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The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and their Museum: Scotland's National Collection and a National Discourse

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Abstract Founded in 1780, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland began immediately to form a museum that has survived remarkably intact within the National Museums of Scotland. Their initiative marked a significant point in the evolution of material culture studies between the "cabinet of curiosities" of the Renaissance and the large public museums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An exploration of the Society's work and ethos in its early years points to the emergence of a distinctive "Scottish History" of collections and a greater significance for the evidence of material culture than has been conventionally accorded it in conventional scholarly discourses.

Keywords Antiquaries · Scotland · Collections · Museums

A Scottish Discourse

In 1888, Dr Joseph Anderson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and under the terms of the newly instituted Gunning Fellowship, summarized his findings of a scholarly tour of archaeological and ethnological collections in local museums (Fig. 1). His lengthy published paper contains detailed reports on 32 Scottish museums. He took a colleague with him on this tour of inspection, his assistant, George Fraser Black. Joseph Anderson, demonstrably a man of firm views, wrote:

> The Archaeological collections existing in local Museums in Scotland are poor and fragmentary. There is no exception to this. Some are richer than others, owing to the presence of special finds, but there is not one of all the collections which can be said to be fairly representative either of the Archaeology of the district or of Scotland. In point of fact, the case may be even more strongly and

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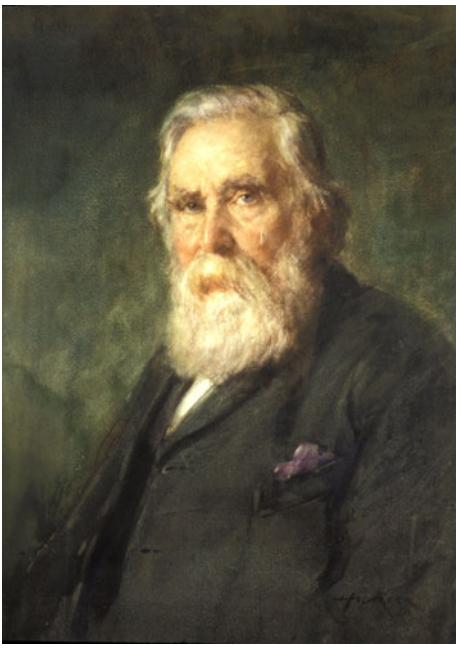

Fig. 1 Dr. Joseph Anderson (1832–1916), Keeper for 43 years of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and principal architect of the concept of a "national discourse" to be built on and sustained by systematic collection and research

> yet truthfully stated. If the National Museum were non-existent, and if all the contents of all the local museums (so far as these contents are known to be Scottish) were brought together, they would fail to furnish the materials for a systematic Archaeology of Scotland, as we now know it. To take a striking instance. In the Museum at Forres, which is the nearest to the Culbin Sands, I found that extraordinarily rich locality represented by a dozen arrowheads; while the result of the systematic effort made by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to ascertain the capabilities of the Culbin Sands as an Archaeological index, has been the accumulation in the National Museum of upward of 15,000 specimens, chiefly of flint and stone implements; while from another sandy district in the south of Scotland, which is scarcely represented in any local Museum, we have amassed about 10,000 specimens (Anderson and Black 1888, p. 421).

Tendentiously and unequivocally argued perhaps, but Joseph Anderson (1832–1916) was looking back over the preceding hundred years of the Society of Antiquaries' existence and inferring that they alone had shouldered the burden of assembling the record, not as whimsical antiquaries as might be assumed but in a process of large-scale and systematic collecting and of introducing concepts and principles of classification and taxonomy. For us today, his perspective is an important one for understanding the evolution of the present-day National Museums of Scotland. This relatively new organisation comprises two national collections which were founded respectively as the museum of the Society of Antiquaries of

Scotland in 1781 and the Industrial Museum of Scotland in 1854, and their collections in essence reflected the different ages in which they were formed and the motives and interests of their creators.

In spite of an often precarious existence after 1780, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland survived to negotiate a Conveyance in 1851 whereby its collections were made over to the Treasury to be administered by government on behalf of the nation (Stevenson 1981, pp. 80–81). The National Museums of Scotland in their present form were created by act of parliament, the National Heritage (Scotland) Act, in 1985 when the museum of the Society of Antiquaries—the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland—and the Royal Scottish Museum were amalgamated. The collections so formed by the 1985 union are now wide-ranging, extending through archaeology, ethnography, the applied and decorative arts, numismatics, social and domestic history, military history, agricultural history, the history of science and technology, geology, and zoology. For the National Museums of Scotland therefore, and for much of the community of museums in Scotland, the historical, cultural and ethnological heritage is the creation of the last two hundred years and a period marked by reverses as well as advances. This short account moves back in time from the Keepership of Joseph Anderson and the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland to the beginnings of the Society and of their museum. It is necessarily constrained and limited in scope but depends on the conjecture that these entities were sustained by an identifiably Scottish discourse as a by-product of the "nation" within the United Kingdom, the larger state formed by the Act of Union of England and Scotland in 1707.

