

The linen weavers of Drumsheugh and the linen damask tablecloth woven to commemorate the visit of George IV to Scotland in 1822

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ABSTRACT

Although Dunfermline has traditionally been thought of as the centre of figured table linen weaving in Scotland, throughout the 18th century weavers in Edinburgh pioneered the manufacture of linen damask in imitation of the much admired figured linen made in continental Europe. After the Union these weavers established markets in the capital, in London and further afield. This article traces the careers of the merchant weavers of Drumsheugh, Edinburgh, the last of whom, John Guthrie, achieved the distinction of being appointed damask weaver in Scotland to George IV, and describes his commemorative table cloth.

INTRODUCTION

In ‘A Tour Thro’ The Whole Island of Great Britain’, Daniel Defoe described the very ruinous state of the town of Dunfermline in 1727, ‘The People are poor, but would be poorer, if they had not the Manufacture of Linen for their Support, the Diaper and better Sort of Linen trade being carried on here, and in the Neighbouring Towns, with more Hands than ordinary’ (Defoe 1746, 147). All the historians of Dunfermline are agreed on the importance of linen, particularly table linen, to the trade of the town, and most credit a local weaver named James Blake with the introduction of damask weaving to Dunfermline around the year 1718 (Ferne 1815, 56; Mercer 1828, 163; Chalmers 1844, 353; Henderson 1879, 400). It is claimed, however, that Blake obtained these skills, legitimately or otherwise, from the weavers of Drumsheugh in Edinburgh. He may have had manufacturing secrets to share

as well as to steal, as he was awarded a premium for improvements to damask weaving by the Board of Trustees while working at Drumsheugh.¹ The earliest documented example of a piece of linen damask connected with Dunfermline is a napkin woven by James Blake in 1719, decorated with Jacobite mottoes, a mansion house and birds and animals, described later by one of Blake’s descendants (Henderson 1879, 401). In general, however, the trade of the town at that time seems to have been restricted to the more utilitarian domestic linens, for example diaper, checks and tycks. Diaper is one of those terms which is used throughout the 18th century to describe a huge variety of figured linen, often in a very loose sense, but a common feature seems to have been a fabric with a twilled ground upon which small figures could be displayed.² Damask was a more unusual and luxurious fabric formed with a satin ground, that is from long

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floats of glossy linen, upon which very detailed and pictorial scenes could be created and which needed a complicated figuring harness on the loom to create the pattern. Confusingly in the historical records, these terms are sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes together.

In Edinburgh, damask weaving had been attempted at least as early as 1659, when a weaver named David Hastie of the Canongate was granted burgh status after the 'earnest supplication of the deaken and brethren of the weavers of this burgh, for his dexterity and skilfulness of the trade in Dameisis and Hollands work', conditional upon his residing within the town.³ Lady Christian Winton's inventory of linen taken in 1699 specifically mentions six Scots Damise tablecloths and three dozen Scots damis table napkins as well as coarse dornick table cloths and napkins.⁴ These may have been the work of John Ochiltrie of Edinburgh whose napkins for the Winton family dated 1712 survive in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland and Huntly House.⁵ They bear a very large and detailed design of the coat of arms of the Earl of Winton and John Ochiltrie's name, written as 'John Ochiltrie Weaver in Edinburgh 1712'. At this period considerable effort went into acquiring the finest damask napery from Holland. Alexander Wedderburn wrote to a merchant in Amsterdam in 1702:

I entreat you would with the first opportunity send for me to Scotland ane handsome suite of damas table linen, I think the ordinar is eighteen napkins and a tablecloth of four Dutch els in breadth; I do not desire them of the very dearest but I had rather allow a tolerable price as have them coarse or not of a good patron; the flowerd are what I believe are most fashionable, those figured with men or beasts I do not like so well; they are forbid you know to be brought into Scotland.⁶

The author asked if the damask could be hemmed and marked with a 'W' so that if challenged it would look as though the napery

was part of someone's possessions. Dutch damask was highly prized but the number and variety of patterns or 'knots' described in Scottish inventories of napery and household linens in the early 18th century certainly suggest a flourishing local figured linen manufacture.⁷ Many of these would have been geometric diaper patterns but in both private and museum collections some early examples survive of a true damask manufacture.⁸

JAMES DONALDSON OF DRUMSHEUGH

The establishment of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures in 1727 signalled a national policy for the expansion of the linen trade in Scotland (Durie 1979, ch 2). With recent improvements in Ireland as an example, several schemes for the encouragement of fine linen manufacture were initiated, based in Edinburgh. These included the finest of all linen fabrics, cambric, fine holland and table linen (Mason 1945, 1–33). During one of their regular meetings in October 1729, the Board heard from a weaver in Lurgan in Ireland named Charles Thomson who was hoping for encouragement to settle and pursue his trade in Scotland. Described as 'very ingenious in working of Diaper and other table linen', some patterns woven by him for one of the trustees, Charles Cathcart, were viewed.⁹ A second Irishman, Richard Holden, described as a linen draper, was already working for the Board in Edinburgh. Both men, particularly Thomson, were considered to be skilled weavers of figured linen which did not involve the use of a draw boy, a youth who was employed by the weaver to lift the pattern threads on the draw loom, and whom the weaver had to pay.¹⁰ Holden's looms had been inspected by two leading table linen weavers from Dunfermline, David Dalgleish and John (James?) Blake, who were agreed on the novelty and efficiency of his method.¹¹ The Board agreed to pay for a broad diaper loom to be made at the considerable cost of £16, to be set

up according to his directions at Dunfermline for the instruction of the local weavers. There was some opposition to Holden's improvements, particularly from the Edinburgh weavers and it was only after Charles Thomson had been sent to Dunfermline by the Board in 1732 that the technique was properly learned.¹² A letter from the deacon of the weavers in Dunfermline with a web of diaper woven by David Wilson on the new loom confirmed its merit and it was recommended to the Secretary of the Board 'to prevail upon the Weavers of Edinb: to make Tryal of this method of working'.¹³ In Ireland, a weaver named John Houlden of Waringstown had been awarded a grant by the Irish Linen Board to develop a new loom for making diaper in 1730. Whether this man was related to Richard Holden is not known, but the discovery of a very large and fine damask tablecloth from Waringstown thought to date to 1727, though the makers are unknown, suggests that in Ireland the manufacture of damask was already at an advanced state (Lewis 1984, 235–44). Charles Thomson was eventually found employment in Scotland, as a Stamp Master in Kelso, that is as an employee of the Board of Trustees, responsible for examining all linen made for sale and for applying the national stamp as a guarantee of quality. At Kelso he was also able to set up his looms and establish himself in the table linen business, supplying the local gentry with fine napery.¹⁴

When the merchant James Donaldson petitioned the Board for aid to expand his manufacture of damask and diaper weaving in July 1736, therefore, there was an established, if small, figured linen manufacture in Edinburgh and schemes in the air, including grants, for improvement and expansion:

Last year I set up Figured Work at a great Expense and have Succeeded in it beyond my hopes This year I am seting up more of it for I have Commissions from England for much more than I can answer and having now filled all my Houses with Looms I can go no further

Unless I build more – I think I have Carried the Weaving Trade at last as far as any other person has yet done in this Country and that without ever receiving a half pennie of the publick Money.¹⁵

In the early 18th century Drumsheugh was a small hamlet to the north-west of Edinburgh and close to the water of Leith. James Donaldson's house and linen manufactory is shown in elevation on Robert Kirkwood's later map (1819) of the New Town (illus 1).¹⁶

Later in the year 12 suits of Scottish table linen were presented to the Speaker of the House of Commons, Arthur Onslow, as a demonstration of the progress of the linen manufactures in Scotland.¹⁷ Duncan Forbes, Lord Advocate, wrote to him:

Being informed that you wanted a supply of linen from home for your table, which they (the Convention of Royal Burghs) took to carry a favourable intention to them, as it must show their manufactures to the best company in Great Britain, they laid hold of the opportunity and ordered it to be made of a particular pattern, fit to show the country it came from' (Menary 1936, 161).

