



## National Museums in Scotland

Sheila Watson

### Summary

In 1707 an Act of Union joined together two former independent nations, England and Scotland. National museums in Scotland have supported the state making and state affirming process and, for a long time, this concept of nationhood was one that fitted comfortably within the notion of the United Kingdom/Great Britain and the union with England. Scottish nation building has been influenced by both civic and ethnic ideas of nationalism, and museums express elements of both of these.

Aristocrats and the middle classes promoted the development of museums as a way of expressing their devotion to their country and their commitment to the Enlightenment. Democratic in nature, Scotland's national museums were open to all, but until the mid twentieth century their displays were, on the whole, for connoisseurs and experts. Fine arts were promoted in the mid nineteenth century as part of a drive to improve design in trade and industry through the Industrial Museum of Scotland, established by Act of Parliament in 1855, opened in 1862, renamed the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art in 1864 and then renamed again the Royal Scottish Museum in 1904. Unlike the Museum of Antiquities, this was a government driven project, inspired in part by the Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace (which was imitated in the Museum's architecture) and the South Kensington museum complex. It is not surprising that in the past Scotland compared her museums with those in London and sought to emulate them, for many politicians and industrialists moved easily between the two capitals and had influence in both. National museums in Scotland were about supporting Scottish identity and pride within the United Kingdom. Devolution in 1998, (coinciding as it did with the opening of a national Museum of Scotland), has led to greater demands for Scottish independence and the National Museum of Scotland has become a symbol of growing national confidence. The Museum presents the Scots as a great nation whether they are inside the Union as now or, in the distant past, outside it. The 1998 Museum of Scotland is sometimes referred to the National Museum of Scotland. To avoid confusion, as the new amalgamation of the Royal Scottish Museum with the Museum of Scotland has led to both museums being united under a title of National Museum of Scotland, the 1998 Museum of Scotland is not referred to as the National Museum of Scotland in this paper. Occasionally it is described as 'national' without the capital letter that would denote an official title.

Scottish exceptionalism has a long history and can be found in the archaeological collections and displays of the National Museum of Antiquities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It subscribes to an idea that the Scots are different ethnically and culturally from their southern neighbours. While current museums do not advocate racial Scottishness, relationships with overseas visitors of Scottish origin are fostered. Museums continue to play a role in civic nation building by demonstrating the importance and effectiveness of the Scots in a wider Britain and their contribution to the United Kingdom as a whole, while reminding them that they were

independent in the past and, by implication, could be so again in the future. The case studies include the National Museum of Scotland, the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery.

The origins of the first national museum of Scotland can be found in the establishment of the Museum of Antiquities of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1780 by David Steuart Erskine, Earl of Buchan. It was one of several museums founded around this time in the United Kingdom in part as a consequence of the Enlightenment and the desire to order and regulate knowledge. Its collections passed into public ownership in 1858 and it became the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. Erskine's aim was, within that framework of the Union, to celebrate Scotland's distinctiveness. The foundation took place during a time of Celtic revival, a romantic yearning for ancient cultural practices located in a time beyond history, linked to ideas about an ethnic identity rooted in folk practices. The museum had a key role in promoting the idea of the Scots as a nation, ethnically and culturally separate from the rest of the UK and Europe. By 1879, Dr Joseph Anderson, the Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities between 1869 and 1913, argued that archaeology demonstrated the unique nature of the Scottish people. It did no such thing but his influence was felt well into the mid twentieth century in the museum and in the public imagination. There is little or no evidence that politicians promoted this sense of Scottish exceptionalism. The National Museum of Antiquities' staff had a similar level of independence to those of their colleagues in London national museums. They decided what to display and what stories to tell.

The Royal Scottish Museum was founded in 1854 by the British government and was the responsibility of the Department of Science and Art. It was first called the Industrial Museum of Scotland (and only renamed in 1904), and was intended to focus on natural history, geology, science and technology as well the decorative arts. It was created in response to the example of the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, an exhibition that encapsulated the mid nineteenth century's interest in industrial design and inventions and the desire to promote high quality manufacturing.

In 1985, these two national institutions, the Royal Scottish Museum and the National Museum of Antiquities, amalgamated to create the National Museums of Scotland (rebranded as National Museums Scotland in 2006). A new national Museum of Scotland was opened in 1998 to tell the story of Scotland. It had been long in the making and was motivated as much by practical considerations as political ones. However its opening coincided with devolution and it is now funded directly by the devolved Scottish parliament. Its relationship with the rise of Scottish nationalism and demands from some quarters for independence from London is complex. It is difficult to disentangle to what extent its existence helped to drive forward a national agenda and to what extent it responded to it. Nevertheless, it contributes to the idea of the distinctiveness of Scotland over time. There is also some evidence that curatorial staff were encouraged by political interest to develop a more nationalistic story than they originally intended (see essays in ed. Fladmark 2000). The second phase of this scheme, the refurbishment of the Victorian building of the Royal Scottish Museum, opened in July 2011. The two buildings are now interlinked and come under one name, the National Museum of Scotland.

The National Gallery of Scotland opened in 1859 but its origins date back to several institutions established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to encourage good design and fine art in Scotland by providing students with old masters to copy. It was a government initiative

under the Board of Manufactures. We see in Scotland something similar to that in England. Artists developed their own Academy, supported by aristocratic and wealthy middle class collectors. The Academy's collection of old masters and Scottish artists was very much a teaching collection and art was for training as much as for appreciation. At the same time, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, inspired by developments in London, wealthy, educated and aristocratic Scots began to aspire to a kind of National Gallery, and this was developed from the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland (founded in 1819, with a Royal Charter in 1857), along with collections from the Society of Antiquaries. All these collections were housed in the same building on the Mound in Edinburgh and the Institution's collections that related to art were curated by part time Academicians until the appointment of the first full time director, J.L. Caw (1864–1950) in 1907.

The National Portrait Gallery was intended right from the start as 'the highest incentive to true patriotism' (Anon cited Clifford 1989: 11). It shared a site with the National Museum of Antiquities. Founded in 1882 the Gallery sought to tell the history of the nation through portraiture and imitated the London National Portrait Gallery.

## Summary table, Scotland

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National Museum of Antiquities	1858	1851	Society of Antiquaries, Aristocracy and middle class patrons.	British Parliament, through Board of Trustees	Archaeology	National	Prehistory to early Modern period	Edinburgh
Royal Scottish Museum	1861	1854	Prince Albert, Aristocracy, middle class patrons.	As above	Ethnography, Natural Sciences, Applied Arts, Technology and the natural world	Universal	From beginnings of time to modern times	Traditional building in Venetian Renaissance style. Edinburgh
Museum of Scotland	1998	1930s, 1951, 1985	Curators, Aristocracy, Middle Class, Parliament.	As above	Geology, Archaeology, Social History	National	From the formation of the continents to the present time	Modern building with medieval associations. Edinburgh
National Museum of Scotland	2011	1930s, 1951, 1985	Curators, aristocrats, middle classes, Parliament.	As above	The Royal Scottish Museum refurbished and added to the Museum of Scotland	National	From beginnings of time to modern times	Traditional building in Venetian Renaissance style, with Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh
National Gallery of Scotland	1859	1850	Prince Albert, civic dignitaries in Edinburgh.	As above	Art	Universal	From early Renaissance to 1900	Neo-classical building in the centre of Edinburgh
National Portrait Gallery	1889	1882	Local newspaper proprietor John Ritchie Finlay.	As above	Art as History	National	Early modern to present day	Grand neo-gothic building in red sandstone in the centre of Edinburgh

## Introduction

### **Scotland and Britishness: Nationalism and the Scottish nation – a complex history**

Any study of Scotland's national museums in the last two hundred and fifty years needs to take account of Scottish national identity within Great Britain. The Act of Union of 1707 created a complex set of arrangements by which the Scots retained a range of individual powers such as a judiciary, yet also agreed to send representatives to Parliament in Westminster and be governed by statute law therein enacted. Constitutionally complex, and subject to a range of interpretations over the centuries, the Act of Union did not make it clear whether it created a brand new state Great Britain or whether it brought together national entities that retained their separate existences (Kidd 2008: 85).

