

# Axminster carpet manufacture in Edinburgh in the mid-18th century

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## ABSTRACT

*Hand-knotted carpets in the Turkey and Persia styles became fashionable in the 1750s when weavers from the Royal Savonnerie Carpet Manufactory at Chaillot near Paris settled in London. An English manufactory developed in Exeter under Claude Passavant, in Axminster under Thomas Whitty and in London under Thomas Moore. These carpets subsequently became known generically as 'Axminster' carpets after the fame of Whitty's manufactory spread. Recent research has revealed that a French carpet weaver came to Scotland in the mid-18th century and established an Axminster manufactory in Edinburgh and Fife. Local merchants and upholsterers also took up the business. None of their carpets have so far come to light, but we are able to trace the origins and progress of this early stage in the carpet manufacture from the historical records.*

The establishment in 1755 of the Edinburgh Society for Encouraging Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture in Scotland reflected the desire in the city's rising middle class for well-designed furnishings and domestic comforts, with the inclusion of annual premiums for, amongst other luxuries, linen damask, carpets and printed linens. The Resolutions of the Society noted:

Carpets are made in several places in this country: to encourage the manufactures to vie with each other, it was resolved, that a reward be allotted for the best-wrought carpet, and of the best pattern and colours, made within a certain time.<sup>1</sup>

Five guineas were offered for the 'Best Carpets as to work, pattern, and colours, of at least forty-eight yards', and four guineas for the next best. The length could be divided into any number of carpets not exceeding six and the 'patterns may be varied or not at the pleasure of the artist'.<sup>2</sup> These carpets were Scotch carpets, a local manufacture, traditionally known as

flat and pileless. Reviewing the results of the competitions the following year in 1756, the *Scots Magazine* commented:

In particular, it is said, the carpet manufacture has risen 10001 [£1000] this last year; and so great a rise is thought to be owing to the premiums given by the society, which, though of small value, have had the effect to excite a spirit of emulation amongst the manufacturers.<sup>3</sup>

The premiums for 1756, therefore, included several classes of carpets: Scotch, Damask figure, Wilton and Turkey. The premium for Turkey was advertised:

For the best imitation of Turkey carpets, as to colour, pattern, and workmanship, of at least two yards long, and one and a half yards broad, five guineas, given by Miss Jenny Dalrymple, who gained the prize for Dresden ruffles last year.<sup>4</sup>

In the event, no Turkey or Wilton carpets were submitted, despite the very modest size required for the Turkey carpet, but the Society's efforts

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were in line with those of the Society of Arts in Dublin (Longfield 1940, 67) and London (Jacobs 1970, 24) who were also trying to encourage the domestic manufacture of carpets. Jenny (or Janet) Dalrymple, sister of David Dalrymple of Newhailes, Lord Hailes, continued to offer the premium and the following year it was won by a Mrs Paterson of Miln's Land, College Wynd, Edinburgh: 'N.B. She teaches this work. The carpet to which the premium was adjudged, may be seen at her house'.<sup>5</sup>

The following year, 1758, two Turkey carpet premiums were advertised, one for five guineas and one for three, and the size of the carpets increased to a length of at least two and three-quarter yards and a width of at least two yards.<sup>6</sup> The first prize was gained by Janet Watson of Musselburgh and the second by Mrs Paterson.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Judges upon Arts of the Edinburgh Society decided to make a special award for an improved Turkey carpet loom:

We have examined a Loom for working of Turkey Carpets And find that it is of a New Construction calculated to render the working easy and Expeditious and for making the work firm and equal and free from bagging (a fault too common in this sort of manufacture) and we are of opinion That it will be a great improvement upon this branch of Manufacture, and in respect That it has cost the Inventor a considerable expense both of time & money And as he is willing to communicate the Invention to the public, We adjudge to him a premium of Fifteen Guineas.<sup>8</sup>

Strictly speaking, the loom used to make Turkey carpets was not a loom at all but a stout vertical wooden frame with rollers at the top and bottom between which the warp was tensioned and upon which the pile was knotted and secured with weft. The details of the construction of the award-winning loom are not known, but consistent tension was important, especially on large pieces, where the beating up of the woollen knots and their weight put a strain upon the warp threads. Contemporary engravings from Duhamel du Monceau's 'Art de faire les tapis

façon de Turquie, connus sous le nom de tapis de la Savonnerie', which appeared in France in 1766, show male weavers at a large vertical carpet frame with the side view and detail of the mechanism for securing the tension on the warps (Verlet 1982, fig 14, 42; fig 15, 43; fig 17, 46).<sup>9</sup>

In October 1758, the Member of Parliament for the Fife burghs, Sir Harry Erskine of Alva, wrote to Lord Hailes:

... I am strongly of opinion that Miss Dalrymple's invention of Turkey Carpet working may be rendered exceedingly beneficial to this country. A principal man in one of the towns which I represent, has a niece that will be very happy to be instructed in the manner of working them and her uncle will be at all the necessary expense in carrying on the manufacture.<sup>10</sup>

