

# Joseph Anderson (1832–1916) and the Scottish historical collection in the Antiquities Museum, 1869 to 1892

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## ABSTRACT

*Joseph Anderson (1832–1916) was an influential figure within the history of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and Scottish archaeology during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But while Anderson is best known for his contribution to the development of Scottish prehistoric and early medieval archaeology, there has been less focus on his role in expanding and studying the Society's Scottish historical collection. This article considers the ways in which Scottish historical material culture was displayed in the Antiquities Museum and investigated by Anderson from 1869 until 1892, with arrangements in Scotland compared to other national museums in the British Isles and Europe. The Society's archives and Anderson's publications have been critically examined within this study to demonstrate that Anderson's archaeological background influenced his approach to studying historic objects and contributed to his vision of a unified Scottish cultural history contextualised through international comparisons. This article also seeks to show how Anderson was in a privileged position as keeper of the museum for 43 years, allowing him to systematise and apply ideas and methodologies to the Scottish historical collection that had been developing within the Society both prior to and during his keepership.*

## INTRODUCTION

The considerable influence of Joseph Anderson on the development of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (SAScot), Scottish archaeology and the Antiquities Museum has been a key interest for those investigating the Society's history (Graham 1976; Clarke 2002). Within the Society's bicentenary volume, *The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition*, Anderson's significant contribution to the Society's development has been considered by various authors, while articles by David Clarke and Hugh Cheape have provided in-depth examinations of the relationships between Anderson,

the development of the museum and Scottish archaeology (Bell 1981; Clarke 2002, 2014; Cheape 2009, 2010). Anderson has been credited with systematising Scottish archaeological practices and promoting a distinctive Scottish identity in the Antiquities Museum based on Scotland's surviving cultural artefacts (Clarke 2002; Cheape 2010). Sheila Watson claimed that Anderson's emphasis on the Scottish nature of the national collection led to Scottish exceptionalism within archaeological practices, both during and after Anderson's death (Watson 2011: 757–8). However, Clarke has demonstrated that although Anderson's immediate successors

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ILLUS 1 Joseph Anderson in the Antiquities Museum, Royal Institution, 1890. (Image © National Museums Scotland)

followed an isolationist perspective, Anderson himself was part of international networks of museum professionals and archaeologists, and his scholarship was both Scottish and European in scope (Clarke 2002, 2014). Indeed, the museum's European archaeological collections were significantly expanded under Anderson's keepership, as discussed by Alison Sheridan (Sheridan 2020: 72). However, there has been less focus on Anderson's equally important role in expanding and studying the Scottish historical collection held in the Antiquities Museum.<sup>1</sup> This article considers the ways in which the Scottish historical collection was displayed and studied under Anderson's keepership from 1869 at the Royal Institution until it moved to new premises at Queen Street in 1891, with a catalogue of the entire collection published in 1892 (Illus 1). Arrangements at the Antiquities Museum in 1892 are contextualised through comparisons with other national museums in the British Isles and Europe. The Society's archives, its museum catalogues, and Anderson's papers and monographs have been critically examined to consider how Anderson's privileged position as keeper for 43 years allowed him to systematise and communicate appropriate methods for investigating and displaying Scotland's historical remains, which had been developing within the Society throughout the 19th century.

Joseph Anderson was keeper of the Antiquities Museum from August 1869 to March 1913, editor of the *Proceedings*, assistant secretary of the Society from 1877, and Rhind lecturer 1879–82 and 1892, establishing him as the leading expert on archaeology and material culture studies in Scotland (SAScot 1917: 5–6; SAScot Minute Book 1868–1880, 13 November 1877). Clarke noted that no paper was published in the *Proceedings* without some form of input from Anderson, making him the most influential figure in shaping material culture historiography within the Society during his lifetime (Clarke 2002: 2). Before becoming keeper, Anderson had been an English and Latin teacher in Scotland and Constantinople in the 1850s, then he was editor of the *John O'Groat Journal* in Caithness from 1860 (Guthrie 1913; Clarke 2002: 4–5). It was

during his editorship that Anderson joined a close circle of antiquaries in Caithness and during this time he was involved in a number of excavations (Clarke 2002: 4–5). When the keepership of the museum was advertised after the death of William McCulloch (1815–69), the Society explicitly required that the new keeper should have 'a general knowledge of archaeology, [and] the classification and arrangement of archaeological objects' (SAS Internal MSS: UC87/5). McCulloch had previously been employed as a librarian at the Edinburgh Subscription Library and the School of Arts, as well as being the salaried clerk of the Society (McCulloch 1870: 535–6). Therefore he acquired his material culture expertise on the job. In contrast, Anderson had obtained archaeological experience in Caithness and had already contributed a number of papers as a corresponding member of the Society (Anderson 1868, 1870; Graham 1976: 279–81). When Anderson expressed an interest in applying for the keeper's post, SAScot secretary John Stuart (1813–77) encouraged his application, since the council 'was bound to take the best man they can find – and I shall be much mistaken if any one with so many claims as you have, will present himself' (SAS Internal MSS: UC21/2). Stuart was right, and as the work of Angus Graham and David Clarke has demonstrated, Anderson went on to exert a significant influence over not only the development of the museum, but also the trajectory of research undertaken on the collection (Graham 1976; Clarke 2002, 2014).

