A Sculptor for Scotland
The Life and Work of Sir John Robert Steell, RSA (1804-1891)

Rocco Lieuallen

PhD History of Art
The University of Edinburgh
2002
ABSTRACT

*A Sculptor for Scotland: The Life and Work of Sir John Robert Steell, RSA (1804-1891)*

Sir John Steell was the most eminent and respected Scottish sculptor of his generation. He set new standards of achievement during his long and prolific career, and consistently worked towards the advancement of Scottish arts. He executed many important public monument projects for Scotland and Great Britain, and sent work to India, New Zealand and the United States. He introduced fine art bronze casting to Scotland, creating the Grove Foundry in Edinburgh in 1849 to cast the Scottish National Monument to the Duke of Wellington. Designated Sculptor in Ordinary to Her Majesty for Scotland by Queen Victoria in 1838, Steell earned a deserved reputation as the finest sculptor in Scotland.

Until now, there has never been a comprehensive assessment of Steell’s life and work. The thesis and accompanying catalogue raisonné examine Steell’s career by focusing upon his major monument projects, but also assess his portraiture work and activities within the Scottish Victorian art world. Steell matured as a sculptor within a nation that was maturing aesthetically. Previous generations of Scottish sculptors with talent and ambition were essentially forced by market conditions to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Steell was the first Scottish sculptor to have a major international career while remaining in Edinburgh.

Steell’s success was often used as an example that Scottish sculpture had achieved parity with sculptural practice in England and Europe. The thesis examines the conditions that allowed Steell to enjoy such a huge level of success in Edinburgh, and places Steell in context with English and European counterparts. The thesis also assesses the political and social conditions in Edinburgh that allowed Steell to dominate the local market. Also addressed are Steell’s activities within the Royal Scottish Academy, and his relationship with the Board of Manufactures, which provided early patronage and assistance.

In terms of patronage, projects, methods, style, genres, display and opportunities, Steell’s career offers an excellent example of the conditions under which Victorian sculpture was created. Steell sculpted the most eminent and famous Britons of his day, and played an essential role in the commemoration of such individuals as Sir Walter Scott, Wellington, Prince Albert and Queen Victoria for Scotland. The thesis and catalogue comprehensively examine the life and art of the man known for over fifty years as Sculptor for Scotland.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements...........................................................................................................i
List of Illustrations...........................................................................................................ii

Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review.........................................................2

Chapter Two: Beginnings: 1804-1829.............................................................................32

Chapter Three: Rome, Edinburgh and the Context for a Scottish Sculptor: 1800-1833.....48

Chapter Four: Steell and the Alexander and Bucephalus, 1829-33; 1881-84.................99

Chapter Five: Early Patronage: “The Queen’s Statue,” 1836-1844..............................122

Chapter Six: The Scott Monument Statue Project, 1832-1846....................................137

Chapter Seven: Steell, Patronage and Portraiture........................................................155

Chapter Eight: Steell, Wellington, and the Grove Foundry: 1840-1852......................173

Chapter Nine: Moderate, not Mediocre: Steell’s Middle Career, 1850-1870..............201

Chapter Ten: “The object of my life”: Steell and the Prince Consort Memorial, 1865-1876....221

Chapter Eleven: Steell as a Unionist-Nationalist Sculptor, 1833-1880.....................251

Chapter Twelve: The Late Career, 1872-1885............................................................275

Chapter Thirteen: The End, and After, 1887-1891......................................................288

Notes.................................................................................................................................303

Bibliography....................................................................................................................324

Glossary............................................................................................................................340
Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the cooperation and assistance of the following individuals and organisations:

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, for granting permission to use documents from the Royal Archives, Windsor.

His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, for allowing the use of documents from the Buccleuch Muniments.

The many individuals who granted access to the works in their private homes and collections.

The University of Edinburgh Development Trust, which provided funding for the photographic work required for the catalogue raisonné.

Dr. Phillip Ward-Jackson of the Courtauld Institute's Conway Library

Dr. David Howarth of Edinburgh University

Dr. Joe Rock

Fiona Pearson of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

Susanna Kerr of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Valerie Hunter of the National Gallery of Scotland

Joanna Soden, Librarian of the Royal Scottish Academy

May Hoy, for valuable information regarding the St. Andrew statue

Liz Lacey, for extremely valuable genealogical information

Claudia Heide, for support, friendship, and a place to stay in London

Clare Swain, for proofreading, editing and tracking down inscriptions

Camilla Cox and Jenny Neave-Graham, for transport and conversation

Dr. J.P. Campbell of Edinburgh University and Helen Smailes of the National Gallery of Scotland, for their effort, guidance and support as my doctoral supervisors.

I declare that this thesis text, catalogue raisonné and accompanying material are my own work and have been entirely composed by me. I declare that the work herein has not been submitted previously for any other degree or professional qualification.

Rocco Lieuallen
List of Illustrations

7. Royal Scottish Academy medals. Gordon 1976, p. 120.
10. John Steell Sr. calotype by Hill and Adamson, c. 1843-47. National Archives of Scotland.
15. Robert Scott Lauder: John Steell, oil on canvas, c. 1827, Dundee University. Museum Services, University of Dundee.
32. Giambologna: Anatomical Figure of a Horse, bronze, 16th Century, University of Edinburgh. Royal Scottish Academy.
34. Alexander Nasmthy: Building of the Royal Institution, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Scotland. National Archives of Scotland.
35. W. Deebie: Royal Institution, Edinburgh. Gordon 1976, p. 120.
52. Engraving of a bronze foundry from Diderot’s Encyclopædia.
54. Antonio Canova, Self-portrait, marble, 1812, Tempio Canoviano, Possagno. Tempio Canoviano.
60. John Steell: *Opening of Great Exhibition* (detail of Gibson's *Hunter and Dog*), bronze, 1876, Edinburgh. Rococo Lissadles
64. John Steell: *Alexander and Bucephalus*, bronze, 1833, Edinburgh. Rococo Lissadles
69. John Steell: *Alexander and Bucephalus* (detail). Rococo Lissadles
70. Dossicri figure, marble, Piazza del Quirinale, Rome. Haskell and Penny 1981, p. 172
73. Engraving of Laurence Macdonald's *Ajax and Patroclus*, 1829. The Scoumont, 31 October 1829
75. Horse performing a levade. Lith. p. 20
76. Horse rearing naturally. Fogg-Tupper Co., Elmont, New York
77. Rearing horse, Parthenon frieze (detail). Warburg Institute
81. Dossicri figure, Rome. Warburg Institute
82. Dossicri engraving, Rome. Warburg Institute
84. Alexandre Sarcoephagus, Archaeology Museum, Istanbul. Warburg Institute
85. *Monumenti a Gassion de Foix*, marble, 1515. Warburg Institute
95. Christofor Eckersberg: *Bertel Thorvaldsen*, oil on canvas, 1814, Royal Danish Academy. Kopenhagen, p. 30
97. Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome. Kopenhagen, p. 35
98. Parthenon horse, marble, British Museum, London. Warburg Institute
102. John Steell: *Sphinx*, freestone, 1837, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh. Rococo Lissadles
107. Canova: *Letticia Bonaparte (Madame Mere)*, marble, 1808, Chatsworth. Desenfans Trust
110. William Playfair: *Elevation drawing of Royal Institution*, 1832. National Archives of Scotland
111. William Playfair: *Elevation drawing of Royal Institution*, 1832 (detail). National Archives of Scotland
113. John Steell: *Queen Victoria* (detail of orb). Rococo Lissadles
117. John Steell: *Queen Victoria* (detail). Rococo Lissadles
118. John Steell: *Queen Victoria* (detail). Rococo Lissadles
119. John Steell: *Queen Victoria* (detail). Rococo Lissadles
120. John Steell: *Bust of Queen Victoria*, 1838 (detail). National Galleries of Scotland
121. John Steell: *Queen Victoria*, 1844 (detail). Rococo Lissadles
112. Carlo Marchetti: *Equestrian Statue of Queen Victoria*, bronze, 1849, George Square, Glasgow. 
114. Drawing of Nelson statue in progress. 
115. Scott Monument, Edinburgh. 
123. Sir Henry Raeburn: *Sir Walter Scott*, oil on canvas, 1808, Bucleuch Collection, Bowhill. 
125. Sir Francis Chantrey: *Sir Walter Scott*, marble, 1820, Abbotsford Collection. 
136. Upper Library, Edinburgh University. 
137. Sir Francis Chantrey: *Sir Walter Scott*, marble, 1820, Abbotsford. 
140. Sir Walter Scott: *Portrait of John Rutherford*, marble, 1853, Dean Cemetery. 
143. John Steell: *Portrait bust of Lord Cockburn*, marble, 1851, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. 
144. Sir Walter Scott: *Portrait bust of George Patterson*, marble, 1862, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. 
149. John Steell: *Portrait bust of Lord Fullerton*, marble, 1852, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. 
156. John Steell: *Portrait bust of James Lindsay*, marble, 1856, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. 
158. John Steell: *Portrait bust of George Patterson*, marble, 1862, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. 
159. John Steell: *Portrait bust of James Lindsay*, marble, 1856, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh.
188. John Steell: Portrait bust of Dr. John Abercrombie, marble, 1846, Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. Rosco Linnall
202. Sir Francis Chantrey: George IV, bronze, 1831, George Street, Edinburgh. Rosco Linnall
203. Sir Francis Chantrey: William Pitt, bronze, 1833, George Street, Edinburgh. Rosco Linnall
204. Ordnance Survey Map of Fountainbridge, Edinburgh, 1853. National Galleries of Scotland
205. Diagram: Sand casting illustration.
206. Diagram: Creating an artist’s plaster. Rosco Linnall
207. Diagram: Making a core. Rosco Linnall
208. Diagram: Steel’s process for bronze casting. Rosco Linnall
211. Calotype of Wellington Monument inauguration, 1852. National Library of Scotland
213. Eutene-Maurice Falconet: Monument to Peter the Great, bronze, 1766-82, St. Petersburg. Conway Library, London
215. Jacques-Louis David: Napoleon Leading his Army over the Alps, oil on canvas, 1805, Musee de Versailles. Leblanc, p. 220
216. David Wilkie: Wellington Writing a Dispatch, oil on canvas, 1835, Aberdeen Art Gallery. Aberdeen Art Gallery
218. John Steell by J.G. Tunny, 1854. Royal Scottish Academy
221. John Steell: Monument to the 93rd Sutherland Highland Regiment, marble, 1859, Glasgow Cathedral. Conway Library, London
222. John Steell: 93rd Regiment Monument (detail). Rosco Linnall
223. John Steell: 93rd Regiment Monument (detail). Rosco Linnall
224. John Steell: 93rd Regiment Monument (detail). Rosco Linnall
228. John Steell: Lord de Saumarez (detail). Rosco Linnall
229. John Steell: Lord de Saumarez (detail). Rosco Linnall
235. John Steell: Lord Boyle (detail). Rosco Linnall
236. John Steell: Lord Boyle (detail). Rosco Linnall
238. John Steell: Sir David Baxter, marble, 1863, McManus Galleries, Dundee. Rosco Linnall
257. John Steell: Monument to 93rd Highland Regiment, marble, 1854, Glasgow Cathedral. Rococo Levallois.
266. Clark Stanton: The Soldier, Sailor and Engineer, bronze, 1876, Consort Memorial, Edinburgh. Rococo Levallois.
268. The Royal Family, 1857 by Caldesi and Montecchi.
269. 1. H. Foley: Monument to the Great Exhibition of 1851, bronze, South Kensington, London.
283. John Steell: design drawing of Consort Memorial, ink and pencil on paper, Royal Archives, Windsor. Rococo Levallois.
311. John Steell: 


320. D.O. Hill, 1855 by Dr. John Adamson or Thomas Rodger, Royal Scottish Museum.


Fig. 1. John Steell, 1854. Photograph by J.G. Tunny
Chapter One
Introduction & Literature Review

Sir John Robert Steell, RSA (1804-1891) is to some extent, a Scottish sculptural enigma. (Fig.1) His professional success was unparalleled, and his work was continually cited by the Scottish press and public as the finest example of native ability and accomplishment in sculpture. From the very beginning of his artistic career, he displayed in equal measure talent, industry and ambition. These traits were accompanied by modesty, magnanimity, and a sincere wish for the advancement of Scottish art. However, there has been little study of his career, and the surviving works themselves are much more familiar than their creator. Steell himself rests in an unmarked grave in Old Calton Burial Ground, Edinburgh—an ironic end for a dedicated statuary who tirelessly worked to commemorate the great and good of his era.

The extent of Steell’s legacy and influence is debatable. He was overwhelmingly successful professionally, and was Scotland’s most patronised sculptor during his active career, receiving the most prestigious commissions available. His dominance of the Scottish market, particularly in Edinburgh, will probably never be equalled. Determining Steell’s influence is more difficult. It has been suggested that he virtually constituted the entire Scottish school and that his success demonstrated that Scottish sculpture, both within and outside of the designation of British art was of sufficient technical and aesthetic quality to compete in any international market.¹
Fig. 2. Sir Walter Scott, 1846, Scott Monument, Edinburgh.
Photo: Rocco Lomaufti

Fig. 3. Provost Blaikie, 1844, Town House, Aberdeen.
Photo: Rocco Lomaufti

Fig. 4. Queen Victoria, 1844, R.S.A., Edinburgh.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London

Fig. 5. Duke of Wellington, 1852, Princes Street, Edinburgh.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London
It has also been posited that his dominance of the market stifled the careers of younger artists. Supposedly, Steell’s hegemony within the Scottish sculpture market had an effect opposite of what he intended: the continual improvement of Scottish sculpture. However, it will be shown that Edinburgh sculptors such as William Brodie (1815-1881) and A.H. Ritchie (1804-1870) had successful careers contemporaneous with Steell’s; the local market was evenly divided by these men. Younger sculptors such as D.W. Stevenson (1842-1904), Clark Stanton (1832-1894), John Hutchison (1833-1910) and James Pittendrigh MacGillivray (1856-1938) all benefited from Steell’s sculptural activities in terms of opportunities, facilities and precedents.

Steell was a sculptor of Scottish ‘firsts.’ He was the first Scot to receive a Scottish public commission for a major monument in marble, the *Scott Monument*. (Fig. 2) He was first to complete a major monument in marble with the *Provost Blaikie* for Aberdeen. (Fig. 3) He was the first sculptor in Britain to execute a statue of Queen Victoria. (Fig. 4) He was first to execute a tympanum for a Scottish building. He introduced bronze casting to Scotland, creating the first fine-art bronze foundry in Edinburgh for the execution of the *Wellington Monument*. (Fig. 5) He was the first Scottish sculptor to execute work for Jamaica, India, and the United States of America. Above all, he was the first Scottish sculptor to accomplish all of these things while remaining in Scotland, not seeking fame and fortune in London or Rome, as so many Scottish artists had done before him.
Given the magnitude of his achievements, and a personality noted for kindness, generosity and a sincere commitment to the improvement of Scottish art, it is curious that his fame never approached that of Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1843), Sir Francis Chantrey (1781-1841) or John Gibson (1790-1866). Coupled with the fact that the majority of his work was in Scotland, it remains a perplexing riddle that he is not known as “The Father of Scottish Sculpture”—even within his hometown of Edinburgh.

Stylistically he was traditional and conservative. His was the meticulously applied formula of blended naturalistic detail and neoclassical expression, as The Academy described it in 1891: “distinguished by great refinement, and by dignity of style...” The Portfolio stressed his verisimilitude, dubbing him “the Scottish Boehm.” For all of his firsts, he did not actively seek novelty. While his work is characterised by a serene energy and expression—both in monuments and in portraiture—he allowed accepted tenets of British sculptural practice to create a context for his work, rather than struggle against the boundaries of expression, as succeeding generations of sculptors would do.

Remaining active until five years before his death, he served as an inspiration for younger men; they could see that a successful career in Scotland was possible. However, by the time of his death in 1891, it was no longer viable for younger sculptors to emulate Steell’s style in anticipation of attaining his level of success. His adherence to a moderate path meant that stylistically he was never a strong influence; there is very little compelling evidence to show that he aesthetically inspired other sculptors.
This should not diminish Steell’s achievements. It could be argued to Steell’s credit that sculpture within Scotland was more vibrant than ever before. At the beginning of Steell’s career there were only four sculptors listed in the Edinburgh and Leith Postal Directory. By 1891, there were forty. When Steell was a young man, there were only one or two groups of sculpture in Edinburgh, and all by foreign hands. At his death, the length of Princes Street was dotted with monuments and statues—the majority executed by Scottish artists.

Working mainly as a portraitist, even within the context of monumental commissions, Steell always had rigid stylistic and compositional factors to sculpt within—a good likeness and appropriate accoutrement were always the primary factors. Fiona Pearson has suggested that this focus on public sculpture restricted his opportunities for free expression. However, while he would on occasion break away from his dominant style of balanced symmetry and classical feeling, even his very late portrait busts employ voluminous drapery and gently idealised facial features, exemplified by the pupil-less eyes of classical works. While he always employed the style best suited to his subject and objectives, more often than not he would adopt the clear, austere dignity of classicism, even in his final works of the 1880s.

Any assessment of John Steell’s career must address the political changes experienced in Scottish society during the course of the Industrial Revolution, both before and after the Reform Bill of 1832. Within the microcosm of the city of Edinburgh, it is notable that Steell’s career was eagerly followed, and happily encouraged by the emergent Whig press,
especially the Scotsman. Steell’s political views are unknown to us, but many of his major patrons and friends were eminent Whigs within Edinburgh’s legal community: Lord Cockburn, Lord Murray, Lord Jeffrey and Lord Rutherfurd were all known to Steell, and sat to him for portraits. These men were older than Steell, and at their deaths, Steell executed the funerary monuments for Cockburn, Jeffrey and Rutherfurd. Younger lawyers, among them George Patton, advocate and David Smith, W.S. were also friends of Steell, and were vociferous supporters of his interests.

As a creator of public monuments, Steell was an integral part of the Victorian Scottish establishment, and a prime mover in shaping that society’s approach to commemoration. The cultivation of taste was a facet of the cult of self-improvement that preoccupied Victorian life, and Steell took an active part in developing public taste through his own work, and through his activities with the Royal Scottish Academy (founded in 1826) and the Royal Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland (founded in 1833). As a Scottish sculptor, Steell not only celebrated the achievements of eminent native citizens, but also those of British heroes, such as Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and the Duke of Wellington. The concepts of public reform, improvement and commemoration within mid-nineteenth century Scotland reflected the social condition described by Graeme Morton as Unionist Nationalism, and this context will be seen to inform both Steell’s sculptural achievements, as well as the conditions and atmosphere which engendered them.
Fig. 6. *Alexander and Bucephalus*, modelled 1833, cast in bronze 1883, City Chambers, Royal Exchange, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
There are several rich sources of information from which we can evaluate Steell’s endeavours. These resources address his origins within the Scottish artisan class, his education at the Trustees’ Academy, the huge success of his debut group of *Alexander and Bucelphalus*, (Fig.6) his early patronage by the Board of Trustees for Manufactures, the consolidation of his reputation with the winning of the *Scott* and *Wellington* commissions, his middle career executing monuments to the great and good of Victorian Edinburgh and Britain, and his later career, which included the conferment of his knighthood in 1876, and commissions that were sent to America and New Zealand.

**Review of Literature**

Steell has only received brief art historical analysis since his death in 1891. His long life occasionally resulted in his omission from seminal publications on British sculpture. As the convention was to include only deceased artists, there is no discussion of Steell’s art in either William Bell Scott’s *The British School of Sculpture* of 1871, or Robert Brydall’s 1889 book *Art In Scotland: Its Origins and Progress*.

Until now, no detailed, comprehensive account of Steell’s life and work existed, though he received a good deal of attention in the Scottish popular press. During his life, he was included in biographical volumes, such as *The Book of Eminent Scotsmen* in 1881 and *Biograph* in 1879, as well as reference works like the *Bénézit* dictionary of artists. Newspapers such as the *Scotsman*, *Caledonian Mercury*, *Edinburgh Evening Post*, and *Edinburgh Courant* followed his career carefully—especially his annual exhibitions of
bust portraiture, and the execution of his many large public monuments in Edinburgh, and elsewhere. London publications, including the Art Journal, Illustrated London News, Builder, Architect, Athenaeum, and the Times also followed the progress of these projects, in the form of notices or reviews, and reported upon the work which travelled to America, Canada, Jamaica, India, New Zealand and England.

The foundation of any Steell scholarship is based on two main sources: the four volumes of Steell scrapbooks held by the National Library of Scotland,\(^8\) and Robin Woodward’s unpublished 1979 Edinburgh University PhD thesis, Nineteenth Century Scottish Sculpture.\(^9\) Woodward’s thesis contains two chapters which evaluate Steell and his importance within the context of Scottish art. The scope of Woodward’s investigation was wide-ranging, and she used his career as an example of conditions in nineteenth-century Scotland in relation to patronage, education, aesthetics and working practice. Her scholarship also included a dictionary/biographical entry coupled with an exhaustive bibliography and list of known works.

**Manuscripts—Letters, Minutes and other Documents**

Steell’s surviving letters are almost always brief, addressed to a patron, client or institution, concerned with organisation of a sculptural project, and direct in manner, while expressed in a courteous voice. While they provide a good insight into the nature of the man, virtually no personal correspondence, between the artist and his friends or family seems to have survived. No journals, diaries, workbooks, sketchbooks, plans, business accounts or any other material of a private nature has emerged. This lack of personal
memorabilia is largely due to the fact that Steell’s eldest surviving son William (1836-1917), an Edinburgh architect, left in his will a proviso that “all my fathers documents, letters to and from him, and his papers of every description are, without any exception whatever, to be burnt unopened and unread...” Little seems to have survived this purge of material.

By their very nature, the various minute books and committee reports for Steell’s projects impart facts, and are a revealing source for discovering the internal balance of power on committees, who was deciding issues, what was decided and how these decisions were implemented. Concurrent letters between committee members and committee secretaries, coupled with newspaper reports, often give a complementary account and describe the nature of debate. Steell seems to have had the ability to get on with everyone, and managed to avoid any political or aesthetic controversies—no small achievement within the rancorous factionalism which often arose during the decisions regarding major monument commissions.

As an art historical source, the surviving letters are an invaluable, though limited source. Steell’s cordial manner is at times impenetrable, but a careful analysis of these documents, particularly the surviving series of letters, give a fascinating picture of the artist’s relationship with his patrons and clients. These letters are also impart an accurate general impression of Steell’s personal circumstances at any given time—the pressures and constraints of work, time, health and money which constantly challenged him while executing projects large and small.
National Library of Scotland

The four Steell scrapbooks held by the National Library of Scotland are the principal surviving resource for Steell’s sculptural career. These scrapbooks seem to have been compiled by the artist’s younger brother, Gershom Steell (1817-1896), as his name is written inside the cover of Volume I. The scrapbooks contain many newspaper and magazine cuttings, along with photographs, pamphlets, and some written entries. They cover a period from circa 1829 to 1877. The National Library of Scotland has fourteen examples of Steell letters. Some are merely autograph letters, but others, which range from his early career to the 1880s, briefly discuss commissions, projects and assorted other business. As of March 2002, no material predating 1829 has been discovered.

National Archives of Scotland, Register House

The Steell holdings at the Scottish Record Office, Register House, are more substantial, and comprise several caches of documents involving Steell’s major monuments. Most of these are within the gift deposit of the Buccleuch Muniments: GD224 511/8-9 and GD224 511/13. The Buccleuch estate now holds the collection numbered GD224/666/1-3 at Drumlanrig Castle, Dumfriesshire. The Buccleuch papers are fairly comprehensive, and are centred on projects for which the 5th Duke was either a committee member or chairman. These collections feature correspondence between Lord Dalhousie, Lord Meadowbank, W.S. Walker, and the Duke, providing insights into the power politics, debates and negotiations which surrounded these large public works projects.
The records of several public bodies currently held by the National Archives in West Register House, Edinburgh, contain information relating to the sculptor’s early life, education and career. Of great importance in understanding Steell’s early environment are the legal documents pertaining to John Steell Senior’s 1819-1826 bankruptcy. The sederunt books contain extensive inventories of the Steells’ business holdings and property, as well as detailed information regarding their commercial contacts. There are meticulous accounts of the family furniture and possessions, including books, utensils, tools and materials. This resource helps create a vivid picture of the artist’s beginnings, and the atmosphere that shaped his subsequent professional life. These factors are examined in Chapter Two.

The papers of the Board of Trustees of Manufactures aid our understanding of Steell’s early career. As the governing body of the Trustees’ Academy, records of Steell’s education exist in the form of two petitions from Steell to study from 1820 and 1824. These petitions are predated by entries from the 1818 minute book recording his first application to study, and subsequent reports on his progress from the academy’s master Andrew Wilson. There are also minutes regarding the statue of Queen Victoria, which Steell executed for the Royal Institution building between 1837 and 1844, and two letters from Steell in reference to this project.

Further letters exist concerning the 1833 exhibition of his Alexander and Bucephalus group in the rooms of the Royal Institution. Additionally, as Steell was appointed as a Commissioner to the Board of Trustees in 1849, he
is listed intermittently as present for meetings in the minute books. The West
Register House archives also hold minute books for the Royal Association for
the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland. Steell is mentioned several times
with reference to statuette replicas of his work periodically commissioned
and distributed by the RAPFAS.

**Mitchell Library, Glasgow**

The Mitchell Library in Glasgow has a series of letters written by Steell
to Sir William Stirling-Maxwell (1818-1878) between 1875 and 1876. The
Stirling-Maxwell letters succinctly illustrate the cordial relationship Steell
enjoyed with his patrons. Several earlier letters from the 1860s to Stirling-
Maxwell from Lady Mary Ruthven, are also important, as they reveal the
manner in which Steell developed his patronage.

Letters of the amateur sculptor Isabella Gore-Booth, held in the
Mitchell Library for the Strathclyde Regional Archive, include an 1856 letter
from a Mr. Campbell to Gore-Booth mentioning that Steell was impressed
with her work. An 1864 letter from Steell himself, informs Gore-Booth that
his men are too busy to copy a modelled bust into marble. In another
regional archive, the artist’s docket of the Aberdeen City Art Gallery has
correspondence pertaining to the two Steell works in its permanent
collection.

**Royal Scottish Academy Library**

The archives of the Royal Scottish Academy contain missives written
by Steell to the Academy’s Secretary D.O. Hill (1802-1870) and to the
Academy’s Council, regarding Academy business. Steell’s name regularly
appears in the Academy’s minute book, as he was a rotating council member.
Fig. 7. The Royal Scottish Academy medals were designed by Noel Paton. Associates received a bronze medal, Academicians received silver. Photo: Gordon 1996, p. 120.

Fig. 8. Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, 1876, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
The pension accounts of the RSA also list the monthly amounts paid to Steell after his reaching age 60 in 1864. Besides this material, the archive holds Steell’s bronze and silver Associate and Academician’s medals. (Fig.7)

*Royal Archives, Windsor Castle*

The Royal Archives at Windsor house several sources of material documenting Steell’s royal portraiture projects, and the *Scottish National Memorial to the Prince Consort.* (Fig.8) Queen Victoria’s diary mentions her sittings for a bust in 1838, as well as the 1876 inauguration of the *Consort Memorial,* and Steell’s subsequent knighthood. Letters also mention the 1862 bust of the Prince of Wales, which Steell executed for the Royal High School, Edinburgh. There are two volumes of correspondence and reports on the progress of the *Consort Memorial.* These volumes contain many letters Steell wrote to General Thomas Biddulph, Queen Victoria’s Privy Purse councillors.

*Other Archives*

Small pockets of documentation relating to Steell are found throughout the archives of several major institutions. Edinburgh Town Council minute books have several entries regarding Steell’s civic works, as the completed monuments were usually turned over to the care of the City of Edinburgh upon their inauguration. The Edinburgh City Archive maintains these records, as well as the minute books of the Scott Monument committee. The Fine Art Department of Edinburgh Central Public Library has a typescript of a 1917 speech written and presented by the sculptor Pittendrigh MacGillivray (1856-1939), “*Sculpture, Nationality and War Memorials*” which mentions Steell.
The Edinburgh University main library holds four letters written in 1841-42 from James Andrew Ramsay, 10th Earl and 1st Marquess of Dalhousie to Sir George Warrender which refer to Steell’s model and portrait bust for the Wellington Monument. The School of Divinity’s New College Library, Edinburgh University, has several letters which Steell wrote to Dr. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) involving sittings for a portrait bust. The British Library holds two Steell items; one is a letter from Steell to Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel requesting an appointment. The second is from Steell’s secretary to a London publisher, which approves a biographical entry for publication.

The Edinburgh Room of Edinburgh Central Public Library maintains several volumes of press cuttings relating to Steell’s monuments, which are organised by subject. The Scott Monument, Wellington Monument, and Consort Memorial are all included, the cuttings ranging from Victorian to contemporary news stories. The library of The Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh has references to Steell in the College’s minute books, involving two bust portraits Steell executed, one of Dr. John Abercrombie and a second of Dr. James Warburton Begbie.

Nineteenth-Century Publications

Steell was not the subject of any books during his lifetime, nor did he ever publish written material of any kind. However, as a respected and eminent man of the arts, and with a wide circle of friends, he was occasionally mentioned, albeit briefly, in contemporary volumes. These books are often published memoirs, which name Steell in conjunction with his public monument projects and offer some assessment of the artist’s skills.
The Scottish writer Allan Cunningham was a stonemason for the sculptor Francis Chantrey before becoming his secretary. Cunningham established a considerable literary career, publishing several volumes on Scottish poetry between 1810 and 1825. He wrote extensively on British sculpture, contributing an article on Chantrey to Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine in 1820, and an assessment of Canova and British sculptors to the Quarterly Review in 1826. Even more influential were the positions stated in his Lives of the most eminent British painters, sculptors and architects, published in London in 1829. His Life of Sir David Wilkie (London, 1843) is still considered an excellent source on the Scottish painter.

Cunningham never mentioned Steell, but given the writer’s links to Chantrey, and his advocacy of a British sculptural style which Steell adopted, assessment of Cunningham’s works is beneficial to an appraisal of Scottish sculpture in general, and Steell’s work in particular.

George Cleghorn’s Remarks Upon Ancient and Modern Art (Edinburgh, 1837) appears to provide the first mention of Steell in any book, and included Steell as among “several young men of high promise ...most of whom have finished, or are finishing their studies at Rome, namely Messrs Scoular, Campbell, Macdonald, Steell, Fletcher, Simson, Ritchie.” Cleghorn did not examine Steell’s work in any detail, though he did mention the very popular Alexander and Bucephalus of 1833.

Thomas Frognall Dibdin’s A Bibliographical Tour in the North Counties of England and Scotland (London, 1838) was published in two volumes. Remarking upon his visit to Edinburgh’s Royal Institution, Dibdin stated: “Mr Steell is at present among the most prominent of resident sculptors at
Fig. 9. The 1868 edition of *Traditions of Edinburgh* featured Steell’s *Allan Ramsay* on the dust cover. Photo: Robert Lamelas®
Edinburgh; and as a bustifier, considered to be the “facile princeps.” I anticipate with confidence his grappling with more gigantic subjects, and his triumphs taking a wider range.”

Christopher North: A Memoir of John Wilson by Mary Gordon was published in two volumes in Edinburgh in 1862. The appendix covered the most recent developments regarding Edinburgh’s memorial to the professor, including a description of the statue’s pose and accoutrement. The 1868 edition of Robert Chambers’s Traditions of Edinburgh (Edinburgh) featured a line engraving of Steell’s 1865 statue of Allan Ramsay on the dust cover. (Fig.9)

Published in Edinburgh in 1874, Lord Cockburn’s Journal of Henry Cockburn 1831-1854, gave a brief account of the inauguration of the Wellington monument, as well as Lord Cockburn’s favourable opinion of the statue: “It is certainly a noble work. Is there a better modern statue of the heroic order in Europe? We are all proud of Steell, a son of Edinburgh.”

The Scottish painter and poet William Bell Scott (1811-1890) mentioned Steell in two separate books, Memoirs of the Late David Scott, R.S.A. (Edinburgh, 1845) and Autobiographical Notes on the Life of William Bell Scott (London, 1892). In the Memoirs, a compilation of diaries of his older brother, the history painter David Scott (1806-1849), Steell is mentioned several times. David Scott and Steell studied together at the Trustees’ Academy, and Steell was a subscribing member to the “Life Academy” that Scott organised in 1827. The men were presumably close friends; Steell’s 1831 diploma work for the Scottish Academy was a portrait bust of Scott.
In his *Autobiographical Notes* (1892), Scott mentioned Steell twice, remarking that when he returned to Edinburgh after many years in London, Steell was one of the few people in town that he still knew. He also reminisced that Steell accompanied him to the annual dinner of St. Luke’s Club in Edinburgh in 1832-33, while David Scott was travelling in Italy.\(^4^3\)

Queen Victoria gave a full page account of the inauguration of the *Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort*, and her subsequent knighting of Steell in *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands* (London, 1884), where she described Steell as “a kind, good man.”\(^4^4\)

Robert Brydall’s *Art In Scotland* (London & Edinburgh, 1889) cited Steell, but not within the context of Scottish sculpture. Brydall evaluated only the work of deceased artists, and the book, published in 1889, did not discuss Steell’s sculptural career. Instead, he is mentioned with D.O. Hill (1802-1870) and Henry Glassford Bell (1803-1874) regarding his contribution towards the establishment in 1833 of the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland. He was also included in the list of RSA members in the book’s appendix.

There are several other publications in which Steell is only mentioned briefly: William Kidd’s *Guide to Dundee* (Dundee, 1888) profiled the Dundee Burns monument by Steell, while Gardner’s *Burnsiana* of 1892 listed the Burns statues in Dundee, New Zealand, New York and London. Printed privately in two volumes in 1890, and edited by Katharine M. Lyell, the *Memoir of Leonard Horner* (London, 1890) included an 1853 letter to Horner’s wife, which mentioned a visit to Steell’s studio.\(^4^5\)
Twentieth-Century Publications

Here again, most references to Steell do not extend beyond passing ones. There is no comprehensive profile of Steell prior to Esme Gordon’s The Royal Scottish Academy 1826-1976 (Edinburgh, 1976). Lionel Cust’s The National Portrait Gallery (London, 1902) listed and illustrated Steell’s bust of Thomas de Quincey, which was donated to the gallery in 1889 by William Bell Scott. E.T. Bradley’s The Westminster Abbey Guide (London, 1908) noted Steell’s bust of Robert Burns in Poets’ Corner.

Edward Goodwillie’s The World’s Memorials to Robert Burns, (Detroit, 1911) profiled Steell’s Burns monuments in New York, Dundee, London and Dunedin, New Zealand. Goodwillie covered the events surrounding the commission of each monument, and gave the dates and details of each inauguration. He did not include a biographical sketch of the artist.

Among texts which acknowledge Steell briefly, William Pitcairn Anderson’s Silences That Speak (Edinburgh, 1931) is a guide to Edinburgh graveyards, and provides short biographies of the men and women interred within them. Steell’s details are given in a brief account derived from the Dictionary of National Biography. Directions are given for locating the family’s plot in Old Calton Burial Ground. Cecil Woodham-Smith’s biography Florence Nightingale 1820-1910 (London, 1950) features an illustration of Steell’s bust, and an account of the circumstances surrounding the commission. W.N. Boog Watson’s A Short History of Chalmers Hospital (Edinburgh, 1964) includes an account of the bust commissioned for the hospital.
Esme Gordon’s *The Royal Scottish Academy 1826-1976* (Edinburgh, 1976) presents a profile of Steell on pages 87-88, and remarks upon Steell’s contributions to the organisation, as well as his long term of membership. In *Sculpture: Processes and Principles* (London, 1977), Rudolph Wittkower mentions Steell in the company of European sculptors such as Rude, Carpeaux, Canova, Thorvaldsen and Gibson as an example of the best work of the nineteenth century. Benedict Read mentions Steell several times throughout his seminal work *Victorian Sculpture* (New Haven & London, 1982). He profiles Steell’s major works, and provides several photographic illustrations of the Edinburgh monuments.

*Civic Stone*, by Ian R. Simpson, (Edinburgh, 1982) simply lists Steell as the artist while accounting for the major monuments in the Princes Street area of Edinburgh; no other information is given. Steell’s career is profiled in Chapter 8 of Colin Maclean’s *Ruins and Remains: Edinburgh’s Neglected Heritage* (Edinburgh, 1985), which provides a partial list of his funerary monuments in Dean Cemetery. Maclean lists the *Dictionary of National Biography* and Rupert Gunnis’s *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1830* as sources.

Helen Smailes’s *A Portrait Gallery for Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1985) refers to Steell as the doyen of Scottish sculpture at the time of the Portrait Gallery’s institution, and the fact that the Board of Manufactures bought many of Steell’s artist’s plasters when the sculptor sold off the contents of his studio in 1888. Two calotypes of Steell, and two of Steell’s father are reprinted in Sara Stevenson’s *David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson* (Edinburgh, 1981). Calotypes of the Scott monument, and Steell’s *Sir Walter Scott* and *Duchess of*
Buccleuch are also included. The Hill and Adamson calotypes are in the permanent collection of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The calotype of Steell is also featured in three other books by Stevenson, *The Personal Art of D.O. Hill* (Edinburgh, 2002); *Facing the Light: The Photography of Hill and Adamson* (Edinburgh, 2002), and *The Companion Guide to Photography in the National Galleries of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2001).

*Burnsiana*, by James A. Mackay (*Ayrshire*, 1988) profiles Steell’s Burns statues and busts, similarly to Goodwillie’s publication. Though his account contains several inaccuracies regarding Steell’s early career, his examination of the Burns work is sound. M.H. Noel-Paton and Patricia Campbell’s *Noel Paton* (Edinburgh, 1990) mentions Steell and his bronze foundry several times within Campbell’s chronological review of Paton’s diaries held in the National Library of Scotland. The diaries themselves, though difficult to read, are a colourful and evocative source of anecdotal material regarding the nineteenth-century Edinburgh art world.


Elizabeth Darby and Nicola Smith’s book *The Cult of the Prince Consort* (New Haven & London, 1983) contains a concise account of the circumstances surrounding the commission and erection of the Scottish
National Monument to the Prince Consort. The authors carefully employed the letters and reports in the Buccleuch Muniments and the Royal Archives for their primary source material.

**Reference Works**

Steell is given entries in several reference directories. None of these accounts diverge dramatically from the biographical material written before his death in 1891. There is a one-page entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* published in 1898. He is also listed in *The Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (London, 1881), the *Modern English Biography* (Vol. III, 1892-1921), Bénézit’s dictionary of art, Thieme-Becker’s *Kunstlerlexikon*, Peter J.M. McEwan’s *The Dictionary of Scottish Art and Architecture* (Woodbridge, 1994), Rupert Gunnis’s *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851* (1968), and Fiona Pearson’s entry for Steell in *The Dictionary of Art* (New York, 1996) published by Macmillan/Grove publishing.

Many volumes list his work but do not include biographical information. One example would be an important reference source, Frank Rinder’s *The Royal Scottish Academy 1826-1916* (Bath, 1975), which gives Steell’s exhibition record at the RSA, but does not include a biographical account. Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Buildings of England*, lists the Burns statue in London’s Embankment in the London volume, and the Wiltshire volume notes the recumbent figure of the *Earl of Shrewsbury* in the Church of Ingestre, Staffordshire. The volumes on Edinburgh and Glasgow note most of the major works in these respective areas.
Richard Ormond’s catalogue published by Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, *Early Victorian Portraits* (London, 1973) lists thirteen of Steell’s works according to sitter, including his busts of Queen Victoria, Thomas de Quincey, Earl Grey, Prince Albert, and Sir Robert Peel. Ormond also includes Steell’s statue of James Wilson, formerly at Calcutta, but now in London. Steell’s work is often cited in the iconography section of each sitter’s entry provided by Ormond.


**Periodicals**

Newspapers and journals are the richest contemporary source of critical comment upon Steell’s work. Also of fundamental importance are the primary sources of correspondence, letter books, minute books and reports of the various monument committees and foundations associated with Steell, such as the Board of Manufactures minutes and the records of
the Royal Scottish Academy. These types of evidence, combined with the relevant news stories, disclose the best examples of the artist’s working practice. We know from minutes, letters and news articles what Steell was paid for certain projects, and we know that he employed assistants. However, with the exception of the Queen Victoria project for the Board of Manufactures, we do not know specific details—how many men, what they were paid, who they were and what they did for Steell.

Newspaper stories tended to follow a similar pattern: an introductory story, usually of a studio visit, followed by periodic feature articles regarding the progress of a project. As a project neared completion, the review would provide a cursory description of the composition. If the work was a public one, the article covering its inauguration would include an extended description of the work, and a lengthy account of the speeches, alongside editorial comment.

Magazine articles were usually short updates, which covered the ongoing process of a project, or the state of work in progress during a studio visit. Brief reviews were also given annually of any works Steell displayed in the Royal Scottish Academy. Magazines covering Steell’s work included the Academy, Architect, Art Journal, Builder, Edinburgh Literary Journal, and the Illustrated London News. Many of the articles that appeared between 1829 and 1876 are included in the Steell scrapbooks.

Twentieth-century Journals and Catalogues

The 1991 catalogue of the National Galleries of Scotland exhibition, Virtue and Vision: Sculpture and Scotland 1540-1990, supplemented the most
comprehensive Scottish sculpture exhibition in recent years. It contains a chapter assessing Steell written by Fiona Pearson of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, a leading scholar in British Sculpture. “Sir John Steell and the Idea of a Scottish School of Sculpture” is the finest concise account of Steell’s life, work and influence. Pearson credits the Steell Scrapbooks, and Woodward’s PhD thesis as her main sources.

Helen Smailes of the National Gallery of Scotland, an eminent authority on Scottish Art, has mentioned Steell several times in various articles, most notably her contribution to the 1991 *Virtue and Vision* catalogue, “Thomas Campbell and Laurence Macdonald: The Roman Solution to the Scottish Sculptor’s Dilemma.” She cited the two older Scottish sculptors’ influence on Steell in the form of Macdonald’s 1829 display of *Ajax and Patroclus* at the Royal Institution, as well as the educational benefit Steell received from Thomas Campbell’s efforts in acquiring antique casts for the Trustees’ Academy.

This particular issue is covered more thoroughly in her “History of the Statue Gallery of the Trustees’ Academy in Edinburgh,” also published in 1991 in the *Journal of the History of Collections*. Smailes again cites Steell as an example of the edifying effect of the cast collection upon Scottish sculptors.

In *The Queen’s Image*, written in partnership with Duncan Thomson in 1987, Steell is mentioned alongside his father in a brief review of the carvings the Steell partnership executed for Duns Castle. The assertion was made that the subject would have been familiar to Steell from his time at the Trustees’ Academy, where the iconography of Mary Queen of Scots was a regular feature of the curriculum. Smailes closed her account suggesting that
the collaborative venture at Duns could be the earliest surviving example of Steell’s figural sculpture.57

C.J. Burnett’s “A Carving of the Royal Arms by John Steell” appearing in The Journal of the Heraldry Society of Scotland was the first article ever written on the work of John Steell, Senior.58 Burnett consulted primary material in Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, and in doing so compiled the first accurate picture of the Steell family business in general, and in particular narrowed down the time frame in which the family settled in Edinburgh.

Nicholas Penny’s “‘Amor publicus posuit’: monuments for the people and of the people” for Burlington Magazine, Volume CXXIX, December 1987, mentions the Consort Memorial and its use of symbolic mourning figures in contemporary dress. Fiona Pearson in Virtue and Vision cited this as being influential in terms of Steell’s awareness of contemporary developments regarding monuments in Europe. Steell’s use of mourning figures actually pre-dates common use abroad.

Mark Stocker’s 1999 article for the Bulletin of New Zealand Art History, “‘This beautiful statue of thee, Immortal Bard of Ayr’: Sir John Steell’s Statue of Robert Burns in Dunedin,” was the first contemporary journal article to assess a single work by Steell. Stocker used local Dunedin newspaper sources, as well as Goodwillie’s and James A. Mackay’s books on Burns iconography to assess the New Zealand version of Steell’s most widely travelled monument.

**Accounts and Anecdotes of Steell’s life**

Over the course of his long life, the accepted resumé of John Steell’s career assumed a certain amount of orthodoxy. However, there are many
gaps in our knowledge of his life—particularly his early education and career—and even the most detailed accounts are at times frustratingly vague. The earliest evidence of his professional sculptural activity comes from catalogue entries for the Scottish Academy in 1827 and the Glasgow Dilettanti Society in 1828. The earliest surviving reviews of his work appeared in the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* of 1829. Coverage was sparse until notices began to appear for the *Alexander and Bucephalus* of 1833, when he truly made an impact on the public. One of the most crucial, yet poorly documented periods is his 1829 trip to Rome. No first, or even second-hand accounts or correspondence have been located.

The initial biographical account that formed the core reference material for later writings was the *Scotsman* obituary of 16 September 1891. This was in turn utilised in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and Rupert Gunnis's *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1850*. Taking a passage from the *Scotsman* obituary notice as a starting point, and measuring it against subsequent writings, we can see how accounts drew from earlier versions, sometimes in slightly altered form, sometimes virtually verbatim:

The *Scotsman*, 1891: "He introduced bronze casting into Scotland, building at his own expense a foundry of his own, which he made available for casting the works of other artists."

*D.N.B.*, 1898: "He first introduced artistic bronze casting into Scotland, and built at his own expense a foundry in which not only his own works but also those of other artists could be reproduced in metal."

Gunnis, 1968: "He was also the first to introduce artistic bronze casting into Scotland, and built at his own expense a foundry, so that not only his works, but those of other artists could be reproduced in metal."

Steell's work has not been the subject of extensive art historical criticism or evaluation. Contemporary comment on his projects tends to be
verbose and descriptive, especially in newspaper accounts. Scottish journalists seemed to universally support any effort as a proof of native ambition and ability. Woodward observed that even very early in his career, Steell received plaudits from the press, when according to tradition, there should have been a certain amount of well-intended criticism and suggestions directed towards improvement. The only trenchant criticism aimed at Steell’s work was posthumous, and appeared in the London periodical The Portfolio: “The statues in Prince’s Street are all poor, but none of them are quite so bad as the Burns, a replica of which adorns the Embankment Garden near Charing Cross Station.”
Lacuna

We know more about Steell’s work than his life. No catalogue exists of his possessions, his library, or the artwork he owned. We do not know if he had a favourite book or poet, or to what newspaper he subscribed, if any. No photographs of the interior of his house, his studio, or his foundry have thus far come to light. There is no record of a will. He had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, but no purely personal correspondence has yet emerged.

What this account intends to do is to analyse and present for the first time all the available evidence of Steell’s life and work in a comprehensive way, and place it within the wider context of Scottish sculpture. The thesis attempts to do this by a careful examination of the major works within a chronological framework, balanced with a survey of the contemporary literature and reactions to his projects.

In evaluating Steell’s life and work, every effort has been made to include the relevant original documents, where available. Newspaper accounts, committee minutes and documents, reviews and letters of involved parties are employed as much as possible. The Scottish newspapers had their own partisan agendas, and were not impartial. While often oblique, periodicals such as the Scotsman, Caledonian Mercury, Edinburgh Courier, Art Union, and others, were the principal contemporary organs of debate for sculptural projects. Discourse regarding public monuments in particular was conducted and disseminated vigorously through the media.
In some areas where much is known—particularly the commissioning procedures for the Scott, Wellington and Consort memorials—there is detailed chronological coverage. Conversely, little material survives regarding the monuments of Steell’s middle career, as from c.1850 to 1865 most of his work was awarded to him directly, without public competition or submission of designs to a supervisory committee. The same is true for much of his portraiture. In such instances, newspaper accounts are the most prominent source of information.

Periods where documentation or recorded coverage is lacking include Steell’s early career, c. 1824 to 1833 (though there are some surviving articles from the Edinburgh Literary Journal from 1829 to 1833) and his stay in Rome in 1829. Primary evidence surrounding the start of the Grove Foundry in 1848 survives only in contemporary newspaper accounts; no other documents have been found. Additionally, no material has been discovered pertaining to Steell’s studio and foundry, how many men were employed, or the details of their employment. It is not known if Steell had any students or apprentices. D.W. Stevenson was mentioned as a former student by the Scotsman in 1888, but this was never corroborated, and Stevenson’s own obituary names William Brodie as his teacher.

From 1833 to 1877, the Steell Scrapbooks allow for a more complete understanding of the sculptor’s activities. As Steell often worked on more than one major project at a time, there is a fairly continual progression of documentation within these four volumes. There are gaps, particularly with regard to various bust commissions, for which there are few committee-related papers. After 1876 Steell mostly worked on his various Burns
projects, for which there are several reviews and newspaper accounts; the actual committee papers themselves have not been discovered. No committee papers or minutes have yet surfaced for the Blaikie, Lord de Saumarez, Dalhousie, James Wilson, John Wilson, Dr. Chalmers, Allan Ramsay, Lord Boyle, Lord Jeffrey, Tyndall Bruce, Sir David Baxter or George Kinloch statues, but newspaper accounts exist for all of them.

Little is known about Steell’s iconographic sources, unless a particular example is given in a newspaper or magazine article. It is often unclear if the information was given directly by Steell or is the conjecture of the journalist. Steell was clearly in touch with the wider Scottish arts community through his work with the Royal Scottish Academy, as well as his periodic contact with the Royal Academy in London. His work consistently maintained a high technical standard, always employing a moderate mode of expression, with neoclassicism as a basis. This grand and austere style maintained its allure in Scotland well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

Steell displayed the incredible potential for self-improvement and upward class mobility that was possible in Victorian Scotland. By talent and ability, coupled with hard work and patronage, Steell, like several sculptors before him, went from the son of a tradesman to a knight of the realm. He never became rich, but neither did he experience poverty or bankruptcy. He achieved a very rare status in that people from all stations and classes seemed to like and respect this shy, affable and reticent man, whom Queen Victoria described in 1838 as “rather good looking, and very unassuming and quiet.”
Steell seemed constantly preoccupied with the improvement of arts in Scotland, and dedicated to the proposition that what was good for Scottish art would be good for him. In this evaluation, it has been decided to take as given the concept of a Scottish Art, as understood by contemporary writers such as Robert Brydall and George Cleghorn. Steell was a Scottish sculptor by virtue of his nationality, his training and his stated goals for Scottish art. While his work in itself might not always be seen as particularly “Scottish” in terms of subject, metaphor or imagery, he did, in his own way execute work that can be seen to fit into the wider understanding of what the Victorian Scottish art programme was trying to achieve. In this light, the aim is to show how the man embodied his title as “Sculptor for Scotland.”
Fig. 10. John Steell Senior, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland
Chapter Two
Beginnings: 1804-1829

Sir John Robert Steell, RSA was born in Aberdeen on 18 September 1804, the first son of Margaret Gourlay (1778-1857) and John Steell (1770-1849), a carver and gilder. (Fig.10) Steell was fourth of eleven children, six male and five female. Most biographical accounts report that Steell Sr. moved the family to Edinburgh in 1805, but C.J. Burnett wrote in “A Carving of the Royal Arms by John Steell”:

...local Aberdeen merchants such as John Eiven ...had an account from Steell in January 1806. By April of that year Steell and his family had moved to London but they did not stay there long as he appears for the first time in the Edinburgh Post Office Directory for 1806/7 where he is described as a carver, gilder and printseller at 2 Low Terrace."

The business moved to 8 Leith Street in 1811, to 44 Leith Street in 1813, yet again to 34 Princes Street, and finally in 1823, to 6 Hanover Street.”

The family lived on Calton Hill, first at number 5, and later at number 20, which remained the family home until the death of Margaret Gourlay Steell in 1857.70 Steell presumably had a basic education before becoming an apprentice to his father at age fourteen, and starting drawing classes at the Trustees’ Academy in 1818.

Steell showed an early precocity in drawing, which was nurtured by his family. His Scotsman obituary acknowledged his father’s influence and included a reminiscence of a childhood friend:

...it must have been about the year 1812, when you were about eight and I about ten years of age, we and your sisters used to play children’s games together, our parents’ houses being on the steep road ascending to Calton Hill. You were a delicate-looking, gentle-spirited little fellow, and wore a little round jacket.

The “plainstanes” or foot-pavement was, as usual then with boys, a favourite place of amusement with our spinning-tops. I remember one day when you greatly surprised me
Fig. 11. Academy students would draw from the cast collection after mastering drawing from engravings. This drawing of Michelangelo’s Pietà was made by Steell’s friend William Bell Scott in 1827. The cast is still held by Edinburgh College of Art. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland

Fig. 12. The Royal Scottish Academy sculpture gallery, c.1890-1900

Photo: Royal Scottish Academy
by drawing with a piece of chalk (by what appeared to me two or three strokes dashed off without the least apparent trouble) a figure of a galloping horse of a large size, so entirely different from and exceeding in point of character and excellence anything that children ever did that it greatly impressed me then, and I never afterwards forgot it. 31

It had been thought that Steell was at the Trustees’ Academy under the instruction of John Graham, but the minutes of the Board of Manufactures show that Graham died in November 1817. 32 The Board of Manufactures received nine applications for the open position. The candidates listed in the minutes of 16 December 1817 were some of the finest Scottish artists of the time, including Alexander Nasmyth (1758-1825), William Allan (1782-1850), John Watson [Gordon](1788-1864), James Howe (1780-1836), Andrew Wilson (1780-1848), and Alexander Carse (c.1770-1843). 33

By January of the new year, the Board had chosen Andrew Wilson based upon: “the Board being highly satisfied with the many respectable testimonials of the character and ability of Mr. Wilson…and the Board having also seen with much satisfaction the specimens of painting and of Drawing lodged by him.” 34 With its new master, the academy again started teaching the young apprentices of Scotland—first by drawing from engravings, or “from the flat,” and later from the growing collection of casts. (Figs.11-12) Steell had probably petitioned for entry to the Academy in 1817, just before or after Graham’s death, as the minutes of 3 February 1818 read:

The Secretary presented petitions which have been lying for some months in the office from young men praying to be admitted into the Academy…
It was agreed that John Steel [sic] and James Muir apprentices to John Steel Carver & Gilder, Daniel Sume, who intends to follow the profession of an Artist or an Architect, Henry Forbes apprentice to David Watt Seal Engraver, and Alexander Gun Lapidary and student of painting shall all be admitted…” 35
Report to The Board of Trustees of the Students attending the Academy.

June 3rd, 1822

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Artistic</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Brown</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jones</td>
<td>Engraving</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Strong</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 13. National Archives of Scotland, NG2/2/21: Report to Board of Trustees by Andrew Wilson.
Steell began instruction under Wilson after the opening of the new session on 23 March 1818. Steell’s original petition to study has not survived, but two others have: his 1820 petition to continue for another year, and his 1824 petition to be readmitted. The four year break was caused by the bankruptcy of John Steell Sr.’s carving and gilding business. According to Burnett, by 1822 the debts had been cleared, and the family was trading again.\(^7\)

Steell’s academy education was almost wholly composed of drawing from engravings and casts of classical subjects that Andrew Wilson imported from Italy.\(^7\) Upon successful completion of a two year course, Steell applied to begin drawing and modelling from casts.\(^7\) Steell’s 1820 petition, written by him in the requisite third person reads:

...he has already been favoured by your Honours by having been two years at your Accademy for Drawing and the Tuition of your Professor Mr Wilson but which time has been wholly occupied in drawing from the flat. But as it would be of escencial service to him in the prosecution of his Business in the Art of Carving to have the advantage of being instructed in drawing from the Round. Therefor I would solicit the favour of your Honours to be still continued as a pupil to enjoy the Privileedge as requested...\(^7\)

The minutes of the Board of Trustees have periodic reports from Andrew Wilson regarding vacancies and the progress of continuing students. One of these reports, in the form of a chart has survived. (Fig.13) According to the table, Wilson regarded Steell in terms of Talent as Moderate. His ratings in Application and Progress were Good. Steell’s draughtsmanship was probably the only criterion of this assessment. As Lindsay Errington writes:

No painting or original composition would have been seen in progress by the visitor. This was not the purpose of the course...Amongst these students, only some were intending fine artists. Others were coach and herald painters, engravers, cabinet makers, carpenters, or
even 'damask pattern drawer'...Everyone, regardless of profession, would have been doing exactly the same work.  

At this time, William White was the only Trustees' Academy student training as a sculptor. Steell was following the path of a decorative carver. There was no difference between the provision Steell and White were receiving. There did not seem to be any specialised training for sculptors at the school at this time, the fundamental skills of draughtsmanship being stressed for all students, regardless of future occupation. This meant that for either an apprentice sculptor or an apprentice carver, the most advanced study available was drawing and modelling from the casts.  

Scottish contacts with sculptural Rome were facilitated by the presence there of Thomas Campbell (1790-1858) and Laurence Macdonald (1799-1878). Campbell formed a sympathetic link with Wilson and the Board of Manufactures, and served as a de facto agent for the Academy, finding and shipping statues and casts, while accepting no commission for himself. Steell was thus able to receive a basic grounding in the accepted contemporary neoclassical taste in sculpture. Additionally, the painting curriculum reflected an increasing encouragement of the use of detailed naturalist imagery constituted from Scottish history as subject matter, following the successes of David Wilkie (1785-1841) and Alexander Nasmyth. This type of visual source material was of particular utility to Steell as an ornamental carver; from very early on the value of balance between naturalism and idealism would have been stressed.

Steell would also have had access to books and prints. No catalogue of teaching material from Steell's time at the Academy has emerged, but
there is a handwritten catalogue, compiled in 1838 by R. Little, the Trustees’ Academy librarian. It is likely that many of the listed books were available during Steell’s tenure at the school. These books include:

No. 1 Völbungen zum Freihandzeichnen [Preliminary Exercises to Free Drawing] 1st and 2nd courses 60 plates
No. 2 Ornamentum Leichtrungs Schule 5 numbers 100 plates...
No. 6 Arabische und Alt Italienische Verzierungen [Arabic and Old Italian Decoration] 30 plates
No. 7 Les Ruines de Palmyre Wood & Dawkins 57 plates
No. 8 Leider & Bilder 61 pages & Index Reineck, N.
No. 9 Die Hobzarchitectur 2 numbers Bottic her 19 plates
No. 10 Classische Verzierungen [Classical Decoration] 2 numbers 12 plates...
No. 17 Pompeii Herculaneum Stabie (Wm. Lahn) 2 Vols 100 plates...
No. 21 L’Villiamay’s Ornamental Sculpture 37 plates
No. 22 Encyclopaedia of Ornament Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 each 3 plates...
No. 24 Le Jupiter Olympien (by Par. M. Quatremere de Quincy) 1 fol. Vol...
No. 26 Paxton’s Magazine of Botany Nos 1 to 17 inclusive...
No. 28 Werner’s Nomenclature of Colours 1 Vol.
No. 29 Iconographic Grecque 3 Vols. Visconti
No. 30 Elgin & Phigaleian marbles in British Museum 2 Vols.
No. 31 Rossini’s Views of Ancient Rome 1 Vol.
No. 32 Musee des Antiques 3 Vols. Fol. Boullien et St. Victor
No. 33 Ancient Monuments in the city of Ercolano 8 vols. Folio
No. 34 Engravings or views of Elgin Cathedral with letter press in cover

The above 4 nos [31-34] have been lodged in the library of the fine arts for some years on account of that library being open at stated times for the students to study these books along with what belongs to said institution, and is under care of their officer R.L. 1838

No. 38 Le Tre Porte Del Battistero Di Firenze or Gates of the Baptistry at Florence by Pisano & Ghiberti

Most of the drawing books are of German origin, but there are also represented several volumes which from their titles, presumably depict classical statues, architecture and ornament. The catalogue begins to give acquisition dates at entry number forty-three, beginning in 1841. Before this time, it is conjectural, but still very possible that the listed books were available for Steell’s purusal and study. Given the range of the collection from classical views to Scottish landscapes and botany, it can be concluded that Steell was receiving an education that was somewhat limited in scope, but still emphasised emulation of the antique with attention to nature.
Steell family bankruptcy and sequestration

In 1820, Steell’s education was interrupted by his father’s bankruptcy. Steell Sr., a carver and gilder, also operated a woodworking shop and storefront establishment where the family traded in furniture, stationary, art supplies, and prints. In 1819, Steell Sr. had become Convenor of the Society of the Incorporated Trades of Calton, a commercial group which regulated trade in the neighbourhood. This required him to take responsibility for the group fund, which had been in debt before his tenure. It would seem that some members with a grudge called in their notes, and accused Steell Sr. of defrauding the general fund.⁶

Additionally, a local economic recession, coupled with poor planning, caused the bankruptcy. Steell Sr. had bid too low for several decorative carving jobs, particularly one in the Signet Library, Edinburgh—the labour and materials costing £68 more than the estimates.⁷ Steell had also lost money with eight separate print publishing schemes.⁸

While the Steells’ financial situation caused great upset for the family, the sequestration process provides several indicators of the state of the household in 1819-20, as careful inventories of the domestic assets and possessions were required. From these inventories, we know how many rooms the Steell flat had, what furniture they owned, the books they read, and the fact that they employed servants.

From these surviving records, it is clear that the Steells belonged to an upwardly-mobile, skilled artisan class, as described in T.C. Smout’s A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950:
The skilled, urban male artisan...in the thriving occupations, expected to earn in good times anything from 13-30s a week depending on his trade and level of expertise: anything above the foot of the scale gave him a more or less comfortable margin above subsistence. He could keep his wife at home, send his children to school instead of to work, and accumulate a modicum of solid material possessions—good bedding, furniture, a nice longcase clock, and so on.

The sederunt books of the bankruptcy process were kept by David McGibbon, Wright, who was the Trustee of the estate during the entire procedure. The books cover the period from 1819 to 1826, and document the practice of sequestration: John Steell Sr. was obliged to live in the Holyrood debtors sanctuary, the Steell family’s household and business goods were inventoried, valued, and offered at a roup sale, the proceeds of which went towards paying dividends to the creditors. Similar procedures were enacted to liquidate the family’s heritable property—their flat on Calton Hill, and the lease on their store and workshop at 34 Princes Street. The debts owed to the business were also sold at a roup sale.

The Steell home was described as “the westmost flat of that garret flat or attic story in Eldin Street.” The rooms as inventoried included a dining room, parlour, west bed room, east bed room, low back parlour and kitchen. The Steells had a comparatively comfortable and well-appointed home. The inventory and valuation for the dining room included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grate fender &amp; fire irons</td>
<td>£2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpet &amp; hearth rug</td>
<td>£2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Chairs</td>
<td>£3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of Dining Tables</td>
<td>£5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofa</td>
<td>£4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano forte &amp; Stool</td>
<td>£10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Window curtains</td>
<td>£2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Japanned Tea trays &amp; two servers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a small mahogany table</td>
<td>£1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Tea vase</td>
<td>£1.5/6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Prints</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Sketch by Carse</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a mirror</td>
<td>£2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronze candlesticks on chimney</td>
<td>12/6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A miniature model in frame</td>
<td>6/...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the Steells had no paintings or sculpture, there were a number of prints, not to mention the “Sketch by Carse,” presumably Alexander Carse (c.1770-1843). The piano was an expensive luxury item, and an indication of refinement and education.

Since Steell Sr. ran an art shop, there are many artists and architects named on his debtors list, including the painter Archibald Skirving (1749-1819) and the architect William Burn (1789-1870), who would later serve on the subcommittee of the *Scott Monument* project. It could be that John Steell Jr. first met many of his later patrons, sitters and supporters in his father’s shop. In addition to exposure to art through prints and engravings, he was also making first contact with the men who would enable him to exercise his talents in later years.

We can also assume that learning and religion were important in the Steell household. The list of books, though not extensive, is particularly revealing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doddriges Expositor</td>
<td>4 vols</td>
<td>£1.4/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pooles Bible</td>
<td>4 Do.</td>
<td>£1.10/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitby on the Testament</td>
<td>2 vols</td>
<td>15/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Annotations</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinbg. Encyclopedia</td>
<td>25 parts</td>
<td>£12.12/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crudeni Concordana</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume &amp; Smollets England</td>
<td>16 vols</td>
<td>£1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rollins Ancient History</td>
<td>8 vols</td>
<td>£1.10/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bells Travels</td>
<td>2 vols</td>
<td>4/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beurcks [sic] Birds</td>
<td>2 vols</td>
<td>15/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Books Sermons &amp; tracts</td>
<td>40 vol.</td>
<td>£2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At twelve pounds, twelve shillings, the Steell family encyclopaedia was one of the most expensive items in the entire house—worth even more than the piano and stool. The first four listed books are all on religion. *Doddriges Expositor* was formally titled: *The family expositor: or, A paraphrase*
Fig. 14. James Gillespie Graham, from Crombie's Modern Athenians of 1847. Graham had first encountered Steell when the young apprentice was working with his father on the carvings at Duns Castle.

and version of the New Testament, by P. Dodderidge, D.D.. Likewise, “Whitby on the Testament” by Daniel Whitby, was fully titled: Paraphrase and commentary on the New Testament. Theodore Haak’s “Dutch Annotations” was one of the first translations of the Bible into a vernacular, and would have been of great importance to any Protestant household. Cruden Concordana was presumably Alexander Cruden’s Complete Concordance to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, first published in London and Edinburgh in 1736.

The family’s other volumes all encompass history, science and the natural world. The facts available in the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, Hume & Smollet’s England, Rollins’ Ancient History, Bell’s Travels and Beurce’s [Bewick’s] Birds would be of use to craftsmen required to carve a variety of decorative projects in wood. The Steell library reflects a family with a wide range of interests, as well as a need for an equally wide command of factual information.

The inventory for the store and workshop is sixteen pages long, and lists many types of tools and materials—especially different woods, papers and drawing supplies. Other items included:

2 Lots of Hunting prints: a Lyon, a bulls head, a Tiger ... 7 Prints from Dulwich gallery; 16 Landscape Drawings; 7 Patterns; 16 Drawings of flowers; 11 Landscape Drawings; 2 Birds; 2 Landscapes; 1 Print of Wellington; 4 Portfolios; 43 Sheets Mountain boards; 22 Sheets single bristol...

A sample of the valued prints as inventoried shows:

1  Framed print of Miss Duncan  8/
1  Print of Sir H. Moncrieff  10/6
1  Do. President Blair  15/
1  Do. Lord Newton  10/6
1  Landscape framed & glazed  10/
1  Print of Walter Scott  15/
1  Henners model of Elgin Marbles  £2 2/
Princess Charlotte & Prince Cobourg framed and glazed £6
Daniel in the Lyons den Do.  £1 5/
The Jewish Harp  Do.  7/6d
Fig. 17. John Steell Senior, Scenes from the life of Mary Queen of Scots (detail), c. 1818, Duns Castle, East Lothian. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 18. John Steell Senior, Coat of Arms, c. 1813. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
These two lists are particularly revealing, for they form a specific inventory of much of the domestic visual artistic material available to Steell as a young man. The “Prints from Dulwich gallery...Landscape Drawings...Print of Wellington...Print of Walter Scott...Henners model of Elgin Marbles...Daniel in the Lyons den...Monument of Viscount Nelson...The Jewish Harp,” (which could be David Wilkie’s _The Jew’s Harp_, or a seventeenth-century Dutch equivalent) all contributed to the artistic environment of the young apprentice. The hunting scenes (with horses), as well as the depictions of Wellington and Scott, illustrate the visual culture of early nineteenth-century Edinburgh, as well as giving precursors to subjects that Steell would execute during his career.

Mrs. Steell’s uncle, Gershom Gourlay died intestate in December 1825, leaving her a potential £2000. On 19 December 1825, William Gourlay Jr., Steell Sr.’s brother-in-law, wrote with a proposition:

_Sir—If your Creditors will give you a Discharge upon payment of 2/6 per pound in addition to the dividend already paid, I agree to guarantee the payment of that sum upon your whole just and lawful debts ranked under sequestration as soon as they have all subscribed a formal agreement to a Discharge._

As there are no further entries in the sederunt books, it seems that with this agreement, the sequestration was discharged after February 1826 and the proceedings wound up. John Steell Junior also had periodic money troubles throughout his career as a sculptor, but he never suffered the embarrassment of bankruptcy, which had disturbed both his education and domestic life.
Fig. 19. Tobacconist’s Figure, 19th Century, Huntly House Museum, Edinburgh.
Photo: City of Edinburgh District Council

Fig. 20. John Steell Senior., Tobacconist’s Figure, 1835, Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.
Photo: Roco Lelandop
Steell returned to the Trustees’ Academy in 1824, after a space of four years, showing that the family’s financial situation had improved before its final settlement in 1826. Steell was now 20 years old, and had been working with his father for six years. He may have become a journeyman, as his petition to re-enter stated that he was “a Carver and Gilder,” not an apprentice. A postscript on his petition showed that he was now capable of producing busts: “Along with this is a Model of a Head from the life.” The architect James Gillespie Graham (1776-1855) endorsed Steell’s petition, noting: “We consider the Petitioner a young man of promising talents and beg to recommend him to the notice of the Board of Trustees.” (Fig.14)

On 30 November 1826, Steell married Elizabeth Graham (c.1810-1885), the daughter of Edinburgh merchant John Graham and mother Anne Mein. (Figs.15-16) Since the completion of his apprenticeship in 1824, Steell had been working with his father at the shop at 6 Hanover Street. The business traded under the name John Steell and Company. It is unclear whether at this point Steell considered himself an artist or an artisan, a sculptor or a wood carver. By the following year, he had created a work that clearly indicated his ambitions for fine art.

Commercial carving

Steell’s first sources of artistic experience were encountered through his father. As stated above, Steell displayed a precocity at draughtsmanship, and was encouraged by his father. Growing up surrounded by woodworking, as well as prints and engravings, all accompanied by the comings and goings of his father’s customers, many of them artists and architects, must have steeped him in the visual and aesthetic environment of
Fig. 21. John Steell Senior's Trade Label
Photo: National Monument Register of Scotland
the day. This was primarily neoclassicism—understood to be the emulation of classical art in terms of subject, composition, dress and accoutrement following the examples of Canova and Thorvaldsen—but tempered by the Scottish propensity for naturalism in genre and portraiture.