It is more likely that Jenny Dalrymple brought the technique of hand-knotting carpets to Scotland rather than inventing it, and Sir Harry later asked if the girl who taught it might instruct Baillie Thomas Martin's niece. Erskine was set on establishing a carpet manufacture in Fife and, as a political friend of Lord Bute in London and of the Prince of Wales, before his death, was aware of developments in the arts and the support of the Court for British manufactures in England. In his next letter to Lord Hailes, from London in January 1760, Sir Harry expressed his frustrations with the progress of the venture:

I am extremely obliged to you for your polite congratulations on the endeavour to establish a Manufacture in which I perceived today much greater difficulties than I apprehended – I doubt if the Kirkaldy Weaver can dye in shades. I am told Scarlet & Crimson and every shade of red is much dearer in Scotland than in England – De la Cour [William Delacour] I remember took 15 Guineas for a pattern for a Carpet from Mr Cheap [William Cheape]. I think that a monstrous price – I have employed a man who drew patterns for Mr Moore [Thomas Moore]. He does them cheap; but he has no idea of the principles of light and shade. His flowers come all equally out of the Canvas. The light falls from different places at the same time on his work. I have tried to suggest

some ideas to him for a pattern in which Palmyra is not forgot. He has hitherto succeeded ill – I have sent to employ a Man superior to De la Cour to draw a design and I will try to get my dauber (?) to execute it in colours – Mr Pesevat [Claude Passavant] the Manufacturer at Exeter, is obliged to this town [London] for some of his shades; carriage to Scotland ought to be as cheap.<sup>11</sup>

William Delacour, complained of in the letter, was the drawing master appointed by the Board of Trustees for Manufactures to their Drawing Academy in Edinburgh, established in 1760. One of his tasks was to draw patterns for the use of Scottish manufacturers and Erskine was clearly concerned about the standard of design and the need to get the best designs. Claude Passavant, the carpet manufacturer at Exeter, had taken over the business of the bankrupt Peter Parisot, a French man who had claimed to be the first to manufacture Turkey carpets in England. Thomas Moore remained in London, employing some of Parisot's weavers who had not wanted to move to Exeter, and he also recruited French weavers from the Savonnerie manufactory near Paris. William Cheape, a linen damask weaver and manufacturer in Edinburgh, had also become interested in carpets, winning a premium for Turkey carpets in 1760.<sup>12</sup> Whether the improved Turkey carpet loom mentioned earlier was constructed by him is not known, but he later applied to the Trustees for financial assistance for another carpet loom in 1762.

In London, however, Sir Harry persevered with his plans. Towards the end of January 1760, he approached the Board of Trustees for Manufactures, particularly Lord Milton, with the following Memorial:

Germain Havard a Frenchman & the principal Manufacturer of Mr Moor's Carpet Manufactory, is engag'd by Sir Harry Erskine & sent down to Pittenweem to establish the best sort of Turkey Carpet Manufacture in that Toun, under the direction of Mr John Cunnigham [sic] Writer in Anstruther & Mr Thos Martin Baillie of Pittenweem. Havard is engaged for three years certain, & under an obligation to enter into Articles

for three years more if required. His wages are £42 pr year. The expense of designs for the Carpets (as the success of the Manufacture will depend on the designs) and the painting of those designs as large as the work is to be, runs excessively high. The making of looms, maintaining of Apprentices, & other incidental charges, will probably be so great that the Manufacture may run a risque of failing unless it be favoured with some encouragement from the Trustees.

The Manufacture is to be established and carried on by money advanced by Sir Harry Erskine, till it shall be able to support itself. Sir Harry flatters himself that Lord Milton will be so good as to take this Infant Manufacture under his Protection. If Lord Milton approves of Sir Harry's making application to the Trustees for some encouragement, Sir Harry begs to know in what manner, & at what time he should apply – But if Lord Milton disapproves of applying, Sir Harry will desist from it.<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately for Sir Harry, the Trustees came to his aid. The secretary wrote to him in January 1761:

... I have the particular pleasure To inform that the Trustees when met as a Board, viewed the Carpet from Pittenweem and admired the Workmanship, only they regretted the seeming deficiency of the bordure, and called for your Letters and Martin's application for some Encouragement for this undertaking and very readily agreed to make it a purpose in the Report to the King at this time for £60.<sup>14</sup>

The venture was to be known as the Royal Velvet Carpet Manufactory.

Meanwhile, the premiums for Turkey carpets had been increased to five guineas for the best, with four, three and two guineas for the runners up and the sizes increased to at least three and a quarter yards in length and two and a half yards in breadth.<sup>15</sup> In 1760, the first prize was gained by William Cheape; Jessie Campbell of Alloa and Janet Walker of Ormiston were joint runners up.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that Cheape had continued with his plans to set up a carpet manufactory in Edinburgh

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Unto the Hon<sup>ble</sup> The Trustees  
for promoting Fisheries & Manufactures  
in Scotland

The Petition of Mess<sup>rs</sup>  
Young, Trotter and Cheape of  
Edinburgh.

The Petitioners sensible that the Manufacture of Carpets,  
already a considerable Branch of Trade in Scotland, was still capable  
of increase by Improvements in their Quality, did enter into a Partnership  
for carrying on the Manufacture of that kind called Scotch Carpets  
and also the Axminster kind made on the same principle with the  
Turkey Carpets.

