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'This flag was never a French one': Abbotsford, authenticity and the Battle of Waterloo

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ABSTRACT

Three flags in the collections at Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott, undocumented by Scott and believed to be connected with the Battle of Waterloo, have long raised questions about their provenance and authenticity, emerging in the decades after Scott's death in 1832 as Abbotsford transitioned from private home to Victorian tourist destination. This paper re-examines the flags and researches their provenance to conclude that they could not be genuine artefacts from the battlefield, and to establish that Sir Walter Scott could not have believed in their authenticity when he acquired them. Their likely origin as props in pageantry and exhibitions staged in London to celebrate the British victory at Waterloo provides insight into how Scott knowingly combined authenticity with theatricality in his aesthetic creation of Abbotsford.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between authenticity and romance, between fact and fiction, has been central to critical assessments of the impact of Sir Walter Scott's extraordinarily successful literary career inspired by the historical culture of Scotland. As a historian, Scott was practised in consulting and evaluating primary source evidence, while as a poet and novelist he combined historical knowledge and meticulous research into written and material sources with the exercise of imagination in plot and characterisation to craft his works. In a 'Prefatory Letter' to his novel *Peveril of the Peak* (Scott [1823] 2017: 10), the author quoted himself, still disguised as 'Author of Waverley', defending his practice in an exchange with the fictional antiquarian the Reverend Dr Jonas Dryasdust:

> A poor fellow, like myself, weary with ransacking his own barren and bounded imagination, looks out for some general subject in the huge and boundless field of history, which holds forth examples of every kind – lights on some personage, or some combination of circumstances, or some striking trait of manners, which he thinks may be advantageously used as the basis of a fictitious narrative – bedizens it with such colouring as his skill suggests – ornaments it with such romantic circumstances as may heighten the general effect – invests it with such shades of character, as will best contrast with each other – and thinks, perhaps, he has done some service to the public …

Alongside Scott's published antiquarian research into the historic environment and material culture of Scotland (for example, Scott 1826), descriptions of recognisable historic artefacts feature in the novels, often in the form of specific original objects owned by or known to him. It is this familiarity with historical artefacts that lends weight and apparent authenticity to his descriptions of settings and costume. A critical understanding of Scott's legacy as antiquarian

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and collector must, however, acknowledge an inherent tension in his motivations and behaviour. Scott combined a commitment to recording and preserving the genuine material culture of Scottish history with a playful tendency to accept the provenance of objects that might be more aspirational than proven. As this paper will consider, that propensity entailed a willingness to surround the apparently genuine with objects he knew to be fanciful and theatrical, including those he commissioned himself. Scott's weaving together of the authentic with the theatrical is most clearly in evidence at Abbotsford, the Scottish Borders home he created, incorporating architectural features salvaged from historic buildings and filled with his collections (Brown 2003). Described in recent commentary as a museum for living in, Abbotsford was once dubbed by Scott himself as 'a kind of Conundrum Castle' in acknowledgement of how it combined eclectic construction and curation with the domestic comforts of contemporary living (Anderson 1972: 411). The story of three objects formerly displayed at Abbotsford and 'rediscovered' in 2008 following decades out of sight and out of mind in storage, can shed some light on how Scott's collecting was understood, and misunderstood, after his death, when the 'Wizard of the North', as he was known, was no longer present to explain the thinking behind the contents and aesthetic of Abbotsford.

NOT THE GENUINE ARTICLE

These objects are, *prima facie*, three military (or royal and imperial) standards, or to use the British military term 'colours', painted on silk. Each is damaged and shows signs of repair and is badly frayed at the fly end; two have been stitched onto plain-coloured silk backings, evidently for conservation reasons. They were found in a cupboard at Abbotsford situated between Scott's Study and Library, in 2008, during the first year of operation of the Abbotsford Trust, the charity that now safeguards and manages the house, estate and historical collections of Scott and his descendants. The first flag (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1226) is 975mm in height and approximately 1280mm in width. Its backing is attached to a wooden staff, which retains a metal finial and silk cord and tassels. The painted and stitched design is a version of the imperial arms of Tsarist Russia over the cross of St Andrew, the patron saint of Russia, rendered as a pale blue saltire on a white ground (Illus 1). Research suggests this design does not constitute an accurate replica that corresponds exactly to any known form of imperial Russian standard, whether military, naval or more broadly heraldic. A combination of imperial arms on a rayed cross, rather than a saltire, was borne on the standards of the Russian Guards and infantry regiments of the late 18th and early 19th century, and these carried other heraldic insignia surrounding the imperial arms (Wise 1978, vol 2: 27–37). But an imperial Russian flag this is clearly intended to be. The second flag (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1278), measuring 980mm in height and approximately 1300mm in width to the frayed fly, carries a simple design of three fleur-de-lys emblems painted in gold on an off-white ground, apparently a representation of the royal arms of Bourbon France, though again not corresponding exactly to any known form of royal or military standard of France. No staff is present (Illus 2).

