

AUTHORISING GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEER REVIEW IN *THE JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY*, 1830–C. 1880.

Abstract:

When the Royal Geographical Society was founded in 1830, its prospectus made a firm commitment to produce a regular journal of the geographic communications it expected to receive. This article examines how submissions from authors were screened by trusted readers before acceptance and hence begins to elucidate the origins of peer review in the discipline's first English language journal. Whilst there has been extensive examination of geographic texts, hitherto there has not been any systematic examination of institutional peer review's governance of geographic knowledge. Historians of science, however, have begun to historicise peer review within scientific fields. This paper adds to these studies, by bringing a discipline on the periphery science in the nineteenth century into dialogue with the history of peer review. Through detailed assessment of author's manuscripts and their associated correspondence, this study reflects on the development of mechanisms that authorised geographic knowledge in the society's journal. It further examines how individual reviewers interpreted and practiced the society's procedures. Overall it demonstrates how peer review was central in shaping the geography that appeared in the pages of *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*.

Keywords:

Periodical; Print culture; Book history; History of geography; Peer review; Editing; Authorship

Peer review is widely understood to be a central and necessary component of modern academic publishing, it functions as a tool of evaluation, it bestows credibility on author and journal, and

it is profoundly integrated into the practices of editorial administration. Contributors to academic journals submit their work in the knowledge and expectation that it will likely be read by their peers who will pass critical judgement on their findings. That awareness is, however, tempered by scepticism of the systems that govern academic knowledge production under the auspices of peer review. Since the early 1990s, a series of government and learned society reviews have raised concerns over the conduct and proficiency of peer review in science and the humanities.<sup>1</sup> More recently, the former editor of the *British Medical Journal* called for the abandonment of prepublication peer review, suggesting there was no tangible evidence to show that it detected errors in results or improved the standard of published manuscripts. *The British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* published an editorial that discussed organised crime in the peer review system in response to the publication of an article that had, unknown to that journal's editors, been reviewed by the authors themselves.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, the former editor of *Society and Space*, Stuart Elden, has described a landscape in which editors struggle to find reviewers and authors complain of the delays to their publications as a result.<sup>3</sup> Peer review, it seems, is in a state of crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> The Royal Society, *Peer Review — An assessment of recent developments*, 1995. [https://royalsociety.org/~media/Royal\\_Society\\_Content/policy/publications/1995/10260.pdf](https://royalsociety.org/~media/Royal_Society_Content/policy/publications/1995/10260.pdf), last accessed 22 June 2017; A. Mulligan, *Is peer review in crisis — Perspectives in publishing*, 2004.

[https://www.elsevier.com/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/93675/PerspPubl2.pdf](https://www.elsevier.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/93675/PerspPubl2.pdf), last accessed 22 June 2017; Research Councils UK, *Report of the Research Councils UK efficiency and effectiveness of peer review project*, 2006.

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/rcukprreport-pdf/>, last accessed 22 June 2017.

<sup>2</sup> P. Jump, *Slay peer review 'sacred cow'*, 2015.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/slay-peer-review-sacred-cow-says-former-bmj-chief/2019812.article>, last accessed 11 October 2016; A. Cohen, S. Pattanaik, P. Kumar, R.R. Bies, A. de Boer, A. Ferro, A. Gilchrist, G.K. Isbister, S. Ross and A.J. Webb, *Organised crime against the academic peer review system*, *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 81 (2016) 1012–1017.

<sup>3</sup> S. Elden, *Editorial: The exchange economy of peer review*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (2008) 951–953.

Given the close attention paid by historical geographers and historians of geography to the nineteenth century, it is curious that the origins of modern peer review — that have been shown to lie in this period — have not been subject to attention. Until now, the task of historicising the practices of peer review has been left to those working in sociology and the history of science. The work done to elucidate the networks and practices that governed the publication of science has situated modern debates in their historical context, demonstrating that the development of peer review is more complex than is often assumed. As science, scientific institutions, and their associated presses expanded throughout the nineteenth century, various reviewing practices emerged with differing degrees of perceived success and credibility. This paper examines peer review as it developed in this period in the emerging discipline of geography. Taking as its focus *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* (now *The Geographical Journal*), the paper shows how, since its establishment in 1831, the journal developed systems for evaluating the quality, value and topicality of submissions. The journal is a significant case study in the history of geographical publishing, being the first English-language periodical concerned solely with geography. That the journal used a system of peer review from the outset also distinguishes it from the periodicals of other learned societies whose approach to warranting knowledge typically relied on the judgement of editors rather than peers. With a near-complete record of manuscript submissions and their associated correspondence housed at the archives of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), the journal presents a unique opportunity to understand how geographical knowledge was authorised and mediated at, and by, the discipline's leading learned society, as well as — in so doing — to contribute to wider discussion of the development of peer review in science.

The first part of this paper provides an overview of the development of peer review at the society, showing its progression from an extemporary practice to a standardised process. The second part of the paper reflects on those persons trusted to pass comment on submitted manuscripts, identifying authority figures and problematising the hierarchies of authority thus revealed. The final section of the paper identifies some of the common and unwritten reviewing conventions of the society as they are revealed in the letters and reports of reviewers. In doing so, the paper evidences the multifunctional process of peer review, suggesting that the system operated not only to pass judgement on the quality and value of manuscripts but also to police the boundaries of the discipline — to determine what counted as geography and who was qualified to write as a geographer. For Felix Driver, the Royal Geographical Society in the nineteenth century was as much ‘an *arena* as an interested group; a site where competing visions of exploration were debated and put into practice’.<sup>4</sup> This paper suggests that refereeing at the society constituted a significant part of that arena where competing visions of geography were contested.

#### DEVELOPING SYSTEMATIC SCIENTIFIC PEER REVIEW

Recent scholarship has shown that ‘the history of peer review at scientific journals is more complicated than many observers have assumed’ and, as such, has outlined the various practices — from defined and organised systems to informal epistolary exchange — that governed the production of scientific knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Collectively, scholars have contributed to this greater appreciation of the historical development of peer review in one of two ways: either by positioning the emergence of peer review within the landscape of eighteenth-, nineteenth-

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<sup>4</sup> F. Driver, Scientific exploration and the construction of geographical knowledge: *Hints to Travellers, Finisterra* 33 (1998) 28.

<sup>5</sup> M. Baldwin, *Making Nature: The History of a Scientific Journal*, Chicago, 2015, 146.

and twentieth-century Anglo-French science, or through critical interrogation of the institutional practices of certain scientific journals. In moving beyond the ahistorical treatment of peer review, the first strand of research has complicated the popular notion that peer review was a product of the seventeenth century. As Melinda Baldwin notes, ‘many academic and popular articles about peer review’ credit the Royal Society’s secretary, Henry Oldenburg, as the first editor to seek external review, doing so in 1665.<sup>6</sup> Aileen Fyfe, Julie McDougall-Waters and Noah Moxham have demonstrated, however, that the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions* took a radically different approach to reviewing than that of a modern scientific journal.<sup>7</sup> Oldenburg’s role was also significantly different to that of a modern-day editor and hence, as Baldwin notes, to credit Oldenburg with the foundation of peer review, as we understand it now, is to imply wrongly that ‘peer review’s form and function have changed little since the seventeenth century’.<sup>8</sup>

The evolution of peer review throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is far from straightforward. As early as 1702, the Paris-based scientific and philosophical periodical, *Journal des sçavans*, assigned the responsibility of screening submissions to an editorial board.<sup>9</sup> However, to conflate the older traditions of committees and councils balloting on papers with the process of modern peer review is to engage in similar arguments to those already shown to be insufficient. It has been suggested that current processes of peer review owe a greater debt to the work of William Whewell, the polymath who is now most known for his work in the

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<sup>6</sup> M. Baldwin, In referees we trust, *Physics Today* 70 (2017) 44–49.

<sup>7</sup> A. Fyfe, J. McDougall-Waters and N. Moxham, 350 years of scientific periodicals, *Notes and Records* 69 (2015) 227–239.

<sup>8</sup> Baldwin, In referees we trust, 45; The suggestion that peer review was born in the seventeenth century is said to have been first discussed in H. Zuckerman and R.K. Merton, Patterns of evaluation in science: Institutionalisation, structure and functions of the referee system, *Minerva* 9 (1971) 66–100.