In pursuing the "science of archaeology," a term he consistently adopts from the 1870s to denote his own systematic approach to the study of the past, Joseph Anderson demonstrates that he and his generation had moved away from a narrow antiquarian enthusiasm, real or imagined, to espouse a wider educational function for museums. This educational role however was predicated on a strong national collection gathered into a central site. The perceived role of museums and their potential lay behind Anderson's criticism of the contemporary local museum community in his Report, but the inference was one of dismissal in favor of the proven performance of the national collection. His and George Black's observations on many of the local collections recorded information apparently unknown even to the custodians themselves of these collections. Dr. Anderson in particular was unequivocal in his comments on such sins of omission as failing to localize and provenance finds, and delivered the odd rebuke. For example, in Perth, besides the prehistoric collections, he noticed "a good old Scotch candlestick and a taper-holder misnamed a pair of snuffers" (Anderson and Black 1888, p. 341).

His principal audience in all this was the nation of the Scots whom he felt deserved better in educating them in their country's history. He pressed the need to make the collections available and accessible, urging the people of Scotland to take notice of their cultural heritage before it suffered more the depredations of time; in modern or current parlance, he urged fellow Scots to take up their "cultural entitlement" to their country's history and museums. He had earlier delivered a radical and ringing warning in the first of his Rhind Lectures delivered in October 1879, published in the first volume of his *Scotland in Early Christian Times*:

> We know that the history of Scotland is not the history of any other nation on earth, and that if her records were destroyed, it would matter nothing to us that all the records of all other nations were preserved. They could neither tell us the story of our ancestors, nor restore the lost links in the development of our culture and civilisation. So, if our ancient monuments be all destroyed, it will be nothing to us if those of England or Ireland or France or Scandinavia are still preserved, for Scotland's antiquities are not the same as those of Scandinavia or England, or any other region that can be named. They belong to Scotland because they are inseparable features of her individuality; and they belong to Scotchmen in general in a sense in which they can never belong to the holders of the lands in which they are placed (Anderson 1881, p. 9; see also pp. 11–13).

Anderson and his generation moved in an atmosphere of fresh and exciting scholarly principles and shifting paradigms, and, significantly, looked to European perspectives and links. At its foundation, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland had forged an important link with Denmark and the Icelandic scholar, Grimur Thorkelin. He was befriended by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and elected a member in 1783, and visited Scotland to research the remains of Viking settlement (Cant 1981, pp. 23–24). The Danish antiquary, C. J. Thomsen, Director of the Royal Museum of Northern Antiquities in Copenhagen, had devised the notional framework for classifying prehistoric object in three broad periods, Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age, and J. J. A. Worsaae, museum director and professor in the University of Copenhagen, explained the classification system in English in *The Primeval Antiquities of Denmark* (1849). In 1851, Sir Daniel Wilson (1816–92) had published his influential *Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* and, as a matter of fact, introduced the word "prehistoric" into the English language (Wilson 1851). In their reiteration of a patriotic purpose, evident from the earliest of their deliberations, Scottish antiquarians used the example of Scandinavia where, in Denmark for example, the collection and preservation of antiquities was a concern of the state rather than merely of private bodies (Worsaae 1880, pp. 349–350). This then was a plea for increased public awareness of and support for the role of a national museum in Scotland and for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland as its parent body. In his day when politics were dominated by the appeal to a powerful British state centrally governed, Anderson's appeal to patriotic sentiment and national identity strikes a rather unusual or unique note.

Elsewhere in print and on the basis of extensive museum visits in Europe, Joseph Anderson extended his commendations of the Society's achievements in that he had "nowhere seen a collection more completely illustrative of the whole consecutive history of culture within the area from which it is derived." His tone and delivery display an assurance and mastery of his subject, and a confidence in the international status of the Scottish national collections. He added a comment whose message still resonated in the late-twentieth century: "I have nowhere seen a collection of such interest and importance, provided with equipment and accommodation so obviously disproportionate to its intrinsic merits" (Anderson 1884, p. 48; see also Anderson 1890, p. 478). Under Anderson's guidance and long tenure of office (from 1869 to 1913—an unprecedented and unrepeated 43 years), the stature of Scottish

archaeology grew and he can be said to have pieced Scottish prehistory into a coherent whole, arguably and in accordance with his personal vision a more coherent contemporary whole than in any other country. In so doing, he moved and narrowed the focus of the Society and the Museum from the eclectic antiquarian interest in all things cultural (including natural history) to the prehistory and antiquities of Scotland (Mitchell 1902, pp. 43–44).