In the late 19th century, Anderson was one of a select group of people in Scotland who held a salaried post focused on Scottish archaeological and historical studies, with most scholars engaged in other professions rather than it being their main occupation (Clarke 1981; Stevenson 1981: 174–9).<sup>2</sup> The systematisation of Scottish historical and archaeological ideas and practices principally developed within learned societies, since Scottish history and archaeology were not yet established as distinct academic disciplines within universities. Philippa Levine outlined how in England academic historians and archaeologists were defining themselves as separate from their amateur counterparts in the late 19th

century through the development of degrees and new university posts, as well as the establishment of new academic journals such as the *English Historical Review* established in 1886 (Levine 1986: 164–7). But Richard Marsden has demonstrated that the division between historians, archaeologists and antiquarians was less pronounced in Scotland because the study of the Scottish past remained outside of the academy for longer (Marsden 2020). Chairs of Scottish History were founded at the University of Edinburgh only in 1901 and at the University of Glasgow only in 1913 (Giles 1933; Kinchin et al 1988: 95, 125). This was followed by the first Scottish Chair of Archaeology being created in 1925 at the University of Edinburgh, following an endowment bequeathed by John Abercromby (1841–1924) (University of Edinburgh, online; Stevenson 1981: 190). Although history was taught as a subject within Scottish universities, Scottish history was largely embedded in constitutional history in the law faculty or studied as part of literature (Anderson 2012; Marsden 2017: 157–63). For example, Marsden noted that even though Professor of Civil History Cosmo Innes (1798–1874) had a keen interest and expertise in Scottish history, changes in the law degree after 1862 at the University of Edinburgh resulted in him focusing his lectures more on English constitutional history (Marsden 2017: 160–3). Therefore, the Society’s meetings were an important intellectual space within which professional and amateur historians and archaeologists could exchange their research findings with fellow enthusiasts of the Scottish past without the restriction of rigid disciplinary distinctions.

During the 19th century there were often no clear distinctions between those who described themselves as archaeologists, historians or antiquarians in terms of practice, even when scholars themselves contested their differences (Marsden 2020; Holder 2021: 86–90). Fellows of the Society used the terms ‘antiquarian’ and ‘archaeologist’ interchangeably (and more occasionally ‘historian’) to describe themselves as scholars studying the past using ‘antiquities’ as primary sources. The antiquities studied by Fellows encompassed objects, monuments and

manuscripts, often with a focus on understanding Scotland’s social and cultural history (Holder 2021: 86–90). Several anniversary addresses to the Society refer to the interdisciplinary nature of antiquarian/archaeological investigations, with James Young Simpson (1811–70) specifically referring to manuscript research as ‘archaeology’ (Murray 1855; Innes 1862, 1865; Simpson 1863: 13; Laing 1871, 1890). Lord Neaves (1800–76) argued that it was not the type of sources that defined antiquarianism, but the approach to the past: ‘History has for its office the ascertainment, narration, and philosophy of past events. The antiquary’s business rather is with the customs and manners, the opinions and usages, and the physical monuments and memorials of former ages’ (Neaves 1862: 326). However, it should be noted that history was also changing as a discipline in the 19th century from a literary exercise towards increasing focus on primary source analysis and cultural history (Sweet 2019, 2020). At the same time, the boundaries of ‘prehistoric’ and ‘historic’ periods were still being defined by archaeologists and historians (Wilson 1863, vol 1: 15–18; Anderson 1881a: 23; Trigger 2006: 133).<sup>3</sup> So even though some antiquarians were starting to label themselves as archaeologists and differentiating themselves from historians, the distinctions were not always clear cut, particularly for those studying historic periods. Anderson’s work developed within this environment, whereby the investigation of historic objects was part of a blurred intellectual space as the interdisciplinary approaches necessary for understanding such items brought them within the sphere of all three overlapping disciplinary labels.

#### JOSEPH ANDERSON, THE RHIND LECTURES AND MATERIAL CULTURE METHODOLOGIES

One important way that definitions and methodologies of Scottish archaeology and history developed within the Society was through the Rhind Lectureship in Archaeology, with lectures delivered to public audiences from 1876 onwards (Stevenson 1981: 157–8; Gilmour 2015).

Alexander Henry Rhind's (1833–63) bequest had originally been offered to the University of Edinburgh to establish a professorship in History and Archaeology. But since the changes under the Universities (Scotland) Act 1858 guaranteed support for the existing Chair of History, he offered his bequest to the Society to establish the lectureship (SAScot 1876b: 13–16). Lectures covered a range of archaeological, anthropological, architectural, art historical and historic subjects. For instance, in 1886 David Masson (1822–1907), Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, presented six lectures titled 'The Social System of Scotland in the Sixteenth Century' (SAS Internal MSS: UC29/37). Joseph Anderson was appointed as Rhind lecturer in 1879 and he delivered lectures between 1879 and 1882 titled 'Scotland in Early Christian and in Pagan Times' (Anderson 1881a, 1881b, 1883, 1886b). It was within the first lecture of this series that Anderson set out his vision for how the material remains of Scotland in both prehistoric and historic periods should be collected and investigated.

