

AN
HISTORICAL ACCOUNT
OF THE
SOCIETY OF THE ANTIQUARIES
OF SCOTLAND.

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LIKE other nations of Europe, the political and historical monuments of Scotland have not only been injured by the natural operations of time, but by many other causes. Our desolating and depredatory wars with England continued for ages. The demolition of ancient buildings, the destruction of public archives, and of private documents, were results of these unhappy contests. When the two nations were *partially* united, by the succession of our James VI. to the throne of England, a temporary peace was established, and promised great and mutual advantages. But, not long after this auspicious event, fanatical and feudal dissensions arose, and produced effects equally pernicious to the objects of the Historian and Antiquary. Though these and similar causes have long ceased, yet, by annihilating our principal materials, they depressed the spirit of inquiry, and made us negligent of those which had escaped the general devastation.

THE *real* union of the two kingdoms, in the reign of Queen Anne, it might have been expected, should suddenly have removed

every obstruction to the progress of Science and of Literature in this country. But, even since that era, Scotland has had her convulsions. Besides, till we were cordially united to England, not in government only, but in loyalty and affection to a common Sovereign, it was not, perhaps, altogether consistent with political wisdom, to call the attention of the Scots to the ancient honours and constitution of their independent Monarchy.

NOT many years have elapsed, since the jealousy of the two nations were succeeded by a mutual attachment to the same family and constitution. During this short period, however, it must be allowed, that the progress of the Scots in every species of art, of science, and of literature, has been astonishingly rapid. Neither have the researches of the antiquary, notwithstanding the many disadvantages he had to encounter, been altogether neglected. But the labours of individual antiquaries, unassisted by powerful patronage, and destitute of proper repositories, have hitherto produced no great light to the public. They, however, excited a taste for inquiries of this nature, which, for some years past, has continued to diffuse itself over the nation.

IN the ordinary progress of human affairs, it was soon perceived, that this taste for investigating the antiquities of our country, could not receive any adequate gratification without the aid of a public establishment. An association, accordingly, similar to that of the Antiquarian Society of London, was projected, by several Gentlemen of eminence and learning, some of whom had made private collections, and were anxious that these, and others which they knew were scattered through the kingdom, should be preserved in a secure and permanent repository. The time, they found, was now arrived, when such a Society might be instituted, without any apprehension of those consequences to national union and concord which had formerly subsisted: They considered, that some useful materials, which

which had been amassed by eminent antiquaries, were now perishing in the possession of persons who knew not their value; that others, still existing in public libraries, depended upon the fate of single copies, and were subject to obliteration, to fire, and to other causes of destruction; and that it was an object of national importance to bring all these, either in their original form, or by accurate transcript, into one great repository, which should be rendered accessible to the Republic of Letters.

THOUGH these, and many other advantages, were to be derived from an institution of this nature, it continued to be the subject of speculation only, till the Right Honourable the EARL OF BUCHAN, zealous to have it carried into execution, invited, on the 14th day of November 1780, the following Noblemen and Gentlemen to his house, where he explained, in a pertinent discourse, the general plan and intention of the proposed Association.

Right Honourable Lord Hope	Sir James Stewart-Denham, Baronet
Honourable Henry Erskine	* Mr John Syme
* Allan Maconochie, Esquire	Honourable Baron Maule
Honourable Lord Kames	Sir William Forbes, Baronet
Honourable Lord Hailes	John Swinton, Esquire
* William Tytler, Esquire	* Andrew Crosbie, Esquire
* Hugo Arnot, Esquire	George Clerk-Maxwell, Esquire
Sir John Dalrymple, H. M. Baronet	Sir James Foulis, Baronet
David Erskine, Esquire	Reverend Dr Henry
John Davidson, Esquire	* Charles Hay, Esquire
Reverend Dr Blair	Mr John M'Gowan
James Colquhoun, Esquire	* Alexander Wight, Esquire
* Mr William Smellie	Mr George Paton
Honourable James Erskine	Dr Gilbert Stuart
* Mr James Cummyng	* Mr William Creech
* Mr John Balfour	* Mr Thomas Philips
John Caw, Esquire	* Mr John Donaldson
* Mr John Williams	Mr Alexander Brown
James Boswell, Esquire	

