

‘The foremost figure in all matters relating to Scottish archaeology’: aspects of the work of Joseph Anderson (1832–1916)

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Joseph Anderson is buried in Warriston Cemetery, Edinburgh beside his wife, Jessie Dempster, and his son, David, who became a Scottish Law Lord, the Honourable Lord St Vigeans. His other son, George, a geologist for the Australian Government, died in Sydney, New South Wales. His grave is marked, fittingly enough, by a ‘Celtic cross’ (illus 1). But it was not, it seems, erected until at least 1922 when Anderson’s only grandson, Francis Joseph Anderson, a lieutenant in the Black Watch, was killed in a motor-cycle accident near Edinburgh. By then, the energy for the creation of memorials in the form of ‘Celtic crosses’ had waned a great deal and the cross erected for the Anderson lair is a pale pastiche of the finest of this type, mainly carved a generation before.

In a very real sense the cross symbolizes Anderson’s whole life: for many years a vibrant and influential figure in Scottish archaeology, in the end he became a poor reflection of once-innovative attitudes. His post-mortem influence was far from benign. Stuart Piggott wrote of how Anderson’s views ‘in the hands of lesser men resulted in a fossilized tradition, out of date and out of touch with developments in England, and sadly isolationist’. Indeed, it was not until after the Second World War, he thought, that ‘Scottish archaeology emerged from its Anderson Shelter’ (Piggott 1983, 5–6). Even as late as the mid-1970s Angus Graham could

describe himself as a survivor ‘from an era when Anderson’s opinions might still carry great weight’ (1976, 279). Yet had Anderson died a decade or more earlier than he did, he might well have had a tombstone based on the cross at Kildalton or Dupplin, or even the Drostan stone from St Vigeans, and an equally different reputation to go with it. Anderson’s scholarship was, at its best, challenging and provocative, rivalling that of the finest European scholars of his day. He deserves better than judgements rooted in his final years or a brusque dismissal on the grounds that his successors did not have the intellectual skills to build on his legacy.

My title uses a remark made by Lord Guthrie at the first Society meeting following Anderson’s resignation as Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities in 1913 (Guthrie 1913). The appropriateness of Guthrie’s description may perhaps be gauged by a quotation from the Minute Books of the Society recording Anderson’s death in 1916:

But it is not so much on account of his writings and lectures that Dr Anderson will live in the memory of those of us who had the pleasure and honour of associating with him, but rather on account of the kindly direction which he gave to our efforts and of his strong personality. Few of us but were indebted to him for hints on our papers before they were read, and no paper when read ever seemed to be complete without the few words that Dr Anderson was always

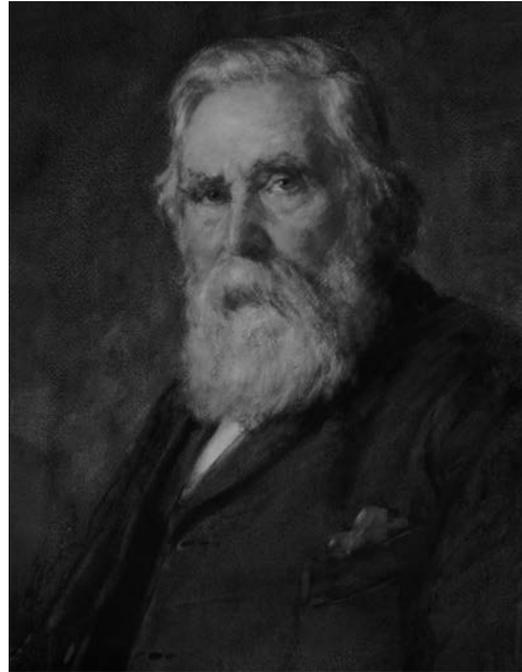
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ILLUS 1 The Celtic cross marking Anderson's grave in Warriston Cemetery, Edinburgh

called upon to add. Those of our Fellows who are in the habit of attending our Meetings are not likely to forget the picture of his rugged powerful face as, on the call of the Chairman, he slowly rose from his accustomed seat to criticize or amplify some paper which had been read. How deliberately yet how unhesitatingly he expressed himself, how admirable was his choice of words, and how much to the point were his remarks! These little speeches of his were models of concise, eloquent, and forceful diction.

All of this makes Anderson sound a very formidable individual (illus 2). Formidable



ILLUS 2 Joseph Anderson just before his retirement as Keeper

and extremely influential if no paper before the Society could in practice be accepted without being influenced or modified by Anderson. Certainly, we can be confident that Guthrie was not alone in his estimate, nor that it was just a recent judgement. William Gallo-way in a letter to Sir Henry Dryden remarked, in the context of interpreting the art on the stones at Meigle, 'But this the hard-headed Joseph will not admit. To him nothing must be believed, assumed, or understood except upon the ground of unmistakeable evidence & absolute truth'.¹ And there are suggestions that the respect was not matched by affection. Robert Munro for example, in his autobiography, mentions Anderson only once, other than in the role of incidental intermediary, and then just to say that 'I made the acquaintance of the late Joseph Anderson, Curator of the museum, whose unrivalled knowledge of Scottish Archaeology was of great assistance to me in classifying the Lochlee relics' (1921, 28) – a

respectful but hardly fulsome acknowledgement of one of the dominant figures during Munro's archaeological life. Yet this respect was not just the piety associated with death that begins to fade even before the obituary ink is dry. Childe, writing almost 20 years after Anderson's death, believed that by 1886 he 'had sketched the essential outlines of Scottish prehistory in a comprehensive and scientific survey such as then existed in no other country' (1935, xi).

Joseph Anderson was Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland for 43 years. He already had a growing reputation when he joined the Museum. Reviewing his activities chronologically produces a long, but apparently disjointed, list of concerns, for Anderson was serving a number of different roles in addition to sustaining his own research. Guthrie acknowledged as much in his remarks on Anderson's resignation:

We in this Society have known Dr Anderson in four capacities. First, as our Assistant-Secretary and editor of our *Proceedings*, the permanent official on whose efficiency the efficiency of the Society chiefly depends; second, as the Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities, the property of the Crown, which we administer; third, as our Rhind Lecturer on Pagan Scotland and Early Christian Scotland and its Monuments; and fourth, as our guide, philosopher, and friend at the meetings of the Society, and whenever any lame dog among us required to be helped over an antiquarian stile (1913, 334-5).