<sup>9</sup> S. Lock, *A Difficult Balance: Editorial Peer Review in Medicine*, London, 1985.

philosophy of science . In 1831, Whewell suggested that the Royal Society (of which he was a fellow) should publish reports on the papers it printed in its journal. Whewell's desire to print reports was, however, less about the critical evaluation of papers submitted to the Royal Society and more about the visibility and identity of science. After only a few years, Whewell's laudable intentions began to unravel and reports again became veiled in secrecy. By the mid 1840s the anonymous referee had become 'an established scientific persona'.<sup>10</sup>

While Whewell's legacy has become central to the history of peer review, 'the committees and referees of the Royal Society ... were only intermittently concerned with anything that might be termed the reliability of scientific research'.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the various demands placed on them, different publications adopted radically differing reviewing strategies — peer review was not, and nor was it intended to be, 'a unitary phenomenon, good for all places and all times'.<sup>12</sup> For example, the commercial weekly journal *Nature* (founded 1869) employed a particularly laissez faire approach, only gradually adopting the practices of peer review during the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Institutional scientific periodicals were more likely to insist on some form of peer review, although the motivations for doing so were variously bound up with particular editorial cultures. At the Royal Society in the nineteenth century, for instance, the practice of refereeing was more to do with the administrative labour of producing a learned periodical. The 'primary purpose of referee reports', Baldwin has shown, 'was not to direct the author about possible revisions; rather, the reports were intended for the internal use of the

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<sup>10</sup> A. Csizsar, Peer review: a troubled start, *Nature* 532 (2016) 308.

<sup>11</sup> N. Moxham and A. Fyfe, The Royal Society and the pre-history of peer review, *Historical Journal* 61 (2017) 866.

<sup>12</sup> Moxham and Fyfe, The Royal Society, 865.

<sup>13</sup> M. Baldwin, Credibility, peer review, and *Nature*, 1945–1990, *Notes and Records* 69 (2015) 337–352.

Royal Society'.<sup>14</sup> That is not say that papers were not revised at the Royal Society, it was however, a culture of epistolary exchange — dialogue between editors, authors and reviewers — rather than referee reports that shaped manuscript abridgement. As has been shown in the case of George Gabriel Stokes and the physicist John Tyndall, correspondence shaped the latter's publications in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*. Stokes, as editor, would save his most vehement criticisms of papers for private correspondence and Tyndall would write to the editor to clarify and dispute some of his suggestions.<sup>15</sup>

What studies have shown is that editorial and institutional context shaped the nature and conduct of peer review. Imogen Clarke has, for example, shown how the *Philosophical Magazine* and the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* were shaped by a reviewing culture in which authors' institutional affiliation and recommendations from laboratory heads factored in the acceptance of manuscripts. Both of these publications were fiefdoms and in the close control of 'small networks of appointed experts [who] were afforded the authority to judge the work of their peers'.<sup>16</sup> To conclude that peer review functioned in the same way at other scientific societies and for their publications would be reductive. Indeed, prior to the mid nineteenth century, submission rates to many journals meant editors were attempting to fill their pages rather than select those papers they wished to publish.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> M. Baldwin, Tyndall and Stokes: correspondence, referee reports and the physical sciences in Victorian Britain, in: B. Lightman and M. S. Riedy (Eds), *The Age of Scientific Naturalism: Tyndall and his contemporaries*, Pittsburgh, 2014, 180.

<sup>15</sup> Baldwin, Tyndall and Stokes.

<sup>16</sup> I. Clarke, The gatekeepers of modern physics: periodicals and peer review in 1920s Britain, *Isis* 106 (2015) 72.

<sup>17</sup> J.C. Burnham, The evolution of editorial peer review, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 263 (1990) 1323–1329.

Notwithstanding the fact that similarities have been shown to exist between modern practices and the way nineteenth-century editors of scientific journals managed the passage of manuscripts from submission to print, it was not until the early twentieth century that peer review truly began to cohere as a mechanism of judgement.<sup>18</sup> Any story of peer review in the nineteenth century then, is concerned with the local practices and knowledge networks of particular societies and their journals. These studies are central to a richer understanding of academic refereeing and, in turn, of scientific publishing more broadly. Therefore, whilst it is clear that scientific texts are ‘more than simply their final printed content’, peer review is another lens through which we can acknowledge that print was shaped by a range of disparate institutional, commercial, authorial and audience contexts.<sup>19</sup> As has been demonstrated, we know something of the development of refereeing within science, this paper intends to show how geography and its texts were shaped by culture and system of nineteenth century peer review.

### AUTHORISING GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE IN PRINT

Geographical texts have proved fertile ground for transdisciplinary study. Scholars of literary studies, social anthropology, book history, the history of art and the history of science, as well as historical geographers, have productively examined travel narratives, atlases and other works of geography in line with their specific disciplinary concerns.<sup>20</sup> These different

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<sup>18</sup> D.A. Kronick, Peer review in 18th-century scientific journalism, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 263 (1990) 1321–1322.

<sup>19</sup> C.W.J. Withers and I. M. Keighren, Travels into print: authoring, editing and narratives of travel and exploration, c.1815–c.1857, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2011) 562.

<sup>20</sup> See, for a review of the diversity of geographical texts as objects of intellectual scrutiny, I.M. Keighren, Geography of the book: review and prospect, *Geography Compass* 7 (2013) 745–758.

disciplinary perspectives have, however, revealed a common concern with questions of authorship, editing, reading, reception and exchange. To date, however, the periodical and questions of peer review and its development within geography have been paid scant attention.<sup>21</sup> That is not to say that geographers have not been attentive to the broader epistemological issues with which scholars of refereeing have concerned themselves. The construction of knowledge in print, and its subsequent critique, has been shown to be fundamental to nineteenth-century practices of exploration and travel. In his study of one of the best-selling works of nineteenth-century travel, David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* (1857), Driver has positioned the exploration of Africa as nothing short of 'a literary event'.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst Driver's work is predominately a close textual reading of the rhetorical and illustrative devices employed in Livingstone's text, he notes that 'in order to understand a work like *Missionary Travels*, we need to grasp something of the wider culture in which knowledge about distant places was produced and consumed'.<sup>23</sup> Such a suggestion sits neatly alongside Charles Withers' assertion that we need to pay closer attention to the material and epistemological conditions that lie behind the making, shaping and consumption of texts in geography.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, both Driver and Withers reaffirm that place and, more specifically, the processes

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<sup>21</sup> For one notable exception, see D. Bond, Plagiarists, enthusiasts and periodical geography: A.F. Büsching and the making of geographical print culture in the German Enlightenment, c.1750–1800, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2016) 58–71.

<sup>22</sup> F. Driver, *Missionary Travels: Livingstone, Africa and the book*, *Scottish Geographical Journal* 129 (2013) 165.

<sup>23</sup> Driver, *Missionary Travels*, 165.

<sup>24</sup> C.W.J. Withers, Geography, enlightenment and the book: authorship and audience in Mungo Park's African texts, in: M. Ogborn and C.W.J. Withers (Eds), *Geographies of the Book*, Farnham, 2010, 192–220.

and nuances of particular sites in the publishing trade matter in the context of making and consuming texts.<sup>25</sup>

In attending to what Withers and Keighren refer to as the inscriptive and epistolary practices involved in the making of geography's written texts, geographers and allied scholars have examined the multiple actors involved in the cultural co-construction of geographical print.<sup>26</sup> Publishers' archives have proved to be a particularly fruitful source for enquiries into the involvement of additional hands in the composition of geographical texts. By remaining aware of James Secord's calls to avoid presenting a narrative of science where knowledge 'passes from highly individualised sites of production to an undifferentiated mass public', investigations of the publishing house have uncovered the attempts by these practitioners to align written style and content with the assumed needs and interests of specific audiences.<sup>27</sup>

Louise Henderson's investigation of Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*, alongside correspondence of the book's publisher John Murray III, has evidenced the editorial efforts that underlie that title's incredible success. As she notes, 'whilst Livingstone and Murray publicly argued that Livingstone alone was qualified to relay his story, the content, style and format of the published narrative had in fact been carefully crafted and revised by John Murray and his employees'.<sup>28</sup> Similar practices of editorial mediation have been demonstrated elsewhere. David Finkelstein has illustrated how the Blackwood publishing house manipulated

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<sup>25</sup> I.M. Keighren, Bringing geography to the book: charting the reception of *Influences of Geographic Environment*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31 (2006) 525–40.

<sup>26</sup> I.M. Keighren and C.W.J Withers, Questions of inscription and epistemology in British travelers' accounts of early nineteenth-century South America, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101 (2011) 1331–1346.

<sup>27</sup> J. Secord, Knowledge in transit, *Isis* 95 (2004) 662.