Onslow donated £100 as a gesture of encouragement, which was used for premiums for the best manufactured damask and diaper, in the years 1738, 1739 and 1740.¹⁸ The Scots would have been aware of the decision of George II's household to commission Irish rather than European damask from 1737 (Mackey 1999, 103, fig 61). Four suits of the table linen were also presented to Duncan Forbes in 1737, for his efforts in promoting the Scottish linen manufacture in London.¹⁹

Donaldson hoped to sell his napery south of the border, perhaps to Scottish families settling in London. An inventory of the household of the Duke of Argyll at Inverary, dated 1744, reveals where else in Scotland a nobleman might be able to commission his domestic linen at this period.²⁰



ILLUS 1 A detail from Robert Kirkwood's *Elevation of the New Town* showing James Donaldson's Linen Manufactory to the north-west of Drumsheugh House, west of Charlotte Place, and south of Melville Street. North is at the top of the map. (Copy courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

Four doz. & one fine bird's eye Marked 44. Mr Cheap
 Two doz. Birds eye courser Salton
 Eleven Damask Napkins Dutch
 Twenty eight Rose knot Spalding at 2s 6d
 Three doz & ten Diamond knot Innerkeithing
 One doz. Dyce & Wave Innerkeithing
 Two doz. Dyce Napkins broad at 2s 6d Spalding
 Two doz. small Diaper fine at 2s 6d Brunstain
 One doz & 6 birds eye course Innerkeithing
 Two doz. & 2 Glass Towels Innerkeithing
 Five Birds eye Table Cloaths
 Two Damask Stript & flower'd
 One Dutch Damask
 Four Open knot Dunfermline
 Four fine Cortre knot
 Two Spot Dunfermline
 One Common Innerkeithing
 Three Rose 2 yd wide – Spalding at 3sh
 Four small Diaper Spalding at 5sh
 Two Common – Innerkeithing
 Four Diamond. Innerkeithing.

The frequent mention of Inverkeithing linen reflects the well established market for the sale and manufacture of household linens in the town, which also held regular fairs.²¹ Dunfermline diaper patterns are also represented. The pioneering manufactories at Saltoun in East Lothian and Brunstane near Edinburgh were owned by Lord Milton, one of the leading figures of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures. James Spalding and William Cheape were linen manufacturers at Bonnington Mills on the Water of Leith in Edinburgh, producing a variety of linen fabrics including table linen. Spalding in particular specialized in the preparation of flax for spinning and yarn for weaving while Cheape concentrated on weaving and became one of the foremost Scottish manufacturers of table linen.

In February 1741, he petitioned the Board of Trustees for the services of a Dutch damask

weaver named Henryk Bideke (the finest nappery was imported from Holland) who was currently working in Edinburgh for Yaxly Davidson at Picardy. He put forward a strong case for Bideke to move to Bonnington Mills, offering him a place to work with apprentices who would in time be able spread the skills of diaper weaving throughout the country.²² Since Yaxly Davidson did not specialize in figured work, the Board agreed to the move and after examining a diaper web woven by Bideke sometime later, which was considered ‘very exact neat work and thick and sufficient cloth’, decided to employ him on the same terms as the other Dutch master weavers then in the country.²³ Terms drawn up for the four apprentices included the award of a broad diaper loom, costing £7 10s Sterling, fit for weaving all kinds of diaper, on completion of their training. Cheape also asked for compensation for loss of work while the apprentices were learning:

The Apprentices being incapable to carry on any kind of work for themselves unless they are thorouly instructed in washing sorting and camming of Yarn they ought likewise to understand the different methods of working all kinds of figures, flowers and the severall kinds of Coats of Arms with the proper Mountings and Utensills fitt for weaving each of them; as also they ought to know how to mount Damask Looms which they cannot possibly comprehend unless the mounting of a loom were purposly cut down and remounted before them; I will likewise be a very considerable loser by their spoiling of work looms which all new beginners never fails to do and by the ill finishing of their first peices doe all which Expense and trouble I may be allowed for each of them. . .²⁴

The Board later decided on the amount to be awarded to Cheape.

Initially Bideke’s diaper found favour with the Trustees and he was credited with excellent workmanship, his tablecloths being described as, ‘Thick and Substantial tho of fine yarn well Skin’d and free from Knotts. And the Figures

and Borders very Just and Exact’.²⁵ But there was a reluctance amongst the weavers, who were accustomed to earning high wages, to spend time learning new and foreign methods for which there seemed no apparent advantage. Furthermore, they did not wish to change an established pattern of working for their noble patrons. When Cheape began to advertise his linen in the local press there was a storm of protest:

We Subscribers, Weavers in Edinburgh and Suburbs. . . require an Answer from Mr Cheape to the following Queries viz. 1st. Is there any Figure of Damask or Diaper, any Coat of Arms, etc that he can work which we cannot? 2dly, Does he propose to make better Cloth, to make his Figures of any kind more distinct than we can do? 3dly Does he propose to weave cheaper than we formerly did, or are willing to do at present ? If he shall answer in the Affirmative to any of these, we are willing to stand Trial when ever asked – If in the Negative, as we have been in the long Practice of serving the Lieges, both in Weaving for our Employers, and Manufacturing for Sale, all sorts of Table-Linnen, in weaving Noblemen and gentlemens Coats of Arms and still contrive to do so, with all the Advantages of our own long Practice and Discoveries, or the Discoveries of others, and have at present considerable Quantities of Damasks to dispose of, which, we apprehend, are as good in Quality, and at as low Prices, as furnished by any others, we flatter ouselves, that our former Employers, or others, will upon Trial find themselves as well and reasonably served by us, as by any other.

The letter was signed by Archibald Howie, deacon of the weavers in Edinburgh, Patrick Lawson and William Thomson of Edinburgh and David Aitken of Potterrow, deacon of the weavers of Portsburgh.²⁶ Although they agreed that Bideke’s loom was very neatly mounted, they claimed that it was not so versatile and ‘cannot be so easily changed from Eight to Seven or five leaves, as in the manner ordinarily used by us’.²⁷ Cheape meanwhile, perhaps in pursuit of greater economy and

speed, had been looking at the improvements made in diaper weaving by a local weaver named Peter Brotherstone from Pencaitland in East Lothian. This prompted Bideke to claim that he knew many more weaving secrets, particularly in the 'Run and Dyced figures not known in Scotland', but he was only prepared to reveal them if his future employment could be secured.²⁸ The Board of Trustees became embroiled in the affair because Bideke had left Cheape's workshop and they were unwilling to support apprentices for both men. The dispute was finally resolved by a test of skill held at Bonnington Mills at public expense in March 1745.