Although Anderson's lectures covered mainly prehistoric and early medieval periods, he recognised that archaeological methods were relevant to the full span of Scotland's past. He noted how 'the archaeology of the historic period and the archaeology of the non-historic period do in fact constitute two sections of the same investigation, conducted by the same processes in both cases, and the results in both depending on the application of the same principles' (Anderson 1881a: 4–5). For Anderson, this meant detailed observation, comparison, classification, and the assembling of a 'cluster of facts' associated with each object (*ibid.*: 16–19). Through this approach Anderson argued that 'archaeology aims at producing a history of man by his works, of art by its monuments, of culture by its manifestations, and of civilisation by its developments' (*ibid.*: 1). By the late 19th century, prehistoric (and excavated historic) objects were increasingly investigated through more systematic recording at sites, studying associated finds, documenting stratigraphy, and classifying and comparing groups of objects (Schnapp 1996: 300–23; Trigger 2006: 121–35;

Díaz-Andreu 2007: 392–7). Although Anderson did not state what constituted a historic object's 'cluster of facts', he clearly meant any information relative to understanding its history; with observation, comparison and classification employed alongside documentary research (Graham 1976: 288–9). Once the cluster of facts was established for an object, this could form the basis of wider conclusions concerning social practices, customs, technological developments and changes in art and craft techniques. By studying both prehistoric and historic objects in a similar way, Anderson could present a connected narrative of national history and society that covered the full span of human habitation in Scotland.

The specifically 'national' importance of collecting and studying the antiquities of Scotland was a key concern for Anderson, argued both in his Rhind lectures and in another given to the Glasgow Archaeological Society in 1887 (Anderson 1888c). Anderson's emphasis on Scotland as a distinct nation with its own material culture history was a continuation and consolidation of the founding aims of the Society and views of Fellows who had preceded him (Stevenson 1981: 31–85; Cheape 2010). Anderson maintained that only Scottish materials could tell Scotland's story, in the same way that all countries had their own national story of development. He defined Scottish archaeological objects as those collected from what was the contemporary geographical location of Scotland, encompassing Highland and Lowland antiquities (Anderson 1881a: 12–13). Anderson argued that modern Scotland was the result of accumulated historical development, 'For ... the idea of nationality cannot be confined to the existing individuals ... but includes the aggregate in all its relations of space and time' (*ibid.*: 13). In this way, he incorporated the different historical and modern people of Scotland into a unified concept of Scottish history that acknowledged differences in Highland and Lowland culture as part of a Scottish whole. Much as Daniel Wilson (1816–92) had argued before him in *Pre-historic Annals of Scotland*, Anderson claimed that there was a continuous line of development from art on sculptured stones to the decoration

on Highland brooches, powder horns, dirks and musical instruments (Wilson 1863, vol 2: 209–37; Anderson 1888c: 352–3). Anderson’s treatment of Highland materials contrasted with that of historian John Hill Burton (1809–81), who negatively presented the Highlands and Islands as an ethnically separate ‘other’ in his *History of Scotland* (Hill Burton 1876; Ferguson 1998: 286–9). Instead, Anderson presented Highland antiquities as an integral part of Scotland’s long and diverse history (Anderson 1888c: 352–3). However, Anderson also maintained that Scottish objects needed to be contextualised. He compared Scottish with non-Scottish objects to understand where forms of decoration had originated or the extent of international influences. For example, in his Rhind lecture on ecclesiastical bells he included Irish, English, Welsh, French and Swiss comparative examples (Anderson 1881a: 167–215). As much as Anderson presented a unified vision of Scottish cultural history, he did not deny that Scotland had been affected by a range of outside influences. His approach was to collate all known information on Scottish material culture to create an integrated Scottish cultural history, which was contextualised through comparison with objects from other countries.

It is important to note that Anderson’s ideas were part of broader discussions in the Society regarding the methodology and scope of Scottish archaeological investigations (Murray 1855; Innes 1862, 1865; Neaves 1862; Laing 1871, 1890; Cochran-Patrick 1888; Clarke 2002: 8). Arthur Mitchell’s (1826–1909) analysis of so-called ‘primitive’ historical objects are particularly relevant to these debates and were presented in his Rhind lectures ‘The Past in the Present’ and ‘What is Civilisation?’ delivered between 1876 and 1878 (Mitchell 1880). Mitchell proposed that modern ‘primitive’ objects from rural Scotland were not only useful for comparing with prehistoric finds but were also a key part of understanding historical continuity and change (ibid: 1–160). His lectures followed an archaeological approach, much as Anderson later proposed, in which he examined the physical properties of objects, considered their relationship to technological developments, observed and recorded the

social and economic practices surrounding items, and compared similar items/practices from different countries (ibid). For example, Mitchell observed a young boy making a spinning whorl for his mother on the Shetland island of Fetlar, recorded how spinning items were used in a number of households, compared Scottish spinning practices to other countries, and noted superstitions surrounding whorls used as charms (ibid: 1–20). Throughout his lectures, Mitchell problematised the assumption that advanced technology equalled higher intelligence and civilised society, instead arguing that the continued use of simpler technologies in certain locations was due to environmental suitability (that is, a material survival-of-the-fittest based on evolutionary ideas) and was ‘the outcome rather of wisdom than of ignorance or stupidity’ (ibid: 37).<sup>4</sup> The Society had been actively collecting objects that were going out of use in Scotland since the mid-19th century (SAS Internal MSS: UC 87/22). However, Mitchell’s lectures demonstrated how the systematic recording of practices and beliefs surrounding such objects (as well as collecting them) allowed archaeologists to reflect on *why* the material culture of different parts of Scotland was so diverse, allowing Scottish societal variations to be incorporated into an integrated narrative of Scotland’s social and cultural history.