Steell Sr.’s activities as a framer, gilder and printseller aside, his main trade was decorative carving, both for architecture and for ships. Several projects survive, most notably in carvings of scenes of the life of Mary Queen of Scots for Duns Castle. (Fig.17) A surviving 1813 Royal coat of arms carving for Leith Customs House by Steell Sr. is described in C.J. Burnett’s article ‘A Carving of the Royal Arms by John Steell’ in The Journal of the Society of Heraldry of Scotland. (Fig.18) The work for Duns Castle was examined by Duncan Thomson and Helen Smailes in the 1987 publication The Queen’s Image, where they suggested that the carved figures could very well be the first known examples of Steell’s figurative work.131

Closely aligned with the decorative carving of his father’s business was the market for sign figures. (Fig.19) Since the eighteenth century these figures had been used to a great extent within Edinburgh. The National Museum of Scotland holds an 1835 piece carved by Steell Sr. of a Turk with a long pipe, which was used for several successive tobacconists in Edinburgh’s Princes Street. (Fig.20) Steell would have executed some of his first figure carvings in this genre. Given their function, these figures were broadly carved, brightly painted, and visually direct; as such they had much in common with his first major work, the St. Andrew for the North British Insurance Company.
Figs. 22 & 23. John Steell, *St. Andrew*, 1827, Kilwinning Lodge, Dalkeith. The architect's elevation drawing of the North British Fire Insurance Building features Steell's composition. (Thanks to Dr. Joe Rock for alerting me to the drawing.)

Photo: Fig. 22, Bruce Lennon; Fig. 23, Dr. Joe Rock.

Fig. 24. Duquesnoy, *St. Andrew*, 1640, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. Photo: Warburg Institute.

Fig. 25. Steell presumably used an engraving like this one to execute his statue. He did not visit Rome until 1829.

Photo: Warburg Institute.
The St. Andrew Statue

By 1827, John Steell had completed his formal education, and was working in partnership with his father; the business was now known as John Steell and Son. To what extent he was modelling is uncertain, but we do have clear evidence that he was carving wood, according to his training in his father’s business. Edinburgh had experienced increasing commercial activity since the opening of the century, and the Steells were in a position to enjoy the benefits of both an increased volume of trade and a rising demand for fine art and craft goods. The city had a burgeoning trade in furniture making, musical instruments, and other domestic luxuries in which the Steell family traded: mirrors, frames, decorative carving, firescreens, and prints. (Fig.21)

Steell’s earliest recorded work of this time was a monumental statue of St. Andrew in painted wood, which was installed on the façade of the North British Fire & Life Insurance Company at 1 Hanover Street. Before its emplacement, it was Steell’s first submitted work in the 1827 Scottish Academy exhibition. The Edinburgh Literary Journal of 18 August 1829 mentioned the work, praising it as “a striking and spirited production.”

The significance of the St. Andrew statue within Steell’s career lies in the fact that its style, execution and commission clearly illustrate the development the young sculptor was experiencing in both skill and ambition. The work was arguably his first major commission as a sculptor, and Woodward speculated that the remuneration received from it financed
Figs. 26 & 27. Steell’s freestone copy of the statue also closely followed the original by Duquesnoy. Photo, Fig. 23: Rocco Lissadie.

Figs. 28 & 29. Steell’s wooden version shares the restrained, classical effect of the later freestone statue. Photos: Rocco Lissadie.
his sojourn in Rome. The statue is nearly identical to the 1640 work by Flemish sculptor Francois Duquesnoy (1597-1643) sited in St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome. (Fig.24) Steell would most likely have known of the statue from engravings, rather than from any Scottish cast collections. (Fig.25) Most intriguing is the link the work represents between Steell’s work as a woodcarver, and his subsequent efforts as a sculptor.

As the statue is one of the most famous examples of the Baroque style, the young sculptor can be seen moving into “fine art” expression, and away from the mercantile necessity of broad, painted commercial object-carving which occupied him up until this time. One main indication of this development is that the statue, though carved in wood, was “painted to resemble stone”—the material of “true” art. As the later replacement figure for the insurance company was in freestone, the original clearly marks the point where Steell stopped considering himself a woodcarver/artisan and began to work in stone. (Fig.26) No subsequent works by Steell in wood have ever been found; it would seem that he never again executed any major project in wood.

While the St. Andrew could be considered as “Scottish” in theme, due to the subject, its style is derivative of Baroque art. This was unique for Steell, as virtually all of his early work is closely associated with Greek or Roman classicism. Steell’s freestone treatment of the subject is particularly restrained in comparison with the original, the most marked difference being the depiction of the head, especially the facial features, and his treatment of hair. (Figs. 27-29) Steell’s Andrew has a more closed mouth, and the hair and beard are shown with much tighter curls. The overall effect of
Fig. 30. David Scott, *John Steell*, charcoal on paper, c. 1827. Museum Services, University of Dundee. Photo: University of Dundee.

Fig. 31. David Scott, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
Steell’s work does not suffer in comparison with the original, but Duquesnoy’s effort is more supple and flowing, while Steell’s appears more upright and brittle. To some extent this could be because of the textural differences between marble and freestone; the wooden figure is quite elegantly Baroque in effect.

While he was executing this work, Steell was also continuing his self-education. In April 1827, his friend David Scott (1806-1849) instituted the “Edinburgh Life Academy” to study and draw the figure from live models. (Figs.30-31) According to a summary of the Academy’s activities by William Bell Scott, Steell was a charter member. Scott also suggested the group was diligent: “that they were assiduous is testified by the same names, with few additions, appearing all through the book till February 1832, at which time the Royal Institution began their school for drawing from the living model.”

Steell must have been a dedicated draughtsman, for in the 1828 Trustees’ Academy minutes: “It was noted that there were no vacancies at the Trustees Academy. However, John Steell Jr. and J. Middleton Hewitson (both who had petitioned for re-admission) were granted permission to draw from the casts in the Trustees collection on Saturdays for another two years.” Given this application at such a late date, Steell must have thought that improvement as an artist required drawing from both nature and the antique. But no amount of drawing practice could make up for the fact that Edinburgh, for all its history, culture and learning, was still comparatively barren sculpturally. Centuries of domination by iconoclastic Protestants coupled with a dearth of patronage and projects meant that for
any British sculptor—maybe even more so for a Scottish one—there was no way to be considered fully trained until he had done as so many others before him, and made the pilgrimage to Rome.
Chapter Three

Rome, Edinburgh, and the Sculptural Context for a Scottish Sculptor, 1800-1833

John Steell trained as an artist during a time of increasing artistic activity, but his location in Scotland meant that there were many specific social and cultural conditions which influenced his development. This chapter will examine the relevant conditions which contributed to his aesthetics, and his later career. The assessment is schematic, and will examine the artistic conditions of Edinburgh, Scotland, London, Great Britain, Europe and Rome, from the end of the eighteenth century to around 1830.

Edinburgh

Compared to London, and more particularly to Rome, Edinburgh was sculpturally barren. There was a native stone carving tradition, distinguished by architectural decoration and modest funereal monuments, but this was not comparable in quality to the statuary being installed in Europe. Sculpture in Scotland was relatively conspicuous by its absence. Given the general lack of trained artists, native patronage, and a dearth of opportunities, sculptural conditions in Scotland were largely dependent upon the state of the art trade in England. Of the eighteenth century, Malcolm Baker wrote:

...the history of sculpture in Scotland at this date was inextricably linked with developments in London and—funeral monuments aside—the pattern of patronage did not differ significantly from that seen in England. While some Scottish painters became major figures in the south, this was not the case with sculpture where most of the demand north of the border was met by London-based sculptors, albeit often of Flemish or French origin.113
Fig. 32. Giambologna, *Anatomical Figure of a Horse*, late 16th century, bronze. Torrie Collection, University of Edinburgh. Photo: Tom Scott
Scottish patrons, usually composed of members of the aristocracy, commissioned and collected work to display their own erudition, or for their own enjoyment. These projects were mostly ideal statues, funereal monuments or portrait busts for a domestic environment, either within stately homes or their grounds. However, the Scottish aristocracy often enjoyed this work within the confines of their English residences. The use of sculpture for public commemoration was not commonplace in early nineteenth-century Scotland, except for graveyards and churches. When it was required, it was widely thought that Scottish (or even British) artists were not sufficiently accomplished to provide the best examples of commemorative work. To improve the quality of taste, some aristocrats assembled private study collections for the education of themselves, their friends, and their favoured artists.

An example of private art patronage and collecting in Scotland can be seen in the collection assembled by Sir James Erskine of Torrie (1722-1825). Erskine was a military man, but also an amateur artist. His collection was composed of Dutch and Italian landscapes and genre scenes, by artists such as Greuze, Guido Reni, and Salvator Rosa, as well as examples of small marble and bronze statues with classical themes. Perhaps the most important bronze in the collection is the late-sixteenth century Anatomical Figure of a Horse by Giambologna. (Fig.32) Erskine assembled his collection under the guidance of the Trustees’ Academy’s Andrew Wilson, and upon his death in 1825, willed it to Edinburgh University, with the intention that it form a foundation for a gallery for the encouragement of fine arts. The collection was not gifted to the University until 1836, and it is unlikely that Steell had
Fig. 33. Engraving of Calton Hill, showing National Monument (left) and Nelson Monument (centre). No date. Edinburgh University Library.
access to the works before this time. However, the Torrie collection provides an excellent example of the kind of private study collections that were available to Scottish artists, provided that they had the direct acquaintance with patrons necessary to enjoy access.

By the end of the Napoleonic wars, Edinburgh had become a more active artistic environment. The eighteenth century witnessed a marked increase in building, particularly the classically influenced Georgian architecture of the New Town. The Doric order was the architectural vernacular in the city which described itself as “the Modern Athens.” However, sculpture was not extensively employed, even as a decorative device. The earliest civic monumental projects, both cited on Edinburgh’s Calton Hill, were architectural. These were the 1815 monument to Lord Admiral Horatio Nelson by the architect Robert Burn (1752-1815) and the Parthenon-inspired National Monument, by C. R. Cockerell and William Playfair, begun in 1822 but notoriously left unfinished when the subscription monies were exhausted in 1829. (Fig.33)

Social and Economic Context

In order to better assess the atmosphere of Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century, it is useful to examine the conditions immediately after 1830. Growing up in Edinburgh from 1805 to 1825, Steell encountered regular examples of classicism and “Scottish” naturalism. These forms, which would have been reinforced during his tenure at the Trustees’ Academy, influenced his general aesthetics. To the more particular area of sculpture, it is safe to say that Steell initially approached its practise as an artisan/carver. Through his own talent, imagination and the example of his father, combined with the
previous generation of Scottish sculptors, by the late 1830s, Steell was able to capitalise on the advantage of an increased local market demand for sculpture that only a few years before had proved unable to sustain the sculptors Samuel Joseph (1791-1850) and Laurence Macdonald (1799-1878). This increase of market activity was due to several factors, but the end result was a growing market for fine art and other luxury items within Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{15}

In his University of St. Andrews PhD thesis, \textit{Artists, patrons and the power of association: the emergence of a bourgeois artistic field in Edinburgh, c. 1775-c. 1840}, Duncan Forbes provided an excellent assessment of the period in question, and presented the political and social context of the burgeoning artistic markets in Edinburgh in the 1820s.\textsuperscript{16} While social and economic trends supported this market activity, the modes of communication and commission between artists and patrons did not develop accordingly until much later. Forbes described the relationship referred to as the "client economy":

In an urban economy largely reliant on the consumption of a wealthy upper-class elite and in which small-scale craft workshops constituted the most common form of manufacturing, the face-to-face relationships of purchaser and producer were still the dominant mode of commercial-cum-social interaction. This was as true for artists as it was for other craft manufacturers, and traditional patronage practices maintained their dominance well into the 1830s.\textsuperscript{17}

This situation would be of great consequence to Steell's career, which depended heavily upon patronage—both of the aristocracy, and even more importantly, of the ascendant middle-class, who demanded portrait busts for their homes and institutions, and who subscribed for public monuments to their heroes and champions. The overall environment for the practice of "improvement" meant that he was able to find commercial opportunities for
Fig. 34. Alexander Nasmyth, The Building of the Royal Institution, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. Nasmyth’s painting shows the confluence between the dense, crowded Old Town and the wide, straight Princes’ Street in the New Town, as the stonemasons lace the Doric columns of the new “Temple of the Arts.”

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland

Fig. 35. The Royal Institution Building. Engraving by W. Deeble, from a drawing by George Meikle Kemp. The building housed the city’s three main arts organisations: The Board of Manufactures (which oversaw the Trustees’ Academy), The Royal Institution, and the Royal Scottish Academy. The Society of Scottish Antiquaries also used the rooms.

Photo: Gordon 1976, p. 120
sculpture within both the domestic and institutional arenas. Steell was able to negotiate the shift in the 1840s from private to public patronage. His early connections served to give him enough regard from the general populace to ensure that his role as “Sculptor for Scotland” was not in name only.

Given the advancement of public patronage, which was linked to middle class values of improvement and self-help, it would not be inappropriate to suggest that Steell’s 1838-44 execution of the Queen Victoria for the roof of the “Temple of Arts” was a poignant visual indicator of the new state of patronage. (Figs.34-35) By substituting Victoria for Minerva, the statue, while still classically based, seemed to state that the eighteenth-century ideals of patronage, relying upon an enlightened, but still paternalistic ruling elite, was to be supplanted by an altogether more democratic and widely-based commercial basis. However, the Board of Manufactures was still a conservative, patrician organisation, and was not advocating a take-over by the masses—most board members probably thought the 1832 Reform Act was enough progress for the time being.

As Steell’s career progressed into the 1840s, Scotland became a more confident and assertive nation within Great Britain. Scots contributed greatly to government, banking, diplomacy and the military all on their own self-referential terms; a separate but equal, or more accurately, distinct but equal basis. It was only natural that the Scottish arts would define themselves along these same lines. From the start of the century, agitation for the recognition of a “Scottish School,” distinct from, yet allied to other forms of British art, had expressed itself. This condition reflected the prevailing strain
of Scottish nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century, referred to by Graeme Morton as Unionist-Nationalism.\textsuperscript{119}

\textit{Unionist-Nationalism and Steell}

This seemingly paradoxical doctrine is difficult to define in a condensed form, but has a direct bearing upon the understanding of Steell’s sculptural career, and the opportunities for patronage and employment which were open to him. Unionist-Nationalism was the desire for a strong Scottish \textit{nation} firmly ensconced within the British \textit{state}. Unionist-Nationalist Scots were not seeking independence from Britain, but deeper integration within it. Simultaneously, they were strongly advocating a Scottish identity that was unique and distinct in its culture and symbols (examples of Morton’s term the \textit{Scottish ethnie}), while agitating for equal economic and political status. As Morton argues:

> Scotland and England, came together in 1707, but...this did not result in a British civil society. Each of the four nations became united under one state, but there was no single British nation as a result, despite the banner ‘United Kingdom’...Anglicisation, welcomed or otherwise, intentional or not, has never homogenised four civil societies into one: its title is that of a kingdom which is united, not a nation. The Scottish ‘holy trinity’ of kirk, law and education have long been regarded as underpinning a separate civil society...\textsuperscript{120}

Morton argues further that the major governmental processes of the period 1830-1860 were localised, and largely organised and implemented by the middle classes through subscriptions and voluntary organisations:

> Mid-Victorian civil society was called by contemporaries their ‘public-life’, and it existed in an acknowledged framework outwith the formal structures of the state....It was the propensity of the urban middle class in nineteenth-century Britain to organise clubs, societies and associations in the ‘spaces’ in civil society left untouched by the central and local state which was the essential mediating structure between the two formal levels of government...The voluntary organisation was the practical means by which the middle class could engage their hegemonic grip...\textsuperscript{121}

> ...The Edinburgh middle classes were engaged in a whole range of issues, problems and causes of which all were conducted within civil society. Public life became structured by a series of philanthropic and voluntary societies by a class creating its own self-definition. This network of associational activity was the very machinery necessary to deal with almost any social, economic or political issue in the city and without recourse to the parliamentary state.\textsuperscript{122}
In this light, Steell could be seen as a Unionist-Nationalist sculptor, in that he created two major Scottish national monuments—the Wellington and the Prince Consort—to Unionist icons (not to mention the 1844 Queen Victoria.) Furthermore, these projects were organised and funded by the middle classes, mostly represented by members of Edinburgh’s legal profession. The confluence of local activism, identification with the British state, and increased public patronage stimulated by the middle classes, created conditions that allowed Steell to dominate the local sculpture market.

**Study Collections**

The aristocracy and the professional classes within Edinburgh began to address the improvement of taste and culture in 1819 with the founding of the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Art in Scotland. This elite body sought to educate and improve public taste through the organisation of exhibitions. Initial displays were of old master paintings from the members’ collections, but later, contemporary works by Scottish artists were also exhibited. It was also a stated aim for the Institution to create a library and cast collection for the study of its members and associated artists.

The governing board, which included Lord Meadowbank and the Dukes of Argyll and Hamilton, appointed the Trustees’ Academy master Andrew Wilson as its agent. In 1825, it reported that Wilson had been given £300 “for the purchase of such works of art as he might judge most useful for the institution in the foundation of a library...and would form an admirable nucleus of such a collection of works of art, prints, and Books of
prints, &c., as would be a source not only of great pleasure to the members...but of useful reference to the Artists.”124 The RIEFAS directors reported in 1827 that “In the month of August [1826] the Directors opened the Library.”125 Unfortunately, no detailed listing of the actual titles or works which Wilson acquired has survived.

Within seven years however, the RIEFAS would be challenged by a rival organisation which came about through the resentment and frustration of the Edinburgh artists themselves. Professional artists within the RIEFAS had no voting or administrative privileges, and were only considered associates of the Institution, rather than primary members. In 1826, the Royal Scottish Academy (initially the Scottish Academy, receiving their Royal Charter in 1838) was formed in reaction to the perceived overweening control of the aristocrats and professional dilettanti organising the Royal Institution. Immediately, the new organisation also expressed a desire to create a library and cast collection. Their third stated aim was “To form a Library of Books of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture and all objects relating thereto, and also of Paintings, Prints, Casts and Models and all other things useful to the Students in their Art.”126

The first mention of acquisitions appeared in the Council minutes of 11 June 1829, when “Letters from Mr. Brittan and Mr. Drummond Hay were read announcing presents of Casts and Books to the Academy.”127 The RSA acquired a cast of a Hercules in 1829, and a cast of the Venus de Medici—reportedly a first cast by Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), (and a gift from the painter James Irvine)—in 1830.128 The Academy acquired casts
Fig. 36. Antonio Canova, *The Hope Venus*, 1817-20, marble.
City Art Gallery, Leeds. (Photo: Lich p. 190)
of the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Diana* from the sculptor Henry Westmacott (1784-1861) in November 1830, paying £7 8/10d.\textsuperscript{129}

Space quickly became a problem for the RSA, and by 1836 its holdings were loaned to the Trustees’ Academy collection. Since there were duplicate items, a committee composed of Steell, David Scott and Thomas Duncan was appointed to oversee the rationalisation and transfer of the casts. In 1840, the RSA launched its life school and gave up its plans for an antique academy. Its casts were then finally assimilated to the Trustees’ collection. Given the time frame of the RIEFAS and RSA cast collections, it is unlikely that they were studied by Steell, who had access to the Trustees’ collection as early as 1818.

Compared to the two emergent institutions, the Trustees’ Academy had a much larger and extensive cast collection. John Graham had been the first master to emphasise the importance of the casts, and he had actively developed the collection between 1800 and 1817.\textsuperscript{130} After 1820, Thomas Campbell acted as agent for the Academy while in Rome, and he secured many important items for the school, from some of the most eminent Roman artists. In 1821 Campbell wrote to the Board that:

>_...the celebrated Canova has very handsomely offered to the Academy a Cast of any of his works that the Trustees may select... Mr. Hamilton, the under secretary of State who is at present at Rome, and well known for his taste in the Fine Arts, suggested to his friend Canova the value of such a gift who immediately expressed the pleasure that he felt in doing anything that might promote the interests of the Academy, or gratify the wishes of the Trustees..._\textsuperscript{131}

The Trustees chose a cast of “Mr. Hope’s Venus”—the statue executed by Canova for the British banker Thomas Hope between 1817 and 1820. (Fig.36) It was also felt that the contemporary art of Thorvaldsen should be represented. Campbell wrote to Sir William Arbuthnot in October 1822 that
Fig. 37. Bertel Thorvaldsen, *Hèbe*, 1816, marble. Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen. Photo: Ove Wulffbye

“Mr. Wm. Clark of Edinr. desires to be remembered to you and to say that
the Academy should possess [sic] some more of the works of Thorwaldsen,
the Hebe & also some examples of draped figures such as the Juno of the
Capitol.” (Fig.37)

Campbell reported to the Board on 7 September 1822:

I have received Canova’s Venus, and have had it incased along with many others, the list of
which I subjoin…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalogue</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbarini Faun now in the possession of the King of Parma</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A first cast of the Dying Gladiator</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torso of an Apollo in the Vatican</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A first cast from the Mercury of the Vatican</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cast of Thorwaldsen’s mercury one of the finest modern productions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A first cast of Camillo draped figure in the Capitol Bronze</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bust of Ajax in the Vatican</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of a large ornamental case in the Capitol [illegible, paper torn]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 pieces of architecture from the Temple of Jupiter Stator Forum</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 pieces from the Temple of Jupiter Tonante</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study of casts was the best way for Steell to learn the language of
sculpture, given the lack of actual masterworks in Edinburgh. In 1800,
Edinburgh had but three significant public statues. These were the 1686
equestrian statue of Charles II by Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721) in Parliament
Square, the 1753 statue of George II, attributed to John Cheere (d.1787) for the
Royal Infirmary, and within Parliament Hall, the 1752 marble statue of
Duncan Forbes of Culloden by L.F. Roubiliac (c.1705-1762). These works, like
the majority of sculpture within Scotland, were created by foreign artists who
had trained abroad.

The Edinburgh statue of Charles II was a lead copy of the 1678-80
bronze equestrian statue at Windsor. (Fig.38) This work, designed and cast
by Gibbons’s studio in 1684/5, was derived from the standard iconography
of classical equestrian figures such as the Marcus Aurelius at Rome. It
featured the monarch with a baton in his right hand, wearing a laurel wreath
Fig. 39. Attributed to John Cheere, George II, 1753, lead. Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Photo: Antoina Reeve.
and an approximation of Roman armour, which David Howarth noted was "the first occasion when the British monarchy can be so observed." Howarth further suggested that the depiction of the horse owed its origins less to classical precedents and more to the table bronzes of Charles I by his court sculptor Francesco Fanelli. The horse is seen in an animated pose, with the right front leg raised in an attitude which suggests a steady walk. The description of the horse's anatomy is carefully observed, with particular attention paid to the musculature of the chest, shoulder and legs.

This work was presumably the first equestrian statue that Steell ever saw. His attention might have been drawn to the fact that the group was taken down in 1824 during renovation of Parliament Square. The work was repaired, but sat in storage for another ten years before being returned to its former position in 1835.

The figure of George II, attributed to John Cheere was also lead, and featured the monarch in classical dress. Like the statue of Charles II, the king is depicted in Roman armour, with a laurel wreath and a baton in his right hand, symbolising his authority. Cheere's portrayal emphasises the power, authority and nobility of the ruler, while also expressing the monarch's benevolence in granting a royal charter to the hospital. The detailing of the armour is carefully delineated, and the treatment of the figure's anatomy painstakingly observed. The veins and tendons of the king's forearms and hands are carefully described, and emphasise the ruler's physical power and strength. The likeness is similarly naturalistic, with the pupils of the eyes described and the lines of the face and tendons of the neck.
delineated in a straightforward manner which eschews the generalisation usually inherent in classical depictions of rulers.

The most dramatic work available to public view was Roubiliac’s marble statue depicting the Scottish judge Duncan Forbes of Culloden. (See Fig.234) Commissioned in 1748 by subscribers within the Faculty of Advocates, this effigy featured expressly naturalistic detailing, with the exception of the eyes, which were left blank in the Greek mode of classicism. Contemporary dress was employed by the French sculptor (who was based in London) and this careful use of verisimilitude combined with a specific depiction of anatomy within the animated pose of the figure created an overwhelming corporal statement which had an effect verging upon the supernatural. The virtuosity of the carving, particularly in Forbes’s wig and mannered drapery, would have been both a revelation of the capabilities of the material and a challenge to any aspiring sculptor. As the work was displayed in a public place, (the courtroom of the Second Division of the Court of Session) Steell would have had access to this work. It was definitely the best example of marble statuary available to him in the city.

Sculptural activity in Edinburgh remained sporadic, and what little work that was available was routinely awarded to English or foreign artists. John Flaxman was chosen to execute the statue for architect Thomas Hamilton’s monument to Robert Burns in 1822. (See Fig.357) Of even greater consequence, in 1812, the Faculty of Advocates commissioned Francis Chantrey to initiate a series of marble statues commemorating its members.

Chantrey was one of Britain’s most successful sculptors. He dominated public statuary in Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century
much in the same way that Steell would after 1838. The men shared a major patron in Alexander Maconochie, 2nd Lord Meadowbank (1777-1861) and it was Meadowbank’s advocacy and support (along with his friend and fellow advocate John Wauchope) which secured for Chantrey the majority of sculptural projects in Edinburgh between 1812 and 1833. Chantrey’s works for Parliament Hall were an emulation of and challenge to Roubiliac’s Duncan Forbes of Culloden, just as Steell’s statues of Lord Jeffrey and Lord Boyle were in 1855 and 1860.

Chantrey’s first statue for the Faculty of Advocates was commissioned in 1812 and was a seated depiction of Lord President Robert Blair of Avontoun (1741-1811). (See Fig. 231) Blair is shown seated in his judicial dress, but without a wig. Chantrey displayed a direct, sober, and informal style, which was far less dramatic than the Roubiliac work, but was considerably more imposing in scale and effect. This statue was completed in 1818, and was sited in the courtroom of the First Division of the Court of Session.

The statue was also meant as a counterpart to the marble of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville (1742-1811), which was commissioned only a week after the Blair statue. (See Fig. 232) This work was sited in Parliament Hall. Melville was a close friend of Blair, and this has been understood as a further connection between the statues. Melville is seen in a standing pose, in his lord’s robes, with a scroll and book under his hand. These are understood to be a visual reference to his 1784 bill which restored forfeited estates in Scotland.
Chantrey’s last major work for the Faculty of Advocates was undertaken in 1820, and was a commemoration of Robert Dundas of Arniston (1758-1819). (See Fig. 233) This work was of life size, (four feet, six inches) in contrast to the two previous statues which were seven and nine feet tall, respectively. This statue, completed in 1824, was considered one of Chantrey’s finest, and is expressly naturalistic, and only slightly softened and idealised. Dundas wears informal contemporary dress with a linear depiction of his judicial robes, in keeping with the sculptor’s straightforward, common sense style. The casual seated pose was a variant which Chantrey often employed for statues of writers, thinkers, and other ‘men of mind’.140

These major sculptural works of lawyer-politicians created a de facto hall of fame for the Faculty of Advocates. With their completion, the building became one of Edinburgh’s richest sculptural environments. During the same period, Chantrey was executing portrait busts of Scottish patrons such as Maconochie, Wauchope, and Professor John Playfair of Edinburgh University. Chantrey had steadily established a powerful network of patronage within Scotland in general and Edinburgh in particular.

This network facilitated even more public displays of Chantrey’s artistry. The bronze statues of William Pitt (1831) and George IV (1833) in George Street effectively consolidated Chantrey’s domination of the local market for portrait statues. (See Figs. 202-203) However, reaction to Chantrey’s hegemony was at times caustic. Three of Chantrey’s productions were met with relative ambivalence, if not downright irritation, with regard to the subjects and the execution. The Scotsman opined:
The three monuments of George IV, Henry Dundas, and William Pitt, if regarded as votive offerings of national sentiment, certainly do no honour to the country—the first, a selfish, pampered sensualist—the second, a coarse minded political adventurer, ready to hire out his unprincipled services to any party—the third, an apostate from the people’s cause...

A foreigner would naturally say—if such be the idols—what are the worshippers! However, now that the monuments are erected, we hope they will never be disturbed... They may be useful as emblems, to remind us of past degradation, and to keep us watchful in future. Scotland has many illustrious dead who are yet unhonoured with a memorial in her capital. She has the mighty shades of Bruce and Wallace—she has John Knox, and John Napier, and nearer our own times, Adam Smith the Scottish Locke, and James Watt. The decoration of our city by works of art is yet only begun; and when justice is done to those names which good men hold in reverence, our public monuments will not, as a whole, be a reproach to our patriotism.  

This nationalistic feeling aside, Chantrey still enjoyed extensive contacts with some of Scotland’s most eminent minds. Two years after the Scotsman’s lament, he provided the 1835 statue of James Watt for Glasgow University. This project, combined with his portraits of Playfair, Maconochie, Sir Walter Scott and the public works in Edinburgh all illustrate the extensive system of patronage which Chantrey enjoyed within Scotland. In all of the works, Chantrey displayed his sculptural style of naturalism balanced with classicism: the portrait element was slightly idealised, but still recognisably individual; contemporary costume was employed, but combined with drapery that emulated classical modes of expression.

One aspect of Chantrey’s working practise in portraiture which should be considered is his use of the camera lucida. This optical instrument, first developed in 1806 by Dr. William Hyde Wollaston, (a friend of Chantrey’s) used a lens to reflect an image onto paper, which the artist then traced. It was used extensively by Chantrey to capture an accurate likeness and suitable proportions at the beginning stages of a commission. Helen Smailes described the method:

Chantrey began by taking with the camera lucida three outlines of the sitter’s head, a profile, a three-quarter profile and a full-face view. From these tracings, which were
Fig. 40. Sir Henry Raeburn, *Francis Chantrey*, 1818, pencil on paper, (21.4 x 29.3 cm). 

Fig. 41. Francis Chantrey, *Sir Henry Raeburn*, 1818, pencil on paper (verso of Fig. 40). 
marked with small crosses to define the essential proportions, a studio assistant would build up in clay the first rough model of the sitter’s head. The sculptor himself would then complete the model in several additional sittings.143

Many of Chantrey’s camera lucida drawings survive in the National Portrait Gallery as a testament to his reliance on the device. Of additional interest is an 1818 experimental pencil sketch of Chantrey made by Sir Henry Raeburn in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; Chantrey’s more accomplished sketch of Raeburn is on the reverse. (Figs.40-41) The sculptor Thomas Campbell also employed the camera lucida for his sittings with the Duke of Wellington in 1836. There is no evidence that John Steell ever used the instrument to execute his portraiture, but it should be noted that the practice was definitely in use in Britain and Edinburgh. Given the sculptors’ eminence, Steell was presumably aware of both Chantrey and Campbell’s employment of the drawing aide.

Chantrey’s work offered Steell the best model for a successful style of monumental sculpture: a generalised naturalist portrayal of the subject, coupled with a certain amount of detailing and accoutrement, and presented with classical drapery, depending upon the wishes of the subscribers.144 Chantrey displayed what Alex Potts termed “the judicious compromise between high classicism and truth to nature that gave Chantrey’s art its particular appeal at the time.”145 By adopting a similar style for monuments, Steell was emulating his predecessor with similar success. As Potts described it, “The strategy itself could be called distinctively British.”146 (Fig. 42)

Following Steell’s 1833 display of Alexander and Bucephalus, Chantrey offered Steell career assistance, provided that he moved to London.147 Steell
Fig. 42. John Steell, *James Wilson*, 1863, The Economist Building, London. This marble statue from Steell’s middle career exemplifies his “sufficiently ambiguous” style: a careful depiction of contemporary costume moderated by the inclusion of a cloak for “classicising” drapery. Wilson’s features are natural, but the eyes are left blank in the Greek mode. The overall effect was intended to emulate classical statuary, while including enough detail for proponents of the emergent school of Realism.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London
declined, stating that he wished to remain in Edinburgh to work towards the continued advancement of Scottish sculpture. This contact was mentioned again in 1838, when subscribers to the Scott Monument project debated whether the statue should be executed by Steell or Chantrey. Presumably, these incidents did not sour the relationship between the artists; it is likely that Steell considered Chantrey something of a mentor. According to Lord Meadowbank, Steell started his own bronze foundry in emulation of Chantrey. Steell's first master caster William Young had worked for Chantrey earlier at the sculptor's foundry in Eccleston Place, London.

For Steell, another potent sculptural antecedent was the portraiture of Samuel Joseph (1791-1850). Joseph had come to Edinburgh in 1821 after a successful academic career at the Royal Academy Schools. He set up practice as primarily a portraitist, and created marble busts of many of the Edinburgh cognoscenti of the 1820s. Joseph was a founding member of the Royal Scottish Academy, as well as a member of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, which examined contemporary theories of expression and anatomy, led by the Combe brothers. George Combe (1788-1858) was an advocate and Writer to the Signet; Andrew (1797-1847) was a noted surgeon.

The veracity of phrenology was frequently debated at the time, but it dovetailed neatly into Sir Charles Bell's theories regarding art and expression, especially the idea of the 'face showing the mind of men.' As Terry Friedman wrote: "What Samuel Joseph seems to have decided to do was to turn this odd but intriguing pseudo-scientific method to the creation of portrait sculpture, by revealing his sitter's inner identity and peculiarities on the surface of the marble." (Fig.43)
Fig. 43. Samuel Joseph, *David Wilkie*, 1842, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh. While working within a classical context, Joseph shared Wilkie's interest and knowledge of expression and anatomy, exemplifying what Terry Friedman termed "The Sculpture of Feeling."

*Photo: National Galleries of Scotland*
Even with steady work and a unique sculptural approach, Joseph was unable to attract the major patronage necessary to expand his studio, and in 1829 after losing the commission for the *Hopefoun Monument* to Thomas Campbell, he moved back to London, pursued by debts. The great importance of major patronage is illustrated in this instance, by the fact that Joseph had been a popular, well-liked, and much employed sculptor in a burgeoning market, yet had still met financial failure.

Despite Joseph’s pecuniary trials, there is a tangible link between his phrenology-based sculpture and John Steell’s work. On 25 November 1830, at a meeting of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, a letter of application was recorded as read for “Mr. John Steele, Esq., sculptor.” Steell was unanimously voted in as an ordinary member on 9 December 1830. He remained a member for the next forty years, was elected as a member of the Society’s council in 1868, and as a Vice-President in 1870. During the history of the Society, there were several artist members, but only three sculptors: Joseph, Laurence Macdonald and Steell.

An additionally direct link between Joseph and Steell was the execution of a marble bust of Professor John Leslie for Edinburgh University, after an original by Joseph. (Fig.44) In subsequent portrait busts, Steell paid tribute to the sculptor by utilising several of Joseph’s signature elements: partial drapery, a herm base, and of course, careful naturalistic detail to highlight idiosyncrasies of the sitter. (Fig.45) While Steell would also idealise and soften the features of sitters if he thought it necessary, he would always maintain a high level of psychological interpretation that could be seen as originally inspired by Joseph, and the doctrine of Scottish naturalism.
Fig. 44. John Steell (after Samuel Joseph) *John Leslie*, no date, Edinburgh University.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland

Fig. 45. John Steell, *Edward Forbes*, 1856, Edinburgh University. Steell’s original bust of Professor Forbes utilises many of the same elements of Joseph’s portraiture seen in the bust of Professor John Leslie.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland
While Steell maintained his membership with the phrenologists until 1870, it is unknown whether he firmly believed in the practice, or used it to inform his sculpture. We do know however, that Steell, like many sculptors before and after him, used a cast of Robert Burns’s skull while executing his Burns statue. Despite the lack of evidence regarding his position on phrenology, it is safe to assume that Steell was very aware of Samuel Joseph’s work as he was beginning his own career as a sculptor. Steell combined Joseph’s naturalist style with classical traits throughout his career.

A further influence upon Steell’s career was the work of the Scottish sculptors Thomas Campbell (1790-1858) and Laurence Macdonald (1799-1878). Campbell was born in Edinburgh, and served an apprenticeship with the local marble cutter John Marshall before travelling to London in 1818 (the same year Steell began at the Trustees’ Academy) to begin study at the Royal Academy Schools. He moved to Rome in the same year, staying until 1830 when he returned to Britain, settling in London. As stated above, between 1821 and 1827, Campbell served as the Trustees’ Academy’s agent in Rome, and facilitated the import of figure casts for the Academy’s study collection. This important resource was of particular benefit to John Steell’s education.

Campbell’s work itself displayed contemporary traits of neoclassical sculpture: emulation of classical themes, compositions, drapery and accoutrement. An excellent example is the ideal work of Arthur Fitzgerald Kinnaird as the Young Ascanius, sculpted at the request of Lord Byron in 1822. (Fig.46) Campbell’s monumental projects, especially the 1824-40 marble of Princess Pauline Borghese for the 6th Duke of Devonshire, (Fig.47) and the 1824-34 Hopetoun Monument for Edinburgh, displayed a marked reliance
Fig. 46. Thomas Campbell, *Arthur Fitzgerald Kinnaird*, 1822, marble. Kinnaird Collection, on loan to National Gallery of Scotland. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 47. Thomas Campbell, *Princess Pauline Borghese*, 1824-40, marble. Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Photo: Devonshire Trust.
upon classical precedents. The *Borghese* statue was designed to accompany Canova’s *Madame Mere* at Chatsworth, and reflected both that neoclassical work and its common source of the *Seated Agrippina*, then at Naples. (See Figs. 108&110) The *Hopetoun* statue featured the 4th Earl as a Greek statesman, with a *chiton* and buckled cloak (or *chlamys*), and cradling a short sword. (See Fig. 94)

Laurence Macdonald was from Findo Gask, Perthshire, and like Campbell, first apprenticed to a stone mason. Patronage from the architect James Gillespie Graham (who recommended Steell’s readmission to the Trustees’ Academy in 1824) aided Macdonald’s move to Edinburgh in 1822, where he entered the Trustees’ Academy. Macdonald moved to Rome after only seven months in Edinburgh, with financial assistance from the Oliphants of Gask. He joined the British Academy of Arts in Rome in 1823, and “enjoyed a virtual monopoly of portrait commissions from itinerant Perthshire notables.” Macdonald returned to Edinburgh in 1826, and for six years maintained an active local studio.

He displayed his group of *Ajax and Patroclus* at the Royal Institution in October 1829, (See Fig. 74) and held a private exhibition of ideal sculpture and portraiture at 70 Princes Street in 1830. This was followed by a London exhibition in Pall Mall in spring of 1831. In view of his classically inspired works, the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* dubbed him “our Canova.” In September of 1832, Macdonald left Edinburgh a second time to take up permanent residence in Rome. He remained for the next forty years, eventually taking over Bertel Thorvaldsen’s studio space in the Piazza Barberini.
There still remained in Edinburgh a native stone-carving culture, which expressed itself in architectural decoration, and perhaps most expressively, in funerary monuments. In wider terms however, Scottish sculpture, as George Cleghorn wrote in 1837, “with the exception of the mere trade of marble cutter, was a dead letter, all our busts, statues and monuments being executed by English and foreign artists.” There had been very few sculptors of any quality working in Edinburgh at all, and none of superior talent until Joseph arrived in 1821, and Macdonald returned in 1826. It would be Joseph, Chantrey, Thomas Campbell and Laurence Macdonald, that contributed most in displaying to Steell what a sculptor was.

Steell also benefited from the popular phenomenon of the “mason-sculptors”. Like Steell, these stone carvers had started out in the trades, and most had never received formal education. Their productions, which could be generally categorised as genre sculpture, were often based on Burns narratives, or other native literary sources. The productions themselves were straightforward, representational depictions of characters, usually executed in freestone. Their efforts were praised (the Edinburgh Literary Journal would grouse that they were being ‘lionized’) and supported in the Whig press as examples of native talent and industry.

Mason-sculptor Robert Forrest (1789-1852) contributed significantly to the sculptural environment of Edinburgh. In addition to his own work, Forrest carved the colossal freestone statue of 1st Viscount Melville, which was placed on top of the huge column in St. Andrew Square, Edinburgh.
Fig. 48. James Thom, *Tam O'Shanter and Souter Johnnie*, 1828, Burns Monument, Alloway. The subject, taken from the Burns poem, was hugely popular in Scotland, and reproduced in a variety of media. Its ubiquity was illustrated in the 5th Duke of Buccleuch's remark regarding native talent for the *Wellington Monument*, "I trust we are not to have a Souter Johnie sort of a statue."

Photo: National Trust of Scotland
Forrest executed the statue according to the design of Francis Chantrey. The column was designed by William Burn; the project was completed in 1828.

Forrest's open display of freestone statues on Calton Hill was hugely popular and famously visited by Earl Grey in 1834. The works included a statue of the Duke of Wellington, as well as four individual equestrian statues—all of which were themes that would form a significant part of Steell's own iconography. Steell, whose family lived on Calton Hill, would have definitely known these groups. Forrest's exhibition remained in place from 1832, until his widow's death in 1876.

James Thom (1802-1850) “The Ayrshire Sculptor,” was a student of Forrest, and enjoyed enormous commercial success with an exhibition of freestone figures of Burns’s Tam O'Shanter and Souter Johnnie in Edinburgh. (Fig. 48) Between November 1828 and February 1829, Thom’s figures drew over 18,000 visitors, each paying sixpence to see his work. The Scotsman of 7 February 1829 reported that one day’s receipts, which were donated to the Royal Infirmary and the Destitute Sick Society, totalled over £36.159

Their fame and success not withstanding, the mason-sculptors were an anomaly—something of a cultural curiosity. Steell’s successes would also be seen as an indication of native talent, but because of his background, not in spite of it. By virtue of his start in the trades, Steell could be, as Duncan Forbes wrote of the mason-sculptors:

Elevated as living examples of the mythical ‘lad ’o pairts’—artisans who pull themselves up the social structure by what one writer described as their ‘talent, sobriety and industry’—these [biographical] narratives celebrated the values of hard work and self-improvement which were eagerly embraced by broad sections of the upper and middle classes.159

As a young man interested in art, Steell would have assimilated the local architecture and statuary, and kept abreast of the productions of his
fellow countrymen—especially Chantrey, John Gibson (1790-1866), Joseph, Campbell and Macdonald. Intriguingly, several of these men, who would have been competition for Steell, left Edinburgh at the most opportune time for him to assume the mantle of, if not Sculptor for Scotland, then Sculptor for Edinburgh. Joseph left in 1829, Macdonald in 1832, Angus Fletcher (1799-1862) in 1834. Campbell returned to Britain from Rome in 1830, but chose to live in London. As Thomas Dibden would write in his 1836 diary, “Mr Steell is at present among the most prominent of resident sculptors at Edinburgh; and as a bustifier, considered to be the ‘facile princeps.’”

Steell’s good timing met not only with the abdication of rivals, but also a surge in the increase of monument building and civic improvements, which was seen as an ongoing programme continuing from the late eighteenth century. The two previous generations had built the gridded streets and squares of the New Town, and filled adjacent Calton Hill with monuments to great men and their Georgian ideals of the previous age—Burns, Nelson, Dugald Stuart. The spaces that were left would be filled by Victorian monuments (commissioned by committees and not individuals) to Victorian heroes and ideals,—Victoria, Scott, Wellington, John Wilson, and Prince Albert. This was a public patronage which had supplanted the one-to-one client economy of early nineteenth-century Edinburgh.

**Scotland**

Sculptural activity outside Edinburgh during the period discussed was largely confined to Glasgow. This city had its own specific systems of patronage, but the patrons themselves were generally drawn from business and manufacturing rather than the predominant Edinburgh pool of
aristocrats, physicians, lawyers and ministers. From 1800, Glasgow steadily
grew as international centre for business, manufactures and shipping. Huge
fortunes were built upon tobacco, shipbuilding, textiles and banking.
However, the concerns of the city’s middle and upper classes were generally
commercial. Art, particularly sculpture, was not significantly supported.

The Foulis Academy, more properly called The Academy of Fine Arts,
was opened in 1753 (fifteen years before the opening of the Royal Academy
Schools in London) by the brothers Robert (1707-1776) and Andrew (1712-
1775) Foulis. The brothers also operated the Foulis Press, and were printers
for Glasgow University. The academy was situated at the University, and
taught drawing, painting, engraving and sculpture. It was one of the first art
and design schools in Great Britain. The school held a collection of Old
Master paintings, as well as engravings and portrait busts.

Student instruction at the Foulis Academy followed established
continental guidelines of the eighteenth century. The students copied from
engravings and drawings, before moving on to draw from casts and from the
life (though models were always clothed, never nude). The school employed
instructors from overseas, including the French engraver François Aveline, a
French painter known only as “Payien” and an Italian called “Medici.” One of the most liberal policies of the Academy was that students did not
pay tuition fees, but instead received a wage, like apprentices. The
considerable financial burden was handled by the patronage of three
Glasgow men, the most prominent being the calico manufacturer and
Provost Archibald Ingram. In fact, Ingram’s death in 1770 was a major
financial blow which led to the closing of the school six years later.
The Academy’s most illustrious students were the painter David Allan (1744-1796) and the medallionist James Tassie (1735-1799), but these were the only two students to make any great contribution to Scottish art.

The Irwins’ assessment of the Foulis Academy was that:

During its existence the Foulis Academy had been an interesting event in the cultural life of Scotland, but in spite of all the effort and finance that was poured into it, the Academy produced few students of merit. The Academy died leaving no trace of its existence behind. Even in the intangible area of influence, it is impossible to say if the Foulis Academy had any at all...Cultural life in the west of Scotland, and in Glasgow in particular, was behind that of Edinburgh...The only permanent, tangible record the Foulis brothers left behind them was in their books.163

Later, the most active body promoting the arts was the Glasgow Dilettanti Society, which organised exhibitions of Scottish artists between 1828 to 1838. John Steell showed work in both 1828 and 1829 at these events. However, after 1829, Steell’s efforts seem to be almost exclusively restricted to Edinburgh or London.

Available sculptural projects were comparably sparse, and like Edinburgh, often awarded to foreign and English artists. Robin Woodward has noted:

The merchant class which predominated in the city took little interest in sculpture during the early part of the century and there were only isolated examples of private patronage of local sculptors... Moreover, monument committees in Glasgow failed to follow Edinburgh’s lead in...competitions to allocate public commissions. This was a feature of patronage that had lured sculptors to reside in Edinburgh. Without such an incentive artists had little enticement to establish studios in Glasgow.164

The state of artistic activity in Glasgow was likewise described by the Paisley-born sculptor John Henning (1771-1851). Henning reminisced that while living in Glasgow in 1802, the noted aesthete Lord Jeffrey “encouraged me in a very pleasing manner and said ‘you must come to Edinburgh, it is more a field for artists than Glasgow.’”165

The city’s first major public statue erected in the city since the early eighteenth century, a bronze of Sir John Moore, was executed by John
Fig. 49. Francis Chantrey, *James Watt*, 1832, bronze, George Square, Glasgow. Photo: Alan Crawford.

Fig. 50. Robert Forrest, *John Knox*, 1825, sandstone, Glasgow Necropolis. Photo: Ray McPhee.
Flaxman in 1819. This work was sited in George Square, and as the century progressed, this public space in the city centre became the community’s most prominent venue for public commemoration. Whereas in Edinburgh, Chantrey dominated public monuments until 1838, Glasgow’s patrons commissioned a more cosmopolitan selection of artists. After Flaxman’s *Moore*, no statues were placed in George Square until Chantrey provided a bronze version of his statue of *James Watt*, which was installed in 1832. (Fig. 49) There were few projects at all in the city in the 1820s, with the exception of the first monument to be erected in Fir Park (later the Glasgow Necropolis), the 1825 monument to John Knox, a twelve foot figure modelled by William Warren and carved by Robert Forrest. (Fig. 50) This was raised on top of a forty-six foot Doric column designed by Thomas Hamilton.166

One of the most active Glasgow sculpture studios was established in 1832 by the Mossman family. William Mossman was born in Glasgow in 1793. He studied in Edinburgh and London before returning to Glasgow in 1831. The Mossmans, including Williams’s son John, and his grandsons William and George, established a firm which ranged from funerary monuments and architectural decoration to portrait busts and monumental statues. Over the decades, John Mossman provided the statues of *Sir Robert Peel* (George Square, 1854), *David Livingstone* (George Square, 1875-9) and the poet *Thomas Campbell* (George Square, 1877).

The other dominant sculptor in Glasgow (though based in London) was Carlo Marochetti (1805-1868). A favourite of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, Marochetti enjoyed the patronage of Sheriff Archibald Alison. Between 1840 and 1863, the French-Italian sculptor received four major
commissions for statues to James Oswald, and the Duke of Wellington, and equestrian statues to Queen Victoria, and Prince Albert. (See Figs. 199, 122, 276) Marochetti’s dominance of the local field was in keeping with the systems of patronage in Glasgow which favoured foreign artists.

However, little of this activity in Glasgow reflected the sculptural environment of Edinburgh in the 1820s, when Steell was learning his trade. The dominant trends originated in London and Rome. Scottish sculptural activity outside of Edinburgh was not of significant influence upon the career of John Steell.

**Britain and London**

The context of art in Scotland was not significantly different from that in other parts of Great Britain; virtually all art theory had been disseminated from London’s Royal Academy. Scottish artists, scholars and theorists had made their own individual contributions, but in general terms, these were all in a confluence of style that could be seen as British.

**Theoretical Context**

Steell’s indigenous understanding of sculpture was coupled with his formal education, which would have emphasised classical modes, constructed on the foundations of Lessing, Winckelmann, and Reynolds. These theorists varied on small points, but all advocated the emulation of classical forms of subject, composition and expression.

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of the *Discourses* of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) upon British art education in general, and nineteenth-century sculptural theory in particular. As President of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, Reynolds delivered a yearly lecture to the
Academy’s students between 1769 and 1790. Reynolds’s views were common currency in Great Britain, and many of the lectures themselves were translated into Italian, French and German within his lifetime. Discourse X, delivered on 11 December 1780, took sculpture as its main topic. Reynolds equated sculpture directly to the Grand Style of painting, which he advocated above all other forms of art, in view of its intellectual, edifying nature and emphasis of ideal beauty.

For Reynolds, nature was a starting point, but particular features were to be corrected and refined to create a generalised ideal:

It is interesting to note that Reynolds used the fifth-century Greek sculptor as an example of his leading principle. Within Discourse X, Reynolds stated that the object of the pursuit of sculpture was “Form and Character.” Sculpture was an essentially limited form of art due to its “grave and austere character” which required “the utmost degree of formality in composition.” Accordingly, particular elements, or an overuse of visual effects or verisimilitude, (what Reynolds termed “petty excellencies”) were not allowed. Facial expression was also meant to be generalised; the overall emotional message of the figure was to be comprised by the total effect of the posture of the body. In this respect, Reynolds compared the expression of character in sculpture to that employed in dance.
Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) and Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) had famously and extensively examined expression, using the *Laocoon* as an example. The former linked the restrained facial expression to actual physiognomy, while the latter held it to be a visual expression of stoicism, and an attribute of Greek morality to suffer pain with dignity. Winckelmann also emphasised the Greek ideal. His *History of the Art of Antiquity*, (*Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*) first published in Germany in 1764, was quickly regarded as a landmark publication.

A 1767 supplement, *Remarks on the History of the Art of Antiquity*, (*Anmerkungen über die Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*) was also well received, and by 1800, the writer “was effectively institutionalized as the father of a new archeology that replaced the earlier antiquarian study of iconographical motifs and textual sources.”170 A 1755 polemical essay which advocated the emulation of classical art, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, (*Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bilderhauerkunst*) was first translated into English by the Swiss-born painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) in 1765.171 Wincklemann’s work was deeply influential. As Alex Potts noted: “It was raided for information, as well as for its eloquent celebrations of the antique Greek ideal, by almost anyone writing on ancient art. At one level it was the bible of late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism, and Winckelmann himself was a hero of the classical revival that gripped the art world at the time.”172

Wincklemann and Lessing’s theories were a development of international concerns regarding expression that had impetus with artists such as Poussin, Caravaggio, and Bernini in the seventeenth century. In
particular, the French court painter Charles Lebrun’s main concept regarding  
expression and physiognomy—that the face could show the mind—was a  
precursor to nineteenth-century beliefs regarding phrenology.

The naturalist argument promoted by Lessing had been subsequently  
supported by academic anatomists, most notably, (and with most resonance  
for Scots) by Dr. William Hunter of Glasgow (1718-1783), and the published  
theories of Sir Charles Bell (1774-1842). Bell had studied drawing under the  
instruction of the Scottish painter David Allan (1744-1796), himself an artist  
who placed special emphasis on fidelity to nature. In his 1806 book Essays  
on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting, Bell cited as an influence Revd.  
Archibald Alison’s Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste, first published  
in 1790. Alison was in accord with a comment Bell expressed in his Essays  
on Anatomy: “...the countenance is an index of the mind, having expression  
corresponding with each emotion of the soul.”

Alison’s theories were developed in view of the work of the Scottish  
philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-1796). Reid was one of the first  
philosophers to discuss physical expression within the arts:

An excellent painter or statuary can tell, not only what are the proportions of a good  
face, but what changes every passion makes in it. This however is one of the chief mysteries  
of the art, to the acquisition of which infinite labour and attention, as well as a happy genius  
are required. But when he puts his art into practice, and happily expresses a passion by  
proper signs, everyone understands the meaning of these signs without art and without  
reflection.

Even more influential was Alison’s theory of the particular nature of  
beauty, which seemingly disputed Reynolds’s and Wicklemann’s concepts of  
the ideal. In Alison’s view, objects were beautiful according to the  
associations they engendered within the mind of the observer. Accordingly,  
any object had the potential to be beautiful. With regard to the human
figure, Alison did not endorse the concept of one fixed type of beauty, arguing:

There is in fact no such supposed form of original Beauty...the sentiment of Beauty is felt from many different and even opposite appearances of Human Form...From this early hypothesis [there being one standard form of beauty] the next step has uniformly been to the imagination of some original Beauty in certain proportions of the Human Form...If there were any definite proportions...it must have followed that the beauty of these proportions must have been as positively and definitely settled as the relations of justice or of geometry.179

John Flaxman (1755-1826) was the first Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy Schools from 1810 until his death in 1826. His theories on sculpture, which do not digress significantly from Reynolds’s views, were also as influential. The first edition of his Lectures was published in London in 1829. His book of anatomical studies, featuring engravings of his drawings by Edwin Henry Landseer (1802-1873), was published in London in 1833. Flaxman cited the writings of Winckleman, Mengs, Leonardo da Vinci, Reynolds and Henry Fuseli as useful for the student of sculpture, as well as, “a contemplation of the admirable assemblage in the Townley collection, the invaluable fragments of the Elgin marbles at the British Museum, the casts in the Royal Academy, and elsewhere collected by individuals.”180

This advice clearly favoured the antique. Flaxman stated:

We cannot avoid pausing to dwell on the exquisite beauty of the ancient sculpture. The choice of the most perfect forms—countenances expressive of the most elevated dispositions of mind and innocence of character—the limbs and bodies, examples of manly grace and strength, or female elegance—youth and beauty, in all their varieties and combinations in perfection...when we look on these forms, so purified from grossness and imperfection...if we could see angels and divine natures, they would resemble these.181

Flaxman held that under Phidias, Greek sculpture “rose to supreme eminence”182 and likewise, that during the Renaissance, Michelangelo, da Vinci, and Raphael had represented “the zenith of restoration of the art.”183 In the same way, Bernini’s work was criticised for its “presuming airs,
affected grace, and unmeaning flutter.” Greek sculpture represented “perfection which has not been equalled in modern times, except perhaps in some very few instances, but never excelled!”

For Flaxman, sculptural style was a means to measure the advancement and regression (Flaxman termed these “stages of its progress” and “degrees of debasement”) of sculpture over time, as well as a way to differentiate between mortal figures and those representing gods:

The characters of style may be properly arranged under two heads, the Natural and the Ideal. The Natural Style may be defined thus: a representation of the human form, according to the distinctions of sex and age, in action or repose, expressing the affections of the soul.

The same words may be used to define the Ideal Style, but they must be followed by this addition—“selected from such perfect examples as may excite in our minds a conception of the supernatural.”

By these definitions will be understood, that the natural style is peculiar to humanity, and the ideal to spirituality and divinity.

In terms of his own work, Flaxman was noted as a refined practitioner of “the true style.” His career, and its effect upon art, was often compared to that of Canova. Sir Richard Westmacott (1775-1856) observed after the sculptor’s death:

Flaxman not only supported the purity of Sculpture, but carried us within the dominion of Poetry, and taught us its value in art... No modern Sculptor has entered so deeply into the recesses of ancient art as Flaxman; his style was founded upon their principles, combined with the simplicity of the Pisani, and others of the fourteenth century. Whilst that of Canova was an union of the ideal with Nature. The one attracts us by the originality and sweetness of his invention, the other delights us with a delicacy and beauty peculiar to himself.

The Scottish writer and aesthete Allan Cunningham (1784-1842) had likewise been advocating the ascendancy of a sculptural classicism tempered by nature. Cunningham had started his career as a stonemason working in the studio of Francis Chantrey before becoming Chantrey’s secretary. Simultaneously, Cunningham built a successful literary career, publishing his Lives of the most eminent British painters, sculptors and architects in 1830. He contributed his views on sculpture even earlier, submitting an article
championing Chantrey’s work to Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine in 1820. This was followed by an article for the Quarterly Review in 1826, which spelled out his advocacy of moderated classicism as a characteristically British form of sculpture in no uncertain terms:

[Chantrey] seems to work as if he were unconscious of any other rival but nature—the antique is before him, but he prefers flesh and blood, and it would certainly cost him far more labour to imitate the work of another school, than to create an image from the impulse of his own feeling. Robert Burns said, that the muse of his country found him as Elijah did Elisha, at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over him—and the same may be said of Chantrey...

Cunningham held that Chantrey represented “not only the true but the classic sculpture of our country.” He advocated the abandonment of moribund allegorical symbolism (he termed these the “cold petrifactions of allegory”) and the adoption of a monumental style which emphasised “Simple statues, without any of these accompaniments.” He also supported a moderate use of contemporary dress, calling for:

... a subordinate beauty—a decorous and prudent use of modern dress. All its characteristic vulgarities are softened down or concealed...no aggravation of tassels, no projection of buttons. Though we are conscious that there is an art used in hiding these deformities, the skill of the sculptor has contrived to conceal it in nature.

Cunningham clearly felt that overemphasis of the classical in relation to nature was of detriment to British sculpture:

... the slavish regard for the antique, which, following its external shape rather than feeling the impulse of its spirit, has driven almost all that is of English growth from its studies. To this school of frozen form the heart of Britain will never respond...The artist who follows nature, who embodies the forms which fancy creates from life, and who desires to give an original image of his day and people, what can he take from the antique? Let us emulate but not imitate.

While Cunningham was publishing these tracts, Steell was learning his trade. An astute and motivated student, there is reason to believe he would have been fully aware of Cunningham’s agenda. As for sculptural examples of it, these would be available to him in the work of Chantrey, who, as it has been seen, was arguably Edinburgh’s most prominent statuary.
Cunningham’s views should perhaps be considered in practical as well as theoretical terms. He had trained as a stonemason, and his views on sculptural directness could be linked to his background within the clear vernacular of Scottish masonry carving, which favoured bold iconic forms and direct symbolic devices and narratives.

During the early nineteenth century, opportunities for sculptors were somewhat more plentiful in London than in Scotland. While governmental patronage did not reach the levels that French sculptors traditionally enjoyed in Napoleonic France, Britain finally determined that the encouragement of native artists would be of considerable value to the nation. Between 1795 and 1850, Parliament awarded some £110,575 towards monuments raised to British heroes in St. Paul’s Cathedral. These monument commissions at the least provided British sculptors with a broad ideological framework to work within. The concept introduced in 1795 was in emulation of France’s Pantheon. While the British version of this national hall of fame was never realised, it was the first comprehensive national programme to encourage British sculptors. Yarrington evaluated the venture as “the first major state patronage of sculpture... the system of commissioning artists and the works themselves set the scene for subsequent attempts by state and private committees to create national monuments to heroes.”

The majority of the works were awarded to the most eminent sculptors in London. These were John Flaxman, John Bacon, J.C.F. Rossi, Thomas Banks, Sir Richard Westmacott and later, Francis Chantrey. These monuments all shared traits of what was termed by Katherine Esdaile as the
Fig. 51. Thomas Banks, *Monument to Captain Burgess*, 1802, St. Paul's Cathedral, London.
“Peninsular School” of British sculpture. These were characterised by a combination of allegorical and naturalistic elements.

Thomas Banks’s Burgess Monument was an example of this British style compromise. (Fig.51) Allegorical elements (in this case, a winged figure representing Victory) was combined with idealised central figure. The ideal body of the figure was in turn combined with a naturalistic and recognisable portrait element. For many, this amalgamation was awkward and unsuitable for monumental sculpture. Cunningham wrote of Banks’s naval monuments to Captains Burgess and Westcott:

Banks had long desired to introduce a more poetic style of art into our national monuments... he tried a style of composition of a mixed nature, which wants alike the dignity of the ancient, and the palpable act-of-parliament reality of modern art—and so, possessing the full charm of neither, pleases few... all is plain and simple—yet with so few figures no sculptor ever contrived to give more offence. The two naval officers are naked, which destroys historical probability... As little can it be accepted as strictly poetic, for the heads of the heroes are modern and the bodies antique: every-day noses and chins must not be supported on bodies moulded according to the godlike proportions of the Greek statues.

Cunningham’s criticisms, while sharp, also went on to lament the state of British taste. This could also be seen as an indictment of the state of British sculpture and sculpture training during the period. Depending upon their location, British sculpture students encountered conditions ranging from little or no formal training (learning instead under a monumental mason, or within a carving apprenticeship) to proper systemised instruction at the Royal Academy Schools in London, or education abroad.

As has been seen, in Scotland, there were some study collections, and societies such as the RIEFAS, and the Glasgow Dilettanti Society. However, access to books, prints, and study casts was relatively difficult and often required important social connections and patronage. Even if a sculptor managed to receive the necessary training, there were fewer opportunities to
show work, strengthen patronage relationships, and receive commissions than there were in Europe. As a result, many British sculptors were drawn inexorably to the continent.

**Europe**

The most active sculptural environment in the early nineteenth century was Rome. However, France also enjoyed conditions which contributed to a vibrant sculptural culture. Successive French governments actively supported sculptors through huge public monument programmes, as well as support of an extensive and rigorous academy system for the training of young artists. June Hargrove described how public commemoration was supported by successive rulers with different ideologies:

One of the most ambitious renovations centred around the bridge that connects the Place de la Concorde with the Left Bank. Napoleon had designated the bridge, built by Perronet in 1787, as a Gallic version of the Ponte St. Angelo in Rome and lined with portraits of eight of his generals killed in battle. When Louis XVIII usurped the plan for a Pont Louis XVI, marbles from d’Angiviller’s *Great Men* were considered, but twelve new statues were finally chosen. They brought d’Angiviller’s idea of a commemorative series into the realm of the public monument proper.

While French sculptors often followed the neoclassical tradition, by the middle of the 1820s, a clear expressionistic reaction to the simple, austere style could be discerned. By the 1830s, true Romanticism was beginning to take hold, evident in the works of David d’Angers. This carefully observed, accurately detailed work emphasised expressive surface combined with dynamic rhythm and movement within the composition and pose. Such sculptural concerns were clearly a legacy of the acclaimed French sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet (1716-1791).
Fig. 52. This engraving from Diderot's *Encyclopedia* illustrated the foundry casting of an equestrian statue. Other plates illustrated the steps involved in making a mould.
Falconet’s most famous monument, and one of the most influential antecedents for Steell, was his equestrian monument of Peter the Great for St. Petersburg. (See Fig. 213) Falconet travelled to that city in 1766 to begin work for Catherine II of Russia. This patronage was largely instigated by Falconet’s friend and correspondent Denis Diderot. Diderot (1713-1784) wrote extensively on art and aesthetics, and his *L‘Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* of 1763 was a major Enlightenment publication. Falconet supplied the encyclopedia entry on Sculpture. The volume also included detailed engravings of the process of mould making and bronze casting. (Fig. 52)

Both Falconet and Diderot respected the antique, but were also fiercely critical of unqualified worship of ancient art. Falconet criticised any work of any era which he felt was substandard. He sharply derided Greek painting, as well the Roman equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius. (See Fig. 79) He went on to state that in certain areas, contemporary art was superior to the antique. Both men were highly critical of aesthetes who followed the antique blindly (for example, Wincklemann) and were suspicious of the opinions of those who were not practising artists. Diderot wrote in 1765:

> Anyone who scorns nature in favor of the antique risks never producing anything that’s not trivial, weak, and paltry in its drawing, character, drapery, and expression. Anyone who’s neglected nature in favor of the antique will risk being cold, lifeless, devoid of the hidden, secret truths which can only be perceived in nature itself. It seems to me one must study the antique to learn how to look at nature...Modern artists have rebelled against study of the antique because amateurs have tried to force it on them; and modern men of letters have defended study of the antique because it’s been attacked by the *philosophes*.

This doctrine anticipated the balanced, moderate, common-sense style of sculpture later advocated by Chantrey and Cunningham. The *Monument to Peter the Great* exemplified this moderate style. The anatomy of the colossal horse was carefully observed and depicted; the pose was novel,
energetic and heroic. Though a depiction of an historical figure, the composition was vibrant and contemporary—the rearing horse was highly original, and a great technical achievement which had rarely been seen in Europe.\textsuperscript{204} The work forms a major part of the lineage that Steell would emulate in his *Wellington Monument*. (See Fig. 189)

The inherent naturalism of the work created an acceptable “native” effect. Instead of a neoclassical, international depiction of the Russian hero, or an emulation of classical Roman statuary, what was seen was an integrated monument which was simultaneously grand and familiar. Falconet’s decision to eschew classical costume and depict the figure in an approximation of contemporary dress, contributed to this more native, direct treatment. Falconet’s monument was a landmark achievement for equestrian bronze sculpture in Europe. In France, another eminent French sculptor displayed a similar adherence to direct naturalism within a classical framework that exerted an influence from Europe, to as far as North America.

Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828) was one of several eminent eighteenth-century sculptors to follow an inherently naturalistic style, though his work ranged widely between rococo and neoclassical modes of expression. His skill as a portraitist was widely recognised and admired for its verisimilitude and accuracy. Houdon regularly made use of life casts, and followed the prevailing academic use of assistants within a large atelier.

He placed great importance upon bronze work, and operated his own foundry. Writing to the painter Bachelier in 1794, Houdon remarked:

I have devoted myself essentially to two studies...to which I have devoted everything I have earned, and which would have been most useful to my country if I had
Fig. 53. Jean Houdon, Diana, 1782, bronze.
Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.
had any support and if I had had the means; anatomy and bronze casting of sculpture. Long housed in the ateliers of the City, I profited by this position by being at the same time sculptor and metal founder, and by reviving in my country this useful art, which could have been lost, since all the founders were dead when I began to concern myself with it. I constructed furnaces, I trained workmen, and after many fruitless and costly attempts, I succeeded in casting two statues: the Diana, of which one cast still belongs to me, and my Frileuse. In 1787 I was evicted from these ateliers by Breteuil, and within three weeks I had bought a house across the street and constructed new furnaces, and there I cast my Apollo.

Houdon clearly felt that he had helped rescue French bronze casting from oblivion. By his efforts, he also served as a model for the sculptor-founder. This was a role that would be emulated by Chantrey and Steell.

It is revealing to note that of the three cast works he mentions, two are of classical theme and the third is allegorical. To further illustrate his eclecticism, the sculptor regularly employed contemporary dress in sculpture. His portrait statues, while emphasising the heroic, also employed natural poses that were consciously less formal than those emulating classical compositions. He explicitly differentiated between three types of presentation and offered sitters versions à la mode, à l'antique and a compromise of these representations to cater for a range of views and tastes.

While his work is often seen as more influenced by nature than the antique, Houdon was completely conversant with classical traditions, an early example being his Diana of 1782. (Fig. 53) The sculptor would also employ classical dress in portrait statues or busts, if required. Treatment of the marble surface was generally smooth, but expressive. Houdon often concentrated on light and shade, and in portraiture especially employed deep undercuts and inscribing of the eyes, to impart an inherent spark of life and illusory sense of animation.

Two events may further illustrate his status as a premier French sculptor. In 1803, Houdon was inducted as a Chevalier in Napoleon's newly
formed Legion of Honour. In 1805, he was appointed as a professor in the Schools of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture of the Institute Français. His position was secured upon the unanimous recommendation of the faculty and students. Throughout his career, Houdon consistently emphasised his particular talent for capturing the attitude and personality of the sitter in marble and bronze. This energetic and ennobling style of monumental sculpture was a simple, eclectic, rational and moderate combination of historical fact, valorisation of the ideal and respect for sculptural antecedents. This form of moderate work can be seen as a clear European tradition that would accommodate John Steell’s portrait statues in a broad context.

Though French sculptural traditions remained vibrant and strong throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Rome was still considered the primary environment for sculptural education and activity. Study at the French Academy at Rome was the ultimate goal for many French students, and there was no higher achievement for a French student of sculpture than the annual Prix de Rome of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Anne Wagner described the many steps of this competition:

In sculpture, the final number [of contestants] varied from forty-five to seventy-five per year. Their first contest, the premier essai on the second Thursday in May, was to execute within the day a sketch of a mythological or historical subject chosen by the professors that morning. Sixteen students were selected from the first group and their names posted in the order in which the judges had ranked their works. Within fifteen days, they returned for the deuxième essai, taking places according to their rank, to mount a figure from the living model...

In the second judgement, both the premier and deuxième essais were taken into account; the first measured skill at composition, while the second tested knowledge of the human figure. On the basis of both works, the field was again reduced to eight contestants. Once again, they were asked to produce a sketch in a day’s time. Its subject could be mythological, historical or religious, while the final form alternated yearly between bas-relief and ronde bosse.

After the students emerged from their day en loge, the sketches were stamped and sealed away by the school secretary. Two months later, when the completed sculptures went on view, the secretary brought out the original sketches. As the works were judged, the finished relief or figure was checked carefully against its sketch.
Fig. 54. Antonio Canova, *Self-portrait*, 1812, Tempio Canoviano, Possagno

Fig. 55. Bertel Thorvaldsen, *Jason*, 1802-28, Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen  Photo: Ole Woldbye
French systems of collection and patronage were more secure and established than those in place in Great Britain. British patronage was comparatively piecemeal, and generally instigated privately for aristocrats or the monarchy. It would not be until the mid-nineteenth century that the practice of public subscription for national monuments approached the level of public commemorative projects enjoyed by French sculptors. While early in the century French painters such as Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) and Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) were significantly influenced by their British counterparts such as John Constable (1776-1837) and Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), British sculptors did not inspire a similar intensity of admiration—though John Flaxman’s work was duly appreciated.

More common was the view that sculpture had a singular, international style which emanated from Rome. Canova and Thorvaldsen were seen across Europe as the pre-eminent masters of the art, and their works were sought from all quarters—Italy, France, Germany and North America.