In prosecution of both these Fabricks, they were determined  
to spare neither pains nor Expence to do the same with Effect, and  
in consequence they fitted up all the proper accommodations for a  
Manufactory in the upper part of the old Tennis Court, where they  
have Erected Seven Looms for Scotch Carpets and Three Looms  
for the Axminster kind, Two large Thron Mills with sundry  
other Expensive utensils.

And being fully satisfied that these, as well as  
many other of the Manufactures of this Country, do labour under  
great difficulty from the imperfect State of the Art of Dyeing in  
Scotland, they have entered into a Lease of a very commodious  
Dyehouse at the Canon Mills for 21 years, engaged a Dyer from  
England and purchased and fitted up all the necessary utensils  
and accommodations for Dyeing at their own proper Charge, by  
which they are now enabled to Dye their Colours in a superior  
manner, and will very soon, at considerable less Expence, than  
usual.

The petitioners not less aware of the importance of Taste  
and propriety of design, than of beauty of Colours in the Manufacture  
in which they are engaged, Resolve to avail themselves of their  
situation in the Capital, by calling in the aid of Pattern Drawers &c.

By

ILLUS 1 The petition of Messrs Young Trotter and Cheape to the Board of Trustees, 1764. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

2.

By these and other advantages they enjoy, they flatter themselves to be able to show some improvements in Scotch Carpets, and also a Manufacture of the Axminster kind, equal to any produced in England at the like prices.

But in regard the petitioners have been at a great Expence in fitting up their Manufactory in the Tennis Court, erecting Seven Looms for Scotch and three for Axminster Carpets, fitting up two large Thrown mills and sundry other expensive utensils, also in fitting up and furnishing the Dyehouse, bringing a Dyer from England and winding themselves in a Lease of 21 years of a Dyehouse, by which and other necessary Disbursements on account of the Manufactory, they are already in advance above 11100 Sterling.

The petitioners express their hope that the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Board, ever attentive to the Interests of Trade, will Judge this Manufacture of which the whole Materialls, excepting a Trifle of Dye Stuffs, is home produce and the entire process performed there, worthy of Encouragement, and will in consequence grant such assistance to the petitioners, as the extent and Utility of their undertaking, shall appear to merit.

independently of Sir Harry Erskine. He had also approached the Board of Trustees for financial assistance and been awarded £60, after they had examined a carpet made by him. When he applied for an extension of the grant, however, the Trustees had reservations, reporting that:

They had Inspected the Loom for Turkey Carpets fitted up by William Cheap but that they could not say what service it might be to the Country, nor did they find that much use had been made of it, and that it was a Complex Machine, and the Board resolved that the £60 provided for this manufacture should be delivered to Mr Cheape how soon another manufacturer shall fit up a loom of this kind and be able to certify its usefulness to the Country.<sup>17</sup>

Cheape appears to have got round this problem by offering employment to Germain Havard after his three-year term with Sir Harry Erskine in Fife had expired and forming a partnership with the Edinburgh upholsterers, Robert Young and Thomas Trotter. He then sought the Board's support again (illus 1):

The Petitioners sensible that the Manufacture of Carpets already a considerable Branch of Trade in Scotland, was still capable of encrease by Improvements in their Quality, did enter into a Copartnery for carrying on the Manufacture of that kind called Scotch Carpets, and also the Axminster kind made on the same principle with the Turkey Carpets.

In prosecution of both these Fabricks, they were determined to spare neither pains nor Expense to do the same with Effect, and in consequence they fitted up all the proper accommodations for a Manufactory in the upper part of the old Tennis Court, where they have Erected Seven Looms for Scotch Carpets and Three Looms for the Axminster kind, Two large Throw Mills with sundry other Expensive utensills.

And being fully satisfied that these, as well as many other of the Manufactures of this Country, do labour under great difficulty's from the imperfect state of the Art of Dyeing in Scotland, they have entered into a Lease of a very commodious Dyehouse at the Canon Mills for 21 years, engaged a Dyer from England and

purchased and fitted up all the necessary Utensills and accommodations for Dyeing at their own proper Charge, by which they are now enabled to Dye their Colours in a Superior manner, and will very soon, at considerable less Expense, than usual.

The petitioners not less aware of the importance of Taste and propriety of design, than of Beauty of Colours in the Manufacture in which they are engaged, Resolve to avail themselves of their situation in the Capital, by calling in the aid of Pattern drawers etc.

By these and other advantages they enjoy, they flatter themselves to be able to show some improvements in Scotch Carpets, and also a Manufacture of the Axminster kind, equal to any produced in England at the like prices.<sup>18</sup>

The petitioners went on to say that this venture had already cost them over £1400 but,

... express their hope that the Honble Board ever attentive to the Interests of Trade, will Judge this Manufacture of which the whole Materialls, excepting a Trifle of Dye Stuffs, is home produce and the entire process performed there, worthy of Encouragement, and will in consequence, grant such assistance to the petitioners, as the Extent and Utility of their undertaking shall appear to Merit.