There is considerable debate about the nature of Scottish nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the nineteenth century Scotland has been seen as a nation that loses its identity while throughout Europe smaller nations rediscover or invent theirs (Devine 2000). English influence is understood to have increased during this time. Certainly there was a blending of loyalties and cultural identities into a 'Britannic melting pot' (Lynch 1997: 359), but Lynch does not see this as a loss of Scottish political identity. Nevertheless it appears that during this period Scotland and its peoples were largely satisfied with their place in Great Britain. Scots took pride in their role in the Empire and in the industrial revolution. The Union was one in which they liked to see themselves as equal partners, indeed contributing a disproportionate 'share in terms of population' to its armies (Pittock 2008: 9). It was also during this time that the Scots invented or recovered elements of their past in the stories of Walter Scott and in popular histories that celebrated folk lore, kings and queens and the cult of William Wallace, the reinvention of the tartan and the romance of the glen. It is in this context, that we can understand the development of national museums in Edinburgh as both Scottish and British, imitators of London institutions, collecting similar material culture and yet also illustrative of pride in Scottish identity. Such an attitude continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century with the two World Wars helping to bind the nations of the United Kingdom together.

It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that Scottish nationalism gained ground, partly encouraged by the discovery of gas and oil off the Scottish coast and a desire to see the benefits coming mainly to Scotland. However, reasons for the growing dissatisfaction with the Union are complex and are prompted by a range of factors, only a few of which can be dealt with here. The decline and loss of Empire removed one of the greatest benefits of the Union to the Scots, such as access to imperial markets, military and colonial job opportunities for educated and ambitious (mainly) young men. The growth of the post war welfare state and Labour policies of nationalisation of services and industries, while welcomed by many in Scotland, also led to greater centralisation of decisions and control in London. ...'[T]he manifest correlative in social and media behaviour to the use of "Britain" and "England" as almost unconscious synonyms in normal speech' (Pittock 2008: 7), although not a new phenomenon, becomes more noticeable and noted in Scotland. The idea of an unproblematic and homogeneous Britishness appears increasingly old fashioned. We can, perhaps, read the lines

from the Declaration of Arbroath, which greet visitors to the Museum of Scotland, as an assertion that the Scots want, at the very least, a higher profile within whatever Union remains:

As long as only one hundred of us remain alive we will never on any conditions be brought under English rule.

Scotland is often regarded as a 'stateless' nation (McCrone 1992, 2002) because of the dislocation between nationhood and statehood and the (perceived and actual) dominance of the English (McLean and Cooke 2000, Pittock 1998). Any history of Scottish national museums will need to take account of this complex and fluid sense of nation and national identity which has been greatly affected by Scottish devolution in 1998 and has also been strengthened by the periodic claims by some Scottish nationalists for independence from the British state. Certainly the national museum of 1998 appears to have stressed Scotland's links with a wider Europe rather than with England. Indeed England is notable for its absence, something that has been recognised by those working in the museum itself. '[T]he complex relationships of Scotland and the Scots with their immediate neighbours, chiefly in England, need more attention, especially where they should be viewed in a positive light...' (Caldwell n.d. 7). At the same time the museum has engaged directly with devolution, altering its top floor displays in 2006. The former twentieth century gallery, a temporary solution to the need to complete the museum on time, was composed of a collection of objects significant to individual Scots. Linda Fabiani, the Scottish Nationalist Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture in the Scottish Parliament, opened the new displays 'A Changing Nation,' in 2008. Considerable attention was devoted to the rise of Scottish nationalism and the creation of the Scottish Parliament.

The following speech is outlined in a key text panel along with an image of Dewar's face (Dewar was the First Minister of Scotland the new Scottish Parliament).

Donald Dewar 1997 – 2000

Scotland's First Minister 1999 – 2000

'There shall be a Scottish Parliament.'

Through long years those words were first a hope, then a belief, then a promise. Now they are a reality. This is a moment anchored in our history.

Today we reach back through the long haul to win this parliament, through the struggles of those who brought democracy to Scotland, to that other parliament dissolved in controversy nearly three centuries ago.

Today we look forward to a time when this will be seen as a turning point: the day when democracy was renewed in Scotland, when we revitalised our place in this our United Kingdom.

I look forward to the days ahead when this Chamber will sound with debate, argument and passion. When men and women from all over Scotland will meet to work together for a future built from the first principles of social justice.

Speech at the opening of the first Scottish Parliament, 1 July 1999.

While most of the text and objects in this area of the Museum tell a relatively uncritical narrative that supports the apparent inexorable rise of Scottish nationalism, one text panel does show the anti – devolutionist Labour politician Tam Dalyell's point of view. The Scottish parliament is presented as unproblematic and representative of all in Scotland, though not, presumably any Scot who questions its existence or has serious doubts about its role, nor those who see the SNP (Scottish National Party) as authoritarian, run by a close knit elite group and fear devolution is the first step to Scottish independence (Gallagher 2009). Their fears and the aspirations of nationalists came one step further to becoming realised when, in May 2011, the SNP won a majority in the Scottish parliament and promised a referendum on this subject. That the museum has, however, caught the mood of the moment is suggested by Caldwell's observation that this gallery has 'received favourable critical comment' (Caldwell nd 6).

## **National Museums and cultural policy in Scotland**

### **Cultural policy and National Museums in Scotland before devolution**

National museums in Scotland followed a similar pattern of development to those in London. Aristocrats, educated and wealthy individuals founded and endowed them, while at the same time the government in Westminster showed only intermittent interest in their development. Art galleries were set up by artists, aristocrats and other patrons to demonstrate Scotland's rightful place amongst European civilised nations. Other museums had their origins in the Enlightenment and educated, wealthy individuals' enthusiasms for collecting curiosities, antiquities, natural history and geology, and cataloguing and curating them. For example, the National Museum of Antiquities started out in 1780 as a private museum for the Society of Antiquaries, only becoming the National Museum of Antiquities in 1858.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London's Crystal Palace and the foundation of a variety of museums in South Kensington on its profits, along with a genuine desire by Prince Albert to encourage similar initiatives elsewhere, led to the opening in 1854 of the Industrial Museum of Scotland. Such initiatives were in part an attempt to improve manufacturing design and also an educational initiative aimed, in particular, at the working classes. The building was originally inspired by London's Crystal Palace and was designed by an engineer Captain Francis Fowke and local architect Robert Matheson. Prince Albert himself opened the east wing and one third of the current main hall in 1866, by which time it had become the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art. In 1904, the museum had become the Royal Scottish Museum.

Although national museums in Scotland, like their counterparts in London, attracted little government attention, occasionally a crisis would occur and a Departmental Committee would be set up to investigate. For example in 1902 an investigation was held into the National Gallery and the use of the buildings it shared on the Mound with other prestigious organisations. As a result of this enquiry the National Gallery's building on the mound was improved, The Royal Society of Artists were granted free tenancy elsewhere to quit the building they shared with the museum whose governance by the Board of Manufacturers was replaced by a Board of Trustees by an Act of Parliament in 1906 (Thompson 1972: 90-1). However, as in London, national government interest in national museums in Scotland was intermittent. Two world wars and an economic recession in the first half of the twentieth century meant funding for the arts was not a priority.

Individual enthusiasms, practical necessity and campaigns by political champions of the arts such as the Marquess of Bute in the second half of the century led to developments such as the new national Museum of Scotland in 1998 rather than any clearly stated national government policy.

### **Cultural policy and national museums in Scotland after devolution**

The devolved Scottish national government has, until recently, paid little attention to museums in Scotland, nor has it formulated a clear policy towards them. The Minister for Culture and External Affairs, Mike Russell, at a 'Museums Summit' on 2 June 2009 attended by delegates from local authority, independent and national museums, was told that:

Some delegates considered that there had been change but there had not been consistency around cultural policy. This had inhibited progress. The question was how best to achieve consistency in policy to allow the sector to fulfil its full potential.