The trial was held over three days and witnessed and adjudicated by James Donaldson of Drumsheugh. The two weavers were Henryk Bideke and John Downie, an employee of William Cheape's. On the first day both men wrought for six hours, Downie weaving 45 inches (1.143m) and Bideke 24 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches (0.63m). Bideke complained that his yarn was so moist that it broke frequently. Over the three days the men wrought for a total of 12 hours 10 minutes, Bideke weaving 79 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (2.02m) and John Downie 97 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (2.47m). Both webs were brought in for the Trustees to inspect, with a blue mark where the weavers began each day and a red one where they gave over. Bideke had woven 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (0.45m) less than Downie, even though he had claimed that his method was quicker, and he therefore had no choice but to ask to return home to Holland.²⁹ Later in the year Cheape advertised new patterns in the *Caledonian Mercury*:

William Cheape Weaver at Bonnymills near by Edinburgh, who was encouraged by the Honourable Commissioners of the Manufactures to rival the Foreign Manufacture of Damask and Diaper Linnens, continues to take in Yarn from all Persons, to be woven after the best Manner into any kind of Damask, Diaper or Scots Holland: And he having hitherto had plenty of Employment in that Way, has now, for the further Service and Benefit of the Publick, fitted

up Looms to weave any Breadth of Damask or Diaper Linnen, from 3 Yards wide Table-cloths, to half Yard wide Tea towels; and has the Art to weave the broadest Diaper Table-cloths as strong as the narrowest Towelling, and at very reasonable Prices, being plentifully provided with the newest and most beautiful Damask and Diaper Patterns, of which Linnens he has great Choice for Sale.

N.B. The Royal Scots Thistle Pattern being often chosen, he has, for the Benefit of his Customers, drawn a new beautiful Figure of the same, supported at the Root by a Flower de Luce, with Crowns, Motto, etc in their proper Places.³⁰

By 1750 he held a comprehensive stock, selling suits of damask and diaper, breakfast covers, supper and side-board cloths.³¹ He also took in customers' yarn to be woven to their order and kept a variety of the 'newest and most beautiful Patterns' at his wareroom near the Tron. A feature of Scottish damask at this period seems to have been a taste for armorial bearings, crowned thistles and the motto of the Scottish Royal Family, *Nemo Me Impune Lacessit*, plus the names of the commissioning family (Tarrant 1999, 83–97).

Clearly a merchant of some skill and influence, James Donaldson had been appointed by the Trustees to act as an Inspector of the Manufactures for the whole of Scotland in 1738.³² This was a new and wide ranging position in the early years after the Union, reflected in the annual salary of £130. His job was to examine all aspects of trade in both the linen and wool manufactures, but particularly to advise the weavers how to eradicate the most serious cloth faults. One of his early tasks (along with other selected manufacturers) was to copy at Drumsheugh examples of linen cloths for which there was an export market, particularly coarse linen fabrics which were much in demand in the plantations of Jamaica.³³ His experiments were sent to the Linen Society in Glasgow who were involved in this export trade, for their comments. Donaldson was also asked to enquire from the

buyers in London what qualities the cloths were required to have, softness and thickness or lastingness, as they had not hitherto been made in Scotland.³⁴ He was also asked to advise the spinners who were unfamiliar with yarns which were both thick and without much twist. The potential size of this export market, which was assisted by an export bounty, led manufacturers including Donaldson to divert looms from the production of the finer linens to the coarser types. The Trustees also encouraged this manufacture with the award of premiums for the best-made pieces.³⁵

Being aware of the growing market for linen cloth beyond customary work for private use, the Trustees had also initiated a scheme to engage Dutch master weavers in Scotland to train journeymen weavers, particularly in the manufacture of holland cloth.³⁶ This was a very fine plain linen used for shirting and much in demand in England. In 1739, on one of his tours of inspection, James Donaldson visited Bonnington Mills where he saw two Dutch weavers and their journeymen at work. He saw Arnoldus Librights, 'Kamming or Warping by his sight and feeling being mostly Customary Work without Weighing the hanks of the yarn'.³⁷ It was felt that if the hanks of linen yarn were properly reeled and sorted, weavers would be able to improve the quality and variety of their cloth and thus increase marketability. He was asked to go to Perth to buy up a certain amount of common sale yarn and show the weavers how to sort it. His report complained of the badness of the spinning, the insufficiency of the looms and the unskillfulness of the weavers of the region, but nevertheless he sorted about 600 spindles of yarn into various sizes or grists and got it woven into pieces of plain linen of different finenesses and also a piece of diaper 2½ yards (2.29m) broad.³⁸ These examples were shown to the merchants and dealers around Perth and to the Trustees in Edinburgh. Donaldson also drew up tables to show the weavers what reeds and finenesses of yarn were required to weave particular types of cloth.³⁹

In the summer of 1745 on his regular circuit of inspection, Donaldson came across John Johnston at Arbroath, weaving table linen 2½ yards (2.29m) broad without the help of another man. He had contrived a shuttle which was moved mechanically, 'Amazed at this Invention and Judgeing it of greater Consequence to the Linnen Manufacture than any other Modern Discovery I Engaged him to come to me before Novemr in order to mount a Weaveing Loom after this New method to be showen to the Trustees'.⁴⁰ After a rather eventful journey to Edinburgh, because of the Jacobite rising, Johnston got his loom set up at Drumsheugh. The Board agreed to reward him if his shuttle proved to be useful to the manufacture, but asked for a full technical description of the way it was thrown across the cloth and queried its safety.⁴¹ No details of this early mechanized shuttle seem to have survived but the fact that it could be thrown without the use of the weaver's hands and was potentially dangerous, suggests that the invention was more than a flying shuttle.⁴² Interestingly, however, Donaldson's son had discovered while in the north of England a similar invention.⁴³ James Donaldson wrote to the Board:

bearing that the Method of Throwing the Shuttle in England on a Broad Loom for Wooll called a Jenny Loom was brought down by one of his sons, and now sett up at Mr Donaldsons at Drumsheugh, for the Trustees. . . in order to Compare with Johnston's Method, which appeared much better for the Wooll, and more so for the Linen than the English Invention'.⁴⁴

A wool manufacturer in Edinburgh confirmed that a good broad cloth weaver would work nearly as much alone as two men, once he had mastered Johnston's method and thought that 'it would be of use to make this Invention known'.⁴⁵ But Donaldson was not convinced that the production of linen would be increased. Moreover his linen weavers were suspicious of the new process and would have nothing to do with it. It was decided to retain

Johnston to reveal his method to particular manufacturers:

paying him at the rate of One shilling per diem for his own Trouble and attendance and when he is obliged to Travel to distant places defraying his Horse hyre and other Expenses of his Journey, and for preventing Confusion every Manufacturer to whom the secret is to be Communicated should get an order from the Secretary and that Johnston should attend them, according to the dates of the orders, and should not Communicate the Secret to any person without an order. . .⁴⁶

If this trial proved successful, Johnston was to be rewarded with a salary for life. It seems he was paid £20 a year until 1753 when the mechanism, though ingenious, was abandoned, 'no method having been yet found to make the Shuttle go in a right direction'.⁴⁷

Much of the importance of Donaldson's work for the Trustees lay in the fact that not only did he visit the manufacturers in person but that the advice and instruction he gave was written up, printed and distributed to the appropriate weavers, spinners or bleachers. Thus for the first time technical information was available to manufacturers in Scotland for guidance. In effect it was a full-time position and his manufacturing interests took second place. Whether after their early promise they continued to be successful is not known. The Board, in continuing his salary in 1750 described him as, 'one of those Skilfull people whom the Board ought always to retain in their Service' but also commented that having engaged his stock when the manufactures were in their infancy, he had 'Sustained Considerable Losses, through the Unskilfulness of Workmen Etc'.⁴⁸ It seemed that he had stopped manufacturing damask in the 1740s, being unwilling to continue working in a small specialized market dominated by customary work. But perhaps by that time he had become much more concerned in the development of wider markets for Scottish linen and the pursuit of higher quality. His name is mentioned

in another inventory of the domestic linen of the Duke of Argyll taken in 1744, where with William Cheape he had supplied five bird's eye pattern table cloths. Headed 'Note of Table Linnen sent to Inverary & Roseneath', there were in all 20 dozen table napkins, five dozen towels, five dozen dusters, 35 fine tablecloths, two side-board cloths and eight huckaback table cloths for the kitchen.⁴⁹ Another Edinburgh weaver, Archibald Hart, is also mentioned for various patterns including damask, and Dutch damask is also listed. Donaldson remained in his post as inspector until his death in 1754 aged 61.⁵⁰ His son John then took over the business at Drumsheugh, although with an increasing interest in printing and publishing he later left Edinburgh to work in London with his brother Alexander. The linen manufactory was put up for sale in 1769:

That Well-built House and Work-houses at Drumsheugh, formerly the Linen Manufactory, with two small gardens, and sundry offices.