What this meant in practice is well illustrated by two letters that Anderson wrote to the naturalist J Harvie-Brown:²

September 25 1879

Dear Sir

In reply to your note of 22nd inquiring after remains of the Squirrel in pre-historic finds I have to say that I do not recollect of its occurrence in any of the Scottish finds but to make sure I will look over the records and

collections in the Museum & inform you if any are to be found. Hazel nuts are often found in connection with traces of man but gnawed pinecones have not so far as I am aware been ever noticed. It is only in connection with human associations that such things come under my notice.

I am

Yours very truly

J Anderson

December 28 1906

Dear Sir

In reply – Mrs Place's paper is now ready to be printed off & when it is ready I will see that you get one or two copies.

Mr John Bruce's paper was read at last meeting & has not yet gone to the printer. It will be included in the next volume, the first portion of which will not be ready for some months yet. But when it is ready I shall keep your request in mind.

These separate copies of papers printed in the *Proceedings* are not strictly under the control of the Society, which has no stock of them. They are thrown off as extra copies, at the time the part of the volume containing them is printed, and they are the property of the authors of the papers, who regulate the number of overprints by payment to the printer according to the numbers wanted. It is therefore impossible to make up sets of them, as no copies are kept here, & the authors probably gave away their copies at the time to their friends. Of course we keep stock of the volumes of the *Proceedings* but to buy the volume for the sake of a single paper is expensive.

Yours truly

J Anderson

In the first of these letters we see Anderson in his role as Keeper of the National Museum and scholar facilitating the research of others whereas in the second he is very much the official of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Nothing in Anderson's background hints at an antiquarian career and certainly not one

as distinguished as his turned out to be. He was born in Arbroath on 30 March 1832, the son of David Anderson and Jane Arnot. His father is described as a weaver in his marriage record of 1831 and in Joseph Anderson's death-certificate. But he appears as an agricultural labourer in the Censuses of 1841 and 1851, and as a day-labourer on Joseph's marriage certificate of 1856 (Graham 1976, 279). At some point early in Anderson's childhood the family moved to St Vigean, presumably related to his father's change in employment. Here he attended the Parish School (not the sandstone building opened in 1875 but the small cottage known as Kirkstyle³); 'he used occasionally to speak of the extraordinarily deep impression made upon his boyish mind by the notable group of early sculptured stones preserved in and around St Vigean' (Anon 1916). And his remarks in his Rhind Lectures for 1880, 'the country churchyard which I best remember (as a boy at school)', alludes to, but does not quite confirm, this influence (Anderson 1881b, 137). From the school at St Vigean he went on to attend the Education Institution in Arbroath, the Free Church academy that had opened on 8 September 1845 (Cowie 1956, 78–82). It was subsequently amalgamated with Arbroath Academy to form Arbroath High School (Cowie 1956, 182–7).

Anderson appears to have begun his career as a private teacher of Latin and English, for he is so described, at the age of 19, in the 1851 Census (Graham 1976, 279). When he was 20 he became a teacher at the East Free School in Arbroath (subsequently Ladyloan School then occupying a site opposite Arbroath Football Club's ground at Gayfield and not the subsequent site further up the Ladyloan: Cowie 1956, 263, map). Perhaps he was one of the two teachers appointed in 1851 because of the success of the school (Cowie 1956, 120). He taught here for four years and the 'experience there must have had a considerable influence in developing his remarkable natural faculty of exposition' (Anon 1916). In 1856 he joined the staff of the English School at Hasskioy,

Constantinople⁴ a post he was to occupy until 1859. His obituarist felt that he was doubtless as 'affected by the monuments of Byzantine and medieval history to which his residence in Turkey gave him access' as he had been by the sculptured stones of Angus (Anon 1916).

He returned from Constantinople to take up a very different profession. In 1860 he settled in Wick taking up the post of editor of the *John O' Groats Journal*. This was not the retreat to a quiet backwater that it might now appear. Caithness at that time was home to an important group of scholars of which Anderson was the final member. That, at least, is how it was viewed by a pseudonymous writer in Anderson's own newspaper at the time of his death (Cairnduna 1916).⁵

Among this group was A H Rhind who had published his work at the broch of Kettleburn and among the Caithness chambered cairns at M'Cole's Castle and at Warehouse in the early 1850s (1853; 1854). In the next decade Anderson was to undertake further investigations at Warehouse (Davidson & Henshall 1991, 152–6). Soon after Anderson's arrival in Caithness, James Traill Calder, the poet, historian and schoolteacher at Canisbay had published his *History of Caithness* (1861). But the emphasis was not primarily antiquarian. Geology and natural history dominated. Through the work of Robert Dick, the impecunious Thurso baker (Anon 1867; Smiles 1878; Martin 1966), Charles William Peach, a Customs Officer at Wick and father of the eminent geologist, B N Peach (Smiles 1878, 238–81; Anon 1886) and John Cleghorn, a merchant at Wick (Mowat 1940, 156), Caithness geology attracted the attention of the likes of Sir Roderick Murchison and Hugh Miller, and reports were regularly presented at the British Association meetings.

Such workers did not see their studies as being confined within the strict boundaries of today's academic subjects. Both Dick and Cleghorn made major contributions to the understanding of the botany of Caithness. Through their work on natural history they

became linked to other workers like Robert Innes Shearer and Henry Osbourne who were building on the work of Dr Eric Sutherland Sinclair documenting the ornithology of Caithness (Shearer & Osborne 1862, 335; Bruce 1907, 362). In all of this work there was considerable sharing of effort and interest. Shearer, who contributed notes on Caithness bird life to the *John O' Groats Journal* throughout Anderson's editorship (Mowat 1940, 145), undertook excavations on the Caithness chambered cairns with Anderson (Anderson 1866a; 1869); Shearer had previously assisted Rhind in his work on the Yarhouse cairns (Anderson 1909, 275). Over four years they excavated 'eight chambered cairns, three brochs, and a number of small cairns with cists' (Anderson 1909, 275). And Anderson 'made researches in the burn of Haster, and washed the material for microscopic specimens [of shells]' as a contribution to the understanding of the processes of glaciation, a matter of great concern to both Cleghorn and Dick (Sutherland 1909, 328).