Those present felt they knew what was wanted for museums: the issue was a lack of unity or overarching approach. The sector needed to get its act together to set out priorities that everyone could work towards. The lack of Government policy caused greater frustration than funding concerns. (Scottish Government 2009)

He acknowledged the need for a national policy for all museums and promised that a group would be set up to help develop this. Since then a Think Tank has met regularly to discuss how to move all museums in Scotland forward and in 2010 the following recommendations were accepted

- Designation of a national body to support the sector and to develop a national museums strategy
- Establishment of a forum of experts to advise the development body on the strategy
- Specific Scottish Government funding of three industrial museums
- Establishment of a federation of industrial museums

(Scottish Government 2010 a)

While the Scottish National Executive has been deciding what, if anything, its policy towards museums should be, national museums in Scotland have been bringing to fruition some important capital projects such as the refurbishment of the National Portrait Gallery, reopening late 2011 and the approximately £48 million refurbishment of part of the National Museum of Scotland (formerly the Royal Scottish Museum).

### **Scottish nationalism**

Scottish national identity is closely associated with the idea that Scots are different from other inhabitants of the British Isles by virtue of their shared common ancestry, their long national history, and their distinctive culture. This idea is implicit in a range of accounts of Scotland and in media depictions of the Scots. At the same time the Scots offer a version of national identity that is very much associated with civic nationalism. Both ideas of Scottishness have influenced the histories of the national museums in Scotland.

Another complex issue that plays on notions of national identity is the impact of inward migration upon Scotland. Large numbers of Catholic Irish settled in Glasgow and are present in relatively large numbers in other cities. English people have migrated north just as the Scots have



come south to England. Then there is the more recent immigration from countries outside the Union, notably those of the old Empire and new Commonwealth. Most recently of all are the large numbers of EU citizens who have sought to make Scotland their temporary and permanent home. The Scottish state is inclined to stress civic nationalism in its attempts to unite disparate peoples while at the same time implying a 'natural' Scottishness that arises from ancestral connections with the country, and these contradictory notions of national identity sit side by side in the national museums of Scotland.

Perhaps as a reaction to the inferior position they feel they occupy in the Union the Scots set great store by the role Scotland or the Scots have played in world history. The Scots see themselves as players on the world stage. 'If there is any single characteristic of which Scots can be proud, it is our ability to interact with the wider world. Many of our great heroes of the past, whether intellectuals or entrepreneurs, have sustained their native genius abroad.' (Dewar 2000: x). The Scots led expeditions abroad, traded in the Empire, had roles in the British armed forces and emigrated in large numbers. As a result Scottish identity is not confined to the geographic nation that is currently Scotland. Anyone with Scottish ancestry is claimed as someone who belongs to Scotland, wherever they currently reside and this sense of Scottishness was emphasised by the Royal Museums of Scotland project, which transformed the Royal Museum by July 2011, integrating it with the modern architecture of the adjacent Museum of Scotland.

### **Scottish national museums – the current picture**

Scottish national museums are mainly based in Edinburgh but have branches in various other locations. There are two main divisions – national museums relating to history, archaeology, natural history and similar subjects, and art galleries. For the purpose of this study the main museum selected is the National Museum of Scotland, which has undergone recent upgrading and redisplay.

### **National Museums Scotland**

The National Museums Scotland collection is displayed across five museum sites in Scotland:

- National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh (the Museum of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Museum)
- National War Museum, Edinburgh
- National Museum of Flight, in East Lothian
- National Museum of Costume, in Dumfries
- National Museum of Rural Life in East Kilbride.

National Museums Scotland (NMS) is Scotland's national museums service and according to a press release in 2010:

is currently undertaking a £46 million project to transform the Royal Museum by July 2011, integrating it with the modern architecture of the adjacent Museum of Scotland, to become a world-class museum complex known simply as the National Museum of Scotland. This will enable NMS to present a breadth and depth of collections rivalling most national museums in Europe. (Scottish Government 2010 b)

The project was completed in July 2011 and both the 1998 Museum of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Museum are now called the National Museum of Scotland. The Scottish Government, via the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate, funds National Museums Scotland. It is a non-departmental public body governed by a board of trustees, all appointed by the Minister for Tourism, Culture & Sport.

### **National Galleries of Scotland**

According to the website accessed in August 2011:

The National Galleries of Scotland comprises three galleries in Edinburgh and two partner galleries in the North and South of Scotland. Our collection of fine art is amongst the best in the world.

The three Edinburgh galleries are:

- Scottish National Gallery
- Scottish National Portrait Gallery
- Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

In addition, the National Galleries of Scotland owns the Granton Centre for Art, a purpose-built storage facility located at the Granton foreshore in Edinburgh.

The two partner galleries are:

- Paxton House, Berwickshire
- Duff House, Banff

(National Galleries Scotland 2011 a)

The National Galleries of Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government and is managed on its behalf by a Board of Trustees, appointed by the Minister for Europe, External Affairs & Culture.

### **Case Studies in chronological order**

For the purpose of this paper we will focus on the following museums:

- the (relatively new) National Museum of Scotland
- the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery.

#### **National Museum of Scotland: origins**

##### ***The Museum of Antiquities/National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland***

The Museum of Antiquities was founded by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1780 as part of their mission to 'investigate ...antiquities and natural and civil history' (Jones M. 2000: 7). The Society was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1783. This project was one of several organised by David Steuart Erskine, Earl of Buchan (1742–1829) to support Scottish national identity (ibid). It was also one of several museums founded around this time in the United Kingdom as a consequence of the Enlightenment. Its collections passed into public ownership in 1858 as the original collections of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

Erskine is an example of an aristocrat whose interest in the arts and pride in his ancestry led him to promote national institutions to encourage the collection, admiration and study of the past and the stories of the nation. The founding of this society and the museum, which was later to give its collections to the National Museum of Scotland, takes place within a period when

Scottish identity was consciously celebrated. This was the period when James Macpherson's 'Ossian', purportedly a collection of ancient Scottish saga tales, was influential in Wales, Ireland and across Europe. This was also the time when the tartan was revived and poets like Burns harked back to folksongs for inspiration.

The London Society of Antiquaries inspired the Society. Like its London equivalent the Scottish Society was very much a forum for likeminded aristocrats and members of the upper middle classes to meet and pursue their interests, albeit for a patriotic purpose (Cheape 2000: 63).

This was an aristocratic endeavour, as the list of the first officers of the Society indicates:

President	The Right Honourable the Earl of Bute Prime Minister in 1762-63
1st Vice-President	The Right Honourable the Earl of Buchan
2nd Vice-President	Sir John Dalrymple-Hamilton McGill, Baronet
3rd Vice-President	John Swinton of Swinton, Esquire
4th Vice-President	Alexander Wight, Esquire
5th Vice-President	William Tytler of Woodhouselee, Esquire
Treasurer	Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo, Baronet

(Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 2010)

Even at the time of its founding there were concerns that the focus on Scottish history and national identity might be politically sensitive and raise issues of Scottish relationships with the other members of the Union (Jones M. 2000: 7). It is important to bear in mind, however, that many leading Scots held positions of power and influence in Parliament (witness the first president Bute's role as Prime Minister under George III). Thus patriotic sentiment at this time was not about stressing separation from the Union but rather individual Scottish identity within it. However, the Society wanted its museum to function as a national museum, although at this stage it was not funded by the state. The members handed over their collections to the nation in 1851 though 'still maintaining charge and custody of the museum' (Callander 1926: 3). The National Museum to house these was founded in 1858. There was still a tendency to regard material culture as unhistorical – material that illustrated fables and myths rather than historical evidence and, as such, to be the preserve of antiquarians, and the National Museum inherited this intellectual attitude to its collections. Until the Museum of Scotland was opened in 1998 the National Museum had several homes.