The success of the petition no doubt depended on the emphasis on Scottish manufactures. The Trustees were interested in encouraging Scotch carpets and in this instance seem to have been persuaded that there was a market for the more luxurious Turkey carpets, which could be shown to effect in a drawing room or a library. The new carpet manufactory was advertised in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* in February 1764:

Young and Trotter having entered into a copartnery with William Cheap, for carrying on a manufacture of carpets, are now making of the fine kind on the same principle as the Persia carpets, after designs by the best masters, and propose to sell them at a price suitable to the demand of this country.

They likewise have fitted up sundry looms for making the kind usually called Scotch Carpets,

on which they resolve to bestow materials of the best quality, and all due attention to the improvement of the patterns. And being sensible that the perfection of both these fabrics depend in a great measure on the beauty of the colours, they have fitted up very complete accommodations for dyeing [sic] their yarns, and engaged a skilful workman for that purpose.

Merchants and shopkeepers who take quantities may depend upon being served on the best terms and private persons at the lowest retail prices, at Young and Trotter's warehouse, where an assortment of the sizes of current demand are always to be had.

The company want two apprentices for making the fine carpets; they must have some taste for designing; likewise two apprentices for weaving Scotch carpets; they must be stout lads, and not under sixteen years of age: and one apprentice for the dyeing [sic] business.<sup>19</sup>

Young men were preferred for the Scotch carpets because, as far as we know at this early period, carpets were woven on a loom with some kind of figuring harness, either a back harness or the larger draw loom.<sup>20</sup> The double cloth structure required two cumbersome worsted or woollen warps and coarse multi-coloured woollen wefts. Furthermore, for the wider widths of carpet, that is a width over six feet, two weavers were required to pass the shuttle from one side of the web to the other.

It appears that George Drummond, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and a member of the Board of Trustees, had presented to Queen Charlotte whilst in London early in 1764, 'a very fine carpet and some very fine linen' manufactured in Scotland, which the Queen graciously accepted.<sup>21</sup> It is not known whether this carpet was a Scotch-type or a Turkey-type, nor where it was made. However, the manufactories at Edinburgh and Pittenweem were both granted apprentices by the Board of Trustees and, in August 1764, Thomas Gervine and James Brown were recommended by Young, Trotter and Cheape for the Edinburgh venture.<sup>22</sup>

In 1765, a Committee from the Board visited Cheape's workshops in order to ascertain

whether the Turkey carpet loom was proving any more useful. They reported:

That they saw a number of Looms for Scots carpets and three large Looms for fine Turkey Carpets, all going; upon which last were working Havard the master Workman, a French man, his wife and three Children, and an apprentice presented by the Board, That they had seen accounts of the Carpets made and sold by these manufacturers amounting in value to about £1600; That they had directed two of the Turkey Carpets to be brought to the office that the Board may see them; and that they were of opinion the precept for £60 formerly issued to Mr Cheap should be delivered to him. Then the accots mentioned by the Committee were read – Mr Cheap attending was called in and spoke with – and the said two carpets were lookt at by the Board who agreeing to deliver the said precept, the Secretary delivered it to Mr Cheap accordingly.

The said Committee at the same time gave their opinion about Encouraging Jackson (John Baptist Jackson) the painter to continue in this Country to draw Paterns for the manufacturers, and to breed apprentices, and Mr Cheap being talked with on this subject, the Board remitted it to the Committee to endeavour to agree with Mr Jackson to prepare some paterns yearly and to teach apprentices for a premium not exceeding £50 p annum.<sup>23</sup>

The Turkey carpets could be viewed and purchased at Young and Trotter's upholstery warehouse, next door to the Magdalen Chapel in the Cowgate, 'where a number of elegant designs lie, by which carpets to any particular dimension can be executed on as low terms, and full as perfect as at Axminster'.<sup>24</sup> The company was still in business in 1769 when it advertised for six girls from ten to 14 years of age, to be taught to work Axminster or fine Persia carpets:

They are to be put under the direction of a woman, whom they have brought from the principal manufactory of these carpets in England; where her business was to teach and oversee girls, and young women employed in that manufactory.

None will be received, but such as come properly recommended.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that if the overseer had come from Axminster, the French method of working the carpets, practised by Germain Havard, had been superceded by the simpler technique used by Thomas Whitty (Sherrill 1996, 187; Rose, 2002, 94). In the system used at the Savonnerie, the warps lay on two levels, rather than lying flat as in Whitty's method, with alternate warps fully depressed so that the front warps were not visible from the back of the carpet after knotting, which gave a sturdier foundation (Sherrill 1996, 62). The claim that the carpets were as cheap as those at Axminster, and equal in quality also support this view. Young and Trotter also advertised for boys and girls to train as wool pickers, wool spinners and pirn winders at their factory in Fountainbridge and gave out wool to be spun.<sup>26</sup>

Havard may have continued to be involved with the Royal Velvet Carpet Manufactory at Pittenweem, for although grants were requested by Thomas Martin in the 1760s and decisions delayed, a most interesting notice appeared in the *Caledonian Mercury* in March 1767:

The fine carpet which was some time ago ordered to be manufactured at Pittenweem in Fifeshire, for her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager of Wales, (widow of Frederick Prince of Wales) is now finished, and last week was shown to a vast number of people at the Custom-house. It is esteemed by the best judges to rival, if not to excel, the manufacture even of Turkey and Persia: the figures are finely fancied; the colours exquisite; and the whole so highly finished, as to excite universal admiration – It is about twenty-five feet long, by seventeen in breadth – The drawing of the pattern alone, by which it was worked, it is said cost 501 [£50] and the carpet itself, we are told, is valued at 3001 [£300] Sterling – On Monday last it was sent off by the waggon for London.<sup>27</sup>

This must have been an exquisite carpet. Even allowing for the enthusiasm of the newspaper

report, its value was very high for the time. Sir Harry Erskine had died in 1765, but his close relationship with the Prince and Princess of Wales, political friendship with Lord Bute and subsequent rehabilitation by King George III, suggest some involvement in this commission.<sup>28</sup>

As well as William Cheape's carpet manufactory in the Canongate in Edinburgh and the Royal Velvet Manufactory at Pittenweem, several individual makers were awarded premiums in the 1760s by the Board of Trustees, who saw an opportunity to employ both men and women in this branch of manufacturing. In 1762, they had drawn up a report which noted the great demand for Scotch carpets, but reflected:

As the Turkey kind of Carpet is undoubtedly preferable to every other kind & in time turns out to be Considerably less Expensive to a Family – As they consume a Deal of Wool, can be made of the Coarsest Wool when of a good Colour may be made by either Men or Women – And as severals in this Country are in a way of making them already – We are of Opinion that premiums for the greatest, nixt and third Quantities of Turkey Carpets made & sold in this Country would certainly be usefull.<sup>29</sup>

They set aside £45 for prizes. In 1763, Mrs Hunter at Ormiston was awarded £20 for three carpets, totalling 43 square yards, valued at £36 12s, two of which had already been sold. The second prize of £15 was awarded to Margaret Burrell from B'oness who had manufactured three carpets containing 29 and three-quarter square yards valued at £35 15s.<sup>30</sup> Little is known of these women, who may well have designed as well as manufactured their carpets. A visitor to Axminster in 1760 had commented:

We found ourselves in a town of a very poor appearance, nothing in it worth a strangers notice, except the carpet manufactory to see; that is indeed well worth while; the weaving of it is extremely curious, and gave us ladies the more pleasure, I believe, as our sex are here admitted to be artists – an uncommon privilege at this time of day, when the men seem to engross every possible branch of business to themselves.<sup>31</sup>



Genuine oriental carpets, of course, were still sought after and admired. In 1769 an imported carpet drew crowds in London:

A few days ago, a curious Turkey carpet, twenty yards long, and eight broad, was shewn as a great curiosity, in Hyde Park, to a great number of the nobility and gentry, who went there for that purpose: It is just imported from Turkey, where it cost 500l [£500] besides the custom-house duty, and the expense of bringing it from Turkey. The workmanship is said to exceed that of any carpet ever imported into this kingdom, and, we are informed, it is intended as a present to her Majesty.<sup>32</sup>

The term ‘Turkey’ carpet was used at this period for both oriental- and British-made versions and it is sometimes difficult to know which is meant, as in this advertisement from the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*: on 6 November 1782 a roup of household furniture at no 3 Thistle Street, St Andrew Square, Edinburgh included ‘a beautiful carpet of More’s manufactory, 17½ feet by 15½; one Turkey carpet, 3¾ by 3½; one fine Exminster ditto, 15 by 17’.

When the Fletcher family were building their new town house, Milton House, in the Canongate, designed by John Adam, their upholsterer in London purchased an oriental carpet for them which unfortunately got damaged by sea water on the journey to Edinburgh. Lady Milton complained, however, both about the damage and the pattern which was not to her taste. The upholsterer wrote back:

... As to the Uglyness of the Carpett I cannot take upon me to say against; the Effects of the Sea water, Logwood & fancy prevent me but I am sure it was well thought of here (London) & in my Opinion very good in every Respect or It had not been sent, as to comparing it with an English Carpett the difference of the Woole & the Colours must allways prefer the English but the difference of weare is much more in favour of the Turkey.<sup>33</sup>

A rare surviving example of an English carpet from this early period may be seen in the Exeter carpet purchased by William, Fifth Earl of

Dumfries, for Dumfries House. The composition has elements in common with the French rococo carpets woven at the Savonnerie. It is 13ft 10in by 10ft 6in and has the letters EXON and the date, 1758, woven into the border (Sherrill 1996, plate 173). Nothing more is heard of the Turkey carpet venture in Edinburgh after 1772, when Elizabeth Payne, described as a carpet weaver, petitioned the Board of Trustees after Young and Trotter ‘would not agree to let her have the use of their weaving Loom & pattern, and therefore desiring the Board would enable her to purchase the same’.<sup>34</sup> They had previously declined to buy this loom for her but had allowed her £5 per annum for three years ‘provided she continued to carry on the Business of Carpet making here’.<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Before the fashion for hand-knotted carpets re-emerged in the 1750s, the manufacture of Turkey or Persian styles had been known in England from the end of the 16th century (Jacobs 1972, 7). The technique of hand-knotting had also been used for fire screen panels, chair seats and backs and cushions. Several chairs survive at Holyrood Palace, which date from 1660 and 1685, commissioned for the use of the judiciary and parliament and ordered from London.<sup>36</sup> One of the centres of production of this kind of work, which is known as Turkey work, is thought to be Norwich, but as examples survive in other parts of England, it is not known how widespread the manufacture was. In Scotland there is a rare example of a Turkey work table carpet dated 1710 in the border and connected with Mary Erskine, the founder and principal benefactress of the Merchant Maiden Hospital in Edinburgh (Sherrill 1996, 150, plate 163). There is also the much larger Kinghorne carpet, Indo-Persian in style but thought to be European, if not English, which dates from the early 17th century (Sherrill 1996, 148, plate 160). An early reference to carpetmaking in Edinburgh is found in the Board of Trustees for Manufactures Minute Books, which mention a Margaret Dunbar,