#### EXPANDING SCOTLAND’S MATERIAL CULTURE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Graham noted that, although Anderson is best known for his contribution to the development of Scottish prehistoric and early medieval archaeology, he was also an antiquarian scholar of his time and equally interested in studying historic subjects (Graham 1976). Anderson’s work developed as part of the expanding body of Scottish material culture histories published by the Society in the late 19th century, with increasing numbers of Fellows presenting detailed, technical papers on historic subjects, drawing on the diverse professional expertise within the Society’s membership (Stevenson 1981: 174–5; Holder

2021: 180–7). Several of Anderson’s papers discussed historical subjects, such as one in 1874 concerning a jet pilgrim badge, another in 1886 discussing a whale-bone casket and a paper in 1888 examining the confessions of the Forfar witches (Anderson 1876, 1886a, 1888b). The recording of ‘facts’ by systematically gathering relevant data and employing international comparisons, on which Anderson built wider conclusions, were as evident in these ‘historic’ papers as in his prehistoric ones (Graham 1976: 281–3).

Anderson’s paper on lion-shaped ewers was a prime example of the technical and comparative approach (Anderson 1879a). In this paper Anderson combined object and archival analysis with the comparison of several ewers from Continental Europe to identify them as aquamaniles for hand washing by Roman Catholic priests as part of celebrating the Mass (Anderson 1879a; Graham 1976: 283). Anderson was primarily concerned with identifying the function of lion-shaped ewers found in Scotland, and a collection of examples from private collections was displayed alongside this paper to compare materials, forms and decoration (Anderson 1879a). Notably, one of the ewers, from Nuremberg, was purchased by the museum in 1887, directly linking the discussion of historic objects in Society meetings with acquisitions for the museum (SAScot 1888: 7; Illus 2). For Anderson’s paper, analytical chemist William Ivison Macadam (1856–1902) had conducted an analysis of one of the ewers to identify its material as brass rather than bronze, demonstrating how historic objects were undergoing scientific scrutiny in a similar fashion to prehistoric materials (Anderson 1879a: 65–6). However, Anderson’s technical, scientific approach to studying historic objects was not unique and reflected a general trend within the Society at this time, particularly from the 1880s onwards (Holder 2021: 180–7). Examples from the *Proceedings* included one paper in 1880 on church tokens by Macadam and another in 1889 on the Regalia of Scotland by silversmith Alexander James Steel Brook (1842–1908) (Macadam 1880; Brook 1890). Both Fellows conducted in-depth analyses of materials and construction methods, utilising their professional

skillsets and employing comparative examples to come to their broader conclusions. The investigation of Scottish historic subjects following a systematic analysis of archival and material sources formed the basis of an expanding Scottish material culture historiography produced by the Society in this period. This was historical information that was extracted ‘from things’ as much as it was ‘of things’, and the scientific investigation of historic objects contributed to broadening who (and what) were considered part of Scotland’s national story.

Anderson was as much a textual historian as an archaeologist, and his interdisciplinarity was evident in his historical monographs *The Orkneyinga Saga*, *The Oliphants in Scotland* and *Ancient Scottish Weapons* (Anderson 1873, 1879b; Drummond & Anderson 1881). In these monographs he employed the same inductive approach, concern with gathering ‘clusters of facts’, focus on Scotland’s unique historical experience and consideration of Scotland’s international connections. In *Ancient Scottish Weapons* Anderson utilised a range of archival sources to detail the history of Highland dress and weapons



ILLUS 2 Lion-shaped ewer from Nuremberg. (Illustration from *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 22 1888: 7; courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of Scotland)

to support the material evidence illustrated by James Drummond's (1816–77) drawings, as well as examples held by the museum and in private collections (Drummond & Anderson 1881: 1–26). In *The Oliphants in Scotland* Anderson drew on a detailed examination of textual evidence to trace the history of the family and their contribution to key events in Scotland's history, including the Wars of Independence and the upheavals during the lives of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI, with select material sources supporting his narrative (Anderson 1879b: xii–xxiii, xxxvii–lxii). In *The Orkneyinga Saga* Anderson analysed information in the sagas, other textual sources and material remains relative to understanding Orkney's unique experience containing a cultural mix of Irish, Norwegian and Scottish influences (Anderson 1873: ix–cxxxiii). Although material sources were more prominent for discussing the Norsemen of Orkney's earlier history, Anderson also considered Orkney's ecclesiastical past through architectural descriptions of churches (ibid: lxxiv–lxxv, lxxxviii–ci). Anderson concluded his essay by stating:

It gives a curious feeling of reality to the ancient legends when we can thus handle the blades and bucklers of which we read such stirring stories, and remember that it was because the Norse sword was then the longest, and the Norse arm the strongest, that we now read the earliest chapters of the history of northern Scotland in the guise of an Iceland Saga (ibid: cxxxiii).

In this statement we can appreciate Anderson's claim that Scotland's national history was the aggregate of a range of peoples, times and types of sources (Anderson 1881a: 13). By applying an inductive, interdisciplinary approach to both pre-historic and historic subjects he aimed to provide complementary and comparative evidence for understanding the development of a social and cultural history that was individual to the area known as modern Scotland.

Anderson's emphasis on investigating distinctively Scottish historical objects or experiences was sometimes necessary to address absences in research concerning Scotland's cultural history compared to its European counterparts.