Like most engaged with academic pursuits this Caithness group was not without its conflict. In 1866 Samuel Laing, then the Member of Parliament for the Northern Burghs, published his archaeological work in Caithness. Notwithstanding that his co-author was Thomas Huxley, then at the height of his fame as Darwin's 'bulldog', the work (Laing & Huxley 1866) received a stinging review from Anderson in the *John O' Groats Journal* that concluded:

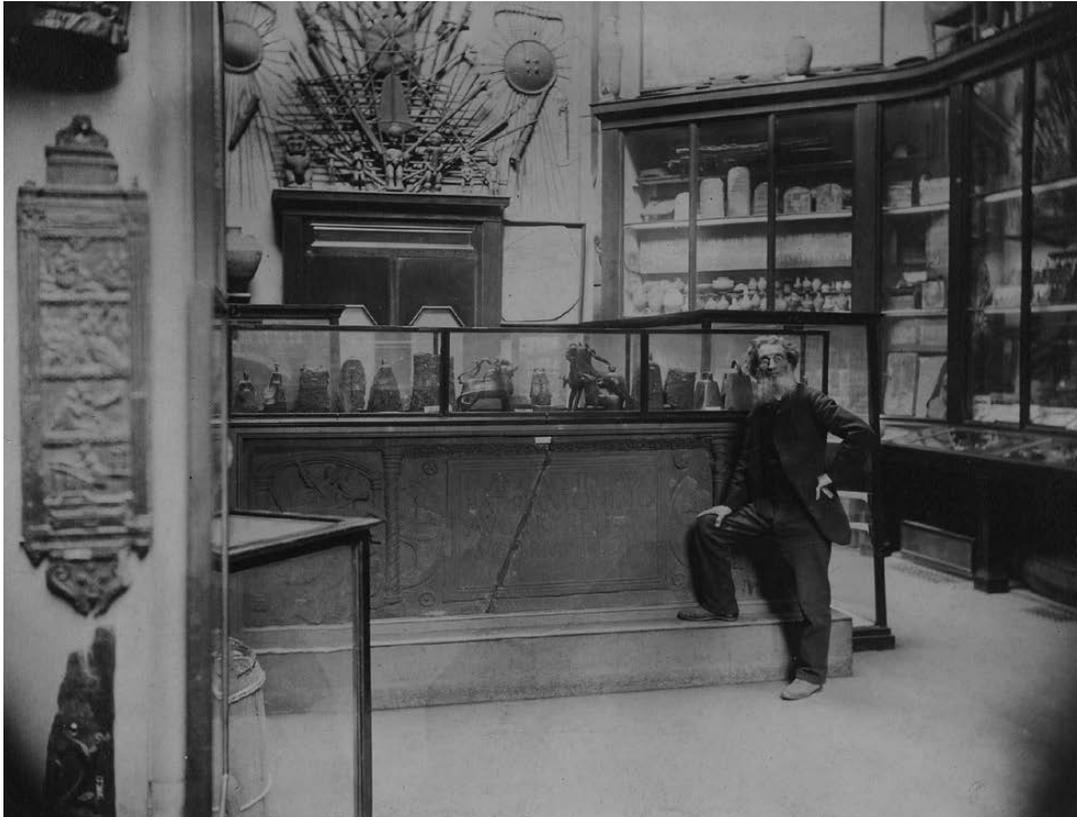
It is little short of ludicrous to see a few days' antiquarian diletantism among the sand hills of Keiss brought forward to supply the missing links of European archaeology, and to remodel the whole system of British antiquities. Mr Laing did well in exploring; we cannot say he has done wisely in making a book (Cairnduna 1916).

This may not have been just a disinterested academic judgement, 'Mr Anderson was bitterly opposed to him [Laing], so there may

have been a touch of political bias in his scathing review' (Cairnduna 1916). And the publication of Laing's pamphlet on Trade and Finance in 1864 by the office of the rival newspaper in Wick, the *Northern Ensign* (Mowat 1940, 119), perhaps suggests that the differences were as much professional as political.

But Caithness provided more than a stimulating atmosphere in which to work. The discoveries, the arguments and the interpretations inevitably attracted the attention of the wider world. Anderson's excavations first attracted the interest of Sir Arthur Mitchell. His visit led to one by John Stuart who was visiting Caithness in connection with Rhind's bequest to our Society (Stuart 1868; Anderson 1909, 275). It seems likely that it was these contacts, perhaps wider than is documented, as much as Anderson's early contributions to the Society's *Proceedings* (1866b; 1868) that led to his appointment in 1869 as Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities. Anderson took up the post in August 1869 and held it until March 1913, a period of 43 years. It was in this position that Anderson made his major contributions to the archaeology of Scotland.

The key to understanding the importance of Anderson's work lies in the identification of his fundamental attitudes regarding archaeology and what it might provide in terms of knowledge and understanding. But a simple chronological review of his work is a wholly inappropriate approach to this necessary characterization. It just offers a long list of loosely connected concerns that do not clearly illuminate Anderson's essential thinking, as Angus Graham's article (1976) shows.⁶ A great deal of Anderson's work was concerned with assembling the relevant details to illuminate particular objects. These objects, though, reflect the patterns of discovery and acquisition which engaged his attention as Keeper of the National Museum. Anderson's approaches are fundamental to all of these publications but he does not often feel the need to make them explicit.



ILLUS 3 Joseph Anderson among the displays in the Royal Institution, Edinburgh, 1890

Instead I want to concentrate on those writings where he offers insight into his views, and in particular to look at a lecture he gave to the Glasgow Archaeological Society in 1887 entitled, 'The systematic study of Scottish archaeology' (1890). And I want to emphasize the strength of these individual beliefs by contrasting the lecture with one given by R W Cochran Patrick in the same year to the same society entitled, 'Archaeology in Scotland: its past and future' (1890). I have chosen this lecture because it offers a more manageable distillation than his four sets of Rhind lectures delivered 1879–82 and published by 1886 (Anderson 1881a; 1881b; 1883; 1886). Confined to a single lecture he had to present his essential position. Anderson is here 54 years old, at the height of his powers and fully conversant with the evidence for Scotland's

archaeology (illus 3). There is little discernible development in his philosophical positions thereafter.