‘who works very neatly in Carpets’ in February 1732, but we do not so far know whether these carpets were woven or hand-knotted, or indeed, embroidered.<sup>37</sup>

The first premium offered for Turkey carpets by the Society of Arts in London in 1757 was for a hand-knotted carpet to be not less than 15ft by 12ft, with a first prize of £30 and a second of £20. Thomas Whitty and Thomas Moore were declared joint winners, Whitty’s entry being 16ft by 12ft 6in, and valued by him at £15. Moore’s carpet, of similar dimensions, was valued at 40 guineas (Jacobs 1972, 30). Whitty later wrote:

The Society were convinced, on examining both carpets, that although Mr Moore’s was made of the finest materials, and therefore cost him more money in making, yet that mine was the best carpet in proportion to its price. They therefore recommended it to Mr Moore and me, to take the fifty pounds, (prize money) and divide it equally between us: which we agreed to do (Jacobs 1970, 24).

His renowned carpet manufactory remained in business until a fire destroyed the works in January 1828.<sup>38</sup> In Scotland, the premiums offered were much more modest and the whole Turkey carpetmaking venture seems to have lasted not much longer than a decade. But this was a period of great experimentation in manufactures, driven by a quest to produce at home the luxuries of the East and of Europe. Parisot, who claimed to have been the first to make imitation Turkey carpets in England in 1750, apparently employed over a hundred master workmen at Fulham, but could not avoid bankruptcy in Exeter in 1756 (Sherrill 1996, 155). Claude Passavant, a wealthy serge manufacturer who took over the business, faced similar problems in 1761 (Sherrill 1996, 159). But at least three important carpets survive from the Exeter manufactory. There may, however, be a link between Parisot, Passavant and Germain Havard, for Parisot had obtained the patronage of the Prince of Wales before the latter’s early death. The carpet manufactory in

Fife was known as the Royal Velvet Carpet Manufactory, which suggests royal patronage, perhaps that of the Dowager Princess of Wales, to whom the later carpet was presented. After Parisot’s move to Exeter, some of the French weavers employed by him decided to stay in London and went to work with his rival, Thomas Moore, who in turn was granted a Royal Patent by George III in 1763.<sup>39</sup> It was Moore who had completed the carpet begun by Parisot’s French weavers, after they had been sacked by Parisot, which was apparently presented to the Duke of Cumberland. He in turn gave it to the Princess of Wales.<sup>40</sup> Germain Havard’s name is not mentioned amongst the personnel recruited by the English manufacturers from the Savonnerie (Verlet 1982, 144). In Scotland, however, the Board of Trustees continued to support another very popular form of carpet throughout the later 18th century and well into the 19th century. A visitor to Edinburgh in 1774 described them:

But their chief manufactory, and that on which, in my opinion, the Scotch ought to rely, is their Carpets: many other countries will rival, if not exceed them, in their other branches; but in this they are without a competitor ... The sale which these carpets meet with in England is astonishing: you find them in every house from the highest to the lowest, as they are calculated to suit that class of people who wish for the conveniences of life, but who cannot afford the extravagant prices of Wilton, Axminster, and other more expensive manufactories ... As yet their artists have not arrived at much elegance in the design or brilliancy of colour: but these improvements follow of course ... In some pieces that I have seen, which have been made by particular orders, great taste has been shewn: a proof that an idea, as yet, probably in its infancy, has been started of improvements in this article. When those improvements take place, and the period will not be far distant, this manufactory may be as much distinguished for its elegance, as it is now for its goodness (Topham 1776, 175).

As well as being much cheaper than hand-knotted Axminster carpets, these Scotch carpets