**Rome**

For an early nineteenth-century Scottish sculptor, all roads truly led to Rome. No artist, however well trained and practised at home, was considered truly complete without exposure to the Eternal City’s ruins, galleries and studios. It was understood to be *the* artistic and sculptural capital of the world. The men considered as the greatest sculptors of the era, Antonio Canova (1757-1822), Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1843), and, for the British, John Gibson (1790-1866), had all maintained their studios and careers in this cradle of visual and sculptural knowledge. (Figs.54-55)
Antonio Canova (1757-1822) was an Italian sculptor, but even more importantly, an international cultural figure. Certainly the most celebrated sculptor of his generation, he first settled in Rome in 1780 and quickly established himself as a major European artist, helping to develop the emergent style that would later be described as neoclassicism. He received numerous high-profile commissions for projects such as the papal tomb monuments for Clement XIV Ganganelli and Clement XIII Rezzonico. He had his first contact with Napoleon in 1802, when the French leader attempted to persuade the sculptor to serve as the director of the Musée Napoleon.

Canova also enjoyed extensive contacts and patronage from British artists and aesthetes. Gavin Hamilton (1723-1798) was a Scottish painter and antiquarian, who became the sculptor’s mentor, and helped him establish extensive contacts with both English and Scottish patrons. Canova’s most eminent clients included the banker Thomas Hope, and the 6th Duke of Devonshire. He exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1817 and 1823, and one of his greatest tomb projects was the Stuart Monument, commissioned in 1816 by the Prince Regent (later George IV), and sited in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome in 1819.

Canova’s finest moment as a diplomat came in 1815, when Pope Pius VII appointed him head of the Papal delegation at the Congress of Paris, charged with the major task of overseeing the restoration of art objects taken from Rome and the Papal States by Napoleon. In an amazing feat of international diplomacy, he was able to settle the matter within days, to the satisfaction of all the concerned parties. Following this triumph, he made a
short visit to London, where he was feted, and took the opportunity to view the Elgin marbles.

The work of this world famous artist would have been known to Steell, especially given his strong connections to Great Britain. However, as Canova died in 1822, Steell would only have known the artist through books (for example, J.S. Memes’s 1825 publication *Memoirs of Antonio Canova*) and accounts in journals and newspapers. He had access to Canova’s work through prints and through at least one study cast in the Trustees’ Academy. However, there were two other major sculptors at work in Rome with whom Steell may have had more direct contact.

Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) was at Rome between 1797 and 1838. He became almost as celebrated an international artist as Canova, and was considered by many to be the purer representative of the neoclassical sculptural style. Thorvaldsen also enjoyed British patronage, and executed an extensive number of busts for British sitters including Lord Dover (1817), the 2nd Duke of Sutherland (1818), Lord Pembroke (1819), Lord Taunton (1828) and Sir Walter Scott (1832). He also created several ideal statues, including *A Shepherd* for Lord Cowley in 1817, *Mercury* for Lord Ashburton in 1818, an 1824 *Venus* for Lord Lucan, and a bas-relief of *Charity* for the Marquess of Lansdowne.

A controversy arose when the sculptor completed a statue of Lord Byron in 1829 intended for Westminster Abbey. Dean Ireland forbid its erection, and the work remained in storage at Customs House until 1842. It was again rejected by Dean Turton in 1843, and was finally sited in Trinity College Library, Cambridge. (See Fig. 128)
Fig. 56. John Gibson, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland
Thorvaldsen and Canova were also known for their incredible generosity to young sculptors, both with money and time. John Gibson (Fig.56) remembered that Thorvaldsen was "like Canova, most generous in his kindness to young artists, visiting all who requested his advice." Gibson, who settled in Rome in 1817, described Rome as "the great University of Sculpture" and noted that the two greatest resident sculptors were perhaps even greater due to their cordial and respectful friendship. Gibson recalled: "Canova used to often say to me, 'Take care not to copy my works, study the Greeks.' He also always advised me to go frequently to the studios of other sculptors, 'and especially go as often as you can to that of Thorwaldsen, he is a very great artist.'"

Thorvaldsen maintained a large studio, and employed both accomplished sculptors and younger students from around the world. Gibson emphasised the importance of this communal learning environment:

One of the great advantages I...derived from residing in Rome was the listening to conversations on art, not only between Canova and Thorvaldsen, but between artists of talent from all countries. In Rome, all the studios are open to each other, every man sees another's works, and holds free communion with him, giving and receiving advice and carrying on the labour of art by a combination of minds...the sculptor must know what others have done and are doing, hear their opinions, examine their works, and enlarge his perceptions by communion with others labouring in the same path.

Scottish sculptors who studied under Thorvaldsen included Patric Park (1811-1855) who studied from 1831 to 1833, and A.H. Ritchie (1804-1870). (Fig.57) Steell was present in Rome in 1829, while Ritchie was working in Thorvaldsen's studio. It is speculative, but likely that the sculptors met, as they would have had contact in the Edinburgh art world, and they shared the acquaintance of the painter David Scott. Scott's memoir mentions that he travelled to Rome with letters of introduction from Ritchie, and had contact
Fig. 58. James Pittendrigh MacGillivray, RSA was the second artist to be appointed Sculptor for Scotland—thirty years following Steell’s death. Photo: Gordon 1976, p. 200
with both Gibson and Thorvaldsen in 1832. What is missing is a direct link between the people Scott and Ritchie knew, and a mention of Steell himself.

Francis Chantrey visited Rome in 1820. He held trenchant views on the value of a Roman education. When Gibson told him he had been in the city for three years, Chantrey replied: “three years is enough to spoil you, or any other man.” When Gibson was planning his Roman study in London in 1817, Henry Fuseli, Flaxman, Benjamin West and William Blake had all encouraged him, but he recalled that “Mr. Chantrey disapproved, saying that there was everything in London requisite for the education of a sculptor, and that I might go to Rome later.” The sculptor was displaying an anxiety held by some that Roman experience could be overwhelming to a young artist. The painter B.R. Haydon (1786-1846) had similarly spoken derisively of Renaissance Rome’s effect upon contemporary British artists, stating “They all come back castrated.” In his journal of 1840, he added:

I can account for feeble minds becoming feebler from going to Italy. The gap between their humbler notions & what they see is so great that the imagination crushes their hopes, their energies, their ambitions. They become copyists, imitators, Connoisseurs, Dealers, or Slaves!—Wilkie too. God save me from such a disease—from such a horror! Italy was Wilkie’s ruin! All his early notions were destroyed by the giant hand of Michel Angelo!

James Pittendrigh MacGillivray (1856-1938)(Fig.58), a Scottish sculptor of the following generation, seems to have entertained a similar opinion of Steell, suggesting in a 1917 lecture to the Edinburgh Architectural Association: “He seems never to have got over his visit to Rome, never to have been able to emancipate himself from the moribund classic of the foreigners resident there in his day—never to have looked with the naked eye upon the native character of the folk in the midst of whom he lived.”
While travel in Italy was still overwhelmingly advocated, by the middle of the century an extended sojourn would no longer be seen as imperative for a productive career. Steell’s short visit could have been a precursor of this view, as he and later sculptors received more opportunities to study the antique through Academy casts than previous generations of students. As Helen Smailes remarked upon a Steell contemporary:

In 1853 William Brodie modelled *Corinna, the Lyric Muse* in Rome with [Laurence]Macdonald’s assistance...he was already well-acquainted with classical sculpture owing to the substantial increase in the cast collection at the Trustees’ Academy. In 1825 Wilkie had written to William Collins from Rome, urging him to persuade Samuel Joseph to seek his fortune in Rome, for ‘he will be lost in Edinburgh’. Thirty years later Brodie stayed just six months in Rome before returning to Edinburgh to develop a career in Scotland.219

Steell’s 1829 excursion to Rome was similarly brief, but influential in widening his choice of subjects. Discussion of his Rome period is problematic however, in that no correspondence has emerged from his time there, nor are there any reports of his activities. Woodward argued for the influence of the journey based upon a comparison of Steell’s subject matter before and after the visit.220 It cannot be denied that Steell’s post-Rome efforts, as reported in the press, showed an increased activity in ideal subjects.221 However, a comparison of his pre-Rome and post-Rome portraits is impossible, as no busts pre-dating 1831 seem to have survived. Steell’s earliest portraits were in a classical vein, and as such were probably not unduly influenced by Roman travel. Steell’s Roman holiday probably served to reinforce and refine his aesthetics and skills, rather than significantly change or challenge them.

Reports from later in Steell’s career gloss over the Rome period, or in several instances report incorrectly that he was there for several years.222 Careful study of the contemporary press shows that he was there no more
than nine months, and perhaps as little as five. Woodward stated that "the sculptor was definitely still resident in Edinburgh in July 1829 when attention was drawn to his recently erected statue of St. Andrew." If this is so, his stay was five months. However, the specific date of the installation was not given in the Journal—and even if it was, does not constitute conclusive evidence that Steell was in Edinburgh for the installation. It is equally possible that he had left for Rome before the July notice was published.

The Edinburgh Literary Journal of 7 November 1829 reported: "Steele, the young sculptor, whose busts, exhibited last spring, were esteemed indicative of talent, is at present studying in Rome." We know for certain that Steell had returned to Edinburgh by December 1829, for there is a letter to D.O. Hill with his Darnaway Street address dated 27 December in the RSA library files. Therefore, determining Steell's length of stay depends upon discovering his departure date, ascertaining whether or not it was before July of 1829. The catalogue listing for a bust by Steell in the Glasgow Dilettanti Society's 1829 exhibition gives his address as Edinburgh, with the caveat, "now at Rome." The exhibition opened on 10 August 1829.

While Steell was in Rome, John Gibson may have been an influence. The Dundee Advertiser suggested that during his time in Rome, Steell "formed one of the band of students that acknowledged John Gibson as their master." The artist's gentle neoclassicism had informed Steell's treatment of surface, as well as his naturalist depiction of animals. Steell later paid tribute to Gibson by including his Hunter and Dog in a bas-relief of The Opening of the Great Exhibition on the base of the 1876 Consort Memorial.
Fig. 59. John Steell, *The Opening of the Great Exhibition of 1851*, 1865-76, Consort Memorial, Charlotte Square Edinburgh. Photo: Rococo Leafladen

Fig. 60. Detail of above, featuring Gibson’s *Hunter and Dog*. Photo: Rococo Leafladen

Fig. 61. John Gibson, *Tinted Venus*, 1851-6, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London
However, Gibson’s greatest (though controversial) artistic contribution was his sculptural employment of the polychromatic nude figure—a form which Steell never presented. (Fig.61)

In addition, the mode of monumental sculpture which Steell later displayed was closer to Chantrey’s work. Gibson stated his reservations with the vernacular, non-allegorical style championed by Chantrey and Cunningham:

There are scribblers about art who endeavour to denounce the introduction into monuments of figures personifying the moral virtues of the deceased; thus they would reduce monumental sculpture to simply the statue of the person, and that must be in a frock-coat and cravat...The human figure concealed under a frock-coat and trousers is not a fit subject for sculpture.227

If Steell received the same type of instruction that Gibson enjoyed under Canova, he would have been given space in a large open studio. His first exercise would have been to model a copy of a study cast, (for example, Gibson’s first exercise was a copy of Canova’s Pugilist) with the mentor correcting the student’s forms and proportions. Following the mastery of this task, he would have been encouraged to conceive of a single figure of his own design—usually a small work, no larger than two feet high. When the master felt this skill was successfully achieved, the student would attempt a full-size figure. These steps could take months or even years, but after the mastery of intermediate skills, the final stages of the student’s exercises were the creation of statue groups, including two or more figures.

While it remains speculative, Steell presumably took the opportunity not only to study and model the great examples of Classical and Renaissance sculpture, but also to practice his stone carving skills. Italy was the primary source for both statuary marble, and the specialist knowledge necessary to execute the finest work in the material. Given the great expense of the stone,
Fig. 62. John Steell, *Boy Fishing*, c. 1829-36. Calotype from the Steell scrapbooks, National Library of Scotland.
Steell would need to know as much as possible about the carving of statues and busts to avoid costly mistakes. As Steell’s apprenticeship had been served as a wood carver, it would have been prudent for him to seek instruction in the finer points of stone work. After his initial success with the model of *Alexander and Bucephalus* in 1833, Steell had enough capital to employ expert stone masons, but until that time, he must have depended upon his own expertise.

We can conclude that Steell worked on some projects in Rome. A small figure, entitled *Boy Fishing*, was reportedly modelled in Rome. A marble version was exhibited in the RSA exhibition of 1836, and was purchased by Francis, Lord Gray for Kinfauns Castle, Perthshire. The work was known before this, for it was mentioned in the Burns parody sung in Steell’s honour at the St. Luke’s Club Dinner of 1833:

```
O come forth, gentle Steell, let thy chisel ne’er rush,
But from forms yet unveiled, hew each soul casting crush,
And come to our feast—let thine own classic bust,
Finely cut by the hand of St. Luke, boy,
Fill its niche in the nave of St. Luke’s.
And boldly yet the song shall rise
For sculpture Steell and a’that,
Like thought, the marble lasts for ages,
Nae time can ever thaw that;
For a’that and a’that
Bucephalus and a’that
The boy that’s fishing in the burn
I wish Canova saw that!
```

There is no evidence of any larger projects executed by Steell in Rome. It speaks to Steell’s abilities however, that his first project upon his return to Edinburgh was a major colossal group which combined equestrian and figurative elements. If Steell followed the regimen of instruction described
Fig. 63. John Steell, *Alexander and Bucephalus*, 1833 (cast, 1883), Royal Exchange, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
by Gibson, then we may assume that within a few short months he had attained the skills necessary for such an ambitious undertaking.

Steell’s general style is at all times moderate and balanced—an amalgamation of what he understood to be the best work of the time. The basis was neoclassicism in the style of Thorvaldsen, Canova, and Gibson, but balanced with the naturalism of Chantrey and Joseph. This balance was also reflected in his education, which stressed classical subjects, themes and treatments, but would also have emphasised the “Scottish” tradition of natural observation, within Scottish historical and genre subjects. This interest could be seen in his early career, when records indicate that he was not only drawing from the Trustees’ Academy cast collection, but from life as well. While he consistently softened and idealised his subjects, in his best portraiture there is always a sense that a psychological contact took place between the sitter and sculptor.

Only one truly “classical” group survives by Steell—the Alexander and Bucephalus. (Fig. 63) As will be seen in the next chapter, this statue had special resonance for 1833 Edinburgh, and marked an early watershed in Steell’s sculptural career; it was, in short, a smash hit. As warmly received as the group was, it essentially marked the end of his major efforts at neoclassicism; the ensuing works were mostly portrait-based commemorative monuments, and as the century progressed, Steell came to employ classical treatment less and less. Steell never followed trends slavishly; he always seemed to consider the visual requirements of the project. His naturally moderate nature and flexible style is probably the main reason he continued to receive major commissions for so many years.
This balance however, had its foundations in Rome. The period, while poorly documented, was of crucial importance to Steell’s career. The classical idioms he encountered there not only reinforced and enhanced his formal education, but also earned for him his credentials as a proper sculptor with exposure to foreign study. Classical and neoclassical antecedents clearly informed the work he executed upon his return, though he would soon combine severe classical forms with contemporary dress and naturalistic details. His next major work however, would draw deeply from the classical sources he had absorbed within a short, but intense period of time.
Fig. 64. John Steell, *Alexander and Bucephalus*, 1833 (cast 1883), City Chambers, Royal Exchange, Edinburgh. Photo: Rocco Lienhard
Chapter Four
"The Finest Production of the Age"
Steell and the Alexander and Bucephalus: 1829-1833; 1881-1884

The most significant project of Steell’s early career was his ideal narrative group of Alexander and Bucephalus. Completed in 1833, this sculpture was Steell’s first large scale work, and was undertaken in the hope of attracting patronage. Steell began work on the group in clay at his studio at 23 Dundas Street in 1829, shortly after his return from Rome, where he would have encountered similar ideal subjects. Steell’s intention was to cause a sensation with the group, extend his reputation and attract more work. Large groups could be ruinously expensive to realise, and were often done on speculation in clay, then cast into plaster in the hope of convincing a wealthy patron or institution to transfer the work into costlier, more durable materials. In Steell’s case, the artist’s plaster, while creating a bona fide sensation, was not cast into bronze until 1884, nearly at the end of his career.

The Alexander and Bucephalus spoke to the people of Edinburgh on an artistic, social and political level. The work’s neoclassical style suited Edinburgh’s reverence for its eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals, and reflected how the cultural elite of Edinburgh wished to see themselves. It was a contemporary work, yet melded with the architecture and associations of the city’s past. Its symbolic message reflected concurrent political ideas regarding the role of government and the nature of the governed; these concepts had been illustrated in several eighteenth-century examples. The
Fig. 65. Steell's use of the *chiton* not only followed classical forms, it enlivened the inherent dynamism of the composition, while serving as a structural element to support the weight of the rearing horse.  
*Photo: Rocco Lieuallen*

Fig. 66. Steell balanced the anatomical details of both figure and horse with a smooth, idealised treatment of surface.  
*Photo: Rocco Lue allen*
overwhelming irony remains however, that as popular and well-received as
the group was, it stood in Steell’s studio for fifty years before being
preserved in an enduring material.

The narrative was a popular one, and was described in Plutarch.
According to legend, Bucephalus was brought before Alexander’s father, but
was so wild that no one could approach him. Alexander intervened, and
was able to tame and ride him on the spot, proving both his ability and
courage:

Alexander went quickly up to Bucephalus, took hold of his bridle, and turned him
towards the sun, for he had noticed that the horse was shying at the sight of his own
shadow, as it fell in front of him and constantly moved whenever he did...Finally, when he
saw that the horse was free of his fears and impatient to show his speed, he gave him his
head and urged him forward, using a commanding voice and a touch of the foot.234

The symbolic message of the story was that intellect and skill could
overcome brute force. More particularly, the narrative stressed Alexander’s
acumen and equestrian skills as evidence of his ability to rule men. The
importance of the horse to the narrative was this: since the animal had no
knowledge of nobility or position, it could not be flattered or threatened into
submission. Skill and knowledge were the means by which the monarch
proved his right to govern.

Conceived as a public debut, the group was an auspicious
opportunity for Steell to display his talents, in that it incorporated both
equestrian and figurative elements. The Macedonian youth is shown strong
and agile, reaching out to calm the fiery stallion, who rears and paws the air
with defiance. Alexander is dressed simply in a Greek chiton, which
accentuates the contours of the figure, leaving the outstretched left arm and
chest bare. (Fig.65) The integration of the classical drapery within the figural
Fig. 67. Steel combined naturalism with classicism, much in the same way as Thomas Banks (below) had done in his naval monument to Burgess, which employed accurate, though idealised anatomy, classical drapery, and a mythic theme. Photo: Rocco Lorcagliesi.

Fig. 68. Thomas Banks, *Monument to Captain Burgess*, 1802, St. Paul’s Cathedral, London. Photo: Irwin 1986, no. 83.
and equine elements was an additional display of his expertise. Additionally, the drapery served as a structural feature, turning underneath the horse, imparting a clear outline and an inherent motion, which were understood to be in keeping with the highest contemporary style.

The neoclassical effect was mediated by naturalistic detailing. (Fig.66) From the first display of the Elgin marbles in 1816, British sculptors had carefully studied and debated the inclusion of anatomical details such as veins and ligaments in horses. Sculptors attempted an overall classical feeling, combined with accurate depictions of anatomy. This reflected John Flaxman (1755-1826) and Thomas Banks’s (1735-1805) early nineteenth-century naval monuments, which employed both Greek drapery and naturalistic portraiture, accoutrement and costume. (Figs.67-68)

Steell’s handling of the surface was smooth and refined. He would continue to employ a highly finished surface to his work for the whole of his career, in both stone and bronze. While his work in clay allowed for naturalistic detailing, he would never use the material in an overtly expressionistic, New Sculpture manner. Regardless of the naturalism he employed, his overall goal was always to present the austere, simple and grand style of neoclassical sculpture. At all points of his career, critics would praise his purity of feeling.

Steell created a unique challenge for himself in the project by setting out to fuse a rearing equestrian form with figurative sculpture. It was a proven theme, but had not been attempted in Scotland; to be a success, it would have to be energetic, yet controlled; expressive, yet dignified; spirited, yet serene. The narrative theme would have to be direct, but amalgamated

Fig. 70. Steell's treatment of Alexander's hair and features are clearly reminiscent of the *Dying Alexander*. Photo: Rocco Leuallen.
within the style of the execution and the general visual effect of the work. Above all, Steell meant the group to be a calling card, and his "'prentice piece"—a sculptural statement that would boldly proclaim his intellectual depth and technical skills as an artist.

Steell’s depiction of Alexander’s features was reported by the *Art Journal* to have been modelled “from a bust of Alexander in one of the Florentine galleries.”²⁴⁰ It is likely that the bust referred to was the *Dying Alexander*, held by the Uffizi since the end of the seventeenth century. (Figs.69-70) If so, it suggests that Steell may have travelled to Florence, as well as Rome in 1829. Alternatively, Steell may have had access to a cast of the bust in the Trustees’ Academy collection. The expression, in keeping with accepted neoclassical language, was animated, but restrained, highly idealised and smooth. It was intended not only as a specific physical description of Alexander’s features, but was meant to exemplify his skill, courage and reason.

Steell’s treatment of the figure was presumably a balance between the classical and the naturalistic. It is not known if he used a life model for his figure of Alexander. His pose and composition, while based on the *Dioscuri* theme, do not share the proportions of the figures. Winckelmann had laid out specific criterion for the proportions of gods, goddesses and heroes in his *History of the Art of Antiquity*, but this had not been translated into English until 1849. It is likely however, that Steell employed a similar system to the general one Winckelmann explained thus: “The head and body of a well-built man will have the same relation to his thighs, legs, and feet, as his
Fig. 71. Dioscuri figure, Rome.

Fig. 72. Apollo Belvedere, Vatican Museum, Rome.

Fig. 73. Steell’s Alexander, Edinburgh.
Photo: Rocco Lezzi.
thighs have to the legs and feet, and as the upper arm has to the fore-arm and hands.”

Examining a Dioscuri figure, the Apollo Belvedere and Steell’s Alexander by using these proportions, it would seem that all three are slightly elongated from Winckelmann’s general criteria, but Steell’s figure is closer than the other two examples. (Figs.71-73) Regardless of this, Winckelmann had also stated that “The ideal part of beauty was always regarded by the ancient artists as the higher part of it; they therefore made accuracy of proportion subordinate, and adjusted, as it were, proportion to beauty...” It would seem that Steell’s figure, as well as his horse, was a composite of both classical antecedents and direct observation of nature, each adjusted accordingly to create a satisfactory whole.

The first public mention of Alexander and Bucephalus (also known as Alexander Taming Bucephalus), appeared in the Edinburgh Literary Journal of 1830:

...the work which Mr Steele is principally directing his attention to at present, ... is a colossal group of Alexander taming Bucephalus; and, from the progress he has already made in it, as well as his talents, and enthusiasm in his art, there is good reason to believe that this work, when finished, will reflect honour on himself and his native city.

The same article had profiled Steell’s other smaller ideal projects, but suggested that the large group was taking up most of his time and effort; it would be another three years until the group was completely finished. The Edinburgh Literary Journal of 16 April 1831 kept the public apprised of the sculpture’s progress:

Steele the Sculptor is again employed on his colossal group of “The Taming of Bucephalus,” which had been interrupted by a necessary removal from the studio where it was begun, and the difficulty of getting proper accommodation. It promises well, and will add to the reputation of this rising artist.
Fig. 74. This line engraving of Macdonald's group of *Ajax and Patroclus* appeared on the front page of the *Scotsman* of 31 October 1829. The engraving was from a drawing by Robert Scott Lauder.
The *Scotsman* was also following Steell’s progress on the group, and offered a great deal of encouragement and praise:

A new and meritorious candidate for distinction in this beautiful art has lately appeared in our city, in the person of Mr John Steel, the younger. The subject which this young gentleman has chosen for his debut as a sculptor is a noble one, the "Taming of Bucephalus," and though it is yet unfinished, enough is done to shew [sic] that he has a fine conception of the great style of art.

...a taste for the art is awakening at this moment in every part of Europe, and our own country holds out something more than the promise of a rich crop of talent. Mr Steell will now be entitled to stand by the side of Macdonald, Fletcher, and other Scotsmen, who have already won a high place in public estimation...

Much as we wish that taste had made sufficient progress in our country to create a market, even though a limited one, for works of this description. At present it happens too often that a talent for the fine arts, must be, like the virtue of the Stoics, its own reward.

The last paragraph reflected the often lamented state of Scottish patronage; there was little demand for ideal work. This problem was being addressed to some extent by the Board of Manufactures, which hosted at the Royal Institution a series of at least three special one-man, one-work exhibitions with the combined purpose of encouraging native artists and educating public taste. Steell was presumably aware of these prior exhibitions, two of which were of sculpture. Laurence Macdonald exhibited his group of *Ajax and Patroclus* from October to December of 1829, and Thomas Campbell showed his *Hopetoun Monument* from November of 1829 to January of 1830. As visitors were charged an admission fee, publicity would not be the only benefit to the artists.

Macdonald’s *Ajax and Patroclus* (Fig.74) excited the Edinburgh cultural community to the extent that members of the cultural elite fought a duel over it—but it had not been sold. The incident showed that at least one part of the community held particularly strong views on contemporary sculpture. Steell clearly followed Macdonald’s example while hoping for a different commercial result.
Steell prepared to show the *Alexander and Bucephalus* at the Royal Institution in spring of 1833. He wrote to the Board of Manufactures secretary Francis Cameron:

4 Northumberland Place  
March 19, 1833

Sir

Being most anxious to have my group of Alexander and Bucephalus, on which I have been employed for some time past, and which is now about to be cast in plaster of Paris, exhibited in a space where it could be viewed at proper distance, I take the liberty of begging that you, Sir, will have the goodness to submit to the Directors of the Royal Institution an earnest request on my behalf that they would be pleased to allow me the use of one of their Apartments for such time as may suit the convenience of the Royal Institution…

Steell was taking no chances that the Board might refuse his request. He had already asked for support from Alexander Maconochie, Lord Meadowbank (1777-1861), who served as a Commissioner of the Board of Manufactures. Meadowbank directed Cameron to call a meeting of the Board to consider Steell’s request.

The Board of Trustees granted Steell free use of its rooms for six weeks. Within this space, the Board displayed its cast collection from the antique, for the instruction of its students, and for the edification of the public as well. The collection also held examples of the more recent European neoclassical sculptors Canova and Thorwaldsen. By exhibiting in this environment, Steell (as Macdonald and Campbell before him) was inviting comparisons and consciously placing himself within this sculptural tradition. An advertisement which misspelled his name, appeared in the *Scotsman* of 15 May 1833:
The notice ran until 22 June.

The exhibition created a veritable sensation. The press were superlative in their praise. The *Caledonian Mercury* of 18 May 1833 wrote:

> Mr Steell's group [is] a noble, or, we should rather perhaps say... incomparable work of Scottish Art... we... beheld before us, in all its grandeur and beauty, a work alike admirable in design and in execution, and which, strong as the expression may seem, would probably have been accounted a striking effort of genius even in the age of Pericles himself. The group [is]... so true to nature in her most classic form, that the effect is inconceivably striking... By this effort alone Mr Steell has placed himself at the head of his department of art in Scotland, perhaps in Britain. Even antiquity itself has bequeathed to us but few things superior to this.

The *Mercury*'s critique gives us great insight into the aesthetic values of Steell's contemporaries. Of great importance was the emulation of classical art and the criteria of "grandeur and beauty." It was high praise for Steell's production to be lauded as "a striking effort of genius even in the age of Pericles himself." Of greatest relevance for Steell's later style is the telling phrase: "so true to nature in her most classical form..." (my italics) These two qualities were seen as particularly complimentary, in that they successfully combined the study of nature with the emulation of what was seen as the highest form of sculptural achievement.

It was this amalgamation of naturalism and classicism that would characterise the majority of Steell's subsequent work. The reviewer
mentioned the group’s strong expression, but suggested that it was fully harmonised. A later article stressed that it was nearly perfect, and displayed the qualities of “unity, spirit, lightness, grace, beauty and classical purity.”

This was Steell’s first and only truly ideal neoclassical work, but he was already balancing his execution with naturalism, especially in the carefully observed details of Bucephalus.

British sculptors had been balancing idealism and naturalism within sculpture since before the end of the eighteenth century. The debate would continue in the perennial discussion of the propriety of modern dress, right up until the end of the century. Even within strict neoclassical portraiture, sculptors had the choice of an idealised Greek mode or a more naturalistic, detailed Roman form. Steell’s education would have stressed this balance between idealism and accuracy of detail. Woodward has suggested that within Scotland especially, “the idea of representing a figure in antique dress never obtained a popular following.”

On 20 May 1833, The Caledonian Mercury reiterated its opinion that the Alexander and Bucephalus was one of the finest works ever created in the history of Scottish art. The paper’s enthusiasm took a decidedly patriotic tone. The identification with the ideal, coupled with the understood Scottish propensity for naturalism, (the Mercury had termed it an “incomparable work of Scottish Art,”) created an aesthetic context for the work that contributed to its overall impact.

A conviction was also expressed by the Mercury, that the Alexander and Bucephalus should be preserved in a finer material than plaster (or even
freestone, for which the Board of Manufactures awarded Steell £50 to execute using native stonemasons:

We hear that there is an intention, in certain quarters, to take measures for having this group cut in freestone, and placed in one of the public squares of our city. The motives of the individuals with whom this idea has originated are, we know, highly commendable and praiseworthy; but still we should be inclined to deprecate its being carried into effect. The coarse granulation of freestone renders it eminently unfit to serve as material for a work such as this...

We find, however, from estimates which have been already obtained, that the group might be cast in bronze for £1500, and in iron for about £1000, either of which, in point of durability, to say nothing of other advantages, would be greatly preferable to stone...

There can be no doubt, therefore, to which material the preference ought to be given; and if the country have any desire to encourage its native art, especially when it promises to outstrip even that of more favoured and genial regions, we cannot imagine that truly patriotic taste in the wealthier classes of our people will be scared by a trifling difference of expense, or that there will be any serious difficulty in raising the moderate sum required for embodying in imperishable bronze the noble and truly classical production of Mr Steell...

There was still an understood hierarchy of materials in sculpture, just as there had traditionally been a hierarchy of subject matter in painting. Marble was seen as the most proper material for the production of work, given its successful employment from antiquity and the Renaissance. Marble also had connotations of internationally acclaimed sculpture epitomised by Canova and Thorvaldsen. However, the finest marble from Carrara was highly valued and difficult to transport; it was accordingly expensive.

Bronze was seen as suitable for outdoor work, yet was also often criticised as "heavy" in effect, casting techniques not yet being practised at the highest level in Great Britain. Bronze was also often seen as prohibitively expensive, and in the wet British climate, liable to darken preternaturally.

Within Scotland there was a considerable emphasis on the use of freestone. This advocacy took a clear patriotic tone in the hands of mason-
sculptors such as Robert Forrest and James Thom (1802-1850), as well as in Steell’s own plan to provide sculptural work for native stonemasons. The honey coloured sandstone had been widely utilised in the buildings of Edinburgh, and sculptural decoration on buildings was becoming more commonplace. Even so, as the Caledonian Mercury remarked with regard to the Alexander and Bucephalus, the “coarse granulation of freestone” made it less attractive than marble for statuary material. A group as acclaimed as the Alexander and Bucephalus deserved marble, bronze or even cast iron, rather than the freestone which surrounded it.

The debate over the propriety of freestone for sculpture was briefly revived in the Autumn of 1833 with the completion of Steell’s Ceres for the Scottish Widows building in St. Andrew Square. Several local newspapers took the opportunity to suggest that the native material was equal to marble when in the proper hands. The Edinburgh Evening Courant of 28 October 1833 wrote: “It is executed throughout from Binny freestone, and affords a gratifying proof of what genuine and cultivated talent may produce from the rude material of our native rocks.” This view was shared by the Edinburgh Evening Post of 15 Nov. 1833:

Mr Steel has been acknowledged on all hands as a classical sculptor, and he seems indifferent as to what substance his ideas are embodied; and here he is right—for it is the work, and not the material, on which the excellence of the sculpture depends...it is more in imagination than reality that marble is the only classical material for statuary...Here, then, we have a native genius, with a mind of the first order, legitimizing the produce of our native quarries for works of the first-rate kind.

The Caledonian Mercury of 11 Nov. 1833 also commented:

It is the work itself to which we must attach classical feelings, and not the block from which the figures are formed. The colour of freestone, in our estimation, is much better adapted than chalky marble to give beauty and harmony to a piece of sculpture...Steell, whose merit is of the first order...has stamped freestone as a legitimate material for the chisel of the sculptor...
Fig. 75. John Steell, *Alexander and Bucephalus* statuette, Dalmeny House. The 4th Earl of Rosebery purchased this edition of the work in 1837. There are at least four surviving copies, all in bronze. It is not known how many were cast, nor where they were produced. Steell did not open his own foundry until 1849.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland
This was a considerable reversal for the *Mercury*, which six months earlier had advocated preserving *Alexander and Bucephalus* in bronze. It is likely that the editors believed that a work as superior as the *Alexander* group deserved the finest material, when compared to the more modest, commercial *Ceres*. As Steell’s career progressed, the issue became less relevant; the subscribers for his projects would request marble and bronze. After 1844, Steell executed two large works in freestone, and both of these in an architectural context. The replacement *St. Andrew* and the *Queen Victoria* would remain his only statues in freestone.

The popularity of the *Alexander and Bucephalus* had profound implications for Steell. It was an immense early triumph. He was only twenty-nine when it was unveiled, and the impact upon both Scottish art and his career was profound. In an 1882 article reporting the incipient casting of the group in bronze, the *Art Journal* evaluated the group’s influence and popularity:

Sir John’s group, while it attracted the attention and elicited the applause of the critics, influenced in no small degree the Scottish Art of the period. Thus the late Sir Daniel Macnee made a study of it in oils; Dyce and David Scott also executing careful drawings of it. Many noblemen and gentlemen, moreover, subscribed for small copies which were executed in bronze... The *Alexander and Bucephalus group*, it will be seen, is invested with much historic interest, it being regarded by the best judges of Art as the most successful work of the kind ever executed in Scotland.

It is not known if the *Alexander and Bucephalus* was specifically designed by Steell to appeal to public taste, but Steell presumably knew his audience well enough to realise that an ambitious group in a neoclassical mode would be appreciated by people of culture. In Edinburgh, as in most of Britain in the 1830s, neoclassicism ruled in the public mind as the highest style of art. Edinburgh revelled in its title as “The Modern Athens.”
Figs. 76-77. The horse at left is performing a *levade*, a trained manoeuvre. The horse at right is rearing naturally. Photos: Fig. 76, Liedtke, p. 20; Fig. 77, Fasig-Tipton Co., Lexington, New York.

Fig. 78. The rearing horses of the Parthenon friezes are the major antecedent for all examples of the form. Photo: Warburg Institute
The depiction was also the first use of the rearing horse in Scottish sculpture. This was a form that had ancient antecedents in both painting and sculpture, but had been employed most markedly from the Renaissance forward, as a form of state portrait. The subject was manifested in two major forms: the horse and rider, and the horse and figure. The royal horse and rider had served as a visual assertion and reinforcement of a monarch’s right to rule. This view strengthens the implication of the Alexander tale; Alexander through his skill and intelligence was entitled to reign over men, as he had governed an animal that had been hitherto ungovernable.  

The importance of formal differences within equestrian sculpture should not be underestimated. Walter Liedtke presented a comprehensive account of these in his 1989 book *The Royal Horse and Rider.* Liedtke stated that the difference between a naturally rearing horse, and one executing a trained manoeuvre such as the *levade* had a bearing on the understanding of the intentions of both sculptor and patron. (Figs.76-77) Rearing horses have many antecedents, but originate from the Parthenon friezes. (Fig.78) Renaissance models for the royal equestrian statue often derive from surviving classical trotting forms such as the *Marcus Aurelius*; most notable is Donatello’s *Gattamelata.* (Figs.79-80)

The horse and restraining figure have a separate origin, usually ascribed to the *Dioscuri* figures of ancient Rome. (Fig.81-84) Closer to Steell’s time, the best known antecedents of his subject and composition are the 1745 *Marly Horses* of Guillaume Coustou (1677-1746). This subject has a more general symbolic message, that of intellect overcoming instinct, or intelligence over raw strength. Examples of this form include the *Alexander*
Figs. 79-80. The Marcus Aurelius (left) served as a model for the Renaissance form of the trotting equestrian monument exemplified by Donatello's Gattamelata of 1445-53 in Padua. These monuments emphasise the skill of the sitters, as well as their authority and right to rule. Photos: Fig. 79, Haskett & Penoy 1981, p. 253; Fig. 80, Liedke, p. 162.
Sarcophagus, Agostino Busti’s Monument to Gaston de Foix of 1515, and closer to Steell’s era, the romantic paintings of Gericault, particularly his 1817 Start of the Riderless Horse Race. (Figs. 85-87) The romantic reading of the horse was one of nature as wild, untamed, irrational and terrible, yet also, in their term, sublime.

Steell’s use of the imagery was neither strictly romantic nor monarchist; Alexander served as an ideal symbol of rational intellect, not royal prerogative or God’s favour. Bucephalus was meant to represent spirit, instinct and nature, but also the people. It is possible that the political atmosphere of 1833 Edinburgh—just a year after the Reform Bill had passed—made for a particularly receptive audience for the theme of reason and rationalism in government. It was this symbolic meaning that eighteenth-century French romanticists had ascribed to the Marly Horses.

The subject of Alexander and Bucephalus as understood by Steell and his contemporaries, had its antecedents in Rome, on the Monte Cavallo, or Quirinal Hill, in the Piazza del Quirinale. Here, two monumental figures, known as the Dioscuri, or “Horse Tamers,” provided a grand and imposing depiction of man and beast. (Figs. 82-83) The colossal group dates from second century Rome, and is thought to have been modelled on Greek fifth century B.C. prototypes. Visible throughout the Middle Ages, they were periodically restored and rearranged in situ, with various theories emerging as to who or what they represented.

A twelfth-century written account, the pilgrim’s guide Mirabilia Urbis Romae, suggested that the male figures were representations of the legendary seers Phidias and Praxiteles under Emperor Tiberius, due to inscriptions on
Fig. 81. *Dioscuri* engraving from Lafreri's *Speculum*. Photo: Haskell & Penny 1981, p. 19.


Fig. 84. Raphael, *Dioscuri* drawing, c. 1518, Ian Woodner Collection, New York. The group inspired generations of artists. Photo: Liedtke, p. 111.
their bases, dated fourth century A.D. \textsuperscript{269} A Renaissance interpretation also held that the reference was to the classical \textit{sculptors} of the same names. Alternatively, they have been interpreted as the twin gods Castor and Pollux. The horses have been thought to represent not only quick-witted \textit{compotistae}, or “calculators,” but also the fabled flesh-eating Horses of Diomedes, which were tamed by Hercules.\textsuperscript{270} Phillis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubenstein write in \textit{Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture}:

Soon after 1550 the antiquaries Pirro Ligorio and Onofrio Panvinio identified both groups as Alexander the Great and his horse Bucephalus and this interpretation prevailed through the 18\textsuperscript{th} century...it was Donati in a late edition of his \textit{Roma vetus ac recentes} (1665) who actually illustrated the reverse of a coin of Maxentius showing Castor and Pollux flanking their horses as a comparison. The many representations of the Dioscuri on sarcophagus reliefs confirm Donati’s identification, which was finally accepted in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{271}

Regardless of the true subject matter, the group continued to be perennially popular with artists. Haskell and Penny observed in \textit{Taste and the Antique}:

It was after Winckelmann had praised the austerity of the earlier phases of Greek sculpture that the figures were most enthusiastically described: Goethe was overwhelmed by them; Flaxman felt that they must, like the Parthenon frieze, have been executed under the direction of Phidias; Canova was said to have been seen studying them at dawn both when he first arrived in Rome and at the height of his fame, and to have considered them comparable with the Parthenon marbles...\textsuperscript{272}

As mentioned above, the subject of man and rearing horse also received treatment in eighteenth-century France, most notably in the form of the \textit{Marly Horses}, by Guillaume Coustou (1677-1746). (Figs.88-89) Originally installed in 1745 at the gardens at Marly, to replace Antoine Coyzevox’s allegorical equestrian statues of \textit{Fame} and \textit{Mercury} of 1702, (Figs.90-91) they were subsequently moved to Paris’s Place de la Concorde in 1795. They now reside in an area named for them, \textit{la concourse du Marly}, in the Louvre. Reproduced in a variety of media, especially statuettes, the subject was
Fig. 85. *The Alexander Sarcophagus*, Archaeology Museum, Istanbul. Photo: Warburg Institute.

Fig. 86. *Monument to Gaston de Foix*, 1515. Photo: Warburg Institute.

Fig. 87. Theodore Gericault, *The Start of the Riderless Horse Race*, 1817, J. Paul Getty Museum. Photo: Liedtke, p. 322.
particularly resonant with the French tradition of rationalism. The theme of Alexander was equally popular in Britain; B.R. Haydon completed a painting of *Alexander and Bucephalus* for Lord Egremont which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1827.\(^{273}\)

Coustou’s masterpieces were strongly influenced by the Baroque. His dramatic treatment of the animals was reminiscent of Bernini’s equestrian statues. The emphasis was on detailed anatomy of both horses and figures, but the general focus was on the vigorous struggle between man and beast. The manes and tails flail wildly; the men strain in their effort to control nature. They are almost naked, emphasising their exposure and vulnerability.

Steell’s overall treatment, while energetic and spirited, is less wild. His treatment of the surfaces is smooth and gently idealised. Instead of Coustou’s rusticated stones for the support of the horses, Steell used softly flowing drapery which enveloped his clothed Alexander and undulated beneath Bucephalus to form a structural base. We receive the impression that the stallion is on the verge of submission to his master, while Coustou’s horses markedly strain against their grooms. While the groups share a common theme, it is clear that Coustou’s origins come from a Baroque tradition which was embraced by the romanticists; Steell’s is classical in both origin and effect.

The form of the rearing horse, not as common as depictions of horses trotting or walking, was still a novelty in Great Britain. One of the first examples of the type was a 1688 statue of James II at Newcastle by the Dutch sculptor William Larson. (Fig.92) Edinburgh had seen very few equestrian

Fig. 90-91. Antoine Coyzevox, *Fame and Mercury*, 1702, Paris. Photos: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
monuments of any kind, with the exception of the 1686 lead statue of Charles II in Parliament Square and the 1824-1834 Hopetoun Monument in St. Andrews Square. (Figs.93-94) Steell would have been familiar with both of these groups, as well as late Roman examples such as Bernini’s Equestrian Statue of Constantine. (Fig.95)

While the Marly group is the Alexander group’s closest antecedent in terms of form and theme, we have no evidence that Steell ever visited Paris. It is possible that he did see the city during his journey to Rome; overland travel via the French capital was common at the time. Even barring a visit himself, Steell could have seen engravings or statuettes of the famous group. As a student of sculpture, he would surely have been aware of such a well known and admired composition. However, given his neoclassical treatment of the theme, it is much more likely that the sculptor received inspiration for his rearing horse and figure during his visit to Rome. The Eternal City had not only the ancient Dioscuri, but a later example of rearing horses by an artist much closer to Steell’s era and style: Bertel Thorvaldsen.

The theme was well known and popular, but for Steell’s purposes, the most relevant precursor of the rearing horse form may have been the plaster reliefs entitled The Triumph of Alexander in the Palazzo del Quirinale by Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1843). (Fig.96) This frieze, completed in November 1812 in expectation of Napoleon’s stay in Rome, depicted Alexander’s historic entry into Babylon as described in an 1809 Italian edition of Quintus Curtius Rufus’ Life of Alexander. Alexander was used by Thorvaldsen as an allusion to Napoleon—the wise commander who conquered, but also brought peace and prosperity.
Fig. 92. Engraving of William Larson's 1688 equestrian statue of James II for Newcastle, Royal Collection.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
These metaphorical and political intentions aside, the reliefs are derived from the Parthenon friezes. (Fig. 97) The multiple depictions of the horse would have impressed and influenced Steell most, coupled with the nearby Dioscuri. The political context of the work would not have concerned Steell. Bjarne Jørnæs has stated: “The Alexander Frieze remained in the Palazzo del Quirinale after the return of Pope Pius VII and its connection to Napoleon was probably soon forgotten.” (Fig. 98) At the time of Steell’s 1829 visit to Rome, Thorvaldsen was understood to be the premier international sculptor of the era; a form and theme executed by the Dane was certainly worthy of emulation by Steell.

Additionally, Steell had access to casts of both the Elgin marbles and the Parthenon friezes. At the end of Steell’s career, Professor Baldwin Brown of Edinburgh University purchased “Four sections of the Elgin marbles” at Steell’s March 1888 studio sale. While we cannot conclude that Steell had these casts when conceiving his Bucephalus, we can say with certainty that he had examples at his disposal from the Trustees’ Academy collection in 1829-33. Coupled with his recent impressions of Thorvaldsen’s work, the combined influence certainly informed his creation of the Greek stallion. (Figs. 99-100)

Given the impressive grandeur of Rome’s sculptural environment, it is not surprising that Steell chose to execute a major debut piece based on the Roman groups, almost immediately upon his return to Edinburgh. Not only was the style of the group carefully chosen to appeal, the subject’s subtext itself was a very evocative one for the period. It was understood that a specific aim of sculpture was the instruction and inspiration of society in
Fig. 93. Grinling Gibbons, *Charles II, 1686*, Parliament Square, Edinburgh.
Photo: National Monuments Register, Edinburgh.

Fig. 94. Thomas Campbell, *Hopetoun Monument, 1824-34*, St. Andrews Square, Edinburgh.
Photo: National Monuments Register, Edinburgh.

Fig. 95. Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Equestrian Statue of Constantine, 1654-70*, Scala Regia, the Vatican.
Photo: Lecitke, p. 780.
moral lessons. The horse—powerful, spirited, wilful—could only be a benefit when controlled by the masterful skill and direction of human intellect. It could be argued that rationality of both the governors and the governed was a dominant theme of contemporary Edinburgh politics.278 Displayed only a year after the Reform Act, it could be argued that the broad classical ideals of democracy greatly appealed to the newly enfranchised middle classes.

The symbolic message would not be lost on the public, nor would the need to internalise its message be ignored or misunderstood—the ideal was for each individual to use intellect to govern and control his or her own passions and spirit, to better serve the public good. That this idea could be communicated through a classical anecdote was even better, as the classical world was at the time, held up as an epitome of human achievement, and worthy of emulating if not imitating. The concept was especially appreciated in Edinburgh, long seen as a major centre of progressive reason and learning—the spiritual and actual home of Knox, Hume, Hutton, Ramsay, Scott, Smith, and countless other men dedicated to intellect, rationalism, empiricism and reason.

It was this progressive Whig atmosphere in Edinburgh that gave the group both an appropriate context and an appreciative audience. The Reform Act passed in 1832 was a huge social and political event.279 Lord Cockburn (1779-1854) had commented in his journal on the people’s reaction to the new order:

6th August 1832. The regeneration of Scotland is now secured! Our Reform Bill has become law. Much follows from this one fact. Nobody who did not see it could believe the orderly joy with which the people have received their emancipation, or the judgement
Fig. 96. Christoffer Eckersberg, *Bertel Thorvaldsen*, 1814, Royal Danish Academy. The reliefs are seen in the background of this portrait. Photo: Kragelund 1991, p. 30.


Fig. 98. Palazzo del Quirinale. Photo: Kragelund 1991, p. 35.
which they seem inclined to use it. They are preparing to exercise their franchise for the first time, and under forms to which they are strangers, with great zeal, but with sound sense and perfect peacefulness...the people themselves are henceforth to be the chief avenues by which power is to be reached.260

Accordingly, a sculptural image of a ruler, that emphasised his intellect and rationality over his physical power could be construed as reflecting a local enthusiasm for a democratic government that emulated both fifth-century Greek political values and fifth-century Greek sculpture. We do not know Steell’s politics, but both he and his father registered to vote as soon as they were able; they are listed in the electoral rolls for 1834.281

Many British critics were at the same time consistently championing and agitating for “ideal” sculpture—work which was classical in theme, subject and character, and held to be the highest, most noble form of art in its supposed ability to instruct and inspire society in proper moral attitude.282 The Alexander and Bucephalus belongs to this category. Though Steell was not essentially a sculptural moralist, it could be suggested that the overriding theme of the group—that of human intellect governing animal passions—was carefully chosen by him to allow an opportunity to pursue both a figurative and equestrian project, as well as a subject that had a great chance of being ardently embraced by its audience. Nevertheless, while many in the critical community advocated ideal work, the market did not. Portraiture was still the area of sculptural activity which enjoyed the greatest demand.283

The Board of Manufactures recognised that Steell had endured pecuniary hardship to realise a work that he might not be able to sell, but Steell’s career accelerated in several ways owing to the success of the group.
Fig. 99. Parthenon horse, British Museum, London.

Fig. 100. John Steell, Bucephalus, Edinburgh.

Figs. 99-100. Steell’s depiction of Bucephalus is clearly reminiscent of the Parthenon horses. The Trustees’ Academy held a cast of the work, and Steell himself kept many equestrian casts, which were reported sold at the end of his career.

Photos: Fig. 90, Warburg Institute; Fig. 91, Rino Lenalden.
The Board awarded Steell fifty pounds in support of a scheme to use local stone masons to transfer the plaster into sandstone. The Board minutes which award Steell the money for his project state:

...one of the objects of the Artist is to have his work executed of the full heroic size in stone, to be erected in this city with the view of extending the number of such works, thereby to increase the use of native material which is to be obtained so cheaply in such excellence and abundance, and thus to create an emulation among the highest class of Artists and afford employment in the actual manufacture to a numerous body of Artizans whose capacity for cutting in stone has perhaps not been surpassed...

This project was never realised, presumably due to the sudden impact of the work leading to an increase of commissions. However, it manifests an early example of Steell’s ambitions for the improvement of Scottish sculpture. Steell did use native freestone and stonemasons for the Royal Institution projects of the sphinxes and Queen Victoria.

When the group was displayed, it prompted the most enduring Steell anecdote of all—Steell’s refusal of Sir Francis Chantrey’s offer of career assistance if he would move to London. It had been assumed that Chantrey saw the group in London, based on a cutting from the Steell scrapbooks, but extensive research of the Times and other publications, has discovered no mention of a London exhibition. It more likely that Chantrey saw the Alexander and Bucephalus displayed at the Royal Institution in summer 1833, while he was in Edinburgh installing the statue of William Pitt in George Street. An article from the Edinburgh Evening Post reporting Chantrey’s opinion that the statue should be cut in freestone and sited on top of the Royal Institution also supports this view.

After its initial display, the plaster resided in Steell’s studio until 1883. In 1881, Walter Francis Montagu Douglas Scott, the 5th Duke of Buccleuch (1806-1884), headed a subscription committee to have the work cast in
Fig. 101. John Steell, *Alexander and Bucephalus*, 1833 (cast 1883). This photograph from the Steell scrapbooks shows the statue at its original site in St. Andrews Square, Edinburgh. It was moved to its current location in 1916 to make way for Pittendrigh MacGillivray's *Gladstone Monument*, now in Coates Crescent. Steell later requested that the city replace the four gas lamps at the corners with two at each end, stating that this arrangement showed the statue to its best advantage. Photo: National Library of Scotland
bronze and installed in Edinburgh. Steell himself saw to the casting in 1883, and the group was installed in St. Andrews Square and unveiled on 18 April 1884. (Fig.101) Buccleuch, the project’s instigator and major patron had died only three days before. Sir John McNeill (1795-1883), another patron, had also died before the project’s completion, but was quoted in the Lord Provost’s inaugural address regarding the importance of Steell in general, and the statue in particular. The Scotsman reported:

[The Lord Provost]... read an extract from a letter to Mr Lockhart Thomson by the late Sir John McNeill, in February 1882: “If a school of sculpture has been erected in Scotland, we owe it to Steell, and the foundation of it was his “Alexander and Bucephalus.” Other Scottish sculptors there were, such as Macdonald and Campbell; but as soon as their merits were recognised, they left us. Steell remained with us, and his works now occupy prominent places, not only at home, but in India and America. Meritorious Scottish sculptors have followed his example, and we can look with some pride on the productions of our school.”

By this time, the Alexander and Bucephalus was an icon of a bygone, pre-industrial Edinburgh. The message was still resonant, and still embraced by the community as a beautiful and proper ideal, but more importantly, it was a nostalgic tribute to the sculptor and his efforts towards the improvement of Scottish art. It also constituted a closing chapter of his illustrious career, and represented the fulfilment of a long intended wish by the entire community. Steell’s first public triumph was his last Edinburgh monument. With the symbol of the city’s ideals finally and safely ensconced in bronze, it was easier to feel that the values the statue represented were safe as well.

However, none of this was evident in 1833. Steell was simply a young, talented artist wishing to show what he could do to impress the patrons who would hopefully nurture his talents. Fortunately for him, the Alexander and Bucephalus would constitute a solid testament to his skills—in
1838, Dr. Hope would deem it “the finest production of the age.”\textsuperscript{292} It ensured him even more prestigious commissions and support. His next major work would secure for him historical significance, royal patronage, and the title of Her Majesty’s Sculptor for Scotland.
Fig. 102. John Steell, *Queen Victoria*, 1838-44, Royal Scottish Academy building, Edinburgh.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 103. John Steell, *Sphinx*, 1837, Royal Scottish Academy building, Edinburgh.

Photo: Rocco Lenzi
Chapter Five
Early Patronage: Steell, the Board of Manufactures, and “The Queen's Statue,” 1836-1844

John Steell was a talented sculptor, but talent alone would not guarantee a sculptural career in Edinburgh. As Fiona Pearson wrote: “In his own case, it was the old system of patronage that enabled him to begin a career in sculpture.” Nowhere is the importance of institutional patronage better illustrated than with his work for the Board of Manufactures. The attention drawn by his successful 1833 exhibition of *Alexander and Bucephalus* influenced the Board of Trustees in commissioning Steell for the sphinxes and most importantly, the statue of Queen Victoria for the Royal Institution building on Princes Street. This commission precipitated Steell’s execution of a marble bust of the young Queen, who was pleased enough with the result to create the post of *Sculptor in Ordinary to Her Majesty for Scotland* for Steell. This royal endorsement sealed his career. With the precedent of royal patronage, he would never again have to seek out commissions. From this point forward, Steell consistently had more work than he could handle alone.

Steell was first asked in June 1836 to provide “eight Sphynxes each 12 feet in length and 6 feet in height, to be placed on the top of the Royal Institution.” These were executed for £200, paid in three instalments, upon the approval of the design by William Playfair. A later plan called for a 20 foot tall statue of Minerva, a subject well suited to the Modern Athens, albeit with her Latin name. A Steell letter in the Royal Scottish Academy library
Fig. 104. Engraving of William Playfair,
Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh. Photo: Youngson, p. 196
states that the sculptor actually started a Minerva statue before the decision was made to change the subject to the Queen. The project also involved more than one large statue, as William Playfair’s (Fig.104) letter to the sculptor of 21 March, 1837 makes mention of two works:

Sir, I hereby, on the part of The Hon.ble The Board of Trustees, accept your offer of date the 18th ult. To design model and execute in Humbie stone for the top of The Royal Institution two colossal statues, fifteen or sixteen feet high when sitting, for the sum of Five Hundred Pounds, to be paid by three equal Instalments—the first, on acceptance of your missive, the second, on the finished models being produced, and the third, on the completion of the work. It being understood that the Board will provide the stone, and place the statues in their position on the summit of the Building. (My emphasis)

The accession of the young Queen a few months later must have inspired the Board to honour her by replacing the goddess—an actual rather than ideal tribute. With the completion of the project, Edinburgh had a true “temple of the arts,” though it was a curious amalgamation of Grecian, Egyptian and contemporary British styles. The columns and pediment were Doric, the sphinxes were of Egyptian origin, the Queen’s statue was unique, and reflected a blend of classical and modern styles.

Of critical value to the understanding of Steell’s working method is the survival of an account of his expenditure for the entire project. This document, titled “Outlay in the execution of the Statue of Her Majesty Queen Victoria for Top of Royal Institution, Edinburgh” records many details of the sculptor’s processes and conditions. This crucial piece of evidence makes the Queen Victoria statue the best documented Steell sculpture in terms of illustrating the practical methods and materials utilised by the sculptor.

The first mention of the Queen’s statue in Board minutes appears on 22 November 1837:
...the Board resolv'd & Ordered that an humble application shall be made to her Majesty the Queen through Viscount Melbourne with a view of obtaining her Majesty's gracious permission that a portrait statue of her royal person should be executed by Mr John Steele Sculptor, to be erected on the summit of the Royal Institution of the City of Edinburgh.—And
The board authorized Lord Meadowbank to communicate this Application to Viscount Melbourne.\(^{301}\)

Lord Meadowbank had expressed an interest in Steell as early as 1833. He now displayed concern regarding the sculptor's financial situation by writing to the Board secretary to arrange for his travel expenses:

My Dear Skene
I wish today to get the Board to give a small sum in advance to poor Steele to pay his viaticum to Windsor. It comes off the sum which will be due him & under the circumstances we are well warranted in giving him this assistance...\(^{302}\)

The Board Minutes of 6 December, 1837 read:

The Committee were of opinion that £50 may be advanced to Mr Steele, and that the Secretary should issue a Precept for it out of the fund for the Building; but not unless Mr Playfair shall certify in writing that the money is to go to account of the price of the two Statues.\(^{303}\)

As reference is made to “two Statues”, at this point the Board may have intended to have both a Minerva and a Queen. Steell’s fare paid, he travelled to Windsor a month later. The newspapers duly reported the sittings:

WINDSOR, Sunday.
Yesterday the Queen gave her first sitting to John Steel, Esq., the eminent artist, who is engaged to prepare a model of her Majesty for a colossal statue, which I understand is to be placed in the centre of the city of Edinburgh.—\textit{The Morning Post}, 8 January, 1838.\(^{304}\)

Queen Victoria sat for five sessions with Steell. After the last one, the \textit{Morning Post} correspondent offered a brief review of the sculptor’s efforts:

WINDSOR, Friday.
...The Queen has given her fifth and last sitting to Mr. Steell, and I have been since favoured with a sight of the work of this artist, previous to its being forwarded from the Castle to Edinburgh. It is certainly most faithfully executed, and the sculptor has deservedly obtained the approbation of the whole Court. Should he be as fortunate with the chisel (of which there should be no doubt) as he has been with the clay he will secure to his fellow-citizens a lasting monument, and at the same time the most correct likeness that has ever been obtained of her Majesty.—\textit{The Morning Post} 13 January 1838.\(^{305}\)
Fig. 105. John Steell, *Queen Victoria*, 1838, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
The sittings completed, Steell returned to his studio in Edinburgh, to take a plaster cast from his clay model. This “artist’s plaster” would then be used to create the final bust in marble. (Fig.105) The Queen took an interest in the project, and asked Meadowbank to provide more information regarding her tribute:

24 January, 1838
The Secretary acquainted the Board that he had during the holidays received a letter from Lord Meadowbank now in London, stating that a desire had been express’d by her Majesty, that the model of the Royal Institution should be sent to London for her inspection, in order that she may have an opportunity of judging of the position in which it is proposed to place her statue...

By midsummer, the bust was complete. Steell must have sent it to London for Her Majesty’s inspection fairly quickly, for the press notices collected together in the Steell scrapbooks are from southern, rather than Scottish publications:

Mr. Steell, of Edinburgh, to whom the Queen sat some months ago for a colossal statue to be erected in that capital has just completed a marble bust of her Majesty.
The bust is at this moment in London, and we have been favoured with a sight of it. It appears to us to be an admirable likeness, executed in the best style of the art; and it has, moreover, this especial recommendation, that it not only gives the features, but the air and expression of the illustrious original...
The people of Edinburgh must be very proud that so fine a work of art as this bust is the production of one of themselves; and the number of orders that have already been given for copies of it in marble will extend the fame of Scottish sculpture in a degree that must be highly gratifying to the national feelings.—London Morning Post 28 July 1838

The Queen definitely approved of her likeness: only a few weeks later, the southern press announced the designation of Steell’s new title:

Mr. STEELE, whose beautiful bust of the QUEEN has attracted so much admiration, has been appointed sculptor to her MAJESTY for Scotland. He is the first artist on whom this honour has been conferred.—London Morning Chronicle 13 August 1838

Queen Victoria noted the reaction to the bust by her trusted Lord Melbourne on two occasions in her diary:

January 11 1838: Sat to Mr. Steele and read dispatches during the sitting. At 1/2 past 3 or thereabouts when the sitting was nearly concluded I sent for Lord Melbourne to see the bust and he stayed, I should say, about 10 minutes in the room looking at it. He made, as usual, some blunt, funny remarks about it, but thought it very like.
By the time the marble was finished in July, Melbourne had formed a somewhat harsher opinion:

July 19 1838: My Bust, by Mr Steele, in marble, was standing in my room and I asked Lord Melbourne if he thought it like. He got up and looked at it, looking from me to the Bust, to compare; he did not like it; said the mouth was much too small, the nose too sharp, the whole insignificant, and that there was "a want of character" in it.\footnote{310}

Melbourne's criticism of the bust should be taken in context, as it would seem from another journal entry that he did not put much faith in sculpture:

August 8 1838: I gave Lord Melbourne some applications, and he said there was now a madness for Monuments; he said they wanted me to subscribe to one for Walter Scott, which he thought unnecessary. "These monuments are sheer waste of public money; they don't add to the man's reputation, his works are his best monument," Lord Melbourne said.\footnote{311}

By spring of the following year, the Board were becoming impatient for their statue:

6 March, 1839

Some conversation having taken place respecting the delay of the Sculptor in cutting the statue of the Queen for the Building

\textbf{Ordered} that Mr Thomson shall write to Mr Steele requesting to know what progress he has made with the statue, and pointing out the necessity of proceeding as expeditiously with the work as possible.\footnote{312}

Steell replied to Secretary Thomson's letter three days later. His explanation illustrates the catalytic effect royal patronage was already having on his career:

11 Darnaway Street
9 March 1839

\textit{Dear Sir}

In answer to your letter desiring to know the reason why the completion of the Statue of the Queen has been so long delay'd, I beg to mention that the exalted task of modelling from majesty, led to commissions, of that nature, which I could not but undertake. & immediately attend to—but in the course of a fortnight I will be entirely clear, and the large model, which is already far advanced, will be completed early in the summer, so I trust the Board will bear with me till then, when, I hope to produce a work which will manifest that what has been lost in time, has been gained in experience, for, although I may not have been working at it constantly with my hands, it has ever been uppermost in my thoughts.\footnote{313}

The "large model" that Steell mentioned may have been his full-sized clay, which would be cast into plaster, then carved into stone with the use of
Fig. 106. John Steell, *Queen Victoria* (artist's plaster), c.1840, calotype from Steell scrapbooks, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Photo: National Library of Scotland
a pointing machine. However, since the Board minutes of 22 May 1839 mention the model being "brought before them,"\textsuperscript{314} it could be that Steell was still working on a design model, prior to the Board's approval of his composition and treatment. According to the terms of his contract, the Board would only disburse the second instalment of his fee with the approval of his model. This must have occurred in 1840, as Esme Gordon notes: "Following approval of the design in 1840, Playfair on explicit drawings carefully designed and detailed the coursing and bonding of a twenty-five-ton massive rubble-filled piece of monumental ashlar masonry that accorded with the drapery and pose of the sculptor's model."\textsuperscript{315} (Fig.106)

It is not known if Steell based his composition upon precedents, or if his depiction was completely original.\textsuperscript{316} Examples of seated female monarchs are not particularly common, though there are some examples of Hellenic goddesses, such as the \textit{Demeter} from the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Cnidus, as well as the \textit{Enthroned Goddess} from Taranto, but Steell may not have known of these works. He could have merely used the composition he had planned for the Minerva statue, substituting an accurate portrait and a change of accoutrement, but most depictions of Athena or Minerva show the goddess standing instead of seated. (Fig.107) However, the 1839 catalogue of the Trustees' Academy cast collection includes a description of a "Fragment of the Statue of Minerva" from the west pediment of the Parthenon, as well as "The Upper Part of the Face and Head of Minerva."\textsuperscript{317} Steell could have combined all, or parts of these examples to create his own composition.
Fig. 107. Minerva Giustiniani, Vatican Museum, Rome.

Fig. 108. Canova, Letizia Bonaparte (Madame Mere), 1808.
Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth.
Photo: Devonshire Trust

Fig. 109. Canova, Model of Maria Hapsburg as Concordia,
Castle Howard Collection.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 110. Seated Agrippina, Capitoline Museum, Rome.
Two precedents of honoured women closer to Steell’s time were Canova’s 1808 statue of Letizia Ramolino Bonaparte (Madame Mère), and his 1814 statue of Maria Luisa Habsburg as Concordia. (Figs. 108-109) It has been suggested that this marble of Napoleon’s second wife was modelled on a wall painting at Pompeii depicting Ceres. The celebrated statue of Napoleon’s mother was said to be based on the Seated Agrippina of Rome’s Musei Capitolini (Fig. 110), though Canova himself actively denied that this was an influence.

As no surviving sketches, maquettes, or models have so far emerged, (aside from Playfair’s architectural elevation drawing of 10 August 1832) (Figs. 111-112) the source of Steell’s treatment must remain speculative at best. Steell’s 1838 portrait bust of the Queen was original, and only the second bust depiction of the new monarch. The statue that followed was the very first colossal figure of her as Queen.

What is known, through the surviving accounts, is that Steell worked on the project with assistance from some nine workers. Alexander Slater was Steell’s overseer (as he is titled in the Board minutes of 15 April 1841) and worked on the project from July 1840 to January 1843 at a salary of £1.10/per week, earning £139, 12/ and 9d for the entire job. Joseph Henderson earned wages from March 1841 to 24 June 1843, at £1.8/a week for a total of £104.19/4d.

James Smith was almost certainly a stone mason; a printed copy of an 1867 eulogy to a “Brother Smith” by W. Hutton is in the Steell Scrapbooks, and notes that Smith’s first job for Steell was on the Queen Victoria statue. Smith was paid from March 1843 to 25 January 1844 at a salary of £1.6/per
Fig. 111. William Playfair's elevation drawing of the refurbished Royal Institution Building is dated 10 August 1832. *Photo: National Archives of Scotland*

Fig. 112. This detail of the drawing shows Playfair's concept for the statue: a seated goddess, with a fasces, lion and helmet.
week, earning £52. 3/ and 10d. This matches the period when Steell would have been carving the stone for the statue. Thomas Russell may also have been a mason, as he is listed as employed from July 1843 to January 1844 at a rate of £1.1/ per week. He was paid £26.15/11d in total for his labour. James Yule was paid wages of £1.10/ per week, and made £26. 9/11d in total; he may also have been a mason, considering his wage.

Steell’s other workers were employed for a shorter time: John Marshall was paid £2.2/ a week, but only earned £2.3/ in total. Robert Smaill was only paid £1.6/3d in total, and D. Skea £1.1/3d. Alex Syme received total wages of £7.17/8d. These men either executed highly skilled work for a short time, or low skilled work over a period of weeks.

The “Outlay” also gives an excellent overview of the consecutive steps in the construction of the work. The first item recorded is “for Carpenter Work of statue of Minerva” followed by an entry of a payment of £4 to “A&J Paterson for Smith Work”—this presumably for the building of a metal armature to support Steell’s clay model. This is likely, as the next notation reads “the Statue of Her Majesty being resolved on instead of Minerva”— followed by an entry of £1.10/ to A&J Paterson “for alterations on Smith Work”—Steell would have needed to change the armature to accommodate the change in statue.

Steell paid his men £2 for “Wages putting up Statue.” His clay cost £1. Of even greater importance is the listing of £33.10/ to “James Thomassie Casting Statue.” Almost certainly, this entry referred to the casting of Steell’s clay original into plaster. This process was highly skilled, and critical to the success of the project’s consequent steps.
Fig. 113. Thomas Bland, *Britannia*, 1842, Shap Wells, Westmorland. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 114. Steell’s unique depiction of the orb. Photo: Rocco Liussilien.

Fig. 115. John Gibson, *Queen Victoria*, 1849, Osborne House. Photo: Conway Library, London.


Figs. 115-116. Both of these later representations of the Queen by British sculptors portrayed her as a Minerva-like goddess, with classical drapery and in Gibson’s statue, a wreath and scroll.
With the “artist’s plaster” complete, it was necessary to take measurements for the transfer into stone by the use of a pointing machine. The accounting reads: “paid for Pointing Machine pr. Receipt-£9.9/9d.” Steell also required a place to work on the large blocks of stone. The Board had furnished a shed on the Mound when he was carving the sphinxes in 1836, but that building was no longer available. Instead, a payment is listed to “W Beattie & Sons for Erecting and Rent of temporary Studio in Bread Street for the purpose of carving the Statue.” This cost Steell £64.5/4d. The rent for the ground on which the building stood was paid from Martinmas term 1840 to Whitsunday term 1844 in six termly payments.

What should be understood from all this accounting is the fact that executing sculpture in the Victorian era was an extremely difficult, expensive and risky venture. Many Victorian sculptors suffered both financially, and physically. In the case of the Queen Victoria, Steell was lucky in that the commissioning body was also paying for his material. In contrast, Patric Park (1811-1855) only rarely had the chance to execute a final work in marble; the cost of the material was often prohibitive. A sculptor often had to include the cost of materials in his commission bid, and hope that the process went smoothly enough that the time spent would prove profitable. Steell was fortunate in that his early success gave him commissions of prestige, and enough capital to afford the best materials. Even so, Steell never became wealthy through his artwork, and at several times in his career came close to penury.

Benedict Read has stated that the first monument to the Queen was an 1842 figure of Britannia in Shap Wells, Westmorland. (Fig.113) This was
Figs. 117-119 Details such as the ermine and thistle pattern of the Thistle robes, the flowers of the crown, and the Thistle badge, were carefully carved in freestone. To give a sense of scale, the Thistle badge measures 1 foot exactly.

Photos: Rocco Lennahen

Figs. 120-121. Steell stayed close to his artist’s plaster likeness when executing the colossal statue.

Photos: Fig. 120, National Galleries of Scotland; Fig. 121, Rocco Lennahen.
a statue for the Queen, not of her. It is unlikely that Steell’s statue had much influence on subsequent iconography of Queen Victoria, though later statues almost exclusively present her seated with sceptre and orb. Steell’s is the only statue to include an orb too large to be held. (Fig.114) This convention was never adopted by other sculptors.