The work-houses are sufficient for twenty-one looms, with good warehouses, and garrets above them. The dwelling-house is very lodgeable. They are all fitted up in a neat and convenient manner, seldom to be met with.⁵¹

It was noted that the house and gardens were outside the city and therefore free from all city taxes, one boll of barley of feu duty being payable to Heriot's Hospital. Later, an auction was announced of the stock of linen yarn which amounted to over a thousand spindles of various kinds, and the looms and other utensils. Whether this site continued as a linen manufactory is not clear, but Drumsheugh is next heard of in connection with the damask weaver James Thomson who was working there in the 1770s.

JAMES THOMSON OF DRUMSHEUGH

By the mid-18th century under the guidance of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures, the early problems of lack of technical skill, equipment and regulation in the linen trade were

being addressed.⁵² There remained, particularly in the fine linen sector for the home market, the problem of design. New dining customs and the popularity of tea drinking led to the increased use of decorated linen in the home. The establishment of the Edinburgh Society in 1755 took account of the growing demand for new and elegant designs for domestic use with the inclusion of annual premiums for, amongst other luxuries, carpets, damask napery and printed linens.⁵³ These premiums reflected the desire in the city's rising middle class for well designed furnishings and domestic conveniences. The inventory of John Davidson of Whitehouse, Principal Clerk of Judiciary in Edinburgh, who died in April 1755, included with his silver tea kettle, tea pot and coffee pot, a dozen twisted handled silver tea spoons and quantities of napery. He owned in his well-furnished house at Whitehouse and in Edinburgh at least 21 dozen tea and table napkins and over 40 table cloths, mostly diaper but some of damask.⁵⁴ Another lawyer, James Nasmyth of Earlshaugh, who died in 1754, owned in his house in Edinburgh over 18 dozen table napkins and over two dozen tablecloths including 16 unbleached.⁵⁵ The Board of Trustees also offered premiums for fine linen fabrics in the 1750s. In 1758, for example, William Cheape gained prizes for both diaper and damask, the latter woven by Alexander Ramsay and Alexander Stewart, in two pieces both 88ins (2.23m) wide and 6 yards (5.49m) long, bleached by Hector Turnbull at the Luncarty bleachfield in Perthshire.⁵⁶ In response to the need for elegant and modern patterns the Board established a Drawing Academy in 1760, which was set up to train designers for the manufactures. The master, William Delacour, was commissioned to design six damask patterns for the use of the manufacturers in 1763.⁵⁷

The opening of the Linen Hall in the Canongate in 1766 also provided a market place to display and sell Scottish linen. But a critical letter on the current state of the linen

manufacture written to the *Scots Magazine* in 1763, suggested that there were still huge improvements to be made. The author, having visited manufacturers in Fife found bad workmanship everywhere. The only exceptions being, 'the public manufacturers of plain and figured linen in and about Edinburgh. These gentlemen, by a steady adherence to the right principles of manufacture, are now arrived at such perfection, that, at this time, I doubt much if there be such goods as theirs to be found in Europe'.⁵⁸ In reply, a correspondent praised the beneficial effects on the linen trade of many of the leading manufacturers, 'Cheap at Edinburgh excells in fine table-linen; and the town of Dunfermline in coarse table-linen and towelling, to a considerable extent'.⁵⁹ It seems that a market for Scottish table linen had been established in England. A letter to David Campbell at Dunfermline from the Managers of the British Linen Company, dated 5 December 1755 detailed the qualities required:

We have now got a return from London anent the qualities and quantity of diaper that will be wanted for the ensuing season. Which are Vizt
400 doz 6qrs Table cloths to cost about 21d or 22d per cloth; 1000 doz ditto to cost from 29 ½ to 2/- such as are generally made of yarn 7 oz warp & 6 ½ woof; 250 or 300 doz at most of 7 qrs, to cost from 3/- to 3/5d; 130 or 150 at most of 8/4 table cloths to cost from 3/10 to 4/6 per yd.

That is seventeen hundred and eighty dozen of table cloths in all, to be made ready betwixt and the first of August next. In part of which we shall reckon those that now are and have been delivering in since last bleaching season was over. We expect you will make the 7 and 8 qr Table cloths of an equal assortment of prices, that is to say, an equal proportion of the highest and lowest prices mentioned. We desire you to make the 6/4 Table cloths that used to cost 21d per cloth of yarn one degree finer for which we are satisfied to allow from 1/2d to 1d more per cloth (Durie 1996, 71).⁶⁰

A later letter, dated 4 April 1758, shows that the Trustees were eager to find and produce the most desirable patterns for sale in England:

In the beginning of winter we sent you some patterns of foreign diaper table cloths. We wish you would take a look at these particularly as to their ends, Mr Tod having wrote us this post that all such of our 8 qr table cloths as cost above 4/- or 4/2 green should be bordered at both ends and have no fringes and only a small division left for cutting between each cloth because the foreign at and above these prices are all made so and better liked at London (Durie 1996, 91).

The letter suggests that there might have been a preference for fringed tablecloths in Scotland which were not fashionable elsewhere. However by the early 1760s it seems that the quality of Dunfermline diaper if not the style, was fully equal to the foreign (Durie 1996, 157).

Meanwhile, in Edinburgh a small group of damask weavers, including James Thomson of Drumsheugh and his father William, were kept employed supplying the home market in the capital. James Thomson had been a student at the Trustees' Drawing Academy. In 1777 he gained one of the Linen Hall prizes offered by the Board of Trustees for a damask tablecloth design, being awarded the very significant premium of £10 for a drawing produced on design, or point paper, that is, ready for the loom.⁶¹ But new patterns were hard to come by and expensive to produce, often taking five to six weeks to prepare from the drawing to the point paper design and artists were not always willing to spend so much time on something which did not pay well.⁶² Manufacturers themselves were also unwilling to pay for patterns. When Mark Stark at Dunfermline approached the Board for new designs in 1776, the Secretary was asked, 'to endeavour to procure from London a few good patterns from the Calico printers or Silk Weavers'.⁶³ A report drawn up by the Board on the role of the Drawing Academy in training designers

concluded in 1786 that although several artists of note had been students, it did not know how many pattern drawers had been trained there. Two who produced damask patterns were John Bain, described as an engineer and James Thomson:

Mr Bain in particular is said to draw extremely well, but he tells me that the damask Manufactures will not give such a price for a new Pattern as to make it worth his while to draw one. Mr Thomson is perhaps a little Inferior to Mr Baine in designing or composing his Patterns But even in this he is allowed to have considerable merit, and he draws very neatly. This man has been of great use to the damask Manufacture, as he supplies almost the whole of the Manufacture with Patterns, and he declared to me, that had it not been for the Board's academy he never would have drawn a single flower. The fact is without a doubt that since the academy was opened, and the Board have given an annual premium for the best damask produced at the Linen hall *that* Manufacture is incomparably more elegant than before.⁶⁴