Let us begin with Cochran Patrick's estimate of Anderson's achievements:

The credit of being the first to employ a strictly scientific method of collecting archaeological facts, must be given to the late Mr Rhind, Mr Petrie and Dr Anderson, the present able assistant secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, in the investigations conducted by them in Caithness (1890, 359).

This is an interesting characterization of Anderson's position, made more so by the links adduced with Rhind and the emphasis on work in Caithness. Seen from a greater distance it is more difficult to consider Anderson's work to be as innovative as Cochran Patrick

would have us believe. After all, Anderson did not even manage to ensure the survival of the finds from his own excavations in Caithness. Perhaps, for Cochran Patrick, allegiance to ‘a strictly scientific method’ was altogether more important than the practical consideration of preserving those facts for others to examine. But Cochran Patrick offers more in his judgement of Anderson:

[Rhind] founded, in connection with the Society of Antiquaries, a Lectureship in Archaeology, the establishment of which marks an era in the history of the science. The great value and importance of such an institution is obvious. Though it did not come into operation for some years after Mr Rhind’s death, it has already produced admirable results . . . It has enabled Dr Joseph Anderson to sum up the results already achieved in Scottish archaeology in the most valuable contribution which has yet been made to prehistoric research in this country; a contribution which has the singular merit of being doubly valuable, first as a record of results, and, secondly, as a model of method (1890, 360).

This is a much more substantive judgement and one that still holds true today. He quite correctly identifies the interlocking of results and methods as the key element that underpins all of Anderson’s approaches. He himself identifies it as such:

But I do not mean to enter on the philosophy of the subject, although it may not be undesirable to suggest that there is a philosophy in it, when once materials have been fairly established on a scientific basis. The basis of science is the plenitude of its ascertained facts derived from recorded observations, and the archaeology is still poor in this respect – greatly poorer than that of most continental countries.

We still have the facts to gather, and for this we must look largely to the members of such societies as yours, who have the opportunity of enriching your published ‘Proceedings’ with carefully recorded observations. Every recorded fact is an addition to the sum total of our general knowledge of the subject; and though in

its isolated circumstances it may seem of little importance, yet when marshalled in its proper place among the rest of the facts accumulated, it may prove to be the missing link which makes the demonstration complete. It is this gathering up of the local facts, and storing them for future use in your ‘Proceedings,’ which constitutes the value of such a society as yours, and becomes an aid to the systematic study of Scottish Archaeology (1890, 353–4).

In identifying the fundamental importance of observation and recording Anderson accords them the status of essential components in his wider view of a scientific archaeology. And, equally important, they are activities that anyone committed to the creation of a scientific archaeology of Scotland can undertake. The value of this work cannot be over-emphasized:

for it is obvious that if the observations by which comparison and induction are accumulated have not been scientifically made, the conclusions drawn from them can have no scientific value, and that the first necessity in every scientific enquiry is accurate observation, exhaustive in its range, and recorded with the requisite precision and fulness of detail (1881a, 21).

This was a position that Anderson felt should permeate Scottish archaeology. Cochran Patrick had translated it for the Ayrshire and Galloway Association in the following terms:

more workers in the localities should come forward. As the object of the Association is simply to record facts, and provide materials for future generalizations, no profound or special archaeological knowledge is required. Accurate descriptions and truthful drawings of remains or relics are all that is necessary and contributions of that kind will be of the greatest use both to the Society and to Archaeological Science (1889).

Not that this was quite Anderson’s view. He has a different understanding of observation and recording which he sees as more active

and all-embracing than does Cochrane Patrick.

The espousing of such views was not only a reflection of the current view of science and its importance. It was first and foremost the acceptance of the primacy of induction in the development of interpretations of the past. This was not in itself new. Sir J Y Simpson had earlier advocated such ideas in an address to the Society of Antiquaries (1861, 37). And late in his life Anderson offered an appreciative assessment of Simpson's archaeological contribution (1911). Simpson's 'services . . . to Scottish archaeology were', thought Anderson, 'many, and of supreme importance. His work was always thoroughly scientific in its methods, and distinguished by a determination to make his investigation as complete, exact, and accurate as possible' (Anderson 1911, 3). So the ideas that Anderson was espousing were abroad in Scottish archaeology just as they must have been familiar to his Caithness collaborators. Anderson's importance lay not in the originality of his views but in his explicit support for these approaches and his constant demonstration of their validity. Anderson's books and articles are a constant re-statement of those positions.

Of course, the concern with comparison and detail harmonized with the accepted rationale for museums. And it can be no coincidence that Anderson was both a keen advocate and Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities. In the latter position he developed strong attitudes of accumulation. This was not, though, as individualistic as some imply. Pitt Rivers' suggestion that Anderson's views on the importance of collecting sculptured stones centrally were 'at variance with the majority of Antiquaries' was much easier to assert than to support with evidence (Foster 2001, 37 but see also 9 & n 28). Pitt Rivers does not make clear which antiquaries he is referring to. If he has in mind those like himself and his close associates, such as John Evans, who were active collectors, one can well imagine that their general view was that

major museums should not be accorded privileged positions in the area of collecting. Certainly, Anderson found no difficulty in acquiring donations and, as John Stuart had earlier noted, the Society of Antiquaries had been committed since the transfer of their collection to Government ownership in 1851 to 'acquiring objects by purchase, when [they] could afford it' (1869, 25). Moreover, Stuart had further asserted, in evidence in 1868 to the Royal Commission on the Science and Art Department in Ireland, that following the transfer of collections they had:

been enormously enlarged. I know in point of fact, from intercourse with people all over the country, that there is now a much greater disposition to part with objects and present them to the Museum than ever there was before. The increase is very great since we were established as a public body (1869, 28).

Indeed, landowners who failed to donate objects found on their estates ran the risk of being branded unscientific. This was not something that all felt concerned about and many accumulated material over time. But the commitment to the importance of a strong national collection did not weaken among antiquaries as the century progressed.