Joseph Anderson had worked to establish the distinctiveness of Scottish archaeology and an altogether separate Scottish prehistory, an endeavor that might be labeled as a patriotic purpose. A "scientific and comprehensive survey" was the judgment of Professor Gordon Childe on Anderson's Rhind Lectures in 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882 and 1883 (Graham 1976, p. 279). These were published as the meticulous recording of facts, their analysis on scientific principles and comparative methods and the organizing of knowledge in an orderly system in a series of articles and also in volumes still full of interest for us today—*Scotland in Pagan Times: The Bronze and Stone Ages* (1886), *Scotland in Pagan Times: The Iron Age* (1883) and *Scotland in Early Christian Times* (1881). Coincidentally, the furnishing of these volumes with series of high quality woodcut engravings fed imagery of significant aspects of Scottish material culture into the public domain, raising awareness of Scottish collections and even influencing contemporary fashions (Cheape 1997, p. 14). His systematic and inclusive methods led, for example, to the first scholarly elucidation of brochs, some of the most impressive monuments of Iron Age Europe, and his accounts of these structures and their material culture described a cultural context of the Iron Age of Atlantic Scotland. Anderson's researches and narrative might be assumed to be dated, particularly in the ready adoption of a label such as "Celtic," which has been criticized for equating archaeological evidence with linguistic criteria. He tends to use the term in opposition to "Scandinavian." Anderson in fact was scrupulously careful about not inferring ethnic assumptions from material culture, but he appeals to contemporary scholarship, particularly in Germany, then theorizing on an Indo-European family of languages, and the importance of the evident interaction of disciplines. Earlier studies such as that by Edward Lhuyd in his *Archaeologia Britannica* of 1707 had demonstrated linguistic unities and Scotland's own George Buchanan had proposed the same notion, especially interesting from a pan-European scholar and neo-Latinist whose language in childhood in the Lennox may well have been Gaelic. Scots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took a keen interest in Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* of 1582 since he had much to offer in the quest for origins. He was the first to put up the "celtic" linguistic marker: "When, therefore, I perceive such an agreement in speech, which still serves to point out, and that not obscurely, an ancient alliance and a similar origin, I am easily induced to believe that before the coming of the Saxons, a language nearly the same was spoken by all the Britons" (Aikman 1827, p. 100).

Concepts of an original lingua franca can be readily dismantled from a modern perspective but Anderson's assemblages and perspectives, arguing carefully from the particular to the general, are still important; he describes it for what it tells us rather than inferring ideologies or social organizations, too current in late-nineteenth century theories of racial origins. Given a large and complex historiography of "celtic" identity, the complete absence in Anderson's texts of the influence of Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan (and their accounts of Celtic spirituality) is

noticeable to the student of these times and intellectual atmosphere (see Bromwich 1965). But even the concept of linguistic markers in the formation of ethnicity is now attracting renewed scholarly attention and Anderson's assemblages too merit renewed attention (Ellis Evans 1999, pp. 1–18).

The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and the Origins of the National Collections

Much of the Society of Antiquaries' museum and collections building had been achieved against the odds over the years, when the Society's fortunes had been varied and at times catastrophic. Starting in a "large and commodious house" in Edinburgh between the east end of St. Giles and the Cowgate, the Society had had to move its premises and museum four times in the first 30 years of its existence, in part due to chronic financial difficulties caused by members failing to pay their subscriptions, leaving the Society unable to pay its rent and creditors pressing for payment. In spite of the shortage of members for the Society, there were some bright stars in this period, such as the scholar-collector, David Laing (1793–1878), but a later commentator castigated the Society for an overemphasis on the Annual Dinner and a proper and generous selection of wines (Mitchell 1902, pp. 46–47). It was a matter too of trying to find a suitable home and space for the collections, an eventuality that was not achieved until the 1820s when the Society was included in the new "Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts." This was W. H. Playfair's classical building in the center of Princes Street at the foot of the Mound, later the "Royal Institution," later still, the Royal Scottish Academy (Fig. 2). At the inaugural meeting in 1826 in the Society of Antiquaries' elegant rooms in this building, two or three rooms on the first floor on the west side, the Curator, James Skene of Rubislaw, advocate and geologist, gave his Report and drew some interesting comparisons:

> On the Continent, indeed, there is scarcely a town of any note that cannot boast of an establishment in full activity where local Antiquities are accurately investigated with a view to the elucidation of history, and where a common repository is formed, to which everyone feels the propriety of contributing. With us, on the contrary, objects of curiosity and interest are not infrequently assigned to dusty garrets, where they are as little useful to their owners as satisfactory to the public. When we consider that the relics of our common ancestors are objects of general interest, to the means of consultation or inspection of which the public have a peculiar claim, we ought not to forget that it is a gratification which is only attainable from the arrangements of such an establishment as this; and that, while the accumulation of these relics into one general repository affords the most likely means of eliciting light upon their general origin, it becomes, at the same time, the means of converting what is otherwise useless lumber into valuable records of ancient history (Stevenson 1981, pp. 67–68).