John Bain later offered the Trustees three drawings for which he was awarded £20. They also commissioned six further designs from him for a total of £30, the patterns to be given 'to such mechanicks as have occasion for them'.⁶⁵ By this period the Board was giving encouragement to damask and diaper weavers in the provinces, sometimes very far from Edinburgh. When James Walker from Galloway petitioned for assistance in 1774 they suggested that 'the Lad should continue in town during the ensuing Winter to attend the Drawing School & follow out his business as a Weaver, after which the Board may consider of enabling him to set up business in Galloway where an expert tradesman may be of use to the Country'.⁶⁶ He was later allowed £30 to purchase a broad damask loom.⁶⁷

The Trustees were conscious of the need for elegant patterns in the face of competition from Europe, particularly the luxurious and fashionable imported damasks from Silesia and Germany, which were much admired in

London. A further difficulty lay in obtaining and keeping apprentices in the face of the emerging cotton manufacture at home. Consequently, at this time, much experimentation was taking place to try to weave damask more quickly and with fewer costs. During the 1780s attempts were made to copy the large un-repeated patterns of Silesian damasks in Edinburgh. Two manufacturers, William Cheape and Ebenezer Gairdner achieved some success – Ebenezer Gairdner, with his two sons Andrew and James, whose business was at Portsburgh at the Grassmarket and then later established in London, notably appointed Damask Manufacturer to Queen Charlotte in 1792, after she had seen a tablecloth pattern of his called ‘Britannia’.⁶⁸ A substantial part of his trade was the supply of armorial linen damask to the Scottish nobility and gentry.⁶⁹ In one of his advertisements in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* he thanked his customers for their support during his most ‘anxious, studious and expensive improvements in the Figured Branches, both Damask and Diaper’ which he maintained were purchased by foreigners in many quarters including those places where the best were made.⁷⁰ He became involved in an argument in the press with other damask manufacturers in Edinburgh over his claim to have invented a method of weaving figures on damask, including coats of arms, much more cheaply and expeditiously than presently practised.⁷¹ The other weavers claimed that the invention, which was not patented and thus could be used by anyone, was in fact the work of James Thomson’s father, William. This seems later to have been borne out, though Gairdner was credited with devising a cheaper way of mounting the loom for weaving armorial linen. He was one of an increasing number of manufacturers who sent their sons to the Drawing Academy in Edinburgh. William Cheape, who became a prominent manufacturer of table linen, spent much of his professional life looking at ways of speeding up the weaving process for linen damask, patenting a loom in 1779 which was able to work without

a draw boy.⁷² Eager to copy the much admired Silesian damask, he petitioned the Board of Trustees (unsuccessfully) for a grant to travel there in 1775.⁷³ Despite this, he continued his studies, winning several premiums in the Trustees’ annual competitions and seems to have been able to produce many original and fashionable patterns for purchase by the city dwellers of the New Town of Edinburgh.

Whereas in the earlier part of the 18th century an aristocratic family might commission suits of damask from a master weaver made from their own yarn often from flax grown on their own estates, professional people could now purchase elegant napery from a manufacturer in his wareroom, who obtained his yarn from, for example, the stock of the British Linen Company. The traveller Faujas de Saint Fond, visiting Scotland in the autumn of 1784 and stopping at Perth, ‘purchased at a manufactory of table-linen a dozen small napkins and a tea-cloth. They were of excellent quality, and cost me four louis. I was glad to carry them to France by way of models’ (Faujas de Saint Fond 1789, ii, 183). He had stayed for several days at Inverary Castle, delighted by the family of the Duke of Argyll and their elegant new home. He described dinner, cooked by a French chef, and served as in Paris:

I was particularly pleased to see napkins on the table, as well as forks of the same kind as those used in France. I do not like to prick my mouth or my tongue with those little sharp steel tridents which are generally used in England, even in houses where very good dinners are given. . . At the dessert, the scene changes; the cloth, the napkins, and every thing vanish. The mahogany table appears in all its lustre; but it is soon covered with brilliant decanters, filled with the best wines; comfits, in fine porcelain or crystal vases; and fruits of different kinds in elegant baskets (Faujas de Saint Fond 1789, i, 250).

Customary work of course still continued – James Thomson’s brother Thomas, working

at Leith Wynd, produced a wide variety of domestic linens from the best Dutch flax, reminding his patrons to give in their yarns in good time if they wanted their cloths back early from bleaching.⁷⁴ As bleaching in the grass bleachfields took up to two months, spinning and weaving had to be completed in time to allow the cloths to lie outside during the summer. An interesting series of accounts survives from Dalmahoy House near Ratho, connected with William Thomson, the father of James and Thomas, for winding, warping, weaving and bleaching table linen in 1772 for the household of the Earl of Morton. This included 25½ yards (23.32m) tea napkins, 25 yards (22.86m) table napkins, two tablecloths 2½ yards (2.29m) wide and 4 yards (3.66m) long and six small table cloths 1¼ yards (1.14m) wide and 1¾ yards (1.60m) long. All the linen was lapped and stamped at Edinburgh.⁷⁵ James Drummond, another of the Drumshough linen manufacturers, advertised a 'few sets of naval and military patterns of fine quality and exceptional elegance' for sale at his workshops in March 1801.⁷⁶ The Linen Hall in the Canongate also stocked a wide variety of linens including suits of damask. The directors, the manufacturers Macvicar Allan & Co, showed patterns for plain and table linens there, and orders could be taken and the owners patterns used at their manufactory at the Pleasance opposite Richmond Street:

At their manufactory, Pleasance. . .the manufacturing of table linen is carried on in all its branches, where coats of arms, or other devices, will be executed in the completest manner, and where yarn will be received from any who wish to have table linen wove from yarns of their own spinning, of such patterns as they may chuse.⁷⁷

James Thomson won first prize for his damask napery at the Linen Hall for several years at the beginning of the 19th century. Two classes of damask were competed for, one with large unrepeating patterns, won by

Thomson, the other with repeating patterns across the cloth, won during the same period by Robert Plenderleath of Edinburgh.⁷⁸ In 1808 however, three Dunfermline damask weavers, George Birrel, Andrew Colvill and Robert McGregor, were admitted as students at the Trustees' drawing academy in Edinburgh.⁷⁹ Thereafter, Dunfermline manufacturers increasingly began to figure as winners in the Linen Hall premiums and in 1810 the recently opened Dunfermline Warehouse situated in the High Street, Edinburgh, also began to advertise their stock:

A great many of the Damask Tablecloths are a fine Imitation and Improvement on the foreign patterns, having Superb Centre Pieces, with elegant corner designs, and will be sold either with or without the napkins.⁸⁰

John Fernie noted these developments in his account of the history of Dunfermline, published in 1815:

The manufacturers, within these few years have paid unusual attention to the designs, or figures for diaper, back-harness, and damask and much improvement, (particularly with respect to the damask) has taken place, in point of novelty, variety, and beauty. In order to have a succession of new and elegant ones, they employ several persons in drawing patterns and give very handsome prices for the productions of their ingenuity and labour (Fernie 1815, 59).

Describing the patterns, he remarked that landscapes, waterfalls and other natural objects such as ponds with fish or waterfowl flying or swimming had been successfully introduced as well as trees containing birds nests with their young in them, of various kinds. But it seems that damask weaving had only slowly evolved in Dunfermline after James Blake's early venture. Around 1768, out of perhaps a total of 400 looms, only 10 or 12 were thought to be damask looms and by 1778 there were not above 20 (Chalmers 1844, 355). A sound reputation and market had been

created for diaper, but for the more luxurious damask more needed to be done to compete with continental Europe:

For many years the patterns were mostly conceived in a wretched taste, were ill-drawn, and utterly unfit to compete with foreign specimens. . . They were executed in a great measure by native operatives, who had rather more taste and ingenuity than a mere weaver, but wanted those various endowments that are requisite in this imaginative and tasteful branch of art (Mercer 1828, 169).