'So far as archaeology is concerned,' wrote Cochrane Patrick, 'I do not know anything which has done so much to injure the progress of the science as . . . scattered local collections, though the motive which leads to their formation is, in itself, a highly laudable one' (1890, 367). He is here talking about what he perceives as a normative pattern among local collections. Initial enthusiasm is followed by waning interest and declining attendance. Objects, never published, are thrown into storage or collections are dispersed:

And the evil is this: that amongst a very great deal of rubbish there may be one or two objects of great value to science. Even if they are not destroyed (which too often happens), the record of their origin and the circumstances with which

they were originally associated (which are of the highest possible significance for scientific purposes) are hopelessly lost. Now this is no fancy picture. It has actually happened in many cases (1890, 367–8).

This is a strong condemnation, made because Cochran Patrick cared passionately about the importance of objects and their associated data:

The first and most important condition then for the successful future of Archaeology in Scotland is the collection of data. And this collection is absolutely essential. For, unless the facts dealt with are thoroughly reliable, the deductions drawn from them cannot be depended on. And it is obvious that the more extensive the collection, and the more complete and accurate the details of the circumstances of each investigation, the more satisfactory and valuable will be the results (1890, 366).

Anderson could not have put it better. These were views that he endorsed wholeheartedly. As Keeper of the Museum, he was very much in the business of collecting and of promoting the importance of the activity. And so, Anderson's gloss on the collections he curated varied with his audience. In Glasgow, the records for the archaeology of Scotland were poor, 'greatly poorer than that of most continental countries' (1890, 353). But to the Society of Antiquaries, four years earlier:

Having some years ago visited the national collections of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and having now also seen those of France, Central Germany and Belgium, I have to say that, so far as I am able to judge, and to judge with impartiality, I have seen none that is more distinctively and representatively national than the national collection of Scotland.

This is Anderson being pragmatic. He well knew that the Society of Antiquaries, as effective proprietors of the National Museum, needed to be reassured about the quality of their achievement. But he equally well knew

that additions to those collections would be largely achieved through harnessing the enthusiasm and commitment of members of other Scottish societies.

The enormous growth in the Museum's collections that took place during Anderson's Keepership was underpinned by his fundamental belief in the accumulation of records. And for him the central records were objects. Moreover, he believed equally strongly that these records should be readily available. All of the objects should be displayed and the associated information drawn up in published form. This is what the 1892 catalogue, created by Anderson and his assistant George Black to mark the move of the collections from the Royal Institution to Queen Street, is all about. The remarkable alpha-numeric system that they developed is rooted in the commitment to display. The use of object type, sites, material and chronology that, at first sight, appears rather idiosyncratic is completely dictated by the way in which they chose to display the objects. There was no concept of a reserve or study collection. Everything had to be displayed. Of course, with single entries reading 'large collection of about two thousand rude Cores, Flakes and Chips from Skelmuir, Slains, Ellon, Waterton, and Forvie, Aberdeenshire, Birnie, Elginshire, &c – T F Jamieson, 1862; Rev Dr Gordon, 1864; James Dalgarno, 1874; J Sturrock, 1880; Purchased 1891, &c' (NMA 1892, 6) we can see that neither Anderson nor his predecessors allowed a concern with the quality of the data to get in the way of an acquisition.

The catalogue contained just over 62,000 individual entries, some of which covered multiple objects. The collections were primarily Scottish and prehistoric or Early Historic in date – around 45,000 entries. But there were also medieval and early modern Scottish objects, and comparative material drawn from all over the world. And for Anderson this material had been gathered together and presented in furtherance of his own political agenda:

If I can succeed [and he really had no doubts that he could succeed] in showing that there is an Archaeology of Scotland as distinguished from Archaeology in general, it will follow that there must be a system in it, and that the discovery and apprehension of the distinctive characteristics of that system are the objects of its systematic study (1890, 343).

This study was greatly helped in the first instance because ‘The Archaeology of Scotland is happily freed from all controversial questions relating to the relative condition and culture of palaeolithic man’ (Anderson 1890, 343). ‘Happily freed’ because the presence of such remains might have provided a serious challenge to ‘an Archaeology of Scotland as distinguished from Archaeology in general’. For Anderson:

The key to the systematic study of the Archaeology of an area lies in its sepulchral deposits, because it was a general characteristic of the burial customs of Pagan peoples to bury with their dead many of the objects that are most illustrative of the conditions and culture of the contemporary life. When the burial deposits of an area are examined and compared, it is seen that they arrange themselves in a series of groups or classes, each of which differs from all the others by the possession of certain specific features. For instance, the Stone Age in Scotland is characterized by aggregate burial in cairns that are chambered, while the Bronze Age is characterized by single burial in cists. The custom of cremation belongs to both ages and is therefore not a distinction of period. The presence of urns in association with the interment is by itself no distinction of period, but there are several varieties of urns, and distinctions may be drawn from their purpose, form and ornamentation (1890, 344).

This very early use of ‘culture’ in an anthropological sense in the archaeological literature is a fine demonstration of Anderson’s awareness of the best and most innovative contemporary thought. But the importance that he ascribes to burial is very much within the mainstream of archaeological views at the time as the

reference to the distinctive purposes of different pot types admirably shows. Here he is referring to Beakers (‘drinking cups’) and Food Vessels as well as cinerary urns and in doing so he is re-affirming interpretations first made by Colt Hoare and Bateman. The belief that function could be discerned from form was a fundamental tenet of 19th-century archaeology.

It is important in all this to keep a sense of the evidential base that was available to Anderson. For example, he notes:

So few [chambered cairns] now remain to be explored that every additional ground plan is a gain to science, the number on record being still under twenty. The system of aggregate burial in the chambers of these cairns included both burnt and unburnt burials. The unburnt interments are, however, few in number, and apparently later than the general deposit (1890, 345).

This seems incredible now as an accurate description of the range and form of the skeletal material found in chambered cairns. But Anderson’s perceptions in this matter were still very coloured by the experiences of himself and his friends in Caithness. And he is writing before the work of people like T H Bryce in Arran & Bute or Walter Grant on Rousay laid the foundations of our current views.

Yet for all the importance that Anderson attaches to the evidence derived from burials, he is forced to admit:

But as a rule the relics of stone or bronze that are found associated with interments are few in comparison with the numbers found casually imbedded in the soil. When we come to examine the various types of implements that are thus discovered, we find that there are certain types which have not been known to occur in connection with interments (1890, 348).

