Based on a range of late-nineteenth century fashion magazines, newspaper reports, Parliamentary Papers, published memoirs and public addresses, British and Irish Home Arts and Industries 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion is an exemplary ‘recovery project’ which re-constructs a ‘lost history’ (p. 3). Offering a detailed historical narrative that examines the philanthropic work undertaken by the Donegal Industrial Fund (f. 1883), the Irish Industries Association (f.1886) and the Highland Home Industries (f. 1849), it discusses the significant roles played by the three women who founded and promoted them: Alice Rowland Hart (1848-31), Ishbel, Countess of Aberdeen (1847-1939), and Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland (1867-1955) respectively. While the focus of the study is ‘craft’, explicit within the narrative is ‘an examination of tactics and strategies implemented by philanthropic organizations to promote and sell objects made by the poor’ (p. 3), which relates closely to recent scholarship on late nineteenth-century philanthropy, fashion magazines, colonialism, exhibition culture and the Body.

Reflecting the complexity of this recovery project, the meticulous endnotes, detailed bibliography and index refer to a wealth of publications drawn from a wide range of academic disciplines, which have been woven together skilfully with primary materials. Recent specialist publications referred to include texts on the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement; works on Irish and Scottish history (with particular focus on notions of national identity and women’s history); studies of the traditional textiles of Ireland and Scotland; and, recent biographies of the aristocratic women discussed. Similarly, articles from journals as diverse as Cultural Anthropology, the Journal of Design History, Fashion Theory, Feminist Review, Gender & History, the Journal of the History of Education, Irish Arts Review, Irish Historical Studies, Scottish Textile History, Ulster Folklife, Victorian Studies, and the Journal of Women’s History demonstrate the many different threads of Professor Helland’s fascinating research.

Set carefully against a low-key backdrop of Irish and Scottish history – the tragedy of the Famine in both Ireland and the Highlands, the campaign for Home Rule, the Easter Rising and agrarian agitation – the focus of this study is explained by its subtitle. British and Irish Home Arts and Industries 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion is an examination of the revival of Irish and Scottish cottage textile crafts – the embroidering of poplin, lace-making and the weaving of tweed and tartan – that also demonstrates the complexities and tensions caused by the ‘internal colonization of the so-called Celtic fringe by London society’ (pp.2-3). Focussing entirely on the histories of the Irish and Scottish Home Arts and Industries, rather than the better-known English or almost forgotten Welsh counterparts, here, the rural and the urban; the metropolis and the colony; the aristocrat and the peasant are presented and analysed through specific moments of public exhibition and spectacle. Indeed, the key feature of this interesting study is the examination of displays of Irish and Scottish textile crafts at important international and national exhibitions.
held in the late-nineteenth century, notably the Irish Exhibition held at Olympia in June 1888 and the World Fair at Chicago in 1893. British and Irish Home Arts and Industries also offers detailed descriptions of many smaller exhibitions held in the aristocratic houses of Dublin, the Highlands and London, where a list of titled women, which reads like Debrett’s, including the Marchioness of Londonderry, Viscountess Duncannon, the Countess of Fingall, the Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Lucan, served behind stalls displaying and selling the crafts they promoted to their equally aristocratic and Royal consumers. It also discusses the role played by fashionable retailers, particularly Fenwick’s and D. H. Evans, in promoting Irish and Scottish textiles and the importance of the fashion press as ‘arbiter of culture and authority on style’ (pp.168-9). This discussion is supported by a range of interesting images taken from contemporary fashion magazines such as Queen, Gentlewoman, Lady’s Pictorial, which illustrate garments and events described within the text: also included here are advertisements for fabrics and fashionable garments featuring named aristocratic women.

Beginning with a clear introduction, which sets the study within the broader context of the English Arts and Crafts Movement and Home Arts and Industries Association, British and Irish Home Arts and Industries highlights class, ethnicity and gender as central tools of analysis, before offering separate case studies of the three philanthropic organizations, the women who managed them and the tactics employed in marketing the peasant textile crafts of Ireland and Scotland to the fashionable ‘upper ten thousand’.