The author of these comments pointed out, however, that designing for the loom was a highly technical business, time consuming and more complicated than producing a painted design on paper and suggested that designers should be paid accordingly:

The late John Thomson (presumably James Thomson) of Drumsheugh, was an artist of very considerable talents and taste. He furnished patterns for the trade here, in which there was as near an imitation of nature as his narrow resources permitted. But he was what is called a mannerist in the pictorial world, and he had no variety of fancy. Every pattern was a copy of the preceding one, with some slight variation (Mercer 1828, 170).

To improve this situation the Board of Trustees decided to establish and support a Drawing Academy in Dunfermline, which opened in July 1826 with 37 pupils (Mercer 1828, 324). In the following year, manufacturers there were consulted over the terms of damask premiums to be offered. When it was suggested that the premium for the best drawing of a damask pattern should be changed to allow for a much bigger and more complex design there was some confusion in Dunfermline and a sharp retort from the Trustees:

The Board have merely ordered an extension of the number of Designs for the best drawing of a Damask pattern, with a view if possible to bring your fine manufacture more on a par with that

of Germany, to which it is yet *prodigiously inferior*. One can scarce bear to look at the one in comparison with the other: you must all proceed in a very different way in order to reach the superlative beauty of German Damask.⁸¹

The artist William Allan in Edinburgh was asked to examine the drawings produced for prizes during its first year.⁸² George Birrel, however, had been picked out for special praise in the premium results of 1825 when his double damask was described as ‘admirably well manufactured, & the pattern so very tasteful & beautiful, exceeding anything of the kind we remember seeing here, that we recommend it to the Board to stamp it with peculiar approbation by adding £10 to the highest premium, & making it £50’.⁸³

James Thomson, who had won many prizes for his damask designs in the early years of the 19th century, retired from business in 1812 and died in November 1821.⁸⁴ The Trustees had considered him of great value to the linen trade, a man who had been able to supply most of the damask manufacturers in Scotland with patterns. In his will, he left property in Leith Wynd on the north side of the Canongate employed as wareroom, warp-room, winding room and weaving shops, and property at Libberton’s Wynd to his eldest son Thomas, who, with his uncle, continued to work as a hand loom damask weaver, with a considerable amount of his trade in the traditional area of customary work. However, the connection with Drumsheugh was continued with the marriage of his daughter Janet to John Guthrie, whose home address was given as 9 Charlotte Place in 1825.⁸⁵ James Donaldson’s house and the row of workshops nearby were demolished in the early 1820s to make way for the present Alva Street. Charlotte Place, now known as Randolph Place continued around the corner into Queensferry Street (Kirkwood 1819). According to the *Post Office Annual Directory*, Guthrie had workshops at Heriot’s Bridge in the Grassmarket from 1826.⁸⁶

JOHN GUTHRIE OF DRUMSHEUGH

When John Guthrie was granted burgh status in Edinburgh in 1812, by right of his wife Janet Thomson, the rights and privileges of the weavers guild had been considerably eroded.⁸⁷ From 1751 any manufacturer or weaver of linen could set up in business, wherever and whenever he chose, without completing a full apprenticeship (Durie 1979, 78). The effect of this amendment of the linen laws was to increase the supply of weavers as the market demanded, often before they had gained experience as journeymen. The plain linen manufacture was the most seriously affected. However, the weaving of linen damask was highly technical and long apprenticeships were essential. Some aspects of the burgeoning cotton manufacture, particularly the machine spinning of yarn, made an impact on the weaving of figured linen. In 1792 an early flax-spinning mill was established at Brucefield near Dunfermline and by 1815 most qualities of linen yarn could be effectively mill-spun (Durie 1979, 96). These included yarns for damask napery which were thought to be as good as hand spun yarns, and the production of yarn thus passed from the householder or weaver manufacturer to the mill owner. As yet, although the power loom was being successfully used for coarse plain cloth, no significant changes had taken place to mechanize the drawloom, although several experiments to speed up the tying in of new patterns and to dispense with the drawboys had been tried. But the arrival of the Jacquard loom, particularly in Dunfermline after about 1825, would considerably alter the working patterns of the damask weavers.⁸⁸ Jacquard's system of lifting the pattern threads on the loom with a series of punched cards and lifting hooks, fully explained by the Dunfermline historian Peter Chalmers (1844), saved time and inconvenience to the weaver. The complete pattern, on interlinking punched cards, could be supplied by the manufacturer to the weaver and patterns could be changed quickly. Two other

benefits were considered by Chalmers, firstly, 'that the finest damask can now be purchased at much less per yard than was formerly paid for weaving it on the old plan', and secondly 'that an unlimited scope is given for design, which has led to an improvement on the patterns' (Chalmers 1844, 362). Since the introduction of the machines 'there have been displayed more ingenuity and better taste, less imagination and more adherence to nature in the conception, and greater superiority in the execution. The patterns are rich and varied, exhibited distinctly to the eye, and are often quite picturesque. Many of them are considered equal, if not superior, to the German' (ibid). Mechanization, with many looms housed in mills, became the pattern for Dunfermline, building on the town's experience in the diaper trade. Increasingly trained designers rather than weavers created the patterns. One of the most notable of these was Joseph Noel Paton, son of the weaver David Paton, who had been trained at the Trustees' Drawing Academy in Edinburgh and may have been taught to weave by his father. Paton submitted many patterns to the Trustees' annual competitions, winning premiums for several years in the 1820s. He was appointed drawing master at the Dunfermline Academy in 1830.⁸⁹ In Edinburgh, John Guthrie followed the traditional path of the master weaver, employing his son James as one of his journeymen, working in linen and on the hand operated draw loom, as James Donaldson had done nearly a century before.⁹⁰ For the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in the summer of 1822, it was he rather than any of the Dunfermline manufacturers who undertook to weave a presentation piece for the monarch. In 1823, the Board of Trustees acknowledged his achievement with an extra premium of £21 in their annual competitions. There were five competitors for the class of double damask that year, the winner James Hall & Co of Dunfermline was awarded £40, the second premium of £25 was awarded to R & G Birrel, also of Dunfermline and John Guthrie an

extra premium of £21 ‘on account of the great Expense & trouble incurred by him in producing a table Cloth commemorative of his Majesty’s visit to Scotland last year’.⁹¹ Whether he had taken it upon himself to produce a commemorative piece as a member of a craft long associated with Edinburgh, or whether he had been invited to do so by the city, is not known.

THE COMMEMORATIVE TABLECLOTH

George IV’s visit to Scotland was a rare event, the first by a British monarch since 1650. It took place a year after his coronation, in late middle age and ill health, an attempt to restore the prestige and magnificence of his throne and to emphasize the unity of his Kingdoms (Smith 1999, 191). He arrived at Leith on 15 August 1822 and was treated over the following two weeks to a great spectacle of pageantry and ceremony, orchestrated by Sir Walter Scott. The visit attracted maximum attention and the press at the time estimated that 300,000 people would see the King during his visit (Smith 1999, 201). Amongst the spectacular events planned were the state entry into the city, a military review, a procession to the castle with the Scottish regalia carried before the King, a Drawing Room and Levee at Holyroodhouse, balls at the Assembly Rooms and a civic banquet. Entering into the spirit of pageantry, the King wore highland dress at the Levee at Holyroodhouse, the effect of which was to popularize the kilt hereafter as the correct form of Scots ceremonial and recreational dress (ibid, 201).