While all this is true it seems an unpromising basis from which to develop general statements. Indeed, he seems almost to be denying his initial assertion that the burial record is fundamental to the definition of regional

archaeologies. But Anderson is here beginning to build a much more subtle argument:

For instance I have failed to find more than one or two well authenticated instances of the association of the common imperforate polished stone axe or celt with interment. Again, there are very few, if any, examples in Scotland of the occurrence of a bronze axe of any kind in association with interment; and there are certain varieties of bronze axes – for instance, the socketed variety – which have never been found with interments in Britain. It is still more singular that it should be so often stated in general terms that bronze swords and socketed spears are found associated with burials, seeing that there is not a single authenticated instance of a leaf-shaped sword, or a socketed spear of bronze, having been found with interments in Britain (1890, 348).

The emphasis on ‘well authenticated instances’ is, of course, Anderson re-affirming one of his key beliefs, the importance of records. But he seems to be doing so in the context of a wider argument with a most unpromising sequence of circumstances. He can find only one or two instances of a burial associated with a stone axe. And the evidence concerning bronze axes associated with burials is even less certain. In the case of socketed axes, none have been found in such circumstances. And the same is true, despite unsubstantiated claims to the contrary, in the case of swords and spears. Yet this play between claimed associations and actual associations is actually a vital piece in Anderson’s emerging assertion:

[The claimed association of swords & spears] and belief [in it] has probably arisen from the well-known fact that bronze swords and socketed spears are found with interments in Denmark, and writers imperfectly acquainted with the phenomena of Archaeology have hastily concluded that what is true of Denmark must also be true of Scotland. But such conclusions are totally contradicted by experience. While it is no doubt true that some of the general outlines of Archaeology – as for instance the succession of the three Ages of

Stone, Bronze, and Iron, and the universality of the Pagan practice of depositing grave-goods with the dead – are found to be constant over the greater part of Europe, it is none the less true that the details are found to differ widely in different areas. So wide indeed is this divergence of detail that the general *facies* of the collection in the Danish National Museum is recognizably different from that of any other country. Even the individual types are different, and for the most part so different that if the general contents of the national collections of Scotland, Denmark, and France were mingled together, it would be perfectly possible to single out and reclaim for each area the typical specimens belonging to it. The variation of the types with varying circumstances of geographical situation – or to put it in another way, the principle that special areas have special types peculiar to themselves, is in perfect harmony with the general teachings of science (1890, 348–9).

Here is Anderson taking us deep into social evolutionary thought. These are ideas ultimately rooted in Darwin’s Galapagos finches. And finally we are offered the conclusion that explains why this elegant argument has been rehearsed:

[For] if it be true, as all experience proves that it is true, that typical characters have always varied with area as well as with time, it follows that while we *may* have in Scotland the same general outlines of Archaeology which prevail over a great part of Europe, we *must* have the details all to ourselves. It is this which gives to Scottish Archaeology the strongest and most enduring interest for us – it is, like ourselves, racy of the soil. It is this also which renders its systematic study of paramount importance to us, for if we do not amass the facts and discover the systems involved in them, not all the Archaeologists of other areas can tell us the facts or teach us the systems (1890, 349).

It was this idea that lay behind Piggott’s concern with the baleful effects of Anderson’s legacy. Piggott knew well enough that Anderson’s attitudes were international both in inclination and practice. Moreover, this aspect

of Anderson was well recognized abroad. He was an Honorary Member of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries in Copenhagen; of the Society of Antiquaries in Stockholm; and of the Royal Irish Academy. His articles show that he regularly used his extensive European network for information and parallels. A simple example will demonstrate the point. In publishing the wooden figure from Ballachulish, Robert Christison wrote:

It was therefore desirable to learn whether there is now extant any specimen of such idols with which the Ballachulish figure might be compared. Mr Anderson accordingly corresponded with Mr Worsaae at Copenhagen . . . Mr Anderson has also communicated with Mr Rygh, keeper of the Antiquarian Museum of Christiania (1881, 175).

Rygh knew of no figures from Norway and his letter does not appear to have survived. But Worsaae sent information about two Danish finds and a German figure. This letter does survive in the manuscripts of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. It is worth quoting in full because it shows Anderson as part of a network of eminent European archaeologists, regularly exchanging and obtaining information:

Det Kongelige Museum for De Nordiske
Oldsager
Copenhagen

13 January 1881

My dear Sir

I have the pleasure to announce to you that wooden statues lately have been discovered in peat bogs in Denmark. One found near Viborg in Jutland is in the Museum here. It measures about 3 feet and represents very rudely a man with a very large priap. Another similar, found in a bog in the north of Seeland, is unfortunately destroyed. They were both of oak and of the same height.

A third one was discovered some years ago, also in a peat bog, in Mark Brandenburg and is now in the Museum at Berlin. It has been described by Ovast in 'Correspondenz-Blatt' Sechster

Jahrgang 1858 No 11 p. 104–106. It seems to have been a man, most probably with a now lost priap.

I regard them as idols and apparently from the bronze age. We have in the Museum here a small bronze figure of a woman (vid. Congrès de Copenhague 1869 publ. 1875) pag 400 4^o, which resembles your wooden figure. I should, for the sake of comparison, feel very much indebted to you, *if you could procure me photographs of the figures with shields from Holderness at Hull*. The eyes, inserted with quartz pebbles, we don't know yet here.

I am just treating several questions of idols of the pagan period, as I have been fortunate enough to explain the many figures upon the remarkable golden horns. The one horn represents the life in Valhal, the other the life in H[?]elheim. I have also found the key to the holy marks of the different gods. A new and most interesting light has thereby been thrown upon the mythologies of the North, and quite against the modern theories of Professors Bugge and Bang in Norway. All our principal myths, the Balders' myth included, go back at least to 400 after Christ. You see that the figures from Scotland and Holderness are of special interest to me.

Many thanks for your paper on the Viking tombs at Islay. I enjoy to observe that the Scandinavian monuments on the British isles are constantly increasing.

Believe me, my dear Sir, always most sincerely
yours

J J A Worsaae

Clearly, Anderson could balance an awareness of the need for a European perspective with a strong nationalist view of Scotland's archaeology. Unfortunately, it was not a position that his immediate successors, Callander and Edwards, were able to maintain and develop. Instead, they just focused on the 'Scotland's different' argument so that for them virtually everything became *sui generis*.