Significantly, the persistent poor showing of Scotland beside European museums in forming a "museum of national history" was picked on by the Marquess of Bute when making a vigorous pitch to the government for a new home for the national

Fig. 2 The museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, about 1890, in its then cramped circumstances in the shared Royal Scottish Academy building in central Edinburgh. The impression of a national "cabinet of curiosities" belies Joseph Anderson's and the Society's thorough research and collecting enterprise

collections in 1989. History museums had become an important element in the nineteenth century towards the building and maintenance of national, regional or civic identity. It was perceived that almost alone in the European museum community, Scotland had acquired the collections but still failed to provide an adequate building for their display. When a program was devised to gain support for the concept of a new museum, Lord Bute, as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, opened his campaign with the strong and unequivocal message: "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" (Cheape 1995, p. 329).

Returning, however, to the Museum's beginnings, when the Museum of Antiquities was established in 1781 as the museum of the newly founded Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, it was the brainchild of that patriotic and quixotic nobleman, David Steuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan (1742–1829; Fig. 3). The rationale for the Society was articulated by Lord Buchan in a printed *Discourse* read by him at the founding meeting held in his house at No. 21 St Andrews Square on the 14 November 1780, opening with the words:

> Gentlemen: It has been long a subject of regret that no regular Society for promoting Antiquarian researches has subsisted in this part of Great Britain. I have used the liberty of soliciting your appearance here at this time, with a view to the establishment of Regular Meetings, at my house, or elsewhere, of such Persons in this city and neighbourhood, as are attached to the Study of the Antiquities of Scotland (Buchan 1778, p. 3).

Fig. 3 David Steuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan (1742–1829), founder and sponsor of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1781. He articulated a rationale and philosophy for forming a national collection in Scotland to reinforce a sense of national identity perceived as atrophied since the Union of the Parliaments in 1707

The copy of the *Discourse* in the National Library of Scotland records that it had been printed in 1778 but probably laid by for a year or two before delivery (Cant 1981, p. 27). The invitation list had 37 names, while 14 attended, and reads as a roll-call of Enlightenment Edinburgh and its community of clubs and societies. This was a period recognized, at least among a social and largely urban elite, for its extraordinary outburst of intellectual activity, dubbed by historians the "Scottish Enlightenment." It brought together the learned and professional world of an intellectual capital in Edinburgh in clubbish and convivial conversazione for professing the cultivation of knowledge. In calling the meeting, Buchan explained that for some years he had 'meditated' the formation of such an organization, but with (for him) an uncharacteristic modesty, he insisted that there were many people better qualified than he for developing a plan and he hoped that interested parties would prepare some ideas for the next meeting of the new Society. His arguably was a nobler purpose and he pursued doggedly, some said obstinately, his goal of creating a more effective means of safeguarding national heritage and of reinforcing a sense of national identity. His strong patriotic tone appears to have been later modified, especially in the face of calls for political reform in England and Scotland, followed by the outbreak of the Revolutionary War; in an "Historical Account" of the Society printed in 1792, the Secretary wrote: "it was not, perhaps, altogether

consistent with political wisdom, to call the attention of the Scots to the ancient honours and constitution of their independent Monarchy" (Smellie 1792, p. iv). Buchan however was still effectively the *beau idéal* of a noble patron, bearing uncomplainingly the responsibilities, many of them financial, which the new venture entailed. Having been founded in 1780, the Society of Antiquaries began to look for a property and a home for a rapidly growing collection.

The Discourse Delivered

In line with the earlier Society of Antiquaries of London, founded in 1707, the Edinburgh Antiquarian Society belonged in the contemporary circles of inquiry following the exploration of the natural world and collecting specimens in the style of the "cabinet of curiosities" of the Renaissance. Observation and collection of facts constituted the new learning of the Renaissance, moving out into the exploration of the natural world and discovery of the New World. The investigation of natural history and geography, human history and antiquities began to supply detailed insights into material culture which was collected with new vigor. Antiquarian studies in Scotland then owed most to three personalities, almost as remarkable for their longevity as for their range of interests, Sir John Scot of Scotstarvit (1585–1670), the conserver of Timothy Pont's cartographic work, Sir Robert Sibbald (1641–1722) whose detailed studies and schemes of national inquiry inspired a number of individuals to contribute to the *Scotia Illustrata*, and Sir John Clerk of Penicuik (1675–1755) who first investigated Roman remains and encouraged Alexander Gordon in his pioneering work for the *Itinerarium Septentrionale* published in 1726. All these figures merited fulsome mention in Lord Buchan's *Discourse*. The London Society looked back consciously to the reign of Elizabeth and an earlier society of antiquaries said to have originated in 1572 under the acknowledged leadership of William Camden whose *Britannia* was published in 1586. Undaunted, Buchan identified another and earlier group of notable scholars with antiquarian interests in Scotland, and for his particularly Scottish discourse he named Bishop Elphinstone, Hector Boece, John Major, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, and George Buchanan as scholars who first had given some sense of the historical development of Scotland.