*Ancient Scottish Weapons* was one such publication that covered materials that were absent elsewhere (Drummond & Anderson 1881: 2). Drummond complained in 1872 that there was a lack of knowledge on the historical development of Highland weapons, claiming that 'much ignorance prevails, even among the Highlanders themselves' (Drummond 1873: 3). Drummond bequeathed his collection of Highland weapons and accoutrements to the Society to contribute to improving the study of this subject, and this collection was significantly expanded under Anderson's keepership (SAScot 1878; SAScot 1892: 300–16). In the 1870s, contemporary multi-national histories of arms and armour barely mentioned Scottish examples (Drummond 1873: 3). John Hewitt (1807–78) made brief references to Scottish military costume and equipment in *Ancient Armour and Weapons in Europe* (Hewitt 1855–60), while August Demmin's (1817–98) *An Illustrated History of Arms and Armour* made even fewer references to Scottish materials (Demmin 1877). *Ancient Scottish Weapons* was a response to this absence by providing detailed descriptions and images of Scottish weaponry with a sketch of their histories.<sup>5</sup> The value of these items for Anderson was their ability to 'disclose the existence of culture and the diffusion of taste, even in the remotest districts of the country ... which illustrate ... the most peculiar and picturesque phases of her national history and native art' (Drummond & Anderson 1881: 1). These items were evidence of Scottish social, art and craft history, with less emphasis on them representing Scottish military capabilities. Although Anderson focused on objects made and used in Scotland (mainly Highland but also Lowland examples), he also noted European influences, such as the popular import of 'Andrea Ferrara' blades in the 17th and 18th centuries (ibid: 19). The study of historic weapons was a popular subject in the 19th century as part of the military and cultural history of Europe. These objects were part of Scotland's national story and were worthy comparators to other European collections, if only for their cultural and artistic attributes. But, as Anderson complained, 'we look in vain among our public institutions for

a completely representative collection of them' (ibid: 1). As keeper of the Antiquities Museum, Anderson held a privileged position to rectify this situation and ensure Scotland's material histories were not only written, but also preserved, classified and displayed in Scotland's national museum.

### THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL COLLECTION ON DISPLAY

Although the Society had always claimed that its main focus was collecting and investigating Scotland's national past, it was only after Anderson became keeper that this was communicated via the museum's catalogues and displays more explicitly. Anderson's 'nationalising' influence was evident in changes in the catalogue title, section headings, and a new notice inserted at the beginning. Before 1871, the museum's catalogues did not have the word 'national' in their title, but this was added from 1872 onwards as *Catalogue of Antiquities in the National Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.<sup>6</sup> Then in 1876, the 'British Antiquities' section was renamed 'Scottish Antiquities', even though English and Irish objects remained on display in this room in the Royal Institution (SAScot 1872: iv; SAScot 1876a: v). A Treasure Trove notice that had formerly been at the beginning of the catalogue was replaced by an excerpt from James Young Simpson's anniversary address of 1861 (Simpson 1863). In addition, donor names were added into the 1876 and 1892 catalogues (SAScot 1876a; SAScot 1892). All these changes indicate that Anderson was appealing to the civic duty, patriotic spirit and purses of his predominantly Scottish visitors. As the excerpt stated:

In pleading with the Scottish public for the ... enrichment of our Museum by donations of all kinds ... we plead for what is not any longer the property of this Society, but what is now the property of the Nation ... It now belongs ... to Scotland; and we unhesitatingly call upon every true-hearted Scotsman to contribute ... to the extension of this Museum, as the best record and collection of the ancient Archaeological and

Historical Memorials of our Native Land (SAScot 1876a: iv).

This stirring appeal for donations from 'true-hearted Scotsmen' coupled with the knowledge that donors would be explicitly acknowledged was clever marketing. It acted as a reminder that the museum's priority was collecting and representing Scottish history above all else, and fed into contemporary public enthusiasm for Scotland's past, fuelled by the influence of Queen Victoria and reflected in the erection of new commemorative monuments (Finlay 2002; Coleman 2014).

When the Antiquities Museum relocated to Queen Street in 1891, the Scottish national story was confidently asserted through the prominence of the Scottish collection within Anderson's arrangement. The historic Scottish collection was placed on the ground floor, the prehistoric Scottish collection on the first floor, and the international comparative collections were displayed on the second floor, *including objects from England and Ireland* (Anderson 1892: 1–2).<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that this was the first time that the Scottish collection had been separated from other British materials, whereas they had been placed in the same cases at the Royal Institution. Despite this, Anderson communicated his belief in the research value of comparative studies in the 1892 catalogue by listing non-Scottish materials within consecutive sections after the Scottish objects, enabling scholars to compare items which were physically located on different floors (SAScot 1892).<sup>8</sup> There were some exceptions to the arrangement set out above; for example, Irish ecclesiastical bells were displayed with the Scottish, while site displays, such as the Culbin Sands in Moray, included prehistoric alongside historic objects to preserve the associated evidence and chronology of a single site (ibid: 90–5, 282–4). Rather than arranging the historic collection by periods, such as 'Renaissance', 'Reformation' or 'Covenanting period', the historic collection was divided into material themes to illustrate different aspects of Scottish culture and society, reflecting a continuation of display practices at the Royal Institution

(SAScot 1870, 1876a). At Queen Street the four largest sections were ‘Ecclesiastical’, ‘Arms and Armour’, ‘Domestic Utensils &c.’ and ‘Scottish Dress’ (SAScot 1892: iv). It is significant that this was the first time the label ‘Scottish Dress’ was deployed in the museum’s catalogue and this section included many of the distinctive items that were uniquely associated with Scotland in the eyes of the wider world, such as sporrans and Highland brooches (ibid: 352–66). The thematic material approach meant the Scottish collection could be presented as a connected narrative of cultural progress from prehistory to the present, treating the whole collection in the same ‘archaeological’ way, much as Anderson promoted in his Rhind lecture (Anderson 1881a: 15–19). This arrangement represented a culmination in interpretive practices within the Society since the mid-19th century, whereby the materiality of the historic collection had consistently been prioritised following archaeological ideas of classification and comparison of ‘types’ of object (Schnapp 1996: 321–4; Clarke 2002: 9; Holder 2021: 112–19). However, the difference was the explicit foregrounding of the Scottish collection at Queen Street, reflecting a tangible embodiment of Anderson’s claim that Scottish materials were the foundation of Scotland’s national story, while other British materials supported the Scottish story as part of the comparative international collection.