Being first to execute a statue of Victoria, Steell was not bound by previous iconic treatments of the monarch, but the combined consequence of Steell’s production being in Edinburgh, and the fact that there were no succeeding public depictions of Victoria until several years later, resulted in the colossal statue quietly fading from the public’s imagination. Victoria did not appear again in the guise of a classical goddess until John Gibson portrayed her in 1849, and this statue was privately commissioned from Victoria herself as a gift to Prince Albert. (Figs.115-116)

Steell’s depiction emphasised the grace and beauty of the young Queen. As the original project was a depiction of a goddess, Steell probably appropriated the general effect of seated female images, deriving his composition from his original design for Minerva. The size of the monument required breadth in the treatment of the features, but though massive, Steell still included finely carved details in the costume and accoutrement. The features were idealised, and the finish smooth and even. Though executed in freestone, Steell made good use of the fine grain of the sandstone to emphasise the serene beauty of the sitter.

By employing the Queen’s Thistle regalia, (Figs. 117-119) the Scottish connection was emphasised by the sculptor. This would have been of great importance to the Board of Manufactures, who were aligned with the
Fig. 122. Carlo Marochetti, *Queen Victoria*, 1849, George Square, Glasgow.
monarch in their position as Commissioners (and who filed an annual report to the Queen), as well as the building’s tenants the Royal Institution and the Scottish Academy, which would receive a Royal charter in 1838. The statue served as a visual presence of the Queen in her Scottish capital, on top of the centre of arts for the community.

The likeness was closely based on the preceding portrait bust. (Figs.120-121) Once again, Steell stressed her youth, beauty and serenity. The colossal statue’s treatment was uniformly broad and idealised especially the carving of the smooth, rounded limbs and the long slender neck. The eyes were unincised in keeping with the Greek mode of depiction. Given the Doric orders supporting the statue, as well as the original subject of the composition, Steell’s portrayal of the Queen approximated to a Hellenic goddess, but with a moderating inclusion of contemporary detailing to ensure that she was recognised as a contemporary head of state. The classical ideal was to be emulated, but was intended to inform, and not overwhelm the general effect of the work.

Even though Great Britain embraced its new Queen, there was no explosion of sculptural manifestations of her until well into her reign. The second major statue of Victoria was not to appear until 1849, when Glasgow commissioned Carlo Marochetti (1805-1867) to provide an equestrian statue for George Square. (Fig.122) It was not until her golden jubilee in 1887 that a definite programme of commemoration, similar to that following the Prince Consort’s death in 1861, was seen in all parts of the United Kingdom.

By the end of 1840 the project was ready to move from a model into freestone, though there were details which needed to be addressed:
2 December, 1840

Lord Meadowbank communicated to the Board a letter addressed to him by Mr Steele, sculptor, stating his conviction of the evil that would arise from having the Queen's statue constructed of 22 stones, as at present proposed, instead of 19, the number he conceives to be most suitable...

Steele obviously felt very strongly about the number of stones, as the minute continues:

... saying that he would rather submit to have the difference of expense for these stones, being £64 3/11d deducted from the amount for which he had already agreed to execute the statue, if the Hon.ble Board should concur in his opinion...

The Board concurred, but did not ask Steele to deduct the amount from his remuneration.

It appears that Steele had originally planned to carve the statue from six massive blocks of Binny freestone. For whatever reason, aesthetics, practicality or supply, it was decided to increase the number of stones used. It is probable that the proposed number of twenty-two stones would have required a number of joins which Steele felt would be of detrimental to the sculpture—therefore his insistence on nineteen blocks.

By April's meeting, an arbitration over a disputed amount of £275 to be paid by the Board for the stone had been arranged:

15 April, 1841

The Secretary laid before the Board, Report of the Committee appointed at last meeting to co-operate with Mr Playfair, Architect, towards effecting an arrangement with Mr. Lind, tackman of the Binny quarry, by means of arbitration, so as thereby to remove the misunderstanding that had arisen in furnishing Mr Steell with stones of the proper dimensions for preparing the Queen's statue... in the meantime Mr Lind should furnish Mr Steell, or his overseer Mr Sclater with stones corresponding to the models...

By autumn of 1842, Steell had received the last of the stone, as the paper of record noted:

On Tuesday an immense block of freestone was brought to town from Binny Quarry...it is the last of a number of huge blocks supplied by Mr David Lind, taxman of the quarry, for the erection of a colossal statue of her Majesty Queen Victoria, now being executed by Mr. Steell, sculptor, and which is to be placed on the north front of the Royal Institution, Princes' street. The above block is upwards of twenty-two tons' weight and was brought to town on a waggon drawn by sixteen powerful horses, assisted at certain difficult parts of the road by Mr. Lind's men.

It was safely lodged in the large wooden building in Bread-street, where Mr. Steell is already far advanced in the formation of this gigantic structure, which, when completed,

Fig. 124. The figure of Nelson was carved in two halves, each approximately 8.5 feet high. Steell's pyramidal composition was considerably different, and lent itself well to being built from nineteen separate blocks of freestone. Photo: Conway Library, London
will weigh upwards of ninety tons. From the well-known talents of the artist, the beauty and solidity of the Binny stone, and the commanding situation it is to occupy, this statue of our beloved Sovereign cannot fail to be an object of great attraction...—The Scotsman, 29 October 1842.\(^3\)

By summer of 1843, the Board again pressed Steell to complete the work; Steell quickly wrote back:

19th July, 1843

Read Letter of 26th Ultimo from John Steell Esquire, Sculptor to Her Majesty. Stating in reply to the Secretary’s note urging him to complete the Queen’s Statue, that it was very far advanced, and would be entirely finished in September, and requesting the Secretary to give directions to have the Pedestal ready for its reception by that time. The Secretary accordingly wrote to Mr Playfair the Board’s Architect, on the subject, who replied that he would immediately turn his attention to the erection of the stone platform on the north Portico of the Royal Institution.\(^2\)

The next mention of the project in the minutes is six months later, and gives us evidence that the statue was completed in a very different fashion than Steell’s other large stone monuments:

5 January, 1844

...He [the Secretary]...informed the Board that all the stones composing the body of the Statue of Her Majesty were put up in their proper places, and that the workmen were busily employed in polishing them off, and that Mr. Steell expected to have the bust put up on Wednesday first, and the whole of the Statue completed and opened to the public eye by the beginning of the week following...\(^3\)

According to the minute, as well as the previous items regarding stones, it seems as if the statue was carved in assembled sections in Steell’s Bread Street workshop, then moved to the site and reassembled in situ on top of the portico of the Royal Institution. This is definitely the only sculpture Steell ever executed in this way, his other stone works being carved from whole pieces of marble.\(^3\) It was fairly unusual to create a monument with so many stones. A comparable project, such as E.H. Baily’s 1840-1843 Nelson for the Trafalgar Square column, was 17 feet high and executed from two large pieces of stone.\(^4\) (Figs.123-124)

The work was completed a few weeks later. No ceremony or inauguration was reported, but a monument so large was impossible to
ignore. The press were mostly supportive of the project, though the
Scotsman’s reviewer held reservations regarding the size, if not the execution,
of the statue. *The Caledonian Mercury* seemed to feel that unduly harsh
criticism was spurious at best:

The magnificent statue of Queen Victoria, executed by our celebrated sculptor Mr
Steele, and which workmen have been employed for some time past in erecting on the top
of the grand portico of the Royal Institution Buildings, immediately behind the apex, was
opened to public view on the evening of Tuesday, and in the course of yesterday was
eagerly gazed upon by numerous groups passing along the fine promenade of Princes’
Street. It called forth general admiration, although there were not wanting individuals to
make objections in reference to various supposed faults in the design, which, however, none
of these hypercritics could very satisfactorily explain. As we have said, the statue was the
subject of general admiration.... *Caledonian Mercury*, 25 January 1844.

The *Illustrated London News* of 17 February 1844 published a line
engraving of the piece, along with this panegyric:

> Enthron’d already in thy people’s hearts,  
> A marble monument no more imparts  
> To thy great fame, young Queen! of all men’s love,  
> Than this: that fondly—truly it doth prove  
> A nation wills to its posterity,  
> A semblance of the life it priz’d in thee!  
> Happy the artist whose ingenious hand  
> Hath plac’d thine image in his native land!  
> Like the old Roman Lyrist, he can say:-  
> "My work is not intended for a day:-  
> "My Queen’s my subject, and by side her name,  
> "I’ll run a lengthen’d parallel with Fame!  
> "No sun shall scorch—no winter’s cold shall chill  
> "The double object of my love and skill!"  
> W. [33]

By the end of February, there were only the bills left to be paid. All
that remained were some odd expenses and the remuneration for the
sculptor’s art:

28 May 1844

The whole of the outstanding debts on account of the Queen’s Statue of which the
Secretary was acquainted having been paid, with the exception of an Account to Mr Lind for
Cramps, amounting to £12.7/, the Secretary presented a precept for payment of the same,
which was signed accordingly.

He also requested to be informed what was the pleasure of the Commissioners in
regard to the remuneration of Mr Steel for his labour in cutting the Statue of the Queen, as
the £279.13.2d which was ordered to be paid at the last meeting, was to reimburse him for
his outlay for furnishings provided by him in the execution of the work, and not for his
labour and genius.
The Board directed one hundred guineas to be paid from the building fund to Mr Steell for the execution of his genius and labour in producing the Statue of Her Majesty.  

Steell had of course received compensation infinitely more valuable than one-hundred guineas. The prestige of the project, coupled with the opportunity to be in contact with royalty, resulted in his appointment as Sculptor in Ordinary for Scotland. This accolade, combined with the prestige of being selected to execute an even greater project—the *Scott Monument*—meant that no one would attain his level of success and popularity in Scotland for another forty years.
Fig. 125. The Scott Monument, George Meikle Kemp, architect, Princes Street, Edinburgh.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London

Fig. 126. John Steell, *Sir Walter Scott* (artist's plaster), 1836-46, Hill & Adamson calotype c. 1843-7.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland
Chapter Six

The Scott Monument Statue Project, 1832-1846

Sir Walter Scott died in September 1832. Almost immediately, the Scottish elite began to plan a monument to his memory. The project was national, but given the eminent nature of Scott’s works and reputation, it was actually an undertaking of international significance. Subscriptions were contributed from around the world, and illustrated the respect and regard he was accorded from all walks of life. For these reasons, and the accompanying implications regarding the state of native arts in Scotland, the choice of John Steell to execute the portrait statue for the monument should not be underestimated.

If the Alexander and Bucephalus represented Steell’s first impression upon Edinburgh’s cultural elite, and the Queen Victoria an affirmation of the elite’s confidence in his ability, then his winning of the commission for the Scott Monument (Fig. 125) proved that within Edinburgh, Steell was becoming the sculptor of choice for any major project. Regardless of his selection, he was still virtually unheard of beyond Edinburgh, and had entered the commission competition as an unknown. Steell cultivated powerful friends and patrons, but patronage alone could not account for Steell’s design of Sir Walter Scott and Maida being chosen from dozens of other entries in the 1836 open competition. (Fig. 126)

The subcommittee in charge of the competition could not award Steell a prize outright, as its own rules had specified a design combining sculpture
Fig. 127. John Steell, Sir Walter Scott, 1846, Edinburgh.

Fig. 128. Bertel Thorvaldsen, Lord Byron, 1830, Trinity College Library, Cambridge.
and architecture; Steell’s submission was purely sculptural. However, the popularity of the entry amongst the committee members merited an even greater reward: it was enshrined beneath George Meikle Kemp’s Gothic spire to form one of the era’s most recognised and important monuments.

Steell employed a traditional form for depicting a man of letters, showing Scott seated and in a contemplative pose. He leans forward slightly, pen in hand, a volume resting on his knee. In this respect, the composition is reminiscent of Bertel Thorvaldsen’s 1830 *Lord Byron.* (Figs. 127-128) The Dane also presented Byron seated, in contemplation with book and pen.

The convention of the seated man of letters was widely employed in both European and British sculpture. While Thorvaldsen’s 1836 monument to *Schiller* in Stuttgart featured the writer standing, a book and pen were still employed. (Fig.129) Closer in theme was Houdon’s 1781 *Voltaire,* which like Steell’s work, portrayed the French author smiling and sagacious. (Fig.130) A hundred years later, an 1881 naturalistic portrayal of *Thomas Carlyle* by Edgar Boehm also featured the seated writer, this time with a particular emphasis on verisimilitude. (Fig.131) Steell was working within a sculptural idiom that would continue to be seen as proper for the depiction of a writer and thinker.

Steell’s group also reflected the well established iconography for the depiction of Sir Walter Scott. Scott was reportedly one of the two most painted men of his time. Portraits tended to emphasise his natural charm and wistful manner, as befitted the author of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders.* He was shown in this role by Wilkie in 1817, and by Sir Henry
Figs. 129-131. Either standing with book and pen, or seated in contemplation, Steell’s portrayal of Scott followed a long tradition of depiction for thinkers and writers.

Fig. 123. David Wilkie, *The Abbotsford Group*, 1817, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Wilkie’s depiction of the writer reinforced Scott’s carefully constructed image as country laird and rustic sage.
Raeburn in 1808 and 1822. (Figs.132-134) He was often depicted as a man of the countryside, with a Borders plaid, stick and dog, as well as the usual attribute of book and pen; contemporary portraits always show him in his customary clothing: coat, waistcoat, trousers and tie.

Sir Francis Chantrey’s 1828 portrait bust was the most well known and popular sculptural portrayal of Scott; the sculptor complained of the work being “pirated by Italians; and England and Scotland.” (Fig.135) The wide dissemination of the bust, while largely unauthorised, made it the definitive sculptural image of the writer. As a result, Steell was obliged to closely follow the bust in his own portrayal of Scott’s features.

While it is uncertain when Steell first saw the Chantrey bust, we know for certain that Steell studied the bust while working on the statue. In a letter of 22 August 1843, Sir Robert Peel wrote to his wife Julia Floyd from Whitehall:

> Will you give directions that Mr. Steell, the sculptor at Edinburgh, should have access to the busts and statues in the gallery and library? He wants especially to see the bust of Sir Walter Scott. He will be pleased to see one of his own busts in the library.  

Steell’s presentation of Scott’s expression is natural, with a slight smile brought about by Chantrey’s decision to depict Scott in a conversational aspect. (Fig.136) Steell also closely copied Chantrey’s use of the *maud*, or lowland plaid for drapery. Like so many of Steell’s subsequent public monuments, the treatment was a balanced blend of naturalism with slightly idealised features. Steell depicted Scott in contemporary dress, but included the shepherd’s cloak in order to give a classical *gravitas* and outline. Chantrey had also produced an 1835 marble statuette of Scott seated with a
Fig. 133. Sir Henry Raeburn, Sir Walter Scott, 1808, Collection of His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch, Bowhill. Seated with book, pen and his dog Camp, there are many formal similarities with Steell's later sculptural group. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 134. Sir Henry Raeburn, Sir Walter Scott, 1822, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh. This later painting emphasised Scott's thoughtful character. He was customarily shown in collar, tie, waistcoat and frockcoat. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
deerhound, but is not known if this model predates, or is directly contemporary with Steell’s design. (Fig.137)

Samuel Joseph sculpted Scott from life in 1824, producing at least two busts; one surviving work is dated 1824, (Fig.138) the second is undated. Steell was presumably aware of the 1824 work; it was shown in the 1825 exhibition of the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland. Joseph employed some neoclassical elements, especially the herm base and drapery, but his treatment of the face exemplified his naturalism; the particular features and expression were markedly not idealised, and made the most of Scott’s idiosyncratic features. As Terry Friedman observed:

Scott, anchored within an integral blocked-base, swings his head to the right and dramatically heavenward as if caught at the moment of experiencing some intellectual revelation...Joseph’s [bust] conveys a feeling of sudden alertness, verging on the nervous, which was rare in British sculpture at this time...346

The mason-sculptor John Greenshields (1792-1838) modelled a seated Scott from life in 1832, which he subsequently carved in freestone in 1838. (Fig.139) This statue, which was owned by Scott’s publisher Robert Cadell (1788-1849), is a direct, realistic depiction of the writer in contemporary dress. Many of Scott’s contemporaries commented on the accuracy of the statue’s likeness; perhaps most memorable was Thomas Thomson’s remark, “it is not a statue, but a petrification of Scott.”346

Scott’s son-in-law and biographer J.G. Lockhart (1794-1854) suggested that ‘Sic Sedebat’ be inscribed on the base of the Greenshields figure, in allusion to the inscription of the effigy of Francis Bacon in St. Alban’s.347 This legend also emphasised the veracity of the likeness. The shepherd’s plaid, a
Fig. 135. Chantrey, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1820, Abbotsford. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 136. Steell, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1846, Edinburgh. Photo: Rocco Liscalzi

Fig. 137. Chantrey, *Scott Statuette*, (80cm), c. 1835, Lever Art Gallery. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 138. Samuel Joseph, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1824 Private Collection. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
consistent iconographic element, was draped over Scott’s chair, emphasising his connection to the Borders, and his position as their bard.

The work of Scottish mason-sculptors such as Greenshields, Robert Forrest and James Thom had been extremely popular in the 1820s, and reflected the Scottish propensity for genre painting.\textsuperscript{348} Not all had approved of this trend. The \textit{Edinburgh Literary Journal} characterised the mason-sculptor cult as another symptom of “Lionization:”

If a sculptor…has the substantial claims of a life devoted to science, and underied talents,… and cannot well be lionized, he won’t do. But let a stone mason come forth, and all the almost insuperable difficulties of the art vanish before him. Never mind what he produces—whether it be a hero apparently under the influence of the lumbago, or a caracterature, not superior, if equal, to a Dutch toy—still, like a Catholic saint, he is worshipped forthwith…\textsuperscript{349}

Nevertheless, Cadell proposed a scheme in an open letter of 23 March 1838, as an alternative to the subcommittee’s resolution to combine Kemp and Steell’s designs:

…the Committee should destine the entire sum collected to the class of structure advocated by a considerable number of the general body, namely, a Gothic monument, to be erected under the direction of Mr. Barry, and to be so constructed that Greenshields’ statue be included in such manner as may seem to that eminent architect most appropriate.

In order to accomplish this, I contemplate a donation of this original Statue, under certain conditions, none of them of a very formidable description.\textsuperscript{350}

Depicting Scott with dogs was an established element of his iconography, and one of the most charming elements of the Steell group is the inclusion of Scott’s deerhound Maida. (Fig.140) An 1831 portrait of Scott by Sir Francis Grant (1803-1878) which was owned by Lady Mary Ruthven (1789-1885) shows the writer with two deerhounds, as does an 1832 painting by Edwin Landseer (1802-1873) of \textit{Sir Walter Scott in the Rhymer’s Glen}. (Figs.141-142) The writer famously doted on his pets, and the 1808 painting by Raeburn also features dogs, as does the Chantrey statuette. Steell seemed to enjoy sculpting animals as much as human figures; a report in the
Fig. 139. John Greenshields, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1838, Parliament House, Edinburgh.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
Edinburgh Evening Post on a studio visit in 1835 mentioned a pair of hunting horses and a bulldog he had modelled for the Duke of Buccleuch. His skill at equestrian subjects had been demonstrated in 1833 with Alexander and Bucephalus.

Steell depicted Scott deep in reflection. While the use of the plaid as a form of classical drapery allowed the statue the proper gravity, austerity and outline for the form, the effect was irreducibly Scottish; the subsequent tone of the group was quiet and homely. Due to the monumental size, it was necessary to model Scott’s features with a degree of breadth, but Steell and his masons managed to do so without losing the gentle quality of expression, inspired by Chantrey’s bust.

Steell emphasised Scott’s humanity and poesy. While he attained a great celebrity during his lifetime, Scott was routinely credited with a natural affinity for people from all classes. Much was made of his friendship with men such as the mason-sculptor John Greenshields, as well as his reverent and nostalgic attitude towards Highland Gaels. While it is necessary to remember that Scott’s rustic persona was largely self-invented, by the time of his death its veracity was accepted and codified in many visual representations of the man.

Steell adopted the artistic canon and iconography of Scott to produce a work which met the expectations of its audience and the conditions of a national monument.

It is difficult to overestimate what Scott meant to the Scottish in 1832. The sense of loss upon his death was palpable. Lord Cockburn wrote in his journal:
Fig. 140. Steell’s depiction of Maida was modelled from the staghounds of Sir John McNeill. Photo: Roco-Lieuallen

Fig. 141. Sir Francis Grant, *Scott*, 1831, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 142. Landseer, *Scott in Rhymer’s Glen*, 1832. Private Collection, New York. Photo: T. Ullichspiegel
22nd September 1832. Scott is dead. He expired yesterday. I had been on a visit at Kirklands...and on coming home to-day I saw Abbotsford reposing beside its gentle Tweed, and amidst its fading woods, in the calm splendour of a sweet autumnal day. I was not aware till I reached Edinburgh that all that it contained of him was his memory and his remains. Scotland never owed so much to one man.

The people of Scotland saw the building of a monument to the man as a significant and necessary form of public commemoration of the writer’s work. Scott had helped Scotland define itself through the appropriation of Highland culture during the “King’s Jaunt” of George IV in 1822. The pageantry and ceremony adopted (and at times invented) by the writer had been a major event in the cultural development of the idea of the nation—even if the proceedings had been more to do with British cohesion, and the legitimisation of the Hanoverian monarchy than historical veracity. This nostalgic and idealised vision of Scottish culture, which had manifested itself in so-called “tartan mania” had been continued in his fiction. Regardless of the amount of truth in Scott’s vision, he was considered an international man of letters, respected and honoured by the cultured elite of Britain, Europe and beyond.

Accordingly, debate regarding the suitable form of a memorial to “The Wizard of the North” ensued from the opening meeting of the committee in 1832. Cockburn had wisely forecast the nature of the potential disagreements in his journal:

5th October. There was a popular meeting here to-day to consider the propriety of erecting a monument to his memory. I expect a glorious addition to our edifices; but we shall have to resist Chantrey and his black bronze, and many foolish projects.

For several years the main questions regarding the monument surrounded which was more fitting, a structure which was wholly sculptural, wholly architectural, or a combination of the two. An ancillary
Fig. 143. David Wilkie, *The Entry of George IV at Holyrood House*, 1828, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The King's 1822 visit to Edinburgh was a pivotal moment in the nation's self-image. Both Wilkie and Scott contributed to the development of this ideal. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
question was the style; supporting factions divided their allegiance between classical or Gothic. The classical style was seen as being in the best contemporary taste, and in keeping with the dominant mode of architecture in Edinburgh. It was also argued that classicism, with its austerity and grandeur, was best for a man of Scott’s nobility and status. The Gothic style was seen by many as more “Scottish,” and more appropriate for the monument, given the native historical subjects of Scott’s writing, and his activities as an antiquarian.

Subscription campaigns had started almost immediately after Scott’s death, but due to the many individual committees, and a London committee acting independently, the Edinburgh committee did not feel it had adequate funds to proceed until the general committee meeting of 28 November 1833. At this meeting, Lord Melville moved:

That it is the opinion of the present Meeting that a Monument purely architectural or including a statue as part of the design, should be adopted in preference to one entirely sculptural.—which was seconded by Sir T.D. Lauder and unanimously agreed to.

The Earl of Rosebery then proposed the following subcommittee, made up of some of the most illustrious and prominent men in Scotland. It included: The Duke of Buccleuch, the Earl of Elgin, the Earl of Rosebery, Lord Viscount Melville, Lord Jeffrey, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, Sir James Gibson Craig, Thomas Thomson, Robert Cadell, and William Allan. George Forbes was the Secretary, and James Skene the Treasurer. Lord Melville was designated the Chairman. These were the men who would make the administrative and aesthetic decisions surrounding the monument.

By 1836, after three years of discussion, which had included the canvassing of many aesthetic and artistic opinions, the subcommittee had
Fig. 144. George Meikle Kemp, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
settled on the fact that a majority of them wished to have a sculptural element in their monument. An open competition for designs was announced, and Steell subsequently entered. Some fifty-four proposals were submitted: twenty-two Gothic structures; eleven statues; fourteen Grecian temples; five pillars, one classical obelisk and a fountain. It took the committee another two years to reach a definite decision.

The committee finally determined that if the monument was to combine architecture and sculpture, then the most fitting style would be Gothic. The committee chose three winning designs, all of them Gothic spires. George Meikle Kemp (1795-1844), (Fig.144) the architect finally chosen, was first mentioned in the minute of 21 December 1836 as receiving one of the £50 prizes. Initially the committee had difficulty identifying Kemp and informing him of his good fortune, as he had submitted his design under the pseudonym John Morvo, the name of the medieval master-mason of Melrose Abbey.

At the subcommittee meeting of 2 February 1838, the Edinburgh architect William Burn gave his professional assessment of Kemp’s design—in short, a vote of confidence for it among the three prize winners. While Robert Cadell would later use Burn’s testimony as one of his many objections to the group’s resolutions, the majority of the subcommittee followed Burn’s lead, and by the end of the month, the subcommittee was ready to make a recommendation to the general committee:
Minute of Meeting of Sub Committee 28 February 1838

Present
The Duke of Buccleuch  Sir John Forbes
Sir T.D. Lauder  Sir Wm Rae
Sir J.G. Craig  Mr Forbes
Mr Allan  Mr Cadell
Mr Skene

...After some discussion Sir Thomas Lauder moved that the Monument should be Gothic, (6 to 2) which motion having been seconded by Sir William Rae, Mr Allan and Mr Cadell voted that the Monument should not be Gothic; Sir J.G. Craig declined to vote because, in the circumstances, he did not approve of the combination of sculpture and architecture; And the other members of the Committee voted in favor of the motion, the Duke of Buccleuch, stating that he thought a work of art alone would be preferable; but if architecture was to be combined with it, he thought Gothic should be adopted.

Sir Thomas Lauder then moved that Mr Kemps Design for a Gothic Cross be recommended to the General Committee for adoption, (6 to 2) which was seconded by Sir John Forbes, the other members of the Committee voting in favor of the motion except Mr Allan and Mr Cadell, and Sir James G. Craig who declined to vote.

Mr George Forbes then moved that Mr Steele sculptor, be recommended to the General Committee, (8 to 1) Mr Cadell dissenting, and Sir William Rae having left the room before the vote.

It was suggested that Sir Francis Chantrey should be requested by the Committee to allow Mr Steele to model from his bust of Sir Walter Scott...

These subcommittee minutes do not reflect the intensity of the continued disagreement between members of the committee regarding both the form of the monument and the choice of sculptor. Cadell did not favour architecture at all—and certainly not Gothic architecture. He preferred a sculptural monument by Sir Francis Chantrey. Sir James Gibson Craig felt so strongly about the amalgamation of sculpture and architecture that he was willing to abstain from voting. Buccleuch was more practical; if a combination was desired, then let it be of Gothic style.

The choice of sculptor was less controversial: the vote for Steele had been carried by 8 to 1. However, Lord Meadowbank, who did not sit on the subcommittee, and Robert Cadell, who did, were adamant that Sir Francis Chantrey should have the commission, based upon the fact that he had a greater reputation, he had sculpted Scott from life, and that Scott had highly regarded his talent. Chantrey had never been formally asked to submit a
design, nor had he entered the open competition, which would have been seen as degrading for an artist of his stature.365 Regardless of this, Lord Meadowbank canvassed Chantrey’s secretary Allan Cunningham, and ascertained that if the committee wished, the sculptor would submit a design.

Robert Cadell, fearing that the project’s general committee would ratify the subcommittee’s recommendations, published his objections in an open letter addressed to the Duke of Hamilton on 15 March 1838. Cadell argued many points, among them being: both committees were acting in haste; there was not enough money to execute the monument in a Gothic style; the architect was unknown and untried; the subcommittee had not had the opportunity to see enough design proposals; Sir Walter Scott had not approved of the “gingerbread” Gothic style;366 Kemp’s design was plagiarised from one by architect Thomas Hamilton; and that the combined effect of these mistakes would lead to a disastrous conclusion, stating:

The Sub-Committee, pelted with paper pellets, are hurried in the process of gestation, and rather than not ‘do something,’ (the favourite reason for coming to a vote) have produced what I hope the larger body will put aside as one of the architectural abortions of the day...367

Regarding the choice of sculptor, Cadell was more conciliatory, remarking that Steell was “a very meritorious Edinburgh sculptor, but to whom Sir Walter Scott was unknown, except as one passing on the street, or looked at for a little in a room.”368 Chantrey had sculpted Scott from life on more than one occasion—the advantage was clearly his. Cadell thought that the main reason for Steell’s appointment was one of economy, caused by the
folly of combining sculpture and architecture. Expenditure on the Gothic spire would leave a balance of only £2000 for the sculpture. Cadell wrote:

...in attempting the impossibility they have elevated the monument to one hundred and thirty five feet, and left the great man the elevation of somewhat like seven or eight at the utmost! By this course, they were almost necessitated to apply to a native artist—a modest and rising one, no doubt, but not the sculptor to model Sir Walter Scott when the Phideas of our day is alive, and who is acknowledged by all to have caught the likeness—the almost living likeness—of the only individual he ever asked to sit to him.500

Cadell’s final objection was the subcommittee’s suggestion that permission be sought for Steell to use Chantrey’s bust as his principal source. For Cadell, this perfectly illustrated his objections. If the committee desired Chantrey’s likeness, why not commission Chantrey?

However, as committee member Thomas Brown observed in an open letter two days later, this constituted a second competition:

Would it, I ask, be consistent with the dictates of honour or proper feeling, that Mr Steell should be unceremoniously removed from the position in which the all but unanimous voice of the Committee has placed him, and which he has unquestionably most justly earned. This act of injustice is what Mr Cadell proposes to commit, and that without even allowing Mr Steell the opportunity of meeting directly Sir F. Chantrey on the fair field of competition, by each producing a finished model for the judgement of the Committee.501

Lord Meadowbank was in an ambivalent position, as he supported Chantrey for this commission, but had been an early patron of Steell. Not wishing to be seen as an enemy of the sculptor, Meadowbank addressed the open general committee meeting of 28 March, 1838:

... it is unnecessary for me to vindicate myself from a charge of not doing justice to the merits of this rising artist, whose qualifications none can more fully appreciate than I do...I was introduced to Mr. Steel’s acquaintance when his name was unknown to nine-tenths of the gentlemen present...I have never omitted an opportunity of doing my utmost to promote Mr. Steel’s interest and advantage. In short, there is no one, be he who he may, that entertains a more anxious desire to see Mr. Steel successful in his honourable struggle to attain eminence, and to raise himself to the head of his profession, than I do...501

Cadell was not only motivated by his belief that Chantrey was better qualified, but also by the fact that he preferred a purely sculptural monument. He published a second open letter on 23 March, suggesting that
if a combination was unavoidable, then the Greenshields statue he owned could be used, the reason being that the total subscription could then be put towards a structure of proper architectural grandeur to befit Scott’s status. Cadell’s open letters prompted much spirited response from Steell’s supporters. A decidedly patriotic tone can be discerned:

All who have seen Mr Steell’s works admit their excellence; and why should we employ others when we have such splendid native talent among us? A majority of the sub-committee have admitted Mr Steell’s merit, and he ought in justice to be employed, and there can be no doubt that he will execute a statue worthy of being identified with the fame and memory of Sir Walter Scott, as well as of forming an appropriate specimen of the national artistic talent of the age in which it is executed.—*Edinburgh Evening Post* (no date)1838.372

Committee minutes make no mention of a discussion regarding the propriety of selecting a native artist. The question of the nationality of the artist was firstly, and most forcefully emphasised by the newspapers and the general public in letters to the editor, not the committee members.373 The only mention of the issue in a public meeting was from Sir William Rae, who was reported as stating in the general committee meeting of 7 April 1838:

The committee were entitled to credit for having brought forward native genius on this occasion; the architect had been hitherto unknown, but he had proved himself to be of a high order of genius; and if Scott himself were now here, knowing his generous nature, he (Sir W. Rae) was sure he would give his vote in favour of these distinguished youthful geniuses of his native town.374

Meadowbank and Cadell were in the minority. National pride, coupled with a sense of fair play, assured that Steell was commissioned for the statue. Perhaps as a concession to the dissenting parties, Steell was probably not so much allowed as instructed to model his Scott from Chantrey’s bust. Both committees had taken six years, but the final decision to adopt the subcommittee’s plan, approved twenty-one to ten, met with public approval.
Fig. 145. Stonemasons working on the Scott Monument, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
By autumn of 1844, the marble arrived at Leith. The *Edinburgh Evening Post* of 23 October reported:

On Saturday, the huge block of marble commissioned by our eminent townsman Mr Steell, for his statue of Sir Walter Scott, to be placed in the beautiful Monument now on the eve of completion, arrived in Leith Harbour from Italy. This enormous mass of Bianco-Chiaro marble, as it is described, weighs upwards of twenty tons, having been cut from the celebrated quarries of Carrara. It was expected, we understand, some time ago, but owing to its almost unprecedented size, great difficulty was found at Leghorn for some time to procure a vessel for its conveyance to this country. \(^{23}\)

The *Scotsman* reported the move, commenting on the atmosphere of the crowds that watched. The people of Edinburgh were well aware of the project and eagerly awaiting its completion. It is not difficult to image the stonemasons and builders on the scaffolding of the monument, (Fig.145) downing tools and looking up to cheer as the wagon, loaded with the enormous stone, “took the steep in a gallant style,” up Princes Street:

Twenty first-rate horses were theretooked to the truck, and, after many painful efforts, they succeeded in putting the wheels in motion. They proceeded along Junction Street and up Leith Walk, followed by a crowd of persons, which increased at every step. Just before coming to Leith Street, the horses were put to their speed, and took the steep in a gallant style, amidst the cheers of the spectators. The hill was gained in a short time, and the cavalcade went slowly again. When it arrived opposite the Monument, great cheering again took place, and the horses were put to their speed.

The car arrived at Mr Steell’s studio, in Randolph Place, a little after eleven o’clock, having been about an hour in progress from Leith. The streets through which it passed were in various places indented with the marks of the wheels. This splendid block consists of 200 cubic feet of marble of the purest quality, weighing upwards of 25 tons, and measuring nearly ten feet in height, and from six to seven across. The expense of conveying it from Leith will not be less than £50.—*The Scotsman*, 6 November 1844. \(^{27}\)

Steell went right to work on the marble; in accordance with his usual practice, the statue was virtually complete within eighteen months of his receiving the stone. \(^{37}\) It would appear that he had already completed the artist’s plaster from his clay original, which would then have been pointed up, and the measurements marked onto the Carrara block. Early calotypes by the pioneering photographers D.O. Hill (1802-1870) and Robert Adamson (1821-1848) show the plaster in Steell’s studio. (Fig.146-148) As stated above,
Fig. 146. Steell's artist's plaster, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 147. Scott statue, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1846. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 148. John Steell, Sepia & ink drawing. Steell presumably used the calotype to make this drawing, dated 1866. Photo: National Gallery of Scotland
we know that Steell employed stone masons, but their number and identities remain unknown, with the exception of James Smith ("Brother Smith," whose printed funeral eulogy in the Steell Scrapbooks credits him with work on the Queen Victoria as well as the Sir Walter Scott.) Following standard academic practice, the masons would do all of the roughing out, before Steell would ostensibly handle the finishing carving himself. However, we do not know for certain how much carving is autograph work by Steell.

It was completely acceptable at the time for a sculptor to leave carving to his masons, though the clientele often assumed that they were receiving the skill of the artist’s hand alone. The American painter Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860) had visited Thorvaldsen’s studio in 1829, the same year as Steell’s trip to Rome. Peale wrote a book and several articles on Rome, and remarked on Thorvaldsen’s studio practice:

Thorwaldsen...never touched his marble and...in showing me his Ganymede, remarked that the eagle was entirely the work of the young man who was chiselling it, as he himself knew nothing about the bird; yet this same Ganymede, which I afterwards saw at the Marquis of Stafford’s, in London, was commented as a work that "no chisel but that of Thorwaldsen could execute, and especially the eagle." (Fig.149)

Steell had trained as a wood carver. It would be natural for him to concentrate on modelling, and let those with greater technical skills complete his vision. The irony of Steell’s academic sculptural practice lies in the fact that the sculptor was dependent upon the very mason-sculptor’s trade from which he emerged and to some extent, sought to distance himself. This condition had been exemplified in the Board of Manufactures premium awarded to the sculptor to employ Scottish masons to cut Alexander and Bucephalus in freestone.
While the conception, composition, and original modelling of the clay was the sculptor's work, all subsequent tasks were executed by assistants. The public tended to take at face value the fact that an artist was directly responsible for the total execution of a work.
Given the celebratory atmosphere surrounding the monument, as well as the high esteem to which Sir Walter Scott was held by Victorian society, there was no way that anyone would have been willing to describe the statue in anything but superlative terms. Steell would had to have created a travesty in order to receive any kind of pointed criticism. Steell had again produced a balanced amalgamation of naturalism and idealism, and the Scottish press were given an example of burgeoning Scottish native genius. The accolades cascaded forth:

...the statue is a noble piece of sculpture, and in our estimation, worthy alike of the fame of the great genius whom it commemorates, and the admiration of his countrymen who have contributed to erect it...It is full of penetrating shrewdness, elevated by a degree of poetical enthusiasm, which no other portrait of Sir Walter—certainly not the one by Chantrey—even attempts to combine. There is the massive head, with the somewhat stern and shaggy eyebrows, the playful mouth, and the generous openness of visage which stamped the character of the man in all his moods...Mr Steel has blended the real with the ideal points in the character of his subject in the happiest and most effective manner, so as to come home to every mind and heart.\(^{38}\)

The statue was completed by August 1846, and on the 16\(^{th}\) of that month was inaugurated in a grand public and Masonic ceremony, which was only dampened by the rain. Only the Scotsman commented on the weather of the day; all other accounts featured the dignity and decorum of the ceremonies. The Caledonian Mercury published all of the speeches in their considerable entirety, many of which were indicative of the growing credence in the concept of native genius. Lord Provost Adam Black stated:

...we see how the glowing genius of the poet has stirred the soul of the architect, and awakened the talents of the sculptor, whose skilful chisel has moulded the rude block into the all but breathing form and features of Scotland’s darling son...we rejoice in the growing vigour of our own citizen sculptor, who, by this exquisite work of art, has given earnest of future productions that will rival the works of the most celebrated artists of this or other countries.\(^{39}\)

Revd. John Smythe Memes (1795-1858), a respected aesthete, also spoke.\(^{40}\) In 1838, Memes had published an open letter to Steell, raising
several points of contention with regard to Steell’s plans for the group. However, in the same letter he had praised Steell’s enthusiasm, dedication and devotion to his art. Revd. Memes’s remarks indicated that any reservations he had held about the work had been successfully addressed:

Mr Steell has not only the merit of rising into the first rank of the most difficult and the most arduous achievements of genius, but he is the first Scotchman that has added the gem and jewel of sculptured renown to the crown of Scotland’s genius...we had no sculptor until Edinburgh sent forth the genius of Steell.

Steell himself spoke—which was in itself very rare; he almost always left speeches to others. Perhaps it was the significance of the event which prompted him to acknowledge the praise of the speakers:

You will believe me when I say that I cannot express what I feel for the honour which has this evening been conferred on me...but I may tell you that you have moved every grateful feeling of my nature—(applause)... in being commissioned to execute the statue...deeply, very deeply did I feel the importance of that commission, that it not only implied the honour of having a part in the execution of a nation’s gratitude to one of the most gifted of her sons, but the part in that national tribute entrusted to me implied also the honour, the sacred honour, of handing down to posterity the lineaments of one whose memory will be cherished by ages to come, and nations yet unborn.

Steell saw the work as an indication of the conditions that would allow for the establishment of a Scottish school of sculpture. Five years later, at a banquet dinner for Baillie Dick, he stated that the project had manifested “the mere beginnings of works of sculpture being executed in Scotland.”

Steell suggested that the project:

...gave us hope that, ere long, there would be the formation of a Scottish school of sculpture... when the Scott committee...were seen to be unwilling to pass over the consideration that it might be important to the arts of Scotland if such works as the statue of Sir Walter Scott could be executed in our native land, this with the prevailing sentiments of the country, gave the sculptors of Scotland something like a tangible reason to hope for the foundation of a Scottish School of Sculpture. But to this great end, he (Mr Steell) would say that her sculptors must remain with her.

This final sentiment indicated a primary concern of Steell’s within the context of Unionist-Nationalism: the continued advancement of opportunities, encouragement and patronage available at home. As will be
explained further in Chapter Eleven, Unionist-Nationalism expressed a desire for Scotland’s treatment as an equal partner within the union, neither as a separate state nor as a poorer province. Steell’s main desire, that “her sculptors must remain with her” reflected not only his ambitions for Scottish sculpture, but the same personal ambitions that had led him to build his career in Edinburgh. The next chapter will examine Steell’s portraiture, and how the patronage it engendered allowed him to pursue a career of international scope, while remaining in the country of his birth.
Fig 150. John Steell, Queen Victoria, 1838. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Fig 151. John Steell, Queen Victoria, 1844, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library

Fig 152. John Steell, Duke of Wellington, 1843. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland
Private Collection, Scotland.

Fig 153. John Steell, Wellington Monument, 1852 (detail). Photo: Rouco Lavallien

Fig 154. John Steell, Prince Albert, 1876. Royal Collection. Photo: National Monuments Register

Fig 155. John Steell, Consort Memorial, 1876 (detail). Photo: Rouco Lavallien
Chapter Seven
Steell, Patronage and Portraiture

In evaluating John Steell’s career, it would be a grave mistake to underestimate the importance of portraiture. Study of Steell’s oeuvre shows that his execution of portrait busts was never indifferent, or purely for commercial ends. Given the lack of demand for ideal subjects, sculptors of his time viewed major monument commissions as the ultimate professional goal and the most noble use of their talents. Portraiture was often seen as a prosaic area of work; it was done to earn a living. In Steell’s case, portrait busts were a means of extending his contacts, as well as serving as a readily displayed example of his skills.

Generations of British sculptors and aesthetes had despaired of the preponderance of market demand for busts at the expense of “higher” subjects, but the Victorian era witnessed a fashion for the genre which proportionally outstripped orders for other sculptural work; the Scottish sculpture market was no exception. As Sir Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901), an artist whose sculptural ambitions were frustrated, complained to the Art Journal in 1895: “To live by sculpture in this country one must devote one’s self almost exclusively to funereal monuments and portrait busts; since for ideal sculpture there is practically little taste, and no demand.”

All of Steell’s major monuments contained a portraiture element, and in the case of such projects as the Queen Victoria, Wellington, and Prince...
Fig. 156. Upper Library, Edinburgh University, William Playfair, architect. Portrait busts here commemorate eminent citizens, former professors and benefactors.

Photo: Youngson, p. 192.
Coizsovt monuments, the execution of a portrait bust was part of the process of creating a larger sculptural group. (Figs.150-155) Additionally, there was a subsidiary market for funerary portraiture. Steell executed many of these commemorations for some of Edinburgh’s most illustrious citizens.303

Portraiture was the genre which Steell executed and displayed most frequently; virtually all of his exhibited work at the Royal Scottish Academy was bust portraiture.304

Well before the nineteenth century, bust portraiture served an ideological purpose beyond the purely aesthetic. Busts of classical statesmen or philosophers demonstrated the owner’s taste and education, while depictions of contemporaries in the classical style reflected the emulation of the ideals that were seen as the most proper.302 The Victorian extension of the bust market reflected both the gentry’s wish to display its erudition, and the ascendant middle class’ emulation of ancient forms to represent modern values. For a middle class patron or group, a bust also constituted a visual commemoration within a manageable budget. Steell’s most expensive busts cost £150.303 A plaster replica could be had for as little as two guineas.304

Victorian enthusiasm for the portrait bust reflected an even earlier tradition for ‘library’ busts that reached back to at least the Italian Renaissance. The display of one’s classical and humanist erudition by collecting busts and medals of philosophers, poets, statesmen and other “uomini famosi” was a well established cultural tradition, and an accepted indication of an individual’s education and taste. This however was a relatively private display; the Victorian use of the portrait bust expanded
outwards, and imparted a public message regarding the nature of a given organisation and its values.

Associations and organisations regularly commissioned bust portraits to honour their illustrious members. (Fig. 156) An example of this Victorian use of the bust in Scotland can be seen in two Edinburgh professional bodies, the Royal College of Physicians, and the Faculty of Advocates. While paintings were also a traditional mode of commemoration, the marble bust was seen as even more tangible and enduring. As Malcolm Baker has commented: “…groups of portrait busts were one of the most telling signs of civic and local identity. As such, they were one of the nineteenth century’s preferred categories of visual representation. Indeed, nothing seems so eminently Victorian as a line of marble busts in a town hall.”

WealthyScottish families travelling in Italy often sat to Laurence Macdonald, Thomas Campbell, and other British sculptors in their Rome studios. Helen Smailes noted: “By the 1850s, when a visit to [Laurence]Macdonald was mandatory for the cultured British tourist, his studio was filled with ‘the peerage done into marble, a plaster galaxy of rank and fashion.’” This aesthetic trend was continued at home as well. Steell produced a wide range of domestic busts, both posthumous and from life, for both middle and upper class clients; his subjects ranged from small children to esteemed spouses and venerated grandparents.

Copies of popular busts were similarly in demand, both as full scale and reduced replicas. Well known busts and groups were often copied in plaster and sold by Italian image sellers. Sir Francis Chantrey’s 1820 bust of Sir Walter Scott (Fig.157) was widely copied, usually illegally. Steell’s bust
of Dr. Thomas Chalmers (Fig.158) was also popular, and was executed in marble many times for organisations that honoured the preacher’s work.\(^{304}\) Of equal popularity was Steell’s bust of the Duke of Wellington, which survives in at least seven editions.\(^{304}\) Throughout the century, the portrait bust served as a popular, versatile means of employing sculpture in both domestic and institutional settings.

Steell sculpted some of the most famous people of his era. Scott, Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, (Fig.159) Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and Florence Nightingale (Fig.160) all sat to the sculptor, or were captured posthumously through the use of portraits, drawings, masks and photographs. It could be argued that Steell’s activities as an artist contributed to an ongoing trend of British cultural legitimisation and valorisation in Scotland and Great Britain. This agenda of commemoration was not systematic, but organic, in keeping with the localised nature of Scottish civil society. It was an active, though loose movement which flourished in the Victorian social environment, and emphasised improvement and respectability. The fashion for busts reflected the increased demand for public statues and monuments, which also characterised the era.

Steell’s position as Sculptor for Scotland meant that as part of the cultural orthodoxy, he was often directly responsible for an expression of the public’s view of what constituted a physical and cultural ideal. Since Steell’s portraits were often allied with monuments, his portraiture serves as a clear indicator of the widely representative attitudes held by society towards the subject of commemoration.
Fig. 161. David Octavius Hill. Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
The portrait bust was generally evaluated according to two main criteria: its value as a true record of the sitter’s features, and as an aesthetic object in itself. Within the realm of the aesthetic was the interpretation and presentation of the sitter’s persona. This was subject to stylistic forms beyond the merely descriptive. A portrait bust by its very nature tended to valorise the sitter as an ideal—an heroic one for men, for women, an ideal of beauty. This presentation was augmented by the adoption of classical dress and drapery, and the execution of the final work in marble or bronze—both expensive materials which suggested wealth, prestige and achievement on the part of the patron.

Evaluation of this effect can be undertaken by comparing contemporary calotype photographs with examples of Steell’s portraiture. David Octavius Hill (1802-1870) (Fig.161) and Robert Adamson (1821-1827) were pioneering photographers in Edinburgh between 1823 and 1827, and like Steell, they recorded many of the most prominent people of their era. The nature of the calotype was essentially different from the portrait bust; a calotype was produced over a few minutes, was small, ephemeral (when compared to sculpture), and of course, printed two-dimensionally on paper. The main scope of comparison lies in two areas: verisimilitude of the subject’s features, and the creation of the sitter’s persona within the image.

Hill and Adamson never approached their calotypes as the mere mechanical creation of an image. Hill composed the pictures as he did paintings; the use of setting, backgrounds, drapery and props were routinely employed. What the camera did best however, was capture the essential
Fig. 162. Lord Cockburn,
Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 163. John Steell, Lord Cockburn, 1851,
Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh.
Photo: Rocco Liedl.

Fig. 164. Sir John McNeill,
Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 165. John Steell, Sir John McNeill, 1859,
Scottish National Portrait Gallery.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
physical nature of the sitter—every line, wrinkle, jowl, and double chin was recorded and represented. This is the essential basis for comparison.

While Steell approached portraiture with a balanced emphasis on classical idealised form and naturalistic detail, we can discern a clear difference in effect when comparing his busts to Hill and Adamson calotypes. The formal elements of sculpture augment the process of valorisation implied by the creation of a portrait bust. In comparison, the effect of the calotype highlights the discrepancy between the intended effect of the constructed persona with the actual physical reality of the sitter.

An example of this effect is seen in a comparison between Hill and Adamson’s c. 1843-7 calotype of Lord Cockburn (1779-1854), and Steell’s 1851 portrait bust. (Figs.162-163) Lord Cockburn appears in the calotype much as we expect a man of some sixty years to look. While his ornate chair, walking stick and deliberative air suggest to the viewer a man of accomplishment and eminence, if our view focuses upon the physical condition of the sitter, we are faced with the image of a wizened old man moving towards the end of his life.

Steell’s marble bust however, with its classical drapery and pupil-less eyes, actively constructs the persona of a Greek philosopher, or Roman statesman. Though many of Cockburn’s physical characteristics as represented by Steell are shared with the calotype—essentially his bald pate and deep wrinkles—the overall representation is elevated and idealised, in keeping with the accepted understanding of the bust’s function, to commemorate and revere beyond the mere recording of features. This was the essential value of the portrait bust.
An even more marked example of the valorising effect can be seen in a comparison of the 1845 calotype and 1859 bust of Sir John McNeill (1795-1883) (Figs. 164-165). McNeill appears stern, capable, and deliberate, but also human in the calotype. He wears contemporary dress, and there are few accoutrements except for a pocket watch upon the table before him. McNeill does not look into the camera, but past it, which gives the viewer a palpable sense that he knows that he is the object of our attention. This awareness of the camera contributes to our understanding of the overall sense of his personality.

In contrast, the Steell bust depicts an austere figure staring straight forward. The huge volume of drapery creates a massive, grand impression which threatens to overwhelm our view of the head. Though the features are clearly recognisable as those of McNeill, the overall effect is so elevated by the formal structures, that the result is a portrait which seems simultaneously imperious and impressive. This may very well have been its intended effect. As portrait busts were expected to last for many years, the desired result was a timeless, clear and austere depiction of the sitter, in keeping with classical antecedents.

Steell’s designation as Queen’s Sculptor for Scotland in 1838 gave him the huge advantage of prestige; he enjoyed steady demand from sitters, and could afford to be discerning in the portrait projects he chose to execute. Though public monuments took up an increasing amount of his time after 1840, he continued to execute a few likenesses of eminent citizens each year. In so doing, he consolidated his established patronage, and cultivated new contacts as well. As Steell executed fewer portraits, there was more work
available for Edinburgh sculptors such as William Brodie (1815-1881) and Alexander Handyside Ritchie (1804-1870). Steell continued to produce an average of at least one portrait bust a year.  

The portrait bust was also the most easily executed and displayed example of the artist’s skills; a bust could be completed in a relatively short period of time, in comparison to a major statue. As Steell was usually engaged with monumental projects, he was often unable to display his primary efforts in the Royal Scottish Academy. During one period, 1845-49, Steell inadvertently violated the rules of the Academy by failing to exhibit work for four years, and was obliged to submit “a reasonable excuse” to the RSA board to explain this hiatus. He cited the fact that the monumental nature of his work proved too large to submit, and too pressing to allow time to execute smaller works. This incident illustrated the difficulties inherent in the display of large sculptural projects, and emphasised the importance of bust portraiture in keeping his work in public view.

A portrait commission could provide an ideal way to develop relationships with new patrons, and Steell seemed to be particularly adept at fostering warm friendships with sitters, who in turn introduced or recommended him to other influential members of society. Once these links were forged, Steell benefited from the fact that these citizens were often the same men who were organising public monument projects.

Bust commissions were often a necessary step in the execution of a monument, and sometimes led to further work. Steell’s successful execution of the likeness of Queen Victoria, required by the commission for the colossal statue, led to his appointment as Sculptor for Scotland. During the
All works by John Steell. From left to right: Lord Cockburn, 1851; Lord Rutherfurd, 1853; Thomas Thomson, 1844; Lord Jeffrey, 1852; Duncan McNeill, 1856; Sir John McNeill, 1859; Lord Patton, 1862. All in Faculty of Advocates collection, except 167, Dean Cemetery and 171, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. All photos by Rocco Lieuallen except 171, National Galleries of Scotland.
Wellington project, the bust helped to convince committee members that Steell should receive the commission. The fact that he had created a popular bust of Dr. Chalmers in 1846 facilitated his being chosen to execute the bronze statue completed in 1878. In 1865, under Queen Victoria’s supervision, Steell completed a likeness of Prince Albert that he utilised for the Consort Memorial; upon completion of that project, the Queen commissioned a marble version of the original bust.

As a means of attracting patronage, the portrait could be vital to a sculptor’s success. In Steell’s case, one group which controlled the workings of Edinburgh society were the lawyers, specifically, the members of the Faculty of Advocates and the Writers to the Signet. While the aristocracy retained vestiges of social control through traditional means, (aristocrats such as the 5th Duke of Buccleuch and 10th Earl of Dalhousie were routinely requested to head monument committees) the practical decision making and implementation of policy was often handled by different members of the same body of lawyers. These men administered virtually all of Steell’s major projects: the Queen Victoria, Scott Monument, Wellington Monument and Prince Consort Memorial.

Many of these men were Whigs, including Lord Cockburn (1779-1854)(Fig.166), Lord Rutherford (1791-1854) (Fig.167), Lord Murray (1779-1859), Thomas Thomson (1786-1852)(Fig.168), and Lord Jeffrey (1773-1850)(Fig.169); all were Steell patrons, subjects, or both. Members of the Tory legal establishment also supported the sculptor. As discussed in Chapter Four, Lord Meadowbank had been an early advocate of Steell. Lord President Duncan McNeill, (brother of Sir John McNeill)sat to Steell in
Fig. 173. John Steell, *Lady Susan Ramsay*, 1859, Private Collection, Scotland.

Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 174. John Steell, *Monument to Viscount Balgonie*, 1859, Monimail Parish Church, Fife.

Photo: Rocco Lisciotti
1856. (Figs. 170-171) Both McNeills served on the Consort Memorial committee. Younger lawyers, such as David Smith, W.S. and George Patton, Advocate (later Lord Patton) (Fig. 172), were dedicated supporters of Steell during the commission process of the Wellington Monument, as will be seen in Chapter Eight. Steell became a colleague of many of these men after he was appointed a Commissioner of the Board of Manufactures in 1849.  

Given this proximity, it is not surprising that apart from the holdings of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, the largest collection of Steell’s work is held by the Faculty of Advocates. The Advocates’ collection is made up of eight busts and two statues, more representations than any other artist, with the exception of Sir Henry Raeburn.  

Relationships formed with patrons in the 1830s and 1840s began to reap tangible benefits by the 1850s, but Steell did not stop developing his contacts. An example of this activity is his relationship with Lady Mary Ruthven (1789-1885). Lady Ruthven was an accomplished amateur painter in watercolours and a collector of classical antiquities. She helped organise two monuments which Steell executed for Monimail Parish Church in Fife.  

Lady Ruthven had links to eminent families in the west of Scotland, particularly that of Sir William Stirling-Maxwell (1818-1878), from whom she also sought advice regarding art.  

In January of 1860, Lady Ruthven wrote to Stirling-Maxwell:

*I wish if you are in Edinburgh you would call at the studio of Steele the sculptor in Randolph Crescent behind Charlotte Sq. He longs to have the honor of being made known to you; & I want you to see a bust of Lady Susan Ramsay [Fig. 173] he has finished for Lord Dalhousie; & also one of Florence Nitimale [sic]... Do go it would please Steile & you would also see his Alto Relief of Viscount Balgonie [Fig. 174] for the Church at Melville...*
Fig. 175. Lady Anna Stirling-Maxwell, 1877.

Photo: Christie's, London.
Lady Ruthven’s letter suggests that Steell was eager to meet Stirling-
Maxwell, and this association meant that fifteen years later, Steell would
have work from Maxwell when he needed it most.

In 1875, Steell received a commission for a bust of Stirling-
Maxwell’s first wife, Lady Anne, who had died in 1874 (Fig.175). The series of letters
held in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow not only reveal the manner in which
Steell dealt with patrons, but also present details of his working practice and
his financial problems at that particular time. Steell was only a year away
from completing the Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, but was
also between instalment payments for the work, and was experiencing
anxiety regarding his finances. In April 1876, he asked Stirling-
Maxwell for a portion of his fee for the bust:

25 April 1876
Dear Sir

It is with very deep regret that I allude to the mere business part of the work I have the
honour of doing for you but as the etiquette of the Profession allows instalments to be paid during the
progress of works, & as several large works having been in my hands for so many years has ^ in the
meantime brought upon me very serious money difficulties, I earnestly hope you will kindly excuse
me requesting of you to favour me with a payment of seventy guineas to account of the price of the
marble Bust of Lady Anne Stirling Maxwell which I am executing for you. It would be of more than
twice value to me at the present moment…

Stirling-Maxwell paid Steell £80, presumably keeping the sculptor
from financial embarrassment. Steell enjoyed the support of other
benefactors as well. One of his earlier patrons was the eminent diplomat Sir
John McNeill (1795-1883). Four months after the exchange of letters between
Steell and Stirling-Maxwell and shortly following Steell’s knighthood,
Stirling-Maxwell received a letter from McNeill notifying him of a public
testimonial subscription to recognise Steell’s achievements and help him
financially.
Steell had done work for the McNeill family as early as 1843, and had displayed a marble bust of McNeill’s daughter Feruooza at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1849. In 1858, Steell would execute the bust of Sir John. A letter from Steell to the family in the McNeill papers, manifests the cordial and earnest regard Steell displayed to his patrons. The letter acknowledges the patron’s payment and thanks, and is remarkable as one of the most poetic Steell missives which has survived, as well as for the postscript, which displays his honesty and meticulous fair-mindedness:

3 Randolph Place
26 July 1843

Dear Sir John

I have the honor to be favored with your note of yesterday enclosing the balance of the payment for the Bust. & allow me to mention that what is expressed in your very kind note has moved my heart intensely—For to have met—in this little work—the expectation & the feelings of Lady Macneill & yourself—is to me everything—and which has made an impression on my mind that will never leave me—in all the windings to the ultimate fate of my career & be a cheering ray of grateful delight— even in my most gloomy moods.

With great esteem
I have the honor to remain
Your obliged & Faithful servant
John Steell

There is a mistake of one pound too much, which I have taken the liberty of returning.411

Steell’s charming nature aside, he was not above requesting a favour. Lord Advocate Andrew Rutherfurd (1791-1854)412 was another Steell patron from the Edinburgh legal community, and the sculptor wrote to him in 1850 asking if he could help secure a position in Natal for his son.413 There is no record of whether Steell’s request was granted, but it shows that Steell felt close enough to Rutherfurd to ask the favour. When sculpture was the matter at hand, Steell also knew how to instil confidence that the patron was receiving not only the best possible application of his skill, but also his best material. Steell wrote to Rutherfurd three years later:
Fig. 176. John Steell, *Lady Sophia Rutherford*, 1853. Location Unknown. Photo: Christie’s, London.
13 April 1853,
My Lord

It affords me great pleasure to mention to your lordship that I am now going on with the bust in the marble, which seems to be of the very finest colour & quality—but should a single speck appear, I shall immediately reject the block, & take up others until I succeed in getting one entirely pure; for nothing that I can command shall be wanting in my endeavour to produce a work satisfactory to your lordship...44

The work in question was the 1853 marble bust of Lady Sophia Rutherfurd (d.1852)(Fig.176). Within the same year, Steell also executed a bronze bas-relief with profile portraits of both Rutherfurds for their red granite funeral pyramid designed by William Playfair in Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh. (Figs.177-178)415 That Steell was asked to execute both likenesses supports the view that his relationship with the Lord Advocate was strong. Rutherfurd was devastated by his wife’s death, and he obsessively planned the details for her memorial; that he trusted Steell with her bust shows the regard he had for the sculptor. He was satisfied with the work, writing to his sister-in-law Elizabeth Rutherfurd: “Steel has quite succeeded beyond my expectations immensely...there never was so good a bust not from sitting.”416

The portrait bust of Lady Sophia is an excellent example of Steell’s moderate style, though it is of markedly neoclassical origin, reflecting Lord Rutherfurd’s love of the antique. It combines the classical and naturalist forms of expression into a skilful union. Lady Rutherfurd is dressed all’ antica, wearing a loose sashed robe of Roman style, known as a dalmatic tunic; the folds in mezzo relief, with buttoned sleeves.417 The carefully separated and carved locks of hair are banded together, with a veil flowing gently down in linear folds to accentuate her neck and shoulders.
Fig. 177. John Steell, Rutherfurd Monument Relief (detail), 1853, Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh. Photo: Rocco Lisaline.

Fig. 178. William Playfair, Rutherfurd Monument, 1853, Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh. Photo: Rocco Lisaline.
Steell slightly softened and generalised her features. His great talent in portraiture was to discreetly flatter his sitter without oversimplifying, creating a bland, overly sweet image, or losing the particular likeness of the sitter. In contrast, Laurence Macdonald received intermittent criticism that all of his subjects looked identical.418

Steell’s taste was well-suited to the practise of portraiture, and what was expected of it; his treatment of sitters was almost universally acknowledged and praised. Even his earliest work received plaudits, though his talents were understood to be better employed upon ideal subjects.419 As with his monumental portrait statues, he worked from a foundation of neoclassicism, but with a balance between the classical treatment of subject and the use of naturalistic details in the faces of the sitters. He imparted a direct psychological ambience through the position of the head, treatment of the features, and arrangement of the drapery, as epitomised by Samuel Joseph.420 (Figs.179-180)

The moderate balance was achieved through a combination of techniques. Steell customarily adhered to three main elements of classical models: the Flavian use of drapery (characterised by the inclusion of the sitter’s shoulders and chest);421; a smooth, matte finish to the surfaces; and uninscribed eyes—Steell never depicted the pupils of his sitters. Within this framework, Steell would introduce contemporary elements. The style of hair is usually contemporary, though the locks themselves are described in a particularly classical way, and never generalised in the mode of the New Sculpture. Steell was also capable of direct verisimilitude, as seen in his bronze bust of Dr. Thomas Guthrie.422 (Fig.181)
Figs. 179-180. Samuel Joseph, Henry Mackenzie, 1822, SNPG; John Steell, Lord Fullerton, 1852, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. Steell's work displays the combination of particular observation within classical context that characterised Joseph's portraits.

Photos: Fig. 179, National Galleries of Scotland; Fig. 180, Rocco Lieuallen.

Fig. 181. John Steell, Revd. Dr. Thomas Guthrie, c. 1856, Private Collection, London. Steell was adept at both naturalistic and idealised depictions of his sitters. Photo: Rocco Lieuallen.
Virtually all of Steell’s busts employed classical drapery and many were costumed *all’ antica*. This presumably reflected the dominant style of the period, as the sculptor was capable of providing whatever costume the client desired. As with painted portraits, there existed a tradition within bust portraiture which allowed a client to select the mode of dress and expression. This practice is perhaps best exemplified by the eighteenth-century French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828). Houdon adjusted his formula for replicas of his most popular busts, presenting them alternately with classical or contemporary dress, Greek herm bases, or generalised drapery. Each version was designed to appeal to different potential customers. (Figs. 182-183)

Steell only produced a small number of busts that employed contemporary dress. Scottish audiences could see the classical drapery as a Scottish plaid if they wished, though Steell never incised a tartan pattern into his drapery, as Chantrey had done in his *Sir Walter Scott*. Unlike Houdon, Steell seems to have adhered closely to his original version of a portrait, and never changed elements in replica copies. For instance, all examples of his Wellington bust are identical in composition, pose and drapery. (Figs.184-185) Even the individual folds in the drapery are identical.

Steell’s portraiture for monuments made greater use of contemporary dress balanced with drapery—a stylistic compromise that seems to have been a British tradition. This allowed adherents of both the classical and naturalist styles to appreciate the works. Steell did not follow styles dogmatically, but adjusted them along a continuum. By this compromise, he
Figs. 182-183. Houdon adjusted the dress to accommodate his clients' various tastes.

Photo: H.H. Atwood.
could blend modes of expression, instilling gravitas without rendering work too austere or severe.

Steell was often praised for his skill in achieving what was understood to be the primary aim of portraiture: an accurate likeness. Contemporary reviewers often commented that a given bust was an excellent likeness as well as a fine work of art. For example, the Scotsman of 5 August 1859 remarked upon Steell’s 1852 bust of Lord Fullerton (Fig. 180): “Regarded either as a work of art or as a specimen of portraiture it is one of the most pleasing of Mr Steell’s many successful efforts.” Likewise, in 1842 the 10th Earl of Dalhousie wrote to Sir John McNeill regarding Steell’s bust of Wellington: “The bust...is really superb, both as a portrait & as a work of art.”\(^{424}\) This suggests a general understanding of two separate criteria for a successful portrait.

Steell used all means available to achieve a good likeness. He employed photographs for the aforementioned bust of Lady Stirling-Maxwell, and for an 1877 posthumous bust of the writer Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859)(Fig. 186).\(^{425}\) A letter to Stirling-Maxwell in 1875 further illustrates his use of photography for portrait work:

16 Jany 1875

Dear Sir William

I am favoured with your note enclosing the two photographs, which I think are excellent. & the one being a front view, & the other nearly profile renders them of great value to the work, a work in which permit me to say I feel the deepest interest, & in the execution of which I certainly shall not fail to try to the very utmost of my power to meet your wishes...\(^{426}\)

It is unknown if Steell ever practised his own photography, or if he always left it to others.\(^{427}\) In any case, the 1843-7 Hill & Adamson calotypes show that Steell was one of the first sculptors ever to have his finished work
Fig. 186. John Steell, *Thomas de Quincey*, 1877, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London


Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 188. John Steell, *Dr. John Abercrombie*, 1846, Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. Steell employed a death mask for this bust. Photo: Rocco Lieuallen
recorded by the new process. Of the six catalogued examples held by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery which feature sculpture as the subject, three are Steell works: two views of the Sir Walter Scott statue, and a calotype of Steell’s bust of Lady Buccleuch. (Fig. 187) There are calotypes of additional works by Steell in the Steell scrapbooks. Steell mainly used photography to record his finished work, but he was clearly aware of the utility of the process in the execution of portraiture.

Steell employed death masks when available; for example, while executing the bust of Dr. Abercrombie for the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, (Fig. 188) and a second time for Lady Sophia Rutherfurd. For his final magnum opus, the Robert Burns monument, he was reported as having employed the iconic Nasmyth portrait of 1787, (now held by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh) and a plaster cast of Burns’s skull, taken by phrenologists when the Burns tomb was opened in March of 1834 to inter the remains of Burns’s wife Jean Armour.425

As noted above, after the beginning of his long domination of public monument projects, Steell executed portraiture less often. It has been suggested by Woodward and Pearson that Steell’s domination of the monument market retarded the success of other Scottish sculptors.429 However, since the Scottish market was overwhelmingly for bust portraiture, this contention does not stand. William Brodie (1815-1881) and Alexander Handyside Ritchie (1804-1870) enjoyed active careers in Edinburgh concurrently with Steell. It would seem that the sculptural market was divided somewhat evenly between the men: Steell executed the
major monuments, Brodie the majority of portraits, and Ritchie the architectural decorations for which he was widely praised.430

Additionally, after 1876 Steell never again received a commission for a major Edinburgh monument.431 Late Victorian civic projects went to sculptors such as William Brodie, for the 1878 Simpson Monument; Amelia Hill (1820-1904), for the 1876 Livingstone; John Hutchison (1833-1910) for the 1877 Adam Black, and John Rhind (1828-1892) for the 1888-91 William Chambers statue. After 1876, Steell continued to execute major work, but for cities such as New York, London, Dundee and Dunedin. As will be discussed in Chapter Ten, Steell also helped his contemporaries by including them in the execution of the Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, between 1865 and 1876. During all of these projects, he continued to create bust portraiture of a high standard.

The majority of Steell’s surviving work is portraiture. The nature of his great success as a monumental sculptor meant that besides these large projects, portraiture was the most active market open to him. Demand was high for his busts, and by executing them he not only extended his contacts within the elite, but also consolidated his patronage for other larger projects. It has been shown that Steell was not indifferent to the genre, and employed innovative methods to execute suitable likenesses in the best taste. While he never executed as many ideal subjects as Laurence Macdonald, John Gibson or Bertel Thorvaldsen, portraiture created contacts, provided manageable examples for exhibition, and, as will be examined in the next chapter, created invaluable opportunities for future projects.
Fig. 189. John Steell, Wellington Monument, 1852, Princes Street, Edinburgh.

Photo: Robert Lawson.
Chapter Eight
Steell, Wellington, and the Grove Foundry: 1840-1852

John Steell’s most striking, and perhaps most significant public monument is the Scottish National Monument to the Duke of Wellington (Fig. 189). Incidents surrounding the commission of the statue and its execution reflect many issues involving our understanding of both Scottish art and Steell’s career: the promotion of native artists by public rather than personal patronage; the technical independence available to Scottish sculptors achieved through Steell’s creation of the Grove Foundry; the continued commemoration of Unionist-Nationalist heroes within Scotland; and the stylistic links that Steell shared with European sculptors in his equestrian monument. The entire Wellington project took twelve years, from 1840 to 1852. During this time, Steell consolidated his reputation and worked towards his ambition of nurturing a vibrant native sculptural community. By the time of the inauguration of the monument, Steell would be seen as Scotland’s premier sculptor, and the notion that Scottish sculpture had reached parity with England and Europe would be stronger than ever.

On 29 January 1842, James Andrew Ramsay, the 10th Earl and 1st Marquess of Dalhousie (1812-1860), chairman of the Scottish National Wellington Testimonial Committee, wrote to Sir John McNeill (1795-1883):

London Janr. 29 1842

My Dear Sir John
The bust and model of the statue of the Duke were sufficiently advanced to enable us to fix the 18th ult. for a General Meeting of the Committee regarding them. I went down to Edin. on purpose for it: & though I had [a] severe & on my return rather a perilous journey, I was rewarded by a very agreeable settlement of all the questions wh.[ich] remained undecided.
The bust as I think I told you is really superb, both as a portrait & as a work of art. The model, regarded as an indication enough of an idea to be afterwards worked up, is very good & met with almost universal approbation. At the meeting the report of the Subcommittee was read...stating matters as they stood: the funds reported at £11,300 & after that, Steell was unanimously appointed in the most flattering manner to him to execute the statue in bronze.

The attempt to have also a Triumphal Arch was given up as not feasible & the front of the Register office selected as the site...

It will give you pleasure I am sure to hear of this pleasing & successful issue. The harmony of it made me very happy.