The banquet in Parliament House was a glittering civic occasion with 300 distinguished, and predominantly male, guests. The upholsterer William Trotter and the theatre manager William Murray had created an elegant setting in crimson and gold, the white table linen on his Majesty’s table provided by G Duncan at the Russia Warehouse in Edinburgh of the finest Scotch manufacture, Union pattern, thistle, rose and shamrock.⁹² After the

banquet, the table linen was sold ‘as it was much admired by the ladies’.⁹³ The King, after dining, had been handed a silver salver and ‘a damask napkin of Scottish manufacture, and of the finest texture’ by the son and nephew of Sir Walter Scott (Mudie 1822, 235). William Murray, both friend and collaborator of Scott, was also involved in the decorations at the Assembly Rooms for the Peers Ball and the Caledonian Hunt Ball, described in detail in the contemporary account written by Robert Mudie (1822, 218–20). For the Peers Ball:

The card-room on the east end was fitted out as a supper-room for his Majesty. . . The floor was covered with crimson; the window fitted up with a rich drapery of Royal tartan, upon scarlet cloth curtains, descending from a gilt cornice, surmounted by a crown; a splendid chair for the king, chairs for the Peers, and an appropriate sideboard, completed the furniture of this apartment. The table was covered with rich gold plate and the walls covered with pictures. . . the whole was designed and executed by Mr Trotter, who, by the liberal conduct of the Peers, was enabled to produce a tout ensemble, in this department, which for effect, elegance and grandeur, has never been equalled in this country.

The decorations remained essentially the same for the Caledonian Hunt Ball. Amongst the collections of the Assembly Rooms are a number of gilded chairs thought to date from 1822, purchased from the sale of the decorations and furnishings for the King’s visit the following year.⁹⁴ The top cresting rail of these chairs is carved in the form of a ribboned spray of flowers, a motif found in the corners of John Guthrie’s cloth, with the addition of flowers and ears of wheat to either side.

The linen damask cloth is woven in one piece, 18ft (5.49m) long and about 7ft 6ins (2.29m) wide, bearing various elaborate ceremonial devices and the weaver’s name woven below the border at each end as follows, ‘WOVE BY I GUTHRIE EDINB’, and the initials JM are embroidered at the centre of



ILLUS 2 The centre-piece, inscribed 'God Save Great George Our King' upon a fringed banner

the top and bottom border. Other letters and numbers, '12 IG 28' are also embroidered at the edge of the cloth in white linen. The cloth bears the appropriate neoclassical symbols for the dining room. In the centre a trophy of arms is emblazoned with a banner supported by cherubs bearing the inscription 'God Save Great George Our King'. Two replete and peaceful lions lie on either side of the state regalia. Below is written 'G IV R IN COMMEMORATION OF HIS MAJESTY'S ENTRY INTO EDINBURGH AUGUST 1822' (illus 2). Above this device is a large

spray of flowers tied with ribbon and surrounded by a garland of leaves (illus 3). Below, another large motif of a cornucopia of fruit and flowers is surrounded by a rich garland of oak leaves (illus 4). Six figures of the goddess of the earth, Ceres, bearing a headdress of wheat ears, a sickle and a basket of wheat complete the central composition (illus 5). The border consists of swags of flowers and tassels with a spray of flowers tied with a ribbon in each corner. A napkin, in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland, in size 36 by 31 ins (0.91 by 0.79m), repeats the central motif



ILLUS 3 A bouquet of flowers tied with a ribbon and surrounded by a wreath of leaves and flowers



ILLUS 4 A cornucopia of fruit and flowers surrounded by a wreath of oak leaves

of the table cloth and its border. But in place of the figures of Ceres, four small thistles are placed towards each corner. The allusions are

to the classical world, rather than to the past history and identity of Scotland, recreated by Sir Walter Scott for the King's visit. They echo



ILLUS 5 The corner of the table cloth showing one of six figures of Ceres and branches of palm fronds

many of the allegorical symbols chosen for the illuminations of private mansions, offices and public buildings of the city of Edinburgh at night, and may indicate the rather chaste neoclassical taste of Trotter's overall decorative scheme for the visit. The napkin was donated to the National Museums of Scotland by Lady Jane Dundas in 1876.⁹⁵ The table cloth was donated to the Huntly House Museum (now the Museum of Edinburgh) in

1961 by Mr Robert McDowall, the great-grandson of General and Mrs Robert McDowall, the original owners.

The cloth described here was intended to be presented to the King, with other examples of Scottish manufactures during his visit, but was apparently overlooked and later sent to the Royal Steward, Henry Conyngham, in London. The *Edinburgh Evening Courant* reported:

Among the various articles, which were presented to the King, on the occasion of his late visit to this city, there was one, which, from particular circumstances, has not yet been publicly noticed, a superb Damask Tablecloth, prepared expressly for his Majesty, as a specimen of Scottish manufacture, by Mr John Guthrie, Drumsheugh, and embellished with a variety of devices and inscriptions commemorative of the royal visit. From accidental causes it was not laid before his Majesty during his residence here; but was forwarded to London, immediately after his departure, and presented by the Marquis of Conyngham, Lord Steward of his Majesty's Household, who has communicated, we understand, to Mr Guthrie, that his Majesty was most graciously pleased to accept and to express his high approbation of it. Mr Guthrie has also been appointed Damask Weaver to his Majesty in Scotland. The patterns, from which the tablecloth was made, are to be seen at Mr Guthrie's factory, Drumsheugh.⁹⁶

Guthrie's cloth does not seem to have survived in the Royal Collections and therefore it is difficult to know if the example at the Museum of Edinburgh is the original tablecloth which has found its way back to Edinburgh or an adaptation or a copy, made for purchase as a souvenir suit of damask and part of Guthrie's regular stock. A comparison with a napkin woven in 1817 for the Prince of Wales by Coulsons of Lisburn, which is a very rich example of imperial state napery and full of work, suggests that it might be the latter (Collins 1994, 28). However, there exists a near copy of the tablecloth in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, donated by Lady Elliott of Stobs in 1968.⁹⁷ The size and overall design is similar to the Edinburgh cloth, apart from the addition of scattered thistles and roses in the ground and four rather than six figures of Ceres. The existence of this second cloth raises the question of whether both may have been used on the supper tables at either of the balls at the Assembly Rooms or at the civic banquet and purchased later at the sale as souvenirs. The deep border of swags and heavy tassels, designed to hang down over

the side of the table would have been appropriate, the covered tables themselves perhaps 'glittering with barley sugar temples and iced mountains' arranged between the woven emblems of state (Prebble 1988, 305).

During the period of the Regency, the splendid dinners and fetes at Carlton House became legendary, with London the centre of taste and polite society. The preparation of linen damask for the table, white, spotless and without a crease, was an arduous business which reflected the status and domestic management skills of the host or hostess. Though Edinburgh could not compete with the lavish expenditure of London, the banquet hosted by the Provost was a stately and magnificent occasion, thought to exceed the King's Coronation Dinner in order and decorum, which cost the city over £2500.⁹⁸ Numerous books on cookery and the proper conduct of servants began to appear at this time, to educate a growing public with money but little experience of the skills of dining and entertaining. The *Footman's Directory* of 1825, for example, gave detailed instructions on setting the table, covering it first with a green cloth and then the linen, right side out. If emblazoned with coats of arms, or baskets of flowers, the bottom of the cloth should face the bottom of the table 'as the design should always look up the table', and if there were napkins they should be folded so that bread could be easily placed in them and removed. Most importantly, 'if the crest, or any other particular design is worked in the napkins, fold them so that it shall be seen' (Cosnett 1823, 75, 80). There followed instructions on the removal of the cloth after dining, sprinkling it with water and putting it into the press, below stairs, ready for the next meal.