### ***Displays: Scotland is different***

In a paper written in 2000, two years after the opening of the Museum of Scotland Hugh Cheape, curator of the Modern Scottish Collections, argued that the Society of Antiquaries and the National Museum it founded and sustained, was a patriotic endeavour that sought to collect and interpret collections relating to Scotland as evidence of its special and distinctive separate identity in Europe. By 1879 Dr Joseph Anderson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities between 1869 and 1913, publicly espoused the patriotic role of the museum as the memory of the nation that he saw to be unique and precious.

Anderson's ideas about the uniqueness of Scotland in prehistory and its existence in some prehistoric form were continued and promoted by Graham Callendar and Arthur Edwards who succeeded him. This idea, that Scottish archaeology was evidence for a group of people with a culture that was distinct and separate from that of the rest of Europe, including Britain, was adopted by English archaeologists although Childe<sup>1</sup> challenged this in the 1930s and 1940s. He pointed out that all the material evidence suggested that the peoples who inhabited what is now Scotland were in no way distinct from those who lived in what is now England, Wales and Ireland. We thus have the nonsensical idea that peoples and their material culture remained and retained separate identities that were linked to the idea of the Scottish nation, long before the notion of Scotland as a separate nation emerged, with find maps neglecting or ignoring evidence to the contrary. However, despite Childe's ideas, 'those within the museum, controlling the collections, remained both hostile and sceptical' (Clarke 2000: 84) to the idea that this was not the case.

Thus the National Museum of Antiquities, the repository of most of the key prehistoric archaeological material from Scotland, maintained an entrenched view of the separateness and uniqueness of Scotland in prehistory, partly sustained by lack of further research and collecting in the relevant areas). There is evidence that non-Scottish archaeologists were discouraged from undertaking research into Scottish archaeology because they held different views of Scotland's past (Clarke 2000: 86).

The view that Scottish archaeology was something incomprehensible to the Sassenach was oddly enough encouraged by English archaeologists who had been effectively frightened off, and like Cyril Fox, made distribution maps that dissolved into nothingness beyond Hadrian's Wall, and in so doing often made a nonsense of any inferences drawn from the incomplete evidence they presented. (Piggott 1983: 5)

Meanwhile in Scotland advances in archaeology were ignored or unknown and the discipline remained wedded to an old fashioned methodology. Whatever their origins and however little or much they were linked to European cultural movements, there is, throughout this period from the founding of the original museum to the present day, a presumption that the producers of material culture in the prehistoric period had something separate about them (Clarke 2000: 86).

Despite the fact that now museum archaeologists are adamant that Scottish archaeology indicates that Scotland is part of the culture and development of what is now understood to be Europe, and that it did not have a separate prehistoric identity, this notion of Scottish uniqueness in material culture and ethnicity appears to have survived within certain ideas of Scottish national identity. Anderson casts a long shadow.

### ***The use of objects to present a story***

Nevertheless in one respect at least the Scots kept pace with other nations in their treatment of collections. Anderson, working in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, moved beyond the ideas of the antiquarian who was prepared to marvel at objects and decontextualise them. He regarded collections as historical evidence. Cheape (2000) argues that this interest in the role of objects in illuminating and explaining the past was unusual in the English speaking world at this time and that the Scots were following the example of continental historians and archaeologists in this respect. However, this attitude was known elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Throughout the nineteenth century the supporters of the museum argued that it should be a focus for patriotic feeling and interest, though the museum at this time suffered from underfunding. Cheape's paper provides an interesting overview that, written with hindsight of the opening of the Museum of Scotland in 1998, perhaps stresses rather too much the patriotic and nationalistic aspirations of the founders, collectors, and patrons of the National Museum of the Society of Antiquaries. Nevertheless, he does present a convincing case that some of their nineteenth century aspirations were rooted in a patriotic sense that the museum's duty was to tell a particular story of a nation, and to celebrate its distinctiveness in an unashamed and uncomplicated way. However, he himself acknowledges that the National Museum was a custodian rather than architect of national identity. To what extent their patriotic role was driven by national government policy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is difficult to discern. It appears that the curators of the National Museum were, like their colleagues in the British Museum, independent agents. They decided what to collect and how to catalogue it and what its significance was. There is no evidence that the National Museum was following any policy guidelines on these matters from Westminster. It was only later, during the 1990s that the new Museum of Scotland appears to have become a symbol of political national aspirations, and then by accident of birth date rather than by design (it was opened, co-incidentally, in 1998, the same year as the establishment of the new Scottish Parliament, the first such parliament since the Union).

Indeed this lack of political interest in the Museum is suggested by the fact that throughout this period the museum was a research institute – collections were displayed by typology for the specialist. It was not until after the Second World War that the museum began some form of interpretation for the non-specialist but Clarke (2000) argues this did not get very far because Keeper Stevenson's key concern was to get out of the existing site in Queen Street. Thus the Museum for many years regarded the general public as being of less importance than specialist scholars. It was not a Museum to promote any form of national consciousness amongst the general visitor.

By the time the Museum became more interested in public display and instruction, albeit slowly, the archaeologists' views on the separation of Scottish prehistoric cultures from the rest of the United Kingdom had changed. Stevenson and his staff with Childe and Stuart Piggott, (who succeeded Childe to the Chair in Archaeology in Edinburgh in 1946), began to reconfigure their research so that they recognised Scotland's prehistoric links with other European countries. Childe and Piggott changed the tradition of Scottish isolationism in academic circles, and the Museum established productive links with the University of Edinburgh which led to much wider research (Piggott 1983: 6).

## **The Royal Scottish Museum**

### ***Origins***

As noted above the Royal Scottish Museum was founded in 1854 by the government and was the responsibility of the Department of Science and Art. Created in response to the example of the Great Exhibition in 1851, it focussed on natural history, geology, science, technology and the decorative art, and was intended to be an educational institution.

The campaign for the formation of an industrial museum in Edinburgh was led by the middle and upper classes such as the Duke of Hamilton, the Duke of Buccleuch and the MP Mr C. Cowan, among others. As a result of this lobbying Parliament voted £7000 for the purchase of the site and for initial costs. More money was given to allow for the purchase of collections and to pay professional curators and keepers. The Board of Trade managed the government's relationships with the museum. Its collections came from various sources, such as Edinburgh's National History Museum.

The museum building was originally inspired by London's Crystal Palace erected for the Great Exhibition. Designed by Captain Francis Fowke and local architect Robert Matheson, it was begun in 1861.

The completed building illustrates several characteristic features of Victorian architecture, particularly revivalism, cast-iron construction and overhead lighting. Its massive sandstone facade is in the Venetian Renaissance style and contrasts strongly with the graceful modernity and airy lightness of the interior, which was clearly influenced by Sir Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace and earlier cast-iron and glass structures. (Anon n.d.: 1)

It was sited in Chambers Street, close to the University of Edinburgh and was surrounded by other grand buildings so that it did not necessarily stand out in a street which itself 'lacked architectural focus and urban design quality' (McKean 2000a: 4).

Its foundation reflected the impetus of Victorian ideals of education and the desire to civilise the working class. The involvement of the Department of Science and Art in London indicates that a 'utilitarian', educational role was seen as central. Swinney (2006) argues that as well as education, it was to have a civilising role as part of Britain's imperial project. For example, in 1857, there were fears that the USA was sliding into civil war, whilst the Indian Rebellion had shaken the British Empire's grip on the subcontinent. George Wilson, the first Director, referring to the establishment of the museum, wrote that 'it will largely help us to hold recovered India, and to diminish the recurrence of American panics, if we can imbue the whole community with such instruction as Industrial Museums are pre-eminently fitted to afford' (Wilson 1857: cited Swinney 2006: 131). It was renamed the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art in 1864, and opened in its first bespoke buildings in Chambers Street in 1866 (National Museums Scotland 2010 a). Thomas Archer, who was appointed Director at Wilson's death, oversaw the construction. His influence (and changes at South Kensington) tilted the museum more towards design and the arts. The ground floor was devoted to practical art – engines and similar, furniture and models, the first floor to glass and ceramics and the second floor to agriculture and food along with medicine. Side wings held the Natural History material and minerals, raw materials, manufactures and applied chemistry.