AGREEABLE to Lord Buchan's invitation, the fourteen Gentlemen, to whose names an asterisk is prefixed, gave their attendance. The others sent letters to his Lordship, highly approving of the scheme, and expressing their regret, that unavoidable circumstances had prevented them from being present. When the Earl of Buchan finished his discourse, he moved, that another meeting should be held at his house, on the 28th day of November 1780, to consider the propriety of forming a Society upon the plan suggested in the paper he had then read. This motion received an unanimous approbation.

ACCORDING to agreement, a considerable number of Gentlemen met on the 28th day of November. After canvassing the utility of the proposed Association, and the mode of its regulation, they unanimously resolved to meet on the 18th day of December, in order to form themselves into a regular and permanent body, under the designation of THE SOCIETY OF THE ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND. On the day appointed, the Gentlemen assembled, instituted the Society, and elected the following officers :

PRESIDENT,	The Right Honourable the Earl of Bute.
1st Vice-President,	The Right Honourable the Earl of Buchan.
2d Vice-President,	Sir John Dalrymple-Hamilton M'Gill, Baronet.
3d Vice-President,	John Swinton of Swinton, Esquire.
4th Vice-President,	Alexander Wight, Esquire.
5th Vice-President,	William Tytler of Woodhouselee, Esquire.
Treasurer,	Sir William Forbes of Pitligo, Baronet.
Secretary,	Mr James Cummyng.

SINCE the institution of the Society, some changes among its principal office-bearers, owing to various causes, have happened. They now stand as follows :

H I S

HIS MAJESTY THE KING, PATRON.

PRESIDENT,	The Right Honourable the Earl of Bute.
1st Vice-President,	His Grace the DUKE of MONTROSE.
2d Vice-President,	Lord Monboddo.
3d Vice-President,	Alexander Wight, Esquire.
4th Vice-President,	William Tytler, Esquire.
5th Vice-President,	Alexander Fergusson, Esquire.
Treasurer,	Sir William Forbes of Pitligo, Baronet.
Secretary,	Mr James Cummyng.

AFTER the Society was formally instituted, its first meetings were employed in the necessary business of framing statutes, rules, and orders ; in receiving donations, and in electing new members.

THE encouragement this Society, from the moment of its institution, received from persons of all ranks, both male and female, soon suggested the idea, that, in order to secure and perpetuate the valuable and multifarious property so early acquired, a Royal Charter was the only effectual measure. On the 21st of May, accordingly, the following petition was signed, and afterwards presented to his Majesty, praying for a Royal Charter of Incorporation. The petition was returned by the Society's agent at London, with a reference to the Lord Advocate of Scotland by Lord Sidney, then one of the Secretaries of State.

To the King's most Excellent Majesty, the humble Petition of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland,

" Sheweth,

" THAT, in the year 1780, your petitioners, consisting of a number of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of this part of your Majesty's united kingdom, formed themselves into a Society for investigating antiquities,

antiquities, as well as natural and civil history in general, with a view to the improvement of the minds of mankind, and to promote a taste for natural and useful knowledge; and the success of their endeavours has already succeeded far beyond their most sanguine expectations.

“ THAT many men, of the first distinction for rank and learning, not only in the British dominions, but in other kingdoms, have, by ingenious dissertations, and valuable donations, contributed toward the prosperity of the Society.

“ THAT, beside donations of relicks of antiquity, and of natural productions, several Noblemen and Gentlemen have contributed liberally in money to enable the Society to carry their laudable views into execution.

“ THAT your Majesty’s petitioners have purchased a house in the city of Edinburgh, for containing their books, papers, and other effects; but, not having a *nomen juris*, their rights to that property, to the effects at present in their possession, or to what they shall afterwards acquire, cannot be legally established, unless your Majesty is graciously pleased to grant them a Royal Charter.