Referring to the beginning of the eighteenth century, Buchan described in his *Discourse* how Scotland also had had its own group of distinguished historians and antiquaries, in people such as Sir James Dalrymple who published his *Collections* in 1705, and Sir Robert Sibbald. The latter, natural scientist and polymath, was a Scottish example of the scholar who assembled information and observed facts to form an absolute and constant corpus of knowledge; Aristotelian classifications allowed "curiosities" to confirm or depart from a preconceived order and taxonomies (accommodating the eccentricities of the antiquarian). Other figures in what Buchan described as the "bright constellation of Caledonian naturalists and antiquaries" were Alexander Gordon (as above), David Crawford, Historiographer Royal for Scotland, Alexander Nisbet, heraldic expert, Thomas Ruddiman, the great latter-day neo-Latinist, editor and librarian, and James Anderson, compiler of the *Diplomata Scotiae*. Buchan could claim that this latter group had formed themselves into a society which

had regular meetings, thereby proposing a credible independent and Scottish pedigree for antiquarian studies (Buchan 1778, pp. 18–19). Though appearing to follow the lead of the Society of Antiquaries of London, the new Scottish society under Buchan's guidance was anxious to instigate a distinctive "Scottish History" of collections. This need not be characterized as anti-unionist political gesturing or forms of proto-nationalism but may be seen in the same light as Scott's detailed evocation of a Scottish culture, under siege since the Wars of Independence and conveniently tucked away in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the skirts of an imperial "Britannia."

James Anderson (1682–1728) scholar and antiquary, is particularly interesting in this context. He trained in the law and made the study of early charters his specialty. This bore fruit posthumously in the sumptuous *Diplomata Scotiae* of 1739 but had been sharpened in the debates preceding the Union of 1707. Following the succession "crisis" of Queen Anne's reign and an implicit threat to the Union of the Crowns, the English claim to superiority over Scotland, the *cause célèbre* of the Wars of Independence, was reasserted in order to safeguard the Union. This was formulated in an argument over whether the Scottish crown was "imperial" or subordinate to the crown of England, and whether there was a right of the Scottish parliament to regulate the succession to the crown; this had been summarily dismissed by an English lawyer, William Atwood, in a scurrilous pamphlet. James Anderson's hurriedly written but meticulously researched *An Historical Essay, shewing that the Crown and Kingdom of Scotland is imperial and independent* appeared from the press in 1705, and arguably supplied the Scottish antiquarian discourse with its own dialectic (Ferguson 1992, p. 9). A copy of Anderson's *Historical Essay* was in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, possibly going through the hands of Buchan himself while acknowledging with a name (inked on the inside back board) that its original owner was Sir William Nairne. Anderson's was a pioneer exercise in record scholarship which itself acknowledged the French record scholar, Jean Mabillon and his *De Re Diplomatica* of 1681 (Anderson 1705, pp. 32–33). The value of this was recognized by Buchan and represented the beginnings of a Scottish historiography. Buchan lamented the destruction of Scottish records and, in proposing a purpose for a society of antiquaries in Scotland, stressed (in terms which seem to draw on Anderson's text) the importance of the study of Scottish History and the search for and examination of surviving Muniments. Surely he had read James Anderson's words?

> Of all proofs in History, none are so concluding and pointed as Charters. They speak for themselves, and need no rhetorical embellishments and flourishes to persuade; which hath made ancient Charters and Records so much the study of this inquisitive age. For Histories being overgrown with Legends of Miracles and Visions on the one hand, and larded with many Romantic Fables and Traditions on the other, there was no safe way left to correct what's amiss, to clear what's obscure, and to add what's wanting, but a diligent search into records and ancient Muniments (Anderson 1705, p. 15).

Buchan's focus was on the visible evidence in both documentary and in structural form of an older way of life, but also significantly on the "ancient honours and constitution," arguably to be a fruitful discourse for Scotland whose records of state

had been negligently handled and willfully destroyed (Livingstone 1905, pp. viii, xiii–xvii). The success of the Society in its early years in collecting the documentary history of Scotland may have been forgotten since important transfers of documents were made from the Antiquaries' collections to the National Library in 1934 and to the National Archives in 1935 (Stevenson 1981, pp. 40–41). Buchan's agenda included the esoteric reconstruction of ancient codes of laws, political and ecclesiastical constitutions, economic activities, and social customs, and, picking up on the example of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century scholars, commonly studied on a strongly topographical basis. This emphasis is strongly evident in the first published volumes of the Society's Transactions and learned papers which reflect the varied and ambitious projects that were being pursued.