The Duke of Buccleuch is much pleased with Steell’s appointment...432

This was an official confirmation of a fact that everyone already knew—John Steell would execute the Scottish National Monument to the Duke of Wellington. The process had started two years earlier, with Steell always being the favoured artist to receive the commission. No committee minutes seem to have survived, but there are extensive letters surrounding the 1840-42 commission process between the 5th Duke of Buccleuch, (1806-1884)433 Dalhousie and others, in the National Archives of Scotland.434 Four additional letters from 1842 involving the commission are in Edinburgh University Library.435 Additionally, there is a volume of correspondence and pamphlets regarding the 1840 resolution to erect the monument held in the Edinburgh Room of Edinburgh Central Public Library.436

Monuments to Wellington, both as soldier and politician, were springing up all over Great Britain, but concentrated mostly in London. The earliest to appear was Sir Richard Westmacott’s (1755-1856) Achilles, (Fig.190) which was dedicated to the Duke’s Napoleonic victories, conceived in 1814, and unveiled in London’s Hyde Park in 1822.437 Following a complicated struggle between factions supporting Sir Francis Chantrey (1781-1841) and Matthew Cotes Wyatt (1777-1862), Chantrey’s equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington (Fig.191) was initiated in 1836 as a commemoration of the Duke’s assistance in passing the London Bridge...
Fig. 191. Sir Francis Chantrey, *Duke of Wellington*, 1844, Royal Exchange Square, London.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 192. Carlo Marochetti, *Duke of Wellington*, 1844, Royal Exchange Square, Glasgow.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
Approaches Act of 1827. Chantrey died in November 1841, and the project was completed by his assistant Henry Weekes (1807-1877) and installed at London’s Royal Exchange in 1844.

A subscription was launched for Matthew Cotes Wyatt’s equestrian Wellington Military Memorial on Waterloo Day, 18 June 1837 in a manifestation of the Wyatt faction’s frustration at failing to secure their artist’s services for the Royal Exchange commission. Wyatt’s statue was completed in 1846. In Glasgow, a bitter controversy regarding the patronage of native talent surrounded the commission for the Glasgow Wellington Memorial, (Fig.192) yet another equestrian statue launched in 1840. The work was completed by Carlo Marochetti (1805-1867) in 1844. Across Great Britain, sculptural activity dedicated to “The Iron Duke” was considerable.

A Scottish national monument to Wellington was conceived in 1838 by Lord Elgin. This plan called for a monumental pedestrian statue, upon a column some sixty to seventy feet high, sited on Arthur’s Seat in Edinburgh. Elgin based his scheme upon two projects which had impressed him: a similar monument to the Duke of Sutherland on Ben Bragghie, Sutherlandshire, and a colossal monument to Carlo Boromeo near Lake Como in northern Italy. Nothing like Elgin’s grand scheme was ever realised, but he perhaps deserves credit for first suggesting what would become the Wellington Monument on Edinburgh’s Princes Street.

“A Rank Edinburgh Job”

The formal resolution to erect a national monument to the Duke of Wellington was passed on 1 January 1840. Sir James Forrest, the Lord
Fig. 193. Lord Provost Forrest, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
Provost of Edinburgh (Fig. 193) had called a private meeting on 13 December 1839, to consider an equestrian monument to Wellington for Edinburgh. This was followed by a public meeting in the Hopetoun Rooms on Christmas Eve 1839. There it was resolved that the work be a national equestrian monument dedicated to Wellington's military career and not to his political service. Sir George Warrender was appointed Honorary Secretary and Adam Hay was made Treasurer of the committee.

In the political climate of 1840, a monument to Wellington needed to commemorate his military victories, not his political efforts. Despite the Duke's Tory agenda, everyone, even the most radical Whigs, appreciated the brilliance and commitment he had displayed as Field Marshal in Europe. Even so, there were parts of Scotland where it was considered that Waterloo was past history, and the current state of affairs did not warrant a national token of gratitude:

Bailie Smith said he had seen, with the utmost astonishment, the names of many of the leading Liberals of the day among those of the subscribers, and among those who were forwarding this national testimonial. He granted the Duke's many excellencies as a soldier and as a commander; but he considered his glories in the field as having been tarnished by his conduct in the Cabinet. He thought he had already been sufficiently compensated for his labours in the field, and would move that the Council should proceed to the business of the evening...

...The matter here dropt, the whole being left, as we understood, to the discretion of the Provost, to do as he thought proper.  

Early in the subscription drive, Warrender wrote to Dalhousie, commenting on this ambivalence within certain regions of Scotland:

6 February 1840

Lord Eglinton tells me that nothing could be more cold than the Whig support in Ayrshire. But they gave it altho' with their tails between their legs; and I confess the way in which in some places they have been brought in to "go the whole hog" has been great fun to me—fun which we had very nearly lost by the doubts of some of your conservative friends.
Fig. 194. Sir John McNeill, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
By summer of 1840, the Duke of Buccleuch (1806-1884) was considerably upset by the parochial favouritism shown by the Wellington Testimonial’s general committee. He had contemplated resigning, so incensed was he at the perceived lack of propriety with which certain members of the group had sought to secure the project for John Steell. As was usual with an Edinburgh sculptural commission, power politics and factionalism had carried the day.44

In marked contrast to the Scott Monument process, the choice of a native artist, and the use of the project as a means to encourage Scottish art was an explicit goal of some committee members from the outset. A printed circular for a July committee meeting stated:

WELLINGTON TESTIMONIAL
Resolutions to be considered July 6 1840

1. That in the opinion of the Committee, it is desirable that the execution of the proposed NATIONAL TRIBUTE of gratitude to the DUKE OF WELLINGTON should be entrusted to a native Artist resident in Scotland, if a design can be procured worthy of his Grace and of the Nation.

2. That a Sub-Committee be appointed, with power to procure a Bust of his Grace, and Model or Models of an Equestrian Statue, from such resident Scottish Artist or Artists as they may think proper, to be submitted to the General Committee; the Bust and Models to be procured under a Contract, referable to the Cost of the Bust and Model only, and under such conditions as shall leave the General Committee quite unfettered in their ultimate decision as to the choice of an Artist...45

The results of the proceedings of 6 July indicated the depth of feeling regarding native talent, and the fact that several members had already decided that John Steell should receive the commission. At the meeting, Sir John McNeill (Fig.194) proposed that the wording in the second resolution be changed to designate Steell as the first artist to be invited to submit designs stating: “...it is desirable that Mr. Steele should be requested to place before the Committee, a Model or Models of an Equestrian Statue of the Duke of Wellington, with a view to enable the Committee to decide
whether Scotland does not possess within herself the means of producing a work of Art, worthy to communicate her gratitude to that great man."

Ostensibly, McNeill thought this would help the committee to ascertain whether there were native artists worthy of the project. However, the resulting controversy over designating Steell in any capacity showed that for some, his selection was prejudicial. As far as McNeill was concerned, Steell’s submission would only help the committee determine whether Scottish sculpture was capable of commemorating Wellington adequately; the second resolution had stated that the committee would remain “quite unfettered in their ultimate decision.”

McNeill’s nominees for an evaluating subcommittee were Buccleuch, Dalhousie, Lord Aberdeen, Lord Rosebery, Viscount Melville, Sir George Warrender, Sir James Stuart, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, McNeill himself, and Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane. McNeill clearly saw the National Wellington Monument as a great opportunity for the advancement of Scottish art, but some members of the general committee must have been equally motivated to use McNeill’s amendments as a stalking-horse to put Steell forward as the epitome of native talent. McNeill certainly had great faith in Steell’s abilities, and was such an eminent and high-minded diplomat that it may not have occurred to him that his amendments might be construed as jobbing on the part of the Edinburgh/Steell faction. McNeill might have already been convinced that Steell was the best man for the project. The amendments were carried by a majority of one.

Buccleuch however, felt that a national monument commission should not only be free from any factional considerations, but should be
Fig. 195. James Thom, *Tam O'Shanter & Souter Johnnie*, c. 1828. "I trust we are not to have a Souter Johnnie sort of a Statue..." Buccleuch was willing to support native arts, but not if the monument was to be broadly narrative, in the style of the mason-sculptors.

Photo: National Trust for Scotland.
granted to the very best artist available—foreign or domestic. He expressed his opinion to the committee on the same day of the meeting (he had not attended), implicitly criticising the "mason-sculptor" phenomenon within the context of "native talent":

Drumlanrig Castle 6 July 1840

To Sir G. Warrender, Bart.

I have received the account of the meeting respecting the Wellington memorial, and I see that the Committee are to meet again today—I think the opinion of the General Committee as there stated is erroneous, and that if the plan there recommended is adopted the whole thing will be a failure.

I trust we are not to have a Souter Johnie sort of a Statue [Fig.195]—Native Talent should be protected and encouraged; but who would put a work which requires the greatest knowledge of the art, the greatest skill and experience not only of the art; but of other works & masters both ancient and modern, into the hands of some young and inexperienced tho' perhaps talented and improving artist; and expect to see something worthy of the City and of the subject...and this to be done merely because he is a Scotchman resident in Edinr. or at all events north of the Tweed—If such a man is to be found in Scotland, with all the skill knowledge & experience requisite, no one will rejoice more than myself; but I shall deeply deplore the failure of such a subject, and wasting of such an immense sum of money, if for the sake of gratifying a piece of absurd National vanity; we draw the ridicule and just criticism of the Public, upon ourselves, our Statue, & our country.”

The architect William Burn (1789-1870) was also concerned about the resolutions of the general committee. Although he was a long-time supporter of Steell, he was particularly vexed by the conduct of the young lawyers on the committee, whom he accused of jobbing and throwing the project into disrepute and chaos:

My Lord Duke

13 George Street

10 July 1840

... at the meeting of the committee on Thursday last, where in a small meeting of twenty three persons, a motion was carried by twelve—being a majority of only one, to employ Mr Steele to make a bust of the Duke, and thereafter submit designs or models of an Equestrian Statue... all this was based upon the most flimsy and fallacious grounds of encouraging native resident talent, as if the selection made, was not in itself the most absolute discouragement to all but the individual contemplated by the motion...

...if the wretched majority of one is to be permitted to saddle the national subscription list with an Edinr. job, every county in Scotland will withdraw their subscriptions and the whole Tribute end in ridicule and contempt.

... it really is too much to see the national feeling subjected to the fancy or caprice or taste (if they will have it) of a young Edinburgh lawyer, and a young W.S. who are scarcely known beyond their limited circle here, but have been very officious in this business and most unwarrantably canvassed right and left to carry their own particular views and wishes...
Buccleuch replied to Burn only a few days later, and finding himself in the similar ambivalent position Meadowbank had faced during the 1838 *Scott Monument* commission debate, the Duke made it clear that he did not object to Steell himself, but the way in which the choice of artist was being restricted by considering only Scottish artists. He asked Burn to supply the details of the vote:

Drumlanrig Castle  
13 July 1840

Dear Sir

... The more I consider the matter, the stronger I adhere to the opinions stated in my letter to Sir G. Warrender, so much so that I have grave doubts whether it is possible for me to act upon the Select Committee and now only wait for a communication from Ld. Dalhousie before I decide.

For Mr. Steele, I have feelings of great interest in his success as an Artist, and until your letter arrived I was not aware that to encourage native resident talent he had been selected at once from Edinburgh to carry out not an Edinburgh but a National tribute of Respect to as great a man as ever shone in the World.

My feelings however for Mr Steele do not one bit alter my opinion or the sentiments I have expressed.

Pray who are the two gentlemen mentioned in your letter

 Believe me &c.

Buccleuch

Could you send me the names of the majority and minority?  

Burn duly supplied the names for which the Duke had asked. From the tone of his letters, the architect was becoming more indignant at the lawyers’ presumption with each passing day. Though the original motion to commission Steell was made by McNeill and seconded by Lord Provost Forrest, Burn named the “movers and Acters” as George Patton, advocate and David Smith. Both these men were friends of Steell, who executed a bust of Patton in 1862. Burn briefed the Duke on these attorneys two days later, also mentioning that he had tried to persuade the sculptor to refuse the invitation to submit designs:
My Lord Duke

... I have seen Steell twice & told him openly and candidly all I feel on the subject, as well as my reasons for declining to act on the Committee, and advised him to decline the employt. on the conditions suggested in Sir John McNeill's motion, but he has been talked over, and cannot well determine on the only proper and manly course left to him, and as he hesitates, my fear is, that his name may get completely messed up with the job others have attempted to perpetrate, and in which I really believe he individually has taken no part whatever...

At this point, the project’s Chairman, Lord Dalhousie wrote to Buccleuch regarding the impasse. Dalhousie felt that the subcommittee was compelled to act on the instructions of the general committee, whether they agreed with them or not. It did not help that his subcommittee chairman was considering resignation.

Dalhousie proposed three plans. The first was to let Steell proceed, then dispute the resolution when the subcommittee presented its report to the general committee. The second plan was to “make a row at once, make a requisition, reassemble the General Committee & endeavour to rescind their last vote.” The third plan was for the subcommittee to refuse to proceed, citing its dissatisfaction with the resolution prescribing native talent, and refer back to the general committee for new instructions.

Buccleuch answered Dalhousie nine days later, with his preferred plan of action, but still warning that he was to resign from his position on the subcommittee:

My Dear Dalhousie

... of the three plans proposed in your letter, the 3d appeared to me the best... For my part I am so dissatisfied that I shall withdraw altogether from the Committee – I will have no hand in carrying into execution that of which I so strongly disapprove. I cannot understand why an Artist resident in Edinburgh should be selected in preference to all other Artists, whether native or foreign whether resident in Edinburgh or not. It is not an Edinburgh Memorial, tho’ it smacks strongly of a rank Edinburgh Job... (my emphasis)

Both Buccleuch and Dalhousie wished to ask for new instructions from the general committee—instructions they felt they could implement
with clear consciences. But for Dalhousie, the most pressing matter was to prevent Buccleuch from resigning altogether. On 4 August 1840, he requested that Buccleuch “not... insist on withdrawing from the Committee until you had stated your views to it.”

By October 1840, Buccleuch had presumably realised the difficulties his resignation would cause the subcommittee; resigning would undermine the subscription drive, and disrupt the proceedings in a scandalous fashion. However, he made it clear to Dalhousie in a letter of 2 November 1840, that he would remain in the group, but would essentially serve as an honorary member, stating: “I have decided to remain as a member of the Sub Committee on the Wellington Trophy, tho’ I think there will not be much chance of my being able to attend the meetings of it. I trust that a course of proceedings may be adopted in which I may be able to concur.”

The subcommittee followed its plan and petitioned the general committee for fresh instructions, citing a “general dissatisfaction” among the members and subscribers. However, the general committee would not be dissuaded from their resolutions to promote native talent through John Steell. Dalhousie wrote to Buccleuch:

My Dear Duke  

Janr. 4 1841  

We met on the 24th & sate (sic) for 3 hours. Mr Steell was had in, & the matter ended in a bust & model being ordered – the model to cost nothing, & the bust in stucco £50; so that the expence (sic) won't be ruinous.

Nothing less than this could be done: Because for my own part I won't agree to get rid of an obnoxious resolution by coercion when we [ould] not by a fair fight. The resolution was a job on the part of some, no doubt; but it was 4 times canvassed & carried; and we must execute it now; lying ready for the next opening that occurs in the proceedings of the general comm[itt]ee to prevent its going any further...
Fig. 196. John Steell, *Duke of Wellington*, 1843. Private Collection, Scotland. Steell was willing to execute the bust in marble for the committee at the price of plaster “To do justice to his own work.” Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
The “next opening” never occurred. One year later, on 18 January 1842, the general committee formally adopted Steell’s design for the *Scottish National Monument to the Duke of Wellington*. As an indication of how important the commission was to Steell, he submitted a marble bust for the price of a plaster one. (Fig.196) He also left his model in clay, so he would be able to accommodate any alterations the subcommittee suggested.456 Dalhousie reported to McNeill that the model was “met with almost universal approbation.” As for the bust, the committee felt that the sculptor should not have to bear the cost of materials, even though he had executed the bust in stone of his own volition. Dalhousie wrote to Warrender on 11 March 1842: “If the Committee wish to give Mr. Steell the full value of his bust, £100, I have no sort of objection.”457

The “native talent” controversy had remained within the boardrooms of Edinburgh; it was never reported in the press. It was clear to the committee that public opinion demanded a Scottish sculptor—and that was John Steell. The newspapers perhaps never knew of the controversy which had surrounded the topic of resident native talent to execute the memorial.

The *Edinburgh Advertiser* said of Steell’s appointment:

[The committee] have not overlooked the claims of native talent, nor have they by rash partiality decided upon employing a favourite native Artist merely because he was a public favourite...We are the more gratified with their proceedings in this case as they form a marked contrast to those which have taken place elsewhere upon a similar subject, and which have unfortunately given rise to much unseemly animadversion, not however, it must be confessed, without more than a mere shadow of pretext.458

This was an allusion to the Glasgow controversy over Marochetti, but Buccleuch, Burn and their supporters would have disagreed with the *Advertiser’s* understanding of events. It was presumably Buccleuch’s
regard for Steell which caused him to be “much pleased” at the committee’s final decision in 1842.

The project had more profound ramifications than just the confirmation of Steell’s favoured status in the Edinburgh arts community. It showed that there was strong public and political determination within Scotland that Scottish artistic interests be fostered and patronised. The native talent disagreement highlighted the shift in power in subscription projects from the aristocracy to the middle classes. This mood was also apparent at the time of the Glasgow Wellington project, when the commissioning of Franco-Italian sculptor Carlo Marochetti was greeted with a violent public outcry.459

Steell travelled to Walmer Castle sometime after January 1841 and had several sittings with Wellington. Steell was also granted the opportunity to watch the Duke riding, so that his depiction of the Field Marshal in the saddle would be accurate in every respect. This kind of accuracy was also manifested in the depiction of the horse. Steell wrote to the Duke of Buccleuch on 26 January 1841:

... It has occurred to me while preparing the model of the Wellington Equestrian Statue that I might be aided by having beside me the horses, which at an earlier period of my progress in Art, I had the honour of executing for Your Grace.460 If you should be pleased to indulge me with the loan of these horses I shall take proper care of them and see to their safe conveyance from Dalkeith and to their being carefully returned...461

The sessions at Walmer were a success, and Wellington was so pleased with the result that he ordered two copies of the bust: one for Eton College and one for Oxford.462 We know that Wellington thought the portrait a superior one from a surviving letter from Dalhousie to Warrender:
Fig. 197. Thomas Campbell, *Wellington*, c. 1827, Thirlestane Castle.  
Photo: Thirlestane Castle Trust.

Fig. 198. Thomas Campbell, *Duke of Wellington*, 1828, Dalkeith Palace.  
Photo: Buccleuch Trust.
London April 12th 1842
My dear Sir George –

The other day at Stratfield Saye the Duke, talking of busts, turned to me and said that he wished very much he could see Mr Steells bust, as Eton College had begged a bust of him & he wished to compare Steells & [Thomas] Campbell's that he might select for Eton the one he thought best – and enquired whether the Committee would let him see the stucco cast... 463

The Thomas Campbell bust was probably the work executed circa 1827, which featured Wellington in Roman armour (Fig.197). This portrait was commissioned by Buccleuch, and had led to a larger monumental marble statue of Wellington for Buccleuch’s residence at Dalkeith. 464 (Fig.198) Steell would certainly have known of this sculptural antecedent, which featured the Duke in a pose alluding to Donatello’s *St. George*. Perhaps of even greater relevance to Steell’s work was Campbell’s depiction of the Duke, which was classical in general effect, and made significant use of drapery to classicise Campbell’s employment of uniform, long trousers and boots.

Steell’s portrait bust had similarly employed a composition with an overall classical effect, which was aided by the employment of Flavian drapery. He slightly idealised the Duke’s features, as well as showing him younger than he actually appeared. Wellington chose the Steell bust for Eton and kept the bust intended for Oxford; it is still on display at Apsley House, London. 465

“*The Iron Duke in Bronze by Steell*”

Steell’s design for the monument returned to the subject that had first garnered him broad public acclaim and approbation: the rearing horse. The sculptor’s challenge was to combine figurative and equestrian elements within a balanced whole. While the project required a suitable amount of
realistic portrayal in the delineation of equestrian anatomy and military accoutrement, the general effect was intended to be grand, austere and classical. Steell’s major compositional device for a classical effect was the employment of a military cloak to serve as drapery for the Duke. The cloak, which Steell often employed in monuments, gave the figure a distinct outline, an energetic, visual rhythm, and a generalising element which countered the finer details of costume and accoutrement required by the Field Marshal’s uniform and riding tack.

Of primary importance was the dramatic energy and motion inherent in the form of the rearing horse. Steell depicted Wellington at a decisive moment in the battle of Waterloo. The choice of this moment of portrayal not only augmented the heroic nature of the group, but also added to the aura and drama of the man and the event. The combination of pose and event capitalised on sculptural antecedents (including Steell’s *Alexander and Bucephalus*) as well as the meaning of an historical event which was still within living memory of many. Steell dramatised the event, combining realistic sculptural details with a valorising formal motif and narrative.

It was this combination of Romantic pose and classical effect that prompted John Ruskin to criticise the work. Ruskin did not approve of Steell’s composition or treatment, which he deemed too theatrical. In the notes to his *Edinburgh Lectures* of 1853 he criticised the work as “tainted with the modern affectation.” In the lecture itself, he had asked rhetorically:

You have a portrait, for instance, of the Duke of Wellington at the end of the North Bridge—one of the thousand equestrian statues of Modernism—studied from the show riders of the amphitheatre, with their horses on their hind-legs in the saw-dust. Do you suppose that was the way the Duke sat when your destinies depended on him? When...he himself sat anxious in his quietness, grieved in his fearlessness, as he watched, scythe-stroke by scythe-stroke, the gathering in of the harvest of death?"
Figs. 199-200. Carlo Marochetti's statue featured minute detailing.
Photos: Fig. 199, Conway Library; Fig. 200, Romo Lieuken.

Fig. 201. John Steell, Wellington Monument, 1852, Princes Street, Edinburgh. Steell's monument is broader in effect, though the anatomy of the horse is carefully observed and rendered. Photos: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
According to D.O. Hill’s account of the lecture, the critic’s opinions met with a mixed reaction:

... At one point of his lecture his denunciation of Steell’s Wellington, divided the house between a ruff & a hiss—which alternated for a minute or two—when whether from sympathy with what he said, or courtesy to the stranger I do not pretend to say—the applause carried the day—which was again renewed when he gave his idea of how the Duke & his Horse should have been conceived ...  

Ruskin later qualified his criticism in the published notes of the lecture, where he mitigated his assessment, stating:

I intended this last sentence of course to apply to the thousand statues, not definitely to the one in immediate question, which, though tainted with the modern affectation, and the nearest example of it to which I could refer an Edinburgh audience, is the work of a most promising sculptor; and was indeed so far executed on the principles asserted in the text, that the Duke gave Mr. Steele a sitting on horseback, in order that his mode of riding might be accurately represented. This, however, does not render the following remarks in the text nugatory, as it may easily be imagined that the action of the Duke, exhibiting his riding in his own grounds, would be different from his action, or inaction, when watching the course of a battle.  

Ruskin’s obduracy aside, a comparison with the Marochetti group in Glasgow is highly illuminating, as Ruskin favoured it for its realism. The group presents us with a visual effect very different from Steell’s (Figs. 199-201) The manner is just as grand and elegant, but where the Edinburgh statue is devoted to dynamic visual motion, the Glasgow work seems to be just as equally determined to depict quiescence. With all four legs of the horse firmly planted, the Duke sits in the saddle, confidently surveying the scene. There is a remarkable lack of drapery, which was traditionally de rigueur for any monument, equestrian or otherwise. Also in contrast to the Steell Wellington is the hyper-realism of the Duke’s uniform, accoutrement and riding tack. (Fig. 200)
The depiction of sharply defined realistic detailing was a condition of Marochetti’s commission; the sculptor was noted for his skill in executing such work. Steell presents these details to some extent, but his primary goal is to show the dynamic interplay between the physical power of the horse, mastered by the superior strength of will of the rider. No such visual tension is present in Marochetti’s group; the horse remains calm and tranquil beneath his master. For Marochetti, it is enough to suggest the dramatic events surrounding the subject in bas-relief panels in the statue’s base.

The two monuments, only forty miles apart, represented wider philosophical distances in both the depiction of the same modern hero and the political conditions of the hero’s commemoration. Steell followed a visually more dramatic, yet conservative monumental style than Marochetti, while simultaneously embodying the case for Scottish sculpture. Marochetti presented a more modern, realistic portrayal of the British hero, ironically while widely regarded as a foreign interloper. Both men valorised the Duke as a saviour worthy of emulation and respect. For Steell however, the project not only served to honour the Duke, but also presented an opportunity to further the course of Scottish sculpture by the introduction of technical skills and facilities hitherto unavailable in his native land.

The Creation of the Grove Foundry

It is not certain exactly when Steell determined to open his own bronze foundry, but it can be assumed that the decision was motivated by the receipt of the Wellington commission, while the inspiration to do so came
from Sir Francis Chantrey. Prior to the completion of the Wellington project, it was reported in the Scotsman that Steell had been aware of problems Chantrey had encountered when executing a statue of William Pitt. The English sculptor had subsequently decided to construct his own facility to ensure a proper standard of work at all times.470

Steell had several motives for creating the foundry. He wanted to maintain control over every stage of the creative process for the Wellington statue; he desired the ability to pursue any future bronze commission available; he hoped to stimulate the taste for bronze in Scotland, and he wished to improve the facilities available for himself and other Scottish sculptors. In an 1851 printed circular regarding the Melville Monument, Steell was quoted as saying:

...at that time [the late 1840s] bronze statuary casting had never been practised in Scotland; and it being impossible to make a genuine and perfect casting otherwise under the immediate and continual direction and actual execution of the sculpture of the work, I felt it to be a fine opportunity for introducing that process into this country...471

Before Steell’s foundry was established, any Scottish sculptor wishing to cast works in metal had no choice but to send them either to London or abroad. This was a substantial risk, as an artist’s plaster, no matter how carefully packed, could be easily damaged in transit. William Brodie’s Simpson statue fell from a hoist on Leith docks and smashed while being conveyed to the Masefield Foundry in Chelsea, London in June 1875.472

Steell’s most compelling motive however, was the need to be able to supervise and control every aspect of the creation of the Wellington.

Steell presumably saw the foundry as a way to secure further commissions. Once the foundry was operating regularly, he had an added
advantage when bidding for projects. He was not at the mercy of London foundry schedules. He did not have to worry about the expense of transport, or damage to his models during shipping. He had the potential for income from casting work for other artists, and producing copies of his own work. More importantly, Scotland finally had its own facility for the production of bronze statues.

The foundry started with a national monument, as proof that native talent and ability could produce art of considerable technical and aesthetic sophistication. Funded at his own expense, the creation of the foundry was perceived as a high-risk venture. For Steell, the potential for both personal success and the improvement of Scottish sculpture made it a risk worth taking.

Within Victorian studio practice, the sculptor exercised his art in modelling clay and finishing carving. Artisans and apprentices executed the fundamental work of roughing-out and scaling-up stone carvings, and mould-making and casting in bronze, before the master’s finishing touches were added. To what extent Steell carved stone has never been determined, but in the act of modelling, he was adamant that no hand touch the clay but his own.473 He left the casting process to his men, especially his superintendents—first William Young and later Adam Walker—but he still desired these operations to be conducted on his own premises and under his own scrutiny.474

When Steell started his foundry there was no bronze casting tradition in Scotland; no local men were trained to do the work. Although Scottish iron casting was ubiquitous, it was understood that the finesse and technical
Figs. 202-203. William Young had supervised the casting of both the George IV and Pitt statues at Chantrey’s foundry in Eccleston Place, London.
skill required for fine art work was lacking in Scotland. This was probably a matter of perception, as the Glasgow sculptor Patric Park (1811-1855) had argued in a long essay to the Scotsman in 1849:

I profess the most entire confidence in the high mechanical genius of our country, and that the capacity which produces daily those perfections of casting required for all kinds of machinery, could execute the most elaborate model of the sculptor, if opportunity afforded...it is a fact, that whatever mystery has been attached to bronze casting, it is no longer the case, and that the question of expense and difficulty can be solved by every practical engineer in the country. 475

While the theoretical knowledge was available, people with actual experience in casting works of art were few. The question was then, not necessarily one of technical ability or available facilities; what had been missing was an individual with the combined desire, motivation and need to execute fine art casts in Scotland.

Steell was fortunate to secure as his master caster the highly trained and experienced William Young (d.1852). Young had been Chantrey's caster for eighteen years. Originally from Scotland, he was trained at the Maudsley Engineering school in London. Recruited by Chantrey and given charge of the artist’s foundry in Eccleston Place, London, he oversaw casting of both the 1831 George IV and 1833 Pitt statues for Edinburgh (Figs.202-203). After Chantrey’s death in 1841, he worked at R.J. Wyatt’s foundry in Dudley Grove, Paddington. Steell depended on Young’s expertise, as the Ayr Observer wrote in 1849:

The practical operations for running bronze casts of such magnitude and importance were new, and entirely unknown in Scotland...the vast responsibility of such an undertaking was too keenly felt by Mr Steell to allow of his risking its perfectly successful execution to the unproved efforts of individuals who...were still deficient in the crowning qualification of practical experience...after much trouble, the artist considered himself fortunate in securing at a very liberal salary, the assistance of Mr. Young, a Scotchman by birth...fully confident in the experience of his well-tried assistant, Mr. Steell placed the entire arrangements for casting under Mr. Young's control, and operations for the erection of a suitable foundry and furnace were immediately commenced. 476
Fig. 204. Ordnance Survey Map of Fountainbridge area, Edinburgh. Published in 1853 by the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton.
Steell also found a Scot to design the foundry. He employed the Edinburgh architect Alexander Black (d. 1858), who lived and practised at 19 Lauriston Street, and worked as the Superintendent of Works for George Heriot’s Hospital. It could be that the link between Black and Heriot’s Hospital resulted in Steell’s first choice for the intended site of the foundry. Steell reportedly purchased or feued land in an area known as Coates Farm on property owned by Heriot’s Hospital. Building work was started in August 1848, and the foundry was virtually completed when an interdict was placed on the project by a neighbouring owner, on the grounds that the foundry “would constitute a nuisance to the neighbourhood.”

This interdict would have been issued through the Bill Chamber of the Court of Session, but a careful search of the Chamber’s roll minutes, day books and indexes has found no record of the procedure. Nor has a search of the relevant sasines revealed any record of Steell’s purchase of land at Coates Farm. It is possible that the interdict records have been destroyed or lost, or even that the procedure was never formally instituted, but merely intimated. Steell was sensitive to the feelings of others, and it could be that even the hint of a confrontation caused him to acquiesce, even with the consequence of considerable monetary loss. As the *Ayr Observer* reported:

> All attempts to remove this gentleman’s opposition, by negotiation or otherwise, having proved ineffectual, after great expense had been incurred, and much time lost, these progressive and costly erections were abandoned.

The second site was in Grove Street, which at the time was dotted with small tradeyards and shops. Contemporary maps show that there was another small foundry adjacent, probably for casting iron, as well as coal...
Fig. 205. Sand casting utilises fine grained sand to create the mould. There is no record of Steell ever using this method.

Fig. 206. Steell would cast an artist's plaster to create his mould. The autograph copy ensured that if there were a casting accident, he would not have to start again from scratch.
yards around the Union Canal. (Fig.204) Most of the area consisted of open fields with a few buildings around Fountainbridge and Grove Lane. The most specific description of the bronze foundry site places it on the east corner of Grove Street (Lane) and Fountainbridge near a large house known as Flora Ha’, which comprised land occupied by industrial buildings as well as a market garden and the Grange Cricket Club.480

Steell began foundry operations on 29 May 1849, with the casting of “the lower extremities of the Duke’s figure.” The pour was widely reported, with accounts appearing in at least five newspapers, as befitting the first fine art bronze casting in Scotland.482 The event was attended by such eminent citizens as Lord Murray; Duncan McNeill; Peter Nimmo, the Depute Clerk of Session, and the architect David Bryce.483 Over the years, Steell continued to invite honoured guests to auspicious pours.484

The Ayr Observer reported further:

About half-past two o’clock, the metal having been previously ascertained to be in a state of perfect fusion, Mr Young gave the signal to open the casting sluice of the furnace, and the fiery fluid, having first run off into the casting ladles, was immediately poured into the mould, in the most entirely satisfactory manner. Indeed, so complete had been the precautions used, in every respect, that not even the most trivially untoward event took place; the casting gave not the slightest indication of sputtering or air-bubble, “and all went merry as a marriage bell,” Mr Young declaring it was the most delightful run he had ever witnessed in his experience. Congratulations were immediately poured upon Mr Steell, who, in acknowledging them, paid a hearty compliment to the zeal, intelligence, and skill, manifested by Mr Young, and warmly thanked the workmen who had so willingly and well assisted in the work; and thus ended the casting of the first portion of the first bronze statue executed in Scotland.485

The statue was cast in six parts, then fused together by running molten bronze along the riveted seams. According to Woodward, Steell and Young were moulding and casting by a technique known as cire-perdue or “lost-wax” casting. This is erroneous; wax was never mentioned in any description of Steell’s casting process. Additionally, Read has stated that
Making the core

1. Create negative investment mould from luto
2. Lay a clay blanket inside the mould the intended thickness of the bronze
3. Close mould, pour in luto to create the core
4. Open mould, tear out clay; secure core with rods

Fig. 207. The core allowed the caster to use less bronze.

Steell's process for casting bronze

Artist's plaster → Create investment shell with luto mixture of plaster & brick dust → Close mould & core, secure with iron bands → Fire mould & core in kiln for 3 mos. to remove all moisture → Bury investment in casting pit → Heat 9 pts. Cu & 1 pt. tin to 2200 C in crucible → Pour into investment mould

(See above)

Fig. 208. The reported details regarding Steell's method for casting are consistent throughout his career.
this type of work was not done in Britain prior to 1882.\textsuperscript{486} From descriptions of the process given in several contemporary news articles, Steell practised an intermediate technique utilising elements of both sand casting (Fig.205) and \textit{cire-perdue}, but without using either material.

Instead, Steell would make negative investment moulds from his artist’s plaster,(Fig.206) with an inner layer of clay the thickness of the intended bronze to determine the size of the core. (Fig.207) The moulds were made from plaster and brick dust, which made them heat resistant. The moulds would be dried in a kiln for up to three months to remove any moisture.\textsuperscript{487} The mould sections were then bound together with iron straps, and the plaster/brick dust core would be placed in the mould with iron rods, leaving the proper amount of space for the molten bronze. As reported by contemporary press articles, Steell used an alloy mixture of nine parts copper and one part tin, with traces of lead for malleability.\textsuperscript{488} (Fig.208) In one instance, Steell created his moulds directly from the clay model. This, he felt, gave him the best detail and most direct cast possible.\textsuperscript{489}

Given the time required for drying the moulds, a casting accident could throw Steell off schedule by months. In the case of the \textit{Wellington}, delays caused by his need to finish projects such as the \textit{Queen Victoria} (1844), \textit{Sir Walter Scott} (1846) and the building of the foundry itself, caused a group of subscribers to become so frustrated that they independently explored legal avenues to punish him. The \textit{Scotsman} reported:

A paragraph...in a recent number of the \textit{Athenaeum}...stated that some impatient members of the committee of the Edinburgh Wellington Testimonial had been making inquires among sculptors and others in London...with a view to ascertain whether it were possible to inflict a fine on Mr Steell...for having exceeded the time specified in the contract. We believe that the paragraph referred to is not altogether correct in its statements...some
Fig. 209. The monument was originally surrounded by iron railings. This detail is from a photograph taken in 1890. Photo: National Monuments Register.
such inquires have been made, but they were not made by the committee...but merely by a few individual subscribers on their own responsibility...⁹⁰

The January 1848 completion of the clay model gave the newspapers a chance to grant explanations for the perceived tardiness of the work:

This announcement will of course put at rest the various surmises which have been thrown out, and perhaps credited in distant quarters, that the artist was unnecessarily delaying the progress of this national tribute to the most illustrious of her subjects...the time bestowed by the artist upon this great work has been well employed, for it exhibits in all its details a degree of care, discrimination and judgement, which could not have been attained without the most anxious and patient deliberation.⁹¹

There was still much to do; the casting process begun in May 1849, would not be completed for another two years. The press reminded its readers that the Wellington was a special group, but was taking the usual amount of time to complete. The Scotsman noted in May 1850:

The degree of progress that has been made since the actual casting was commenced is exceedingly satisfactory, and to aid us in estimating it properly it is a fact worth recalling that no similar work has ever been executed in less than three years after the casting had been begun, while four years or upwards has been the usual period. Mr Wyat’s monster Equestrian statue of the Duke at Hyde Park Corner occupied no less than seven years in being transmitted into “ever-enduring brass.”⁹²

The Edinburgh architect David Bryce (1803-1876) designed and executed the base for the memorial. Bryce also oversaw the screen wall alterations, which had engendered a small controversy when it became clear that this feature of Register House was to be receded to make room for the pedestal. Argument and counter-argument appeared in the papers, but in the end, the overwhelming public wish to commemorate “the Iron Duke” far outweighed any perceived damage to local architecture. When completed, the figure of Wellington created a physical and ideological link with another memorial, as the Duke’s gesture directed the attention up Calton Hill, to the prominent monument of his naval counterpart Lord Nelson.
Figs. 210-211. Calotypes from Steell scrapbooks, National Library of Scotland.
The unveiling was a public holiday. Note the umbrellas are out in the second calotype.
This project marked the second collaboration between Steell and Bryce, who had worked earlier in partnership with William Burn, before Burn’s move to London in 1844. Over the years, Bryce designed many bases for Steell’s monuments, including the 2nd Viscount Melville, John Wilson, Allan Ramsay, and the Consort Memorial. The Wellington base was made of red Peterhead granite standing 12 feet high, and was originally surrounded by iron railings (Fig.209). The Edinburgh Advertiser reported in January 1848 that there were to be bronze reliefs depicting the battles of Salamanca and Waterloo on the east and west sides, but the reliefs were abandoned by the committee in 1852 due to cost.

The monument was inaugurated on Friday 18 June 1852, the thirty-eighth anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. The day was declared a public holiday; the first one ever for the unveiling of a monument in Edinburgh. Multitudes thronged to Princes Street to view Wellington’s glory and Steell’s triumph. Several calotypes of the ceremony have survived, (Fig.210-211) as have many personal and newspaper accounts. Perhaps the most evocative is that of the incomparable Lord Cockburn:

21st June 1852… The ceremony was striking, from the masses of people perched on the all our pinnacles, horse and foot soldiers—of whom the most interesting was a band of Waterloo pensioners, sundry processing bodies, chiefly those grotesque masons, and various lady-filled scaffolds. The cheers when the canvas dropped and disclosed the statue—running from the near to the distant streets, and ascending to the summit of the Calton, to the top of Scott’s monument, to the tower of St. Giles’s, and prolonged on innumerable picturesque heights, were very fine; and before they had ceased the guns of the castle roared; and scarcely had they done their best, when the inspired thunder rolled also, and left us to disperse in silence, and under a short torrent of rain.

This cloudburst inspired the famous Edinburgh couplet:

‘Mid lightning’s flash and thunder’s peal,

Behold! The Iron Duke in Bronze by Steell!’

196
Fig. 212. August Kiss, *Amazon Attacked by a Tiger*, 1839, Berlin.

Fig. 213. Falconet, *Monument to Peter the Great*, 1766-82, St. Petersburg.
Cockburn continued:

Some think that it is more a statue of a horse than of a man—a great mistake; but not an unnatural one, from the man being only visible above the horse in high action. I went to see it twice the next day, and of all the groups of gazers I scarcely observed one person talking to his neighbours. This silence was the deepest homage. It is certainly a noble work. Is there a better modern statue of the heroic order in Europe? We are all proud of Steell, a son of Edinburgh.

Steell had proved, perhaps even more decidedly than with his Scott, that Scottish sculpture was capable of producing works of art on a par with those of any other nation. The monument was proof that Scotland now had the means, both technical and aesthetic, to share the stage artistically with England and Europe.

By virtue of the subject, the statue was naturally popular, but Steell’s treatment also received great adulation and praise. It was compared favourably with August Kiss’s Amazon on Horseback Attacked by a Tiger in Berlin (1839)(Fig.212), and with the Monument to Peter the Great by Etienne-Maurice Falconet in St. Petersburg (1766-82).(Fig.213) The Edinburgh Courant focused on the difference in pose and effect between Steell’s and Marochetti’s treatment, stating: “In Marochetti’s work at Glasgow...the charger is quite still, with all four legs at rest. Mr. Steell, therefore, in departing from what seems to have the sanction of established usage, has the highest claims to originality.”

Steell had once again successfully utilised the dramatic properties within the composition of the rearing horse. He had his own precedent in the Alexander and Bucephalus, but he had actually improved the structural element of the pose by using Copenhagen’s tail as the third leg of a tripod, which gave a graceful, fluid line to the overall motion of the work, while
Fig. 214. Louis Rochet, *William the Conqueror*, 1847-1851, Falaise.

Fig. 215. Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Leading his Army over the Alps*, 1805.
Musee de Versailles. Photo: Liddice, p. 305.
maintaining stability. It was a much more elegant solution than his use of
drapery in the earlier group.

Steell was also utilising a contemporary depiction of the hero;
equestrian monuments were being erected all around Europe. In France,
Louis Rochet’s 1847-51 monument to William the Conqueror at Falaise was
almost exactly contemporary with Steell’s unionist hero. (Fig.214) Ironically,
Steell’s depiction of Wellington had much in common with David’s well
known 1805 painting of another French conqueror, Napoleon Leading his
Army over the Alps. (Fig.215)

Steell showed Wellington as a heroic, idealised saviour. By choosing
to present the commander at a crucial moment of the battle, the rearing of
the horse served as a contrast to the general’s cool intellect. While he later
stated that his depiction of Wellington’s face was not idealised, even when
accounting for the requirement of breadth in a colossal statue, the overall
treatment was valorising and dramatic. This was a marked contrast to
another Scottish artist’s vision. David Wilkie had seen the man in a more
deporative light when painting Wellington Writing a Despatch in 1835. (Fig.216)

This more human, introspective treatment of the hero was a precursor to a
realist aesthetic that Steell approached within the context of accoutrement,
but would not extend beyond the depiction of minutia like shoelaces and
buttons, for many years.

Steell’s Wellington was more than just an example of public art. The
conditions surrounding its commission and creation, as well as the style and
effect of the finished work were of themselves manifestations of the
Fig. 216. David Wilkie, *The Duke of Wellington Writing a Dispatch*, 1835, Aberdeen Art Gallery. Photo: Aberdeen Art Gallery.
aesthetic, technical, political and cultural context of the nation. The *Daily Mail* had realised this in 1849, when it stated:

Mr. Steell...adopted at once the spirited resolution of making a commencement in the art of casting this imperishable description of statuary in Edinburgh; instead of, as in other cases, resorting to London. By this resolve he has effectually secured to the nation the full honour of producing the highest public works of art.\(^5\)

This idea of Scottish native talent, pride and honour was repeated by the *Edinburgh Courant* of 19 June 1852, when it remarked:

Long after the ceremony—indeed, until the approach of night—large crowds assembled at the Register House to view the statue. We heard the expression of only one feeling—that of deep and heartfelt admiration of the genius of the sculptor. All classes seemed to feel that a great work of art had been added to the numerous monuments that adorn the city; and loud and general were the congratulations that among ourselves an artist had been found capable of the execution of a work destined, we doubt not, to immortalise his name.

Steell continued to operate the Grove Foundry for another forty years, casting all of his subsequent bronze work there. While throughout the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s and even 1880s, Steell received the greater share of bronze commissions, the foundry was open for the use of other artists. The *Standard* of September 1878 reported that D.W. Stevenson’s monument to John Platt, M.P. in Oldham had been completed “at the foundry of Sir John Steell, of the Grove, under the superintendence of Mr. Adam Walker.”\(^6\)

The Glasgow sculptor John Mossman (1817-1890) used the foundry to cast his 1884 statue of George A. Clark for Paisley.\(^7\) One of the very last casts at the Grove, which was thought to have closed upon Steell’s retirement in 1888, was in fact executed in April 1889. An unsourced cutting held in the Royal Scottish Academy library notes that: “The Statue of the late Dr. Grigor, by Mr. Hutchison, R.S.A. has been successfully cast in bronze at
Fig. 217. John Hutchison, *Dr. John Grigor, 1889, Nairn.* This was probably the last statue produced at the Grove Foundry.  Photo: Rorro~uallen.
the Grove Foundry, Edinburgh, and will, it is expected, be erected in the town of Nairn in the course of the next six weeks.”503 (Fig.217)

With a fully operating foundry, and the ability to produce quality work in both stone and metal, Steell was now in a position to consolidate his dominant presence within Scotland and Great Britain. As for the Wellington Monument, it remains one of Steell’s most successful and evocative works, and continues to inspire its viewers with its successful balance of naturalistic detail and classical effect.504
Fig. 278. John Steell, photograph by James Good Tunny, 1854.
Photo: Royal Scottish Academy.
Chapter Nine

Moderate, not Mediocre: Steell’s Middle Career, 1850-1870

By 1852, John Steell had been a professional sculptor for over twenty years. (Fig.218) During this time he consistently produced critically popular work while building his reputation as the finest sculptor in Scotland. This chapter examines how Steell consolidated this reputation, and how the contemporary Victorian fashion for commemorative statues in Edinburgh enabled him to continue developing his skills, his production facilities and his ambitions for the advancement of Scottish sculpture within the social context of Unionist Nationalism. The majority of the Scots that Steell represented in marble and bronze were establishment figures who had achieved similar status to the non-Scottish unionist heroes that were commemorated in the streets of Edinburgh’s New Town.

The fact that these monuments were funded by public donations illustrates the popularity of the subjects, but also the fact that subscriptions to public monuments were socially expected. Subscription lists were published in newspapers; for a gentleman who wished to advance socially, contribution alone would not suffice. To be seen to contribute was also an essential factor. The building of public memorials to the heroes of the age increased steadily through the century, resulting in what was sometimes characterised as a “statue mania.” This increase of activity was seen in a
positive light, and each new production was greeted as further evidence of Scotland’s steadily increasing erudition and taste.

By the time of the inauguration of the Wellington Monument on Edinburgh’s Princes Street, John Steell was the *facile princeps* of Scottish sculpture. Steell enjoyed a consolidated status particularly within Edinburgh; between 1840 and 1865 he was consistently commissioned to execute monuments for the city. The statues of 2nd Viscount Melville (1771-1851), Allan Ramsay (1713-1784), John Wilson (1785-1854) and Dr. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) were all assigned to Steell directly by the respective committees, without recourse to open competition. Steell would not enter any competition for a monument until 1864, when he submitted a proposal for the *Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort*, a commission he was awarded in 1865. Steell developed artistically during this time; he increasingly employed detailed naturalistic effects in both his marble and bronze sculpture.

Several incidents illustrate Steell’s increasing popularity. In 1842 he was commissioned by the administration of Tory Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel to execute a statue to naval hero Lord de Saumarez (completed in 1854), and in 1850 he was invited to submit a design for the Manchester Peel Memorial, an honour he declined. A statue for Calcutta in honour of the Governor General of India, the 10th Earl and 1st Marquess of Dalhousie, manifested Steell’s increasing nationwide prominence as a British sculptor; the 1858 selection committee was organised in London.

During this period, Steell continued to execute a few bust portraits each year, including many of members of the Faculty of Advocates in
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 221. John Steell, Monument to the 93rd Sutherland Highland Regiment, 1859, Glasgow Cathedral. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
Edinburgh. In addition to these busts, life-sized statues of Lord Jeffrey (1855) and Lord Boyle (1860) (Figs. 219-220) were executed for Parliament House, Edinburgh. The steady stream of colossal monument projects such as the Queen Victoria, Sir Walter Scott, and Wellington, that had engaged him until 1852, levelled off somewhat until 1865, when he began the work which would preoccupy him for the next eleven years: The Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort. However, these middle career projects saw him extend the limitations of his expressive style, while simultaneously demonstrating the flexibility of his moderate compromise of naturalistic and classical effects in projects both large and small.

His monumental style remained a compromise between classical idealisation and naturalistic detail. In each project he shaded towards one end of the spectrum or the other. During his middle career he increased his use of naturalistic detail with several marble groups, particularly the 1860 statue of Lord Boyle, which featured extremely delicate and detailed carving. The 1859 marble monument to the 93rd Sutherland Highland Regiment featured a combination of verisimilitude in the accoutrement of the soldier, and classicism in the allegorical figure representing Fame. (Figs. 221-224) During this same period, he continued to develop his ambitions for bronze work, which benefited from greater emphasis on detail, and which allowed for more dynamic effects involving drapery and accoutrements.

The perennial debate between classical conventions and contemporary dress lasted until the turn of the century, but Steell, whose work was always moderate without being mediocre, generally escaped any criticism regarding his likenesses, portrayal of subject, use of detail and
Fig. 222. Allegorical figure of Fame, 93rd Highland Regiment Monument.

Fig. 223. The figure of the fallen soldier is costumed in an historically accurate uniform.

Fig. 224. Steell depicted both the kilt pattern and the badger head sporran in particular detail.
drapery, or inclusion of accoutrement. This was often due to his superlative execution and the obvious technical skill displayed in all of his productions. The press continued to view his success as a manifestation of inherent Scots talent in the art, and proof that as a sculptor, he had “added the gem and jewel of sculptured renown to the crown of Scotland’s genius.”

This balanced development is best illustrated by a broadly chronological examination of Steell’s mid-career projects, their chronology based upon either the commission or completion of the work, as Steell worked consistently and concurrently on these projects. Each of the major works of this period, while stylistically similar, can be interpreted as an individual indicator of a specific facet of the general aesthetic trends observable in Steell’s work of the period. Each work evaluated in this chapter will focus on a particular area.

**Lord Admiral de Saumarez** (Fig. 225)

In 1842, the government of Sir Robert Peel honoured three naval heroes with sculptural monuments. (Figs. 225-227) The work was to be done by regional British sculptors. This project constituted a rare employment of government funding for sculpture, but reflected similar efforts by Peel in the form of the sculptural decoration of the rebuilt Houses of Parliament. In 1841, the Select Committee on the Amelioration of the Arts of Great Britain had heard testimony from many experts, and determined that in order for the nation to achieve parity of excellence with European nations such as France and Germany, more assistance in the form of opportunity was required by the government.
Fig. 225. John Steell, *Lord de Saumarez*, 1854, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

Photo: Rocco Lienallen.
De Saumarez was a naval hero with a distinguished career, having served with Nelson at the Battle of the Nile. In December 1842, the Morning Post commented on the project:

We are pleased with the selection of these sculptors, because it extends the patronage of the government to artists at a distance, who may possess the talents, though they are excluded from the local advantages enjoyed by those who are fortunate enough to possess a metropolitan reputation; but we are still more pleased...because it is carrying into effect in practice, the desire expressed by Sir Robert Peel, that public patronage of art should, for the future, be so accorded as to aid men of genius in acquiring a name, instead of being lavished upon those who have already emerged into full popularity...513

Peel’s policy of awarding government work to those sculptors who were suffering from lack of prominence due to their distance from London was as liberal and generous in conception as it was unique in its execution. It amounted to a governmental publicity campaign for provincial sculptors. The British tradition of both public and private patronage had always favoured the man with the greatest reputation; prominent sculptors were sometimes awarded projects without knowing that they had been considered.514 Steell himself benefited from this form of automatic patronage in Edinburgh after 1850. The de Saumarez was Steell’s first and only governmental work. More importantly, his 1842 selection showed that his reputation was growing. By the completion of the work in 1854, he would be considered in the first rank of British sculptors.

Artistically, the de Saumarez also displays Steell’s fully moderated style. (Figs.228-229) The combination of accurate features and facial expression with classicising drapery was clearly described by The Illustrated London News:

The mode of treatment adopted by Mr. Steell is that daily gaining ground—all the essential characteristics of costume, badges of honour and emblems of rank being retained, although partially concealed beneath the ample and picturesque folds of a boat cloak, the continuous sweep of which, terminating in graceful lines...invests the entire figure with true classic feeling.
Fig. 226. Thomas Kirk, *Sir Stanley Smith*, 1845, Greenwich. 
Photo: Roccoco Liwanian.

Fig. 227. Patrick MacDowell, *Lord Exmouth*, 1846, Greenwich. Peell's scheme for regional sculptors was in the same spirit as the programme to employ British sculptors for the decoration of the newly rebuilt Houses of Parliament. 
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
This is also implied by the reviewer’s allusion to “the essential characteristics” in the same paragraph as the much desired “true classic feeling.” This was the stylistic compromise which Steell would employ many times throughout the following decades. Some commissioning bodies issued specific instructions requiring such use of detail and accoutrement.\(^5\) For Steell, the decision to combine classical and naturalistic treatment would at times be out of his own immediate control, as well as necessary for his continued commercial success.

**Robert Dundas, 2\(^{nd}\) Viscount Melville**

On 6 August 1851 the *Scotsman* announced that a resolution had been approved for Steell to execute a bronze statue in honour of Lord Melville (1771-1851). (Fig. 230)\(^5\) The organising committee was chaired by the 5\(^{th}\) Duke of Buccleuch (1806-1884). Subscriptions were liberally contributed, and the project passed without controversy and only one or two difficulties and delays.\(^5\) The one remarkable aspect of the project with regard to Steell’s career was its immediate relevancy to Steell’s ambitions for the future of bronze statuary in Scotland, which were revealed in a letter between Lord Meadowbank and Buccleuch:

...Steele who has been here several times wishes to be allowed to undertake for a statue of Heroic size instead of Life size the latter being not more than 7 feet & the former 8 1/2, & to run his chance of the subscriptions being ultimately of such an amount as to enable the Comee to pay him £1600 instead of £1200 which is to be the sum contracted for. *His object is to make the work of such importance as to induce others to adopt statues of Bronze which have never been executed in Scotland...* (my italics)\(^5\)

At the time, Steell had been operating his foundry for three years, and most of his incipient work was in marble. The *Melville* would be the next large bronze statue that Steell executed after the *Wellington* was completed in 1852. Steell clearly wished to stimulate an increase in the demand for
Fig. 228. "... all the essential characteristics of costume, badges of honour and emblems of rank being retained..."

Fig. 229. Steell presented the Admiral's uniform in minute detail; even the anchors on the buttons were represented. Photos: Rocco Litsaglen.
bronze monuments, and the best way to do so would be to press for as much bronze work from patrons as his foundry could handle, and make sure that the completed works met with as much publicity and approbation as possible. Meadowbank’s letter goes on to say: “Steele (sic)…told me he meant to send [to the Royal Academy]…a duplicate in bronze of the Duke of Wellington’s head and shoulders taken from the statue in order to show what he can do in that department.” The effect of Steell’s efforts to promote bronze as a medium are difficult to determine, but from 1850 onwards, there was a discernible increase in the use of bronze for statues not only in Scotland, but in the rest of Britain and Europe as well.

A thorough examination of this increase is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it could be argued that the trend was a symptomatic manifestation of the increased popularity of naturalism and detail in sculpture, which was easily employed in cast work, as well as an indication of the improvement of industrial processes and their new application in the area of fine arts production. As the century progressed, the Art Union movement also contributed to the increased taste and demand for bronze in the form of statuettes, which were an accessible and manageable form of domestic sculpture that could be disseminated widely through the Art Unions’ lottery schemes. Steell’s Scott, Wilson and Burns statues were later published as bronze or ceramic statuettes for the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland. The 11 November 1876 Scotsman stated: “Sir John Steell has, no doubt, had the effect to a great degree of having promoted the art [of bronze work] which Mr. Brodie, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Hutchison, Mr. Black, and Mr. Stevenson now so worthily represent.”
Fig. 230. John Steell, *Lord Melville*, 1857, Melville Crescent, Edinburgh.

Photo: Racco-Lomens.
The Scotsman’s vote of confidence in Steell’s promotion of bronze work would have heartened him greatly, since the Melville statue was a direct manifestation of his ambitions for the material. Steell would continue to contract for as much bronze work as he could. In the following eight years, he would execute four more large bronzes: the 1865 Professor John Wilson for Edinburgh; the 1865 Tyndall Bruce for Falkland Palace; an 1865 pedestrian statue of Lord Boyle for Irvine; and lastly, a replica of his Sir Walter Scott for New York’s Central Park in 1872.

**Lord President Boyle**

Throughout his career, Steell had formed close ties with many of the Edinburgh legal fraternity. From his presentation as a young man to Lord Meadowbank by Thomas Thomson in the early 1830s, Steell’s associations within Edinburgh’s Faculty of Advocates steadily increased, perhaps most markedly following Steell’s 1849 appointment as a Commissioner of the Board of Manufactures. Steell executed at least ten portrait busts of advocates, and many of these were later displayed prominently in Parliament Hall. Even more significantly, Steell’s 1855 statue of Lord Jeffrey and 1860 statue of Lord Boyle contributed to this unique sculptural environment. In this large, august space Steell’s sculpture was in the company of several contemporaries and heroes alike.

Sir Francis Chantrey (1781-1841) had contributed three statues to the room: the massive 1818 monuments to Lord President Robert Blair, and Viscount Melville, as well as a more modestly scaled, but exquisitely executed 1824 seated statue of Robert Dundas of Arniston. (Figs.231-233) This work was conspicuous in its gentle, carefully observed naturalism. Of even greater
Fig. 231. Francis Chantrey, Lord Blair, 1818, Parliament Hall, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 232. Francis Chantrey, 1st Viscount Melville, 1818, Parliament Hall, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 233. Francis Chantrey, Robert Dundas of Arniston, 1824, Parliament Hall, Edinburgh. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
virtuosity in carving and naturalistic effect was the 1748-52 monument to Duncan Forbes of Culloden by L.F. Roubiliac (1702-1762). (Fig.234) This striking marble statue is almost supernatural in its animation and carefully observed gesture. Although the sculptor employed the classical convention of pupil-less eyes, a definite spark is conveyed by the sitter’s outstretched right hand and visible teeth, as Forbes passes judgement.

Planned almost concurrently with his 1855 production of Lord Jeffrey was Steell’s depiction of Lord President Boyle, which, as stated above, was one of his most detailed naturalistic studies. A tour de force of marble carving, it compares favourably with the surrounding productions executed in the same idiom. Of primary importance to Steell’s group is the costume and accoutrement. The horsehair judicial wig is painstakingly carved, using extensive drill and file work. (Fig.235) Of equally elegant and accomplished detailing are the lace cuffs of the judge’s shirt and cravat, (Fig.236) and the fur trim of the judicial robes. The pose is by far one of Steell’s most grand, as Boyle presses home his point of law onto an open volume resting on his lap. Intriguingly, Steell employed pointing gestures in all three of his 1863 marble statues of James Wilson, Sir David Baxter, and Lord Dalhousie. (Figs.237-240) Here, the sculptor depicted a very direct and real manifestation of his sitter, employing all of his abilities in portraiture, composition and detail carving to create a memorable masterpiece to the memory of a distinguished countryman.
Fig. 234. L.F. Roubiliac, *Duncan Forbes of Culloden*, 1748-52, Parliament Hall, Edinburgh. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
James Ramsay, 10th Earl and 1st Marquess of Dalhousie

Presumably, John Steell first encountered Lord Dalhousie in 1840, during the commission process for the Wellington Monument. Steell had been associated with the Ramsay family as early as 1847, when he had executed portrait busts of James Andrew, the 10th Earl and 1st Marquess of Dalhousie (1812-1860), and his wife, Lady Susan Hay (d.1858). He completed a portrait of their oldest daughter, Lady Susan Ramsay in 1862. (Figs. 241-243)

It was probably due to this long association with the family that in 1858 Steell was selected by a London committee, acting on behalf of subscribers in India, to execute a full sized marble statue of the Governor General of India for Government House in Calcutta. (Fig. 244) This was not Steell’s first production for an expatriate audience; his marble monument to Countess Elgin (Fig. 245) was sent to Spanish Town, Jamaica in 1849. However, that project had been for a local church, and had not involved as prominent a public figure as Dalhousie. This project, along with the 1865 statue of James Wilson, also for Calcutta, defined Steell as a truly Imperial artist, and confirmed his status as one of the first-rank sculptors of Great Britain. This is the main historical importance of the work, though the conditions of its commission also illustrate just how far the employment of contemporary dress and detailed accoutrement in sculpture was being advanced by its patrons in the mid-nineteenth century. The Scotsman of 18 September 1858 reported:
Fig. 235. Steell, Lord Boyle. Photo: Rocco Lecallen.

Figs. 235-236. Steell and his masons paid particular attention to the judge’s wig and lace cravat and cuffs. Photo: Rocco Lecallen.
Among other conditions which circumstances dictated for the treatment of the work was a stringent and by no means common one. To adhere with faithful detail to the modern dress, in a work of character and dimensions actually classic, is a requirement which has happily proved no trammel to the sculptor’s genius; though it will be acknowledged that it was rendered doubly trying by the fact that the figure is to be translated, not into the ever-during brass, but into the brittle material of statuary marble.

It is particularly intriguing that the newspaper praises the sculptor for his willingness to execute the work in “doubly trying” marble, implying that bronze was the better material for the job. Steell employed an animated pedestrian pose, which he favoured for many of the monuments he produced in this period: a direct composition which indicated the sitter’s position and eminence; classical in feeling, atmosphere and scale; but also including particular detailing and contemporary dress, moderated by an interpretation of classical drapery. Steell showed Dalhousie standing resolutely, holding a scrolled map of the Punjab and Oudh, and pointing at a spot on it, in a pose reminiscent of Lord Boyle’s seated aspect.

When the marble was completed in 1863, the Scotsman commented on the work as an indication that Scottish sculpture was truly contributing to Empire, and that London no longer completely dominated the field:

It is now most gratifying to find that our city has now become an exporter of works of high art of this class, instead of being compelled, as it was thirty years ago, to seek in London or elsewhere sculptors capable of executing such monuments for our own public halls or streets.

Once again, the Scotsman echoed the sentiments of Unionist-Nationalism. Scotland was not only capable of attaining parity with her neighbours, but could now lead the way forward in the arts, as it had done in other realms of Imperial endeavour. But while Steell was now exporting work abroad, he was also continuing to concentrate on local monuments as well.
From left to right: Fig. 237. *James Wilson*, 1863, London; Fig. 238. *Sir David Baxter*, 1863, Dundee; Fig. 239. *Dalhousie*, 1863, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. All of these 1863 works featured a pointing gesture also employed on the *Boyle* statue of 1860.

Photos: Fig. 237, Conway Library; Fig. 238, Rocco Lewallen; Fig. 239, National Galleries of Scotland; Fig. 240, Conway Library.
Allan Ramsay

Steell’s depiction of the great eighteenth-century pastoral poet was unique, in that the monument was not paid for by public subscription. Lord Murray, a descendant of Ramsay (1686-1758), commissioned the work directly from Steell. According to the Scotsman of 24 November 1855, the statue was to be made of “the hardest and finest description of freestone which even Binny Quarry can supply.” Steell took delivery of an eleven-by-four foot block, but Murray later asked for the statue to be executed in marble. What remained intact was the composition and attitude of the pastoral poet, as well as the planned execution of the base, which featured freestone relief carvings of members of the Ramsay family.

The poet was an integral part of Edinburgh’s reputation as the centre of the Scottish Enlightenment. Ramsay was revered for several reasons; like Burns and Robert Fergusson, he wrote in Scots dialect. His poetry was seen to be particularly representative of Scottish sentiment, but perhaps even more resonantly, the Scottish intellect, which concerned itself with the deep understanding of reality through direct personal observation—a precursor to pure empiricism. This method of investigation, even in a poetic mode, was seen as most effective when stripped to its plainest and most essential elements. Ramsay explained his views in his 1724 preface to The Evergreen, a collection of sixteenth-century Scottish poems:

I have often observed that Readers of the best and most exquisite Discernment frequently complain of our modern writings, as filled with Delicacies and studied Refinements, which they would gladly exchange for that natural Strength of Thought and Simplicity of Style our Forefathers practised. When these good old Bards wrote, we had not
Fig. 241. Dalhousie, 1847, Private Collection, Scotland. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 242. Lady Susan Hay, c.1847, Private Collection, Scotland. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 243. Lady Susan Ramsay, 1862, Private Collection, Scotland. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
yet made use of imported Trimmings upon our Cloaths, nor of Foreign Embroidery in our Writings. Their Poetry is the Product of their own Country, not pilfered and spoiled in the Transportation from abroad: Their images are native, and their Landskips domestick: copied from the Fields and Meadows we every Day behold.

Duncan MacMillan suggested that Ramsay’s principles incorporate both “a kind of natural primitive classicism” and a belief in naturalism, or empiricism within the concept of images “Copied from the Fields and Meadows we every Day behold.”

Steell had a well-established ideological framework to build upon for his conception of the monument. It is known that he conferred with his patron regarding the form of the memorial; Sir John McNeill said in his inauguration speech that the statue “was designed by a descendant of the poet himself.” Steell was in possession of the technical ability to produce whatever a paying customer required. His ordinary moderated style could support both an idealised, general, neoclassical approach, or a specific, historical, naturalistic delineation, which might have been seen to be more fitting, given the nature of Ramsay’s accepted reputation as a Scottish naturalist pastoral poet: “images, native; Landskips, domestick.”

Since Lord Murray directly commissioned the statue, there were none of the usual quarrels regarding the project. The subscription community would probably have supported a monument to the Enlightenment writer—in 1865 he was still as popular and revered as Burns or Scott. In this context, Professor John Wilson (1785-1854), another writer Steell commemorated, was perhaps more prominent in the public mind, having only died in 1854; there was keen support for his statue. Steell worked on both the Wilson and Ramsay groups simultaneously, and they were
Fig. 244. This photograph of the marble Dalhousie statue is in the Steell scrapbooks. Photo: National Library of Scotland.

Fig. 245. Steell's statue of Lady Elgin was shown in the 1849 Royal Academy exhibition before travelling to Spanish Town, Jamaica. It was Steell's first work to travel overseas. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
inaugurated in a unique double ceremony in 1865. It is certain that the local press, which was the major critical organ for the arts in Edinburgh, would not censure a large public monument, commissioned by a Lord of the judiciary, executed by a local sculptor, and commemorating an illustrious son of Edinburgh.

This work, along with the Wilson, Melville, Boyle, Jeffrey and Chalmers statues, exemplified a particularly vigorous local programme of commemoration and legitimisation for eminent Scottish people. As stated above, from 1850 to 1870, Steell’s production seemed to be much more locally oriented, the statues for India and Jamaica notwithstanding. It would almost seem that he was gathering strength for the twelve year struggle that would mark the Consort Memorial project, and usher in his later career, which was marked by overseas commissions: one bronze Sir Walter Scott for New York, and four large statues of Robert Burns, for New York, Dundee, London and New Zealand.

It was equally certain that by 1855, the concept of a distinctive Scottish identity within the arts was common currency. The Scotsman reviewer, when describing Steell’s Ramsay model, took pains to explain the purportedly delicate and enormous task facing the sculptor, in depicting these national traits:

Ramsay came not only as the painter of Scottish life, but he was himself a national type. His fine Scotch nature alone enabled him to penetrate, with the keenest and liveliest sympathy, into the hidden recesses of the Scottish heart... This is really the highest part of Mr Steell’s problem;... To seize and embody the susceptibilities of Allan Ramsay’s nature, in which pleasantry and his strongly-marked humour seemed to melt into pathos, almost into the earnestness of poetic minds, in which prudence, judgement, good sense, struggled with fancy and overcame it, and into which was thrown a quiet dash of Scottish slyness that enabled its possessor to take his own hold of the world—to embody these seems to be the work that lies before Mr Steell, and we hope that he will feel its vastness, and gird himself for its accomplishment.
Fig. 246. John Steell, Allan Ramsay Monument, 1865, Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh.
The *Scotsman* also explained that to properly do this, Steell planned to move away from the standard classical idiom—though planning to use it as a basis:

Breaking loose, also, from a literal imitation of what are called classic models, and from academic rule, Mr Steell has attempted to reproduce the Ramsay of a century and a quarter ago, as he lived and moved; and, if we understand this method of working, has rather sought to import Grecian principles in their abstract form into the modern sphere of art...Ramsay, therefore, does not appear in the costume of a Greek or a Roman, Mr Steel justly regarding the pallium of the former and the toga of the latter as a most unfitting, and indeed ludicrous method of representing modern character. Especially, would either the one or the other be unbecoming on such a man as Ramsay, stamped as he was, in an eminent degree, with the most radical and therefore distinctive features of the Scottish character.537

In some sense, it could be considered as Steell’s tribute to the earlier mason-sculptors in its straightforward depiction in stone. Although the stone is marble, and the treatment of the face is a typically softened and idealised portrayal, this is moderated by the use of historical costume, and minimal use of drapery. Steell reportedly set out to show Ramsay “as he walked in the Lawnmarket and High Street.”538 Intriguingly, Steell chose not to inscribe the pattern of Ramsay’s plaid in the marble version of the statue; a surviving Begbie photograph of the artist’s plaster shows the plaid clearly described. (Figs.251-252)

To what extent Steell meant this work to be specifically *Scottish* is unclear. It would be inappropriate to claim that the *Scotsman* correspondent’s particular agenda coincided with Steell’s own aesthetic and artistic intentions. Steell certainly intended to employ historical costume, at the request of Lord Murray. What is singularly revealing is the oblique quality of the *Scotsman*’s account, in its emphasis of the sculptor’s attempt to capture what it terms “the hidden recesses of the Scottish heart,” as well as
Figs. 247-250. Steell’s freestone reliefs of the Ramsay family emulated classical forms.

Photos: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
allegedly quintessentially Scottish traits as “prudence, judgement, good sense...” and “Scottish slyness.” Proving whether or not a statue of a Scottish poet, in his contemporary costume, constituted an especially Scottish artwork is beyond the limits of this thesis, but Steell’s direct treatment could be linked to the straightforward nature of the productions of his predecessors the mason-sculptors. In this light, Steell’s balanced historical naturalism in costume, coupled with an idealised portrait could be understood as part of the established understanding and tradition of a Scottish mode of expression.

Though the work was privately commissioned, it also represented an ongoing public sculptural reassessment of Scotland’s (and in local context, Edinburgh’s) literary past. Ramsay was a specifically local hero, while Burns and Scott belonged to the whole world. Within this context, the Allan Ramsay can be understood as essentially a parochial commemoration, and in fact it does tread a middle ground between a public, civic monument and a private tribute from a conscientious family. It would be another local monument to another revered local writer that would constitute further evidence that Scotland and Edinburgh wished to manifest their proud literary tradition within the idiom of sculpture.