For Anderson though, demonstrating the distinctiveness of Scottish archaeology was not a sufficient goal in itself. He wanted to create a connection between prehistory and

himself and his contemporaries, 'it is, like ourselves, racy of the soil,' he said. This use of the phrase 'racy of the soil' echoes the use of the same phrase in the motto of the Young Ireland newspaper, *The Nation* (quoted in Sheehy 1980, 29). It is possible that this is an unconscious borrowing on Anderson's part but, given his newspaper background and the context for the phrase, this seems unlikely. The continuing importance of Irish affairs in the second half of the 19th century suggests that Anderson was using the phrase to make a nationalist allusion that would have been well understood by his audience. But realising his wider aspiration posed a new set of problems:

With the Iron Age there comes a new development of culture, with whose phenomena we are less familiar . . . Of all the pre-historic ages, the Early Iron Age in Scotland ought to be the most attractive to the systematic student, first because its phenomena are almost wholly unknown, and second because of the rarity and exceptional interest of its relics. The causes of that rarity have yet to be explained. One is undoubtedly the absence of known burials of the period. Yet burials of the period must exist, and one of the problems of the future is their discovery and identification (1890, 349).

There is an interesting assumption here that all groups in the past will have used burial techniques that remain recognizable in the archaeological record. Absence is simply a failure of recognition. Given the connections that he wishes to establish between then and now, Anderson has to believe that the dead were accorded formal burial in the Iron Age because that is what happened in the 19th century:

[So] in the almost total absence of recognized burials of this period in Scotland, it is to the defensive structures of the Iron Age that we must look for the illustrative collection of its remains. Of these the best known are the hill forts and crannogs, [and] . . . in the earth-houses . . . we meet . . . with a series of remains belonging unmistakably to the Iron Age, and apparently to the later portion of that period

which came in contact with the Roman civilization. In like manner the brochs, those singular towers . . . present also a series of relics bearing the unmistakable characteristics of the later Iron Age, and in some cases even coming down into the early Christian time (1890, 350).

But in exploring this new range of evidence one must not lose sight of the uniqueness of the record:

Now, in all its types of structure no less than in the typical characters of its relics and their forms of ornamentation, the Iron Age of Scotland has little or nothing in common with that of Continental Europe. Its crannogs, of course, resemble Swiss lake dwellings in so far as they are constructed in lakes, but the essential features of their construction are totally different. Its earth-houses resemble those of Cornwall, Brittany and Ireland in as much as they are galleries under ground, but they differ completely in plan from any of these. Its hill-forts differ from all others in their inexplicable characteristic of vitrification, and its brochs, apparently the latest form of the Iron Age structure, are absolutely unique (1890, 350–1).

Infected with a growing confidence in the singular characteristics of the Scottish archaeological record, Anderson makes a remarkable claim:

But the strongest peculiarity of the Iron Age of Scotland is the character of its decoration. In the Bronze Age the system of decoration was rectilinear with occasional circles and segments of circles, and relief and repoussé work were the exception, and incised or punched work the rule, even during the later period of the Age of Bronze. In the Iron Age all this is changed. The system of decoration becomes a curvilinear instead of a rectilinear system, and the curves employed are not those of the circle but of the ellipse. Incised and punched work still remain, but relief and repoussé work become the rule instead of the exception. Beside all this, the use of coloured enamels brings an entirely new element into the system of surface decoration of metal-work. Some of this enamelled work, dating from a period prior to the Roman

conquest of Britain, is marvellously beautiful; and in the manner of implanting the enamels, in the scheme of colours employed, and the style of the patterns produced, the work of this kind done in this country at that time has no parallel anywhere (1890, 351).

All of this was arguable on the basis of the evidence available at the time. But for someone as familiar as Anderson was with European material, the suggestion that the character of Iron Age decoration is the most quintessentially Scottish aspect of the material is difficult to accept. And the assertions that the enamel work ‘has no parallel anywhere’ was even then patent nonsense. Why would Anderson, with all his knowledge, make such suggestions? The answer is implicit in the next few sentences:

Its colours are still brilliant and lustrous, and its patterns invariably present an individuality of character, which stamps them as the purest offspring of indigenous art – the peculiar products of the Celtic area. . .

It was this art of the Pagan period of the Iron Age, of the Celtic area, that was the precursor and parent of the beautiful and strikingly characteristic developments of decorative art by which the early Christian period in Scotland is characterized (1890, 351).

The establishment of Iron Age art’s associations with Early Historic art was the key link in Anderson’s chain of connections between prehistory and the present. With Christianity an unbroken strand of religious belief was established with the present. The wilder assertions were Anderson’s attempt to keep the connections firmly within Scotland:

The introduction of Christianity made a complete revolution in the archaeological phenomena of burial. It abolished cremation, and put an end to the custom of depositing with the dead the common objects of their every day life . . . [And] the general archaeological result of the change as regards the burials was this, that the distinctive characteristics were transferred from the underground deposits to the over-ground memorial fixtures, and the study of the

archaeological phenomena of Christian burial thus becomes a study of monumental art, and monumental symbolism. And here again the archaeology of Scotland differs from that of all other countries, inasmuch as it presents the student with a style of monumental art, and system of monumental symbolism of indigenous development. Nothing is known like them anywhere else. Until this fact was realized we have thought little of them, but now we know that if we do not preserve them there will be no more like them in the whole world when they are gone; and if we do not study them while we have the opportunity, the materials for their investigation may utterly perish unutilized. There is no more interesting field of investigation in the whole range of archaeological research, and none in which there are more difficult problems still unsolved. . . Like so many other systems which the systematic student of Scottish archaeology meets with, it belongs to Scotland alone (1890, 351–2).