Though there were likely shortcomings in antiquarian as in any such pursuits, there was systematic scholarship in the orderly accumulation of material supplying information and evidence in an epistemology belonging most obviously to the sciences. The published "Transactions" of the Society in *Archaeologia Scotica* for the most part demonstrate this. But the antiquarians have frequently been dismissed as a class and ridiculed, and Buchan alluded to the same gratuitous comments facing the embryonic Society: "the name of Antiquary, from the frivolous researches of some of them, and the prejudices of the uninformed public, has, with other still more respectable appellations, become the butt of fashionable and humorous strictures" (Buchan 1778, p. 23). Antiquarian interest in the eighteenth century, seen in retrospect, had tended to depart from an acceptable epistemology, and declined to an intellectual state which was ultimately caricatured by Scott in his novel of 1816, *The Antiquary*. Scott constructs his satire on dilettante and eccentric individual behavior and it may be unfair to impute the characteristics of Jonathan Oldbuck to the corporate persona of the recently founded Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. It is no doubt significant that Scott disliked the Earl of Buchan and avoided too close involvement with the Society in its early years. Scott's distancing may have had other motives such as his scholarly preference for an intangible cultural heritage over a tangible one, or his own antiquarian purposes, implicitly in competition with the Society, of assembling "gabions" to adorn Abbotsford (Cheape et al. 2003, p. 56).

"Antiquities" was considered as a branch of history, and history as we understand it in terms of a rational and critical discipline was in its infancy and still largely in thrall to literature. Significantly, Enlightenment scholars such as William Robertson (1721–93) were throwing the net widely in their survey of source material and setting new standards in scholarly technique. But the latter provides a telling note which gives an insight into contemporary attitudes, in other words that material culture belonged to the antiquarians and should be considered as the antithesis of conventional (documentary) record evidence; in his *History of Scotland* (1759), he structured Scotland's past in four periods and dismissed the early period of Scottish history as "the reign of pure fable and conjecture, and ought to be totally neglected, or abandoned to the industry and credulity of antiquarians."

Antiquarianism has not had a good press and may be heard as an academic pejorative. It is more readily characterized or decried as an untidy habit of mind rather than systematic scholarship. It is treated with humor but also sympathy in Sir Walter Scott's Jonathan Oldbuck of Monkbarns, holding a mirror at times to his own creation of Abbotsford. The trait which Scott represented so memorably was the curiosity about the past for its own sake and a curiosity particularly for the physical remains of the past. But the fellowship

with others of like interest allowed for disagreement and endless arguments over antiquarian detail, and this could cut across divisions almost endemic in the politics and religion of seventeenth- and eighteenth- century Scotland. Scottish antiquarianism therefore appears a force for good and essentially the same empirical methods are with us still in various modern guises in the processes of excavation, description, classification and presentation. Though methodology and focus took time to develop and began to adopt scholarly disciplines from England and Scandinavia, history and the study of the past was still a social activity. When it came into being at the end of the year 1780, the new Society drew inspiration and example from the London Society of Antiquaries.

The Society of Antiquaries of London undoubtedly provided inspiration for the Scottish society inaugurated in 1780. The London Society had included a number of Scots, particularly from the 1720s, men such as Sir John Clerk of Penicuik and Alexander Gordon who served as Secretary in the 1730s. Lord Buchan himself became a Fellow in 1764 and regularly attended meetings. There were other considerations, prominent undoubtedly in Buchan's mind, writings and arguments, such as a need to prevent the disposal and destruction of collections of antiquities. He and others were conscious of the loss of earlier collections painstakingly assembled by individual scholars, in particular the two important natural history collections of Sir Andrew Balfour (1630–94) and Sir Robert Sibbald to which he referred in his *Discourse*. These had been bequeathed to the University of Edinburgh but within the space of fifty years had been dispersed. They had certainly been valued in their day and were described in relation to the Toun's College of Edinburgh in 1727 by Daniel Defoe: "It contains a vast treasure of curiosities of Art and Nature, domestic and foreign from almost all Parts of the World, and is greatly valued by the Virtuosoes containing some rarities that are not to be found either in those of the Royal Society at London or the Ashmolean at Oxford." Much of this material was dispersed about 1779 by the then Professor of Natural History, Rev. Professor John Walker, on the grounds that "the greater part of it is mere rubbish that can never be of any use." This cultural profligacy was painfully recent and put the need to have a home for collections at the head of the new agenda. Buchan also wished to pick up from the Scottish group of early eighteenth-century antiquaries since the emphasis of their work in history and antiquities had been lost. His own words at the inaugural meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland recalled these disasters:

> I suspect that that Society … as well as all other which are instituted for the study and collection of Antiquities and the objects of Natural History, failed on account of their having no house in property, nor any private interests to care for their books, museum and other necessary appurtenances: and that having met in taverns, their meetings degenerated into convivial and anomalous conversations. All these hazards I mean, with your approbation, to guard against and ever to exclude (Buchan 1778, pp. 20–21).