The focus of this paper is the third flag (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1223), 880mm in height and approximately 940mm in width to the frayed fly, which is a representation of a French Napoleonic military standard, fringed at the top and bottom edges, and consisting, at first inspection, of the tricolour of republican and imperial France, with painted lettering denoting it as the standard of the 105th Infantry Regiment: 'L'EMPEREUR NAPOLÉON AU 105TH REGIMENT D'INFANTER[IE] DE LIGNE' (Illus 3). The staff is present. Displayed separately in the Entrance Hall at Abbotsford is a representation of a French imperial 'eagle' (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1431) (Illus 4), the insignia borrowed by Napoleon from the armies of imperial Rome. Such devices topped the standards of his regiments, a distinction in the military culture of Europe of the period which saw the French standards, composites of flag, cravat (a length of fabric tied to the staff), staff and eagle,

ILLUS 1 Reproduction Russian imperial standard (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1226). © The Abbotsford Trust

ILLUS 2 Reproduction French royalist standard (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1278). © The Abbotsford Trust

ILLUS 3 Reproduction French imperial military standard of the 105th Infantry Regiment (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1223). © The Abbotsford Trust

often referred to simply as 'eagles' following the lead of Napoleon himself, who considered the standards subordinate to the symbolism of the eagle he had introduced to his Grande Armée (Fraser 1912: 12). Scott alluded to Napoleon's distinctive 'eagle standards' in his 1811 poem *The Vision of Don Roderick*, written in support of Britain's war effort in the Peninsular War:

> That Prelate marked his march — On banners blazed
> With battles won in many a distant land,
> On eagle standards and on arms he gazed;
> (Scott 1811: 41).

The 'eagle' at Abbotsford, which measures 215mm in height on its integral plinth and 220mm in width, is, however, made of wood, rather than the gilded bronze from which the Napoleonic eagles were cast by Pierre-Philippe Thomire after the original design of Antoine-Denis Chaudet (Wise 1978, vol 1: 5). Unlike the Russian and royalist French flags that it is preserved alongside, which appear to be generic in conception, this flag is designed to represent a specific historic object, identifiable as one of the standards hastily produced on the Emperor Napoleon's return to power in 1815. These were presented by him in person to his regiments of the Grande Armée on the Champ de Mars, Paris on 1 June of that year, in preparation for the War of the Seventh Coalition, the military campaign which culminated in defeat at the Battle of Waterloo and the end of his '100 Days' regime. More than this, the eagle standard of the 105th Infantry Regiment was one of two captured from their French standard bearers by British army regiments during the battle – violent feats of trophy-taking celebrated by the British military and

Illus 4 Reproduction French imperial military eagle (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1431). © The Abbotsford Trust

political establishment, and in the press, in the aftermath of the battle.

The Abbotsford Trust's discovery of the three flags in storage in 2008 attracted national media attention, with the story 'Waterloo flags find at Scott home' carried in several newspapers and by the BBC (BBC News 2008). In the published stories, the flags were accepted as relics of Waterloo, associated with Sir Walter Scott's well-known visit to the battlefield during his trip through France and Belgium in August 1815. Arriving just six weeks after the battle, Scott had been one of the first celebrity writers to visit the scene of the British and Allied victory and of the great human tragedy it amounted to. Despite the publicity, no new information about the origin or assumed authenticity of the flags came forward and, with due concern for their fragility, they were prepared for further storage and otherwise left undisturbed. The 2015 bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo galvanised the Abbotsford Trust to conduct further investigation, and the flags were examined in close detail by the curator of Abbotsford and a cohort of curators and conservators from National Museums Scotland.

It was soon apparent that the flags could not be considered genuine military standards of the Napoleonic era. The quality of materials, needlework and heraldic art was far below the standard to which such symbolically important objects were produced. The silk and fringing was poor, they were rather crudely painted, and, even for a standard made and issued in haste following the restoration of Napoleon, the French tricolour did not conform to the pattern of the surviving eagle standards of the Grande Armée. This was no

surprise, since the two standards captured during the charge of the Union Brigade of British cavalry in the later stages of the battle were immediately sent to the rear, rushed back to London and physically laid at the feet of the Prince Regent as trophies by the officer bringing news of the victory. Both are now in UK military museums, with that of the 105th Regiment being in the collections of the National Army Museum in London (NAM 1971-10-24-3). The eagle standard of the 45th Infantry Regiment is now in the collection of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards Museum, Edinburgh Castle (21214). The two eagles, without their standards, were brought together for the 2015 exhibition 'Waterloo: After the Battle' at the National Museum of Scotland. Unlike the Abbotsford version, the original 105th eagle standard is double-sided, with the reverse carrying the named battle honours of the regiment, and its lettering is rendered in fabric stitched to the ground, not painted. Beyond the fact that the original eagle standard of the 105th Regiment was therefore already accounted for, the eagle at Abbotsford which was presumed to be associated with it bore other hallmarks of its status as a copy. Made from wood and lacking the regimental number '105' that would have appeared on the front of the plinth on which the eagle stood, according to the pattern of the originals, there were further errors in the execution of the standard that pointed to a different origin story.