The most explicit evidence of the Scottish national emphasis in the Queen Street galleries is seen in ‘Description of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland 1892’, which exists only as a bound typewritten document with Anderson as its presumed author (Anderson 1892).<sup>9</sup> The content and tone of language evidenced therein indicates that it was intended as a guide for non-specialist visitors to the museum and it provided lengthy interpretation that could not fit onto labels or in the catalogue. This document is one of the few surviving interpretive texts from the Antiquities Museum, since none of the 19th-century labels were preserved. It gave a general description of what was contained in the collection, while also including extensive explanations of some of the lesser-known objects that illustrated

Scottish everyday life, supporting Anderson’s argument of the value of objects as indicators of the history of society and civilisation (Anderson 1881a: 1). For example, it devoted six pages to explaining ‘all the means and appliances used in producing the light of other days’ (Anderson 1892: 3). A further eight pages described ‘the general domestic economy of the Scottish household’ (ibid: 8).<sup>10</sup> Shorter sections mention the military collection, Highland accoutrements, key items such as the Lewis chess pieces, and the museum’s selection of sculptured stones (ibid: 2, 17–22). A further 20 pages focused on the prehistoric collection, which was exhibited using a combination of the three-age system and individual site displays, such as the Culbin Sands section described above (ibid: 23–43).<sup>11</sup> Since the whole collection was on display with little interpretation, this guide explained what objects revealed about Scottish society in the past (Clarke 2014: 86). But notably, the comparative gallery on the second floor was not described and was merely mentioned in a brief paragraph at the end, meaning visitors would presumably have viewed the comparative collections through the lens of the information they had on Scottish objects (Anderson 1892: 44).<sup>12</sup> Since acquiring national status in 1851, the Society had aimed to provide educational displays of Scotland’s history through objects displayed in the museum (Innes 1862). But although a comparative international section existed, this guide demonstrates how after 1891 the Scottish story was predominantly communicated to the visiting public through the Scottish collection.

The language Anderson deployed in this guide reinforced the idea that the Scottish collection was capable of illustrating Scotland’s unique prehistoric and historic journey. However, this was a cultural representation of Scottish development, disconnected from political history, people and events, reinforcing Anderson’s claim that archaeology focused on cultural history and the development of civilisation (Anderson 1881a: 1). On the first page Anderson asserted that ‘the series of Scottish antiquities is now ... a representative collection, national in character, and unsurpassed in scientific interest by

any national collection in Europe' (Anderson 1892: 1). Arguably, although the collection had significantly expanded in the 1880s, this claim was more aspirational than accurate (Stevenson 1981: 200–4). That said, the historic collection was sufficient for presenting cultural themes and stories connected with Scottish society of the past and, as Anderson explained, was 'classified so as to illustrate the domestic and social, the military, the ecclesiastical and other aspects of ancient Scottish life and manners' (Anderson 1892: 2–3). For example, Anderson noted the museum's collection of military equipment, with separate cases to highlight the distinctively different designs on Highland weapons and accoutrements, which had been identified in *Ancient Scottish Weapons* (ibid: 2, 17–18; Drummond & Anderson 1881). He pointed out the toddy ladles 'jointed so as to fold up to be carried in the pocket with the penny-wedding knife and fork, which recall the festivities of a homelier time than the present' (Anderson 1892: 8). He also noted how 'peer men' were so named, 'from the custom once common of making the wandering beggar [that is, poor man] hold the fir-candle in consideration of the supper and bed in the barn, to which his evening's service thus entitled him' (ibid: 6–7; Allen 1888). In these descriptions there were echoes of other Fellows of the Society, like Robert Chambers (1802–71), in whose work objects were associated with ordinary people of the past and recalled the customs and practices of former days, as described in *Domestic Annals of Scotland* (Chambers 1859–61; Holder 2021: 69–73, 132–3). But the ability of objects to provide evidence concerning specific historical figures or events was noticeably absent in this guide, with Scottish cultural continuity and the history of civilised society being the core message expressed through the Scottish collection's arrangement and interpretation.

#### COMPARING MUSEOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN BRITAIN AND EUROPE

Although the Queen Street displays emphasised the Scottish collection and narratives of

cultural progress, this was in part suggestive of broader British and international museum practices, reflecting connections between antiquarians and archaeologists in Scotland, Britain and Europe (Babes & Kaeser 2009). The Society had always fostered informal connections with other British and European learned societies and museums (Cheape 2010: 360; Sheridan 2020). The early adoption of the three-age system in Scotland has been attributed to the close connection between Scottish and Scandinavian antiquaries, and the Society's vision of a national museum in Scotland took its inspiration from the museum at Copenhagen in Denmark (Wilson 1855; Rowley-Conwy 2007: 137–76). During Anderson's keepership, more formal connections developed between the SAScot and international societies through the exchange of publications and antiquaries visiting collections across the UK and Europe. For example, in 1878 the SAScot council approved the exchange of publications with the Anthropological Societies of Berlin, Paris and Rome (SAScot Minute Book 1868–1880, 24 April 1878). In 1874, Robert William Cochran-Patrick (1842–97) attended the Congrès International d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Préhistoriques (CIAPP) in Sweden and visited Swedish museums as part of the programme of events (Cochran-Patrick 1876). The Society was well connected to international archaeological gatherings, with Anderson and SAScot Fellows listed as subscribing members receiving the congress's published transactions, although only a few Fellows appear to have been able to attend these events (International Congress 1869: xxv–xxviii, 27–36; International Congress 1884: xxvi–xxix; International Congress 1891: xx–xxi).