The Character of the Early National Collections

Though object collection was not at first seen as the only or even necessary purpose of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, a museum devoted to the national history

could conserve and record all that was perceived as contributing to the distinctive identity of Scotland. Buchan's attitude is exemplified by his own contribution to the Society's published "Transactions," *Archaeologia Scotica*, and was the outcome of a plan to survey all the parishes of Scotland, first formulated by him as early as 1761 and prefiguring the "Statistical Account of Scotland" later instigated and carried through by Sir John Sinclair. His account of the parish of Uphall was matched by impressively detailed accounts of Haddington, Liberton and Aberlady parishes, absorbing over two hundred pages of the 570-page volume. Other papers covered topics as varied as numismatics, weights and measures, geology, field monuments (inviting inevitably far-reaching speculation), language (Gaelic and Scots), music, and seasonal festivals. This last category is represented by an account of the Lammas Festival in Midlothian in the middle of the eighteenth century by Rev. Dr James Anderson. He endorses the purpose of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland as "transmitting to posterity a true account of this country as it now is, and has been in times past", thus picking up on the distinctiveness of a culture in danger of being lost.

If any single influence persuaded the new Society of Antiquaries to embark on a systematic acquisition of objects, apart from the more obvious acquisitive predilections of its members, it was likely to have been the investigation of "northern antiquities" which touched Scotland and Edinburgh in the late eighteenth century. Paradoxically perhaps the foundation of the British Museum in 1759, with the collections of the physician and naturalist, Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), did not sway the Society. Antiquarian studies, as we have seen, were comparatively well advanced in Denmark (particularly with the national collections in Copenhagen), Sweden, Norway, and Iceland, and scholarly and fieldwork visits of northern scholars in those years, following in the footsteps of Thorkelin, showed the relevance and importance of their work to early Scottish history and offered a distinctive example.

The accumulation of collections and a museum in which to house them were, as Buchan believed, of first importance for the new Society and the first recorded accession was a collection of 53 pieces of broken bronze weapons and scrap dredged from Duddingston Loch, Edinburgh, almost all still extant in the National Museums today. Buchan in developing the concept of objects as evidence cited the examples of earlier (seventeenth-century) collections, those of Dr. Andrew Balfour and Sir Robert Sibbald, which had been bequeathed to Edinburgh University but later dispersed because of neglect and lack of curatorship. A property acquired in Edinburgh in 1781 was intended to provide a home for objects as well as proper meeting-rooms for the Society, Buchan himself bearing most of the cost.

Scottish prehistoric material was clearly a priority but foreign prehistoric and ethnographic material was collected in quantities as a natural concomitant to activity in the widening sphere of empire. Subsequently large amounts of objects have been transferred to other museums in bids to rationalize the collections, not least to bring them more into line with the patriotic purpose of completing the record of Scotland's past. Though termed a museum of "antiquities," it is important to recall that this concept was widely interpreted; from the earliest days of the society, "modern" or contemporary material was also collected. Some of this included natural history specimens that were also considered as curiosities, for example an unusually shaped

branch of Scots fir and the 4.9 m-long jawbone of a whale. A commitment to the natural sciences seemed then firmly embedded in the Society's deliberations as the Secretary noted in his Report for the year 1821–1822:

> The deficiency in public collections connected with the various pursuits of science and history has long been a matter of regret to ourselves, and of surprise to strangers. That most important branch, natural history, of which, till within these very few years, no public collection whatever existed, is now in progress, and likely to become highly creditable to the scientific character of this city, as well as supplying an invaluable source of information to the student (Smellie 1822, Appendix 4).

Other objects were collected for insights that they might give into historic or prehistoric societies and also in the prevailing spirit that times were changing and that the familiar would soon be an irretrievable thing of the past. This prefigured the beginnings of a more philosophically devised plan, formulated by Dr. (later Sir) Arthur Mitchell (1826–1909), to collect comparative ethnological material, then disregarded and overlooked, within Scotland itself in order to throw light on prehistoric material and techniques. In essence this process characterized objects as a new form of evidence—the survival of "the past in the present"—and related to the contemporary Darwinian debate on theories of evolution and concepts of progress (Mitchell 1880, pp. 4–5, 21–24). From the 1860s, Mitchell began to add a new stratum of material, what he called the "neo-archaic," to the archaeological collections of the Museum of Antiquities. In his travels as a government commissioner, he observed and collected pottery, ploughs, spades, looms, querns, and cruisie lamps which had been recently made and whose manufacture could still be observed and were still in use though apparently "prehistoric" in character (Cheape 1993, p. 117).