The first was that the colours of the French tricolour are reversed from their correct configuration. The blue bar should be at the hoist – viewed from the left the order should be blue, white and red, the sequence formally adopted as a national ensign by the National Convention in 1794 and retained for French military standards by the Emperor's order in 1812. Secondly, the rendering of the numbered title of the regiment uses English ordinal lettering '105th' rather than the French *cent cinquième* signified by the ordinal '105e', or '105^{ME}' as it appears on the original standard in the National Army Museum. Whoever painted the lettering on the Abbotsford flag may be assumed to have been an English-speaker.

In the knowledge that Sir Walter Scott could speak French fluently and indeed that his wife of 29 years was French by birth, it seems inconceivable that he could have believed the flag genuine. As a former volunteer soldier, a member of the Royal Edinburgh Light Dragoons, whose 'guidon' cavalry standard he would have seen and perhaps held in person, Scott would have been familiar with the quality and weight of the military standards of the period, and aware of the discrepancies between these and the flags he apparently brought to Abbotsford. Moreover, as one who followed the news of war and of the court and political establishment of his country, Scott could not fail to have been aware that the original eagle standard of the 105th Infantry Regiment captured at Waterloo was in London. The rapid journey of the two captured eagle standards from battlefield to the court of the Prince Regent was part of the popular lore of the British victory. In January 1816 they had been ceremonially placed in the Chapel Royal housed in the Banqueting House in Whitehall, London, where a number of other French standards taken during the Peninsular War were already displayed. The ceremony at the Chapel Royal, conducted by the Guards regiments, in the presence of the Duke of York, Commander-in-Chief of the British army, was widely reported in the press, including in *The Times* of London, on 19 January 1816, and the *Caledonian Mercury* of Edinburgh, three days later, which probably would have come to Scott's attention.

COLLECTING WATERLOO

Scott may indeed have considered himself well-schooled in the collecting of Waterloo artefacts and the pitfalls thereof, a practice that gathered pace as British tourists returned to the continent following Napoleon's defeat and the Allied occupation of Paris (Semmel 2000; Pollard 2023). Not only could Scott boast first-hand experience of visiting Waterloo itself as an early battlefield tourist, but he had also negotiated locally in the market for souvenirs offered for sale by entrepreneurial villagers living nearby, who might reasonably be suspected of having been less than scrupulous in claiming the provenance of their

wares as Waterloo battlefield souvenirs when the genuine articles became scarce. In his published travelogue *Paul's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Scott noted the plunder of the French and British baggage by the local inhabitants and that:

> A more innocent source of profit has opened to many of the poor people about Waterloo, by the sale of such trinkets and arms as they collect daily from the field of battle; things of no intrinsic value, but upon which curiosity sets a daily increasing estimate (O'Keefe 2015: 145).

Scott's collecting and display at Abbotsford ranged from prehistory, through the medieval to what would be considered contemporary collecting in today's museum parlance. The results of the battlefield souvenir hunting which Scott pursued during and after his Waterloo visit can still be seen today at Abbotsford in an assemblage high on the west wall of the Entrance Hall, consisting of objects which he bought at or near the scene of the fighting, and others that he acquired remotely and later through intermediaries and dealers. Of two sets of French cuirassier's body armour, one in steel and brass and one in steel, the former (Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, T.AD.0014) was purchased by him at La Belle Alliance, the inn close to where the victorious British and Prussian generals, Wellington and Blücher, met at the conclusion of the battle, the latter (Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, T.AD.0007) back at Brussels (Maxwell Scott 1893: 32–3). Alongside them are a French cuirassier's helmet (Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, T.AD.0013) and a scarlet *czapka* cap (Faculty of Advocates Abbotsford Collection Trust, T.AD.0006) thought by Scott to be that of a Polish lancer of Napoleon's Imperial Guard, but of a pattern more probably worn by the Imperial Guard's Dutch lancer regiment (Pawley 2003: 9). The helmet and cap are both believed to have been acquired by Scott after his return from Waterloo. Items collected by Scott at Waterloo itself and now housed in Abbotsford's archive include a French soldier's *livret* or account book (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.2479) picked up on the battlefield by Scott, who found 'fragments of books and papers strewed the ground in great profusion', and a German prayer book (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.2521), fragments of which he found in such quantities 'that I have little doubt a large edition had been pressed into the military service of one or other party, to be used as cartridge paper', that is to say, being torn up to make up rounds of black powder and musket ball ammunition (O'Keefe 2015: 140–1). Formerly displayed in the Library, a pocket manuscript of French songs (Abbotsford Trust, Z.AT.982), 'bearing stains of clay and blood, which probably indicate the fate of the proprietor', was given to Scott by the daughter of another battlefield tourist of his acquaintance (O'Keefe 2015: 147–54).