### ***The twentieth century***

Throughout its history the museum expanded its professional staff. In 1901 the museum was transferred to the Board of Education and in 1904 its name was changed to the Royal Scottish Museum. The museum developed a strong educational remit and, during the early part of the twentieth century, it focussed on developing a range of collections such as art.

After the Second World War the museum developed a programme of temporary exhibitions, which illustrate that the museum was as much about bringing the world to Scotland as it was

displaying Scotland to the world. Exhibitions in the first decade after the war included 'Meet Canada' 'Standard Products for Building', 'Germany under control' (in 1947), 'Danish Art' and 'USA today'.

### **Background to the new Museum of Scotland which opened in 1998**

In 1985, an amalgamation of two national institutions took place: the Royal Scottish Museum and the National Museum of Antiquities to create the National Museums of Scotland (rebranded as National Museums Scotland in 2006). According to McKean the new National Museums were the result not of a national agenda but of 'a contingent and expedient response to a political problem' (McKean 2000b: 123). Two museums, the Royal Scottish Museum in Chambers Street and the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in Queen Street were merged by Act of Parliament to create one institution to secure agreement over the use of a site for the new museum being planned. The National Museums then began a programme of development and expansion that resulted in a new national Museum of Scotland, which opened in 1998 in an iconic new building. In 2008 The Royal Scottish Museum closed for a complete refurbishment and reopened in 2011. Confusingly both the 1998 Museum of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Museum are called the National Museum of Scotland and in the National Museums website (National Museums Scotland 2010 b) it is clear that they are currently conceived of as one institution under two roofs.

National Museums Scotland is run by a Board of Trustees, and has charitable status, but has statutory responsibilities. Until 2000 the Board was responsible to the UK government in Westminster but after devolution it became accountable to the Scottish Minister and the Scottish Parliament. Most of its funding comes directly from a parliamentary grant.

The genesis of the National Museums goes back before the decision to merge the Royal Scottish Museum in Chambers Street and the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and it underwent several changes along the way. The role of any national museum changes over time and is not always clear, even to those who work in it, what its remit is. The idea of a 'national museum has not always implied a museum of national identity' (McKean 2000b: 124). In 1849 the definition adopted by the civic authorities in Edinburgh was that of an independent museum open to visitors in a capital city (McKean 2000b: 124). The director of the new Museum of Scotland which opened in 1998 argued that it was not so much a new museum but a new building for an old one (Jones, M. 2000: 7). However, this is disingenuous. It is clear from the evidence presented below that the new museum is more than an amalgamation of two older museums, (one of which survived in essence, and reopened in 2011). It is in effect the first nationalistic museum for Scotland in that it sets out to tell Scotland's story over the centuries and thus positions it as an independent nation within the Union, one that has become in some ways more distinct than less so during the years of collaboration and cohesion in the United Kingdom. By 1997, the date of the laying of the foundation stone for the new museum the Secretary of State for Scotland was able to compare the new Scottish parliament and the new museum of Scotland as two symbols of Scotland's renaissance. Both were symbols of Scotland's resurging national confidence.

### ***Changing ideas about the role of the National Museums of Scotland – becoming more Scottish as time went on***

The idea of a new museum to house the collections had been mooted in the 1930s and raised again in 1951. According to Clarke the national museum changed considerably in 1985 when the National Museums of Scotland were created with the merging of the National Museum of Antiquities with the Royal Scottish Museum. The new National Museums placed less emphasis on scholarship and research and more on visitors and access. In 1989 the Secretary of State for Scotland announced government support for a new building (Bryden 2000: 30).

In 1986 a Working Group, set up to work on plans for the first stage of the new national museum (which opened in 1998), aspired to a building that would ‘animate’ the objects it contained. Curators were asked to identify iconic objects and the working group was expected to devise ways to persuade the people of Scotland that the national museum was ‘something they absolutely must have’ (McKean 2000b: 127). By 1989, the Feasibility Study stated very firmly that, far from being just an amalgamation of the two museums – a black box for curators to play with – ‘a new national museum will be seen as a symbol of national identity’ (Richards, n.d.: 1 cited McKean 2000b: 126). The words by which the Chairman and Board of Trustees introduced their 1989 campaign for support for a Museum of Scotland are telling:

Scotland stands alone amongst countries of its size in having nowhere to tell the full story of its peoples and to show properly its most treasured possessions. This is a disgrace, long recognised by many. (cited Hooper 1990: 9)

Thus, in a few years, the idea of the new museum (of 1998 foundation) had moved from an institution that would bring together the existing collections of two individual museums in a museum that would be national in the sense that it was in the capital city, into a museum that would tell the story of Scotland and be significant in the sustaining and formation of Scottish cultural identity. Between 1986 and 1992 all non – Scottish components of the proposed museum such as the Chinese lacquer galleries and the ethnographical collections were abandoned, leaving only material relating to Scotland.

The museum relied on public funding as well as government grants and the emphasis at this point was on the need to bring national collections out of store, on the architecture, and on the unique dimension that objects give to the past, ‘one which had never before had a voice’ (Bryden 2000: 30). A particular emphasis was placed on raising money from abroad and this, we may presume, impacted on the way in which Scotland’s story was told, not just as a nation over time but as a people who influenced the world, who remained Scots even though they had never set foot in their ancestral homeland. There was a deliberate attempt to avoid clichés such as bagpipes and tartan.

Over seven years after 1986, the museum’s remit moved considerably, driven by specific politicians such as the sixth Marquess of Bute, a direct descendant of the first president of the Society of Antiquaries, and a member of the House of Lords (Jones P: 2000). The sixth Marquess also served as a trustee of the National Gallery of Scotland and took a particular interest in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, before becoming Chairman of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland.



Originally, the curators had expected that the collections would lead the story. However, during its planning stage the curators were told to make the collections fit the narrative – the story of the Scots people over time. When collections did not do this then the story was told anyway. The Scottish Enlightenment, for example, was given prominence although there were few collections to explain or illustrate it. Only in the basement, where archaeology was placed, did the curators resist this attempt to impose the Scottish story. Here the keeper of archaeology argued that:

Our main messages are: (1) that people in prehistoric and early historic times are not to be regarded as squat grunting savages leading squalid brutish lives. (2) That for 90%, in terms of time, of the human occupation of the geographical area of Scotland, the concept of a Scottish nation, as we now understand it, is now meaningless. (3) Our view of Scotland as a relatively impoverished country at the extreme edge of Europe is merely a modern map projection that provides no universal template for understanding pre-history and early history. (Cited McKean 2000b: 128-9)

Museum archaeologists here have completely abandoned former ideas about the separate identity of the Scots as illustrated through prehistoric collections. However, there is still an understandable tendency to read Scotland's prehistory through a comparative lens in which Scotland is promoted as a significant place (albeit non national) in Europe.

### ***The building***

The choice of architect for the new museum was contentious. The Scottish media wanted the competition to be open only to Scots and was furious when five out of the six finalists came from London. In the end, the London firm Benson and Forsyth were selected and their building in Scottish sandstone was deliberately chosen to represent the geological age of the nation. The main feature is the rounded entrance tower, which makes reference to medieval towers and there are many other hints of Scottish architectural traditions within the building.

### ***The displays and national history at its opening***

From the beginning, its collections were designed to cover every aspect of Scottish archaeology and history and to store collections that would act as a reminder of Scotland's unique past and destiny. As we have noted the opening coincided with devolution and the election of a separate Scottish Parliament. According to Jones, this is coincidental. He points out that the three Unionist Secretaries of State who provided the funding for the museum had not intended the new museum to be linked in any way to this political act. However, the opening of the two institutions – new national Museum and new Parliament, were both products of the political and cultural change in mood in politics over the last thirty years. Jones, the first Director, has argued that the museum cannot only be seen in the context of national aspirations but has also to be understood as the result of a museological problem – too many collections and not enough display or storage space (Jones, M. 2000).