From early in his career as keeper, Anderson examined collections in other museums to inform his curatorship of the SAScot collection (Anderson 1884). His assistant George Fraser Black (1866–1948) supported him in this endeavour (Anderson 1888a; Black 1893). Anderson's trips were initially supported by the Society; for example, they funded his trip to Ireland in 1870 and Denmark in 1872 (SAScot Minute Book 1868–1880, 16 June 1870 & 20 December 1872).

After 1887, the Gunning Fellowship, established from the gift provided by physician Robert Halliday Gunning (1818–1900), was utilised by Anderson and Black ‘to examine other collections and keep the Edinburgh Museum as completely furnished with information and examples as possible’ (SAScot Minute Book 1880–1887, 18 June 1887). These visits allowed Anderson and Black to examine the collecting and exhibition practices of other museums, particularly to inform the re-display of the Antiquities Museum at Queen Street.

Anderson visited museums in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, North Italy and Switzerland (Anderson 1884, 1890). During his visits, Anderson observed that the principal European museums followed similar display strategies to those found in the Antiquities Museum, which were only partially realised at the Royal Institution but more systematically applied at Queen Street. European museums emphasised their respective nation’s progress from prehistoric to historic civilised society and exhibited objects that could illustrate different aspects of this story, combining evolutionary and nationalist ideas (Anderson 1884, 1890; Díaz-Andreu 2007: 377–8). Historic collections in European museums contained objects similar to those in the Antiquities Museum, such as arms and armour, ecclesiastical objects, personal adornments, architectural fragments and domestic items (Anderson 1884, 1890). In like fashion, they arranged their collections by material categories to represent their nation’s cultural progress, rather than narrating key historic events or periods (Anderson 1884, 1890). Some prehistoric collections were exhibited in dedicated museums separated from historic collections, but Anderson criticised this practice, since it broke up historical sequences from prehistory to the present (Anderson 1884: 40–1). This sequencing was important, since he claimed it allowed a nation to represent its full span of development and identify its distinctive cultural history and trajectory. Indeed, Anderson claimed that in this sense the Scottish collection was unique: ‘there is no European country which possesses a phase of indigenous art – surviving to the commencement

of the last century ... imparting a distinctively national character ... which is now so strikingly illustrated in our collection of Highland relics’ (ibid: 48). Anderson went on to argue, ‘I have nowhere seen a collection more completely illustrative of the whole consecutive history of culture as represented by successive developments of industrial arts ... than that which is now ... in our Scottish National Museum’ (ibid). Generally, Anderson found much that he admired in European museums with their collections tangibly representing the development of modern civilised society in Europe. For Anderson, not only was Scotland part of this European history of progress but, he argued, it was also exceptional in the longevity of its national culture, thereby elevating the importance of the Scottish national story and justifying the separation of the Scottish collections at Queen Street.

If the Antiquities Museum at Queen Street is compared to other national museums in the British Isles, the elevation of the ‘nation’ was also evident in England and Ireland in this period, although this was not as pronounced as the configuration in Scotland.<sup>13</sup> The British Museum (BM) and the newly established Dublin Museum of Science and Art both made some form of separation of the material culture of their respective nation in the 1890s and early 20th century.<sup>14</sup> The BM opened a separate English ceramics gallery and the south wall of the medieval room displayed portraits ‘of Englishmen or persons connected to this country’ (British Museum 1892: 196, 206–9). But the collection in the medieval room at the BM mixed British and European items within the same cases and displayed the medieval and early modern past through a European lens (ibid: 196–9).<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the Dublin Museum had separate rooms dedicated to the Irish antiquities collection, which had been transferred from the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) in 1890 (*Nature* 1890; Mitchell 1985: 132–4). The RIA collection of Irish antiquities was divided between four rooms, and three separate guides were produced from 1909 to 1911 describing the historic sections of the collection (Coffey 1909; Westropp 1911a; Westropp 1911b). However, the rooms were tucked away on the first floor of the

museum, while prominence was given to the science and art collections (Crooke 2000: 123–5).<sup>16</sup> The Dublin Museum was managed as a branch of the South Kensington Museum in London; therefore the focus on the science and art collections is perhaps understandable. Also, curatorial oversight by the RIA meant the Dublin Museum was not allowed to remove items from the RIA collection to add to other rooms (McDowell 1985: 63–4; Crooke 2000: 125).

Elizabeth Crooke argued that the RIA collection lost its prominence as a ‘national’ Irish collection by being subsumed into a museum that was principally focused on industrial education (Crooke 2000: 123–9). In this light, it is relevant that in 1884 Anderson and the Society rejected space at the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (later renamed the Royal Scottish Museum), which was also focused on industrial education and administrated through the same governmental department as the South Kensington Museum (Stevenson 1981: 165; Swinney 2013: 8). In 1883, when the SAScot council were urging the British government to provide new accommodation for the museum, they were deeply dissatisfied with the space offered to them in the Edinburgh Museum and maintained that:

The proposal to store the priceless National Collection of Antiquities in two small upper floors ... would be in a national sense impolite and discreditable, as giving an altogether unworthy expression to the views and obligations of Government, which under the Treasury Minute of 1851 undertook ‘to provide at all times fit and proper accommodation’, ‘for the Collection so generously gifted to the nation by the Society of Antiquaries’ (SAScot Minute Book 1880–1887, 6 November 1883).