Scott's enduring fascination with the life of Napoleon Bonaparte, exemplified by his nine-volume biography of the deposed and deceased Emperor (Scott 1827) is further represented by the presence at Abbotsford of what purport to be Napoleon's pen case and ink blotter, a matching set in silk velvet and wirework. The pen case (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.2199) is said to have been taken from Fontainebleau or from Napoleon's desk at the Elysée Palace after he abdicated following defeat at Waterloo. It is believed to have been preserved by Marie Joséphine Louise, Duchesse de Gontaut, and later came into the possession of Viscountess Hampden, whose 1829 letter presenting it to Scott is preserved inside the pen case. The provenance of the ink blotter (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.21918) is less detailed and the specifics of its acquisition have proved enduringly elusive, although it contains an 1827 note from a Mr R Dalton at Nether Hall, Bury St Edmunds, enclosing a lock of Napoleon's hair that Dalton had acquired from Lieutenant-Colonel William Elphinstone, who had commanded the 33rd Regiment at Waterloo, and which he believed would be of interest to Scott (Maxwell Scott 1893: 29–30). It has been assumed that the blotter relates to Napoleon's carriage, abandoned and taken as a trophy after Waterloo, which was purchased from the Prince Regent by the show and exhibition entrepreneur William Bullock and duly exhibited in London. However, the published 1818 catalogue of the

carriage's exhibition at Bullock's Museum in Piccadilly (Bullock 1818: 7) refers inconclusively to 'a *writing desk*, which may be drawn out so as to write while the carriage is proceeding, an inkstand, pens &c'.

In his collecting of Waterloo and Napoleon memorabilia, Scott was undoubtedly invested therefore in the pursuit of authenticity. And yet his willingness to preserve and display that which he considered to be authentic alongside material which he knew was not, must be factored in to an investigation of the three flags. The possibility that Scott may have commissioned the flags as reproductions for his displays cannot be discounted. He was in the habit of commissioning new objects for Abbotsford made from historic materials and incorporating historic objects, such as the quaich made from the wood of a tree at Crookston (or Cruikston) Castle traditionally associated with Mary, Queen of Scots and Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, incorporating a 'Crookston dollar' coin of 1565 (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1804) (Thomson 1909: 160–1). He also acquired direct facsimiles of objects from other collections, such as the 'Bishop's branks' torture instrument copied from the original preserved in the Church of St Mary, at St Andrews (Abbotsford Trust, T.AT.1438), gifted to Scott in 1821 (Train 1845: 113). Yet if Scott were to have taken the trouble to commission a reproduction of captured French standard from Waterloo for Abbotsford, it is questionable that he would have chosen only the standard of the 105th Infantry to copy. The other French eagle standard captured by the British at the battle, that of the 45th Infantry Regiment, was taken in action by Sergeant Charles Ewart of the 2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys), a native of Ayrshire. Ewart's feat was widely celebrated in Scotland especially as a demonstration of Scottish valour. As a patriot, storyteller, and passionate historian of his native land, Scott seems unlikely to have snubbed this opportunity to recreate Ewart's captured eagle standard in favour of copying its companion. The taking of the eagle standard of the 105th also had a Scottish connection, in that a Scottish officer of the 1st (Royal) Dragoons, Captain Archibald Clark, was prominent in its capture, but it was Ewart who commanded popular attention in Scotland. Captain Clark nevertheless features later in the story of the Abbotsford flags.

It is, however, to the aforementioned exhibition of Napoleon's carriage in London that the provenance of the three flags at Abbotsford may most plausibly be traced. William Bullock's role as exhibitor and entrepreneur has attracted considerable scrutiny in the historiography of early museums and museum collecting (Altick 1978: 235–52; Costeloe 2008; Pearce 2008). He was only one of several competing impresarios who created displays of Waterloo and Napoleonic collections in London in the years after Napoleon's defeat, but Bullock's acquisition and display of the Emperor's carriage at his 'Egyptian Hall' Museum, and in a touring exhibition that travelled the UK, was probably the most commercially successful, attracting by one estimate over 800,000 visitors during the three years it was before the public (Costeloe 2008: 78). It is noteworthy that William Bullock was the brother of George, who was the leading furniture designer and cabinetmaker during the first phase of Sir Walter Scott's extension work at Abbotsford (Wainwright 1977). George Bullock actually used some of the interior space at the Museum as a showroom and workshop known as The Ware Rooms, and this is undoubtedly where some of Abbotsford's early furniture took shape. He also made furniture for Longwood, the house provided for Napoleon in his final exile in St Helena (Levy 1998). It seems likely also that Scott saw Napoleon's carriage when Bullock's tour reached Scotland, travelling to Edinburgh, Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen, Crieff and Glasgow in 1818 (Costeloe 2008: 78).