### ***The displays***

The Museum of Scotland drew on collections from the National Museum of Antiquities and from other museums in Scotland and these were grouped into the following categories:

- Beginnings: Scotland's geological foundations and early wildlife
- Early People: archaeology and the beginnings of literacy
- The Kingdom of the Scots: from the eighth century to the last Scottish Parliament in 1707
- Scotland Transformed: focuses mainly on the eighteenth century with social history collections
- Industry and Empire: looks at the impact of industrial change on Scotland, Scotland's role in this and the contribution of the Scots to the Empire
- Victorian and Edwardian life in Scotland
- The twentieth century. Here people were encouraged to choose their own objects – most of which were personal and many of which did not relate to the nation as a whole (Watban 2000). This area has now been redisplayed as a narrative of Scotland in the twentieth and twenty first century concluding with the struggle for devolution.

Collections were thus themed not by discipline but by narrative – how they fitted into the story of Scotland, and the disciplines of geology, natural history, art, archaeology, industrial and social history and anthropology were abandoned in favour of the story.

The relationship of the new Museum of Scotland to Scottish nationalism is a complex one. On the one hand it is clearly a nationalist aspiration and offers a national story to the people of Scotland that strengthens Scotland's claims to a separate identity from England, Ireland and Wales, rather than an aspiration to leave the union. Indeed throughout its displays it maintains a complex relationship to British national identity, accepting it as a 'Good Thing' when it results in opportunities for the Scots to display leadership and other qualities, such as during the period of imperial expansion, and also despising it as a 'Bad Thing' when it is understood through the lens of English imperialism. We have already noted the sentence from the Declaration of Arbroath (an assertion of independence issued by Scottish magnates in 1320) that greets all visitors and refers to a determination not to be ruled by England. However, this old enemy (England) is mostly hidden in the shadows. 'The absence of England is striking' (Clarke 2000: 87). Scotland is so keen to prove its independence it appears to have forgotten its formative relationship with its powerful neighbour, or perhaps just ignores it.

The new (1998) Museum of Scotland's team wanted visitors to

feel a sense of national pride, a recognition of Scotland's place in the world, and a sense of amazement at the achievements of the past. Furthermore we hoped to stimulate a sense of fascination at the true, and largely untapped, richness and depth of Scotland's inheritance... (Bryden 2000: 32)

The story was to be chronological 'focusing on a celebration of Scotland's story over 3,300 million years to the present day as told by the national collections' (Bryden 2000: 35).

The Museum of Scotland in 1998 deliberately set out to position the nation as more than its geographical entity and the people currently inhabiting it, drawing on statistics that show that Scotland lost rather more than half the natural increase of the population in the eight decades before the First World War. As such it was part of a European wide phenomenon. From 1815 to

1930s about 52 million Europeans emigrated around the world. Ireland led the way with the most emigrants per head of the total population with Scotland and Norway vying for second place (Forsyth 2000: 115- 6).

This focus on the ambitions, achievements and character of the Scots has led to a lack of understanding as to how the Scots might, through their expansionism and enthusiasm for Empire, have impacted negatively on indigenous peoples. For example, in a section on Empire the Scots are seen to have provided labour, ideas, leadership and governance of the British Empire throughout the world. This text panel on Africa does not once mention the impact of imperialism upon Africans.

The Scottish experience of Africa in the 19th century centred on missionaries and explorers. The best known was David Livingstone but others were just as influential. Service in Africa offered opportunities for women, as missionaries such as Mary Slessor, and in medical work and education.

With the 'Scramble for Africa' by European colonial powers in the 1880s, Scots began to make their mark as soldiers, administrators in the Colonial Service, doctors and engineers.

Scottish emigration to Cape Colony and Natal which began in the 1820s is recalled in the many Scottish place names in these provinces. From the early 1890s gold and diamond discoveries strengthened the attraction of southern Africa.

Scottish missionaries had a profound influence in East Africa, and were often enthusiastic collectors of native objects, such as the combs in this case.

The 'profound influence' in East Africa, we may assume from the tone of the text, and the reference to 'medical work and education', was understood by the Scots to be entirely positive. Ian Jack, writing in the *Independent*, concluded that 'If a museum of England imitated the Edinburgh Museum's treatment of Empire... there would be a lynch mob at the gates' (cited Jones M. 2000: 10). African voices might have presented a different kind of story.

## **National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery**

### ***National Galleries of Scotland - Origins***

The origins of the National Galleries of Scotland date back to the Treaty of the Union of 1707 when the Board of Manufactures, a Scottish Department, was set up to make use of Treasury funding by encouraging manufacturing. To facilitate good design the Board established a drawing academy in Edinburgh in 1760 and built a large Gallery on the Mound in Edinburgh, designed by William Henry Playfair (1790-1857), and opened in 1828. This building not only housed the Academy but also the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries, and the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (founded in 1819 with a Royal Charter in 1857). This Institution was founded in imitation of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, established in London in 1805. The idea behind both these organisations was to encourage modern art through the appreciation of old masters. At first individuals loaned these old masters but over time the Institution began to buy collections of old masters and also encouraged contemporary art by holding modern art exhibitions. According to Thompson (1972: 56), the attempt to foster 'the grand manner' of painting in Scotland failed miserably. What

survived were the old masters that the Institution purchased. A distinction was maintained between the gentlemen who managed the Institution and associate artists who exhibited and the artists resented this.

The Royal Scottish Academy (RSA), founded in 1826, and granted a Royal Charter in 1838, used the building on the Mound for its annual exhibitions. Note this remains separate from the National Galleries even today – just geographically close to them. This Academy was similar to the Royal Academy in London in that it was and is an independently funded institution led by artists and architects whose purpose was to promote the visual arts through exhibitions and education. The Academy collected examples of best practice and built up a historic collection of works by Scottish artists. There was intense rivalry between the Royal Academy and the Royal Institution. The former was controlled by artists, the latter by aristocrats.

Another independent body that influenced the development of the National Galleries of Scotland was the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland, which was founded in 1834 as a subscription association (similar to the Art Unions of London in 1837). It encouraged the exhibition of modern Scottish art and it purchased pictures for the National Gallery. It was concerned with the need to encourage an improved taste in the population at large and ‘the mass of the people’ (Thompson 1972: 62) for fine art. In fact, as Thompson points out, this was a fiction as the majority of the subscribers were wealthy businessmen, bankers and merchants or aristocrats. Its members purchased art for themselves as well as raising money to buy works of art for the National Gallery.

What is particularly interesting for the notion of the museum in Scotland as a means of uniting Scots all over the world in a ‘larger’ Scotland is the way in which the Royal Association operated. While at first membership was confined to Scotland it soon attracted members overseas who appear to have been particularly fond of Scottish landscape painting. At the AGM of 1839, a member is recorded as stating ‘Can anything be more endearing to a Scotchman toiling on a distant land – perhaps on the burning sands of Hindostan – than to see ever before his eye the smiling village, and the green vales, and the misty mountains of his native land? (loud cheers)’ (cited in Thompson 1972: 62). The Association was dissolved in 1897, having donated 12 paintings to the Gallery.

By the mid nineteenth century, there was an aspiration to bring these diverse collections together and to found a Scottish National Gallery. In 1847 a Government report identified the fact that both the Royal Academy and the Institution lacked space and, in 1849, it was agreed that the cost of erecting a building in which the two organisations could exist side by side should be met by the Board of Manufactures with the help of a Government Grant. Thus the dual role of the RSA and the Institution as supporters and educators of artists continued to be a key element in the foundation of the National Gallery.

The foundation stone of the new building was laid in 1850 by Prince Albert. When he addressed the crowds he stated that the building and its contents were to have two purposes: ‘to refine and elevate the national tastes’ and to ‘lead to the production of works, which...will give to after generations an adequate idea of our advanced state of civilisation’ (cited Thompson 1972: 51). The new building was opened in 1859, also designed by Playfair. It was intended to house the new National Gallery (founded on the collections of the Royal Institution) and the Royal Scottish Academy. The Mound was in the centre of Edinburgh and Playfair’s classical temples to

the arts 'achieved picturesque harmony with the dramatic backdrop of Edinburgh Castle' (National Galleries Scotland 2011 b).

