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PhD Final Oral Examination

**BUILDING THE HIGHLAND EMPIRE:
THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF LONDON AND THE FORMATION
OF CHARITABLE NETWORKS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND
CANADA, 1778-1857**

A B S T R A C T

Date: Tues., Apr. 22, 2014

Time: 9:30 am

Location: MACK 020

Advisor:

Kevin James

Examining Committee Members:

**Graeme Morton
Dan Gorman (UW)**

External Examiner:

**Dr. Stana Nenadic (University of
Edinburgh)**

Chair:

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This dissertation explores the development of charitable networks by the Highland Society of London (est. 1778) in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries—a period of rapid social and economic change in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The Highland Society of London (HSL), a voluntary association, was formed exclusively for elite Highlanders living or working in London. Members of the HSL were able to exploit the expanding British fiscal-military state in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries through active political lobbying, socializing, charity work, and the development of an institutional network for Highlanders first by attaching itself to ‘sister’ societies, notably the Highland Society of Scotland (est. 1784), opening subsidiary joint-stock companies to undertake specific improvement projects, such as The British Fisheries Society (est. 1786), and developing a network of branch societies around the globe linking Highlanders in London to Highlanders in major centres in Scotland, India, and British North America.

Through these means members were able to lead the development of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland socially and economically, help to preserve Highland culture, and provide charity for members of their own communities located in the Highlands, London, and Canada, on their own terms. In the process, Highland elites we find in HSL circles developed the notion of a ‘Highland Empire’, which linked economic support for charitable projects to a wider conceptual Imperial framework. This framework was one in which Highland Scots influenced their own communities, whether in Great Britain or abroad, as well as the broader sociopolitical British imperial community through political lobbying and garnering subscriptions for projects from the general public. This directly challenges the idea that Highland Scottish elites were more than willing to sacrifice their own culture and integrate themselves into the dominant Anglo-Scottish elite in order to benefit from participation in the British Empire.