Professor John Wilson

Wilson was a prominent Edinburgh celebrity, and in 1820 was elected to the chair of Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University. He wrote the column *Noctes Ambrosianae* for Blackwoods Magazine under the pseudonym of “Christopher North,” and was a Tory, yet still progressive enough to count Jeffrey and Cockburn as his peers. He was a prominent
Fig. 251. Steell, Allan Ramsay, 1865, marble. Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Figs. 252. The Begbie photograph of Steell’s artist’s plaster clearly shows the inscribed pattern on Ramsay’s plaid. This was dispensed with in the final marble version.
Photo: Begbie collection, City of Edinburgh District Council.
figure within the Edinburgh art world, and knew Steell through the Royal Scottish Academy, and the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland, as well as the St. Luke’s Club.\(^{540}\)

Steell depicted the writer in contemporary dress, which by this time had become his standard mode of monumental portraiture, but he also emphasised the heroic aspect of the man. Even more striking was the sweep of drapery—in form of a plaid—employed across the whole figure. Gordon emphasised the historicism of this element:

...the sculptor, in presenting to us that memorable figure in his habit as he lived, was able also, even by faithful adherence to that habit, to attain much of the heroic element. The careless ease of Professor Wilson’s ordinary dress is adopted, with scarcely a touch of artistic licence...a plaid, which he was in frequent habit of wearing, supplies the needed folds of drapery...\(^{541}\)

The plaid allowed Steell to create a visual dynamism and a solid outline—both compositional factors which were seen as essential—and consolidated the figure while alleviating the somewhat dull visual effect of a straightforward “coat and trousers” statue. The costume also emphasised Wilson’s literary persona of Christopher North. It was often thought that the fluid effect of bronze drapery significantly enlivened a figure in the hands of a skilled sculptor; a less successful production would often be criticised for its “heavy” effect. Steell had known Wilson personally, and knew that an emphasis on the heroic nature of the man would be the most welcome portrayal. The sculptor therefore slightly idealised the features, while remaining essentially true to a natural and energetic delineation of the portrait.

When comparing Steell’s depiction of the writer with calotypes by Hill and Adamson, it is clear that the sculptor was doing his best to emphasise
Fig. 253. John Steell, *Professor John Wilson*, 1865. This photograph is from a Thomas Begbie negative. Photo: Begbie Collection, City of Edinburgh District Council.
the dramatic and heroic aspect of a man well past his prime. Wilson’s role as a writer was an important symbol of Edinburgh’s cultural, literal and artistic self-image. It is not known from whence the idea came to inaugurate both the Wilson and Ramsay statues on the same day, but it is significant as an indication of the spiritual link that existed between the two authors’ works. Both men were seen to have expressed the Scottish outlook—pastoral, nostalgic, humanist—in the Scots language, which by 1865 was seen as under considerable threat. Lord Cockburn had written in 1844:

…it is the sphere of the Scotch language, and the course of Scotch feelings and ideas, is speedily and rapidly abridging, even in Scotland...I see no other remedy except to teach it as a dead language. I would teach it as a regular branch of education. Burns, Scott, and Wilson, besides many others, have made this as reasonable as to teach some continental languages...Scotch cannot be obliterated without our losing the means of enjoying some of the finest productions of genius, and of understanding the habits and characters of one of the most picturesque of European nations, and of losing an important key to the old literature, even of the south. Above all, we lose ourselves. Instead of being what we are, we become a poor part of England.  

It was no accident that the city chose to honour the memories of two resident writers in a dual ceremony. Both the Ramsay and Wilson statues can be seen as illustrative of a steadily progressing agenda of commemoration and improvement regarding eminent citizens in letters, (Scott, Jeffrey, Wilson, Ramsay) the military, (Wellington) politics, (Melville) and religion (Chalmers). Edinburgh, which had been ambivalent about its monuments to outsiders in the 1830s, was now commemorating the individuals that it felt reflected the city’s beneficence and honour. That Steell was responsible for commemorating both Scottish and British worthies at home and abroad further illustrates the context of Unionist-Nationalism in which Steell operated.
Figs. 254-255. Steell presented the Professor in his physical prime, though he was presumably aware of his sitter’s actual physical condition.
Other monuments of the period examined are of a broadly similar type. These include the four marble regimental monuments Steell executed between 1850 and 1872 (Figs. 256-259); the 1855 Lord Jeffrey monument; the 1863 marble Sir David Baxter for Dundee; the 1863 marble James Wilson for Calcutta; the bronze statue of Onesiphorous Tyndall Bruce, completed for Falkland Palace in 1865; and the 1865 bronze pedestrian statue of Lord Boyle for Irvine. The accompanying catalogue raisonné evaluates each of these works in detail.

The year 1865 was a particularly productive time for Steell’s studio. Within that year he completed five major monuments, and in March, received confirmation that he would execute the Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort. In fact, it could very well be that Steell’s increased output in this year was due to his wish to clear all outstanding commissions in preparation for this huge undertaking; one which would constantly preoccupy, and at times, bedevil him until 1876.

Steell’s middle career witnessed an increase in his prestige, his popularity and his patronage both at home and outside Edinburgh. He continued to steadily execute major monuments, smaller projects and bust portraiture with increasing technical achievement and to marked acclaim. He further displayed his moderate style, slowly introducing the kind of detailed verisimilitude that would characterise the execution of his largest and most ambitious sculptural project. It would be this work, The Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, that would dominate his working life for the following eleven years. Yet, as will be seen, not even the demands of
Fig. 256. John Steell, *Monument to 78th Highland Regiment*, 1850, St. Giles’ Cathedral, Edinburgh. Photo: Rocco Lieuallen.

Fig. 257. John Steell, *Monument to 93rd Regiment*, 1854, Glasgow Cathedral. Photo: Rocco Lieuallen.

Figs. 258-259. John Steell, *Monument to 34th Regiment*, 1861, Carlisle Cathedral; *Monument to 42 Highland Regiment*, 1872, Dunkeld Cathedral. Photos: Fig. 258, Conway Library; Fig. 259, Rocco Lieuallen.
this project would prevent him from completing other sculptural work both within and outside of Scotland and Great Britain.
Fig. 260. John Steell, c. 1865
Photograph from Steell scrapbooks.
Photo: National Library of Scotland.

Fig. 261. Steell, Queen Victoria, 1838,
Scottish National Portrait Gallery.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 262. Steell, Edward, Prince of Wales, c. 1861
Scottish National Portrait Gallery.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 263. Steell, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, 1865, University of Edinburgh.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
Chapter Ten

“The object of my life”: John Steell and the
Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, 1865-1876

In 1865, John Steell was sixty-one years old. (Fig. 260) He had been Queen Victoria’s Sculptor for Scotland for twenty-seven years, first executing her portrait in 1838, when the newly crowned monarch was still a girl of eighteen. (Fig. 261) Since that time, Steell had done two more portrait busts of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh. (Figs. 262-263) The death of the Prince Consort in December 1861 was a pivotal moment in the Victorian era. The Queen was devastated by her loss, and the public shared in her grief. It was natural that a national tribute to him would be planned for Scotland. Steell won the competition for the project in March of 1865.

This prestigious commission became both a blessing and a curse to Steell. After its completion, he wrote “I feel as if the object of my life was now accomplished.” But the monument was completed at a substantial cost to his health, his finances, and perhaps even several relationships in the Edinburgh artistic community. The project suffered a series of delays and misfortunes, which were constantly aggravated by the fact that the monument involved the monarchy and its concomitant politics and conventions.

The monument was Steell’s largest, most ambitious and most prestigious project. It was a further example of his commemoration of
Fig. 264. Albert Memorial, Hyde Park, London.
Photo: National Monuments Register.

Fig. 265. Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
Unionist heroes within Scotland, and displayed his knowledge of contemporary aesthetic trends in bronze statuary monuments, as well as his willingness to exploit them. The work was also a unique opportunity to display the capabilities of Scottish sculptors, as Steell engaged five other artists to assist him in the completion of the monument’s many sculptural elements. The project combined their individual efforts into a cohesive and unified vision. As the artists were all younger men than Steell, he may have seen the monument as a model for the Scottish school of sculpture that he had always wished to foster.

The project took nearly the same amount of time as the much larger and complex Albert Memorial in Hyde Park, London. (Figs.264-265) Throughout the fourteen year process, starting in 1862, (when the project was first proposed,.) to its completion in 1876, there were difficulties regarding subscriptions, the process of commissioning the sculptor, the site, construction of the pedestal, and frequent recriminations with regard to delays—all of which was complicated by the participants’ wish to please the Queen. Though she personally approved each portion of the monument, she was not satisfied with the end result. However, it is likely that no effort would have pleased her. No monument, no matter how excellent, could have compensated for the loss of her “dearest Albert.”

Steell set out to achieve an emotive and naturalistic monument that would be classical and timeless in general effect, while specific and particular in detail. As stated by both Nicholas Penny and Fiona Pearson, Steell displayed a knowledge of European developments in monumental projects of this kind, especially in his use of contemporary votive figures.
This chapter examines other depictions of Albert, as well as some of the alternative proposals that were put forward to honour his memory in Scotland. The public expressed strong opinions on the issue, and all phases of the project were exhaustively debated in the press.

Steell expressed his intentions in a printed monument prospectus—the only surviving statement for a project that categorically explained what he wished to achieve and how he intended to realise his ideas. His employment of the equestrian monument looked back to the two outstanding projects of his early and middle careers represented by the 1833 *Alexander and Bucephalus* and the 1852 *Wellington* statues. Subtle realistic elements in the *Consort Memorial* show that he was capable of working within a broad scale of aesthetics which did not restrict him to one calcified mode of expression. This flexibility would be seen in his treatment of his next major work, the 1874-1880 *Robert Burns*, which was as broadly idealised in its portrait as the 1865-76 *Consort Memorial* was specific.\(^\text{547}\)

This was also Steell’s greatest achievement as Sculptor for Scotland: a memorial of the Queen of Great Britain’s Prince Consort, but a statue which stressed the royal family’s Scottish connections. From his employment of an equestrian statue, which showed Albert as he appeared at the 1860 review of volunteer regiments at Holyrood Park, to his employment of Scottish regimental mourning figures, (Fig.266) to the dressing of the younger princes in kilts in the bas-reliefs, (Fig.267) Steell emphasised the memorial as a symbol of commemoration by the Scottish people and the Scottish nation. The next chapter will further discuss Steell’s status as a “Unionist-Nationalist” sculptor for Scotland. Albert of Saxe-Coburg was as ethnically
Scottish as he was Inuit, but since the time of George IV, when it had been declared that “we are all Jacobites now,” where the royal family was concerned, nothing as inconvenient as actual genealogy would be allowed to spoil the spiritual links between a great British hero and the separate but equal Scottish nation, often called “North Britain.”

**The Commissioning Process**

The committee for the *Scottish National Memorial to the Prince Consort*, which will also be referred to as the *Consort Memorial*, was nominated in early 1862, and was chaired by the 5th Duke of Buccleuch (1806-1884). W.S. Walker of Bowland was the secretary, and Sir William Gibson Craig (1797-1878) and Sir John McNeill (1795-1883) also served in the group. As the Duke took an active role in the project, the greatest source of documentation for the monument is the Buccleuch muniments. An equally rich source is the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle.

There was initial confusion between the Edinburgh fund and the London subscription for Hyde Park. Scottish schemes were also started in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Perth and Dundee, and the Edinburgh committee initially perceived that they were struggling to raise sufficient funds to finance a monument of national status. Despite these initial problems, the subscription was closed in January of 1863, with an estimated £12,000 collected.

Albert had been as popular in Scotland as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but his popularity had fluctuated widely. However, the royal family’s vacations in the Highlands had helped create the fashion for touring
Fig. 268. Photograph of the royal family by Caldesi and Montecchi, Osborne House, 26 May 1857. The younger princes were often seen wearing the kilt; Steell emphasised this in his bas-reliefs on the Consort Memorial. Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London.
the Scottish countryside, and it was in the Victorian era that the purported affinity between the monarchy and the Highlands truly began. The Scotsman credited Albert for this in its assessment of the inauguration of the memorial in 1876:

Not a few of the Queen’s happier hours have been, and still are, passed on Scottish soil; and it has come to be believed that she loves not only the scenery but the people...it was inevitable that a representative Scottish community should enter with special heartiness into...the last act of respect...more particularly when it is remembered how large a share he had in creating and perpetuating the Royal interest in Scottish people and Scottish things.554

This “Royal interest” was itself a continuation of a tradition which had its origins in George IV’s 1822 “jaunt” to Edinburgh. This Scottish visit by Victoria’s uncle, with pageantry arranged and at times invented by Sir Walter Scott, had been the first royal visit since 1651.555 It had done much to cement the relationship between the nation and its monarch, at a time of considerable populist strain, manifested by the Radical War.556 Victoria and Albert’s yearly visits continued to emphasise the idea of a united kingdom.557

Victoria and Albert first visited Scotland in 1842, and followed with tours in 1845 and 1848, when they first stayed at Balmoral Castle. In 1852, Albert purchased the Balmoral estates, and rebuilt the castle in a Romantic style in collaboration with architect William Smith.558 The tradition of annual summer trips to the region then began. This was mostly due to Albert’s enthusiasm for the outdoors and hunting, but it also created the impression that the Saxe-Coburgs truly identified with the people and land of Scotland.559 (Fig.268) This mythic union between the monarchy and the Scottish nation moved one newspaper to suggest that it was the one nation in the United Kingdom best suited to appreciate Albert’s qualities:
Fig. 269. Sir Charles Eastlake
We have no wish to make invidious comparisons, but we doubt whether south of the Tweed the late Prince Consort can be as perfectly appreciated as in Scotland. There are affinities between the highest order of Scottish intellect and the philosophical structure of the late Prince Consort’s mind which are, perhaps, not to be found in the case of our English friends, whose chief qualities are practical rather than intellectual, and for whom a statesman and orator like the late Sir Robert Peel embodies the ideal of excellence...

Given the Prince Consort’s reputation, the public demanded a significant commemoration of the man. At the same time, the Scottish artistic community realised that such a resonant cultural opportunity was unprecedented, and would never recur. High hopes for the endeavour, coupled with the desire to please the Queen created a particularly intense atmosphere surrounding the project.

The Queen took an active part in the proceedings, but this led to an extra level of bureaucracy for both the committee and the sculptor to negotiate. The managing committee wished to act decisively and correctly, while maintaining a deliberative stance; despite their diligence, there were several instances of poor communication with the monarchy. The committee wished to anticipate and satisfy the Queen’s wishes, but any problems encountered were further complicated by the involvement of the monarch. The sensitive nature of the project, combined with the Queen’s continued devotion to Albert’s memory, occasionally prevented issues from being settled in a straightforward manner.

In addition, the Queen was not confident of her judgement and taste in sculpture, having always depended upon Albert’s suggestions and opinions. In his absence, she relied upon committees to help determine the proper form of memorials, both for the Edinburgh and the London monuments. Even more importantly, she turned to that great Victorian arbiter of taste, Sir Charles Eastlake (1793-1865), (Fig.269) and it was indeed
Fig. 270. Emil Wolff, *Prince Albert*, 1844, Osborne House. Photo: Conway Library, London.


Fig. 272. As in this 1859 Winterhalter portrait, Steell would use the Prince’s military uniform to avoid the iconographic difficulties caused by Albert’s ambiguous constitutional role. Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London.
Eastlake’s opinion which most effectively influenced the committee to choose Steell’s design for the Edinburgh memorial.

A sculptural form of monument was the most popular solution. Albert had already been the subject of several sculptural productions (mostly busts) before his death, and he had been an energetic patron of both British and European artists. In 1844, Emil Wolff had portrayed the prince as a classical warrior in antique Greek armour, while also in the 1840s, Henry Weekes had produced a popular bust that had been replicated in porcelain, featuring Albert’s Field Marshal’s uniform. (Figs.270-272) These two costumes were initially the most common modes for presenting Albert, as they avoided the constitutional controversy surrounding his position (or, more accurately, lack of position) in the ruling of the nation. Posthumous portrayals of Albert incorporated his uniform, contemporary dress, and in some productions, the Prince’s Garter robes.

John Henry Foley (1818-1874) created statues of Albert for Dublin, Manchester, Cambridge (now at Madingley,) and Birmingham as well as the most famous example for London’s Hyde Park memorial. (Fig.273-274) In both the Dublin and London works, Albert is shown wearing his Garter attire. The pedestal of the Dublin monument features allegorical youths representing Science, Art, Industry and Agriculture. Allegorical elements were often employed by sculptors to emphasise Albert’s dedication to these aspects of society and national life.

Carlo Marochetti (1805-1867), a favourite sculptor of Victoria and Albert, also portrayed the prince seated in court robes for his 1863 monument in Aberdeen. For Glasgow’s George Square, Marochetti chose an
Fig. 273. J.H. Foley, *Prince Albert*, 1871, Dublin.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 274. J.H. Foley, *Prince Albert*, 1876, Hyde Park, London.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
equestrian form, and showed Albert in his Field Marshal’s uniform. (Figs.275-276) Thomas Woolner (1825-1892), an associate of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, chose to depict the prince in contemporary cloak and gloves for his Oxford University Museum statue, emphasising the progressive and practical nature of the man. (Fig.277)

Sculptural treatments of Albert’s features were strikingly uniform, with particular attention given to his receding hairline, moustache and sidewhiskers. Productions by J. Edgar Boehm (1834-1890), E.H. Baily (1788-1867), Thomas Woolner (1825-1892), William Theed (1804-1891), Matthew Noble (1817-1876) (Fig. 278), Thomas Thornycroft (1815-1885), Henry Weekes (1807-1877), J.H. Foley (1818-1874), Carlo Marochetti (1805-1867), Henri de Triqueti (1804-1874) (Fig.279) and John Steell all share this manner of depiction. Albert’s image was one of the most well-known and well-disseminated of the era, and to a marked extent, sculptors would take licence only with costume and accoutrement; the Prince Consort’s features were too well-established to be re-interpreted. So many projects were instigated upon Albert’s death, that Charles Dickens was moved to write to a friend in 1864, “If you should meet with an inaccessible cave anywhere in that neighbourhood, to which a hermit could retire from the memory of Prince Albert and testimonials to the same, pray let me know of it. We have nothing solitary and deep enough in this part of England.”

Besides public statuary, of which there were many proposed forms, other schemes to honour the Prince in Edinburgh included scholarships for travel abroad, the building of a free public library, the restoration of Holyrood Chapel, the completion of the National Monument on Calton Hill,
Fig. 275. Carlo Marochetti, *Prince Albert*, 1863, Aberdeen.
Photo: Rocco Limalben.

Fig. 276. Carlo Marochetti, *Prince Albert*, 1864-66, George Square, Glasgow.
Photo: Rocco Limalben.
a triumphal arch, a classical-style temple, a column, and an Egyptian style obelisk.

In 1863, while subscriptions were still being collected, and schemes for monuments were being solicited, a controversy arose regarding the submission of a design by Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901). The *Scotsman* of 1 July announced that Paton’s design had been approved by the Queen, when in fact it had merely been seen by her and passed on to the committee. Paton’s advocates accused the committee of unfairly dismissing the submission, but Paton was actually shortlisted for the project.

To expedite matters, in 1864, at Buccleuch’s request, the Queen named a “Select Committee,” also known as the Committee of Advice. Proposed by Colonel Charles Phipps, an advisor to the Queen, this group resembled the existing sub-committee, and was originally comprised of Buccleuch, Gibson-Craig, Lord Provost Warrender, and Sir John Watson Gordon (1788-1864), President of the RSA. Buccleuch also suggested that Sir John McNeill be included in the committee, on the grounds that he had been one of the first to suggest the project. This was agreed to, as was the inclusion of W.S. Walker to serve as Secretary. From 1864, the divisions of responsibility were clarified, and the Select Committee took a more proactive organisational role.

Another significant inclusion on the Select Committee was Professor Lyon Playfair (1818-1890), who held the Chair in Chemistry at Edinburgh University. Playfair was a staunch supporter of Paton’s design, and he lobbied hard for its adoption. On 13 June 1863, a few weeks before the
Fig. 277. Thomas Woolner, *Prince Albert*, 1864, Oxford.
Photo: Conway Library, London.

Fig. 278. Matthew Noble, *Prince Albert*, 1864, Salford.
Photo: Conway Library, London.

Fig. 279. Henri de Triqueti, *Prince Albert*, c. 1861, Frogmore Chapel, Windsor.
Photo: Conway Library, London.
Scotsman debacle, he had written to the Queen’s secretary General Charles Grey (1804-1870) (Fig. 280), who also apparently favoured Paton’s scheme:

My dear General

I had a talk with Sir W. Gibson Craig on the subject of Noel Patons design…
I ascertained that the committee are waiting for the Duke of Buccleuch to come down before taking steps in regard to your recommendations. As Sir John McNeil, Sir W Gibson Craig & the Duke really form the committee the result of their considerations is easily divined. At present the opinions of the first two seem to be as follows.

1. That Noel Patons design is out of the question on the grounds of expense.
2. That Noel Paton being a painter & not a sculptor cannot carry it out, as professional sculptors will not aid him.

We will be provided with efficient answers to both their difficulties...If you can win over the Duke to take a favourable view… before coming down it will be of great importance. I think that Sir W. Gibson Craig now sees the difficulties in a less formidable light than formerly.

Yours Sincerely

Lyon Playfair

P.S. The real difficulty comes in the Committee hearing a strong opinion in favour of an Artist who is committed to the Equestrian Statue opposite the Duke of Wellington.56

The postscript suggests that there may have been general interest in an equestrian form of monument. One of the first monument schemes to be suggested in the press was for an equestrian statue in front of the General Post Office on Princes Street, directly opposite Register House. Steell had not yet forwarded a proposal, but when he did, two of his three designs featured the Prince Consort riding.

On 4 May 1864, the committee decided that an open competition would be the most expedient way of determining both a design and a site.567 While a competition was usually considered beneath the dignity of an established artist, Steell had no such reservations. W.S. Walker wrote to Buccleuch:

Sir John McNeill has been in communication with Steell & Professor Playfair on the subject… Steell does not object of open competition. He says he is not thin-skinned about being beaten by an unknown man. Besides he thinks that some of the most formidable of the known men will not enter an open competition and so his chance as a competitor will be, profauto, increased.568
Fig. 280. General Charles Grey
It was then in May 1864, that John Steell determined to enter designs for the *Scottish National Memorial to the Prince Consort*. On 21 November, Walker reported to Buccleuch that the sculptor had prepared his work and meant to enter the contest.\(^{569}\)

The committee did not open the competition until almost a year later. They spent the intervening time soliciting opinions regarding a suitable site for the monument. Newspaper advertisements solicited suggestions, and the committee vetted and submitted a short list of five sites. The committee presented an appendix to their report of 5 September 1864 which stated:

Of the Sites which have been suggested for the Memorial, the most eligible appear to be,

1. A knoll on the Spur or Ridge running N.N.E. from Arthur’s Seat, and about 540 feet above the sea.
2. West Princes Street Gardens, at the foot of Frederick Street or Castle Street.
3. East Side of Charlotte Square Garden, facing George Street.
4. The Queen’s Park, in the immediate neighbourhood of Holyrood Palace.\(^{570}\)

The Queen favoured the first site, and the committee concurred enough to emphasise the area in their report. However, when it was circulated that the monument was to be located *on top* of Arthur’s Seat, public consternation was intense. So vehement was the furore, that Buccleuch was forced to contact the monarch and diplomatically ask for her to prefer another site. This request received a pointed reply from Grey:

*Her Majesty regrets to hear that some dissatisfaction is expressed at the site for the Prince’s memorial for which she expressed preference. Nothing could be further from the Queen’s intention than to dictate in any way to the people of Edinburgh where this memorial should be placed. H.M. has simply complied with the request made to her, to say which, of a certain number of sites pointed out, she will herself prefer. It is for the people of Edinburgh to decide whether or not it shall be adopted.*

*I will add… my own opinion—that it will be much better not to refer to the Queen at all, than after she has expressed her wishes, in compliance with the request made to her, to continue the [debate] on the subject. Where opinions differ as widely as to the best site, it is doubtless impossible to please everyone—but when H.M. has chosen, out of many sites submitted to her, that *which* seems to her the best… it would be right to acquiesce in it.*\(^{571}\)
Fig. 281. Noel Paton, Design for the Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, c. 1863. Photo: Art Journal, 1895.

Fig. 282. Joseph Durham, Monument to the Great Exhibition of 1851, 1863, South Kensington. Several on the Committee of Advice felt Paton's design was too similar to Durham's monument. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
The unpleasantness served to discourage both parties from pursuing any location near Arthur’s Seat as a site for the monument. After John Steell was awarded the commission, he inspected all of the possible sites before recommending the Queen’s Park. As will be seen, the issue of the site was far from settled.

By December 1864, sixty entries for the design competition had been submitted. The models were numbered, and placed on display in the National Gallery of Scotland. A catalogue was also compiled and published. The five finalists were Noel Paton, John Steell, William Calder Marshall (1813-1894), David Bryce (1803-1876) and a combined proposal from Joseph Durham (1814-1877) and John Robinson.

A Selection of Designs

David Bryce was Scotland’s leading contemporary architect, having largely developed the Scottish Baronial style. For the monument, he proposed to build a five storey, 165 foot tower within the grounds of Edinburgh Castle. Bryce described his project as an “Albert Keep on the Mons Meg Battery…to consist of a large hall having polished stone groined walls and a polished stone groined roof, from which a broad staircase, consisting of centre and side flights would lead to the large hall above, where the statue of the Prince will be placed.” Bryce estimated the building costs at £10,500.

Joseph Noel Paton had shown his design to Queen Victoria in 1863. (Fig.281) While it has been suggested that she preferred his scheme, committee members were divided on the matter. (Fig.282) Paton submitted
Fig. 283. This design drawing of the memorial by Steell is held in the Royal Archives, Windsor. Virtually all of the composition is identical to the finished project, with the exception of the Soldier, Sailor and Engineer. This is the only known design sketch of the monument.
nine sketches to the committee for a ninety-eight foot high Gothic memorial, featuring trefoil arches and four allegorical figures representing the arts and sciences. Paton portrayed Albert in Garter robes, with his left arm heavily draped, resting on his hip. The lower pedestal supported four bas-reliefs beneath each figure. Paton estimated his costs at between £13,000 and £15,000.

Of all the submitted designs for the memorial, most shared such elements as allegorical figures, Gothic arches, staged pedestals, bas-reliefs and a pedestrian depiction of the Prince in court robes. The catalogue of designs does not feature illustrations, or elaborate descriptions, but from newspaper accounts, it does not seem that any equestrian proposals other than Steell’s (and one suggested by Robert Matheson of the Board of Works) were forwarded. As most of the submissions used allegorical figures to support a statue of the prince, it also seems that Steell’s was the only design to emphasise contemporary figures, representative of the social classes.

**Steell’s Designs**

Steell submitted three designs for consideration: two equestrian, and one pedestrian. Steell included two plaster sketch models of the equestrian designs; the pedestrian scheme was submitted as a drawing. Due to the length of description of the first sketch—the equestrian statue which was adopted—it would seem as if it had been Steell’s primary effort. (Fig.283)

This depiction was meant to be naturalistic, historically accurate, and linked to a specific place and time. Steell wrote in his proposal:

The intention in this design is to give us now, and to preserve for posterity, an actual and full representation of the Prince as he was—“the very lineaments of the man,”—to give illustrations of his life and character,—and to express the admiration in which he was held by the whole people....Symbolical emblems to this extent, I trust, may be
Fig. 284. William Brodie, *Rank & Wealth*, 1865-76, Consort Memorial, Edinburgh.

Fig. 285. Clark Stanton, *The Soldier, Sailor and Engineer*, 1865-76, Consort Memorial, Edinburgh.

Fig. 286. D.W. Stevenson, *The Artist, Student and Venerable Sage*, 1865-76, Consort Memorial, Edinburgh.

Stevenson may have used his former Trustees' Academy master Robert Scott Lauder as his model for the Venerable Sage. Steell would have approved of the inclusion of his old friend.

Photo: Roco Lieuallen.
acceptable; but, in our day, merely conventional or emblematical sculpture, I humbly think, will not satisfy public feeling, especially on such an occasion as this, when the very heart of the nation is stirred by the loss of the excellent and much-loved Prince; and when all classes seek to evince the depth of their feelings, by contributing thus to honour his great and good name. I have, therefore, in my attempt to meet these feelings, adopted the most direct and familiar mode of expression, so that every grade may not only at once perceive, but feel the idea.

Steell then explained his use of specific mourning figures to represent each class of society, united in its grief and respect for the Prince (Figs.284-286):

I have introduced at each of the angles of the first stage or base, groups representing the people, of all classes, from the peer to the peasant, approaching the effigy of the Prince, looking up to it with reverence and affection, and leaving at its base chaplets and wreaths, in token of their gratitude and love...

These groups are intended to represent to us, in this our day, and to tell to coming generations, how we admired and sought to honour the great virtues and talents of "The noble Father of our Kings to be."

Steell suggested to the committee that other Scottish sculptors be employed to execute elements following his designs. He emphasised his credentials as Sculptor for Scotland, the man who had introduced bronze casting to Scotland, and estimated the cost of each design at £13,000.

Monuments featuring staged bases and figures of common people were by this time becoming a popular trend in sculptural memorials—enough for several newspaper correspondents to suggest their use. In 1865, when Steell was designing his group, he was demonstrating that he was not aesthetically isolated in Scotland, but was familiar with European developments in naturalistic monument projects.

Across Europe, similar equestrian monuments were being executed. Carlo Marochetti executed two in Turin, to Savoy aristocrats Emmanuile Filiberto of Savoy in 1838, and to Carlo Alberto of Savoy in 1861. (Figs.287-288) These were equestrian statues upon staged pedestals which featured both bas-reliefs and, in the case of the Carlo Alberto, allegorical figures and
Fig. 289. Marochetti's monument to Carlo Alberto featured both allegorical figures and naturalistic soldiers in detailed uniforms.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
naturalistic soldiers. (Fig.289) Steell similarly directed his sculptors to employ accurate costume and accoutrement in the votive figures, with particular attention paid to the details of buckles, buttons, shoelaces and decorations. This type of verisimilitude was later displayed by the noted sculptor of Realism J.E. Boehm in his 1888 equestrian monument to the Duke of Wellington at Hyde Park Corner, London.

In Berlin, Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857) completed his complex equestrian Monument to Frederick the Great in 1851. (Fig.290) This was of a much grander scale and composition than Steell’s design, but it featured the pyramidal composition, staged pedestal, bas and alto-reliefs, and a marked naturalism in the many figures. This group had been widely publicised in Great Britain, appearing in such periodicals as the Illustrated London News.579

In Le Creusot France, Henri Chapu’s 1876 Monument to Joseph-Eugene Schneider featured just one figure group, but it was of a working class woman explaining to her son the importance of their industrialist benefactor. (Figs.291-292) Steell’s 1865 design for his group of Honest Labour preceded Chapu by eleven years.580 (Fig.293)

Further evidence that this form of design was topical is seen in the scheme of architect Robert Matheson, who worked for the Board of Works and submitted two proposal designs for equestrian monuments in December 1863, one of which was, as described by the Scotsman:

Three steps or stages support the lower base of the pedestal, and upon them at the corners are seated four figures in bronze representing the arts and sciences, with appropriate emblems. Above these rises the pedestal proper, panelled, adorned with bas-reliefs, and supporting an equestrian statue of the Prince in a Field-Marshal’s uniform.581
Fig. 290. Rauch, *Monument to Frederick the Great*, 1851, Berlin. Photo: Conway Library, London.

Fig. 291. Chapu, *Monument to Eugene Schnieder*, 1876, Le Creusot. Photo: Conway Library, London.

Fig. 292. Chapu, *Monument to Schnieder*.

Fig. 293. D.W. Stevenson, after Steell, *Honest Labour*, 1876, Consort Memorial, Edinburgh.

Figs. 292-293. Steell’s 1865 design preceded Chapu’s, but both projects were completed in 1876. Photos: Fig. 292, Conway Library; Fig. 293, Rocco Lersalett. 
A person using the pseudonym of "Auld Reekie," who had been a consistent Noel Paton supporter during the Paton design controversy, wrote to suggest that this design was simply:

...the cribbing of Mr Paton's attendant figures of peace or of the whole design from that of Frederick the Great at Berlin, to the very basso-reliveos on the pedestal. So much for the originality of these designs...

This public criticism clearly displayed the fact that the form of equestrian monument featuring staged pedestals, with supporting figures was in the public's eye and mind enough to be familiar to the average connoisseur. In many Albert projects, allegorical figures were employed as representations of Art, Industry, Agriculture and Commerce; they were most famously used in the Hyde Park project. Steell's figures were not strictly allegorical, but contemporary representations of the social classes united in their sorrow, respect and remembrance.

If Noel Paton's early submission and support from Charles Phipps, Lyon Playfair and Sir George Harvey, PRSA (1806-1876), (who had assumed Sir John Watson Gordon's committee post in 1864) caused the perception that Queen Victoria favoured his design for the memorial, a single letter to Grey from Sir Charles Eastlake dispels this view once and for all. Eastlake's opinion was unequivocal and direct:

7 Fitzroy Square London
2 March 1865

Dear Sir

On reading your letter today received I had no recollection of having seen a design for the Scotch Memorial corresponding with your description. I have therefore been to Buckingham Palace today. I find accordingly that there is a model by Mr Steel answering your description & which it seems was not with the rest at the time of my former cursory view.

I can have no hesitation in giving the preference to that design.

Of the others I thought the two by Mr Noel Paton & Mr Marshall, respectively, preferable to the rest, but I am decidedly in favour of Mr Steel's...
Fig. 294. The London architect Charles Barry had also envisioned this equestrian monument to the Prince Consort; the form was seen by many as a fitting tribute to Albert, though he was not noted for his military achievements.

Photo: Brooks 2000.
The Queen definitely trusted and depended upon Eastlake's taste in sculpture, as she depended on his counsel for the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park. Benedict Read notes in his appraisal of the Albert Memorial:

...though the Memorial was deeply important to Victoria, she distrusted her own aesthetic judgement, as she later confided to her Journal: 'it is terrible for me, who do not thoroughly understand severe & correct art, as my beloved one did, in such a wonderful degree, to have to decide on what is best.'...Charles Phipps contacted Eastlake 'to ask privately' for his 'assistance and advice'...584

It could be that Eastlake felt that the equestrian nature of Steell's design was the most proper and fitting mode of commemoration for the late Prince—none of the other short-listed entries featured a horse. In 1867, there was a proposal for an equestrian monument of Albert for the London memorial,(Fig.294) though it was Marochetti who most strongly advocated this plan, perhaps because he had so much trouble with the seated figure of the Prince.585

The Scotsman carried the notice of Steell's commission on 11 March 1865, the same day that the sculptor wrote to the Committee:

...I am unable adequately to express the great gratification which this intimation has afforded me, but I may be permitted to say that Her Majesty's gracious approval cannot fail to stimulate me, in executing the work, to do the utmost of which I am capable to merit Her Majesty's approbation; and I may add that it is one to which from the first my whole heart has been given.586

Almost immediately, Steell began recruiting other local sculptors to help him with his project. Amelia Hill (nee Paton) (1820-1904) declined to take part, perhaps in consideration for her brother's feelings, or perhaps due to being over-committed to work in hand. Walker reported to Buccleuch on 22 April 1865:

... Mrs. Hill declines the offer made to her. Mr. Harvey saw her once & Mr. Steell saw her twice on the subject.
Mr. Steell tells me that she was evidently gratified by the offer having been made, & appreciated the feelings that had activated both himself in originally hesitating to name her & the Committee in putting the employment in her power. But, after two interviews she definitively declined to accept the offer made...587
John Hutchison (1833-1910) initially accepted Steell’s invitation to execute a group, but backed out of the agreement. On 24 August, Walker reported the gossip regarding Hutchison’s reasons to Buccleuch:

... Mr. Hutchison’s reasons for declining... I do not know. But I understand that he or his friends give out that the remuneration offered is too small. People however surmise either that the Noel Paton party have influenced him, or that never having executed such a work he is afraid of risking his reputation by the attempt...

[Steell] has begun to think that there should be no branch of the memorial in which his own hand has not taken part—and he hears that in the Art gossip of Edinburgh it is said that “Steell is afraid of taking the groups in hand & is trying to put them off upon others.”

That people were willing to say Steell was afraid of executing his own figures indicated that the atmosphere immediately following the commission process was fairly rancorous. Steell was determined to prove his detractors wrong, but, as the project developed, delays compounded and pressure mounted, Steell was forced to delegate the extra group to D.W. Stevenson (1842-1904).

David Bryce (1803-1876) was responsible for the design and construction of the large stone base, which when seen from above, formed the shape of the Scottish national flag, the Saltire. At this point, it was still thought that the monument would be sited in the Queen’s Park. However, it would soon be deemed unsuitable, and the further debate regarding the location for the memorial would create delays that would later have a detrimental effect upon Steell’s patience and health.

Steell worked closely with the Royal family on Albert’s portrait, travelling to Windsor in 1865 so that the Queen could suggest improvements in the likeness. The Queen’s journal has two entries regarding the visit:
June 28—Saw Mr Steele, the Edinburgh Sculptor who is to do here, the bust of dearest Albert for the great Scotch Memorial.

June 29—Saw Mr Steele’s bust, which promises extremely well.590

By March 1867, work was at a standstill. Steell had been unable to receive an audience with the Queen, who insisted on approving each element of the memorial before it was finally cast. Without her approval, the committee was unable to pay the sculptors the second installment of their contract fees. On 26 March Walker wrote to Buccleuch, “I think it might be well if you represented the present embarrassing state of matters. & ascertained whether the Committee have rightly apprehended Her Majesty’s wishes...”591

A fortnight later, there had been no change, and while Steell was reportedly patient about the impasse, William Brodie was not. Walker wrote to Buccleuch on 18 April 1867:

… The deadlock in which we are placed is very embarrassing. I had a visit the other day from Mr. Brodie, anxiously enquiring the course of the delay & evidently somewhat hurt & distraught about it. He seemed to think that we were to blame…

Besides retarding the completion of the work, the delay causes a pecuniary loss to the Artists—especially to Mr. Steell. He, however, with the delicacy of feeling which characterises him, has not recently made any enquiries. & I have not dared to go to his studio. But I know that the delay in casting the Bas Reliefs will entail a serious loss upon him.

Really, some way must be found to get out of the present difficulty...592

Steell wrote to General Charles Grey on 9 May 1867, to discuss “unquestionably correct” suggestions the Queen had made regarding the bas-reliefs, and to ask for the audience which would allow the sculptors to proceed.593 This missive illustrates the extent to which the Queen was significantly involved in the project. Even so, the audience that would allow the artists to proceed was not yet granted. Steell’s courtesy belied the fact that the artists were at a crisis point regarding their finances. He wrote to...
Grey again the following month, this time asking more pointedly for an audience:

25th June 1867

Sir

I am really grieved to be so troublesome to you, but from the great anxiety of the Committee, the other Artists, & myself, to proceed with the execution of the Scottish National Memorial to His Royal Highness the Prince Consort, perhaps you will excuse me taking the liberty of requesting of you to be so kind as favour us by bringing under the notice of the Queen our humble but earnest entreaty, that Her Majesty would be graciously pleased to inspect the models which are at Windsor Castle.

The Queen granted Steell his audience on 2 July and the work proceeded. Steell now went to work casting the bas-reliefs. Despite the possibility of delay, he took a calculated risk in the production of these works, by creating investment moulds directly from his clay models. Steell explained this to the committee in a report of 10 September 1867:

... the moulds from which the bronze is cast, are made direct from the finished clay models, a process which, if successful, secures an entire facsimile of the clay in bronze, with all the undercuttings complete and without any divisions or piecing whatever—In so doing however, the clay model has to be picked out of the mould in useless portions; and there being no stucco cast to fall back upon,—as in the usual mode,—should any accident occur in the operation of casting, it involves the necessity of remodelling the whole work from the very beginning.—But, as by no other process of which I am aware, can so perfect a casting be produced, I willingly ran this risk, and as the result has shown, with most fortunate success.

The project seems to have progressed fairly smoothly from 1867, though there were occasional setbacks. George MacCallum died in September 1868, and Steell was ordered by his doctor to take a complete rest at the same time. This was the first in a series of illnesses that Steell suffered during the project. Walker reported to Buccleuch on 7 October 1868:

... you may have seen in the Newspapers the death of Mr Macallum... I called at Steell's to ascertain how we stood with regard to Macallum's work. I found that poor Steell had been ill-knocked up by work-& had been sent by his Doctor to the Country. Today Steell came to me & told me that a few weeks of country air & suffered idleness had quite restored him to health.

Though Steell was well again, there was still much to accomplish.

The next problem to emerge was the monument's stone base. The original
Fig. 295. Sam Bough, c. 1870, National Gallery of Scotland. This watercolour of Chambers Street speculatively featured the Consort Memorial. The site was rejected as too undeveloped. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
design called for a construction in freestone, but the Queen and committee felt that Aberdeen red granite would be more proper, stating in a committee memorandum: “...the Bronze Bas Reliefs harmonize so much better with the colour of the Granite than with White Freestone.”598 The problem was the additional expense; granite would cost at least £2000 more than the budgeted amount. A supplementary subscription was called for by the committee in 1870, but met with little success.

In addition to the added costs of the stone, the site created a need for additional funding. All parties had been planning for the monument to be sited in what was known as “The Queen’s Park,” more accurately, the Review Ground in Holyrood Park. Steell had recommended this site to the Select Committee in 1865, stating that it was “noble and commanding.”599

Although the site was fitting, it was comparatively remote. This factor led to anxiety on the Committee’s part; a statue in a remote location was a target for vandals.600 The committee reported: “It was impossible to place the Memorial in so exposed and unprotected a situation, from the danger, or rather the certainty, that the Groups, Figures and the Bas Reliefs would be damaged or destroyed.”601

A further complication for any new site was that the Queen insisted that the memorial stand alone; the Consort Memorial was not to compete for attention with other monuments. This ruled out Princes Street Gardens as a possible site. The only two remaining places on the committee’s list were Charlotte Square Gardens, and in front of the Industrial Museum—in what is now known as Chambers Street. (Fig.295) This site was quickly rejected as too undeveloped (it was still unpaved) to properly serve as a position for
Albert’s commemoration. This left Charlotte Square, and its attendant problems.

A committee report of 12 July 1871 explained that “The proprietors of Charlotte Square having...placed the Garden of the Square at the disposal of the Executive Committee as a site for the Scottish National Memorial to H.R.H. the Prince Consort, the Committee have now no hesitation in respectfully recommending the acceptance of that site to Her Majesty.”

Though the location was finally settled, additional funds were still needed for both the granite and the alterations to the gardens. In February 1872, the committee prepared to apply to the government for a grant of £4500 to complete the project. Buccleuch signed the application, but declined to head a deputation to the Queen and the Prime Minister, and the scheme was abandoned, as without the support of its highest-ranking member, the committee had little hope of success.

Instead, in August 1872, Buccleuch offered to personally guarantee £2000 of the necessary amount. As a result of this gesture, the public was inspired to subscribe anew, and the cost was met accordingly. In the end, the Duke’s offer was never taken up by the committee; his public action had itself garnered the necessary funds.

By April 1873, there was yet another problem with the site. It had been assumed that the ground in Charlotte Square Gardens was stable, but it was not. Building a foundation to support the pedestal would cost £1000. The outlook was not optimistic for further public subscription, therefore the committee looked for opportunities to cut production costs. At one point, the
committee contemplated abandoning the site—an option which Steell found unthinkable.\textsuperscript{604}

David Bryce was asked to amend his design, but refused. Steell then tried to convince the architect. Walker reported to Buccleuch: “I told him that the committee had failed to induce Mr Bryce to modify his design so as to lessen the expense... if he could succeed in doing so I was sure the committee would be only too glad to be relieved of their dilemma.”\textsuperscript{605}

Steell and Bryce had collaborated on projects as early as 1839, when Steell had provided the tympanum for Bryce’s Standard Life building in Edinburgh. From the erection of their first monument together, the Wellington in 1852, Bryce had designed and built bases for Steell’s Lord Melville, John Wilson and Allan Ramsay statues. Perhaps on account of their long working relationship, Steell was able to convince the architect that lowering his cost was in the interest of the entire project. Walker reported to Buccleuch on 9 May 1873:

\textit{Mr Bryce has now submitted an estimate within our means, the freestone steps at the base of the granite pedestal being abandoned ... Mr Steell, I fear, will now be our greatest difficulty. He seems to have been trusting to the certainty of the delay in the erection of the pedestal & it is doubtful whether he will be ready with the Statue in Autumn.}\textsuperscript{606}

Walker’s assessment was accurate; Steell was behind schedule with the equestrian statue. The compounding delays, including the committee’s initial inertia, problems with subscription, site, commission and foundations meant that the project had taken eight years from the adoption of Steell’s design in 1865. The committee, forgetting the many problems that had not involved the sculptor, was frustrated at the continual delays. They now made Steell a target for their frustration. Walker reported to Buccleuch on 2 June 1873:
Fig. 296. John Steell, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1872, Central Park, New York. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 297. John Steell, *Recumbent 18th Earl of Shrewsbury*, 1873, Ingestre, Staffordshire. Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
Steell... now reports that he will not have the Statue ready till July 1874! This delay is quite unjustifiable on his part, but the committee are powerless to prevent it... if it were not for Steell's intolerable delay all would be satisfactory.607

Sir John McNeill and Sir George Harvey were designated as a subcommittee to directly supervise Steell's work. They reported to the committee on 13 June 1873 that they had informed the sculptor:

...in consequence of the extraordinary and unaccountable delay that had occurred in the advancement of his part of the work... the committee had ceased to rely with confidence on his assurance as to the time when he now engaged to have the equestrian statue placed upon the pedestal... this distrust...led them to doubt whether the statue would ever be completed by him... public feeling on the subject was also strong and that, by his inexcusable procrastination, he had placed the committee...in a position of the greatest embarrassment...our visit...we intimated to him, should be repeated monthly, or more frequently if necessary.608

It is not clear what caused the delays the committee described as “inexcusable.” It is likely that during the suspension of activity caused by the 1871-73 Charlotte Square site problems, Steell had devoted more time to the bronze replica of Sir Walter Scott for New York City, (Fig.296) which was executed between 1871 and 1872. Additionally, in 1872 Steell had been occupied with the marble Earl of Shrewsbury monument, (Fig.297) the monument to the 42nd Highland Regiment for Dunkeld, and the bronze statue of George Kinloch for Dundee. This workload, combined with worries over the Consort Memorial, again affected his health. In December of 1873, it was reported to Buccleuch that the sculptor was again under physician’s orders to stop working and rest.609

Steell must have felt tremendous pressure. The monarch was also becoming impatient. Steell wrote to Lyon Playfair on 16 December 1873:

Dear Sir,

I am favoured with your note informing me that the Queen had done us the honour to express a wish that the Scottish National Memorial to His Royal Highness the Prince Consort would be ready for Her Majesty to inaugurate it in August next – Cold indeed would my heart be if it was not moved to the very core to strain every nerve to meet the wishes of the Queen.
Every effort shall certainly be made, & although I have no doubt of accomplishing it, still, I feel nervous to speak positively in replying to Her Majesty in a manner that admits of the possibility of disappointment - & the failure of a single casting may throw me out in point of time...

By March of 1874, Steell was still working towards an August completion. Knowing the uncertainties of bronze casting, he had tried to avoid definite promises when pressed for a completion date. The Scotsman reported on 4 March 1874:

Mr Steell's original intention had been to dispose of [the statue] in two, or at the most three, operations; but on mature consideration, it was thought desirable still further to sub-divide the work rather than run any unnecessary risk by taking too much at a time. Accordingly five distinct castings were resolved upon; and one of these, embracing the fore-legs and chest of the horse, was successfully carried out a few days ago.

Steell executed the statue in five pours: first, the forelegs and chest; second, the head, neck and forequarters; third, the hindquarters and hind legs; and in the fourth and fifth pours, the figure of Prince Albert. Unlike the bas-reliefs, Steell made his investment moulds from a plaster positive, which had been cast from his original clay. It meant that if an accident occurred, he would not have to start from scratch. However, any casting problems would still mean a great delay, as once the investment moulds were made, they were dried in a kiln for between two and three months before they were ready to receive the molten bronze. According to the Scotsman, Steell's second pour, on 3 March "turned out beautifully," but when the moulds of the first pour were finally cool enough to open, they discovered a disaster. Steell wrote to Biddulph on 30 April 1874:

... I am grieved to find that a misfortune has happened, a large bronze casting of a considerable portion of the horse of the Equestrian Statue has turned out to be a complete failure. The iron girder which bound the under parts of the mould together, broke, & consequently a great quantity of the metal escaped, entirely ruining the cast: so I had no alternative but just to begin again & make a new mould, & will have to recast in bronze the whole of this part of the work ever again, which, will throw me out altogether in point of time... it drives me to the conclusion that it will now be quite impossible to have the Prince Consort Memorial completed & ready for inauguration in August 1874.

I am utterly cast down with grief & dismay at not being able to have this work completed by the time named by the Queen. My only relief is in the hope that the ever great, generous, & kind...
considerateness of Her Majesty may perhaps be graciously pleased to bear with me in this grievous delay...  

We can glean from several letters that during the following ten months, until February 1875, Steell again suffered an incapacitating illness. Biddulph wrote to Steell on 15 February of that year:

My Dear Sir

When I was in Edinburgh last NoBr. I was sorry to find that you were confined to your room by illness from which I trust you have recovered. As the Queen may probably soon enquire as to the progress of the statue of the Prince Consort, will you be so good as to send me a line to state how far it is advanced & whether you can with confidence fix a time for it to be placed on the pedestal and uncovered...

Steell replied three days later:

... Deep is my sorrow at the delay in this work & it is my anxious desire to reply definitely to your inquiry, but of late my works have been so sadly interrupted either by illness, or by some misfortune happening to me, that I am actually afraid, even now, to say positively when the memorial will be entirely completed fearing it may lead to disappointment... The Memorial is now of course very far advanced & my whole heart & life is devoted to the completing of it...

Though Steell was anxious to finish, he was unwilling to sacrifice quality. In September 1875, Steell completely remodelled the figure of the Prince, causing a further delay of a year. Steell’s perfectionism is the nearest explanation for the sculptor’s decision to rework an entire section of the monument at such a late date, with pressure from all quarters urging him to complete it. It would seem that at this point, Steell was inured to any further criticism regarding delays. He would take whatever time was needed to ensure that the final version would live up to the reputation of its subject.

On 9 May 1876, Steell gave Biddulph the first definite assurance that the monument would finally be ready—in September. Biddulph wrote back two days later to say that this would not be soon enough to fit the royal engagement calendar: “The middle of August is the latest period which
Fig. 298. This photograph is contained in the Steell scrapbooks, National Library of Scotland. Photo: National Library of Scotland.
would suit." Steell then reorganised his schedule, and the inauguration date was set for 16 August 1876.

With a completion deadline determined, Steell would have been busier than ever, directing his men in applying patina to the bronzes, arranging the transport and installation of the statues, securing the bas-reliefs, and any other details involving the red granite base. The pedestal had been erected in January of 1874 by Beattie & Sons, with the assistance of MacDonald, Field & Company, the Aberdeen quarry which supplied the stone. A photograph in the Steell scrapbooks shows the monument with all elements in place, except for the equestrian statue. (Fig.298)

As the inauguration approached, issues regarding protocol during the ceremony were discussed. The day would be a major holiday, with all proper pomp and pageantry observed. (Figs.299-300) The Prime Minister wrote in the formal third person to the Queen in reference to the honours she would bestow on the day:

Mr. Disraeli saw the Duke of Buccleuch yesterday, who was of opinion that a knighthood would be the proper honor for your Majesty to confer on the Provost. His grace, however, doubted whether a similar distinction should be conferred on the sculptor. He thought a kind word from your Majesty would be ample reward for him, & he knew, would be so considered. Mr. Disraeli would presume to say a few written lines, full of that grace & feeling, which have touched & charmed so many would be a fitting favor.  

As it transpired, Lord Provost James Falshaw was made a Baronet, and Steell was knighted. It had taken eleven years from the receipt of the commission, but by 16 August the project was finally completed and ready for Queen Victoria’s inspection. Her account of the events of the day was published in her 1884 book More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands:
Fig. 299. The inauguration ceremony was thoroughly covered by the press.

Photo: National Library of Scotland.
Mr Cross then declared that I wished the statue (an equestrian one) to be unveiled, which was done most successfully without a hitch. The effect of the monument as a whole, with the groups at the angles of the pedestal is very good...

Mr Steell, the sculptor, was presented, and this was followed by the singing of another beautiful chorale...We then, followed by our own suite, the committee, and Mr Steell, walked round the statue, and examined the groups of bas-reliefs. The three sculptors who had executed the groups were also presented.

However, the unexpurgated version of the Queen’s journal in the Royal Archives reveals that aside from the general effect, the Queen was disappointed with the work:

[The unveiling] was done... without a hitch. I am sorry to say it is not good, the horse very stumpy & the figure heavy, unlike dearest Albert & too small for the horse. But the “tout ensemble” made a good effect... Got back [to Holyrood] shortly before five, & I knighted Mr. Steell, who looked so excited & happy...618

John Steell would have been very unhappy, had he known of Queen Victoria’s true opinion of his statue, but the monarch’s views on his sculptural talents, recorded in the letters and journals of the royal family, are at times greatly contradictory. An example of this changeable attitude is that Steell was almost immediately commissioned (in August, 1876) to execute a marble portrait bust of Albert for the Queen, based upon his original model for the Consort Memorial. (Fig.301)

It is difficult to ascertain definitively how Queen Victoria and her circle felt about Steell’s artwork; he received commissions from the Queen throughout his career, but these were deemed good or bad with little consistency. Victoria noted in her journal entry of 28 April 1864, “Saw a good bust of Affie [Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh] for Edinburgh by Steel.”619 (Fig.302) This is extremely similar to the 1862 bust of the Prince of Wales for Edinburgh’s Royal High School, (Fig.303) of which the Prince of Wales wrote to his mother in 1861:
Fig. 300. Several illustrated newspapers reported upon the inauguration. The *Illustrated London News* featured the ceremony on the cover of its 26 August edition.

Photo: Roch Lenoir.
I am sorry to hear that you find Sir J. Watson Gordon's pictures and Mr Steele's bust of me so bad, but I cannot say I feel surprised at it, as I thought that you would not like them, & after I had given them my last sitting at Windsor, it did not seem to me that there was much improvement, which I think is rather hard, after having sat so long & so often to them.520

In another letter, from October 1891, regarding a dying wish Steell made to the Queen, (requesting that his annual £100 Civil List pension would continue to be paid to his daughter) Miss Harriet Phipps stated the Queen’s attitude towards the artist: “The Queen is very anxious that poor Sir John Steell’s request should be complied with, but does not feel sure whence the pension came whether from the Civil list or from the Queen personally? The Queen did not much care for his sculpture but had a great regard for him as a good and worthy man...”621

She had described him with similar warmth in August 1876, when she wrote: “He has now long white hair—such a kind, good man!”622 It would seem that her patronage of Steell had depended not so much upon his skills as a sculptor, as on the content of his character. But this character alone perhaps deserved such rewards; to complete the Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort, Steell had displayed dedication and commitment in the face of consistent difficulties and setbacks. He had endured both physical and financial hardships, and had managed to produce not just a major public monument, but also the 1872 Sir Walter Scott for New York City, the 1872 George Kinloch for Dundee, and the 18th Earl of Shrewsbury in 1873 for Ingestre.

He was now secure in the public mind as the most eminent sculptor in Scotland—a living incarnation of his own Venerable Sage. But while there were plaudits and praise, his pecuniary situation was no better than before. In September 1876, a public subscription was launched for a testimonial to
Fig. 301. John Steell, *Prince Albert*, 1878, Royal Collection. Victoria commissioned this bust immediately following the completion of the *Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort*. Photo: Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments.

Fig. 302. Steell, *Duke of Edinburgh*, 1865, marble, Edinburgh University.

Fig. 303. Steell, *Prince of Wales*, 1861, plaster, Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Figs. 302-303. These two Steell portraits of the Duke of Edinburgh (1865) and Prince of Wales (1861) met with contradictory comments from members of the royal family, though they were virtually identical. Photos: Fig. 302, Conway Library, London; Fig. 303, National Galleries of Scotland.
him, in recognition of his longstanding efforts to improve Scottish sculpture.

One of the initiators, Sir John McNeill, wrote to another Steell patron, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell:

My dear Sir William,

At a preliminary meeting held in the City Chambers Edinburgh it was unanimously resolved that a testimonial should be presented to Sir John Steele in consideration of his successful efforts to promote the advancement of high art in Scotland and that it should be national & not merely local – With this view a committee is to be formed of which we hope to have the Duke of Buccleuch for Chairman...

Steele as you are perhaps aware with all his many merits is afflicted with one at least of the not rare defects of genius – He is not a good manager of his financial affairs & tho’ economical in his domestic arrangements is I fear a very poor man – It is hoped that the proposed testimonial will not only confer upon him a great honour but also a substantial benefit – He needs it but is very sensitive...

The resulting subscription testimonial was open for several months, and eventually raised £1,700 for the Steell family. Given the precarious nature of his finances, it was probably greatly appreciated. While Steell occasionally struggled throughout the 1870s, he also created major work, and would continue to do so for another twelve years.

These years would see him execute his farthest travelled works—four large statues of the celebrated bard Robert Burns. In addition was the 1872 replica of his Sir Walter Scott for New York City’s Central Park, as well as many smaller projects. His later career also witnessed a studio visit from Princess Louise and the King of Denmark, and a final realisation of his earliest triumph in the casting of Alexander and Bucephalus in bronze for St. Andrews Square in 1883. As John Steell progressed into old age, he retained his faculties, his skills, and most importantly, his desire to keep creating sculpture for both Scotland and Great Britain.
Chapter Eleven
Steell as a Unionist-Nationalist Sculptor, 1833-1880

From the very beginning of his career, John Steell held the ambition for the development of a recognised Scottish School of Sculpture. What would constitute this school in detail is not clear. How it would manifest itself is also subject to qualification, just as our understanding of what was considered a “Scottish” sculptural style (or if one was even desirable) is subject to debate. Generally, what was advocated was an active, prosperous native sculptural community. This would be fostered by improvements in education, training, patronage, and exhibition opportunities. John Steell sought to encourage these improvements on both a professional and personal level through his own sculpture, his work with various associations and organisations, and by personal altruism as well.

Steell’s successful career was often cited as an indication of the aesthetic parity of Scotland within Great Britain. It was commonly thought that sculpturally, Scotland had lagged behind England, just as England had lagged behind Europe. Steell’s achievements were often cited as evidence that Scottish arts in general, and sculpture in particular, had finally caught up with the rest of the world. Assessing the contemporary state of Scottish sculpture in 1837, George Cleghorn wrote:

...up to a very recent date, Scotland could hardly be said to possess any native sculpture. While painting and architecture attained no inconsiderable excellence, sculpture, with the exception of the mere trade of a marble cutter, was a dead letter, all our busts, statues, and monuments, being executed by English and foreign artists. This stigma on our country is now removed. Within the last twelve years a taste for the art has been gradually
Fig. 304. John Steell, Sir Walter Scott, 1846, Edinburgh.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
gaining ground, and several young men of high promise have devoted themselves enthusiastically to the profession, most of whom have finished, or are finishing their studies at Rome, namely, Messrs Scoular, Campbell, Macdonald, Steell, Fletcher, Simson, Ritchie, &c.... We may at length boast of possessing a national school of sculpture, imbued with an ardent love of their art, and a generous emulation, in spite of every discouragement, to reach excellence in the higher branches.\textsuperscript{626}

Cleghorn praised Steell’s \textit{Alexander and Bucephalus}, and lamented that funds were not forthcoming to put it into bronze or stone.\textsuperscript{627} This had been a local triumph; an international one was the 1838 \textit{Scott Monument} commission, which had also featured a moderate treatment of the subject. (Fig.304) Steell had defeated a large field of contestants for the project. In 1851, Steell himself said of the prior conditions leading up to the competition:

\ldots we may have in former days to apply to England to France and to Italy to perpetuate in bronze and marble the great and the good of our own land, which had enriched us with statues of Pitt, of Watt, of Moore and of Burns from England;... but when the Scott Committee, consisting of the first in rank, the first in literature, and the first in art, were seen to be unwilling to pass over the consideration that it might be important to the arts of Scotland if such a work as the statue of Sir Walter Scott could be executed in our native land, this...gave the sculptors of Scotland something like a tangible reason to hope for the formation of a Scottish School of Sculpture...\textsuperscript{628}

It was this desire to be seen as an equal partner that reflected other avenues of Scottish interaction with England. In his book \textit{Unionist Nationalism}, Graeme Morton argued that our modern understanding of Scottish nationalism is too quickly centred upon ambitions for the creation of a separate nation state. Morton further argued that a significant majority of Scots of the nineteenth century (particularly between 1830 and 1860,) were deeply devoted to Unionism, but were adamant that Scotland be seen and treated as an equal partner in political union with England.\textsuperscript{629} Morton noted several instances—“four explicit iconographic events”—where this dual notion of national selfhood expressed itself in monument projects as it
“concentrated the collective mind of the Scottish nation and forced it to pinpoint its identity.”\textsuperscript{630} These were the 1832 death and 1846 commemoration of Sir Walter Scott with the \textit{Scott Monument}; the Robert Burns centenary in 1859; Joseph Noel Paton’s unfulfilled scheme to create a Wallace and Bruce memorial for Edinburgh in 1859, (an ideological predecessor to the National Wallace Monument at Stirling in 1869); and finally, the uncompleted National Monument on Edinburgh’s Calton Hill—an example of how the notion of Scottish identity shifted within a succession of political climates.\textsuperscript{631}

Within this framework, Steell’s career resonates markedly. Many of his largest and most important projects are of British figures—Queen Victoria, the Duke of Wellington, and Prince Albert. His most famous statue, that of Sir Walter Scott, was of a Scottish figure, but one whom had been assimilated and embraced by the English as an example of Britishness as well.\textsuperscript{632} Ideas of what constituted Britishness, and Scottishness are convoluted and complex, and beyond the scope of this thesis. The objective of this theory is not to definitively categorise Steell as primarily a British or Scottish sculptor, but to assess the context and atmosphere in which he operated. By defining him as a Unionist-Nationalist sculptor, it is suggested that Steell’s work reflected a moderate professional and political ideology similar to the one that he followed stylistically.

To do this, it is necessary to examine the few public statements he made regarding Scottish art and sculpture, as well as examining the contemporary statements and activities of his colleagues, the press, and the politicians of the period. That Steell had such a long career further
Fig. 305. John Steell, *Robert Burns*, 1884, Embankment Gardens, London.
Photo: Rocco Liwaller.
complicates our assessment. From the onset of his career in the 1820s until his retirement in the 1880s, there were significant changes in how the Scottish regarded themselves and the Union. However, the most active part of his career, from 1830 to 1880, has been characterised by Graeme Morton as the period of time when Unionist Nationalism was at its height. It was not until the 1870s that the first rumblings of agitation for home rule began.

Moreover, as Steell was used as an example of Scottish parity, it could be argued that his success, if reflecting such equality, augured against the need for Scottish art to be discriminated as different or distinct. If Scottish sculpture could stand on its own in an international arena, as it had done in the Sir Walter Scott project, then the designation of its Scottishness was unnecessary. There was no reason to place Scottish sculpture into a tartan ghetto. Scottish sculptors could have the self-confidence to address human issues and eternal themes, or could do so by employing native themes which addressed eternal subjects. Steell would not have wished for his sculpture to be judged "good, for Scottish art" but good against any standard.

In this capacity, Steell can be seen as a Scottish sculptural representative for the whole of Great Britain. An example of this is his last major work, the Robert Burns, a version of which stands in Victoria Embankment Gardens, London. (Fig.305) If the viewer were not previously aware that Burns was a Scottish poet, there would be nothing in the composition or execution of the work to indicate as much. Burns, the Scot, had been assimilated as a British icon in the heart of London.

Conversely, in Edinburgh, Steell was repeatedly responsible for the portrayal of Unionist figures for the Scottish nation. This is particularly the
Fig. 306. Steell, *Queen Victoria*, (artist's plaster), 1844, Edinburgh.
Photo: National Library of Scotland.

Fig. 307. Steell, *Duke of Wellington*, 1852, Edinburgh.
Photo: Rocco Licensellen.

Fig. 308. Steell, *Prince Albert*, 1876, Edinburgh.
Photo: National Library of Scotland.
case with the *Queen Victoria, Wellington* and *Prince Consort* statues. (Figs.306-308) These projects originated within Scotland and were patronised and subscribed for by Scots. It was never suggested that the monuments were Imperial interlopers. The public response to these monuments contrasted markedly with the reaction to the earlier statues of *William Pitt* and *George IV* by Chantrey installed in George Street in the early 1830s—both of which met with local ambivalence at best.634

Steell’s greatest achievement was to remain in Scotland. He managed to have a vibrant and successful career, but he had done so through good timing and patronage. His work with educational institutions suggests that he supported a more structured sculptural education than his studies at the Trustees’ Academy had afforded him. But by mid-century, Steell was still viewing the emergence of a Scottish school as a possibility—something yet to be secured, the primary requirement being that native sculptors be induced to stay at home. As already noted in Chapter Six, at an 1851 dinner, the *Edinburgh Advertiser* paraphrased Steell in the third person, referring to the *Sir Walter Scott* as:

...the mere beginning of works in sculpture being executed in Scotland...if such works such as the statue of Sir Walter Scott could be executed in our native land, this with the prevailing sentiments of the country, gave the sculptors of Scotland something like a tangible reason to hope for the foundation of a Scottish School of Sculpture. But to this great end, he [Steell] would say that her sculptors must remain with her. (my italics)635

Morton also discusses the workings of civic society in nineteenth-century Edinburgh, and how the middle classes, especially those representing the legal profession, controlled the social, economic and cultural activities of the city by instigating the process of local subscriptions for improvements and facilities.636 This is the administrative environment
Fig. 309. John Steell, Wellington Monument, 1852, Princes Street, Edinburgh.
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
which allowed Steell to flourish, as this same group of men were his main patrons and clients. The major projects from 1830 forward which Steell executed: *Queen Victoria, Scott, Wellington, Allan Ramsay, John Wilson, Melville* and the *Prince Consort,* were all seen as eminent citizens of Great Britain and in some cases, of Scotland as well. The patronage and subscription which allowed the funding of these commemorations was characteristically local and decentralised, freed from the immediate political control of Westminster, yet symbolically linked to the subscriber’s affinity with both the home nation and the governing state. ⁶³⁷

A prime example of this attitude was cited in Chapter Eight, in the controversy surrounding the commissioning of the *Wellington Monument.* (Fig.309) Wellington was a *British* hero, but as the monument was representative of the Scottish nation, there was vigorous lobbying on the part of middle-class members of the committee, (especially lawyers David Smith and George Patton,) that the group be executed by a native sculptor. Another faction, led by Buccleuch, felt the primary consideration was to secure the best work of art possible—be it from a native artist or not. ⁶³⁸ The dispute illuminates the ambience of the local subscription/commission environment, showing that there was a shared conviction by a significant majority that fostering Scottish sculpture and native talent was necessary if there was a major opportunity to do so. But while the nationality of the artist was a matter of prime importance to the committee and subscribers, the propriety of the monument’s subject was never debated; Wellington was a hero for all British subjects.

256
Figs. 310-312. Lady Elgin, Dalhousie and James Wilson are all examples of Steell's Imperial sculpture. He received the commissions from Scottish administrators of empire. The Dalhousie and Wilson statues were for Calcutta, the Elgin was for Jamaica.
Steell can also be seen as an Imperial sculptor. Several of his medium-sized monuments, including Lady Elgin (1849), Lord Dalhousie (1863), and James Wilson (1863), travelled abroad to British colonies. (Figs.310-312) These projects were offered to him through his personal network of contacts, as well as his position as Queen Victoria’s Sculptor for Scotland. Dalhousie had been one of Steell’s earliest and best patrons. The monument to Lady Elgin was commissioned by Scots in Jamaica, while the Robert Burns statues, commissioned late in his career, were requested in recognition of his earlier productions. When projects were commissioned by expatriate Scots, Steell’s image as sculptural representative of Scotland provided him with an unchallengeable reputation.

As a further example of Steell’s work within the Scoto-British system, the 1854 statue of Lord de Saumarez was executed for the British government to recognise that officer’s contributions to British sea power. (Fig.313) Later, Steell would replicate his monuments to Scottish/British cultural heroes Scott and Burns for the United States, (Figs.314-315) while in New Zealand, a monument to Robert Burns would be provided for Scots in the farthest reaches of the Commonwealth. These statues represented the cultural and artistic heritage of Scotland abroad, rather than the nation’s commercial or political contributions. Yet the Burns statues, all executed between 1880 and 1887, exemplified a traditional, albeit nostalgic and idealised symbol of Scotland.

Steell was never recorded as advocating or defining a recognisable Scottish style of sculpture. Based upon his Advertiser comments, “Scottish sculpture” probably meant any sculpture conceived and executed in
Fig. 313. Steell, Lord de Saumarez, 1854, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Photo: Rocco Lieuallen.

Fig. 314. Steell, Sir Walter Scott, 1872, Central Park, New York. Photo: Conway Library, London.

Fig. 315. Steell, Robert Burns, 1880, Central Park, New York. Photo: Conway Library, London.
Scotland, by Scottish artists. Aside from the popularity of neoclassical treatment of subjects, or the selection of subjects from Scottish literature, there was no particular visual characteristic of native work that was seen as quintessentially Scottish. This was in contrast with the accepted contemporary view of Scottish painting, influenced by Wilkie, which was connoted conceptually by genre subjects.\(^{640}\)

In addition, it was generally held within Britain that sculpture had but one proper style, the classical. This view was stated in 1780 by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his Tenth Discourse, but some sixty years later, in 1841, Sir Charles Eastlake offered the same opinion in a brief to the Select Committee for the Promotion of the Fine Arts.\(^{641}\) While British sculptors continued to create work that featured contemporary dress and accoutrement, the foundation of their work as a whole was understood to emulate the grave and austere productions of the classical age. As sculpture was meant to be timeless, even the treatment of Scottish subjects would require a generalised, classical approach. (Fig.316) Within this context, sculpture was seen as its own nation, with its own language, dress and conventions.