<sup>28</sup> L. Henderson, *Missionary Travels* in Britain and America: exploring the wider circulation of a Victorian travel narrative, *Scottish Geographical Journal* 129 (2013) 185.

the work of the African explorer John Hanning Speke to suit particular ‘ideological and commercial interests’.<sup>29</sup>

Investigation of the travel narratives published by the house of John Murray between 1773 and 1859 has illustrated that the firm routinely employed the services of trusted literary readers in advising on the quality and suitability of texts. Many of these readers were fellows of the Royal Geographical Society and, in offering their advice on the likely interest of a text or suggestions for its abridgement, were instrumental in fostering the firm’s reputation as a travel specialist.<sup>30</sup> Murray’s readers were, though, but one of many hands involved in practices of review and emendation. That is to say that the making of texts depended then, as it does today, on ‘the dynamic interplay of authors, publishers and other members of the book trade’.<sup>31</sup>

Historical geographers have been attentive to the way local contexts have shaped the mediation of geographical texts and have focused particularly on the publishing house as a location of judgement and evaluation and as a site of editorial labour. This paper seeks to advance our understanding of the moderation and policing of geographical writing by examining the practices of warranting and editing applied in a somewhat different social and spatial context — the disciplinary-institutional setting of the Royal Geographical Society. In so doing, the paper contributes to scholarship on the making and mediation of geographical knowledge and to work on the development of peer review in the nineteenth century. What follows is an investigation of the mechanism, practitioners and politics of reviewing at the society. The paper

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<sup>29</sup> D. Finkelstein, *House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era*, Pennsylvania, 2002, 52.

<sup>30</sup> I.M. Keighren, C.W.J. Withers and B. Bell, *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and Publishing with John Murray, 1773–1859*, Chicago, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> R.B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publications*, Chicago, 9.

shows how the society positioned itself as an arbiter of quality, how systems were developed to evaluate authors' claims to knowledge and how the journal depended upon the labour and expertise of a range of differently qualified actors in the making of geographical print. The paper begins, however, by placing *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* in the wider context of nineteenth-century scientific print culture and periodical publishing.

## A JOURNAL PAST AND PRESENT

*The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* was founded upon the principal aim of the society as it was set out in its founding prospectus of 1830. The society was to record the 'new, interesting, and useful facts and discoveries' it hoped to receive, to position itself as the leading authority on geography in Britain and internationally, and to disseminate accurate and authoritative geographical knowledge to an audience made up of fellows and interested members of the public.<sup>32</sup> This ambition was, in part, a reaction to the observation that although there was a 'vast store of geographic information existing in Great Britain', it was so 'scattered and dispersed' in books and the pages of general periodicals that it was almost unavailable to the interested reader. Whilst much work remains to be done to fully understand the periodical networks through which geographical knowledge was being disseminated before the founding of the Royal Geographical Society and its journal, it is clear that the *Quarterly Review* and the *Edinburgh Review* were favourite publication venues of the society's first fellows.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Royal Geographical Society, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 1 (1831) vii.

<sup>33</sup> In the five years preceding the founding of the Royal Geographical Society the following articles were contributed to the *Quarterly Review* by its council men or fellows. 1825, Dr. Johann Baptist von Spix and Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, 'Travels in Brazil in the Years 1817 to 1820'. 1826, John Britton, 'Britton's Cathedral Antiquities'. William Edward Parry, 'Journal of a Third Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage from the

Under different titles throughout the nineteenth century — *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* (1830–1880), *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* (1878–1892) and *The Geographical Journal* (1892–date) — the society issued the latest geographical knowledge it received from an international network of authors. Published by the travel literature specialist John Murray, the journal functioned initially as a record of the society's transactions by publication of papers read at its evening meetings. At a time when no discipline-specific English-language geography periodical existed, and when tales of travel had captured the public's imagination, Murray had high hopes for the journal's appeal. Advising the society at its council meeting in December 1830, Murray encouraged it to consider publishing the journal with greater regularity and a wider range of content than just its transactions. He declared that the proceedings of the society should form 'only one stem, among many others, in its composition'.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, the journal slowly became the compendium of geographical information Murray had envisioned, featuring analysis of the latest works of geography together with a range of original papers and miscellaneous communications. By the latter part of the century, the journal's remit had broadened substantially. While

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Atlantic to the Pacific'. James Weddel, 'A Voyage towards the South Pole, performed in the years 1822–1824'. 1828, William Edward Parry, 'Narrative Attempt to reach the South Pole'. 1829, John Crawford, 'Journal of and Embassy from the Governor General of India to the court of Ava, in the year 1827'. Lieutenant-General Sir Raufane Dokin, 'Dissertation on the course and probable termination of the Niger'. Captain William Henry Smith, 'Life and Services of Captain Phillip Beaver'. Captain Basil Hall, 'Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828'. Numerous geographical articles were published in the *Edinburgh Review* by council men or fellows. 1828, Phillip Parker King, 'A Survey of the Intertropical and Western Coasts of Australia, in 1818 and 1822'. The Honourable George Keppel, 'Personal Narrative of a Journey from India to England...'. 1830. Lieutenant General Rufane Donkin, 'A Dissertation on the Course and Possible Termination of the Niger'.

<sup>34</sup> Council Minute Book, 29<sup>th</sup> December 1830, 11–12.

prominence was still given to original research articles — which, by design, were required ‘to precede all other matter’ in the journal — issues also included critical analysis of geographical books and maps.<sup>35</sup> The journal also carried a record of geographical news, proceedings of other societies (most particularly from Section E of the British Association for the Advancement of Science), obituaries, notes and other communications deemed important enough to be recorded.

Whilst it was Murray’s original idea to expand the scope and content of the journal, it was not his influence alone that brought about that change. After an ill-fated attempt in 1847 to take on the cost of producing the journal at his own risk, Murray concluded that the journal had no obvious public market and thereafter he had little to do with its day-to-day running. The general editorial and administrative labours were undertaken by a paid editor (generally although not exclusively with pre-existing experience of geographical publishing) who would sometimes double as the society’s secretary, depending on the journal’s financial fortunes. Publishing the journal was a largely loss-making endeavour. With fellows entitled to a copy of each number, as part of their subscription, sales never generated any meaningful profit. The society, though, never showed any particular concern for attracting a paying readership; the journal was, primarily, a symbol of institutional prestige and authority, not a mechanism of revenue generation. Print runs, periodicity and issue length were all adjusted owing to the society’s financial fortunes — the editors always had enough copy (even when publishing three issues per year) but, on occasion, accepted papers were deferred until space was available. The lag times resulting from such deferrals were occasionally so great that in 1855 some council members criticised the policy and suggested that the society create a supplementary publication, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* (ultimately

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<sup>35</sup> Committee Minute Book, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1878, 68.

published between 1857 and 1877), to print accounts of the papers read at the evening meetings and the short discussion that followed them more rapidly than the journal itself could routinely manage. When the society fell upon hard times it published just a single annual volume of the journal and typically reduced the print run to 750 copies — enough only for the society’s fellows. Otherwise, print runs fluctuated during the century between 1,000 and 1,500 copies, until 1878 when the journal’s title was changed in an attempt to widen its appeal and print runs increased to 5,000 copies as a consequence.<sup>36</sup> The journal was, in this respect, in a state of constant change, both materially and in terms of its content.

The examples drawn upon in this paper to illustrate the processes of evaluation, emendation and exchange which I am interested in, derive from the fifty years of the journal’s publication. After the development of *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* in 1878, with its wider scope and larger print runs, the journal and its refereeing process gradually adapted to the changing demographics of the society and the professionalization of geography. Although there is much to be said in relation to practices of reviewing at the Royal Geographical Society after 1878, my focus on the journal’s first fifty years places emphasis on the close networks of geographers that came to guard the papers printed in the journal. This paper then, gives a sense of the way in which (even in a journal with a relatively small immediate audience) careful procedures were developed and practiced in order to judge articles submitted for publication.

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<sup>36</sup> Pages per volume fluctuated. The society fell upon hard times in the 1840s owing to a membership structure that did not guarantee the institution’s long-term financial security. The first annual volume of the journal was 276 pages, a number that steadily grew to 689 pages by the time the journal’s tenth volume was published. Page numbers decreased through the 1840s to a low of 238 pages (inclusive of eighty eight prefatory pages). As the society became more prosperous in the 1850s page numbers rose once again and from 1856 the society did not publish a volume under five hundred pages in length.

The primary source material upon which this paper draws — the manuscripts and associated correspondence of nineteenth-century geographical authors — form the Journal Manuscript Collection of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers). The collection — approximately 1,800 manuscripts together with their reviews and related correspondence for the period 1830–1880, arranged by geographical region (see Table 1) — represents a near-complete record of manuscript submissions to the society (even where rejected manuscripts were returned to their original authors). While a small number of manuscripts are without reviews or related correspondence, it is possible — by reading the council’s minutes — to determine whether the manuscript in question was sent out to a referee or if the manuscript passed into the pages of the journal without external validation. Only a very small number of manuscripts lack any associated correspondence and it is likely that even these were subject to some sort of oral verification at a society meeting.