were made in strips and could be easily fitted to a room with a complementary border, or simply as a carpet square. On the whole, weavers could draw on a repertoire of their own designs and change colours, particularly in the weft, as they chose. Furthermore, the Board of Trustees saw an opportunity to use quantities of coarser Scottish wool in the thick wefts. Like the increasingly popular Brussels and Wilton loom-woven carpets, they were easier to maintain. Luxurious hand-knotted carpets were produced again in Scotland in the 1830s, by Gregory Thomson and Co at Kilmarnock and Richard Whytock and Co in Edinburgh.<sup>41</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 *Scots Magazine*, 17, 1755, 126.
- 2 *Scots Magazine*, 17, 1755, 129.
- 3 *Scots Magazine*, 18, 1756, 48.
- 4 *Scots Magazine*, 18, 1756, 107. The other carpet premiums were for an all wool carpet of the best damask figure, best colour and border, four guineas. For the best imitation Wilton carpet of at least 20 square yards, divided into any number of carpets, four guineas. For the best Scots carpet making 48 square yards, divided into any number of carpets, ‘the firmest and best made, best figure, best colour and border’, five guineas, next best four guineas. No Wilton or Turkey carpets were produced. William Gilchrist and Co at Kilmarnock gained the prize for the best damask figure carpet. The Hawick carpet manufactory gained first prize for Scotch or Scots carpets. David Hunter and Co at Kilmarnock were the runners up. *Scots Magazine*, 19, 1757, 51.
- 5 *Scots Magazine*, 20, 1758, 43.
- 6 *Scots Magazine*, 20, 1758, 213.
- 7 *Scots Magazine*, 21, 1759, 214.
- 8 National Library of Scotland (NLS), Newhailes Mss 25320 f28. Reports of Judges of Premiums for the Edinburgh Society, 10 March 1759.
- 9 Verlet 1982, 44, 46. Wooden levers were attached to the upper and lower beams, pulled down in the case of the upper beam and up in the case of the lower beam and secured to the side frame with ropes. The large looms varied, according to du Monceau, from 25 to 35ft in width and the narrow ones, used for panels, chair seats and to train apprentices, were often less than 6ft in width. The warps were made of several strands of wool plied together and marked at every tenth pair by, in general, blue threads. This division, to aid the weaver, was known as a ‘dizaine’. Tension was applied to the narrow looms by toothed wheels and ratchets.
- 10 NLS, Newhailes Mss 25294 f72. Letter from Sir Harry Erskine to Lord Hailes, 25 October 1758.
- 11 NLS, Newhailes Mss 25300 f72. Letter from Sir Harry Erskine to Lord Hailes, 12 January 1760.
- 12 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 7 March 1761.
- 13 NLS, Saltoun Mss 17564 f171. Memorandum for Sir Harry Erskine, 25 January 1760.
- 14 National Archives of Scotland (NAS), NG 1/3/7, 31 January 1761, 246. Letter Books of the Board of Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures and Improvements.
- 15 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 13 March 1760.
- 16 See Note 12.
- 17 NAS, NG 1/1/17, 23 July 1762, 39. Minute Books of the Board of Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures and Improvements.
- 18 NLS, Saltoun Mss 17565 f289. Petition of Messrs Young, Trotter and Cheape to the Board of Trustees.
- 19 *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 28 February 1764.
- 20 The back harness enabled the patterning capacity of the loom to be increased by the addition of specially designed healds, explained by John Duncan in his *Art of Weaving* (1808, 156, plate 8; the draw loom is illustrated and described on pg 176, plate 9).
- 21 *Caledonian Mercury*, 27 February 1764.
- 22 NAS, NG 1/1/18, 3 August 1764, 45.
- 23 NAS, NG 1/1/18, 15 February 1765, 77.
- 24 *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 February 1767. I am indebted to Helen Smailes, Senior Curator of British Art, National Galleries of Scotland, for this reference.
- 25 *Caledonian Mercury*, 19 April 1769. A visitor to Whitty’s manufactory in 1779 noted children working, ‘... we were much delighted to see a row of fine children, properly so called, for none of them, I think, could exceed twelve or fourteen, sitting close to each other the whole breadth of the carpet, with every stitch of the pattern before them, and which they executed with surprising dexterity and dispatch’. Whitty used thick plied yarns for the carpet pile, however, with a low number of tufts to the inch (Jacobs 1970, 31).