Steell did employ Scottish elements in the form of Highland dress in some of his figures, most markedly in the Consort Memorial and also in regimental monuments, which featured kilted figures. (Figs.317-318) However, Steell never employed thistles, rampant lions, or other traditional Scottish symbolic devices or elements derived from heraldry in the same way as Noel Paton did in his designs for sculpture. Additionally, Steell is never known to have contemplated national monument projects to either William Wallace or Robert Bruce, as Paton had done.
Fig. 316. John Steell, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1846. Steell employed drapery for a classical effect, but also to emphasise Scott's status as the national bard. Photo: Rocco Lunialis.
Of prime importance in the construction of Steell’s image as “Father of Scottish Sculpture” was the consistent championing he received in the columns of the *Scotsman*. Founded in 1816, the newspaper was reformist and radical in tone and content. Due to the interests of one of its founders, John Ritchie Findlay (d.1870), it focussed more than many other periodicals on art in general and sculpture in particular. It constantly employed Steell as an example of Scottish parity in the arts, compared with England, a typical example being an article appearing in March 1856:

> Mr Steele, we believe is almost the first sculptor of eminence who has located himself permanently in Edinburgh, the others having preferred to seek fame and fortune in the sunny south. This is not to be wondered at, as until lately the great body of our merchant princes, who are now the most liberal patrons of art, did not posses, and did not aspire to, any sympathy with the noble creations of the painter and sculptor. A great improvement has lately taken place in this respect; and suitable encouragement being given, we doubt not the native professors of sculpture will here, as they have done elsewhere, take their place as second to none in the practice of their art.643

**Institutions**

Steell actively attempted to foster improvements in the area of education. He did this through his work with several associations: the Royal Scottish Academy, the Royal Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland, The Board of Manufactures, and the Edinburgh School of Arts. In keeping with the de-centralised, local framework of administration that characterised nineteenth-century Edinburgh, his activities can be seen as examples of Unionist Nationalism at work.

Steell had benefited from his Trustees’ Academy education, but there was still no formal training for sculptors. Like those before and after him, Steell had depended upon his own talent and ambition, coupled with skills taught in his apprenticeship. The Academy curriculum had concentrated on
Figs. 317-318. Monuments to the 93rd and 42nd Highland Regiments. Steell regularly employed Highland regimental dress in these statuary reliefs.
drawing, with some clay modelling, but no carving or casting. It was not until the turn of the century that young Scots interested in sculpture could receive any kind of comprehensive, systematic training. In the case of the Edinburgh College of Art, the curriculum was devised according to suggestions and standards made by Pittendrigh Macgillivray (1856-1838).

Steell acted as a Commissioner of the Board of Manufactures from 1849 until his death in 1891. This governmental body administered Scottish art education by funding and overseeing the activities of the Trustees’ Academy. Steell sat on the Board’s Design School committee in yearly rotation with D.O. Hill, and Sir John Watson Gordon, to give informed opinion in their role as practising artists, as well as graduates of the institution. (Figs.319-321) While Steell was never recorded as contributing a great deal of advice, (aside from his 1852 statement of opinion on art education) it is very likely that his views were often canvassed by the non-artist members of the board, especially where sculpture was concerned. Steell also periodically judged the annual drawing competition within the Trustees’ Academy.

Another contribution to Edinburgh art education was Steell’s work as a board member of the School of Arts of Edinburgh for the Instruction of Mechanics. This establishment was started in 1821 for the express purpose of educating working class students in the fields of science and design. Steell’s father taught ornamental modelling and carving at the school, and the school’s report of August 1836 thanks both him and Steell. As in the case of the Board of Manufactures, Steell is not recorded as offering any opinion, but it could be safely assumed that in view of his eminent position, he was...
Figs. 319-321. Steell, Hill and Gordon were all Commissioners of the Board of Manufactures in 1849.
asked to provide views on the instruction of sculpture within the school. It is clear that through his time and efforts on these various administrative boards, that the sculptor sought continual improvement in artistic practice and educational provision for Scottish artists.

**The Royal Scottish Academy**

Founded in 1826, the Royal Scottish Academy was arguably the single most influential and important body in nineteenth-century Scottish arts. Steell was an early member, entering as a full Academician in 1829 as part of the Hope-Cockburn compromise which saw the legitimisation of the academy, following a protracted struggle with the previous premier Edinburgh art organisation, the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland. Primarily, the altercation and its subsequent disposition marked the ascent of the middle class in determining the nature of political and cultural activities in Edinburgh. The Academy was comprised exclusively of artists who had seceded from the Royal Institution, alienated by the undemocratic and non-consultative manner of the administrators, who were predominantly aristocrats and lay members, not artists. The governing clique of the RIEFAS made administrative decisions on behalf of the artists, who were not allowed voting membership.

The RSA was thus promoted on the grounds of allowing the artists full autonomy and self-determination in the pursuit of their interests. Professional artists were ready for a professional representative body. The idea that matters of aesthetics and taste were to be arbitraged by the ruling-class market, rather than the artisan-class producers was discarded. This was an idea that had expressed itself as early as 1815 when a letter addressed to
Fig. 322. William Calder Marshall, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7. Calder Marshall was a Scot, but spent virtually all of his career in London. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
the *Scots Magazine* asked why artists should endure the “painful discipline of public instruction from those who are unqualified for the task?”

In another example of Steell’s good timing, he received membership in the Academy in 1829, just as it achieved its legitimacy, and when it was set to do the sculptor the most good professionally. Through the Academy, which served not only as an aesthetic arbiter and commercial and pedagogical entity, but also as a social club, Steell enjoyed increased access to the ruling cultural and political elite of the city, just when his professional career was truly getting underway. After 1829, and his trip to Rome, Steell would see his prospects soar with the universal approbation received by his *Alexander and Bucephalus*, but he had already built the foundations for his acceptance by his inclusion in the Scottish Academy.

While the RSA had links to the Royal Academy in London, and its members regularly exhibited there, the members considered the RSA to be a primarily Scottish concern. Members did not need to be Scottish—Samuel Joseph and Clark Stanton were both English RSA sculptors—but residency, or failing this, regular submission to the annual exhibition was seen as crucial. Following the resignations of painter Thomas Faed and sculptor William Calder Marshall (Fig.322) in 1860, the RSA council reported:

> Council feel that the Academy are constrained to the acceptance of resignations tendered to them by members who have left Scotland, and feel themselves unable to implement the leading duties of membership, namely, the contribution of their principal works to the Annual Exhibition...they also feel that a Resident School of Artists is not only valuable but indispensable to the healthy existence of the Academy...

This view was in keeping with Steell’s 1851 comment regarding a Scottish school of sculpture: “her sculptors must remain with her.” The RSA council considered the Academy as the primary opportunity for patronage
Figs. 323-325. Hill & Adamson calotypes, c. 1843-1847. According to Brydall, the RAPFAS was conceived by Hill and Steell, then organised by Sheriff Glassford Bell. Bell had also started the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* in 1829. Photos: National Galleries of Scotland.
and publicity within Scotland by virtue of its annual exhibition, but the intent was to both enrich the Scottish public and create opportunities for native artists.

Simultaneously, the RSA was creating an idea of Scottish art, perceived as being distinct from English art. With the Academy’s legitimacy, a new centre of artistic activity was formed, and Scottish artists did not necessarily have to travel to London to exhibit. The Academy’s goals were not merely academic, there were also strong commercial elements which drove the organisation forward. Annual exhibitions were organised in the hope of encouraging patronage and sales. The late 1820s saw a surge in attendance, if not in purchases; the annual exhibitions were popular both as a venue to see as well as to be seen.\textsuperscript{554}

The Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland

When exhibition sales began to decline in the early 1830s, the RSA Secretary D.O. Hill (Fig.323) devised a scheme which he developed in consultation with Steell. (Fig.324) This was the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland—the very first “Art Union” scheme of the day. The RAPFAS was designed to stimulate the market for all arts, as well as to provide a guiding hand for the development of artistic taste in Scotland. Robert Brydall explained the scheme in his 1889 book \textit{Art in Scotland}:

The first [union] of the kind in Britain was the Royal Association for Promotion of the Fine Arts in Scotland, which owed its origin to the suggestion of D.O. Hill, R.S.A., afterwards taken up by (Sir) John Steell, R.S.A., and Sheriff Glassford Bell, [Fig.325] the last mentioned of whom first made it public and devised a constitution. It was founded in the year 1833-34, and received its charter of incorporation in 1848. The annual subscription to this Association is one guinea, each subscriber receiving an engraving, or set of engravings, for the year to which he subscribes. After allowance for this and working expenses, pictures are purchased by the directors from the exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy, afterwards balloted for distribution among the fortunate subscribers. In conformity with the regulations included in the charter, a percentage (not exceeding ten per cent) of the gross amount of the annual subscriptions is set apart each year towards the purchase of a modern
work of art, to be deposited in the National Gallery of Scotland, which, however, remains the property of the Association.655

Conversely to the RSA, the Art Union did not require artists to be resident, but it did insist that they be Scottish. The RAPFAS Secretary J.A. Bell reported to the Select Committee on Art Unions in June 1844 that "The purchase of the pictures themselves, and the selection of the picture to be engraved from, has always been confined to living Scottish artists."656 In this commercial environment, the association had the ability to be even more influential than the Academy, as Forbes remarked:

...in terms of both the levels of capital devoted to expenditure on the fine arts and its efforts to harness public interest, the Association was the single most significant arts institution in Victorian Scotland;657 its ascendancy marked the decline, although not the final disappearance of the exclusive institutional practices of the gentry and its agents and ushered in a new era of artistic expansion founded on the basis of a confident and expanding bourgeois public sphere.658

This influence of the "expanding bourgeois public sphere" was implicitly linked to the political environment of Edinburgh, much in the same way as the Royal Scottish Academy was, perhaps even more so, given the exclusive nature of the Academy. The RAPFAS committees were overwhelmingly composed of lawyers and judges, including Lords Meadowbank, Cockburn, Hope and Jeffrey. These were men who had consistently taken an active role in the community in all areas, but who also had a special regard for art and aesthetics.

The RAPFAS also intended to improve the public's taste, as Bell reported to the Select Committee that "high art, or historic art" was preferred for annual selection.659 Asked to ascertain the type of art "most in favour with the Scottish public," Bell answered, "I should say any painting illustrative of their own history, or connected with their own poetry, such as
from Sir Walter Scott’s works. 

Unionist-Nationalism can again be discerned operating within this social context. Scots were working locally for the idea of improvement in their nation, for the good of the whole of Great Britain, but with distinct native characteristics.

It is important to remember that most of the Edinburgh institutions depended to a great extent upon the beneficence of the government; the RAPFAS alone was independent. The Board of Manufactures was funded annually through a government grant. Starting in 1829, the Royal Institution received £500 annually from the Board of Manufactures budget, as authorised by the Treasury. The RSA depended upon the Board to provide accommodation and support for its annual exhibitions. Government funding had provided the original Royal Institution building in 1822, as well as the subsequent extensions and additions. The £50,000 cost of the new National Gallery, started in 1850, was met by £20,000 from the Board of Manufactures and a special Treasury grant of the remaining £30,000.

This combination of local subscription support illustrated by the RAPFAS, and the distribution of British governmental funding by the Board of Manufactures and the Royal Scottish Academy are primary indicators of the dominant Unionist-Nationalist ideology. Scots were helping themselves within the context of a larger national framework. The organisational principles made practical sense; even with the advent of railways, London was still comparatively distant. Scottish artists required their own national venue for their exhibitions and education.

This confluence of control became even greater in 1858, when the Trustees’ Academy was brought under the authority of the “South
Kensington’s system of the Department of Science and Art in London. This structural reorganisation was resisted by the Board of Manufactures, but supported by the three Board Commissioners who were also RSA members: Steell, D.O. Hill and John Watson Gordon. All three had weighed the nominal loss of control over administration against the benefit of increased resources promised by the Department of Science and Art. In the end, the promise of more government funding displaced the desire for local control of curriculum. For the time being, the restructuring left the RSA with responsibility over advanced fine art education in Scotland, a subject it had doggedly sought to wrest from the grasp of the Trustees’ Academy for many years.

As a member of the artistic elite, John Steell was uniquely placed to contribute to the improvement of Scottish sculpture. His consistent contact and association with the leading figures and foundations of both the artistic and political reform movements of contemporary Edinburgh display his commitment to the arts in Scotland, while still maintaining the accompanying tenets of Unionist-Nationalism. Scotland would be improved for the greater amelioration of the ruling state. In this context, it would be valuable to compare Steell’s brand of moderate unionist iconography and activity to a contemporary Scottish artist who is understood to have held many of the same ideas, ambitions and values, but who displayed them in a markedly different manner and to significantly more ambiguous effect.

Noel Paton, John Steell, and Scottish sculpture

Noel Paton had always aspired to a sculptural career, and his surviving sketches display a clear and well-conceived series of sculptural
Fig. 326. Noel Paton, *The Lion of Scotland defeating Typhon*, 1859. The intended message of this group was commonly misunderstood as derogatory to the English.

Photo: *Art Journal*, 1895.
ideas. However, Paton suffered consistent difficulties during the perilous committee processes which accompanied all nineteenth-century Scottish monument projects; his design and model for the Wallace Monument at Stirling was initially accepted, then suddenly rejected. His domestic responsibilities, coupled with their financial demands, also seem to have impeded his plans. Additionally, he was in the public’s mind a painter, and he lost at least one commission, the 1865 Consort Memorial, partially on account of this typecasting. While initial support was enthusiastic for his 1859 proposal for an Edinburgh National Memorial of the War of Independence Under Wallace and Bruce, monetary backing for the project was never realised.

Paton’s designs could be categorised as Pre-Raphaelite, derived from medieval and heraldic motifs. Paton was an antiquary, and as with his finely detailed paintings, offered a great deal of verisimilitude within dynamic compositions. Celtic elements, like the runic Cross proposed for the Wallace and Bruce memorial, displayed more readily identifiable “Scottish” symbols than any Steel ever presented.

However, it was this easily recognised Scottishness which made the subscription committee at Stirling decidedly uneasy in the social climate of Unionist-Nationalism. This led to the compromise of the Gothic tower of the National Wallace Monument at Stirling. The need for large sums of money led more often than not, to less controversial designs. Where nationalism could be misinterpreted as anti-English sentiment, commerce engendered conservatism.

This had been the case at Stirling, where the acting committee had initially adopted Paton’s design for The Lion of Scotland defeating Typhon.
Fig. 327. Noel Paton, design for Wallace & Bruce Monument, 1859.
Photo: Paton, 1859.

Fig. 328. Noel Paton, design for William Wallace, 1859.
Photo: Paton, 1859.

Fig. 329. Noel Paton, design for Robert the Bruce, 1859.
Photo: Paton, 1859.
Paton exhibited a model of his proposal in the 1859 RSA exhibition, but its meaning was often misinterpreted. Paton intended the group to represent Scotland vanquishing treachery and cruelty, but it was described by one onlooker as “The Lion of England worrying the Wallace.” Others viewed the freed lion with the broken chain as triumph over English tyranny. Ironically, this was the opposite of Paton’s declared intent.

The *Art Journal* reported on the controversy:

> The design is exceedingly spirited...It is completely out of the “conventional” style; hence it has alarmed some of the committee, who have the folly to talk of offending the English by such a display...English tourists are prophesied to fly Scotland in future in high dudgeon at all this; and perhaps intestine wars may again break out between north and south...Most certainly no Englishman is silly enough to take the ignorant and narrow view of the matter some Scotsmen seem inclined to take. A poetic work must not be put into vulgar and distorted prose for mere party purposes.\(^666\)

It is possible that Paton’s nationalist imagery was not the only element of the group to which subscribers objected. Sir William Stirling-Maxwell criticised Paton’s model as “without beauty and merit” and went on to suggest a “tall and stately tower, of our early national architecture” for the monument, citing that all the submitted projects would “look utterly insignificant on the majestic brow of the Abbey Craig. For a position which is a landmark to so vast a range of country, a statue, however colossal, is manifestly unsuited.”\(^667\)

While Paton failed at Stirling, he still held hopes for Edinburgh. His “unconventional” imagery aside, Paton had expressed a bedrock Unionist-Nationalist view: the fourteenth-century wars of independence had allowed Scotland to enter the Union on an equal footing. In his 1859 proposal for the *War of Independence* project, Paton stated:
Fig. 330. Noel Paton, Wallace Crowned in Mockery at Westminster Hall, 1859.

Fig. 331. Noel Paton, Bruce Strikes the First Blow at Bannockburn, 1859.
In my design for the projected Monument, while endeavouring to give due expression to the legitimate enthusiasm which we all feel towards our patriot heroes and martyrs, I have been studious to interweave the recognition of the peaceful triumphs of a later and happier day, when the sword of internecine war has been for ever sheathed in these lands, and the Scotch and their ‘auld enemies’, the English, had become, under the providence of God, one great, free, and united people.668

Graeme Morton described Paton’s proposal as:

...a wonderful example of the interplay between two apparently opposite symbols of the Scottish past: the Wars of Independence on the one hand and the Union of 1707 on the other. It is the explicit use of pre-modern symbols of the Scottish ethnie in the mid-nineteenth century, with the aim of strengthening the Union and appealing to Scottish notions of independence. It is this sort of discourse in the nineteenth century that has been referred to as Unionist-nationalism.669

In 1859 Paton published a fully illustrated booklet which described the details of the monument: a 110 foot high runic cross with an octagonal basement of steps; (Fig.327) a twenty-two foot high group of Wallace as Guardian of Scotland; (Fig.328) a group depicting Bruce as king with the Arbroath Protest, which featured him seated in authentic dress and armour. (Fig.329) The six-by-ten foot reliefs on the base displayed four compositions: Wallace crowned in mockery at Westminster Hall; Bruce strikes the First Blow at Bannockburn; The Union of England and Scotland as Independent Powers, and The Reign of Peace. (Figs.330-333) The planned materials were equally grand, the elements to be made in bronze, granite and Scottish marble. Paton’s commemoration of Wallace and Bruce reflected both his Pre-Raphaelite style and his interest in antiquities. He wrote in his proposal, “I should spare no amount of labour and research to attain the nearest possible approximation to the real appearance ‘in their habits as they lived’ of the men represented.”670

Local schools pledged financial support of this scheme, which would have been incredibly expensive, given the scale and materials, but after the
Fig. 332. Noel Paton, *Union of England and Scotland as Independent Powers*, 1859.
Photo: Paton 1859.

Fig. 333. Noel Paton, *The Reign of Peace*, 1859.
Photo: Paton 1859.
initial plans were determined by Paton, the money was not forthcoming. The cost of the project combined with doubts about the political message served to dampen the initial enthusiasm and led to the project’s abandonment. This was a pattern similar to what had occurred during the debacle of the 1822 National Monument.

Paton himself must have realised the potential controversy surrounding his design, as he addressed the issue directly in his proposal:

Intelligent Englishmen know full well the source of Britain’s strength and greatness, and that to the independence achieved under Wallace and Bruce, the UNION of Scotland with her sister kingdom, on terms satisfying to both, owes not only all its practicability, but the greater portion of its success. Intelligent Englishmen also know that their countrymen of Wallace’s day, who...formed the staple of the English nation, not only had no sympathy with the feudal despotism of the Norman Kings, but mourned for the Scottish patriot as for their forlorn hope against “the common oppressors of both countries.”

This was a truly convoluted theory: the modern Englishman would honour Wallace and Bruce not only for their status as facilitators of the subsequent Union, but for their defiance of Norman interlopers. As further evidence, Paton included a section of a letter from “an ardent admirer of the proposed erection:”

Intelligent Englishmen can afford to smile approval on such an evidence as this Memorial would present, of the nationality of the country which gave birth to the Minstrel who sang the tale of Flodden Field. [Sir Walter Scott] ‘Merrie England’ can and does appreciate the greatness and warmth of that mighty Scottish heart, and teeming Scottish brain, which made even England and Englishmen better known and appreciated...through the stories of ‘Ivanhoe,’ ‘Kenilworth’, and ‘The Talisman’...

This is an excellent example of the Unionist use of Sir Walter Scott as a British writer rather than a solely Scottish symbol. This cultural confluence within the British context was what the sculptor of the memorial meant to illustrate. Despite this, the contortions of logic necessary to rationalise the subject and imagery—the suggestion that English viewers wouldn’t be insulted, given their respect for Sir Walter Scott—emphasise the obvious fact
Fig. 334. John Ballantyne, *Noel Paton in his Studio*, 1867, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Both the *Wallace and Bruce* and the *Lion and Typhon* are clearly visible at left and right, respectively. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
that the need for such theories indicated a real anxiety within the subscribing Scottish public.

After the demise of the project, Paton intended to at least have his models cast into bronze, but this was never realised. If they had been cast, we would now have a definitive sculptural example of the notion of Unionist-Nationalism. Instead, we have only the project proposals, the drawings, and in an 1867 painting by John Ballantyne, RSA (1815-1897), both of Paton’s planned commemorations to Scottish nationhood. The models of both the War of Independence monument, and the Lion of Scotland appear in the canvas. (Fig.334)

Steell never initiated a sculptural project, choosing instead to answer calls for competition or direct commissions. Steell had always supported Paton’s sculptural ambitions. A letter from D.O. Hill to Paton, dated 21 July 1852 reads:

> I had a very interesting crack with Steell yesterday about you & he came out very strong on your sculptural powers. & remained most anxious that you should come out in that way. So don’t ...hide these talents in a napkin which the Great Giver has made yours.\(^2\)

Though the artistic community appreciated and encouraged Paton’s “sculptural powers,” the political atmosphere and the community of subscribers did not. Unable to secure the financial support necessary to realise his monumental plans, by the 1870s, Paton became disillusioned, and was forced to settle for small relief projects to realise his sculptural ideas.

Noel Paton’s frustrated ambitions for a sculptural career illustrate both the precarious, fickle nature of the organisational processes for large monuments as well as the public’s inability to accept designs beyond the
Fig. 335. Thomas Duncan, RSA. Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-7.  
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 336. Thomas Duncan, Dr. Thomas Chalmers, 1843, Scottish National Portrait Gallery.  
Chalmers sat simultaneously for this Duncan portrait and Steell’s bust portrait.  
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
moderate, conservative style for public work. In contrast, controversies surrounding John Steell’s public projects involved principles of patronage or organisation, never the design of the work itself.

**Personal help**

In addition to his activities with official bodies, Steell often acted altruistically on a personal level to improve Scottish art. There are several sources of evidence regarding Steell’s generous nature. James Findlayson recorded in *Notes Concerning Thomas Duncan RSA*, that in 1844, Steell arranged a portrait bust sitting with Dr. Thomas Chalmers in Duncan’s studio, so that the painter would have the opportunity to execute a portrait.\(^{67}\) (Figs.335-336)

The amateur sculptor Isabella Gore-Booth also received encouragement from Steell. A letter to her from a Mr. Campbell in the Mitchell Library’s Strathclyde Regional Archive states:

21 January, 1856

*My dear Isabella—*

I meant to write sooner to tell you that Mr Steell was here on Friday—he came to see the bust and I think you wd. have been quite pleased, had you seen his expression of satisfaction & surprise when he saw it & heard that [it] was the work of a lady who had taken up the noble art with little if any instruction.

He said that all you wanted was some technical knowledge of the way to treat yr. subject & that all he could teach wd be required by your seeing him work for a very short time—He said both to myself and Prof. Miller, (who is a gr. Friend of his & is attending a child of his now), that his studio wd. be open to you at any time & he wd. be only too happy to show you his way of working—I am sure he wd. not think of taking any enumeration for so slight a service & that you wd. only insult him by offering it ...\(^{67}\)

Steell also fostered his fellow sculptors in other ways, most notably, in his proposal to include other sculptors in the production of the *Consort Memorial*. On this project alone, Steell incorporated the talents of William Brodie (1815-1881), A.H. Ritchie (1804-1870), D.W. Stevenson (1842-1904), George MacCallum (1840-1868) and Clark Stanton (1832-1894). He offered
The Glasgow Herald reported that neither Paton supported their sister's proposed RSA associateship.
groups to both John Hutchison (1833-1910) and Amelia Paton Hill (1820-1904). Steell seems to have had a special regard for Hill. He asked her two times to join the Consort project, and even more significantly, in 1868, he suggested that she apply to be an associate of the Royal Scottish Academy.

The proposal was reported upon by the Glasgow Herald in a series of articles from August 1889, when the topic of RSA reform was being discussed fervently in the press. In 1868, Steell, supposedly with the support of D.O. Hill, suggested that Amelia apply as an associate academician, based on her past work, but especially upon the completion of her colossal bust of Livingstone, which had been shown to great acclaim in the RSA exhibition of 1868. The proposal created a great stir, with both Waller and Joseph Noel Paton objecting to their sister’s membership. (Fig.337) The RSA Treasurer W.B. Johnstone (1804-1868), declared that it would not do for two Academy pensions to go to one household. Steell, ever anxious to avoid altercations, had no stomach for a political battle, and let the matter drop. The Royal Scottish Academy would not have its first female academician until sculptor Phyllis Bone (1894-1972) was elected in 1944.

As discussed in Chapter Eight, Steell’s introduction of fine art casting at Scotland’s first bronze foundry was undertaken for both personal and altruistic ambitions. He consistently demonstrated a keen commitment to the improvement of Scottish sculpture in terms of execution, education, materials, facilities, taste and markets. Other examples of his ambition for a Scottish school can be drawn from his activities on the Board of Manufactures, the Board of the Edinburgh School of Arts, and his
administrative work with the RSA. At the heart of all these activities was a desire that reflected Unionist-Nationalism: that Scotland be accorded equal partner status in all of its institutions and fields of endeavour. On the occasion of a testimonial subscription for Steell, in recognition of services rendered by him to Scottish art, one newspaper remarked:

> When he decided to abide permanently in Scotland, all other artists were flying from it. The contrast is now great and gratifying. We have many excellent sculptors in Edinburgh and Glasgow, most of whom have been entrusted with the execution of public statues, and all of whom have about as much private work as they can comfortably overtake. Indeed, when one knows whence many of these public and private commissions come, one is inclined to think that Edinburgh may be in a fair way to become like the Rhodes of ancient times, a home of the arts, and for this she will be indebted in a great measure to Sir John Steell.⁷⁷

After receiving his knighthood and testimonial in 1876, Steell was the best known, best patronised, and perhaps best loved sculptor in Scotland. He had worked steadily and progressively for almost fifty years, and had executed work that represented Scotland and Great Britain at home and abroad. In front of him lay twelve more years of work, most of which would be concentrated on four statues of the same subject, which would travel to four corners of the earth. Steell’s late career would be dominated by the figure of the man who, perhaps more than any other Scot, came to symbolise the Scottish nation internationally: Robert Burns.
Fig. 338. George Reid, *Sir John Steell, RSA*, 1883, Aberdeen Art Gallery.

Photo: Aberdeen Art Gallery.
Chapter Twelve
The Late Career, 1872-1885

The 1870s were an extremely busy and productive time for John Steell. Though approaching old age, (he was seventy in 1874)(Fig.338) Steell found both his reputation and demand for his work growing internationally. Between 1872 and 1873, Steell completed two highly naturalistic groups, the monument to Lord Shrewsbury for Ingestre Church, Staffordshire, and the Monument to the 42nd Highland Regiment in Dunkeld Cathedral, Perthshire. In February of 1872, the bronze statue of George Kinloch was installed at Dundee. (Figs.339-341) Even more auspicious was the completion of the 1872 bronze replica of Sir Walter Scott for New York City’s Central Park, his first commission for the United States.

During this time, Steell and his studio were struggling to complete Edinburgh’s Consort Memorial project, and the statue of Dr. Thomas Chalmers. That statue had been contracted for in 1869, and was finally completed in 1878. Between 1876 and 1888, Steell completed six monumental works in bronze; four of them were versions of his Robert Burns. While Steell continued to execute work in metal and stone right up to his retirement in 1887, after the completion of the Consort Memorial, Steell concentrated on only a few major bronze commissions: Dr. Chalmers, Robert Burns and an 1883 bronze cast of Alexander and Bucephalus.

Steell continued to execute portrait busts right up to his retirement in 1887. He was increasingly regarded as an elder statesman of Scottish art, being one of the oldest members of the RSA in terms of both membership
Fig. 339. Steell, 42nd Highland Regiment Monument, Dunkeld Cathedral, Perthshire.  
Photo: City of Edinburgh District Council.

Fig. 340. Steell, George Kinloch, 1872, George Square, Dundee.  
Photo: Rocco Lieuallen.

Fig. 341. Steell, 18th Earl of Shrewsbury, 1873, Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Ingestre, Staffordshire.  
Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
Fig. 342. *Sir Walter Scott and Maida*, 1872, Central Park, New York City. Members of the city’s St. Andrew Society and Caledonian Club commissioned Steell for a bronze replica of the Edinburgh monument to mark the centenary year of Scott’s birth in 1871.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.

Fig. 343. The inauguration of the statue was a grand occasion, attended by the subscribers, the organising committee, and the pipe band of the 79th Highlanders. The statue of Scott was reportedly the first of the author in the United States. Expatriate Scots, emigrant Scots and Scottish-Americans all viewed the monument as a significant contribution to the city and the identity of the Scottish in America.

Photo: National Library of Scotland.
and years. Given his advanced age, and the rigours of sculptural activity, he was increasingly unwell for periods of time. These spells of indisposition were never described in detail, but by gleaning information from various letters, it is clear that they were severe enough to keep him in bed for extensive periods. In 1875, Steell himself had written to Sir Thomas Biddulph, the Queen’s Privy Purse after one period of sickness: “I was very ill but am now almost all right again.”

**Sir Walter Scott, New York**

Despite periodic illness, Steell remained productive. In 1871, a group of New Yorkers commissioned a bronze replica of *Sir Walter Scott and Maida* for Central Park, to commemorate the centenary of the writer’s birth. (Fig.342) Steell took a plaster cast from the marble statue on Princes Street, and the first bronze cast was reported in the *Scotsman* of 2 March 1872. Steell managed to complete the group within a year, and the monument inaugurated on 2 October 1872 met with great enthusiasm. (Fig.343)

The *Scottish American Journal*, which took some credit for instigating the movement for the New York statue, ran an extensive account of the project’s history, as well as the inauguration. Steell’s 1871 reaction to receiving the commission was given:

> This is the honor of my life. The struggle over the original was severe, and now, after the lapse of so many years, to have such a commission from the metropolis of the New World, and that too from my own countrymen is more than I ever anticipated or expected. It is more than a mere commission, it is a great honor that has been done me.

The New Yorkers were pleased with their rapid results, and almost immediately began planning a Burns monument to accompany the *Scott*. The approbation was auspicious for Steell; William Paton, Vice-Chairman of the
Fig. 344. John Steell, *Dr. Thomas Chalmers*, 1878, George Street, Edinburgh. Photo: Racco Larnaeilen.

Fig. 345. Chalmers inauguration ceremony, 7 July 1878. Photograph is from the Steell scrapbooks. The coat of arms on the building at right was carved by John Steell Sr. Photo: National Library of Scotland.
committee, and many others on the *Scott* committee, would later organise
the Burns monument as well. Paton said of Steell:

That noble, genial gentleman of the olden school regarded the whole affair more as
a national than as a personal honor. Faithfully had he worked on towards the completion,
not only of the statue, but also of the magnificent pedestal on which it rests, until the whole,
a perfect work, stood forth.681

The importance of this project was twofold. Not only was it the first
major public statue of a prominent Scot to be executed for America by a Scot,
it also inspired the city’s Burns enthusiasts to subscribe for the *Burns*
monument. The popularity and success of these projects then led to Steell’s
commissions for additional Burns statues in Dundee, London and Dunedin,
New Zealand. Overseas committees were impressed with both the quality of
Steell’s work, as well as Steell’s position as Queen’s Sculptor for Scotland.
Along with the *Consort Memorial*, Steell was now almost exclusively
executing important iconographic work. The *Edinburgh Courant* noted:

It is not often that any one country produces such men as Burns, Scott and
Chalmers, and it is not less seldom that any one native artist has the opportunity and
responsibility such has fallen to the lot of Mr Steell, of embodying a visible representation to
their own and future generations, in enduring brass and marble, the form, the character,
and expression of three such men.682

**Dr. Thomas Chalmers**

Steell was finally able to complete the *Consort Memorial* in 1876, and
presented the *Chalmers* statue to Edinburgh in 1878. (Fig.344) It was
inaugurated on 7 July at its site in George Street. (Fig.345) Steell’s second son
William (1836-1917), a practising architect, had designed the stone base for
the statue; it was the first time father and son had collaborated on a
project.683 Forty years after the *Scotsman* had lamented the thoroughfare had
no memorials, (except to foreign interlopers of dubious reputation,) the
effigy of the great clergyman and reformer, who had led both the Disruption
An 1891 letter to the editor of the *Scotsman* stated that sculptor and subject had enjoyed the conversation engendered by their acquaintance:

"Sir John used to speak often of the eminent persons who sat to him in his studio, and of their notable sayings. 'It is very strange, Mr Steell,' said Chalmers to him on one occasion, 'that sculpture is at once the most material and the most ethical of the arts, for while you can grasp the figure with your hand, the marble idealises the likeness of your friend in a way that the flat surface of the painter's canvas is unable to accomplish.'" (Unsourced cutting, RSA Library.)
of 1843, and the foundation of the New College of the Free Church of Scotland, stood proudly preaching the gospel of charity and independence down Castle Street. Steell depicted Chalmers in his Geneva robes, with buckled shoes and an open quarto Bible, “this being the attire he wore as Moderator of the General Assembly.”

Chalmers, one of the most celebrated personalities of the era, was usually depicted in either clerical dress or moderator’s robes. He was a favourite sitter of Scottish artists, and there are several oils, watercolours, silhouettes, and a glass medallion of him held by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Robert Adamson (1821-1848) and David Octavius Hill (1802-1870) made at least eight calotypes of the cleric in the 1840s. Steell’s bust and statue are the definitive sculptural portrayal of the man.

Steell must have been gratified to have finally completed this long anticipated commission, after some nine years’ work. His bust of the clergyman had always been popular, but now there was an even more impressive monument to his memory. Woodward stated that the statue had been commissioned in 1847 upon Chalmers’ death, but this would suggest an unacceptable wait of thirty-two years. Articles in the City of Edinburgh District Council Monuments Catalogue, and the 29 July 1878 Scotsman serve to clarify Woodward’s assertion. Both sources reported that while a marble statue was suggested for the library of New College in 1847, the project was actually held in abeyance, since “it was felt that this was not enough and that a monument of Chalmers should not be of a sectarian or provincial nature but that of a national character.”
Fig. 347. John Steell, *Robert Burns*, 1880, Central Park, New York City.

Photo: Conway Library, Courtauld Institute, London.
The momentum of the project diminished. It was not until Dean Edward Bannerman Ramsay (1793-1872) revived the idea at a meeting in November 1869 that a subscription was opened, and Steell was commissioned to execute the monument. Around £3000 was eventually raised for the project. Steell was in an excellent position to create a statue, given both his friendship with Chalmers, and the success of his previous portrait bust. Steell himself remarked that Chalmers had had to sit for him many times, as the convivial conversation between them had often distracted him from his modelling.688

Robert Burns, New York

The Burns monument for New York City was inaugurated on 2 October 1880. (Fig.347) In *The World’s Memorials of Robert Burns*, Edward Goodwillie, declared it “America’s first tribute to the Bard of Scotia.”689 He continued:

...in no part of the world are Burns’ works more appreciated and his name more honored than in the United States of America. Nor is it to be wondered at. Did not the great Emerson—“The Sage of Concord”—tell his countrymen that their Declaration of Independence was not a more weighty document in the history of Freedom than the Songs of Robert Burns? Americans understand the meaning of “A man’s a man for a’ that,” for it is part of their gospel, and, thanks to the innate reverence for the poet in Scotsmen and their descendants, Burns Clubs can be found from Maine to California; from Canada to the Gulf.690

Commissioning the project had indeed been due to the efforts of “Scotsmen and their descendants,” as had been the case for the *Scott* statue, which had been organised by New York’s St. Andrew Society and Caledonian Club. Steell was chosen for the work in view of his reputation, and the reception of the *Scott*. The project was conceived as a complement to the *Scott*; the two Scottish writers are positioned opposite each other in the
Figs. 348-349. Steell depicted Burns in a broad, idealised and iconic manner. The general treatment of the poet’s features was combined with an attempt at historical portrayal of the costume, based upon the Nasmyth portraits. Photos: National Library of Scotland.

Figs. 350-351. Alexander Nasmyth, Robert Burns, 1787 (left) and 1828 (right), Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Steell used these portraits, as well as a cast of Burns’ skull for his likeness of the poet. Photos: National Galleries of Scotland.
Mall section of Central Park. Steell agreed to provide the statue for 2000 guineas; the cost of the granite base was additional.691

Late Victorian interest in Burns was high. By the closing years of the nineteenth century, the poet had become a potent (albeit romanticised and nostalgic) symbol of Scotland all over the world. As Sculptor for Scotland, Steell was, as usual, in an advantageous position to secure prestigious commissions for monuments to the poet. Similarly, one commission led to another, and this allowed Steell to repeat his success on three continents. As a result, the New York and Dunedin statues were some of the first Burns monuments in the New World.692

Subsequent Burns iconography, especially work executed after 1880, is decidedly reminiscent of the New Sculpture. In comparison, Steell’s group looks both stylised and idealised, but published criticism of his statue did not appear until the late 1890s. Steell’s treatment of the bard is an important indicator of established contemporary convictions regarding the poet’s likeness and public image. Steell had sought to portray an idealised and iconic version of the man, while integrating in his moderate style, accurate details of dress and accoutrement. (Figs.348-349) This naturalism is balanced by his employment of several broad symbolic elements, especially the plough-sock and pen. Even Steell’s employment of an elm tree for a rustic seat is a tangible symbol of Scotland.693

The Steell Burns, while being one of his most idealised works, stayed true to the traditional depictions of the poet from other media. Like sculptors before and after him, Steell based his likeness on the 1787 and 1828 Nasmyth portraits,(Figs.350-351) and used an Edinburgh Phrenological
Fig. 352. Steell, Robert Burns, 1884, London. Steell’s depiction of Burns’ “rig-and-fur” stockings had no precedent in either sculpture or paintings. Later statues would often feature them. Photo: Rocco Lissalein.

Fig. 353. John Steell, Robert Burns, 1884, London. The pose was criticised in some quarters, but the general opinion of Steell’s monument was positive. In four versions, it was his most replicated statue. Photo: Rocco Lissalein.
Society cast of Burns’ skull for a purported maximum veracity. Steell employed the poet’s contemporary dress, but as customary, included a classicising drapery in the form of a plaid. The sculptor apparently took licence with his depiction of the poet’s ‘rig-and-fur’ stockings, there being no artistic precedent in sculpture or paintings. The overall effect was of the traditional romantic view of the ploughman poet, overcome by the inspiration of his muse, while still wearing his hobnailed boots.

Mark Stocker points out that Steell derived his moment of depiction from “a then widely credited source, Jean Armour’s memory of her husband in October 1789 composing the song ‘Thou Lingering Star,’ also known as the ‘Ode to Mary in Heaven.’ Steell shows Burns composing the poem on the spot, in the fork of an elm tree, rather than at his desk, as originally accounted. Pen in hand, a plough-sock at his feet, a scroll of paper with lines inscribed to his departed Highland Mary spilling across the bottom of the composition, Steell provides a direct view of the rustic bard, seen as distracted and dreaming, focussed entirely upon his composition.

There seems to have been criticism from some quarters with regard to Steell’s choice of pose. (Fig.353) According to his apologists in the Dundee Burns Club, it had been Steell’s intention to represent Burns:

...by conveying in the work, the highest intellectual phase of the bard...The sculptor’s idea, therefore, was to reproduce his subject in the act of composing the beautiful poem last cited...One excellent feature of the work is its entire freedom from conventionality. The pose of the limbs has been censured as awkward, but the critics who so write fail to perceive that when a human being’s consciousness is entirely absorbed by some high inspiration, the airs and graces of posture are undreamt of...Sir John Steell’s insight into poetic idiosyncrasy has prompted the thought that true art consisted in the negligent disposition of the statuesque limbs.

Not everyone agreed. When the Montrose Burns Club approached the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for a donation towards a statue, Carnegie
contributed £20, but added, "Permit me to hope that you will not think of taking a replica of the statue with which we are afflicted in New York. To see Burns as a hump-backed simpleton is distressing...I can assure you that more money could be raised to take it from New York Central Park than was raised to put it there."  

The *Art Journal* also reviewed the work in 1881, but strongly endorsed it as "the most truthful and powerful representation of Burns yet given to the world." Despite this approbation, the critic Edward Pinnington attacked the group sixteen years later in the same journal. Pinnington’s main thesis was that Burns statues ought to be generalised and embody an idealised view of the poet, expressing, in his term, *breadth*. He was highly dubious of the accuracy of the Nasmyth portraits, and disputed the idea that any use of the painting, or any other reproductions, could lead to a successful likeness. He was also critical of Steell’s specific portrayal, as well as the propriety of the anecdote chosen for the composition. Pinnington wrote:

...it is a co-ordinate mistake for a sculptor to represent him [Burns] in one specialised mood or character. Concentration is fatal to breadth; selection leaves too much unsaid...Sir John had long meditated a Burns, but the commission did not come until the burden of his years was becoming heavy, and the statue is not worthy of his prime. Of all the parts Burns played on earth, there was none in which he was so unspeakable a failure as that of lover. In that character Sir John Steell made the initial mistake of choosing to depict him. He made a second false step when he selected the old and generally abandoned view of the attachment between Burns and Highland Mary as the *motif* of his design. He clings to the romance wreathed round a pure and early love wounded by death...It need hardly be said that the conception is devoid of breadth. There is in it so little that is significant of the completeness of Burns, that its concentrated sentimentality becomes offensive, and a disposition grows to resent the exposure of a strong man in an hour of weakness. As a work of Art, the statue will not bear all-round examination. Of an ideal Burns it emits not a whisper.

In the same article, Pinnington shows clear preference for later depictions of the bard, particularly George Lawson’s 1891 statue at Ayr,
Fig. 354. George Lawson, *Robert Burns*, 1891, Ayr.  
Photo: James Mackay.

Fig. 355. Pittendrigh MacGillivray, *Robert Burns*, 1895, Irvine. This model of MacGillivray's version of Burns displays the loose, energetic and free treatment of material which marked the New Sculpture. Steell's Burns would later be criticised for its lack of 'breadth.'  
Photo: Aberdeen Art Gallery.
(Fig.354) and Pittendrigh MacGillivray’s 1895 production for Irvine. (Fig.355)
Of the former work, he wrote, “Mr. Lawson has quickened intellectual force
with poetic passion and fire...The work can neither be located by incident,
nor specialised in respect of sentiment. It is Burns broadly generalised, the
inseeing, rapt, intense poet.”700 As for the latter, Pinnington further displays
his support for original New Sculpture solutions, stating: “Equally self-
contained and original is Mr. Macgillivray’s Burns at Irvine. The face and
head are not slavishly copied from any misleading portrait, and the features
are of a finer mould than the pen-pictures ascribe to Burns.”701

Pinnington’s assertions lead us to believe that by 1897, Steell’s work
was increasingly seen as outmoded, yet it should be pointed out that at the
time of its execution, the Steell Burns was hailed as a singular success. The
subject himself was of sufficient status to ensure a great amount of
veneration. The Art Journal article of 1881 notes an interesting and unique
phenomenon which occurred when the group had been completed, but was
still at Steell’s foundry:

The statue had quite an ovation before it left the foundry...The working men of
Edinburgh by some accident came to know that it was to be on view, on the afternoon of a
certain day, to a limited number of Sir John’s friends and patrons. At the close of the
afternoon’s séance the artisans presented themselves in force, and politely requested
extension of privilege. Sir John, with characteristic urbanity, at once gave instructions for
their admission, and they came and went in the most orderly manner, in relays of one
hundred or so, until over eight thousand of them had seen the statue. This says much for the
appreciation of Art in the Scottish capital, and it is to be hoped that many statues of the
Burns type may yet issue from the studio and foundry of the father of Scottish sculpture.702

Even allowing for Burns’ great popularity, it is still unlikely that such
approval would have been given to a mediocre statue. As with most of
Steell’s work, the needs and desires of the audience were amalgamated with
the artist’s vision. Mark Stocker assesses the 1897 critic’s viewpoint, writing:
Fig. 356. Herman Cawthra after Peter Turnerelli, Robert Burns, 1936, Burns Mausoleum, Dumfries. Turnerelli's original sculpture was completed in 1819, but had deteriorated by the 1920s. The original was displayed in Burns House, but was later stored in a builder's yard, from whence it disappeared. Turnerelli's composition was derived from Burns' dedication for his Edinburgh volume of poems: "The Poetic Genius of my country found me...at the plough and threw her inspiring mantle over me." Photo: James Mackay.

Fig. 357. John Flaxman, Robert Burns, 1825, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Flaxman's statue featured contemporary dress with classical drapery. A bas-relief upon the base depicts the muse crowning Burns. Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
Pinnington’s hatchet job reflected his belief that the sentimentality and literalism that marred Steell’s statue had given way to an idealised, abstracted, *fin de siècle* image of Burns that stressed his ‘greatness and virility.’ Pinnington went too far in playing down the attachment between Burns and Highland Mary, and his dismissal of it as an ‘early love’ has been subsequently rejected. Perhaps his criticism should be considered as much a repudiation of the Highland Mary cult as an attack on Steell’s statue. Despite Pinnington’s vehemence, the popular appeal of Steell’s Burns was left largely unaffected.703

Steell’s production, while perhaps displaying “sentimentality and literalism,” was a bridge between earlier neoclassical efforts, and the New Sculpture productions advocated by Pinnington. The first recorded statue of Burns was completed in 1819 by the Irish sculptor Peter Turnerelli (1774-1839) for the Burns mausoleum in Dumfries. (Fig.356) This was a neoclassical motif, showing the Muse of Poetry discovering Burns at the plough, the subject being taken directly from Burns’s dedication to his 1793 Edinburgh edition of poems: “The Poetic Genius of my Country found me at the plough and threw her inspiring mantle over me.” It is an uneasy coupling of an ethereal muse in flowing drapery, with a somewhat nondescript Burns in an approximation of contemporary dress. Turnerelli had access to the 1787 Nasmyth portrait to aid in his likeness, and showed the poet literally at the plough.

The second known statue to be produced was John Flaxman’s 1825 marble for Edinburgh. (Fig.357) Flaxman (1755-1826) often worked in a pure neoclassical mode, but in this instance chose the often utilised method of combining contemporary dress with classical drapery. As with the Turnerelli, there are many direct, literal Scottish symbols in the composition, including a bonnet, a thistle, and a ploughshare. Burns holds a daisy, which alludes to his 1786 poem. He wears a tight, eighteenth-century tailcoat, with a drapery in the form of a plaid. Flaxman also alluded to the same narrative.
Fig. 358. George Ewing, Robert Burns, 1877, George Square, Glasgow. Ewing’s statue was a straightforward, direct portrayal in historical dress. Photo: Ruxheuallen.
subject as Turnerelli, by including a bas-relief on the statue’s base depicting the Muse crowning Burns with a laurel wreath.⁷⁰⁴

George Ewing (1828-1884) executed his Burns statue in bronze for Glasgow’s George Square, completing it in 1877. (Fig.358) This was a very straightforward production, noted for its directness. The last statue to Burns erected before Steell’s was the Kilmarnock monument sculpted in marble by W.G. Stevenson (1849-1919), completed in 1879.

It is unlikely that any of these works had any real influence on Steell’s design. Steell was the first sculptor to present the bard seated, perhaps in view of the fact that it was meant to complement the Scott in Central Park. We do not know exactly when Steell conceived his Burns design, but several sources report that the project’s composition had been a long-held idea, awaiting an opportunity. Pinnington mentions that “Sir John had long meditated a Burns…”⁷⁰⁵ but of particular interest is a letter written to the editor of the Scottish American Journal, dated 21 July 1874, which described in detail a visit to Steell’s studio:

...Knowing the deep interest which all Scotsmen over America feel in the statue of Robert Burns...I paid another visit yesterday to the studio of the sculptor to whom the work is entrusted... I found Mr. Steell more enthusiastic than ever about Robert Burns. He says that for years past the idea he is now working out to represent the great Scottish poet had been in his thoughts by day, and formed part of his dreams by night.⁷⁰⁶

A letter filed three days later supports the view that Steell had designed the statue much earlier:

In another “sanctum,” I was shown a carefully locked box. With many pledges of secrecy this was opened, and then was disclosed, the entire statue as first designed years ago by its author. It was Burns in a characteristic attitude; the whole design is a most original and effective one; and the figure is emblematic of the bard as he is known and described to us.⁷⁰⁷
Fig. 359. Amelia Paton Hill, *Robert Burns*, 1882, Dumfries. Hill’s version of Burns later met with considerable criticism. The statue was carved by stone masons in Italy, from a smaller model by Hill. The sculptor used many direct symbolic elements to allude to Burns poems, including a bonnet, pipe, thistle and mice. Edward Pinnington’s patronising comment of 1895 remarked that the work was interesting as “the nearest existing approach to a woman’s sculptured thought of Burns.”

Photo: James Mackay.
Steell’s subsequent Burns statues are all essentially identical to the New York example, with the exception of the London work, which features a different pose of the head, and was a gift of John Gordon Crawford, originally a Glasgow merchant, rather than the result of a subscription. Steell’s Burns for Dundee was inaugurated on 16 October 1880, with some 25,000 people attending the ceremony in Albert Square. This was seen as a public triumph for Steell, who had ties to the area via his mother’s family in Broughty Ferry. Dundee now had three major public statues by Steell: Robert Burns, Sir David Baxter, and the 1872 bronze of George Kinloch, M.P. The Burns for Dunedin, unveiled on 24 May, 1887, was an exact replica of the New York and Dundee statues, and was the first Burns statue in New Zealand.\(^7\) This was the last major monument to be executed by Steell’s studio.

Given that Steell’s Burns was subject to a great deal of publicity and approbation upon its unveiling in New York, and just a fortnight later, in Dundee, it may be assumed that his design was at least studied by subsequent sculptors for their projects. In particular, Amelia Hill’s marble statue for Dumfries is seated like Steell’s predecessor, as well as including a canine element (in this case a Collie,) which could be likened to the design of Steell’s Sir Walter Scott. (Fig.359) Hill also included several other direct attributes: a bonnet, shepherd’s pipe, thistle and mice. Pinnington dismissed the statue easily, though he allowed that “It is however, the nearest existing approach to a woman’s sculptured thought of Burns, and it is an interesting, even if it never was a lofty embodiment of the poet.”\(^7\) It would seem that

286
even a sculptor’s gender could be taken into account where Burns was concerned.

Virtually all Burns statues which appeared after Steell’s made use of contemporary dress, especially in the employment of breeches with the ‘rig-and-fur’ stockings originally depicted by Steell. This is not suggesting that all sculptors directly followed Steell’s lead in dress, but British and North American sculptors especially, must have at least been aware of Steell’s precedents. Steell arguably created the first high profile monument of Burns, given the prominence of New York’s Central Park, and London’s Victoria Embankment Gardens. That the original design was replicated a further two times speaks for its popularity. While later productions of Burns statues by younger sculptors followed a different expressive criterion, the visual precedent was there to be considered, even if it was ultimately rejected in favour of more expressionist, New Sculpture treatments.

By 1885, Steell was starting to slow down. He was eighty-one years old, and had been employed in the demanding physical practice of sculpture for over fifty years. As he moved into the final portion of his artistic career, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his work was represented in Britain, America, India and New Zealand—literally in all corners of the globe. An artist who had depicted some of the most famous Britons of his generation and of all time, he would soon retire knowing that his commemorations in marble and bronze would endure far longer than any fame he himself had enjoyed.
Fig. 360. Steell, *Robert Burns*, 1885, Burns Monument, Alloway. The first version is in Westminster Abbey. Photo: RmoLm.den.

Fig. 361. Steell, *Stern of the San Josef*, 1885, Nelson Monument, Calton Hill, Edinburgh. Photo: RacoLmden.

Fig. 362. Steell, *Sir Walter Scott*, 1886, Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. The marble version of this relief is placed Above the main courtroom at Parliament Hall. Photo: RacoLmden.
Chapter Thirteen

The End, and After: 1887-1891

The last recorded sculptural works executed by John Steell were an 1885 marble bust of Robert Burns for Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey, a bronze model of the stern of the ship San Josef for Edinburgh’s Nelson Monument, and an 1886 marble medallion relief of Sir Walter Scott for Parliament House, Edinburgh. (Figs.360-362) Steell wrote to the Board of Manufactures on 1 October 1886, “offering for sale privately his collection of models, instruments and implements.”710 This was the first notice of his intention to retire. In 1887, Steell received a £100 annual Civil List pension,711 and in March of 1888, Steell held a public auction of his studio’s contents. The Scotsman reported:

There was a fair attendance of the public, but for the various works submitted there was very little competition, and the prices obtained were low...there were, as a matter of fact, few things of any great interest put up for sale. The cream had evidently been taken off some time ago by private purchasers; the colossal models were evidently not for house decoration, and the smaller figures were not in the best state of preservation.712

Professor Gerard Baldwin Brown of Edinburgh University (1849-1931) purchased casts of four sections of the Elgin marbles, a cast of the Supplicating Youth, and casts of the Venus de’ Medici, Townley Venus and Venus de Milo for the University museum, spending £3 and 2/713 The sculptor D.W. Stevenson (1842-1904) spent 21/ on a box of Steell’s modelling tools. The building itself was sold to “Messrs Macfarlane and Wallace, who intend, it is understood, to convert them into decorative studios.”714 Steell’s foundry on Grove Street remained open until at least 1889. The last known
Fig. 363. Steell's artist plasters for Sir Walter Scott and Maida and Queen Victoria were displayed prominently at the 1888 Glasgow International Exhibition.

Photo: Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
work produced there was John Hutchison’s statue of Dr. Grigor for the town of Nairn.

In 1888, Steell’s artist’s plasters of Scott and Queen Victoria were seen by thousands at the Glasgow International Exhibition. (Fig.363) His last submission to a Royal Scottish Academy exhibition during his lifetime was in 1889, when he displayed a marble bust of the late Mrs. James Stewart. Slowly, his public life and career were coming to an end. Minutes from RSA functions of the time usually mark his apologies for his absence. He increasingly spent more time at home in Greenhill Gardens. His obituary in the Scotsman stated:

For the past...years he has lived in complete retirement, and latterly his health had broken down so seriously that he was confined almost entirely to bed. But his mind was healthful and vigorous to the last; and through the infirmities of age had reduced and weakened his bodily frame, his intellectual activity remained unimpaired...

Steell could look back on a full, productive career which was marked by exceptional achievement. He had sculpted some of the most illustrious men and women of the era, had created outstanding monuments for all corners of the globe, and had consistently contributed to the advancement of the arts in Scotland. Personally, he had enjoyed a fifty-five year marriage to Elizabeth Graham, who died in 1885. They had raised nine children, though only three would survive him.

Steell’s sculptural contribution to Edinburgh was unprecedented. At the beginning of his career in the 1830s, the city had little public sculpture. Steell changed all of this. By 1891, Princes Street, George Street and their immediate environs were all adorned with his work. The area constituted an open air gallery of Steell’s art; no fewer than eleven major works in stone and bronze embellished the neighbourhood. (Fig.364)
Fig. 364. Johnston’s Plan of Edinburgh, 1890, W.&A.K. Johnston, Edinburgh and London. Red circles indicate major works by Steell.
From east to west, the succession was impressive: the Wellington Monument, Princes Street; The Wise and Foolish Virgins, upon the Scottish Widows Building pediment, George Street; Alexander and Bucephalus, St. Andrew Square; St. Andrew in front of the North British Insurance Building, Princes Street; the Scott Monument, Princes Street; the John Wilson Monument, Prince's Street Gardens; Queen Victoria, on top of the Royal Institution Building; the Allan Ramsay Monument, West Princes Street Gardens; Reverend Thomas Chalmers Monument, George Street; the Prince Consort Memorial in Charlotte Square, and the monument to 2nd Viscount Melville in Melville Crescent. No one sculptor ever dominated a city in the same way that Steell made his mark upon Edinburgh. Given his modesty regarding his achievements, as he passed into old age, his overall sentiments were probably those of profound gratitude.

John Steell died at seven-fifteen in the morning on 15 September 1891, just three days from his eighty-eighth birthday. His death certificate, certified by Dr. Claude Muirhead listed the cause of death as "Fatty Degeneration of the heart 3 years and disease of the stomach 1 year." His death was registered by his son William on the same day.

The news was received with sadness, but not shock; Steell had reached an advanced age, and had been in poor health for some time. The newspapers printed obituaries and notices of the funeral:

FUNERAL OF SIR JOHN STEELL, R.S.A.
The remains of Sir John Steell, R.S.A. were interred in the Old Calton Burying Ground, Edinburgh, this afternoon. The funeral was of a private character, but was attended by several members and Associates of the Royal Scottish Academy. Assembling at the Galleries, the members and Associates drove to Greenhill Gardens, the residence of the deceased. The coffin, which was of oak with brass mountings, bearing the inscription "Sir John Steell, R.S.A. Born September 18th, 1804; died September 15th, 1891," was borne on a plumed hearse drawn by four horses. The following members of the Academy were present

Another report noted:

... At the entrance to the Burying Ground a considerable number of people had assembled to see the last of the famous sculptor, whose handiwork adorns the principal thoroughfares of the city. The pall-bearers were:- Mr William Steell and Dr Graham Steell, sons; Messrs Graham Steell, John Steell and William Steell, grandsons; Messrs Gourlay Steell and Gershom Steell, brothers; Mr Peter Graham, nephew; and Mr George Reid, [RSA] President.—Unsourced cutting, RSA scrapbooks.

A Dundee paper wrote:

There has been no Scottish sculptor of recent times who has so distinctly left his mark upon Edinburgh as Sir John Steell, who died in Edinburgh yesterday. In more than one sense he may be regarded as the father of modern Scottish sculpture, and some of his most notable works occupy prominent positions in the Scottish Metropolis...

For nearly 60 years his name has been associated with many of the most remarkable pieces of statuary produced in this country, and he survived to witness the rise of a younger school of sculptors that rivalled but did not efface the renown which he gained so long ago, and which he maintained till almost the close of a protracted life.—Unsourced cutting, RSA scrapbooks.

John Steell’s career exemplified the prevailing conditions of Victorian sculpture in terms of education, training, techniques, style, influences, processes, patronage, genres, and opportunities. This thesis has attempted to illustrate the significance of the sculptor’s career, within a Scottish, British and European context. It has been suggested that Steell’s success was seen as an indication of the artistic parity of Scotland within Europe, as Scottish “fine art” sculpture had struggled for survival between the Renaissance and the early nineteenth century. Steell’s efforts to improve Scottish sculpture reflected both a resurgent confidence in native talent, as well as the rise of the middle class as patrons of the arts. Steell owed his career to patronage, but the men who served as facilitators for his art were not drawn exclusively from the aristocracy, but rather from the dominant Edinburgh professions of the law, medicine and the church.
The support of these patrons, coupled with his own substantial talent, led to one of the most significant events in his career: his appointment as Queen's Sculptor for Scotland in 1838. This early accolade was a formidable advantage, and helped to cement his reputation to such a degree that most other high-profile projects were subsequently offered to him. The fact that he was awarded the Sir Walter Scott commission in 1838, the Wellington in 1840 and the Consort Memorial in 1865 illustrate the prestige which this title instantly conferred upon him.

Steell's most significant works were memorial monuments which were funded through public subscription. He owed his dominance of the local market to the links which he forged with the most powerful local individuals, the law Lords. These men, among them Lord Meadowbank, Lord Jeffrey, Lord Murray, Lord Cockburn, Lord Rutherfurd and Lord Colonsay and Oronsay, operated the mechanisms which controlled virtually every significant process of everyday life in nineteenth-century Edinburgh.

This is not to say that within the context of art patronage, the aristocracy were no longer of any consequence. Two of Steell's most active supporters were the 10th Marquess of Dalhousie and the 5th Duke of Buccleuch. Contact with Dalhousie had led to commissions for India, while Steell's relations with Buccleuch had contributed to his greatest triumph, his selection to complete the Scottish National Monument to the Prince Consort. Although promoted by the aristocracy, the monuments themselves were largely financed through public funds, contributed for the most part by the middle class.
Steell was considered the pre-eminent sculptor in Scotland for the majority of his career. His title of Sculptor for Scotland both reflected and perpetuated his dominance of the Edinburgh market, as well as his works for England and the Empire.

The fact that Steell was never commissioned for a major monument for Glasgow remains a conundrum. The city had its own enclosed systems of patronage, and a circle of subscribers, mostly drawn from the manufacturing industries. In the 1840s and 1850s, Carlo Marochetti seemed to enjoy preferential status among Glasgow patrons, similar to the hegemony which Steell held in Edinburgh. Personal contacts were seemingly paramount, as the other major Scottish city to which Steell contributed work was Dundee. There, Steell had personal connections through his mother’s family in Broughty Ferry.

Steell was consistently fortunate during his career. The explosion of demand for bust portraiture, funerary monuments and monumental statues coincided with the start of his career in the early 1830s. The well-documented trend known as ‘statue mania’, which ostensibly started with commemorations of Sir Robert Peel, and reached its zenith with monuments to the Prince Consort, was concurrent with Steell’s most active years as a sculptor. Steell’s early successes generated a kind of momentum in his professional life which carried him into his later years.

An example of this phenomenon was the 1871 Scott Centenary which created an opportunity for him to create a replica of Sir Walter Scott for New York. This project led to a second, related commission for the Burns Monument in New York, which itself engendered three more commissions.
and created the opportunity for his work to be sent to America and New Zealand. Significantly, it was often Scottish expatriates, or Scottish emigrants who commissioned these projects. The Scots who travelled the world to administer the British Empire were eager to possess the work of the Queen’s Sculptor for Scotland.

When considered broadly in terms of style, John Steell was a neoclassical sculptor. He had studied the antique carefully, and his first major success reflected his own endorsement of his education, which emphasised the legacy of Winckelmann, Reynolds, Thorvaldsen and Gibson. However, the British context for neoclassicism had always been moderate, and balanced with naturalism. It was naturalism especially, which informed the most influential Scottish artists of the generations immediately prior to Steell: Allan Ramsay, Alexander Nasmyth, David Allan, Sir Henry Raeburn and David Wilkie.

Steell had several models for his career, one of the most significant being Samuel Joseph, who markedly combined meticulously observed and described idiosyncratic detail in his portrait busts, and Sir Francis Chantrey, who successfully combined naturalism and contemporary dress with a generalised classicism to create a commercially viable compromise. This was the moderate monumental style which Steell employed to great effect and approbation. Thorvaldsen and Gibson were world-class celebrities, and their work was in great demand within Britain. That Steell managed to build a successful career by carefully combining neoclassical general effect with contemporary dress and specific portraiture and accoutrement was a significant achievement. He had as his local models the work of Thomas
Campbell and Laurence Macdonald. Additionally, the work of mason-sculptors such as Robert Forrest, James Thom and John Greenshields had been extremely popular in Scotland, and featured direct, specific details in sculpture, which Steell would later employ, though he would always present an overall general, classical effect within his compositions.

This thesis has consistently emphasised the moderate nature of Steell's style. If a given work was classical in general effect, there was also specific naturalistic detail. If a work employed historical or contemporary dress, the portrait element would often display classical idealisation. If there were to be one feature of Steell's work that was particularly neoclassical, it might be said to be the depiction of the eyes. Steell never inscribed the eyes of his portraits or statues. With the exception of this feature, he was also capable of explicit verisimilitude, as evidenced by the particular, contemporary nature of the votive figures in his design for the Consort Memorial. John Steell never clung dogmatically to his sculptural style. Whether work was largely neoclassical or naturalistic, it was always moderately so.

John Steell was an academic sculptor. His autograph work was executed in clay by his own hand, then cast by artisans in plaster and bronze. Works in marble would be scaled up from an original model by stone masons. We do not know to what extent Steell finished his own statues, but it is clear that during his career, the issues of authenticity and direct-working which would emerge after Rodin, were absent from his aesthetic framework. His conception of sculptural integrity was epitomised by his refusal to let anyone touch his clay models. Likewise, his atelier never approached the factory-like proportions of Thorvaldsen or Chantrey. At most, he hired
between five and ten assistants, though in the absence of direct evidence, we can never be sure (with the exception of the Queen Victoria project,) how many worked for him and what they did.

John Steell responded to the markets which were open to him by providing monuments, bust portraiture, architectural reliefs, funerary monuments, and to a lesser extent, statuettes. These were the major areas of sculptural work available to a Victorian sculptor. In Scotland (as elsewhere in Great Britain) portrait busts were the most popular genre of sculpture during his career. His greatest number of surviving works are naturally portraits. Steell had particular success in creating major monuments; this in itself was a great achievement given the political manoeuvring, vagaries of committees and huge expense involved in these major public works.

John Steell seems to have been continually occupied with the advancement of Scottish sculpture. The creation of the Grove Foundry was perhaps his single most tangible contribution to the arts in Scotland. His efforts, as recognised in his 1876 testimonial, extended to his career, which from an early age he determined to pursue in Scotland. Chapter Eleven carefully set his activities in the context of Unionist-Nationalism, and suggested that Steell wished for a distinct Scottish school of sculpture, both independent from and equal to the conditions of sculptors in England. This idea would be perpetuated by Pittendrigh MacGillivray, who succeeded Steell in the office of Sculptor for Scotland in 1921.

Prior to Steell's retirement, the practice of sculpture in Britain had slowly undergone crucial changes. Perennially seen as a severe, austere, monolithic and limited form of art, the radical revolutions and ardent
philosophical debates that had occupied painters of the nineteenth century had largely not been shared in the sculptural world. Working as an academic sculptor in the tradition of Thorvaldsen, Gibson and Chantrey, the New Sculpture was never commented upon by Steell. We have no evidence of his opinion of the emergent style of expression, but Steell obviously appreciated the talents of younger men like Clark Stanton and D.W. Stevenson, as he employed them to execute in a realistic mode the specific figures required for the production of the Consort Memorial.

Steell's greatest achievement and most enduring legacy remains his establishment of an international career from a base in Scotland. Pittendrigh MacGillivray in particular shared this ambition to work from Scotland. Though he travelled in Europe and displayed an energetic, expressive style and surface comparable to that of Rodin, MacGillivray avoided moving to London, and followed Steell's example by seeking to advance the cause of Scottish sculpture from home.

MacGillivray argued for a distinct Scottish school of sculpture in terms much more direct than Steell's. In 1917 he delivered a lecture to the Edinburgh Architectural Association which suggested that the incipient monument projects that would follow the end of the Great War would be of the greatest benefit to the Scottish nation if reserved for exclusive execution by Scottish sculptors. This kind of protectionism was necessary, in view of what he described as "the wretchedly neglected condition of sculpture in Scotland." With regard to a Scottish school of sculpture, MacGillivray noted that with the exception of the Alexander and Bucephalus, there was "not one
piece of ideal sculpture in any outdoor part of Edinburgh, nor any sign yet in the capital of Scotland of anything like a native school of sculptors.”

He further argued that artistically, Edinburgh had become:

...a suburb of London-- Octopus London! That London which so magnetically draws within its gates those throughout the island who have talent, that it is almost held a mark of the second or third-rater for one to remain in his native place and endure in the capital of his country the stigma of being ticketed 'local.'

Steell could well have found himself in a comparable dilemma at the end of his career. In 1889, when donating a bust by Steell of Thomas de Quincey to the National Portrait Gallery in London, William Bell Scott had felt compelled to explain to gallery director Sir George Scharf, who Steell was:

... If you do not know anything of Steell—Scottish artists who do not live in London being little known out of Edinburgh, perhaps you may think him an amateur. He is an artist of 80 years of age, amply exhibited in the streets and squares of the northern capital.

If this was in fact the case, then it could be seen that Steell’s vision of a Scottish school had failed. It could also be suggested that Fiona Pearson’s assertion was correct: Steell had encompassed the entire Scottish school himself. When he died, the school died with him. However, if we accept the fact that the next generation of Scottish sculptors, including Stevenson, Hutchison, Stanton, Burnett and MacGillivray all enjoyed active careers within Scotland, then perhaps it was true that a Scottish school was still possible; MacGillivray’s 1917 comments were meant as polemic. Steell had never described a specific detailed plan for an actual coherent school, but merely the conditions that would allow Scottish sculptors to practice their art at home. In view of the active careers of MacGillivray (1856-1938), Pilkington Jackson (1887-1973), Alexander Carrick (1882-1966) and Phyllis
Bone (1896-1972), it could be seen that Steell’s ambitions for a healthy native body of Scottish sculptors was in a sense realised.

Given his advocacy of native talent, one of the greatest conundrums of Steell’s career is that regardless of his stated ambitions for the improvement of Scottish sculpture, there is no evidence that he ever trained students in his studio. Virtually all of the younger Scottish sculptors of the era, including D.W. Stevenson, T.S. Burnett, Alexander Rhind, George MacCallum and Pittendrigh MacGillivray trained under William Brodie. George Lawson, John Rhind and Alexander Munro all studied for various periods under Alexander Handyside Ritchie. There was only a single instance where the press mentioned Steell having a student, and this was erroneous.

Though not in keeping with our understanding of Steell’s character, it could be that he had no desire, or perhaps, no time to teach. It would seem that he had no students amongst the subsequent generation of Scottish sculptors. No younger artist ever claimed Steell as a teacher, and presumably any ambitious sculptor would have been quick to claim Queen Victoria’s Sculptor for Scotland as his mentor. Could it be that Steell’s inherent modesty kept him from taking on students? Perhaps his perfectionist tendencies meant that he preferred only to direct skilled workmen? Could it be that younger men were unwilling to take instruction from a sculptor whose style they felt was outmoded? The lack of evidence of any students is quite out of keeping with the studio practice of the day; Steell clearly valued artistic education, as evidenced by his continued efforts with the Trustees’ Academy, and the Edinburgh School of Arts. It may be that
this discrepancy regarding Steell's ambitions for Scottish sculpture will only be resolved through the discovery of further evidence.

John Steell remains the most significant neglected Scottish sculptor of his generation. Even today, within Edinburgh, Steell's work surrounds us, but like a great deal of Victorian public art, it has suffered the ignominy of becoming invisible. Very few are acquainted with the subjects of the monuments, let alone the sculptor who created them. An even smaller minority are aware that the multitude of statues represent the work of one artist.

This state of affairs is perhaps unavoidable, given the progression of time. However, the importance of the monuments remains in their historic value. They were and are particularly strong indicators of the values of the people who paid for them. They were incredibly expensive. They were the result of protracted discussions and negotiations. They reflect the aesthetics and politics, as well as the technical abilities of the nation.