INSERT TABLE 1

The reports of referees give unparalleled insight into the society’s practice of assessment and decision making with respect to the content of its journal. Each manuscript, and its associated correspondence, tells its own story of acceptance or rejection. Some illustrate the internal politics of the society and its contested visions of geography; others reveal how particular personal relationships served to shape the fate of submissions. Taken as a whole, however, the collection allows us to elucidate, for the first time, the systems that governed geography — as a process of knowledge making — in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*.

THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY AND THE GOVERNANCE OF PRINT

As far as it is possible to tell from the society's records, prospective authors were given little indication of the means by which their manuscripts might be evaluated. It seems unlikely that this lack of guidance was a deliberate attempt to deceive would be authors about the processes to which their work would be subjected, rather it is indicative of the rather ad hoc way in which the society operated during its early years. As one historian of the society has noted, the opening years saw 'many experiments [that] were made and abandoned' as the organisation sought to develop the routines and practices of a learned society.<sup>37</sup> In practice, the absence of a coherent reviewing strategy was not unusual for the mid nineteenth century, we know even the most respected scientific journals were not reviewing on a systematic basis until well into the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> More interestingly, this indicates that papers took different paths to publication. That does not, however, presuppose that manuscripts were not subject to some form of external peer review. Undoubtedly, given the vast number of submissions, it is probable that some articles were printed without a written report from an external examiner. The manuscript of John Barrow's 'State of the Colony of Swan River', the first article published in the journal's inaugural volume, offers no indication that it was reviewed. Barrow's position as founding member, vice president, and, in the words of the Scottish journalist William Jerdan, an 'arrogant and dictatorial' leader, perhaps suggest why the archive record does not contain the associated correspondence that signifies the external evaluation of his paper.<sup>39</sup> The lack of external review is possibly the reason why Barrow self-deprecates in his opening paragraph, writing that the work did not possess the 'degree of minute accuracy which may be expected from the Proceedings of the Society in its more mature state, when higher objects shall ... claim more marked attention'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> H.R. Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society, 1830–1930*, London, 1930, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Baldwin, *Making Nature*.

<sup>39</sup> Mill, *Record of the Royal Geographical Society*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> J. Barrow, State of the colony of Swan River, 1st January, 1830, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 1 (1831) 1–16.

There are other credible suggestions as to why Barrow's paper appeared without a written report. As scholars such as Diarmid Finnegan and Secord have demonstrated, the culture of oratory was central to both the dissemination and negotiation of nineteenth-century science.<sup>41</sup> At the society, orality was intimately linked with the production of print, not only because referees' reports were read and confirmed at meetings of the council, but also because papers were performed at its evening meetings.<sup>42</sup> As such, the author's words — sometimes delivered by another fellow — were subject to another layer of critical review in the quasi-public space of the society's lectures. More so, Barrow's paper — read on 22 November 1830 — was not the unfettered writing of a single author. His paper was largely drawn from a report that likely crossed his desk at the Admiralty, meaning that the paper might have avoided external verification because of the authority derived from the source that was the basis of his argument. Even if Barrow's words were not formally reviewed, the society's then editor, the retired British naval officer Alexander Maconochie, would have cast his editorial eye over the paper. Furthermore the paper would have also engaged in a form of external peer evaluation in the post-talk discussion. In short, multiple methods of evaluation shaped the content of the society's journal.

Given that other papers printed in the society's first volume were commented upon in letters sent to Maconochie, it is entirely possible that the testimony of an independent reviewer of Barrow's paper has since been lost. It is evident, however, that there was no clear instruction

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<sup>41</sup> D. Finnegan, Finding scientific voice: performing science, space and speech in the nineteenth century, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2016) 1–14; J.A. Secord, How scientific conversation became shop talk, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007) 129–56.

<sup>42</sup> E. Hayes, Geographical light: the magic lantern, the reform of the Royal Geographical Society and the professionalization of geography c.1885-1894, *Journal of Historical Geography* 62 (2018) 24–36.

to referees about how to report upon papers referred to them, some wrote formal letters addressed to Maconochie, others wrote notes on scraps of paper and it seems likely that some delivered their reports orally at council meetings. Indeed, as I go on to demonstrate in the cases of Fedor Karacsay and Lieutenant James Webber-Smith, some referees even engaged in direct written dialogue with authors, often posing a series of questions, the answers to which were to be incorporated in revised versions of the manuscript.

There is one thing we can know for certain about Barrow's paper: irrespective of the reception the manuscript received, it would have been balloted upon by the society's council prior to being sent to the journal's printer, William Clowes. In this sense, the council assumed ultimate control over the textual content of its journal. In practice, this formal acceptance (or rejection) of manuscript material almost always reflected the comments of either the editor or the independent reviewer. For authors submitting papers to the society in the 1830s and 40s, there were multiple paths to publication, but all, to some degree, involved value judgements by a series of stakeholders, be it the editor, council members, fellows present at society's talks or independent reviewers.

The path to publication in this period typically followed a common set of steps. The receipt of papers intended for publication and reading at evening sessions was formally acknowledged at meetings of the society's council. In an undocumented selection process, papers would be assigned a single referee to pass comment on the manuscript — a process overseen by the editor or secretary of the society (only in unusual circumstances would a second referee be called upon). Often returned by reviewers within two weeks of receiving the manuscript, the correspondence would be read aloud at the following council meeting with those in attendance balloting on whether to accept or reject the advice it contained. In most instances, the paper

would be read at one of the society's evening meetings, although, on occasion, papers were read before they were subject to the formal process of review. The referee's comments would then be passed to the author to allow him (or, in a small number of instances during this period, her) to revise the manuscripts. Authors who were geographically distant from the society, or busy with other endeavours, often delegated the task of editorial amendment to the journal's editor, trusted friends or the referees themselves. Proof copies of typeset articles were sent to some but certainly not all authors. With corrections at this stage of the publishing process being particularly costly, it is possible that this was a tactic of particular editors to economise on the journal's production costs.

In 1850, the society's council approved the creation and adoption of 'a referee's circular' in an effort to further standardise the practice of reviewing.<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to know the reason for the transition from the multiple practices of reviewing to one coherent, society-wide system. However, the most likely explanation is the arrival of a new editor, Norton Shaw. The son of a Danish army general, Shaw had travelled extensively, being educated in both New York and Copenhagen where he qualified as a surgeon. During his time as a surgeon at sea he was said to have built up 'a knowledge of men and foreign lands that proved useful in his new post'.<sup>44</sup>

The referee's circular (Fig. 1) was commonplace at the society by the early 1850s, in comparison, the Royal Society would not adopt a similar printed pro forma until the 1890s. The circular defined the parameters of evaluation and expectations of reviewers by asking a set of four standardised questions. The relative simplicity of the circular's enquiries into the originality of the manuscript, its publishable content and the necessity of any abridgment or

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<sup>43</sup> Council Minute Book, 14 January 1850, 239.

<sup>44</sup> Mill, *Record of the Royal Geographical Society*, 60.

illustration, probably indicates the reason for its longevity. Over time, there were some changes to the questions set out on the circular. The advent of the *Proceedings* meant that reviewers were asked which of the society's publications the manuscript was best suited to. In the late 1860s, the question concerning illustration was altered so that referees were directed to include a recommendation as to the size of any map(s) they thought were required. And, later in the century, reviewers were asked to suggest whether the paper under consideration might be suitable for reading at an evening meeting. Notwithstanding Shaw's attempts to standardise the instructions offered to reviewers from 1850, he was unable to standardise reviewers' interpretations of those instructions. In this sense, peer review was a process that resisted attempts to reduce it to objective criteria and common practices.

#### INSERT FIGURE 1

On examining the range of responses to the referee's circular, the mutability of Shaw's questions becomes quickly apparent. The question of originality was, for the most part, taken to mean authorial ownership, inasmuch that an author had collected (or at least been involved in collecting) the data presented and were either individually or collectively responsible for the manuscript laid before the society. But reviewers variously interpreted originality to mean original within the pages of the journal, having not been published elsewhere, or detailing *terra incognita*. Each of these interpretations had some validity. As one reviewer noted, given that 'the greater part' of the paper under his consideration 'has already appeared elsewhere I presume it would be against your practice' to print it.<sup>45</sup> This reviewer's supposition was, however, only partially correct; papers given elsewhere were unlikely to appear in the first section of the journal — which contained the original research papers that had been read before

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<sup>45</sup> Sir W. Parish, 12 December 1843, JMS 5/13, RGS.

the society — but they might have appeared as an abstract or notice later in the volume. As I will go on to show, there were numerous other seemingly contradictory decisions made by reviewers and editors.