Despite the popular enthusiasm for inspecting Napoleon's carriage, Bullock must nevertheless have concluded by late 1818 that interest was on the wane, and he took the decision to close the Waterloo display in London. In April 1819, a substantial quantity of Bullock's antiquarian collections, including the carriage and associated artefacts, went under the hammer as he chose to reconfigure his museum spaces (Costeloe 2008: 81). Bullock's collection comprised a remarkable array of natural history specimens, ethnographic

material and militaria, and this breadth of content is very much apparent in the auction catalogue. Annotated copies reveal that several key collectors of the age were present in person or through appointed agents, and Walter Scott's name appears frequently, notably in Lot 104 where it is inscribed alongside 'a trophy of French arms and colours from Waterloo' at a price of £3 13s 6d, beneath a 'silver Helmet taken at Waterloo', also destined for Abbotsford at a similar price and part of the Entrance Hall display described above. All three were listed in the sale, incongruously, under the heading 'The Emperor's personal wardrobe taken from the carriage' (Johnson & Hewett 1979: 146). Bullock's 'trophy of arms and colours' is not described in sufficient detail to provide proof positive. There is no specific mention of the Russian, royalist French or other standards, but it appears highly likely at least to be the source of the three flags now at Abbotsford. This sale lot acquired by Scott may also correspond to an entry in the catalogue of his museum that Bullock published in 1816 (Bullock 1816: 27), which specifically mentions 'Eagles' and Waterloo:

> The Walls of the Apartment are decorated with Trophies, composed of a variety of Articles that have been used in the various changes of the Governments of France, that have succeeded each other during the exile of the Bourbons; among which are numerous splendid Military Orders, Eagles, Silver and Steel Cuirasses, and Helmets, Guns, Carbines, Pistols, Swords, Spears, Axes, &c. &c. of the various French Regiments, many of which will excite considerable interest, as being from the memorable Field of Waterloo, which may be considered to be the last act of this eventful period which this interesting Exhibition is intended to commemorate.

Other sources indicate the presence of military standards as embellishments to Bullock's display of Napoleon's carriage. An 1816 popular print 'Exhibition at Bullock's Museum of Bonaparte's Carriage taken at Waterloo' (Illus 5) presents one of Thomas Rowlandson's characteristically ribald crowd scenes as visitors to Bullock's Museum swarm over the carriage, giving some sense of the feverish excitement its display caused. In the foreground, exhibit props are scattered on the floor, apparently displaced by the melee of visitors. A fringed flag, apparently a military standard, lies among them. Between two windows in the wall of the exhibit hall to the right, three French imperial eagles on their staves are displayed in trophy of arms style. The *Bristol Mercury* of 2 September 1816 reported Bullock's touring show of Napoleon's carriage arriving in that city, noting 'It was decorated with the flags of the Allied Powers, and with the British standard in the centre above the French banner.' A 'French banner' seems rather a generic term for a reproduction of the eagle standard of the 105th Infantry Regiment captured at Waterloo, but 'the flags of the Allied Powers' as described may bear relation to the royalist French and imperial Russian flags now at Abbotsford.

If, on balance, the available evidence suggests that the three flags at Abbotsford were acquired from Bullock's Museum, a further question remains over where and how Bullock acquired them. The post-Waterloo marketplace in London for battlefield souvenirs, trophies and relics of the Emperor Napoleon's reign was thriving. The catalogue of Palmer's Waterloo Museum in Pall Mall, a rival to Bullock, runs to 188 entries, all claimed as genuine, and including four military eagle standards, albeit these were not attributed to Waterloo (Waterloo Museum 1816). No provenance information is included, however, in either Palmer's or Bullock's published catalogues, and Bullock left only scant record of his collecting activities in London and through trips to Belgium and France in 1814 and 1816 (Costeloe 2008: 60–1, 69). A plausible theory is that the three flags acquired by Bullock as exhibition props to complement his display of Napoleon's carriage were originally theatrical props, made for one of the numerous Waterloo spectacles and theatrical pageants that were staged in London in the aftermath of the battle. The three flags, imperial Russian, royalist French and imperial French, might have been made to communicate a plot, conceivably that of the downfall of Napoleon via the retreat from Moscow in 1812, his 1814 abdication, and the final defeat at Waterloo in 1815.

ILLUS 5 'Exhibition at Bullock's Museum of Bonepartes Carriage taken at Waterloo. Publish'd January 10th 1816 by R Ackermann No 101 Strand, Rowlandson Del 1816'. Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 810955. © Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2024. Royal Collection Trust

