

# Indian Forester, Scottish Laird:

the Botanical Lives of  
Hugh Cleghorn of Stravithie

by H.J. Noltie

# The Cleghorn Collection:

South Indian Botanical Drawings,  
1845 to 1860

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Royal  
Botanic Garden  
Edinburgh

**H**ugh Francis Clarke Cleghorn (1820–1895) was one of the many remarkable Scottish surgeons who worked for the East India Company, but who used an official posting as a base for research upon India's rich flora, and recording it visually in drawings made by Indian artists. His particular interest was in useful plants, which led to the major work in the field of forest conservancy for which he is best remembered. In 1851 he read a pioneering report on tropical deforestation to the British Association for the Advancement of Science; in 1856 he was appointed the Madras Presidency's first Conservator of Forests; and in the 1860s, with Dietrich Brandis, Cleghorn played a major role in setting up a structure for forest management in British India that, while providing timber for burgeoning commercial demand (especially railways), allowed an element of forest preservation for the protection of watersheds and climatic amelioration.

After Cleghorn's death his outstanding collection of drawings, and books relating to forestry and botany, was divided between the University of Edinburgh and what became the National Museum of Scotland. The latter share was transferred to the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) in 1940, whereupon it was reunited with his substantial Indian herbarium that had been given in 1896. At this point Cleghorn became, if posthumously, one of the most significant benefactors in the Garden's 300-year history – books dating back to 1582, and around 3000 exquisite botanical drawings. Neither Cleghorn's significance for RBGE, nor the breadth of his interests and achievements, has ever been fully appreciated. In order to do this, two books have been necessary.



The biography explores Cleghorn's life and work, placing it in the latter days of the Scottish Enlightenment (in the first phase of which his eponymous grandfather was a leading figure), both in the field of applied and useful knowledge, and the documentation of natural resources in both words and pictures. In the second volume more than 200 of the drawings from the Cleghorn Collection are reproduced, in colour, for the first time. These include drawings from nature, copies based on European prints, and Nature Prints made from herbarium specimens. They are the work of several South Indian artists and of pupils of the pioneering Madras School of Art.

The volumes conclude a trilogy on Scottish East India Company surgeons and their collections at RBGE. Of these the first concerned Alexander Gibson (1800–1868), the first Conservator of Forests for the Bombay Presidency; the second examined the life and work of Robert Wight (1796–1872), a major taxonomist and economic botanist who experimented with cotton cultivation.

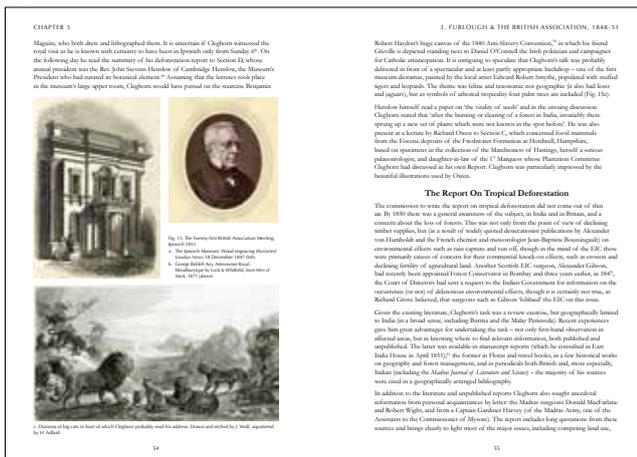
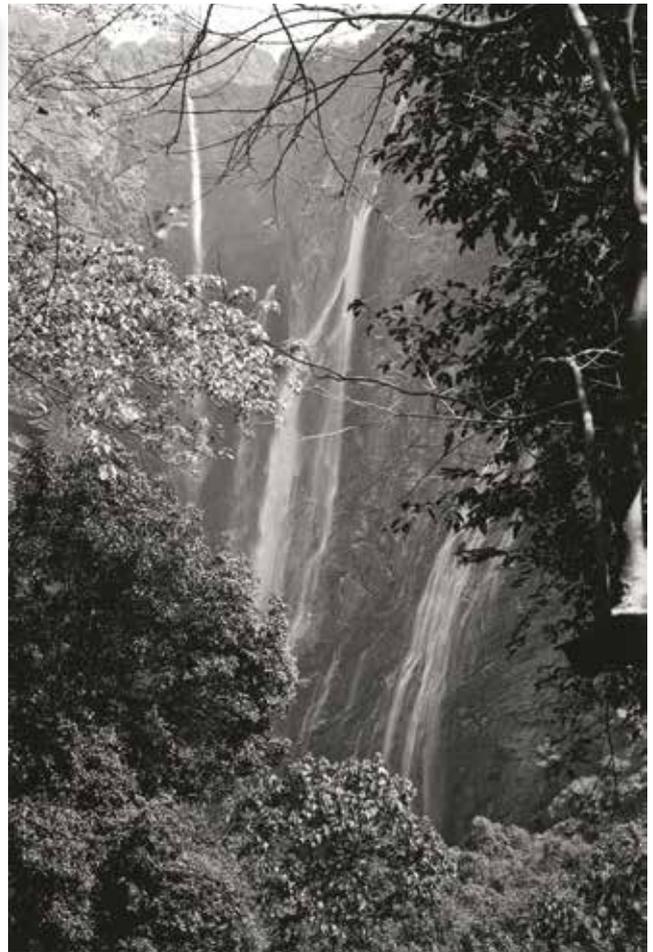


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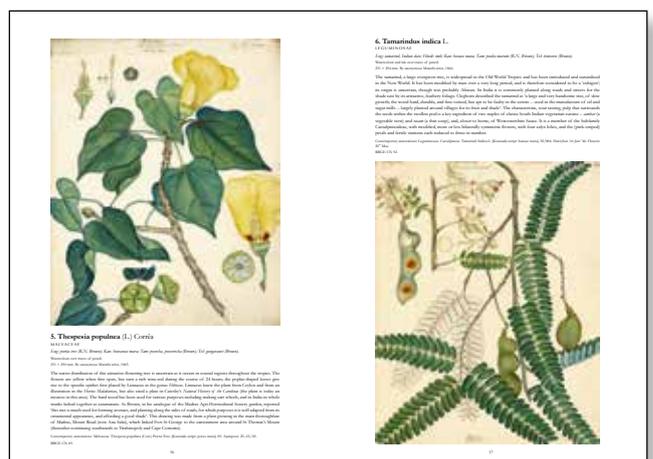


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