The responsibilities of alteration and abridgement were, likewise, variously conceived. Some reviewers favoured a hands-on approach, becoming deeply involved in the reformulating of manuscripts and thereby challenged the assumed distinction of the roles of author, editor and reviewer. Others, like George Dashwood Goldie, the African traveller and British colonial administrator, distanced themselves from the possibility of being asked to edit manuscripts. Reviewing George Garrett's investigation of Sierra Leone and the upper waters of the Niger River, for example, Goldie wrote that the 'document could, no doubt, be condensed; but it would require rewriting', and, therefore, he saw it as 'a question of printing in full or not at all'.<sup>46</sup> And in relation to Thomas Alldridge's paper — 'Wandering in the hinterlands of Sierra Leone' — Goldie suggested that the society decide upon the space that could be afforded to the manuscript (which, on first submission, had comprised sixty one hand-written pages) and then 'allow and leave Mr Alldridge full liberty in bringing the paper down to that limit' as he did not think it mattered 'which portions he cut out'.<sup>47</sup> For Goldie then, refereeing was an intellectual matter — technical abridgement was to be conducted by the editors.

The practices outlined above are illustrative of a society clearly concerned with the quality of manuscripts that would appear in their journal. The procedures in place attempted to select the papers most suited to publication on the grounds of originality, novelty and value. These processes are, in some ways, similar to those uncovered by other investigations of learned

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<sup>46</sup> Sir G.D. Goldie, Referee's Circular 27 November 1891, JMS 1/146, RGS.

<sup>47</sup> Sir G.D. Goldie, Referee's Circular n.d. c. November 1893, JMS 1/148, RGS.

societies in the nineteenth century. As this paper demonstrates in the following section, such a system depended — as they did at almost every comparable learned society — upon the labour and judgement of a small network of trusted authorities whose opinions and actions effectively policed the disciplinary boundaries of geography.

### HIERARCHIES OF AUTHORITY: EXPERTISE AS FELLOWSHIP

The institutional protocols outlined above relied on a small circle of trusted critics forming opinions about manuscripts under their consideration. The Journal Manuscript Collection offers an important insight into how that circle of critics was constituted and how that constitution changed over time. Throughout the century the circle of trust, authority and credibility did not extend far beyond those closely associated with the society's internal functioning. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as the discipline of geography grew and the society had an increasingly diverse fellowship, a series of debates about who might be classified as practitioners of geography resulted in an official list of geographical authorities being drawn up by the council.<sup>48</sup> This list certainly included a far wider range of geographers than the society ordinarily drew upon to review its papers, but the extent to which this impacted the refereeing practices into the twentieth century requires more investigation. Throughout the nineteenth century, those asked to review manuscripts were predominantly, although not exclusively, council members. Given the exclusion of women as fellows until the early part of the twentieth century, reviewers were largely men of science. Whilst women were not completely excluded from the society's journal, contributing papers by 1840, in terms of being

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<sup>48</sup> C. Markham, Handwritten List *c.* 1893, AP/66/1, RGS.

expert judges of the nineteenth-century geographical and scientific press, their voices were entirely absent.<sup>49</sup>

The society's minutes first began to record papers and their referees in April 1837. That year, the referees included the president, William Hamilton; the secretary and editor, John Washington; the Irish hydrographer and naval officer, Francis Beaufort; the imperial surveyor and cartographer, Thomas Jervis; and the diplomat and author, James Morier. All these individuals sat on the society's council that year. That the practice of asking council members to act as expert referees was a longstanding one is evidenced by the list of referees for 1878–1879, the final volume of *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*. The fifty-four papers submitted for consideration were evaluated by eighteen referees, with just one — Alfred Russell Wallace — not a member of council (see Table 2). Wallace's selection stands out given that he was only an ordinary fellow of the society but reflects that his expertise on Indonesia — evidenced, for example, in his book *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) — made him a suitable choice to comment on a manuscript that dealt with a Dutch expedition to Sumatra. There were, of course, many other fellows with expertise that would have made them eligible candidates to referee manuscripts, it is likely that it was Wallace's personal connection to the society's then editor Arthur Hinks (the two travelled together in South America in 1848) that meant he was called upon. Individual editorial practices and networks had the capacity, therefore, to determine who — beyond the council — was asked to undertake refereeing duties.

INSERT TABLE 2

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<sup>49</sup> Miss Wilkins, *Reise in die Steppen des südlichen Russlands, &c. Journey Through the Steppes of Southern Russia, Undertaken by Dr. F. Goebel, Accompanied by Dr. C. Claus and Mr. A. Bergmann, Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 10 (1840) 537–543.

Reviewing at the society had a distinct geography. To maintain an active presence on the society's council, proximity to its central London meeting spaces in the heart of clubland was important.<sup>50</sup> And as most reviewers were active or former council members, the labour of refereeing was primarily undertaken by metropolitan men. So, whilst the journal circulated to an international audience and its authors were similarly global, the practices of governance were intimately local. Some reviewers did fulfil their duties from further afield. George Long, for example, member and editor for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, returned manuscripts from Brighton where he held a lectureship at the local college.<sup>51</sup> But ultimately long distance communication to referee papers in the nineteenth century was a relatively rare occurrence.

The use of council members and a small selection of trusted fellows as reviewers had other important implications for the society's developing system of review. The referees' circulars and their dates of issue and return indicate the general efficiency of the reviewers. Given that rapidity is central to the form and function of the periodical, this close network of referees ensured that manuscripts were commented upon quickly, with most circulars being completed either on, or the day after, their date of issue. Even though the society occasionally failed to publish its journal regularly, or to publish approved manuscripts in the next available issue of the journal, the rapidity with which papers were reviewed supported the founding objective of publishing new works of geography at regular intervals. This relative rapidity sits in contrast to some of the criticisms of peer review at the Royal Society revealed by Moxham and Fyfe. At the Royal Society, authors typically felt that slow refereeing was unnecessarily delaying their publications from appearing. While refereeing was almost instantaneous at the Royal

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<sup>50</sup> 'Clubland' refers to the network of institutions that congregated around Pall Mall and St James's, London.

<sup>51</sup> G. Long to Dr N. Shaw, c. April 1850, JMS 15/27, RGS.

Geographical Society — and a boon for authors as a result — some referees complained of the tight turnaround times they were expected to meet. On the whole, however, it appears that referees understood the value and necessity of timely reviewing.<sup>52</sup>

The small numbers of trusted reviewers, accompanied by a known quantity of geographical writers, meant that anonymity was typically only notional. The referees' circulars made no attempt to conceal the details of the title or the author of the paper. Indeed, some reviewers were deliberately selected for their close acquaintance with manuscripts. For example, as William Leake noted when reviewing a manuscript from one Captain Spratt, 'this paper is part of a letter addressed to me'.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, given the limited number of potential referees, some authors could readily identify the reviewer of their paper. In his referee's report to the secretary, James Fergusson noted that Captain Whitehouse had called by his residence to question the reference his paper would receive. On being informed that Fergusson thought 'an excursion extending only 15 miles into the unknown country' was insufficient for the journal's pages, and it being the summer recess of council, Whitehouse 'requested permission to withdraw his paper', going on to publish part of it the *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*.<sup>54</sup> Withdrawing papers in this way was relatively uncommon, but rejected papers often appeared elsewhere, sometimes on the recommendation of a referee who thought the manuscript was ill-suited for the pages of the journal but a better fit in another publication.

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<sup>52</sup> See for example, J. Arrowsmith, Referee's Circular 9 August 1858, JMS 14/8, RGS, Arrowsmith's circular is dated 27 July 1858 to be returned by the 5 August 1858. His return is dated 9 August 1858. For work that details the practice of another learned institution see, Moxham and Fyfe, *The Royal Society*.

<sup>53</sup> W. Leake, Referee's Circular 31 July 1854, JMS 15/13, RGS.

<sup>54</sup> J. Fergusson, Referee's Circular 6 November 1882, JMS 1/126, RGS; F.C. Whitehouse, Lake Moeris: From Recent Explorations in the Moeris Basin and the Wadi Fadhi, *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 14 (1882) 85–108.