- 26 *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 12 July 1765.
- 27 *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 March 1767.
- 28 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 18, 2004, 533.
- 29 NAS, NG 1/1/16, 22 January 1762, 175.
- 30 NAS, NG 1/1/17, 2 December 1763, 208; and 23 December 1763, 215.
- 31 Climenson 1899, 65.
- 32 *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 May 1769.
- 33 NLS, Saltoun Mss 16719 f167. Letter to Lady Milton from James Cullen, London, 7 March 1761.
- 34 NAS, NG 1/1/19, 12 August 1772, 243.
- 35 NAS, NG 1/1/19, 29 July 1772, 238.
- 36 Swain 1987, 53. An Inventory from Saltoun Hall in East Lothian dated 1746 included 42 pieces of carpet for chairs, together with a 'Carpet with a white ground & a larger Carpet', which were stored in a chest in the Wardrobe. NLS, Saltoun Mss 17086, p 5.
- 37 NAS NG 1/1/2, 18 February 1732, 233. Margaret Dunbar, or Mrs Ross, petitioned the Board of Trustees for accommodation for her family and carpet looms in 1732 and were allowed the kitchen and large room above it in James Spalding's house in Candlemaker Row for a year, 'if the windows of the large room were repaired & Sashed' by Spalding.
- 38 The fire broke out in a business behind the carpet manufactory but destroyed much of the building and equipment. The workshops were rebuilt but recovery was slow and the company struggled on until 1835 when it was declared bankrupt (Jacobs 1970, 59). Blackmore of Wilton then took over the looms and stock and moved the business to Wilton. In Scotland, premiums for hand-knotted Axminster carpets began to reappear in 1830.
- 39 Moore had also claimed to be the first person to manufacture hand-knotted carpets in England. In business as a Manufacturer and Hosier in Chiswell Street, London, he had apparently supplied wool to Parisot but had only begun to manufacture carpets after 1752 when he employed the weavers sacked by Parisot, undertaking to complete their work. He later stated, in *The Public Advertiser*, 7 January 1756, 'after finishing the first Carpet ever made here (which, when begun, was intended for his late Royal Highness the Prince of Wales) did prevent the Workmen from leaving the Country at his own private Expense, and employing them at his own House; and again, in July last when the Manufactory at Fulham was discontinued, he engaged all the best Workmen, by whose Assistance he has been enabled to finish some of the most curious Pieces ever seen in this Kingdom' (Hefford 1977, 844). Germain Havard was presumably one of these men. Hefford illustrates two trade cards of Thomas Moore. In the later one from the 1790s, women are shown working at a Turkey carpet loom (Hefford 1977, illus 48).
- 40 Hefford 1977, 843.
- 41 A report was commissioned by the Board of Trustees in 1830 to determine whether premiums should be continued or extended on Scottish manufactures and also to consider emulating the French exposition of objects of national industry held every four years at the Louvre in Paris. It was decided to increase premiums on carpets, particularly Turkey or Axminster types: '... Both are chiefly formed of coarse wool, and if established to any extent in Scotland, would afford a corresponding demand for the staple produce of a considerable portion of the kingdom, which for some time past has been almost unmarketable. Both, too, are prized by the richer Classes of the community, not so much from the influence of fashion, as from their superior appearance and comfort, and if manufactured extensively, and at reasonable prices, would undoubtedly obtain a ready sale'. NAS, NG, 1/1/36, 16 March 1830, 29 Gregory Thomson and Co of Kilmarnock were awarded the first premium. NG 1/1/36, 23 November 1830, 95. Richard Whytock and Co of Edinburgh exhibited a carpet made for the Duke of Buccleuch, probably a Turkey type, in 1833, which was greatly admired. NG 1/1/36, 19 November 1833, 340.

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#### GLOSSARY

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1842, 6th Edn, Vol 6) entry on CARPETS, gives a good technical description of the most popular styles of carpet then in use.

Sherrill (1996) also gives technical information and a comprehensive history of each type.

**AXMINSTER CARPET:** Originally hand-knotted carpets made in the manufactory of Thomas Whitty at Axminster from the middle of the 18th century. They were characterized by the use of a flat warp, low number of tufts to the square inch and relative cheapness especially when compared with those manufactured by Thomas Moore and Claude Passavant, but luxurious nevertheless and commercially highly successful.

**BRUSSELS AND WILTON CARPET:** Woven carpets with looped worsted pile (Brussels) or cut pile (Wilton) first made at Wilton, although copied from the French Moquette carpets. In 1741, Ignatius Couran, a London merchant, John Barford, a Wilton upholsterer, and William Moody, a clothier in Wilton, took out a patent to make these carpets, which were made in strips, generally 27in wide, with a low looped or velvet pile surface. Campbell (1747, 245) noted that they were usually purchased from carpet warehouses or upholsterers and were a very ingenious and profitable branch of weaving. Thinner and cheaper than Axminster carpets, they had the advantage of being able to fit any room when the strips were cut and sewn together. Consequently they were often used to cover the floor of a room, or suite of rooms from wall to wall. Technically they were difficult to make, as the pattern threads, placed at the back of the draw loom, had to be lifted over wires during weaving. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1842, 173) describes the work of the draw boys whose job it was to select the pattern threads which made the pile: 'When the boy draws the lash, (to lift the pattern threads) he has in one hand a piece of thin board, three feet long and six inches broad, which is called a sword. This sword he passes under the yarn so drawn with the lash, and keeps it on its edge until the weaver passes a wire through in front of the reed. This wire keeps up the worsted, and the weaver throws two shoots of linen woof (weft) through the web, and forms the pile. It is necessary to have sixty of these wires for raising the pile, and at all times to have at least six of them in the web next to the reed, or else the worsted would sink ...' To make Wilton, 'the wires that are used have a groove in them, and a small knife with a guide in it, called a travat, is drawn across the web into the groove, and cuts the pile'.

**SCOTCH CARPET:** Also known as Kidderminster or Ingrain carpet. Traditionally a double cloth, that is,

a reversible pileless all wool carpet woven in various widths. The name suggests that the local version may have had some distinguishing feature, but this has not so far been determined. They were often made with a warp of two colours with more colours added in a coarser woollen weft which gave a characteristic stripeyness to the pattern. They were made all over Scotland in the mid and later 18th century as a cheaper alternative to Axminster or Brussels and

Wilton carpets and were widely exported to England and beyond.

**DAMASK FIGURE CARPET:** There are no surviving positively identified examples of this type of woven carpet, but it is thought to have been a double cloth with a floral pattern and flat and pileless. Gilbert et al (1987, 72, plate 11a) illustrate what might be a damask figure carpet in two shades of green.