The second chapter, ‘Exhibiting Ireland: The Donegal Industrial Fund, 1883-1900’, begins with a brief biography of Alice Rowland Hart, sister of the better-known philanthropist, Henrietta Barnett, and, stressing Hart’s middle-class mercantile background and Jewish connections, this chapter offers an overview of the Donegal Industrial Fund, which she founded in 1883. It highlights the establishment of Donegal House in Wigmore Street, the Fund’s London warehouse and showrooms and discusses the importance of the ‘Kells Embroidery’ developed by the Fund. Finally, it considers the significance of Hart’s work in organising prize-winning displays of Donegal textiles at a number of regional, national and international exhibitions. Providing fascinating descriptions and using illustrations drawn from contemporary reports and magazines, Professor Helland discusses Hart’s creation of a faux Donegal village for the Irish Exhibition at Olympia held in June 1888. Complete with a cross brought over from Ireland, the ruins of a low Irish tower, a Holy well and twelve cottages where examples of textile crafts were demonstrated by ‘actual workers’ from remote Donegal villages (p.51), this was a hugely successful display of the luxurious goods or ‘artistic handicrafts’ made by the Donegal Industrial Fund for consumption in England. This chapter also highlights the tensions between Hart’s organization and the Countess of Aberdeen’s Irish Industries Association, a state of affairs exemplified by the exhibition of two competing versions of Ireland – another version of Alice Hart’s Donegal Village and Ishbel Aberdeen’s Irish Village, complete with a replica of Blarney Castle and its eponymous stone – at the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893: perhaps it was inevitable that English involvement would create two Irelands?
This troubled relationship and the personal differences between the two women are also discussed in following chapter, ‘Fashioning Ireland: The Irish Industries Association’, which examines the Countess of Aberdeen’s ‘interminable attempts to expand and control the advancement of both the Irish and Scottish organizations’ (p.76). Stressing Lady Aberdeen’s use of fashionable dress and costume to promote Irish textiles, it highlights a number of key events, notably the ‘spectacular and theatrical performance’ of the Vice-regal Garden Party in May 1886, where Lady Aberdeen ‘conflated her own body with Ireland’ appearing as ‘Aoife, the twelfth-century Irish bride of Norman invader Strongbow, in a costume resplendently embroidered with Celtic motifs’ (p.82). It also considers a ‘unique’ fashion event held at ‘Brighton’s fabulous Hotel Métropole’, where a live mannequin from Fenwick’s ‘displayed “smart frocks” by circulating through the rooms [...] “attired in various costumes”’ (p.110), and ends with a section subtitled ‘The Privilege of Lace’, which describes Lady Aberdeen’s ‘Lace Ball’ of 1907: an event that ‘signified wealth at a moment when that wealth was shifting and highlighted the aristocratic at moment when the meaning of the term was changing (p.132).

The chronology continues with the fourth chapter, “Of pleasure a taste, Of duty no waste: Fashion, Philanthropy and Tweed’, which examines the Scottish Home Industries founded in 1849 in the aftermath of the Famine by Harriet, the second Duchess of Sutherland and revived by Millicent, the fourth Duchess in 1886. Focussing on the ‘practical and shrewd’ (p.149) efforts of Millicent Sutherland, who publicly rejected the image of ‘Lady Bountiful’, this chapter considers the first Sutherland Industrial Exhibition held during the Highland Gathering of 1886; the foundation of the Scottish Home Industries Association in 1889; the displays of Scottish and Irish crafts at Victorian Era Exhibition of 1897 (complete with imitation crofter’s cottage); and, most significantly, the creation of the fashion for tweed. Here, the discussion focuses upon on the hand-weaving of authentic Harris and Sutherland tweeds, which were marketed with their own trademark; the iniquitous ‘truck system’ of middle-men; and the shift in the understanding of tweed as textile to tweed as fashion. This discussion highlights the often contradictory meanings of fabrics – croft-woven Harris Tweed was traditional, but when translated into fashion, it represented modernity (p. 184).

Concluding with a brief discussion that links the work of the Donegal Industrial Fund, the Irish Industries Association and the Highland Home Industries to the current market for hand-made Irish and Scottish cottage textile crafts promoted by the Crafts Council of Ireland, the Scottish Arts Council and Craft Northern Ireland, Professor Helland comments: ‘The patrons of the home arts and industries associations, who converted craft objects into fashion, were protagonists in one part of a continuous story that began long before their projects and that carries on today’ (p. 199). And today, ‘Craft’ is the subject of a great deal of renewed interest and reinvestigation as has been demonstrated by several recent publications, plans for a new *Journal of Contemporary Crafts* and the high profile exhibition and accompanying book, *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* (V&A, 2007). Here, in an essay titled, ‘The Spectacle of the Everyday’, Glenn Adamson has discussed the nature of contemporary craft practice suggesting that ‘Craft has finally been swallowed by the
society of the spectacle’ (p.13). Within this context, through its detailed historical narrative and thoughtful analysis of late-nineteenth century cottage crafts produced in the Celtic fringe, British and Irish Home Arts and Industries 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion, reflects highly contemporary critical concerns and offers a much needed addition to the history of craft.