Given that many referees were council members and held respected positions in education, government or colonial administration, it is perhaps surprising that they were prone to moments of reflexivity and doubt. The textual lives of these practitioners contrasted with their carefully crafted public image. Dr Thomas Hodgkin, physician and ethnologist, professed, for example, that he was not entirely confident to form an opinion on the manuscript of Mr Beaumont's account of the 'Race and origin of the Cimi'. Yet Hodgkin suggested a rejection of the manuscript and for the author to develop his views and 'present the paper in its amended form to the Geographical and Ethnographical section of the British Association'.<sup>55</sup> When the manuscript was resubmitted almost a year later, Hodgkin again argued for the paper to be rejected on grounds that its scholarship was 'so very questionable'.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Sir Woodbine Parish, the British diplomat and scientific traveller, declared at the start of his letter to the editor that he knew 'nothing of the country described in Mr Bailys paper' that detailed the isthmus of Nicaragua. But, as Parish went on to note, the paper 'appear[ed] to be highly interesting as the original account of a survey of a most important line'.<sup>57</sup> Given Parish's interest in South America, and his political and geological efforts in that region, it would seem unlikely that he knew 'nothing' of a country that was then being discussed as a potential route of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Here, then, we have two society-endorsed experts professing ignorance of the subject they had been called to comment upon. It is likely that the small pool of referees that the society drew upon perpetuated these moments of reflexivity. However, it is possible that these examples are less evidence of unsuitable referees lacking the knowledge or resources to pass comment on manuscripts and more possibly rhetorical devices deployed by reviewers to distance themselves from any later

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<sup>55</sup> Dr T. Hodgkin, Referee's Circular 27 June 1855, JMS 15/36, RGS.

<sup>56</sup> Dr T. Hodgkin, Referee's Circular 14 April 1856, JMS 15/36, RGS.

<sup>57</sup> Sir W. Parish to Col. J. Jackson, c. December 1843, JMS 5/13, RGS.

disagreement, detract from the possibility of themselves conducting editorial work, or signalling for the editor to call for a second opinion.

Whilst Hodgkin's and Parish's reports might evidence moments of self-doubt, many other reviewers were more forthright in their suggestions. The practices of Robert FitzRoy, founder of the meteorological office, Royal Navy officer and later governor of New Zealand, and those of Francis Galton, whose wide-ranging interests included meteorology, sociology, anthropology and eugenics, continue to complicate the practices and politics of review at the society. Most importantly they evidence hierarchies of authority. Both Galton and FitzRoy were particularly active reviewers, Galton reviewed large numbers of African manuscripts and FitzRoy became the society's authority on the discussion of interoceanic communication between the Atlantic and Pacific. FitzRoy's expertise was evidenced in the society's own journal, having published 'Considerations of the Great Isthmus of Central America' and 'Further Considerations on the Isthmus of Central America' in 1850 and 1853 respectively.<sup>58</sup> After his second publication, FitzRoy reviewed all incoming manuscripts concerning the subject for the following three years.

Whilst Galton's intimate knowledge of Africa was also textual, his considerable efforts in reviewing papers were not solely due to his knowledge of the region. He was one of the council members who, in 1855, had lobbied for the *Proceedings* to supplement the journal. Ambitious in his own desires, Galton was memorialised as being a man 'of strong character, at once enthusiastic in urging his own proposals and instinctively critical of those of others'. His

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<sup>58</sup> R. FitzRoy, Considerations of the great isthmus of Central America, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 20 (1850) 161–189; R. FitzRoy, Further considerations on the great isthmus of Central America, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 23 (1853) 171–190.

proposal for a supplementary publication disgruntled some of the council, not least Norton Shaw who, as editor, saw his workload increase with the additional publication. When Galton relived Shaw of the labour of editing the *Proceedings* in 1861 it is said that Shaw nevertheless ‘resented interference by an honorary officer in what he had learnt to consider his ... [own] domain’.<sup>59</sup>

Despite their differences, Galton, as the advocate of the *Proceedings* and later its editor, continued to review for Shaw, selecting articles he deemed unworthy of publication in the society’s journal but important enough to be recorded by the society as notices or abstracts in the *Proceedings*. His involvement might have been considered to have had distinct benefits, as Galton had the authority to action steps that other reviewers might only tentatively suggest. For example, in his review of Lefroy’s manuscript detailing the West Africa Niger Expedition (1859–1863), he wrote to Shaw that ‘the only position that would interest the society is the news brought back of [William] Baikie’ the expedition’s leader. And as such Galton had ‘inserted 3 or 4 lines on this in a footnote to the abstract of Baikie’s paper in the forthcoming number of the *Proceedings*’.<sup>60</sup>

If Galton’s official title was honorary secretary, FitzRoy might have been considered *de facto* editor of papers concerning interoceanic communication. In taking the expert opinion of FitzRoy, the society entrusted someone who had not only laid out their own views on the matter in the journal but was also particularly forthright in those opinions. Given FitzRoy’s distain at reviewers’ interference, evident in correspondence with Shaw it is perhaps unsurprising that

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<sup>59</sup> Mill, *Record of the Royal Geographical Society*, 74.

<sup>60</sup> F. Galton, Referee’s Circular 2 April 1862, JMS 1/80, RGS.

manuscripts passed under his gaze relatively unscathed. That, at least, was the case until the writing of John Power was sent for review in 1856.

FitzRoy had already laid out his principal thoughts on the best possible routes of interoceanic communication and its potential benefit to commerce in his 1850 paper, and most incoming manuscripts followed a similar stance on the matter. When Power submitted his manuscript, there was a clear disparity between their respective views on the mean sea level of the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean. FitzRoy had discussed mean sea level of each ocean in an extensive footnote to his 1850 paper and again referred to it three years later. Citing various authorities, he unequivocally declared that there was ‘only a trifling difference between the levels of the oceans at this isthmus’.<sup>61</sup> Power’s paper, which in part aimed to induce funds from the society for exploration of his theory, was rejected on FitzRoy’s advice. In his review for the editor, FitzRoy noted that ‘In the Society’s Journals are articles on the interoceanic communication across the Isthmus which shows that the mean level of each ocean is very nearly identical ... my humble opinion is that the question is settled’.<sup>62</sup> So, whilst the close networks of the society’s reviewing system could be considered to have had benefits in terms of logistics, speed and trustworthiness, in only considering the comments of one trusted reviewer, debates such as those over the mean ocean sea levels at the Isthmus of Panama were absent from the journal’s pages.

## THE POLITICS OF REVIEWING: DISCIPLINARY POLICING AND STRATEGIC VALUE

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<sup>61</sup> FitzRoy, Considerations of the great isthmus, 177.

<sup>62</sup> R. FitzRoy, Referee’s Circular 22 November 1856, JMS 5/35, RGS.

If what has been demonstrated above is the mutability of referees' practices, it is important in this final section to acknowledge some of the commonalities that reveal themselves through the reports and letters of reviewers. In exploring techniques of travel writers published by John Murray, Keighren, Withers and Bell have demonstrated that textual triangulation was a device used by authors to appear credible by referring to other well-established works of geography and travel.<sup>63</sup> Despite the journal also being published by Murray, the society's referees actively discouraged authors from including references to other texts, preferring to give prominence to the original empirical material contained within their manuscripts.

William H. Smyth, then president of the society, suggested the removal of footnotes in his review of Lieutenant E.M. Leyceter's lengthy manuscript concerning the origins of the Greek island Santorini. Smyth wrote that he would 'advise leaving out the citations from Von Buch & Humboldt near the end, except using as much for a note as would explain the difference between their theory of the origin of Santorin [sic], & that of Lieut. Leycester, which may perhaps be found the most correct of the two'.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, in his comments on Baily's paper on the isthmus of Nicaragua (the subject he had claimed he knew little about), Woodbine Parish suggested the paper be 'limited to the Authors own observations' and therefore 'the omission of his allusion to the others'.<sup>65</sup> Whilst it is possible that removal of citations from Leycester's paper might have been suggested because of the paper's length, the regularity of such calls to remove citations to other works of geography, and particularly classical texts, indicates it was the preference of the reviewers, and by extension the society, to limit papers appearing in its journal to predominantly empirical contributions. Indeed, Baily's paper only accounts for three pages in the journal and hence the call to remove citations was not simply a matter of

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<sup>63</sup> Keighren, Withers and Bell, *Travels into Print*.

<sup>64</sup> W.H. Smyth to Dr N. Shaw, n.d., JMS 15/27, RGS.

<sup>65</sup> Sir W. Parish to Col J. Jackson, c. December 1843, JMS 5/13, RGS.

economics. In fact, Baily's paper includes an editorial note that references his confirmation of Humboldt's supposition of the nature of the mountain range lying between the Pacific and Lake Granada in Nicaragua — possibly an agreement between editor, author and reviewer. What such interventions show is that credibility in this period, and in this form of publication, was seen to be related to original empirical work rather than scholarship per se.