A theatre connection could indeed account for the presence of the flags at Abbotsford even if the equation made here with the lot from Bullock's Museum sale is in fact inaccurate. Scott was a shareholder of Edinburgh Theatre Royal and a keen supporter of the theatrical world, where so many of his poems and novels reached new audiences in adaptation. He called many of its actors, set dressers and scene painters his friends, including the landscape and portrait painter Alexander Naysmith, who painted theatre sets through much of his early career. Some of these individuals became involved in the design process at Abbotsford, where paint effects familiar from the stage are used to convince the onlooker that plaster and sugar paper are wood, and the Library bow window, perhaps Scott's most beloved corner of his home, is framed with painted drapery like a stage curtain. Daniel Terry, the actor and theatre impresario, was actively collecting in London on Scott's behalf for Abbotsford. On the stage, accuracy was less essential than visual effect; this, the very definition of style over substance, might account for the lack of substance and the errors in the Abbotsford flags. It seems possible that such props might have changed hands between stage managers and exhibition designers putting together immersive diorama and displays such as those employed at Bullock's London Museum. Vauxhall Gardens was one venue where military displays were staged to celebrate British victories, beginning with a Grand Festival held in July 1813 in honour of the Battle of Vittoria, which was attended by the Duke of Wellington. The first Waterloo event held at the Gardens on 18 June 1817 was advertised as 'a splendid Fete … where the gardens will be illuminated with extraordinary splendour

and ornamented with various emblems and devices appropriate to the occasion' (Coke & Borg 2011: 275). That emblems and devices on such occasions could have included reproduction flags used as props in dramatic reconstructions is indicated by accounts of commemorative events still being staged in London some years after Scott apparently acquired the flags from Bullock's sale. In 1824, Astley's Amphitheatre staged a hugely successful panoramic Battle of Waterloo spectacle featuring live actors on horseback, against a moving backdrop, which was revived annually for several years. In 1827, Vauxhall Gardens staged a two-hour re-enactment of the battle. The Vauxhall extravaganza, heavy with equestrian spectacle, concluded with an actor mounted on a charger, who would, quoting an advertising bill:

> at full speed, ride up a nearly perpendicular rock, to the Temple of Fame, at the summit of the Firework Tower, and there deposit the British and French Colours, as an Emblem of Amity, in the Temple of Concord, a feat unequalled in the Annals of Horsemanship (Coke & Borg 2011: 311).

AFTERLIFE AT ABBOTSFORD

Whatever the precise origin of the three flags, as exhibition set dressing and/or as theatrical props, their story does not end with their acquisition by Sir Walter Scott. Scott did not systematically list his collections or his library at Abbotsford, beyond incorporating the description of highlights in his 1830 manuscript *Reliquiae Trotcosienses*, wherein the Waterloo and Napoleon objects, including the cuirasses and lancer cap, were represented as authentic: 'the west or left side of the entrance is garnished with spoils from the memorable field of Waterloo, where I collected them in person very shortly after that immortal action' (Carruthers & Lumsden 2004: 34). No mention is made of an eagle standard. After his death in 1832, assumptions and questions about the flags began to emerge among visitors to Abbotsford, which had already become a destination for tourists in Scott's lifetime. 'Abbotsford, The Hall', a *c* 1834 watercolour sketch by David Roberts, features a furled flag to the left of the picture, which, although indistinct, features red, white and blue colouring strongly suggestive of the eagle standard (Abbotsford Trust, 2024.Z.AT.1070) (Illus 6). The flags, two flags to be specific, are alluded to in an 1840 magazine description of a visit (*Chambers Edinburgh Journal* 1840: 301), in modern terms a review of the visitor experience, where their authenticity as relics of Waterloo is assumed, and their location at that time on display in the Entrance Hall appears to be confirmed:

> on the side walls of the hall … Two brightly polished cuirasses, once borne on the breasts of Napoleon's cuirassiers, and a pair of beautiful French flags, form also conspicuous objects, being memorials of the field of Waterloo.

In 1843, American tourist Benjamin Punchard recorded seeing what must have been the reproduction eagle standard on his visit to Abbotsford, and evidently received an embellished account of how it had come into Scott's possession by gift of the King: 'The Hall, or entrance room, is hung with armor and devices of the ancient Scottish clans … Here were, likewise, a French standard and Eagle, taken at Waterloo, and given him by George the Fourth' (Fuller et al 1857: 29).

One more discerning visitor was not so easily convinced. In 1844, the French Romantic novelist Charles Victor Prévot, vicomte d'Arlincourt, made a tour of England, Scotland and Ireland, from which he published a travelogue, *Les Trois Royaumes*. Like so many other travellers drawn to Scotland, he visited Abbotsford, and describing his impressions in the book noted his own acuity in spotting the translation error in the painted legend on the reproduction eagle standard, given here in the published English translation:

> One of the flags in the first room is tri-coloured, and bears these words in large characters, L'Empereur Napoleon au 105TH régiment de ligne! 'This flag was taken at Waterloo', said Mrs Ormond, a sort of crabbed old housekeeper, who acts as a guide to the pilgrims of Abbotsford. 'This flag was never a French one' replied I without hesitation. Mrs Ormond

Illus 6 David Roberts 'The Hall, Abbotsford'. (Abbotsford Trust, 2024.Z.AT.1070). © The Abbotsford Trust

> frowned. I had just perceived an undeniable proof, that the pretended trophy, given to Walter Scott as historical, had never figured in the ranks of the imperial army. The English artist who composed it had printed his own fraud thereon. The words cent cinquième, in figures, ought to have been written thus: 105-ème, the little letters ème being indispensible. But no, he had used the English *th:* the last two letters of the word *fifth* were there instead of the three last of the word cinquième. A stupid fault! Sir Walter Scott had not noticed it, or he would not have let himself be so imposed upon. I was stooping towards the flag to examine it the better. 'It is not allowed to touch anything here', said Mrs Ormond sourly (D'Arlincourt 1844: 326–8).