William Playfair who designed the new building on the Mound was influenced by the arrangements in Trafalgar Square in London where National Gallery Building was divided internally and the Royal Academy occupied one half of it from 1837 to 1868 when the Academy moved to Burlington House. A part time professional curator was appointed from among four Academicians nominated by the Academy and chosen by the Board of Manufactures. The choice of curator also resembled that of the National Gallery where Academicians directed it between 1854 and 1904 (Thompson 1972: 52).

The Gallery was open free of charge on three days a week and on Sunday evenings, the other three days a week were made available to art students making copies. The foundation collection of the Gallery was the collection of the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts. The Gallery collected mainly old masters with a few Scottish paintings. These were augmented by bequests and gifts. Some of the most ardent supporters of the Gallery could be described as 'antiquaries' (Thompson 1972: 66) rather than art collectors. For individuals such as David Laing and James T. Gibson-Craig art was illustrative of past times and was part of the material collected to show these. In turn these men bequeathed paintings to the National Gallery.

### ***Mid – late Victorian art in the National Gallery***

During this period, no pictures were bought because there was no money to buy them. The Royal Institution, though never formally dissolved, had spent most of its money with the purchases of some Veronese paintings and Zurbarán's *Immaculate Conception*. It was not until the 1880s that the Board of Manufactures began making purchases for the Gallery. The National Gallery continued to collect Academicals' Diploma work but also acquired, through bequests, significant old masters. Both were hung side by side along with reproductions and copies with no distinction between them. By the end of the nineteenth century, some order had been created with the modern Academy pictures hung in a separate section. However, the walls of the gallery were crowded.

Thus the history of the National Galleries of Scotland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appears to be a complex and confused one because the National Gallery of today is the product of several different organisations, one of which, the Royal Scottish Academy, remains a separate institution, and after vacating the Playfair building for a period is now back within it. This confused origin can best be explained by the fact that the Scots aspired to collections of national importance but had not determined (until the beginning of the twentieth century) how best to develop, maintain and exhibit them. What we see in Scotland is something similar to that in England. Artists developed their own Academy, supported by aristocratic and wealthy middle class collectors. The Academy's collection of old masters and Scottish artists was very much a teaching collection. Art was for training as much as for appreciation. At the same time, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, inspired by developments in London and particularly as a result of the Great Exhibition, wealthy, educated and aristocratic Scots began to aspire to a kind of National Gallery and this was developed from the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (founded in 1819 with a Royal Charter in 1857) along with collections from the Society of Antiquaries. All these collections were housed in the same building on the Mound in Edinburgh

and the Institution's collections that related to art were curated by part time Academicians until the appointment of the first full time director, J.L. Caw in 1907. For the first time, a collecting policy was established with clear guidelines as to what should be purchased.

### ***The National Gallery in the twentieth-century***

In 1906 the National Gallery of Scotland Act specified a change of use for the buildings on the Mound. Lack of space to accommodate the collection resulted in the National Gallery being allowed to inhabit the whole of the National Gallery building. The Royal Scottish Academy, in return, was given indefinite tenancy of the building in front (then the Royal Institution which became known as the Royal Scottish Academy). This building then became known as the Royal Scottish Academy. Under this Act, the Board of Manufacturers, which had 28 members, was replaced by the Board of Trustees for the National Galleries of Scotland, which had only seven. The Royal Scottish Academy also accepted a lump sum to pay for the collections in the National Gallery that belonged to them and these were left in the National Gallery. An annual purchase grant of £1,000 was given by the state to the Gallery. For the first time a collecting policy was established with clear guidelines as to what should be purchased. This indicates that the aspirations for the National Gallery were threefold:

1. To continue the ideas of the aesthetic movement and to this end collect mainly modern art (but not that of living painters).
2. The collection of old masters for their aesthetic merits
3. The formation of a representative collection of Scottish painting.

According to Thompson (1972: 92) this last was the result of an antiquarian interest.

During the early part of the twentieth century the National Gallery tended to follow the ideas of Roger Fry (1866–1934), who argued that aesthetics were all important.

It was in effect an authoritarian attitude, and it was far too exclusive. The small-scale, sensitive work of art of the kind that was most in favour was adapted to the life-style of the cultivated private collector. Perhaps unavoidably, the public gallery was apt to be regarded as 'an extension of the collector's house, and the visitors as an extension of the collector's circle of acquaintances. (Thompson, 1972: 129)

### ***Governance and management***

Control of the National Gallery is in the hands of the Trustees. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees from 1952 – 72 was David Lindsay, Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (1900-75). Lindsay was an experienced connoisseur and politician, having served as a Trustee of the National Gallery in London, and he guided the Gallery's purchase and acquisitions (helped by the fact that he was chairman of the National Art Collections Fund).

By 1989 the National Galleries had significant paintings, which were organised, into the following schools:

Italian, Spanish, Flemish and Dutch, French, Scottish, English and American, German and Danish, and a group known as 'Twentieth Century' which covered an international collection with collections of German Expressionism, Surrealism and French art generally amongst others. (Anon 1989)

### ***National pride***

The demand for British portraits peaked just before the Great War and Sir Henry Raeburn was much sought after. His portraits, all painted in Edinburgh, were much in demand. This made people more aware of the value of 'their heritage' (Thompson 1972: 93) and the National Art Collections Fund was founded to enable the purchase of these types of pictures with a nation association.

Insofar as national pride was a pre-occupation with past glories rather than a present political force, it grew out of antiquarians' interest in regional history. In 1908 a Scottish National Exhibition was held in Edinburgh to illustrate the achievement of the Scottish school as a whole. The Scottish school was understood to be a continuous tradition of art independent of mainstream European art although this was not true. From this time onwards the National Gallery actively collected art by Scottish artists whereas in the nineteenth century very little interest had been shown in this. In 1929 a distinction was made between Scottish and English art in the catalogue whereas previously these art works were seen as British. It also actively collected old masters (paraphrasing Thompson 1972).

### ***The Scottish National Portrait Gallery***

When the National Gallery was opened in 1859 it had 34 portraits in its first room that were intended, according to the catalogue, to lay the foundations of a National Portrait collection. In the early eighteenth century private collectors were interested in European portraits but by the 1780s the idea of a collection of illustrious Scots had attracted the attention of the Earl of Buchan who, as we have seen, helped to found the Society of Antiquaries. The National Portrait Gallery was intended right from the start as 'the highest incentive to true patriotism' (Anon cited Clifford 1989: 11). It shared a site with the National Museum of Antiquities. The Gallery sought 'to collect and display images of distinguished, celebrated or even infamous Scots, whether in paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, commemorative medallions or photographs' (Clifford 1989: 11).

The collection at first comprised of pictures of artists with very few historical characters. However the antiquarian Laing left his own collection of 26 historical portraits to the Society of Antiquaries in the hope that they would act as a foundation collection for a new National Portrait Gallery in Scotland.

The following information is taken from the website of the National Gallery.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of a National Portrait Gallery for Scotland was championed by many, including the historian Thomas Carlyle. A believer in heroes, Carlyle wrote that "Historical Portrait Galleries far transcend in worth all other kinds of National Collections of Pictures whatever". Despite widespread enthusiasm, however, the government of the day was reluctant to commit funds to the project. Instead, it was the philanthropy of a local newspaper owner that allowed the present Gallery to open its doors to the public in 1889.

John Ritchie Findlay, the chief proprietor of *The Scotsman*, not only paid for the construction and an endowment, but he also masterminded the building that was to house the collection. He employed the architect Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, who had previously won the competition for designing the Edinburgh Medical Schools and who later earned a

wide reputation for the restoration of ecclesiastical buildings in Scotland. Rowand Anderson created a modern purpose-designed art gallery to rival the most advanced at the time in Europe and America. At the same time, he wanted his building to be a shrine for Scotland's heroes. The extensive decoration scheme, both external and internal, was designed with this idea in mind and is now an essential part of the visitor's experience.