“ YOUR Majesty’s uniform patronage of the fine arts, and of useful literature, encourages them to hope, that you will extend such patronage to your petitioners, which will render the utility of their plan more diffusive, and effectually secure the heritable and moveable property they already possess, or may acquire.

“ YOUR petitioners, therefore, most humbly pray, that your Majesty will be graciously pleased to grant your Royal Letters patent, under the Seal appointed by the Treaty of Union

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to be kept in Scotland, in place of the great seal formerly used, constituting and erecting the present Members of the said Society, and all those who shall afterwards be admitted Members, into one body politic and corporate, or legal incorporation, under the title and name of *The Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland*; and as such, and by such title and name, to have a perpetual endurance and succession, and to be able and capable to sue, plead, defend, and answer, and to be sued, impleaded, defended, and answered, in all or any of your Majesty’s courts of judicature, with all other necessary clauses,

“ AND your petitioners shall ever pray, &c.

“ SIGNED in presence, and by appointment of a General Meeting of the said Society, this 21st day of May, in the year One thousand seven hundred and eighty-two.

(Signed) BUCHAN, PRESES.
JAMES CUMMYNG, SEC.”

Copy Reference to the Lord Advocate, written on the Margin of the above Petition.

“ Whitehall, 26th September 1782.

“ HIS Majesty is pleased to refer this petition to the Right Honourable the Lord Advocate of Scotland, to consider thereof, and to report his opinion, what may be properly done therein, whereupon his Majesty will declare his further pleasure.

(Signed) T. TOWNSEND.”

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IN consequence of this reference, the then Lord Advocate of Scotland, now the Right Honourable Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, gave a most favourable and just representation of the nature and intentions of the Society. The Royal warrant, of course, passed the Privy Seal on the 29th day of March 1783; and, as soon as it was received at Edinburgh, the charter was extended under the Great Seal. The Gentlemen of this office, as well as those of the Chancery, sensible of the many public advantages to be derived from the Society, generously refused to accept their accustomed fees.

THE Charter, of which the following is a copy, after passing the seals, was read to a general meeting of the Society on the 6th day of May 1783.

R O Y A L C H A R T E R .

“ GEORGIUS, Dei Gratia, Magnae Britanniae, Franciae, et Hiberniae Rex, fidei defensor : Omnibus probis hominibus, ad quos praesentes literae nostrae pervenerint, salutem : Quandoquidem nos considerantes, quod petitio humilis nobis oblata fuerit in nomine Sociorum Societatis Antiquariorum in Scotia, enarrans, quod, anno millesimo septingentesimo et octogesimo, numerus primatum et generosorum, in illa parte regni nostri Magnae Britanniae Scotia vocata, in societatem sese formaverunt ad investigandas, tam res antiquas, quam historiam naturalem et civilem in genere, eo proposito, ut hominum ingenia excolerentur, et ut studium naturalis et utilis scientiae promoveretur, et quod eventus eorum conatuum spes summas longe excesserat ; quod multi homines, aut loco aut literis insignes, non solum in nostro Magnae Britanniae Regno, sed in aliis regnis, per lucubrationes eruditas, et dona pretiosa erga societatis res secundas contribuerant ;