D'Arlincourt could claim background military knowledge, since he had been appointed by Napoleon as an auditor in the Spanish army in 1811 and had been present at the Battle of Tarragona, but his readiness to assume that Scott had been duped was less well grounded, since it was housekeeper rather than collector who made the claim to authenticity.

A definitive opinion might be expected of an earlier visitor to Abbotsford, he being one who had seen and handled the original standard of the 105th Infantry Regiment as a prime actor in its capture on the battlefield at Waterloo. But the account of Lieutenant-Colonel Archibald Clark Kennedy only confuses the picture. The sequence of events whereby the standard was taken are confused and were disputed at the time, but credit was shared between Captain Clark and Corporal Styles of the 1st (Royal) Dragoons. By the time of his visit to Abbotsford years later, Clark had taken the name Clark Kennedy and retired with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. His thoughts on encountering the flags at Abbotsford appear in a letter he wrote in 1839 about his experiences at Waterloo which was published in Siborne's collection *Waterloo Letters* in 1891

(Siborne 1891: 75). Clark Kennedy's description of how he and Corporal Styles shared in the capture of the original eagle standard begins by stating that, there being *two* flags of the French 105th Infantry Regiment on the battlefield, 'I did not see the Eagle and the colours (for there were two colours, but only one with an Eagle) until we had been probably five or six minutes engaged.' He concludes his description of the action with reference to his subsequent visit to Abbotsford in 1838:

> What became of the other colours without the Eagle I know not, but it is rather singular that I last autumn saw a dark blue silk flag, with the words 105me Regiment d'Infanterie de Ligne in gold letters upon it, in the hall at Abbotsford along with other military curiosities. How it got there I could not learn, the present Sir Walter Scott telling me he had no knowledge of how it had got into his late father's possession, or where it came from. Could this have been the very flag that was along with the Eagle, or was it only a camp colour? The flag of the Eagle was red, white, and blue, this is all blue.

A camp colour was a military term for the flags used to designate the 'companies' into which infantry regiments were divided. They did not carry symbolic significance equal to that of a regiment's 'Colours' or standards. This comment of Lieutenant-Colonel Clark Kennedy is the only reference to an all-blue flag at Abbotsford. No such flag is known to survive there. And yet the 1840 *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* description quoted above alludes to 'a pair of beautiful French flags'. From the moment of 'rediscovery' at Abbotsford in 2008, there are three flags, two of which are 'French', only one of which is 'imperial French' and neither of which is entirely blue. If it is conjectured that Clark Kennedy somehow missed the 'stupid fault' in the lettering of '105th' that so riled d'Arlincourt, it is possible, if unlikely, that he might have noticed the other mistake in the reversed colours of the tricolour, with blue at the hoist, and mis-remembered that errant feature as an all-blue flag. The possibility must be allowed that one all-blue flag has since been lost. And yet it is notable that Clark Kennedy's letter made no comment about any other flag, nor about the existence of the reproduction tricolour standard which d'Arlincourt was shown as a visitor only six years later. It seems improbable that, with his personal connection to the original, he could have noted one flag at Abbotsford, and not the other one, if both were on display.

The display position of the flags, whichever they might have been, cannot be traced through the entirety of their time at Abbotsford. The *Catalogue of the Armour and Antiquities at Abbotsford* published in 1887 by Scott's great-granddaughter, the historian Mary Monica Maxwell Scott, makes no reference to the flags but relates all the listed Napoleonic French material in the Entrance Hall to Scott's attribution in *Reliquiae Trotcosienses*, quoted above, claiming them as genuine battlefield souvenirs. This assertion of authenticity appears directly below the catalogue entry for the wooden eagle from the reproduction 105th standard, which is, however, recognised as a copy: 'Model French Gilt Eagle Standard' (Maxwell Scott 1887: 35). The wooden eagle is not visible in photographs of the Entrance Hall taken during the 1860s to 1870s by George Washington Wilson (National Galleries of Scotland, MMK.00999.69), although the cuirasses and helmets can be seen. But the eagle is clearly visible high in one corner, in much the same position it occupies today, in an 1878 James Valentine photograph of the same scene (University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums, ID: JV-449).

