whether or not they were currently in work, were regarded by many in the working classes not as a step forward but as an economic imposition. The strikes were seen as a movement against an education system that had become too centralised, and autocratic; that confiscated control away from the local level. Rosie Findlay suggests that the ambient industrial militancy in Scotland in later years could be seen as a direct result of the strikes which had played their part in forming the country's industrial and political militancy.

Many of those children would perhaps have participated in the educational activities set up by Labour at the turn of the twentieth century and during the First World War and described by Christian Civardi in his chapter. He discusses the ways in which Socialist Sunday Schools, working class study groups, the Workers' Educational Association and the Scottish Labour College intersected with or diverged from mainstream Scottish education. Through studying texts such as *Wage, Labour and Capital* as homework, then going over it in detail in class, students made progress in fluency and grammar. However the utopic vision of emancipation through knowledge, culture, and leisure was not sustainable and the Labour movement's educational organizations petered out eventually because those who had gained knowledge and learning through them subsequently aspired to climb the social ladder and leave their working class origins behind them.

Part 2 centres on professional knowledge. Tri Tran sets out in his chapter on Scottish and English navy apprenticeships to establish how seamen in Scotland learned their jobs and what was distinctive about their apprenticeship in comparison to that of their southern neighbours between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Young Scots were throughout this period considered valuable if sometimes somewhat reluctant recruits.

Romain Girard highlights the important role played by Scottish seats of learning such as the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as certain learned societies in broadening the opportunities offered by medical training and the dissemination of medical knowledge in Great Britain. These Scottish centres challenged the monopoly of the *Royal Colleges* dominated by the social elites of Oxbridge who ruled over the training of the most prestigious medical corporations until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Girard concentrates on the representation in the works of Arthur Conan Doyle of the increasing importance of the professions in general in Victorian Britain and in particular the rise of medical specialists of various descriptions. He shows that they are increasingly used as narrators defining, describing and distributing medical knowledge over the course of the narrative and argues that the omnipresence of medical experts and their discourse in the work of Conan Doyle appears to both glorify and subvert the image of the medical professions in the nineteenth century.

John Anderson, a peripheral figure of the Scottish Enlightenment and the subject of Ronald Crawford's contribution to this volume provides another example of the non-linear circulation of knowledge originating in Scotland. Anderson was a Francophile and while in Paris in 1791, he published an edition of his *Essays on Field Artillery* in French. The text of the French edition differs in many ways from the English text. It provides, for example, a significantly more detailed explanation of Anderson's secret gun-metal formula. Today, the English version is extremely scarce while there are several copies of the French

edition in the archives of Strathclyde University, an institution that evolved out of the Anderson Institute, created from funds provided in John Anderson's will. Anderson's aim was to revolutionize higher education by calling into question traditional ideas of what makes an appropriate university programme of study and by defending the concept of useful learning and useful knowledge associated with service to one's country.

Part 3 focuses on more informal modes of transmission of knowledge. In her chapter on the journey of Charles I to Spain in 1623, Sabrina Juillet-Garzon explores the ways in which this adventure promoted Scottish values on the European continent, — values such as those favouring reconciliation with the Catholic states and defended by Charles' father, James VI of Scotland. During his sojourn in Spain, Charles presented himself as an English, Scottish and British prince, exploiting his Anglo-Scottishness to benefit from the Spaniards' contrasting opinions of the English and the Scots despite their trade agreement with the whole of Great Britain.

During the eighteenth century reading was increasingly regarded as an improving activity by elite Scottish women. Drawing on a selection of private letters and memoirs, Anne McKim examines the ways in which Scottish women write about their reading experiences, reveal their views on education, and disseminate knowledge based on their experience in the form of guidance for younger women. Because these texts were not originally intended for publication, the women who wrote them were generally more open about their own experiences of reading and of education than they would have been in public fora, often stressing the importance of women's knowledge and how this is transmitted to future generations. They repeatedly emphasize the important role played by parents, and grandparents, as the primary educators of children passing on the knowledge often gained through reading and self-teaching.

William Welstead examines the concept of High Nature Value farming, exploring the interplay of a tacit knowledge system based on traditional ecological knowledge passed down experientially and through socialisation, and an explicit knowledge system based on agricultural and ecological science originating in the Scottish Enlightenment. He examines the impact that traditional methods of farming have on producing a landscape that is rich in biodiversity as well as the ways that traditional farmers in the Scottish highlands and islands, have resisted or adapted to outside influences. There is widespread agreement that it is traditional ways of farming that produce the High Nature Value farming landscape although overemphasis on that traditional knowledge and culture may be a barrier to greater flexibility.

As a whole, this collection aims to show some small part of the breadth of knowledge created in Scotland and disseminated in and outwith the country. This wide-ranging field of interest echoes the wider range of subjects traditionally taught in Scottish schools. It attempts to highlight what is distinctive about the Scottish approach to knowledge acquisition in general while also presenting the areas in which this endeavour overlaps with similar concerns in the rest of the world. The overall impression created is that of a country consistently confident in its ability to create useful knowledge and capable of applying that knowledge at home and sharing it with others.