To this day, the Gallery continues to collect works that are portraits of Scots, though not necessarily made by Scots. It aims to add portraits of those missing in the collection, as well as to bring the collection up to date. Since 1982 there has been a policy of commissioning portraits of living Scots by contemporary artists. (National Galleries Scotland 2010)

### ***The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art***

The Gallery was opened in 1960 in Inverleith House in the Royal Botanic Garden. There were aspirations for this gallery as far back as 1826. The aim was to foster a school of artists, originally British but later Scottish. The aim of the Tate Gallery when it was founded in 1879 was similar for it was then named the National Gallery (British Art) and its collection was limited to modern British painting and sculpture. In 1926 the Tate enlarged its terms of reference and its building to include modern foreign works.

The National Gallery of Modern Art contains the more recent works in the National Gallery. In 1966 it moved to a larger house on Bedford Road. This Gallery has a significant collection of modern Scottish art and also European modern art.

### **Scotland abroad and the concept of nationalism outside Scotland and national museums**

The Scots have maintained strong links with emigrants and have often sought to capitalise on their wealth and connections in order to support institutions at home. For example, as we have seen, the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland was founded in 1834 as a subscription association that encouraged the exhibition of modern Scottish art and its purchase for the National Gallery. It was at first confined to Scotland but it aspired to establish links with Scots abroad, which it did, and in 1861 it had 300 honorary secretaries throughout the empire. This sense of Scotland beyond its borders, of a Scotland 'bigger than it is' has increased over time, driven in part by tourism and partly by national sentiment.

In 2009, the Scottish tourist industry staged a Homecoming event throughout the year. It was described thus:

2009 was a special year for people living in Scotland, for the millions of ancestral Scots overseas and for everyone the world over with an affinity for Scotland. It was a time to come home and to invite people home. Organisations all over the country were involved, extending the invitation worldwide. (EventScotland 2010: 6)

Anyone with Scottish ancestry was invited 'home'. Scotland is understood emotionally (and economically for the benefits to tourism are huge) to be more than the current inhabitants of that nation. Scottish National Museums have contributed and continue to contribute to this idea both in their permanent displays and in events they hold.

The Royal Museum project newsletter of winter 2008/9 commented:

While our programme of events will continue in the United States, there will be many opportunities throughout 2009 for international visitors to participate in Scotland's Year of



Homecoming. A year-long programme of events will draw audiences from across the world in 2009 and we look forward to welcoming many of our friends to Edinburgh to participate in the celebrations. National Museums Scotland will be participating in the Year of Homecoming in a variety of ways including the opening of a new exhibition – Salt of the Earth – in autumn 2009. This exhibition will explore the modern diaspora across the world and highlight Scots' adventurous spirit as they make their own way abroad, taking with them their Scottish values, acumen and creativity. (Royal Museum Project 2008)

In its permanent displays the Museum of Scotland dedicated a section of the Industry and Empire exhibition to 'Scotland and the World'. According to the guidebook of the National Museum describing this section 'Some prospered, some suffered, but they all held on to a sense of their own nationality, proud of their heritage' (Martin 1998: 30).

## Conclusion

Scotland led England in the state provision of arts for such sponsorship had begun 'in a modest and roundabout fashion' with the Act of Union of 1707 when part of an annuity granted to Scotland at that time was allocated to the arts and administered by the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Manufactures (Hook 2005: 227). However, after this head start, the development of the national museums then followed a similar pattern to England's and, what London had, Edinburgh aspired to have also. The upper and middle classes founded national museums as both Enlightenment projects and as a means of cultivating taste and improving design. However, unlike the patrons and staff of London museums those in Scotland were always aware of a national cultural identity that was separate from a British one and sought to promote 'Scottishness' in all its manifold forms. That did not stop these museums and galleries from foregrounding Scottish achievements in the United Kingdom and they were constructed within the notion of the Union, not outside it.

Like the national museums in England the Scottish museums comprise of some smaller institutions including a National War Museum. The Imperial War Museum in London does not distinguish between the separate nations in its displays and it is interesting to see that Scotland has chosen to separate out its national war story.

At the present time the National Museums Scotland, as all national museums are currently called, are governed by a Board of Trustees who are non political but who are accountable to Scottish Ministers and to the Scottish Parliament. It is inevitable in these circumstances that they are more integrated into national policies than they were before devolution, though as we have seen policies appear to be few and far between. These national museums are also more inclined now than ever before to see their role as a celebratory one – of Scotland's past and its links to the present. The National Museum of Scotland has just undergone a second phase multimillion-pound transformation and opened in July 2011. The Scottish National Portrait Gallery at the time of writing (August 2011) is also undergoing a refurbishment and is planning to reopen in November 2011. The website suggests that the portraits will be redisplayed within a form of historical narrative:

When the Gallery re-opens in November, the way in which the collection is displayed will also be transformed. The portraits will be shown within the context of various historical and thematic exhibitions, bringing to the foreground the fascinating stories behind the sitters and

the artists. Much more photography will be on display, and there will be a strong focus on Scottish art. (National Galleries Scotland 2011 c)

Politicians and the public see the National Museums of Scotland as symbols of national pride (Jones, M. 2000), but it would be too simplistic to describe these institutions as deliberate attempts at nation building, neither can we ascertain to what extent they contribute to it. Curators and politicians often have very different priorities and the public may interpret a museum or gallery very differently from that intended by both. There can be no doubt, however, that National Museums and Galleries in Scotland contribute to the vital cultural confidence of this nation as it explores its future relationship with its other partners in the Union.

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For the history of the National Gallery of Scotland I have drawn heavily on Colin Thompson's invaluable *Pictures for Scotland, the National Gallery of Scotland*, (1972). All opinions expressed here and any mistakes are, of course, my own.

The author, Dr Sheila Watson, is a lecturer in the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, England.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> In 1927 Gordon Childe was appointed the First Professor to the Chair of Archaeology in the University of Edinburgh. He became a world renowned authority on prehistory. Ironically the one place his ideas were rejected was the National Museum in Edinburgh, though he briefly held the role of Director there between 1944 and 1945.

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## Annex table, Scotland

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach
National Museum of Antiquities	1858	1851	Society of Antiquaries – aristocrats, middle class patrons	British Parliament, at arm's length through a Board of Trustees	Archaeology	National	Prehistory to early Modern.
Scottish Royal Museum	1861	1854	Prince Albert, aristocrats and members of the middle classes	As above	Ethnography, Science, Applied Arts, Technology and the Natural World	Universal	From beginnings of time to modern times.
Museum of Scotland	1998	1930s, 1951, 1985	Curators, aristocrats, middle classes, Parliament	As above	Geology, Archaeology, Social History	National	From the formation of the continents to the present time.
National Museum of Scotland	2011	1930s, 1951, 1985	Curators, aristocrats, middle classes, Parliament	As above	The Scottish Royal Museum refurbished and added to the Museum of Scotland	National	From beginnings of time to modern times.
National Gallery of Scotland	1859	1850	Prince Albert, civic dignitaries in Edinburgh	As above	Art	Universal	From early Renaissance to 1900.
National Portrait Gallery	1889	1882	Local newspaper proprietor John Ritchie Finlay	As above	Art as History	National	Early modern to present day.

The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art	1960	1959	Living artists	As above	Art	Universal	20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> c.
National Museum of Flight	1975	1971	Enthusiasts	As above	Aviation	National	20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> c.
National Museum of Costume	1982	1977	Collection of an individual, Charles Stewart	As above	Costume	National	19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> c.
Dean Gallery	1999	Late 1990s	Sir Eduardo Paolozzi	As above	Art	Universal	Contemporary artists
National War Museum, Edinburgh Castle	1990s	1920s	Ex service men and women and the armed forces.	As above	Military	Universal temporary exhibitions National permanent exhibitions	19 <sup>th</sup> to 21 <sup>st</sup> c.
National Museum of Rural Life	2001	1949	HLF, National Trust for Scotland, South Lanarkshire Council.	As above	Rural Life, Social History	National	Mainly 19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> c.