In her later book, *Abbotsford: The Personal Relics and Antiquarian Treasures of Sir Walter Scott*, published in 1893, Mary Monica Maxwell Scott included a transcription of the letter by Lieutenant-Colonel Clark Kennedy quoted above (Maxwell Scott 1893: 10). It appears in text associated with a chromolithograph of the Dining Room by William Gibb, who illustrated the volume. The image (Illus 7) shows a group of standards furled on their staves propped together in the corner of the Dining Room to the right of the window. The red, white and blue of a French tricolour is discernible, with the colours in the correct order, not as on the reproduction 105th Regiment standard, and there are three, or

ILLUS 7 'The Dining Room' (Maxwell Scott 1893: Plate IV). © The Abbotsford Trust

possibly more, standards pictured in total, one of which suggests the pale blue saltire of the imperial Russian reproduction standard. But the image is indistinct. No explanation for the discrepancy over the blue flag in Clark Kennedy's letter is attempted by the author. In a follow-up illustrated volume, *Abbotsford*, published in 1905, again featuring a print illustration of the Dining Room, this time by William Smith Jr, the standards in the corner of the room are no longer present (Smith & Crockett 1905: 204).

Whatever the permutations introduced by Clark Kennedy's recollections of a blue flag, and whatever the later display history of the three flags, it seems the idea of a French eagle standard as a treasure of Scott's Abbotsford had already been cemented. Its presence in consciousness is reflected in an 1874 painting by the Scottish painter and collector Sir William Fettes Douglas (Illus 8), entitled 'A Scene from the Antiquary' (Dundee Art Gallery and Museums Collection (Dundee City Council), accession number 138-1912), referring to Scott's 1816 novel, whose titular character Jonathan Oldbuck is an archetypal antiquarian collector with echoes of Scott himself. The painting depicts a scene set in Oldbuck's 'Sanctum Sanctorum', the private chamber in which he arranges and studies his eclectic collections. Propped in one corner to the right is a French tricolour standard which may be assumed to represent a Waterloo trophy. No eagle is shown atop the staff. The colours are in the correct sequence, the opposite of the 105th eagle standard at Abbotsford.

TIME AND MEANING

Beyond knowing that, in the words of d'Arlincourt, this flag was never a French one, it may be that the precise provenance of the three flags at Abbotsford will never be ascertained with certainty. In the convoluted story of their likely origin, and in what little we know of their display at Sir Walter Scott's home over the more than two centuries subsequent to their acquisition, they convey something of Scott's belief that the power of an object lay in its human story and its ability to function as a springboard to storytelling. Whether that was a real artefact or a reproduction perhaps mattered more to the tale-teller than their audience, and Scott would

Illus 8 Sir William Fettes Douglas, 'A Scene from the Antiquary', Dundee Art Gallery and Museums Collection, 138-1912. © Dundee Art Galleries and Museums/Bridgeman Images

cite on more than one occasion his tendency to get carried away by his own imagination, as he put it 'gliding into the prosy style of an antiquarian, disposed in sailor phrase to spin a tough yarn' (Maxwell Scott 1893: 4–5). He filled Abbotsford's interiors with surprises and witticisms that require more than one viewing to unpack. His home and the stories and items it contains are very deliberately full of conundrums and theatrical reveals. Scott was fascinated by the mechanics behind optical illusions; his friend and neighbour the scientist and inventor Sir David Brewster would publish a book of such phenomena, dedicated to Scott (Brewster 1832). Taking all of this into account gives a sense of the delight Scott might have taken in setting these military standards as imposters in such a rich environment as Abbotsford, where the eye, the mind and the heart can be so easily tricked into thinking they are the real artefacts.

Returning to the imagined conversation with the Reverend Dr Dryasdust with which Scott prefaced *Peveril of the Peak*, we might place Scott's acquisition and display of the flags at Abbotsford

in the context of his defence against Dryasdust's suggestion that his historical fiction raised the 'danger of causing history to be neglected'. To the charge of 'readers being contented with such frothy and superficial knowledge, as they acquire from your works, to the effect of inducing them to neglect the severer and more accurate source of information', the Author of Waverley insisted to the contrary:

> by introducing the busy and the youthful 'to truths severe in fairy fiction dressed,' I am doing a real service to the more ingenuous and apt among them; for the love of knowledge wants but a beginning – the least spark will give fire when the train is properly prepared; and having been interested in fictitious adventures, ascribed to a historical period and characters, the reader begins next to be anxious to learn what the facts really were' (Scott [1823] 2017: 10–11).

In a similar vein, so might Scott's placing of what he knew to be reproduction flags in the vicinity of Waterloo artefacts thought by him to be genuine, have served his purposes at Abbotsford, by helping to create atmosphere, an atmosphere intended to engage the fascination of his visitors, drawing them into connection with the real things.

It is also the case that time has changed the meaning of these objects. While they were never genuine in what they were made to represent, as contemporary copies, exhibition set dressing or theatrical props, they have become part of a different story, one which has emerged over the two centuries since the Battle of Waterloo. They contribute to knowledge of how the British victory was received and celebrated in the years immediately following the war, and of how that celebration was commercialised in theatre, pageantry and exhibitions in London and beyond. They take their place in the history of the early commercial museums of London, and of the career of William Bullock in particular, and they demonstrate how the known and assumed provenance of historic objects can evolve and confuse. As objects which relate to histories of these kinds, the three flags at Abbotsford have become entirely authentic.

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