There was no doubt in the council’s mind about the national status of the Antiquities Museum and the obligations of the British state to support it. So Anderson was not alone in arguing that the Scottish collection was unique and nationally important; rather, he was promoting widely held views within the Society at this time. Eventually, it was due only to the wealth and philanthropy of Fellow and newspaper owner John Ritchie

Findlay (1824–98), who provided the funds for the Queen Street galleries, that a satisfactory alternative space was later forthcoming (Thomson 2011: 23–35). In contrast, the RIA was not offered a dedicated, delineated space for the Irish collection and it was not until after the establishment of the Irish Free State that the Dublin Museum was rearranged to give Irish antiquities pride of place on the ground floor of the building (Mitchell 1985: 135, 162; Crooke 2000: 144).<sup>17</sup> In Scotland, the Antiquities Museum and the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art remained separate institutions with different collecting and display strategies until they institutionally amalgamated in 1985 (Swinney 2013; Bucciantini 2018). This situation gave Anderson the freedom to assert the primacy of Scottish antiquities at Queen Street in a way that was not possible in Ireland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, allowing the Scottish collection to expand and form the basis of more systematic and in-depth investigations of Scotland’s prehistoric *and* historic past.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

During his 43 years as keeper of the Antiquities Museum, Joseph Anderson occupied a crucial role in expanding, displaying and promoting methods for investigating the Scottish historical collection. Gathering data from detailed observations, classification, comparisons, and analysis of textual and material sources were the foundation of Anderson’s approach, and the results of these investigations fed into the expanding body of Scottish material culture histories being produced by the Society at this time. However, we must not fall into the ‘great man’ trap. Anderson was operating within the wider antiquarian and museological community, through which the definitions and methodologies of history, archaeology and curatorship were being developed (Clarke 2002: 8–12). He held a privileged position of authority, by means of which he could consolidate and communicate many of the ideas and approaches that were emerging within the Society both before and during

his keepership. Anderson's long tenure at the museum gave him the opportunity to develop and systematise these archaeological, historical and curatorial practices, whereas those whose professions lay elsewhere did not have the time or means to devote their attention to these to the same extent. As the number of museum staff increased from the 20th century onwards, dedicated curators have continued to expand and research the historical collection and develop distinct specialisations based on specific periods or categories of object.

It is interesting to note that Robert Stevenson (1913–92), who was appointed keeper in 1946, stated that from the mid-20th century onwards, the Antiquities Museum aimed to expand the collection of historic objects made or used in Scotland to foster 'the study of the ordinary (as well as the exceptional) things of modern historical times in what might be called an archaeological way' (Stevenson 1981: 203). In this aim we can clearly hear echoes of Anderson, with his concern for focusing on the development of the Scottish collection, as well as an archaeological approach being applied to the museum's historic materials. However, these ideas were the culmination of the longer-term development of the Society, as antiquarianism started to make the disciplinary shift towards archaeology and curatorship, with proponents focusing on the study of material remains and cultural history, regardless of period. The 'inter-disciplinarity' that is key to the study of historic materials and periods in the 21st century is a continuation of 19th-century antiquarian and curatorial practices (Hicks & Beaudry 2010; ScARF 2012; Gerritsen & Riello 2015; Gaskell & Carter 2020). And much as for Anderson and his contemporaries, combining documentary research with the application of archaeological and technical approaches to the study of historic objects is giving current researchers greater insight into Scottish historic materials, bringing new information and stories from Scotland's history to light (Loomis et al 2012; Sanger & Kinnaird 2016).

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## NOTES

- 1 The historical collection is defined as objects in the Antiquities Museum which were created or used in Scottish society from the 12th century onwards, so it encompasses medieval, early modern and modern objects.
- 2 For example, David Christison (1830–1912) and Robert Munro (1835–1920) were both medical doctors.
- 3 The solidification of the 12th century as the dividing point between prehistory and history was based on the appearance and increase in written sources from this century onwards, as noted by Anderson in his first Rhind lecture.
- 4 See Trigger 2006: 166–210 on the development of evolutionary archaeology.
- 5 Anderson does not explicitly refer to contemporary histories of military antiquities, but he was aware of Drummond's argument that there was a lack of scholarship on Highland examples.
- 6 The previous title was *Catalogue of Antiquities in the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.
- 7 There was only one stone hammer from Wales in the SAScot collection.

- 8 The catalogue stated the physical locations of objects at the start of each section so that comparative items on different floors could be found.
- 9 There is only one copy of this publication that has been identified by the author. This does not seem to have been published, so was possibly intended for visitors to consult in the museum rather than purchase or take home.
- 10 Including drinking vessels, cooking utensils, hand mills, pottery and implements for spinning and weaving.
- 11 Other site displays were Glenluce, Golspie, Shetland and Orkney.
- 12 It was not until the 20th century that guides for sections of the comparative collection were published, such as M Murray, *Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 1900).
- 13 The National Museum of Wales did not fully open to the public until 1927.
- 14 There is no national museum of England, but the BM collected materials from all the nations of Britain.
- 15 The BM's medieval room contained objects of the early modern and modern period.
- 16 Although there were some Irish objects in the science and art collections as well.
- 17 The rearrangement occurred in 1927, five years after Irish independence.

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