Of course, to understand the textual practices of the society in its early history is to recognise how they embody the wider cultural politics of a society headed, in part, by those who hoped for scientific and scholarly recognition and those who aimed to provide a public forum to celebrate feats of geographic exploration. It is immediately tempting, then, to suggest that the removal of citations and references to classical texts might have been a triumph for those wishing to broaden the society's appeal. However, given that reviewers were those in the society's inner circle it seems unlikely their interests lay in the popularisation of the society's textual record (the journal did not print enough copies to be considered an organ of popular geography until much later in the century). I suggest, rather, that this practice is symptomatic of a society and discipline uncertain of its own scientific status and, further, a practice of reviewers whose military and governmental experience led them to give greater value to empirical observation and practically useful knowledge than to scholarly or theoretical speculation.

In this context, reviewing at the society was as much about defining what counted as geographical endeavour as it was about evaluating the credibility and reliability of manuscripts. Robert FitzRoy's sceptical and frank assessment of Arthur P. Perceval's two manuscripts detailing the comparative fitness of Cork, Limerick and Galway for transatlantic packet stations, is indicative of the general preference for papers based upon direct observation. It was

the overly theoretical tone of Perceval's papers that irked FitzRoy. In his view the papers were 'so theoretical — merely — without practical support — that it would not lend to any desirable object' as far as FitzRoy could see. He concluded with an attack on papers more generally:

But there is another grave objection — in my mind — to the adaption of merely speculative Papers not strictly speaking geographical which is — that by so doing a door is opened for the admission of many schemes — the authors of them having no scientific or practically geographical object in view which would tend to lower the character of the Meeting — as well as the Society — and induce speculation to endeavour to make known their projects from so advantageous a position.<sup>66</sup>

Credible empirical observation coupled with a clear disciplinary tone and style was an important part of having papers accepted by the society. Numerous papers were rejected because they did not make a clear contribution to geography but the mutability of the discipline led to several seemingly contradictory decisions. The British naval officer William Hutcheon Hall considered Laurence Oliphant's paper on the Japanese island of Tsushima publishable because it contained 'much valuable and useful information to those visiting that particular part of the Japanese Sea, but particularly to Navigators'.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, a paper titled 'Remarks on Skyros', by the naval officer and naturalist Thomas Graves, was rejected because 'however useful to the seaman', it would 'carry no interest to the geographer'.<sup>68</sup> Whilst on the surface these two decisions appear distinctly incompatible, it is possible to speculate as to the reasons why Oliphant's paper was more favourably received. The answers might lie in both the local and global context of the paper. Oliphant's paper was in a clear minority. Given the isolationist

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<sup>66</sup> R. FitzRoy, Referee's Circular 3 February 1852, JMS 15/29, RGS.

<sup>67</sup> Capt. W.H. Hall, Referee's Circular 13 February 1863, JMS 12/8, RGS.

<sup>68</sup> Capt. F. Beaufort to Dr N. Shaw, 30 October 1849, JMS 15/24, RGS.

policies of Japan in effect until 1866, manuscripts concerning the country made up just a small percentage of those received by the society but enjoyed an above average publication rate. So, whilst Oliphant's writing was immediately favourable in the local context of the society, the global geopolitical context was clearly important in cultivating interest around the subject. Oliphant had been stationed on the island during the Tsushima incident of 1861 when British warships were involved in escorting a Russian corvette away from shore.<sup>69</sup> Oliphant's intimate knowledge of the coast perhaps give the clearest indication as to why the paper was accepted. As the reviewer, Hall, noted in his concluding remarks, the paper was promising from 'a commercial point of view', particularly as the author claimed to see numerous merchants in their 'short run of 50 miles'.<sup>70</sup> So, a heightened desire for information on Japan, exacerbated by the geopolitical context and the sensitive commercial knowledge included in the manuscript, explains the rationale for accepting Oliphant's paper.

Reviewers appeared willing to overlook shortcomings in order to publish articles of perceived strategic value. This fact is most evident, perhaps, in the papers of Count Fedor Karacsay. As has been well argued in modern geographic scholarship, English as the discipline's *lingua franca* produces implicit bias against non-Anglophone scholars.<sup>71</sup> If the power structures of language in modern geography are predominately implicit, the nineteenth-century reviewers of the Royal Geographical Society made their opinion on language quite clear. Indeed, in a letter of recommendation for the work of the missionary Reverend Johann Christaller, Robert Needham Cust noted that the manuscript 'would not do for reading at an evening meeting'

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<sup>69</sup> C. Blacker, Laurence Oliphant and Japan, 1858–1888, in: C. Blacker (Ed), *Carmen Blacker Collected Writings*, volume 3, Abingdon, 2004, 262–273.

<sup>70</sup> Capt. W.H. Hall, Referee's Circular 13 February 1863, JMS 12/8, RGS.

<sup>71</sup> A. Bajerski, The role of French, German and Spanish journals in scientific communication in international geography, *Area* 43 (2011) 305–313.

because ‘Germans are very dry in their way of putting a matter’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, whilst William H. Smyth noted that Andreas Poey’s 1855 chronological table of cyclones and hurricanes was ‘highly creditable to the author’s knowledge’ of the English language, he said it bore ‘all the evidence of being written by a foreigner’ and hence required significant revision.<sup>73</sup> Karacsay’s manuscript posed a different problem — it was written in German.

Karacsay’s manuscript, titled *Albanien, historisch-ethno-geographisch, statistisch, in drei abtheilunge*, was referred to William Wittich. The choice of referee is interesting, given that Wittich was not a member of the society’s council. Wittich was, however, a colleague of the council member George Long, whom he worked alongside at University College London, and the pair collaborated on publications for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It seems probable that Long, a professor of Greek and Latin, and at the time engaged in the laborious task of editing the twenty-seven volumes of the *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1828–43), might have recommended his counterpart to review the work. Being an instructor in German, Wittich was a suitable candidate for the role.

As its German title suggests, Karacsay’s manuscript on Albania was divided into three parts. Wittich reported that the information on Austrian Albania had ‘interesting details’ but was ‘sufficiently known’, inasmuch that all of what was said was ‘very interesting to the inhabitants of the country; but [had] not much value for foreigners’. The section on Montenegro was considered too general, but the manuscript’s detailing of Turkish Albania was treated more favourably for its valuable information on the commercial routes of empire. ‘The most important part of the work’, Wittich noted, ‘is certainly the description of Turkish Albania, and

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<sup>72</sup> R.N. Cust to H.W. Bates, n.d. c.1884, JMS 1/130, RGS.

<sup>73</sup> W.H. Smyth, Referee’s Circular 8 October 1855, JMS 3/50, RGS.

it contains a good deal of new matter. I think I may say, that there is no country of Europe of equal extent which is less known than this portion of the Turkish Empire and of which therefore any new information must be accepted'.<sup>74</sup>

Wittich, recognising the value of Karacsay's manuscript, wrote in a separate private letter to the society's secretary Julian Jackson that it would be valuable if they could procure a more extensive survey of the country. He went on, 'I did not venture to make a direct proposal in the report but I take the liberty of making it to you', namely that Count Karacsay should be made an honorary member of the society in light of his potential contribution to the geographical understanding of the region. It was suggested that, in writing to inform him of his election, the reasons as to why the first two parts of his manuscript could not be printed could be communicated. Wittich went on that if Karacsay were to 'pursue a detailed answer to some proposed questions' his section on Turkish Albania would be printed in the society's pages.<sup>75</sup>

This style of dialogic review, albeit being relatively uncommon, does appear in the manuscript records periodically and evidences the differing objectives of reviewers. Lieutenant James Webber-Smith was also requested to answer a series of questions on his manuscript that detailed his exploration of Mount Athos. The reviewer, naval officer and hydrographer, John Washington, questioned Webber-Smith on his orthography, his amendment to positions on the map, and the accuracy of his narrative (Fig. 2). In doing so, the questions served a different purpose to the ones sent to Karacsay. Wittich's enquiry included questions on distances between villages, the prevalence of crops and the estimation of heights of mountains and widths of valleys. Through his selection of certain lines of enquiry, Wittich constructed the narrative

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<sup>74</sup> W. Wittich to Col J. Jackson, 25 November 1841, JMS 15/15, RGS.

<sup>75</sup> W. Wittich to Col J. Jackson, 25 November 1841, JMS 15/15, RGS.

that he would subsequently translate for the society's pages. What each of these examples demonstrates is the multiple routes to publication through the same system. Positive reviews were not simply the product of submitting a well-written manuscript to the society, rather they were judged upon the basis of a perceived strategic benefit to the society, its journal and the discipline's intellectual expansion.