contribuerant ; quod, praeter reliquiarum antiquitatis et rerum naturalium dona, diversi primates et generosi pecuniam contulerant, ut Societas sua proposita laudabilia exequi posset ; quod petitores Domum emerant in civitate Edinensi, ut in ea continerent libros, chartas, aliasque res, sed quod, absque nomine juris, perpetua possessio istius domus, et aliarum rerum quae in praesentia possident, aut quas postea acquirere possint, legaliter constitui nequiret ; petitores igitur submisit orant, ut nobis, pro gratia nostra, placeat, literas nostras patentes, sub sigillo infra script. concedere, constituentes et erigentes praesentes socios dictae Societatis, et omnes qui postea affumentur socii, in unum corpus politicum et incorporatum, seu legalem incorporationem, sub titulo et nomine SOCIETATIS ANTIQUARIORUM SCOTIAE, utque talis et per talem titulum et nomen perpetuitatem habeat et successionem, atque ut potens et capax sit petere, causas agere, defendere, et respondere, et convenire, in iudicium vocari, defendi, et responderi, in omnibus seu ullis nostris curiis iudicaturae, cum omnibus aliis clausulis necessariis : Et Nos, considerantes intentiones laudabiles petitorum, et cupientes promovere tam utilem institutionem ; igitur ereximus, creavimus, et incorporavimus, sicuti nos, regia nostra praerogativa et gratia speciali, pro nobismet ipsis nostrisque regiis successoribus, per has praesentes literas patentes, erigimus, creamus, et incorporamus, propter proposita memorata in petitione, omnes et singulos praesentes socios dictae societatis, omnesque viros qui postea affumentur socii ejusdem, in unum corpus incorporatum et politicum, per titulum et nomen SOCIETATIS ANTIQUARIORUM SCOTIAE, institutae anno millesimo septingentesimo et octogesimo, cujus Societatis NOS declaramus NOSMET, *Regiosque nostros successores*, esse PATRONOS : Quo sub nomine et titulo perpetuam successionem habeat ; etiamque habeat et utetur sigillo communi, in quod nos privilegium damus gerendi pro insignibus gentilitiis, *in campo caeruleo crucem Sancti Andreae argenteam, coronam imperialem in summo, et carduum in imo, propriis coloribus ; haec omnia intra limbum regalem aurum* : Illic et eorum successores.

sub eodem titulo et nomine legaliter poterunt et capaces erunt, petere et convenire et recipere, capere, tenere, et frui, in perpetuum, vel aliter ad seipfos et eorum successores reliquiis antiquitatis, rerum naturalium vel artium speciminibus, libris, libris manuscriptis, bonis, rebus, aliisque facultatibus quibuscunque, quales jam possident, vel postea acquirant; et emere et frui terris, tenementis, aliisque haereditariis non excedentibus valorem mille librarum monetae Sterlinaensis, et commodare summam vel summas pecuniae alicui personae aut personis, et pro tali securitate qualem idoneam putabunt: Et dicta Societas seipsum ejusque actionum series et negotium administrabit, secundum statuta, ordinationes, iussa, et leges privatas, facta vel facienda ab ea, cum potestate, de die in diem, ut usu venit, mutandi et revocandi eadem, et novas ordinationes in eorum loco faciendi, quales idoneas judicabunt, et convenientes, ita ut eadem justae bonae et aequae sunt, et dummodo nequaquam contrariae sint legibus hujus regni. In cujus rei testimonium, praesentibus sigillum nostrum, per Unionis tractatum custodiend. et in Scotia vice et loco magni sigilli ejusdem utendum ordinatum, appendi mandavimus. Apud aulam nostram apud St James's, vigesimo nono die mensis Martii, anno Domini millesimo Septingentesimo et octogesimo tertio, regniue nostri anno vigesimo tertio.

“ PER signaturam manu S. D. N. Regis supra scriptam.”

THE following is written on the back of the charter, viz.

“ WRITTEN to the seal, and registered, the 5th day of May 1783.
THOMAS MILLER, Subf.
Gratis.”

“ SEALED at Edinburgh the 6th day of May one thousand seven hundred and eighty-three years.

JOHN WAUCHOPE Dep.
L. 80 Scots *Gratis.*”

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THE meetings of the Society, during the vacations of the Court of Session, are held every month, and every fortnight when that Court sits, which it does five months in the year. It is singular, and worthy of remark, that, from the institution of the Society, in November 1780, to the present time, not a meeting has passed but donations have been received, and discourses, or ancient papers, read. Since that period, the Society has been honoured with presents from no less than 1130 donors. The number of donations, some of which are exceedingly curious and valuable, amount to about 16,000 articles. They chiefly consist of ancient weapons, dresses, charters, historical papers, poems, and an immensity of coins of all ages and nations. A descriptive account of them would make a large volume.

THIS short narrative of the origin, progress, and present state of the Antiquarian Society of Scotland shall be concluded with a copy of the statutes, and a chronological list of its Members, which will show not only its respectability, but the estimation in which it is held, both by the republic of letters, and by men of the highest ranks in life.

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STATUTES.