Steell's major monuments stand as a dual reflection of both the heroes of the era, and the conditions of commemoration in Victorian Scotland. These works display a continuity of style shared with Britain and Europe, an example being the Sir Walter Scott; a native depiction of an international figure. Other works, such as the Queen Victoria, Wellington, and Prince Consort groups, share commemorative functions of other monuments outside Scotland, but within cultural and stylistic criteria that was seen abroad as well. Steell's monumental work, in its essentially moderate nature, is simultaneously and quintessentially British and Scottish.
These works clearly valorise and romanticise their subjects. Steell did not aspire to an unorthodox depiction, but consistently provided an iconic view of the hero. His depictions of the celebrated leaders were never debated with regard to the propriety of the style of depiction, or the propriety of the commemoration. All of his monuments were of popular figures, be they local, national or international. It was this essentially conservative, orthodox mode of work which was challenged by younger men. Given the conservative nature of sculpture in general, and public monuments in particular, Steell’s moderate style ensured success during his lifetime, but also contributed to its current anonymity.

In 1827, when John Steell first took up the challenge of attempting a sculptural career in Scotland, the general outlook for the profession was fairly bleak. There was a paucity of demand for sculpture. There was little in the way of financial incentive or native patronage. What training there was existed in generalised courses aimed towards painters, or at the most, carvers and stone masons. The few projects for public monuments were largely awarded to foreign artists. Opportunities to exhibit were also few, and the capital necessary to execute sculpture on a meaningful scale was virtually unattainable for anyone of the artisan class.

John Steell managed to overcome all of these obstacles through his own talent, ambition, luck, hard work and commitment to become the premier Scottish sculptor of his generation. He left a valuable legacy to the next generation of Scottish artists who chose to remain in Scotland. He never became financially wealthy through his art, but he seems to have achieved an even greater and rarer reward: while achieving great eminence,
Fig. 365. Revd. J.S. Memes, Hill & Adamson calotype, c. 1843-47.
Photo: National Galleries of Scotland.
he was consistently regarded as a modest, popular and respected public figure. As Revd. J.S. Memes, HRSA, (Fig. 365) wrote to him in an open letter in 1838: "I have made the history and the principles of art the study of many years. This has led me to converse much with artists, and a deeper and nobler enthusiasm that yours—a more simple or manlier perception of art—a more steady or sincere devotion in the pursuit of excellence—it has never been my chance to meet."
Notes

Abbreviations:
DNB: Dictionary of National Biography
EPL: Edinburgh Public Library
EUL: Edinburgh University Library
f.: folio
Ibid.: Ibidem; in the same place
p.: page
pp.: pages
MSS: Manuscript
NAS: National Archives of Scotland
NGS: National Gallery of Scotland
NLS: National Library of Scotland
QVJ: Queen Victoria's Journal
RA: Royal Archives
RAPFAS: Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland
RIEFAS: Royal Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland
RSA: Royal Scottish Academy
SNPG: Scottish National Portrait Gallery
SRO: Scottish Record Office

2 WOODWARD PhD, 1979, p. 106.
3 The Art Journal, 1881, p. 72
4 The Academy, 26 September 1891, p. 270
5 The Portfolio, 1891 p xxii. Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm (1834-1890) was a leading British sculptor in the style of Realism.
7 PEARSON, Virtue and Vision, 1991, p. 73
8 NLS MS.FB.m.55
9 Edinburgh University Library.
10 National Archives of Scotland (NAS) SC70/4/502. William Steell's trustees were his wife and two daughters; it is likely that his wishes were followed.
11 The flyleaf reads "Gershom Steell's scrapbook."
12 This is the number of letters catalogued under Steell's name. Other uncatalogued items continually emerge in collections of papers of Steell's associates.
13 Buccleuch was a member of the Scott, Wellington, Wilson and Chalmers committees; he was the Chairman of the Melville and Consort committees.
14 NAS CS231
15 Catalogued under the classification NG1.
16 NAS NG2/2/22
17 Steell also carved the building's eight sphinxes.
18 NAS NG1/41/18/6; NG1/41/18/7
19 NAS NG3/4/14
20 NAS NG4/1/1; NG4/1/2
21 Mitchell Library, Stirling-Maxwell Papers, T-SK 29/25
22 Ibid. T-SK 29/74
23 Mitchell Library, TD1/459
24 Ibid.
These are the portrait busts of William Sinclair and Thomas Guthrie; See Catalogue Raisonné.

Letters are catalogued under the sculptor’s name.

Royal Archives, Queen Victoria’s Journal (QVJ). See also Catalogue Raisonné.

Minute books are catalogued Acc 326.

EUL Special collections: LA11 509 ff1522, 1524, 1526, 1528

Catalogued as: CHA4.215.14; CHA7.2.11; CHA4.320.32; CHA4.320.34; CHA4.330.56; CM/5113

British Museum, MSS Add40509 f.80; Add28512 ff148

EPL Edinburgh Room YPR5339

EPL Edinburgh Room YDA 1968 W45

EPL Edinburgh Room YDA2302[B26948]


An exception is the pamphlet explaining his proposals for the Prince Consort memorial.


Ibid., p. 242.


VICTORIA, p. 328.


ANDERSON, p. 608.


WITTkOWER, p. 231.


Mackay is generally accepted as the foremost biographer of Burns, but as of this writing, (2002) issues have arisen regarding plagiarism.

NLS Acc 351

CANT, p. 17.

SMITH p. 104-106.

Steell was a Commissioner of the Board of Trustees from 1849 to 1891. He was elected to the Royal Scottish Academy in 1829 and served on the Council periodically until 1875.


Ibid. p. 124.

Issue No. 6, 1984.

The Scotsman obituary mentions success with Italian friends and instructors, but does not give names.

The Scotsman, 16 September 1891, p. 7.


Gunnis, p. 370.

See Chapter Eleven.

WOODWARD PhD, 1979, p. 86.

The Portfolio, 1891 p. xxii.

The Scotsman, 19 March 1904, p. 4

Royal Archives, Queen Victoria’s Journal, 6 January 1838.

BURNETT, 1984, Journal of the Heraldry Society of Scotland, No. 6, 1984, p. 20. Pearson has the move to Edinburgh in 1807, based on Woodward’s dictionary entry. However, Woodward’s accounts within her dictionary differ: the entry for Steell Sr. has the move in 1807, while the entry for Steell Jr. has the move in 1805. Burnett’s account, based on the Aberdeen merchant’s records and the Post Office Directory, is probably most accurate.

Ibid.

Ibid. Sequestration papers give the address as “Eldin Street.”

304
71 The Scotsman, 16 September 1891, p. 7
72 The Dictionary of National Biography and Woodward have Steell studying under Graham, as do Thomson and Smailes in 1997. However, by the time of her 1991 article on the Statue Gallery, Smailes correctly has Steell under Andrew Wilson.
73 NAS NG1/1/34, p. 7.
74 NAS NG 1/1/34, p. 15.
75 Ibid., p. 21.
76 BURNETT, 1984, p. 21. Study of the sederunt books show that their debts were not cleared until 1826. Steell Sr. may have managed to make arrangements which allowed him to trade before his debts were paid.
78 An account of the Trustees Academy curriculum near the time of Steell’s attendance may be found in Lindsay Errington’s Master Class: Robert Scott Lauder and his Pupils (Edinburgh, 1983). Lauder attended the Academy under Andrew Wilson in 1822.
79 NAS NG2/2/22
81 Steell’s 1824 petition states, “...it would...be of great advantage...if your Honours would grant him the priviledge [sic] of...Drawing and Modeling [sic] from the casts.” (NAS NG2/2/22)
85 NAS NG2/2/29: Catalogue of Books for use by Drawing Academy Classes (1838-1894).
86 Dr. Joe Rock is preparing an article on Steell Sr. which examines the bankruptcy in detail.
87 NAS CS.96 415/1 p. 48.
88 NAS CS.96 415/1: “Account of Losses made up and exhibited by Mr Steele Loss sustained by publishing eight portraits: £163 Mr _____ having been done twice £30; Inglis £10; Braidwood £20; Gilon £28; Hope £10; L.H.Moncrieff £40; Luke Fraser £25...”
90 Proceedings began 28 July 1819.
91 The Society of the Incorporated Trades of Calton were the main creditors. Steell’s total debt was £7835.18/8d.
92 Report of meeting of 1 Feb. 1826: SRO CS.96 415/2, p. 21
93 NAS CS.96 415/1
94 William Burn (1789-1870) was a successful Edinburgh architect. After receiving training from his father Robert, (the designer of Nelson’s Monument on Edinburgh’s Calton Hill) he joined the firm of Robert Smirke, before starting his own practice and designing such buildings as the Customs Office, Greenock and the Church of St. John.
95 During the Scott Monument debate on the proper sculptor to depict Scott, George Forbes said that Scott had visited the Steell shop many times, and that John Steell “often watched him in his father’s shop” and “had every advantage but that of actual sitting.” (Edinburgh Evening Courant, 7 April 1838, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 33)
96 This is presumably a misspelling of Bewick’s Birds, or, A History of British Birds by Thomas Bewick (1753-1828). Bewick was an English wood engraver, who published many books on British wildlife. Bewick’s Birds was a popular reference volume for artists; Robert Scott, the engraver and father of David and William Bell Scott reportedly owned a copy. (See BRYDALL 1899, p. 204)
97 This is presumably a misspelling of John Henning (1771-1851), a Scottish sculptor whose miniature plaster copies of the Parthenon friezes and Elgin Marbles were extremely popular. See GUNNIS, Rupert, Dictionary of British Sculptors, 1660-1851, p. 197
98 NAS CS.96 415/2, p. 23.
99 NAS NG2/2/22.
100 BURNETT, p. 21.
101 THOMSON and Smailes, The Queen’s Image, p. 124.
The earliest work attributable to him is a painted plaster figure of a dog, signed and dated "J. Steell 1821" held in 1972 by the antique dealers Biggs of Maidenhead. (Courtauld Institute, Conway Library Steell files) However, it could also be the work of Steell's father. Woodward suggested that Steell did not model in clay or carve in stone until the late 1820s, noting that his bust of J. Robison, Esq. displayed at the 1828 RIEFAS exhibition was cited as "among his first attempts at clay." (WOODWARD PhD, p. 86) Despite this, Steell's petition to re-enter the Trustees' Academy in 1824 was accompanied by a "Model of a Head from the life." (See Chapter Two, p. 42.)

The Steells also traded in furniture; a table with a Steell trade label was discovered in San Francisco in 1982.

See Catalogue Raisonné.


WOODWARD PhD, 1979, p. 85


This description is from the Edinburgh Literary Journal, 28 February 1829, p. 224

Freestone is a type of sandstone found in the Lothians.


NAS NG1/2/7, 29 January 1828.


See CROUZET, François, The Victorian Economy, London, 1982, pp. 48-54. Contributing factors included: the opening of European markets due to the end of the Napoleonic wars; economic recession in the late 1820s leading to an upward cycle in 1830s; the creation of the Art Union in 1833 witnessing an increase in public awareness of the fine arts.

FORBES PhD, 1996, p. 29.

Ibid. p. 89.

Samuel Smiles's 1859 book Self-Help was a best-seller, and exemplified the Victorian enthusiasm for self-improvement. Self-Help includes anecdotes of the lives of the English sculptors John Flaxman, John Gibson and Francis Chantrey, as well as Scottish artists David Wilkie, Noel Paton and the Scott Monument architect George Meikle Kemp.


MORTON, 1999, p. 64

MORTON, 1999, p. 97.

For a full list of membership, see NAS NG3/1/1, pp. 17-21.


NAS NG3/7/5/2, RIEFAS Annual Report, 10 January 1827.

Letter from John Elder to Lord Advocate, 6 December 1826, printed in 1st Report of Council of the Scottish Academy, Edinburgh 1828, p. 28.

RSA Council Minutes, 11 June 1829, p. 187, RSA Archives.

RSA Council Minutes, 27 October 1830, pp. 325-6, RSA Archives.

RSA Cash Book #1, p. 58. Henry Westmacott was the brother of Sir Richard Westmacott.


NAS NG2/3/1/2; Campbell to George Thompson, 31 March 1821.

NAS NG2/3/1/5, 19 October 1822.

NAS NG2/3/1/4


Ibid.

CEDC Monuments Catalogue, Vol. I.

Maconochie was instrumental in arranging Chantrey's execution of the statues for Parliament Hall and George Street, Edinburgh. See YARRINGTON, Alison, et. al.; An

139 See Ibid. p. 42.
140 YARRINGTON 1994, p. 46.
141 Ibid. p. 135.
142 The Scotsman, 28 September 1833, p. 3.
146 Ibid. p. 18.
147 Ibid. p. 22.
148 Presumably, Chantrey offered Steell a position as a studio assistant.
149 The Scotsman, 19 November 1851 (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p. 77)
151 Ibid.
152 Edinburgh Phrenological Society Minute Book, p. 161. Edinburgh University Library Special Collections Gen 608/2 and 608/3
153 See Catalogue Raisonné.
154 The Scotsman, 20 August 1874. MS.FB.m.55, Vol. III, p. 44
156 Edinburgh Literary Journal, 1830, pp. 93, 229, 363.
157 CLEGHORN, 1837, p. 241.
158 Greensields and Thom served apprenticeships; Forrest attended the School of Arts, received private tuition in modelling, and attended Warren’s academy in Glasgow, studying anatomy, drawing and modelling in 1825/6.
159 Edinburgh Literary Journal, 21 February 1829, p. 199.
160 The Scotsman, 7 February 1829, p. 87.
164 Ibid. p. 90.
166 MALDEN, John, John Henning 1771-1851: “a very ingenious Modeller”; Paisley, 1977, p. 3
169 REYNOLDS, 1975, Discourse III, p. 44
170 Ibid., Discourse X, p. 176
172 Fuseli was elected twice as Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy: from 1799 to 1805, and from 1810 to 1825.
173 POTTS, 1994, p. 13
174 Allan stated in his dedication for the 1788 Foulis press edition of Allan Ramsay’s poem The Gentle Shepherd, that his illustrations were authentic, and copied directly from the locations where Ramsay had composed his verses. (See MACMILLAN, Duncan, Scottish Art 1460-1990, p. 131.)
175 BELL, Charles, Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting, Edinburgh, 1806, p. 18
176 BELL, 1806, p. 88
The 1849 edition of Reid’s *Works*, (Edinburgh) includes a 1790 letter from Reid to Alison regarding Alison’s essays. See also, MACMILLAN, Duncan, *Scottish Art 1460-1990*, Edinburgh, 1990, pp. 154-7.


FLAXMAN, John, *Lectures on Sculpture*, London, 1838, p. 74


172 FLAXMAN 1838, p. 184.
173 FLAXMAN, 1838, p. 183.
174 FLAXMAN, 1838, p. 206.
175 FLAXMAN, 1838, p. 235.
176 FLAXMAN, 1838, p. 165.
177 FLAXMAN, 1838, p. 168.
179 FLAXMAN, 1838, p. vii
180 Cunningham mentioned Joseph along with William Behnes (1795-1864) and William Scoular (d.1854) as “most hopeful” young sculptors. (Quarterly Review, Vol. XXXIV, p. 133)
183 Ibid. p. 132.
184 Ibid. p. 135
185 Ibid. p. 132
186 Ibid.
187 PARLIAMENTARY Papers, Select Committee Reports(1841), p. 437. See also,
189 Ibid.
195 The only other significant rearing horse in Europe was the 1634-40 equestrian statue of Phillip IV in Madrid by Pietro Tacca (1577-1640).
198 This was a cast of Canova’s *Venus* for Thomas Hope. See above, pp. 56-57.
199 Thorvaldsen was introduced to Edinburgh audiences via the December 1818 article in Blackwood’s *Edinburgh Magazine*, “Sketch of the Life of Albert Thorvaldsen.” Blackwood’s *Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. IV, December 1818, p. 336.
202 Ibid. p. 53.
203 Ibid., pp. 50-51.
204 SCOTT, W.B., 1845, p. 52.
205 EASTLAKE, 1870, p. 55.
Ibid. p. 42.


MACGILLIVRAY, "Sculpture, Nationality and War Memorials" Fine Art Department, Edinburgh Central Public Library; NB 479 M14 X65516


WOODWARD PhD, 1979, p. 87

The Edinburgh Literary Journal of April 1830 mentioned "a small model of Hebe...a boy fishing...and a small model of Daniel in the Lion's Den." (NLS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.1.)

The 1882 Art Journal reported that he had gone to Rome in 1829, returning in 1832.

WOODWARD PhD, 1979, p. 87

NLS F.B.m.55, Vol. I, p.1

Strathclyde University, Andersonian Library Special Collections.

Dundee Advertiser, 17 September 1891. It is unknown whether the paper was speaking figuratively or literally.

EASTLAKE 1870, pp. 90-91.


The Scotsman, 5 March 1836, p. 3

NLS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.23

See Catalogue Raisonné.

Steell's studio address is given in RSA exhibition catalogues. (DE LAPERRIERE, 1991, p. 237)

While Steell was modelling the group in clay, it was destroyed twice before he could cast it in plaster. For the need of patronage to cast in durable material, see READ, 1982, pp. 56-59.


The drapery was never criticised as a clumsy solution to the structural problem, but Steell resolved the issue much more elegantly in the Wellington statue.


Ibid. p. 66.

Steell's marble sculpture ranges from a customarily matte finish, to an occasional low polish. He rarely gave his work a high polish, in the style of Canova.

Thomas Campbell had combined a horse and figure in his 1824-34 Hopetoun Monument, which Steell probably knew; Steell was the first to employ a rearing equestrian form.


WINCKELMANN, Johann Joachim(G.H. Lodge, trans.) History of Ancient Art, London, 1850, p. 183

Ibid., pp. 181-2

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.1

Mentioned are a Hebe, and a Samson in Prison. These works do not seem to have survived.

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.1. In 1831, he had again moved his studio, this time to 40 Northumberland Street.

The Scotsman, 21 January 1832, p. 3

The exhibited works were Grigor Urquhart's full-scale copy of Raphael's Transfiguration; Laurence Macdonald's Ajax and Patroclus, and Thomas Cambell's Hopetoun Monument.

NAS NG 3/1/1, Royal Institution Minute Book, pp. 262-278.

As an additional benefit, the Board furnished their rooms free of charge.

The editors of the Scotsman and Caledonian Mercury fought over the latter organ's opinion of Macdonald's talent. (SMAILES, Virtue and Vision, 1991, note. 17, p. 69)

SMAILES, Virtue and Vision, 1991, p. 67. Helen Smailes suggested that Steell was emulating Laurence Macdonald's October 1829 Royal Institution Exhibition of Ajax and Patroclus, which garnered a huge amount of publicity for the sculptor.

NAS NG3/4/14/11
Alexander Maconochie (1777-1861) was the son of the respected judge and politician Allan Maconochie (also Lord Meadowbank, 1748-1816). He took his seat on the Scottish Bench as Lord Meadowbank on 1 July 1819. He was a Commissioner of the Board of Manufactures, and Vice-President of the Royal Institution—both positions which led him to encounter many issues regarding arts, art education, and the edification of the public.

NAS NG3/4/14/12
NAS NG/3/4/14/14. Meadowbank wrote to Cameron on July 26, regretting the group could not remain longer.

The Caledonian Mercury, 20 May 1833. (NLS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.7)

WOODWARD PhD, 1979, p 78.

Ibid.

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.23

Ibid.

These were a version of the Wise and Foolish Virgins for the Standard Life building in Dublin, and the tympanum of the Bank of Montreal. He also made a small relief for the Jeffrey tomb in Dean Cemetery. See Catalogue Raisonné.

See Catalogue Raisonné. The locations of the Macnee painting and the Scott and Dyce drawings of the group are unknown.


LEIDTKE, Walter, The Royal Horse and Rider, New York, 1989, p.42. Leidtke observed that in 16th and 17th century art, the horse was often the symbol of the people.


Ibid.

Ibid.

As an example of the work's enduring reputation, the Trustees Academy added casts of the reliefs to their collection in 1837. Thorwaldsen was one of very few contemporary sculptors included in the collection.

The Scotsman, 14 March 1888, p. 6.


The main effect of the Scottish Reform Act, passed in 1832, was the expansion of the electorate from 4500 people to 65,000. (SMOUT, T.C., A Century of the Scottish People, London, 1986, p. 233) The Act specified that any man owning property worth at least £10 per year was entitled to vote.

COCKBURN, Henry, Journal of Henry Cockburn, Edinburgh, 1874, Vol. I, p. 31. Henry Cockburn(1779-1854) was a Scottish judge and eminent Whig. He was an intimate friend of Thomas Thomson (1768-1852) and Francis Jeffrey(1773-1850), both of whom were also patrons, clients and supporters of Steell. A vocal advocate of good design and architecture, he is well remembered by his Letter to the Lord Provost on the Best Ways of Spoiling the Beauty of Edinburgh, as well as the Memorials Of His Time.

Register of Qualified Voters, Edinburgh Central Public Library, Edinburgh Room, YJF 1043.832 [42927]

This purported duty of sculpture was posited by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and later by John Ruskin, who held that the moral status of a society could be determined by the state of its sculpture.

Edinburgh newspapers such as the Caledonian Mercury and the Scotsman often lamented the lack of patronage for ideal works. Steell's largest market was for portraiture.

NAS NG1/1/36, p. 292, 19 February 1833.
The project was still afoot in 1838, being mentioned in a public meeting by Dr. Hope. (Edinburgh Evening Courant, 7 April 1838; NLS MS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 33)

See Chapter Three, pp. 63-64. The earliest published record of the anecdote appears in clippings in the Steell scrapbooks in items from the Edinburgh Courant and Dundee Advertiser from 1863, but it is likely that the story was common knowledge before this.

Edinburgh Observer, 1 November 1833 (NLS MS.FB.m.55 Vol. I, p.23)

Edinburgh Evening Post 15 November 1833 (NLS MS.FB.m.55, vol. I, p.23)

Edinburgh Town Council Minutes, Edinburgh City Archives, SL1/1/331, p. 344.

The group was moved to its present site in front of City Chambers on the High Street in 1916 to make way for Pittendrigh Macgillivray’s Gladstone Monument, which was itself shifted to Coates Crescent in 1955.

The Scotsman, 19 April 1884, p.10

Edinburgh Evening Courant, 7 April 1838, (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 33)


This building is now known as the Royal Scottish Academy.

NAS NG 1/3/25

Royal Scottish Academy Library files: Steell mentioned the Minerva in a letter to the RSA in 1863: “I beg to explain that it was completely out of my power to exhibit any Works at that time...as the whole of my time and thought was unavoidably occupied modelling a colossal Statue of Minerva, twenty feet in height, afterwards substituted by the smaller Colossal Statue of the Queen erected on the Royal Institution.”

GORDON, 1976, p. 77. Gordon’s book also published a signed Playfair drawing of his redesign, dated 10 August 1832 showing a seated female figure with a fascii and lion, presumably Minerva.

An addenda to Playfair’s 21 March 1837 letter to Steell reads: “Contract. Royal Institution, Statue of the Queen.”

Esme Gordon suggested that the sphinxes were “fashionable as a result of Napoleon’s Egyptian exploits.” (GORDON, 1976, p. 75.)

NAS NG1/41/19/11

NAS NG1/2/9, p. 20.

NAS NG1/41/18/4 (2).

NAS NG1/2/9 p. 28.

NLS MS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.24

Ibid., p.25

NAS NG1/2/9, p. 38.

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 39

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 40

Royal Archives, Windsor, Queen Victoria’s Journal (QVJ), 11 January 1838

Ibid., 19 July 1838

Ibid., 8 August 1838

NAS NG1/2/9 p. 110

NAS NG1/41/18/6, Letter from Steell to George Thomson, Trustees Office, Board of Manufactures & Fisheries.

NAS NG1/2/9, p. 112.

GORDON, 1976, p. 77.

See Catalogue Raisonné

National Gallery of Scotland Library, 8EDI


Henry Weekes (1807-1877) executed the first bust in late 1837.

NAS NG 1/2/9, p. 246

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. III, p. 58

Following quotes are all from NAS NG1/41/19/11.


READ, 1982, pp. 49-52.

READ, 1982, p. 369.
The Thistle Regalia would have been a particularly evocative symbol of Scottish national identity in light of the rediscovery of the Scottish Regalia in 1818 by Sir Walter Scott. (For more on the importance of this event, see SMILES, Helen, Andrezu Geddes 1783-1844 'A Man of Pure Taste', Edinburgh, 2001, Chapter Six)

An exception is the 1872 Monument to the 42nd Highland Regiment, which is a relief composed of several sections of marble.

Baily wanted one block (from the Duke of Buccleuch's quarry at Granton), but the shipping company would not transport it at 20 tons; two ten-ton shipments were made. (BLACKWOOD, John, London's Immortals, London 1989, p. 252)

Subscriptions were received from Russia, Holland, India, Africa, Australia, the U.S.A. and Canada, among other locales. (Scott Monument Committee minutebook, Edinburgh City Archives, Acc 326, Vol. I, pp. 26-53)

Steell never executed a major monument for Glasgow.

At the time, there were three versions of the bust, which was first modelled in 1820. The version which Steell studied was dated 1828. See YARRINGTON: "An Edition of the Ledger of Sir Francis Chantrey, R.A., at the Royal Academy, 1809-1841", Fifty-sixth volume of the Walpole Society, Leeds, 1994, p.136. Chantrey wrote to Sir Robert Peel: "The bust was pirated by Italians; and England and Scotland, and even the colonies, were supplied with unpermitted and bad casts to the extent of thousands..." (NL5 MS. 3653, f. 209)

FEEL, George (ed.) The Private Letters of Sir Robert Peel, London, 1920, p. 246. The Steell bust that Peel refers to was an 1842 portrait of the statesman George Canning (1770-1827). This bust is listed in the sale catalogue of the Peel Heirlooms sold on 6 and 7 December 1917. Its current location is unknown.


Edinburgh Literary Journal, 21 February 1829, p. 199.


One account is John Prebble's The King's Jaunt. The irony was that the Highland Gaelic culture celebrated as essentially Scottish by Scott in Edinburgh would be wiped out by land use policy and the Highland Clearances.
The first general meeting was 5 October 1832, and assigned 101 citizens to the General Committee.

George IV for Edinburgh.

Scott Monument Committee Minute Books, Edinburgh City Archives, Acc 326, p. 27. The subcommittee of 11 Feb. 1835 decided: “their future deliberations should be limited to the alternatives of a Gothic Cross, and an Obelisk.”

Edinburgh City Archives, Acc 326, Vol. I, p. 55

Opinions were sought from such luminaries as David Wilkie, William Playfair and William Allan.


Kemp had worked for Burn earlier in his career.

Cadell’s main objection was that Burn was not an expert in Gothic architecture.

Parentheses indicate marginal addenda in pencil in the minute book: the counts of each motion vote.

Eminent sculptors often received commissions directly from committees, and were reluctant to enter open competitions. See Chapter Ten, pp. 230-31.


CADELL, Robert, *Letter to the Duke of Hamilton*

Ibid. p. 12

Ibid. pp. 12-13

BROWN, Thomas, *Observations on a Letter to the Duke of Hamilton by Mr Robert Cadell Respecting the Scott Monument*, March 17 1838, p. 6 (NLS MS.FB.m.55 p. 28)

Speech of Lord Meadowbank, 28 March, 1838 Edinburgh Public Library, Edinburgh Room YPR 5339 [42286.5]

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.26

There was no minuted discussion regarding the nationality of the artists involved. However, the members did look close to home in their consultations regarding the monument.

Edinburgh Evening Courant, 7 April, 1838, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.34

NLS MS.FB.m.55 Vol. I, p.58

By following the news items reporting the receipt of stone and the completion of the Queen Victoria, (1844) Professor Blaikie, (1844) and Sir Walter Scott (1846), it seems that Steell averaged about eighteen months to execute a major work in stone.

Funeral Oration on Smith by W. Hunter, 1867, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. III, p.58

“Academic” sculptural practise refers to the European academy method of production: the sculptor would create autograph work in clay, then hand the clay over to artisans for finishing in plaster, bronze and marble.


Edinburgh Evening Post, 10 June 1846. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.64)

Caledonian Mercury, 17 August 1846. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.67)

Memes had written several books on art, including *History of Sculpture, Painting and Architecture* (Edinburgh, 1829) and *Memoirs of Antonio Canova* (Edinburgh, 1825). He was elected as an honorary member of the Scottish Academy in 1833.


Caledonian Mercury, 17 August 1846. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.67)

NLS MS.FB.m.55, p. 54

Edinburgh Advertiser, 19 August 1851. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p.4)

Ibid.

Steell's funerary monuments are customarily profile portraits of the deceased in stone or bronze, incorporated into the design of the memorial.

Steell displayed only portraiture in RSA exhibitions, except for the St. Andrew in 1827; "Cribb, modelled for His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch" (this was most likely a sculpture of a dog or a horse) and the Boy Fishing in 1836; and the marble reduction of the Scott Monument statue in 1865.


Strathclyde Regional Archive, Mitchell Library T-SK29/26/297

NLS MS 3109, f. 134. Letter from Steell's secretary to a Miss Hutchison.

BAKER, 2000, p. 25.


See Catalogue Raisonné for surviving editions.

Between 1831, the year of his earliest surviving bust, and 1891, Steell executed at least sixty busts.

Royal Scottish Academy Library, John Steell file.

Following the Union of 1707, the governing of Scotland was greatly vested in the office of the Lord Advocate. In the vacuum created by the absence of a parliament, the law lords held a great deal of influence and power in Scottish politics and civic life.

See Chapter Four, pp. 105-6; Chapter Six, pp. 148-9.

For example, a Board of Manufactures Commissioners meeting of 28 August 1850 had Buccleuch, Lord Hope, Lord Cockburn, Lord Meadowbank, Lord Boyle, Duncan McNeill and Steell in attendance.

The Faculty of Advocates holds ten paintings by Raeburn.

She consulted with the sculptor while choosing monuments to the 8th Earl of Leven and family in the church at Monimail.

Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, Baronet, (1818-1878) was a politician and historian. He travelled in Spain and the Levant, publishing *The Annals of the Artists of Spain* in 1848. Maxwell is now credited as a pioneer in the study of Spanish art and architecture in Britain. He organised the 1871 Scott Centenary loan exhibition in Edinburgh.

Strathclyde Regional Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Stirling Maxwell Papers, T-SK 29/74/1

Ibid. T-SK 29/26/294

Ibid. T-SK 29/31/105 The letter's text, and details of the project are given in Chapter Ten, p. 250.

NLS Acc 9714, f.5

Andrew Rutherfurd (1791-1854) was a Scottish judge. While he was primarily the patron of the English sculptor William Theed (1804-1891), Steell executed most of the local work for the family. He died 13 December 1854 and was buried in the pyramidal tomb at Dean Cemetery.

NLS MSS 9715 f. 272.

NLS MSS 9717 f. 53

See Catalogue Raisonné.

NLS MSS 9707 f. 116


*Art Journal*, 1854, p. 351.

The *Edinburgh Evening Post* of 3 January 1835 suggested: "it is not in portraiture...that we must look to Steel, but to those epic compositions, where the mind of man is brought into action and represented so as to waken the sympathies of the heart." (NLS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 26)

Classical antecedents from 5th Century Greece, and the portraiture of Samuel Joseph have been suggested by Woodward as influential. (WOODWARD PhD1979, pp. 100-101.)
The term is derived from busts of Flavius Vespasian and his sons Titus and Domitian, the Flavian emperors of Rome, A.D. 69-96.

See Catalogue Raisonné.


NLS MS Acc 9714.

The Scotsman of 19 March 1877 noted: "...the sculptor, with nothing to go upon but some drawings and daguerreotypes, has not only achieved what friends acknowledge to be a good likeness, but has been remarkably successful in grasping the character of his subject..."

Strathclyde Regional Archive, Mitchell Library, Stirling-Maxwell Papers, T-SK 29/25/387

The Steell scrapbooks contain many early photographs, some negatives of which are known to be the work of Edinburgh photographer Thomas Begbie (1840-1915). James Good Tunny (1820-1887) also provided photographs of Steell's work.

The Scotsman, 20 August 1874. (MS.FB.m.55, Vol. III, p. 44)

WOODWARD PhD 1979, p 106; PEARSON, 1991, p. 76

Brodie's obituary in the Scotsman (31 October 1881, p. 4) credited him with the execution of "between 400 and 500 busts." Ritchie dominated the market for architectural sculpture, providing statuary and reliefs in Edinburgh for the Commercial, Western, and British Linen Banks, and the Life Association of Scotland. He also executed a tympanum for the Commercial Bank, Glasgow, and the carvings of lions and heads of Time, Death and Eternity for Hamilton Mausoleum. This was considerably more architectural work than any Steell ever executed.

The casting and installation of Alexander and Bucephalus in 1883-4 was instigated by the 5th Duke of Buccleuch.

NLS MS Acc 9714

Buccleuch was one of the most significant Scottish art patrons of the era. As Helen Smailes noted, he served as a member of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures in Scotland, Vice-President of the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland, President of the Architectural Society, and President of the Society of Antiquaries. He was an early patron of Steell, but also supported Scottish sculptors Thomas Campbell, Alexander Handyside Ritchie and William Calder Marshall. Buccleuch later served upon organising committees for Edinburgh monuments to Professor John Wilson, 2nd Viscount Melville, the Prince Consort and Dr. Thomas Chalmers. (See SMAILES, Helen, The Burlington Magazine, Vol. CXXIX, 1987, pp. 709-710.)

Buccleuch Muniments, NAS GD 224 511/8

Edinburgh University Library Special Collections, La. II 509

Edinburgh Central Public Library Edinburgh Room, YDA 1968 W45 [T60772]

Westmacott's statue emulated the antique, and was based upon a Dioscuri figure.


NAS GD224/511/8. The Sutherland monument was completed in 1838. It was a collaboration between William Burn and Chantrey, similar to the 1822-28 Melville Column for Edinburgh.


ECPL Edinburgh Room, YDA 1968 W45 [T60772]

Ibid. Unsourced press cutting.

Ibid.

Ibid. f. 27.

Ibid. f. 22.

Ibid. f. 21.

Ibid. f. 28.

Ibid. f. 29.

Ibid. f. 34.
453 Ibid. f. 31
454 Ibid.
455 Ibid. f. 6
456 Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections, La. II 509, f.1522.
457 Ibid. f. 1526
458 Edinburgh Advertiser, 21 January 1842, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 45
460 The Edinburgh Evening Post of 3 January 1835 reported that Steell had sculpted figures of
461 two of Buccleuch’s hunting horses. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.24)
462 Artist’s letters, Buccleuch archives, Bowhill.
463 See Catalogue Raisonné.
464 EUL Special Collections, La.II 509, f.1526
465 See SMAILES, Helen: “Thomas Campbell and the ‘camera lucida’: the Buccleuch statue of
467 See also Catalogue Raisonné.
469 D.O. Hill to Noel Paton, 19 November 1853, NLS MS 9717, f. 149
470 Ibid.
472 Chantrey employed the Bramah Foundry in London to cast his 1833 statue of William
473 Pitt, but was so unsatisfied with the results that he cancelled the contract. The Scotsman of
474 19 November 1851 reported this anecdote, which was addressed to a public meeting by Lord
475 Meadowbank. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p. 77)
476 NAS GD 224/511/13.
477 The Scotsman, 29 June 1875, p. 4.
479 Steell was aware of previous sculptor/founders such as Falconet, Houdon and Chantrey. Information on the process could have been obtained through standard early texts on
480 casting by Cellini, Boffrand and Falconet. While Steell had a theoretical knowledge of the
481 process, he most likely trusted his artisans to execute the work under his superintendence.
482 The Scotsman, 28 July 1849, p.3
483 Ayr Observer, 5 June 1849. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.97)
484 Caledonian Mercury, 31 May 1849 (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 96) and SRO SC70/1/99 p.
485 315.
487 Ibid.
488 CANT, Malcolm, Gorgie and Dalry, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 16
489 Daily Mail, 30 May 1849, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 94
490 The Steell scrapbooks have five accounts of the first pour from the Daily Mail, Scotsman,
491 Edinburgh Evening Post, Caledonian Mercury and Ayr Observer.
492 Ayr Observer, 5 June 1849, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.97
493 There are two invitations in the Blackwood papers, NLS, for pours of the Wilson and
494 Consort memorials. (NLS MS 4193, f. 232 & MS 4325, f. 230)
495 Ayr Observer 5 June 1849, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 97
496 READ 1983, p. 60.
497 Moisture in the mould could cause an explosion when the molten bronze was poured in.
498 The Daily Mail of 30 May 1849 noted the composition of the bronze. Twenty-five years
499 later, the Scotsman of 4 March 1874 reported a casting for the Consort Memorial project which
500 gave the same recipe for Steell’s statuary bronze.
501 See Chapter 10, p. 240.
502 The Scotsman, 19 January 1848. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 84)
504 The Scotsman, 1 May 1850. (NLS.MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p.12)
505 Steell executed a tympanum relief of The Wise and Foolish Virgins in 1839 for Bryce’s
506 Standard Life Assurance Company offices at 3 George Street in Edinburgh. (See Catalogue
507 Raisonné.)
The contemporary Scottish sculptor David Mach (b. 1956) routinely recounts in his lectures that his first memorable experience of sculpture occurred on a school trip to Edinburgh from his native Fife when he was eight years old. Mach states that he was transfixed by Steell's grand depiction of the Iron Duke and Copenhagen in front of Register House. "It was brilliant," he enthuses with typical irreverence to audiences, "you could even see the veins in the horse's cock!" (Interview with the artist, 6 February 2001.)

The Scotsman, 23 October 1850. (NLS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.4.) The article provided no reason for Steell's decision.


See also Catalogue Raisonné. James de Saumarez first sailed in 1770. He received his first command, the Tisiphone in 1781, sailing against the French in the West Indies; his actions at Cadiz in summer 1801 saw his promotion to rear-admiral.

Woodward PhD, 1979, p.28. Woodward uses as an example the 1810 Glasgow commission of Joseph Nollekens (1787-1823) for a monument to General Moore. Nollekins was commissioned on the recommendation of Moore's son; when the sculptor declined, the committee commissioned John Flaxman. In both instances, the sculptor had no previous knowledge that he was being considered.

Illustrated London News, 14 January 1854, p. 28

The Dalhousie committee made it a condition that Steell show the relevant badges and decorations, as well as modern dress.

Robert Saunders Dundas, 2nd Viscount Melville (1771-1851) entered parliament at age 23 in 1794 as M.P. for Hastings. In 1801, he became M.P. for Midlothian, becoming 2nd Viscount in May 1811 upon his father's death. See Catalogue Raisonné.

There were two delays: Steell's clay model was destroyed by frost when he was away from Edinburgh, and the first site in the High Street later proved unsuitable, and delays incurred in securing the site in Melville Crescent. The entire project was completed in 1857.

NAS GD 224/1031/12/18-19

Authorship of the couplet was attributed to Sheriff Gordon, Professor John Wilson's son-in-law. (Scotsman, 18 September, 1891, p. 7)

Cockburn 1874, p. 282.

Edinburgh Courant, 15 May 1852. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p. 18.) See also Catalogue Raisonné.

Unsourced cutting, no date, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p.1

Daily Mail, 30 May 1849. (NLS.MS.FB.m.55, Vol. I, p. 94)

The Standard, 1878; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Fiona Pearson Steell File.

The Building News, Volume 47, 17 October 1884, p. 647

Unsourced cutting, c. April 1889, RSA Library.

Those who endorsed governmental aide to British sculptors included Sir Martin Shee, P.R.A., and W.J. Bankes.

NLS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.46. Steell was the Scottish sculptor; Thomas Kirk (1781-1845), who executed the statue of Sir Sidney Smith, was a Dublin sculptor; Patrick MacDowall, R.A. (1799-1870) who carved the statue of Lord Exmouth, was Irish, but worked in London.

Woodward uses as an example the 1810 Glasgow commission of Joseph Nollekens (1787-1823) for a monument to General Moore. Nollekins was commissioned on the recommendation of Moore's son; when the sculptor declined, the committee commissioned John Flaxman. In both instances, the sculptor had no previous knowledge that he was being considered.

READ 1982, pp. 82-84

Report from Select Committees & Commissioners on Promotion of Fine Arts, pp. 41; 78-9; 86.

Those who endorsed governmental aide to British sculptors included Sir Martin Shee, P.R.A., and W.J. Bankes.

NLS FB.m.55, Vol. I, p.46. Steell was the Scottish sculptor; Thomas Kirk (1781-1845), who executed the statue of Sir Sidney Smith, was a Dublin sculptor; Patrick MacDowall, R.A. (1799-1870) who carved the statue of Lord Exmouth, was Irish, but worked in London.

Woodward uses as an example the 1810 Glasgow commission of Joseph Nollekens (1787-1823) for a monument to General Moore. Nollekins was commissioned on the recommendation of Moore's son; when the sculptor declined, the committee commissioned John Flaxman. In both instances, the sculptor had no previous knowledge that he was being considered.

Illustrated London News, 14 January 1854, p. 28

The Dalhousie committee made it a condition that Steell show the relevant badges and decorations, as well as modern dress.
monuments of Lord Provost Adam Black and Sir James Young Simpson, made by Hutchison and Brodie, respectively.

525 See Catalogue Raisonné.
526 Dalhousie’s (1812 –1860) most prestigious public service began in 1847, when Lord John Russell appointed him Governor General of India. He was sworn in on 12 January 1848, at only 36 years old. See Catalogue Raisonné.
527 Dalhousie was the Chairman of the General Committee.
528 See Catalogue Raisonné.
529 NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p.99
530 Great Britain aggressively annexed both regions under Dalhousie’s administration; as such, their inclusion on the statue was a clear imperial message on Steell’s part.
531 The Scotsman, 9 February 1863, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p.100
532 Sir John Archibald, Lord Murray (1779-1859) was a Scottish judge and reformist Whig. He took the bench as Lord Murray in 1839. In 1848, he was listed in attendance at the first bronze cast at Steell’s Grove Foundry. See Catalogue Raisonné.
533 NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p. 66.
534 MACMILLAN, 1991 p .98
537 Ibid.
538 Ibid.
539 See Catalogue Raisonné.
540 The Saint Luke’s Club was founded in 1829 as a social gathering for members of the Edinburgh art world.
541 Ibid., p. 369
544 See Catalogue Raisonné.
545 RA/Vic/Add I/239
546 PEARSON, 1991, p. 76
547 The Consort Memorial depicts the Prince Consort at a specific time and place—the Volunteer Review of 1860—employing naturalistic detailing throughout. The Robert Burns also depicts the poet at a specific time and place, but the poet’s features are broadly idealised.
548 PREBBLE, p. 206. The statement was made by the Edinburgh Observer.
549 GD224/666 is the Scottish Record Office designation for the documents relating to the Consort Memorial; the records themselves are kept at Drumlanrig Castle, Dumfriesshire.
550 Royal Archives Vic/Add I
551 These Scottish cities raised subscriptions and monuments of their own. The Glasgow monument was an equestrian statue by Carlo Marochetti, who also executed a seated figure for Aberdeen. The Perth monument was completed in 1864 by William Brodie. Dundee chose a commemorative building instead of a statue, erecting the Albert Institute in 1867.
552 GD224/666/3/1/1 (Subcommittee report of 20 January 1863)
554 The Scotsman, 18 August 1876 (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. IV, p. 6)
555 The occasion was the Scottish coronation of Charles II at Scone on 1 January 1651.
556 See PREBBLE, John, The King’s Jaunt, London, 1988
559 Albert and his sons both wore the kilt. While Albert only wore it in Scotland, the younger princes were photographed in it regularly. This was another example of the royal family’s public identification with Scotland.
560 The Courant, 7 September 1865. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. III, p. 67)
561 The project’s central committee resolved on 3 April 1862 “the wishes of the Queen shall be consulted as to the nature, the site, and the execution of the Memorial.” (GD 224/666/3/3/12)
The committee had many reservations regarding Paton’s proposal, among them being: Paton’s design was too similar to Joseph Durham’s 1863 Monument to the Great Exhibition of 1851 in South Kensington; the design was too expensive; and that the electroplate technique that Paton proposed for the statues would not be durable. (GD 224/666/3/1/3)

Due to constraints of space, only the winning design is examined.

Paton’s design was too similar to Joseph Durham’s 1863 Monument to the Great Exhibition of 1851 in South Kensington; the design was too expensive; and that the electroplate technique that Paton proposed for the statues would not be durable. (GD 224/666/3/1/3)
Sir John McNeill wrote to W.S. Walker on 16 December 1873: "I had not been well, and was unable to ascertain what Steell had been doing lately. Indeed, I may say since some time before his medical advisers – Drs. Smart and Begbie – ordered him to suspend his work and go away for a time."

W.S. Walker reported to Buccleuch with some incredulity: "Steell now fixes next Spring for the completion of his work! He has incurred considerable delay by taking the Prince's Figure to pieces & remodelling it." (GD 224/666/3/12/3; 14 September 1875)

Steell had acted similarly while executing the Kinloch statue. See Catalogue Raisonné.


Steell's decision to remain in Scotland, and his scheme to use native stone and stonemasons to create a lasting version of Alexander and Bucelphalus speak for his early commitment to native sculpture.

CLEGHORN, 1837, pp. 241-242

Ibid., p. 166. Scott was himself a pro-Union Tory.

While photographing this statue in March 2001, a Scottish couple viewing it remarked that there was nothing in the work that clearly indicated Burns was a Scot.

See Chapter Three, p. 62.

Edinburgh Advertiser, 19 August 1851. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p.4)

Morton gives an account of the activities of the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights. The NAVSR was active in the 1850s, and despite their provocative title, never campaigned for independence or even devolution, but for more expenditure within Scotland by the Exchequer. (MORTON, 1999, p. 140)

MOR chân, 1999, p. 155

Ibid., pp. 184-187.

Morton explores these conditions in Chapters 4 and 5 of Unionist Nationalism.

See Chapter Eight, p.148.

The New York City Burns was requested in view of the success of the Sir Walter Scott replica; the subsequent Burns projects were inspired by the New York group.


Select Committee Reports; Third Report of the Commissioners of Fine Arts (1844), p. 471

The term was used by the Art Journal in 1881, p. 72.

The Scotsman, NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II, p. 72.


The Board of Manufactures and the RSA periodically struggled for supremacy and control over art education in Edinburgh. See ERRINGTON, 1983, pp.27-36
Steell's main point was that the Trustees' Design School curriculum would only improve by guidance from a Master with a Fine Arts background.  


Steell was an associate, and stayed with the RIPFAS in 1826, when the founding RSA members broke away. In 1829, when the Royal Institution was seen as increasingly untenable, these 24 members joined the then Scottish Academy *en masse* under the terms of the Hope and Cockburn Award.

Forbes noted in *Art and the Academy*, p. 99: “...despite the worst economic recession of the nineteenth century, the art union poured around £40,000 into the Academy’s coffers over the next fifteen years, working to construct what the Academy itself could never achieve unaided: a large bourgeois public for the fine arts in Edinburgh.”

Paton wrote in his February 1876 diary, “It will be curious if, after all, the earlier dream of my life be so far realised and I die A SCULPTOR.” (NLS Dep. 351)
The writer's centenary was marked in Edinburgh by an exhibition at the National Gallery of Scotland, organised and curated by Sir William Stirling-Maxwell. Steell's statue was represented in the exhibition by two statuettes in parianware and marble, lent by the RAPFAS and James Hay, Esq., respectively.

Scottish American Journal, 7 November 1872. (NLS FB.m.55, Vol. III, p.85)

Ladies Journal, 25 November 1872, (NLS FB.m.55, Vol. III, p. 90.) This was the only pedestal Steell ever designed.

Edinburgh Courant, 12 June 1873, (NLS FB.m.55, Vol. III, p.94)

William Steell’s architectural practice is first listed in the 1870 Edinburgh and Leith Postal Directory at Steell’s studio at 9 Randolph Place. Steell may have asked his son to design the pedestal due to the fact that David Bryce had died in 1876.

CEDC Monuments Catalogue, Vol. III

Depictions by the most illustrious artists are those by Steell, Sir Daniel Macnee (1806-1882) (painted 1843) and Sir John Watson Gordon (1788-1864)(painted posthumously.)


GOODWILLIE, Edward, The World’s Memorials of Robert Burns, Detroit, 1910, p. 47

Goodwillie stated that Burn’s biographer James A. Mackay describes the story as ‘highly embellished’ but that it was accepted until the 1930s. The source of the original anecdote was James Lockhart, “quoting John McDiarmid, who allegedly got the facts from Jean [Armour].”

Minute Book of Dundee Burns Club, 1880, quoted in Goodwillie, pp. 51-52.

The Scotsman, 20 November 1881

Art Journal, 1881, p. 72

Art Journal, 1897, pp. 238-241

Ibid., p. 242

Ibid.

Art Journal, 1881 p. 72

STOCKER 1999, p. 17

The statue was completed after Flaxman’s death by his assistant Joseph Denman.

Art Journal, 1897, p. 240

NLS FB.m.55, Vol. III, p. 94

Scottish American Journal, 24 July 1874. (NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. III, p.95)

For more details on the statue and its commission, see Mark Stocker’s comprehensive article.

Art Journal 1897, p. 241

NAS NG1/1/48

The Times, 16 September 1891, p. 7

The Scotsman, 14 March 1888, p. 6

Brown held the Watson-Gordon Professorship of Fine Arts at the university.

Ibid.

The Scotsman, 16 September 1891

Information compiled from a copy of the death certificate by Liz Lacey, Steell family descendant and genealogist.

Steell’s nephew Peter Graham, RA, ARSA (1836-1921) was a noted landscape painter.

READ 1982, pp. 85-87

322
The Scotsman of 14 March 1888 named D.W. Stevenson as a student, but Stevenson trained with Brodie; the mistake was probably due to Stevenson’s employment on the Consort Memorial.

NLS MS.FB.m.55, Vol. II.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished Material

Manuscripts

National Archives of Scotland
Buccleuch Muniments: NAS GD224 511/8-9; GD224 511/13; GD224 666/1-3
Steell Sr. Sequestration: NAS CS 231
Board of Manufactures Minutes: NAS NG1; NG2/2/22

National Library of Scotland: Steell Scrapbooks, National Library of Scotland, MS.FB.m.55 (4 volumes)

Mitchell Library, Glasgow
Stirling-Maxwell Papers: T-SK 29/25;
Gore-Booth Papers: TD-459

RSA Archives: John Steell Letter File; Council Minutes; Annual Reports

Royal Archives, Windsor: Queen Victoria’s Journal; Vic Add I

Edinburgh City Archives: Acc 326 (Scott Monument Minutes); Edinburgh Town Council Minutes

New College Library, Edinburgh University: Chalmers Papers: CHA4

Edinburgh University Special Collections: LAII 509, folios 1522, 1524, 1526, 1528

Theses and Articles

FORBES, Duncan

GOW, Ian
The Northern Athenian Tomb: Playfair versus Theed (Unpublished article)

MACGILLIVRAY, James Pittendrigh
Sculpture, Nationality and War Memorials (Lecture typescript, delivered 22 November 1917 to Edinburgh Architectural Association)

ROCK, Joe
"An Ingenious self-taught sculptor" Robert Forrest (1789-1852) (Unpublished article)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WARD-JACKSON, Philip</td>
<td>The Duke of Wellington, Royal Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Manuscript entry for London monument survey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Published Material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALISON, Archibald</td>
<td>Essays on the nature and principles of taste, Edinburgh, 1811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDERSON, William</td>
<td>Silences That Speak, Edinburgh, 1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANONYMOUS</td>
<td>Sculpture: Tam O’Shanter, Souter Johnny, the Landlord and Landlady executed by Mr. James Thom, London, 1830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTS Council of Great Britain</td>
<td>The Age of Neo-Classicism, London, 1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTERBURY, Paul (ed.)</td>
<td>The Parian Phenomenon, Somerset, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEGBIE, Thomas</td>
<td>Thomas Begbie’s Edinburgh: A Mid-Victorian Portrait, Edinburgh, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELL, Sir Charles</td>
<td>Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting, Edinburgh, 1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELL, Sir Charles</td>
<td>Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression in the Fine Arts, London, 1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELL, C.F.</td>
<td>Annals of Thomas Banks, Cambridge, 1938</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BETT, Norman

BLACKWOOD, John

BOASE, T.S.R. (ed.)

BOBER & Rubenstein

BOWLER, P.J.

BOYLE, Anne, et. al.

BRIGGS, Asa

BROOKS, Chris

BROOKS, Chris (ed.)

BROWN, Thomas

BRYDALL, Robert

BURKE'S

BUSCO, Marie

CADELL, Robert

CANT, Malcolm

CELLINI, Benvenuto
(C.R. Ashbee, Trans.)

CHECKLAND, Olive

Civic Bronze, Edinburgh 1982


English Art 1800-1870, London 1959

Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture, Oxford, 1986

The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past, Oxford, 1989


The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867, London, 1959

The Albert Memorial, London, 1995


Observations on a letter to the Duke of Hamilton, Edinburgh, 1838

Art in Scotland, its origin and progress, Edinburgh, 1889


Sir Richard Westmacott, Sculptor, Cambridge, 1994

Letter to the Duke of Hamilton Respecting the Scott Monument, Edinburgh, 1838

Edinburgh: Gorgie and Dalry, Edinburgh 1995

Treatises on Goldsmithing and Sculpture, New York, 1967

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location, Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLEGHORN, George</td>
<td>Remarks on Ancient and Modern Art, Edinburgh, 1837</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIFFORD, Timothy et. al.</td>
<td>The Three Graces: Antonio Canova, Edinburgh, 1995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COCKBURN, Lord</td>
<td>Journals of Henry Cockburn, 1831-1854, Edinburgh, 1874</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COCKBURN, Lord</td>
<td>Memorials of His Time, Edinburgh, 1946</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COCKBURN, Lord</td>
<td>Letter to the Lord Provost on the Best Ways of Spoiling the Beauty of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 1849</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOKE, E. Thornton</td>
<td>Sir Walter's Dogs, Edinburgh, 1931</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROUZET, François (Forster, Anthony trans.)</td>
<td>The Victorian Economy, London, 1982</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUNNINGHAM, Allan</td>
<td>Lives of the most eminent British painters, sculptors and architects, London, 1829-33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUNNINGHAM, Allan</td>
<td>The Life of Sir David Wilkie, London, 1843</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURL, James Stevens</td>
<td>The Victorian Celebration of Death, London, 1972</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURTIS, Penelope, et. al.</td>
<td>Return To Life: A New Look at the Portrait Bust, Leeds, 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAICHES, David</td>
<td>The New Companion to Scottish Culture, Edinburgh, 1993</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARBY, Elizabeth &amp; SMITH, Nicola</td>
<td>The Cult of the Prince Consort, New Haven &amp; London, 1983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DENIS, Rafael C. &amp; Trodd, Colin (eds.)</td>
<td><em>Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century</em>, Manchester, 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBDEN, Thomas F.</td>
<td><em>A Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in the Northern Counties of England and in Scotland</em>, London, 1838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIDEROT, Denis</td>
<td><em>Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry</em>, New York, 1959</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EASTLAKE, Lady Elizabeth</td>
<td><em>Life of John Gibson, R.A.</em>, London, 1870</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERRINGTON, Lindsay</td>
<td><em>Master Class: Robert Scott Lauder and his Pupils</em>, Edinburgh, 1983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESDAILE, Katherine</td>
<td><em>English Church Monuments, 1510-1840</em>, London, 1946</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALCONET, M.E. and Diderot (W. Tooke, trans.)</td>
<td><em>Pieces on Sculpture, and on the Statue of Peter the Great</em>, London, 1777</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIDDES and Rowan</td>
<td><em>David Bryce</em>, Edinburgh, 1976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDLAY, J.R.</td>
<td><em>Personal Recollections of Thomas de Quincey</em>, Edinburgh 1886</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAXMAN, John</td>
<td><em>Lectures on Sculpture</em>, London, 1838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORBES, Duncan</td>
<td>&quot;Private advantage and public feeling: the struggle for academic legitimacy in Edinburgh in the 1820s&quot;; <em>Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century</em>, Manchester, 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FUSCO, Peter & Janson The Romantics to Rodin, New York, 1980


GILBERT, W.M. (ed.) Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century, Edinburgh, 1901

GOETHE, Johann (GAGE, John, trans.) Goethe on Art, London, 1980

GOODWILLIE, Edward The World's Memorials of Robert Burns, Detroit, 1911

GORDON, Esme The Royal Scottish Academy, 1826-1976, Edinburgh, 1976

GORDON, Mary Christopher North: A Memoir of John Wilson, Edinburgh, 1862


IRWIN, D. & F. Scottish Painters at Home and Abroad 1700-1900, London, 1975


HAYDON, B.R. Correspondence and Table-Talk, London, 1876


HONOUR, Hugh Neo-classicism, London, 1977


HUNTER, W. Funeral Oration on Brother Smith, Edinburgh, 1867
INGLIS, John (Vaughn, E. ed.)  

A Victorian Edinburgh Diary, Edinburgh, 1984

IRWIN, David

English Neoclassical Art, London, 1966

IRWIN, David


IRWIN, David & Francina

Scottish Painters at Home and Abroad, London, 1975

JANSON, H.W.

Nineteenth-Century Sculpture, London, 1985

JONES, George


KAPLAN, Wendy (ed.)

Scotland Creates: 5000 Years of Art and Design, London and Glasgow, 1990

KRAGELUND, Patrick & NYKJAER, M.

Thorvaldsen: L’ambiente l’influsso il mito, Rome, 1991

LAPERRIERE, C. (ed.)


LAVER, James

A Concise History of Costume, London, 1969

LEE, Sidney (ed.)

Dictionary of National Biography, London, 1898

LESSING, Gotthold

Laocoon: an essay on the limits of painting and poetry, London, 1853

LEVEY, Michael

Painting and Sculpture in France 1700-1789, New Haven and London, 1993

LICHT, Fred

Canova, New York, 1983

LIEDTKE, Walter

The Royal Horse and Rider, New York, 1989

LYELL, Katherine (ed.)

Memoir of Leonard Horner, London, 1890

MacDOUGALL, Ian (ed.)

The Minutes of the Edinburgh Trades Council, Edinburgh, 1968

MACKAY, James

Burnsiana, Ayrshire, 1988

MACMILLAN, Duncan

The Torrie Collection, Edinburgh, 1983
MACMILLAN, Duncan  

MACMILLAN, Duncan  
*Scottish Art 1460-2000*, Edinburgh, 2000

McEWAN, Peter (ed.)  
*Dictionary of Scottish Art and Architecture*, Woodbridge, 1994

McKEAN, Charles  

McKENZIE, Ray  
*Sculpture in Glasgow*, Glasgow, 1999

MALDEN, John  

MARKMAN, Sidney  
*The Horse in Greek Art*, Baltimore, 1943

MARWICK, W.H.  
*Economic Developments in Victorian Scotland*, London, 1936

MEADOWBANK, Lord  
*Speech of Lord Meadowbank*, 28 March 1838, Edinburgh, 1838

MEMES, J.S.  
*Memoirs of Canova*, London, 1825

MEMES, J.S.  
*History of Sculpture, Painting and Architecture*, Edinburgh, 1829

MEMES, J.S.  
*Letter to John Steell Esq., S.A. regarding the Scott Monument*, Edinburgh, 1838

MILES, H.A.D. & BROWN, D. (eds.)  
*Sir David Wilkie of Scotland*, Raleigh, 1987

MINISTÈRE de la Culture et de la Communication  
*La Sculpture Française au XIXe Siècle*, Paris, 1986

MONRO, G.  
*Scottish Art and National Encouragement*, Edinburgh, 1846

MORTON, Graeme  
*Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland 1830-1860*, East Lothian, 1999

MUDIE, Robert  
*Modern Athens: a dissection and demonstration of men and things in the Scotch Capital*, Edinburgh, 1825
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Editor</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL Galleries of Scotland</td>
<td>Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture</td>
<td>Edinburgh, 1957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICHOLSON, Gordon</td>
<td>The Sheriff Court at Edinburgh</td>
<td>Edinburgh, 1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOBLE, Andrew</td>
<td>“John Wilson (Christopher North) and the Tory hegemony”; The History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 3: The Nineteenth Century</td>
<td>Aberdeen, 1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORMOND, Richard</td>
<td>Early Victorian Portraits</td>
<td>London, 1973</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANTAZZI, Michael, et. al.</td>
<td>Egyptomania</td>
<td>Ottowa, 1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY Papers, British</td>
<td>Report from the Select Committee on Art Unions (1845)</td>
<td>Dublin, 1968</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY Papers, British</td>
<td>Reports from Select Committees and Commissioners on the Promotion of Fine Arts and on National Monuments and Works of Art (1841-7)</td>
<td>Dublin, 1971</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY Papers, British</td>
<td>Reports from Select Committees and Commissioners on Fine Arts and on the National Galleries (1847-63)</td>
<td>Dublin, 1971</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY Papers, British</td>
<td>Select Committee and other reports on Schools of Art, Art Union Laws, The Paris Exhibition, and the Ancient Monuments Bill (1864)</td>
<td>Dublin, 1971</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATON, Joseph Noel</td>
<td>A Proposal to build a National Memorial of the War of Independence under Wallace and Bruce</td>
<td>Edinburgh, 1859</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author/Editor</td>
<td>Title and Details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILLIPSON, N.T. &amp; Mitchison, R. (eds.)</td>
<td><em>Scotland in the Age of Improvement</em>, Edinburgh, 1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTTS, Alex</td>
<td><em>Flesh and the Ideal</em>, New Haven and London, 1994</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREBBLE, John</td>
<td><em>The King's Jaunt</em>, London, 1988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REID, Thomas</td>
<td><em>Lectures on the Fine Arts</em>, The Hague, 1973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REID, Thomas</td>
<td><em>The Works of Thomas Reid</em>, Edinburgh, 1849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REYNOLDS, Sir Joshua</td>
<td><em>Discourses on Art</em>, New Haven and London, 1975</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICH, Jack C.</td>
<td><em>The Materials and Methods of Sculpture</em>, New York, 1947</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RINDER, Frank</td>
<td><em>The Royal Scottish Academy, 1826-1916</em>, Bath, 1975</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSEBERY, Lady</td>
<td><em>Dalmeny House</em>, Broxburn, no date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROUNDRobIN, R. (Patrick Gibson)</td>
<td><em>A Letter to the Directors and Members of the Institution for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Scotland</em>, Edinburgh, 1826</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUBINSTEIN, David</td>
<td>Victorian Homes, London, 1974</td>
<td></td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSKIN, John</td>
<td>Lectures on Art, London, 1906</td>
<td></td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAUNDERS, Laurance</td>
<td>Scottish Democracy, 1815-1840, Edinburgh, 1950</td>
<td></td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOTT, W.B.</td>
<td>Memoirs of the Late David Scott, R.S.A., Edinburgh, 1845</td>
<td></td>
<td>1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOTT, W.B.</td>
<td>The British School of Sculpture, London, 1872</td>
<td></td>
<td>1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOTT, W.B.</td>
<td>Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott, London, 1892</td>
<td></td>
<td>1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHEPHERD, Thomas</td>
<td>Modern Athens! Displayed in a Series of Views, London, 1829</td>
<td></td>
<td>1829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YARRINGTON, A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMPSON, Ian et. al.</td>
<td>Civic Stone, Edinburgh, 1982</td>
<td></td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKINNER, Basil</td>
<td>Burns: Authentic Likenesses, Ayrshire, 1990</td>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMAILES, Helen</td>
<td>A Portrait Gallery for Scotland, Edinburgh, 1985</td>
<td></td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMAILES, Helen</td>
<td>Andrew Geddes, 1783-1844, 'A Man of Pure Taste', Edinburgh 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STEVENSON, Sara
David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, Edinburgh, 1981

STEVENSON, Sara & Duncan Forbes

STEVENSON, Sara
The Personal Art of David Octavius Hill, Edinburgh, 2002

STEVENSON, Sara
Facing the Light: The Photography of Hill and Adamson, Edinburgh, 2002

STODDART, A.M.
Henry Glassford Bell, A Biographical Sketch, Edinburgh, 1892

SUTHERLAND, Colin & Craik, (eds.)
Parliament House Portraits, Edinburgh, 2000

SWEET, Matthew
Inventing the Victorians, London, 2001

SYMMONS, Sarah
Flaxman and Europe, London, 1984

THOMSON, Colin
Pictures for Scotland, Edinburgh, 1972

THOMSON, Duncan & Lockhart
Scottish National Portrait Gallery Concise Catalogue, Edinburgh, 1977

THOMSON, Duncan & Smailes
The Queen's Image, Edinburgh, 1987

TURNER, Jane (ed.)

VAUGHN, Phillipa (ed.)
The Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta, Mumbai, 1997

VICTORIA, Queen

WALKER, Stephen
The Faculty of Advocates 1800-1986, Edinburgh, 1987

WATSON, Charles, (ed.)
Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild Brethren 1761-1841, Edinburgh, 1933

WEINSHENKER, Anne
Falconet: His Writings and His Friend Diderot, Geneva, 1966
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHINNEY, Margaret</td>
<td><em>Sculpture in Britain 1530-1830,</em> London, 1964</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHINNEY, Margaret &amp;</td>
<td><em>The Collection of Models by John Flaxman, R.A. at University College London,</em> London,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnis</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE, Paul</td>
<td><em>On Public View,</em> London, 1971</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLSHER, Betty</td>
<td><em>Understanding Scottish Graveyards,</em> Edinburgh, 1985</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINCKELMANN, Johann</td>
<td><em>Writings on Art,</em> London, 1972</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Irwin, D., ed.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINCKELMANN, Johann</td>
<td><em>History of Ancient Art Among the Greeks,</em> London, 1881</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(G. Henry Lodge, trans.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YARRINGTON, Alison</td>
<td><em>Commemoration of the Hero 1800-1864,</em> London, 1988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Published Material: Periodical and Catalogue Articles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANONYMOUS</td>
<td>“Sketch of the Life of Albert Thorvalldsen”: <em>Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine,</em> Vol. IV,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1818</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAKER, Malcolm</td>
<td>“‘A Sort of Corporate Company’: Approaching the portrait bust in its setting”: <em>Return to Life: A New Look at the Portrait Bust,</em> Leeds, 2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


CUNNINGHAM, Allan  "Francis Chantrey, Sculptor"; Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. No. XXXVII, April 1820, pp. 3-10

CUNNINGHAM, Allan  "Canova—British Sculpture"; Quarterly Review, Vol. XXXIV, 1826, pp. 110-136

DIMMICK, Lauretta  "Thorvaldsen's Influence in America"; Thorvaldsen: L'ambiente l'influsso il mito, Rome, 1991

ERRINGTON, Lindsay  "Sir Walter Scott and Nineteenth-Century Painting in Scotland"; Scotland Creates, Glasgow and London, 1990

FORBES, Duncan  "'Dodging and watching the natural incidents of the peasantry': Genre Painting in Scotland 1780-1830"; Oxford Art Journal, Vol. 23, number 2, 2000, pp. 81-94


HARGROVE, June  "The Public Monument"; The Romantics to Rodin, New York, 1980


KNOX, Tim & LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN  "Thorvaldsen's 'Valdrescot': A lost bust of Sir Walter Scott discovered"; Apollo, February 1993

LEONI, Massimo  "Techniques of Casting"; The Horses of San Marco, Venice, London, 1979
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEARSON, Fiona</td>
<td>“Phrenology and Sculpture 1820-1855”; <em>Leeds Art Calendar</em>, 1981, number 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTTS, Alex</td>
<td>“Chantray as the National Sculptor of Early Nineteenth-Century England”; <em>Oxford Art Journal</em>, November 1981, Vol. 4, number 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STOCKER, Mark</td>
<td>“‘This beautiful statue of thee, Immortal Bard of Ayr’: Sir John Steell’s statue of Robert Burns in Dunedin”; <em>Bulletin of New Zealand Art History</em>, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STORY, Alfred</td>
<td>“Sir Joseph Noel Paton: His Life and Work”; <em>Art Journal</em>, 1895</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Newspapers and Periodicals**

*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 1818, 1820

*Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 1829

*Edinburgh Literary Journal*, 1828—1831

*Illustrated London News*, 1844—1891

*The Scotsman*, 1829—1891

*The Scots Magazine*, 1815

*The Times*, 1891

*The Academy*, 1891
Glossary

Italics connote a cross referenced term within the glossary.

*Artist's plaster* The first direct plaster cast of a sculpture, taken from the sculptor’s original work in clay.

*Bronze* A metal alloy composed of nine parts copper and one part tin; traces of lead are often added for malleability.

*Casting* The act of replicating sculpture in plaster or metal through use of a mould. The term “cast” can also refer to a completed copy of a work, or the action of pouring bronze.

*Casting pit* A pit filled with sand or charcoal dust, where moulds or investment moulds are placed for casting.

*Charging* The act of filling a mould.

*Chasing* The process of finishing a sculpture, removing gates and filing off casting marks.

*Core* A core of investment material placed in the centre of an investment mould to reduce the amount of bronze necessary for a cast.

*Crucible* A heat-resistant receptacle which contains the molten bronze during heating and pouring.

*Gates* Small lengths of wax in a lost-wax positive, that become spaces in a negative mould, which create avenues for the molten bronze to travel, and for gases to escape. Also called “vents” or “ducts.”

*Gets* Small metal pins or rods, which hold the core in place. Also called “Gits.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investment mould</td>
<td>A mould for bronze casting, usually made of luto, composed of three parts plaster and one part brick dust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiln</td>
<td>An oven used to prepare investment moulds by heating at a constant sustained temperature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost-wax casting</td>
<td>A process of metal casting where an investment mould is created around a wax original, which is subsequently melted out (therefore “lost”) in a kiln, a practice called “burn-out.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luto</td>
<td>A moulding compound of three parts plaster (for strength) and one part brick dust (for heat resistance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mould</td>
<td>A matrix, or device which creates a negative space around an object, for the purpose of the replication of the object in a different material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patina</td>
<td>The surface appearance and colour of a sculpture, due to the reaction of the material with the atmosphere. In bronze work, patina can be controlled through the application of chemicals and heat, a process known as patinasation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piece mould</td>
<td>A solid, reusable mould formed from separate pieces, for the execution of multiple casts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointing machine</td>
<td>A device used to measure the depth and dimensions of a model or artist’s plaster, in order to transfer it into stone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pour</td>
<td>A bronze casting session, ie: The statue was cast in four separate pours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand casting</td>
<td>A process of metal casting where the mould is composed from fine sand, which assumes the negative form of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shank</td>
<td>A tool composed of a steel ring attached to long handles, which allows for the handling manoeuvring and pouring of the crucible when loaded with molten metal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprue</td>
<td>The main duct for the entry of molten metal into a mould.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongs</td>
<td>A clamp-like tool for lifting the crucible into the shank ring.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Waste mould        | A mould designed for only one use; the act of removing the cast requiring the destruction (“waste”) of the mould.}