INSERT FIGURE 2

## CONCLUSION

In tracing the institutional practices of reviewing at the Royal Geographical Society, this paper has contributed to the growing literature on the emergence of systems of peer review during the nineteenth century. The evidence cited from the manuscripts and their associated correspondence suggests that reviewing papers submitted to the society was a mechanism that governed the content of *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* since its establishment. In common with what historians of science who have engaged with other journal-specific archives have demonstrated, reviewing was predominately conducted by council members or those close to the inner workings of the society. Conducting the refereeing process in this way ensured the timely delivery of reviews and an understanding of the society's unwritten practices. Yet these examples have illustrated that the personal relationships of reviewer, editor, author, society and geography underpinned the society's refereeing praxis. This paper demonstrates further that learned institutions were using peer review for varying purposes and with different levels of success. Refereeing was part of the administrative labour of producing a learned periodical, but it was also part of the broader discussion of what geography was suitable to be published under the auspices of the society.

Whilst the processes that shaped geographical content delivered to the society for publication in its journal remained fixed for the second part of the century at least, the practices of even the society's most trusted authorities were mutable. Karacsay's manuscript was accepted on the assumption that he had more valuable papers on a lesser-known part of Europe. His acceptance, no doubt, was also bound up within broader questions of identity given the lack of anonymity in the process. Historians of science have demonstrated that the editors of particular periodical publications treated particular institutions or laboratories favourably; similar judgements appear to have been made of the status and reliability of particular authors hoping to publish in the society's journal. This fact is a reminder that editors and peer reviewers are not only concerned with truth, 'methodological soundness, and such; they also care ... about the interest of the work, the readability of the article, and its suitability for a particular journal'.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the refereeing system at the Royal Geographical Society reflected the personal desires of reviewers and the society more generally for the future direction of geography.

In remaining cautious of accepting papers associated with other disciplines, the reviewers of the society evidence a lesser concern with reading audience and more consideration of the identity of the society and the discipline it aimed to promote. Shaw's attempts to standardise and simplify refereeing at the society also contribute to this narrative. Throughout the century the considerable efforts of editors and reviewers attempted to ensure journal included papers that were credible, influential, original and above all else, geographical. The question of being geographical lay largely in the referee's interpretation of the manuscript and their understanding of the society's unwritten expectations. Successful manuscripts were often empirical and their content new and original but they also usually piqued the geographical

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<sup>76</sup> S. Haack, *Evidence Matters: Science, Proof, and Truth in the Law*, Cambridge, 2014, 163.

interests of their reviewers and — in focusing on the right places at the right times — were imagined to be interesting to a wider audience of fellows. To be considered sufficiently geographical was, also, to have a demonstrable wider utility, be it commercial, political or military. In this way, the society was not just the arbiter and disseminator of geographical knowledge, it was itself influencing (or at least attempting to influence) engagement with the wider world. Of course, what it meant to be geographical was mutable. There was no single definition, no one simple way to ensure a favourable review was received. As we saw in the examples of Thomas Graves and Laurence Oliphant, the wider political and disciplinary context was central to the rejection of one paper and the acceptance of the other. The journal was, then, a product of its refereeing, by those trusted to uphold the desire of the society to produce an authoritative geographical journal.

If Keighren, Withers and Bell have demonstrated the relational complexity of author and editor-publisher, we might do well to add referees to that assemblage. The significance is to further complicate our understanding of how geography became print. There was not a single system of review at the society, each paper evidences, rather, a unique interaction between reviewer, author and editor. Whilst reviewers such as Goldie distanced themselves from implementing manuscript changes, others, such as Wittich, were intimately involved in the writing of the text that appeared in the journal's pages. Moreover, Galton and FitzRoy blur the boundaries between editor and reviewer. There are, of course, still many unanswered questions about the development and spread of scientific refereeing. This paper has only been able to include a small fraction of the papers refereed at the society, but by examining the systems developed it provides important insight into the decision-making processes that shaped geography in the discipline's first English-language journal.

	1830–1839	1840–1849	1850–1859	1860–1869	1870–1879
Africa	33	50	94	118	126
Americas	43	42	71	57	47
Asia	68	67	84	153	156
Australasia	26	29	36	91	35
Europe	8	18	23	26	81
Polar	11	4	30	16	39
Islands	14	12	18	16	10
Maps & Misc	10	6	11	6	13
Total	213	228	367	483	507

Table 1. The number of manuscripts submitted to the Royal Geographical Society between 1830 and 1879 arranged by geographical region and decade. The geographical categories are an amended version of those employed in the organisation of the Journal Manuscript Collection.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Registered Address</b>	<b>Role at RGS</b>	<b>Papers Reviewed</b>	<b>Topic(s) of paper reviewed</b>
Alcock, Sir Rutherford	14 Great Queen Street, Westminster S.W. London; and Athenaeum Club, S.W. London.	Vice-President	3	Grand Canal and the Yellow River (China), Amoy and Hankow (China), Hankow and Canton (China).
Barkly, Sir Henry	Bina-gardens, South Kensington, S.W. London.	Vice-President	5	Tribes of North of Transvaal (Africa), South Africa and Zulus, River sources of Natal, Damaraland, South Rhodesia.
Bates, Henry W.	1 Saville Row, London.	Assistant Secretary and Editor	3	San Jorge (Uruguay), Equatorial South America (French Guiana/ Brazil), Galapagos Islands.
Cust, Robert Needham	64 St George's Square, S.W. London.	Council Member	2	Miri Hills (India), Andaman Islands (India).
Ellis, Sir Barrow H.	69 Cromwell Road, S.W. London; and India Office, S.W. London.	Vice-President	1	Valley of the Indravati and Bastar Lowlands (India).
Evans, Captain F. J. O.	Hydrographic Office, Admiralty, S.W. London.	Vice-President	2	Cocos/Keeling Islands (Indian Ocean), Longitude in Hour Angle.
Freshfield, Douglas W.	Kidbrooke-park, East Grinstead, Surrey, England; 6 Stanhope Gardens, South Kensington S.W. London; and United University Club S.W. London.	Council Member	1	Russian Lapland.
Galton, Francis	42 Rutland Gate, S.W. London; and Athenaeum Club, S.W. London.	Vice-President	6	Journey through Congo, Observations on fixed positions in Darfur, Report on general map of Kordofan, Lake Ngami, Lake Tanganyika, The impact of man upon nature.
Grant, Lieutenant-Colonel James A.	19 Upper Grosvenor Street, W. London; East India United Services Club, S.W. London; and Househill, Nairn, Scotland.	Council Member	5	Sierra Leone, Lake Nyassa, Circumnavigation of Lake Nyassa, Source of Nile, Recent information from Victoria Nyanza.
Lefroy, General Sir John Henry	82 Queen's Gate, S.W. London and Athenaeum Club, S.W. London.	Council Member	1	The Bahamas.

Markham, Clements Robert	21 Eccleston-square, S.W. London; and Athenaeum Club, S.W. London.	Secretary	2	The Valley of the Turnach (Afghanistan), Iceland and Faroe Islands.
Merewether, Colonel Sir William Lockyer	31 Linden Gardens, Kensington, W. London; and India Office, S.W. London.	Council Member	2	Midian, Narrative of journey to Samsoon to Diarbekir.
Ommanney, Admiral Sir Erasmus	The Toucers, Yarmouth, Isle of Wight; and United Service Club, S.W. London.	Council Member	4	Lissa and Pelagosa (Croatian Archipelago), River Gambia, Coastal Norway and Lapland, Barents Sea (Arctic).
Pelly, Colonel Sir Lewis	Athenaeum Club, S.W. London.	Council Member	1	Nejd (Saudi Arabia).
Rawlinson, Major General Sir Henry C.	Athenaeum Club, S.W. London; and 21 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, W. London.	Vice-President	5	Information on expeditions of Maeff and Severtsof, The mountain passes leading to Bamian (Afghanistan), The Valley of the Turnach (Afghanistan), Account of travel from Khotak Pass to Lugari Barkhan (India), Cyprus.
Rigby, Major General Christopher Palmer	Oriental Club, W. London; and 14 Mansfield Street, W. London.	Council Member	4	Usambara and East Africa, Zanzibar to Usambara, Four days in Berbrah, New Route to Candahar.
Thuillier, Lieutenant-General Sir H. L.	32 Cambridge Terrace, Hyde Park, W. London.	Council Member	6	Shorawak Valley and Toba Plateau (India), The Peshin Valley (India), The Valley of the Turnach (Afghanistan), Survey of operations in Baluchistan and Southern Afghanistan, Account of travel from Khotak Pass to Lugari Barkhan (India), Kandahar and Girishk (Afghanistan).
Wallace, Alfred Russel	Waldron Edge, Duppas Hill, Croydon.	Fellow	1	Dutch expedition to Sumatra (Indonesia).

Table 2. Details of the referees responsible for reviewing manuscripts received by the Royal Geographical Society between 1878 and 1879.