Anderson is here highlighting one of the leitmotifs of his archaeological career. The fascination with these sculptured monuments first kindled by a childhood at St Vigean was to culminate in his fifth series of Rhind lectures, given in 1892. Of course, Anderson had considered the stones in his earlier Rhind lectures. But these 1892 lectures were to form Part I of the great corpus of the stones finally published in 1903 (Allen & Anderson 1903; the origins and realization of this major project have been charted in Henderson 1993). It is clear that we have only an abbreviated version of Anderson’s full Rhind texts. But his opening remarks show the importance that he attached to these early sculptured stones as the articulation between prehistory and history:

That the whole of the Sculptured Stones of Scotland are of Christian character and origin is, in the meantime, neither affirmed nor denied. But it becomes evident at the outset of such an investigation that its results will be manifestly incomplete if they do not include an inquiry into the characteristics of the peculiar class of early incised monuments which, while they present no obvious indications of Christianity,

do yet exhibit unequivocal evidence that they represent the earlier links in the chain of a system of symbolism which, in its later links, becomes a prominent feature on the monuments that are undeniably Christian in character (Allen & Anderson 1903, iii).

And there was other evidence to strengthen and support the claimed connection between then and now:

For the succession of phases of this indigenous art is continued in the middle ages, in the series of monumental memorials of Highland chiefs and priests scattered among the graveyards of the Western Highlands and Islands. Need I say that, little as they are regarded, there is nothing like them anywhere else in the world . . . But they are not the only witnesses to the survival of the old system of art under changed conditions. The succession of art products, decorated in the native style, is found in the personal ornaments of the people, on their musical instruments and warlike accoutrements – in the brooches of silver and brass, in the caskets of wood and bone, on harps, bagpipes, and chessmen, on powder-horns and targets, and on those beautiful Highland pistols of steel, inlaid with silver and niello . . . Thus the characteristic phases of an indigenous style of art exclusively Scottish can be traced in their manifestations in the industrial arts of the people from before the advent of the Romans to the period of The Four Georges. That in itself is surely a contribution of some importance to the history of a country (1890, 352–3).

We must remember, of course, in reading this that Anderson was born less than four years after the death of George IV:

But the great result of the systematic study of the archaeology of our own area is that it shows us that Scotland *has* an archaeology, a series of the phenomena of the past history, culture, and art of her people – exclusively peculiar to the country – which belongs to us alone among all the nationalities of the world, because they are the materials which disclose the long course of development from civilization to civilization, and from culture to culture, by which we have

progressed towards the attainments we now possess. Every portion of that long course has its influence on the circumstances of our position and attainments today, is part of our national history, and goes to form also its proper portion of our individual inheritance of character and capacity. The life of the nation, like that of the individual, must necessarily comprise the story of its earlier infancy as well as that of its maturer age, and it is evident that unless we know the foundations upon which our modern culture has been built, and the processes by which its complex systems have evolved from systems of less and less complexity, we cannot hope to understand it or appreciate its distinctive qualities and capabilities (1890, 353).

It would be foolish not to expect that Anderson would see the past other than in terms of the demonstration and verification of the idea of progress. But this was not his principal interest, or indeed purpose, in his pursuit of the past. His was a national archaeology created through systematic, scientific study using burials and art styles. It is not, of course, a national archaeology that extends much beyond Early Historic times:

Jos A w^d tell us we were both fools to waste a previous summer on such a well trodden spot [Iona]. When plenty of first class archaeological work is waiting and likely to wait long enough. The great hillforts of the east counties the unrecognized brochs of the west. Everything that is prehistoric. Medievalism is a very secondary or non interest at all with J.A.⁷

Yet there are some notable absences in the story he creates, particularly the issue of race. The second half of the 19th century had been much concerned with racial studies, largely based on skull types. The association of dolichocephalic skulls with long barrows and cairns and of brachycephalic skulls with round barrows had become by 1890 the accepted orthodoxy. The absence of such interpretations, particularly in light of their close association with burial archaeology, is

surprising. But the explanation is perhaps that such ideas did not fit easily with Anderson's search for a documented Scottish uniqueness.

Joseph Anderson was the leading member of the group of Scottish antiquaries at the end of the 19th century that ensured Scottish archaeology had a European reputation. They were not a harmonious group (see Piggott & Robertson 1977, nos 90 & 92 for the disquiet of John Abercromby). It may well be that Anderson's belief in a uniquely Scottish archaeology was a contributing element in the emergence of tension among them. As Anderson's obituary noted, 'cautious to a degree in forming his own opinions, he was apt to be a little impatient of the hasty conclusions of the amateur antiquary, while his contempt for the charlatan was unconcealed' (Anonymous 1916). This is a man of firm views, respected rather than loved. Joseph Anderson was, *The Scotsman* believed, 'one of the most remarkable Scotsmen of his generation' (Anonymous 1916). Unfortunately, Anderson's desire for a separate 'Scottish' prehistory and the related national sentiments are still flowing strongly in Scotland and many among the general populace want these interpretations to be confirmed. His international interests are accorded nothing like the same importance. The result is an undeservedly begrudging academic reputation in which the Scot eclipses the European.

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NOTES

- 1 Orkney Archives, D34/S/3, Letter of William Galloway to Sir Henry Dryden, 17 December 1877, Macrae & Robertson Collection.

- 2 Both letters are in the Harvie-Brown Collection – correspondence: Library, National Museums of Scotland.

- 3 *St Vigean's Church celebrates 1485 to 1985* [St Vigean's].

- 4 I am using the spelling for the Constantinople district in which the school was situated as provide in his obituary (Anon 1916); Graham has it as Hasskeui (1976, 279). I have been unable to locate any information on this school. It does, however, seem to have been in existence for some time as my only reference is in a letter from Gertrude Bell to her father, 11 September 1921. In it she describes meeting 'Sata' Beg al Hisri who was Faisal's Minister for Education in Syria . . . He is married to a Turkish woman – she was educated in an English school in Constantinople and he says she speaks English perfectly . . .' (Newcastle upon Tyne University Library: Special Collections).

- 5 Cairnduna's piece was not strictly an obituary but more a noting of his death with some anecdotal material. It appears to have been felt that by the time of Anderson's death very few readers of the *John O'Groats Journal* would remember that there was once an editor called Joseph Anderson. Cairnduna in his regular column noted Anderson's death and provided some local stories about him.

- 6 Graham's list of Anderson's published work is incomplete but remedying the situation will be difficult.

- 7 Orkney Archives, D34/S/3, Letter of William Galloway to Sir Henry Dryden, 29 October 1877, Macrae & Robertson Collection.

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