Conclusions

Objects collected and displayed in a museum—in the Museum of Scotland for example—are now being looked at as identifiers or measures of national identity as well as valid and essential historical and archaeological evidence (Fig. 4). Scotland's experience might be regarded as noteworthy in that, through the creation of the National Museum of Antiquities and the vigour and views of the Society of Antiquaries in the late eighteenth century, a Scottish dialectic may be identified, that is, the accumulation of national collections for patriotic purposes. This expression of patriotism supplied an ideological imperative which in Scotland's case was grafted onto evolving museological practice such as scientific method, taxonomy, comparative ethnology, and other methodological trends observable in the nineteenth century. It finds definition and direction for example in Sir Daniel Wilson's *Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* of 1851 where it was stressed specifically that the Museum was to be a focus of patriotic interest and feeling. The National Museum saw itself both as custodian as well as architect or creator of national identity and that the pursuit of such a patriotic purpose might beget a national identity, discarded politically at the Union and lost

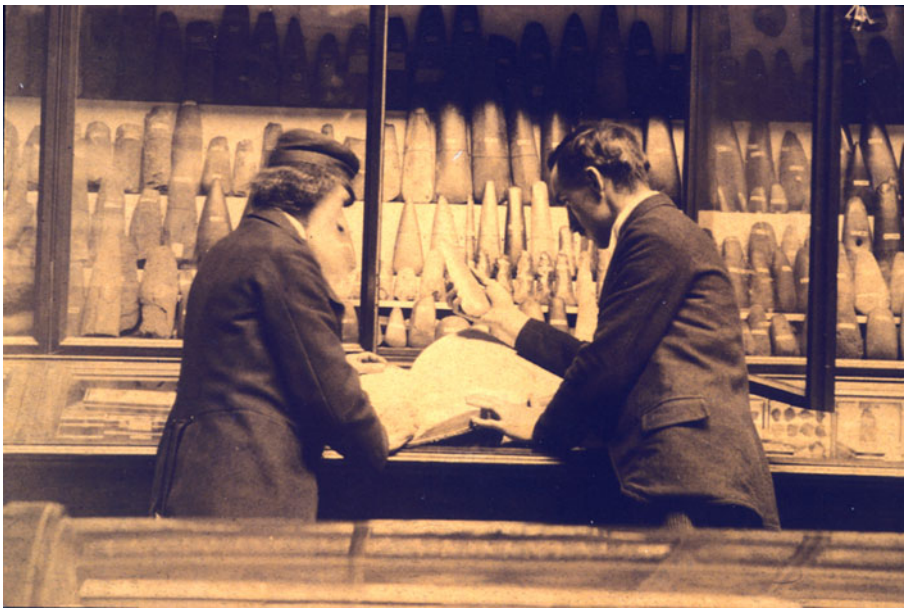

Fig. 4 Dr. Joseph Anderson (*left*) and his assistant, George Fraser Black (*right*), examining stone axe heads in the National Museum about 1890. The fruits of the research and intense collecting efforts of Anderson and his colleagues in the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, are self-evident

culturally through the manifest neglect of "antiquities." Buchan, the Society of Antiquaries, Wilson and Anderson brought the concept of Scotland's material culture into the dialectic.

When the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland moved into its new building in Edinburgh's Queen Street in 1891, a building shared with the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, the patriotic purpose of Lord Buchan and his supporters seemed not only to be dramatically vindicated but also significantly enhanced. The publication of a 380-page Catalogue in the following year, with over 62,000 individual entries for principally prehistoric and early historic material, demonstrated how an "archaeology of Scotland" had been assembled and public benefit served. In the spirit of Victorian self-confidence, all objects were on view in densely massed displays and as much information as possible published. The "democratization" of Scottish culture had been passionately pursued. Joseph Anderson, Daniel Wilson and others had moved the subject far beyond the aspirations of the Society's founders, codified by the Secretary in 1792 as 'one great repository which should be rendered accessible to the Republic of Letters' (Smellie 1792, p. v). An elitism persisted perhaps only in the insistence on a centralized and strong national collection. Sir Arthur Mitchell, in his "Jubilee Address to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland," celebrated the motives as well as the purpose of the Museum, that objects were made the central record in the national collection and the Enlightenment concept of the founding fathers grafted onto nineteenth-century notions of public education, together with a strong dash of national passion:

> I have pressed the importance of regarding the Museum as National. It is so in the sense of being the property of the Nation. This makes its preservation secure. But it is National in another sense. It is very largely a collection of objects illustrating our Nation's pre-history. Indeed, if taken with local collections, it supplies nearly all the material for this study which we possess —of course adding those objects which cannot be removed to a museum and also those relics which are described and figured in the *Proceedings* though not in the Museum. … There are persons perhaps to whom Scotland is nothing but 'that garret of the world—that knuckle end of England,' but to us Scotland is the special field of our studies, as well as the land we love; and it seems to me that the very reason of our existence as a Society is to make additions to the knowledge of its unwritten history (Mitchell 1902, pp. 49–50).

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