As Guthrie exhibited the designs for his table cloth at Drumsheugh, it is likely that he took orders for copies or variations of the pattern. For members of Scottish society, the King's visit produced a memorable round of balls, dinners and private parties in Edinburgh, an opportunity to purchase suits of

commemorative damask as family souvenirs of this historic event (Prebble 1988, 257–61).

In the 1841 Census Guthrie was described as 54 years old, with a second wife, Christian (also 54) and four children, James (23), Jane (19), Maria (17) and Christian (14). Jane Thomson Guthrie, his eldest daughter, became a dressmaker, living with her sister Maria at a genteel address in the New Town at 4 St Andrew's Square.⁹⁹ At the time of the King's visit, therefore, he must have been about 35 years old, working as a master linen damask weaver in a trade which was undergoing considerable change. Its heart was also moving demographically, from Edinburgh to Dunfermline. The continuing demand for armorial linen damask napery amongst the aristocracy and the wealthy middle class may have provided him with enough work, as the population of Edinburgh expanded. A suit of armorial damask designed by Joseph Noel Paton for James Hay Erskine Wemyss, MP for Fifeshire, was exhibited at the 1862 International Exhibition in London (Cavallo 1963b, 63). It is interesting to note that in the 1820s, the manufacturer Richard Whytock began to produce woven furnishing damasks in silk, and silk and worsted, in the city, perhaps providing additional work for the specialist table linen weavers. Edinburgh had also become a centre for the weaving of figured wool and cashmere oriental shawls. Nevertheless in all plain work the power loom was beginning to replace the hand loom weaver, both in the cotton and linen sectors. It was estimated that between 1814 and 1830 the wages of hand loom weavers fell by two-thirds (Durie 1979, 167). The adoption of the Jacquard loom in the expanding factory system further marginalized the independent weaver. Guthrie was not represented in the Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Practical Science, held at the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh in the winter of 1839. There were damasks, notably woven by Messrs E & R Beveridge and Robert & George Birrel from Dunfermline.¹⁰⁰ Also exhibited were the various stages

in the machine manufacture of flax, cotton and wool and a working Jacquard loom. In the 1851 Census John Guthrie was described as a damask weaver employing two men, but by then must have been reaching retirement.¹⁰¹ His name is last recorded in the *Edinburgh Post Office Annual Directory* of 1858–9 (Cavallo 1963a, 58 n).

CONCLUSION

The interest and encouragement of the Board of Trustees in the pioneering work of the linen damask weavers of Edinburgh, including those of Drumsheugh, acted as a spur to the subsequent growth and reputation of the damask trade in Dunfermline: grants for new technology, apprentices, training by foreign experts, and the establishment of schools of design aided a domestic manufacture always overshadowed by continental Europe. But despite this, as Hugo Arnot the historian of Edinburgh wrote in 1779, the linen trade became a staple industry of Scotland with the capital playing an active role:

The number of looms employed in Edinburgh in the linen branches is extremely fluctuating; the largest number that has been known is about 1500; at the present it is supposed there are upwards of 800. That city has long been famous for making the finest damask table-linen, and linen in the Dutch manner equal to any that comes from Holland. Little of these articles is now imported; whereas, formerly, the nobility and gentry of Great Britain were entirely supplied with them from abroad (Arnot 1779, 351).

Surveying the linen manufacture in 1795, the Board of Trustees observed, 'Diapers in yards and Table Cloths are chiefly manufactured in Dunfermline. . . All the finer table linen, such as Damask & fine Diaper, and fine plain linen. . . is best made about Edinburgh, & is chiefly disposed of for home consumption, tho' part of both is sometimes exported'.¹⁰² Although early examples of Scottish damask are rare, the high quality of John Ochiltree's

napkin, dated 1712, supports Arnot's view. The work of the Board of Trustees also ensured that master damask weavers were able to set up in business in rural areas to supply elite local families some way from the capital. John Guthrie's career as a master weaver had many similarities to that of James Donaldson nearly a century before, but he was one of the last weavers to make linen damask on the hand loom. At the time he wove the commemorative tablecloth a modern writer could claim, 'An exotic fashion set at the tables of his predecessors 300 years earlier had enabled (George IV) the most fashionable monarch of his time to commission first-class damasks within his own realm' (Cavallo 1963a, 58 & n). The later progress of the damask manufacture at Dunfermline is captured in a poem published by the author, David Patton or Paton, himself a weaver, in 1813:

Dunfermline treade it was not great
 when I first in it dwelt
 Two manufactrers had the most
 if I right recolect
 The tread of this toun did consist
 of dornicks cowrse and fine
 Some deaper also here were wove
 back-cams were very thin
 But demask now in all its kinds
 is drove on to great extante
 From this to London by the sea
 to Merchants it is sent
 From thence it through the world go
 and serves both east and west
 Both Affrica and Indea too
 has there teables with it dres'd
 Now Manufactrers half a score
 Dunfermline doth contain
 the weaving treade in less or more
 is caired on by them
 These men their stock they do not spair
 but lays it out indeed
 By these many a one doth live
 by weaving for their bread
 Some of them that did rise this treade
 at first to any hight
 Their names into Dunfermline shou'd
 shine with Luster bright¹⁰³

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NOTES

- 1 National Archives of Scotland (NAS), NG 1/1/4, 20 January 1738, 198. Minute Books of the Board of Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures and Improvements.
- 2 An example of linen and cotton flowered diaper dated 1750, from the Holker manuscript, is illustrated in Montgomery 1984, Plate D-25.
- 3 Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren, 1406–1700, 225.
- 4 NAS, CS 96/2211 Inventory of Linen belonging to Lady Christian Winton, 1699.
- 5 Cavallo 1963a, 51. See also Tarrant 1999, 83–97.
- 6 NAS, GD 24/3/240/4, Letter of Alexander Wedderburn to a merchant in Amsterdam, possibly John Drummond, 1702, Abercairney Mss.
- 7 National Library of Scotland (NLS), Mss 2557. An undated 18th-century weavers pattern book which survives in the National Library of Scotland shows a variety of designs which weavers could offer their customers ranging from simple checks to elaborate diapers, one called Star and Diamond, another Nebuchadnezzar's Dream.
- 8 The National Museums of Scotland have a collection of 18th-century armorial damask connected with Scottish families.
- 9 NAS, NG 1/1/2, 10 October 1729, 13. Minute Books of the Board of Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures and Improvements.
- 10 NG 1/1/2, 21 November 1729, 24–6.
- 11 NG 1/1/2, 26 March 1731, 150.
- 12 NG 1/1/3, 9 June 1732, 18.
- 13 NG 1/1/3, 7 July 1732, 25.
- 14 NG 1/3/1, 23 December 1732, 206. Letter Books of the Board of Trustees. It was reported to the Trustees in June 1734 that an apprentice of Thomson's, having been with him only 12 months, 'had woven a Table Linen Web, that excelled any thing of that kind of Weaving, that

- had appeared in that Country. . .’ NG 1/1/3, 14 June 1734, 206.
- 15 NLS, Saltoun Mss 16565 f 207
- 16 Kirkwood 1819, ‘Elevation of the New Town of Edinburgh’. James Donaldson’s house is thought to be Drumsheugh House, shown to the west of Charlotte Place with the linen manufactory to its left. See Wilson 1945, 71–89. ‘Donaldson’s Factory’ is shown on Kincaid 1784, ‘Plan of the City and Suburbs of Edinburgh’.
- 17 *Burghs Convention Recs*, v, 1711–38, 609, 629.
- 18 *Burghs Convention Recs*, v, 1711–38, 629. Details of the prizes, 632. Archibald Howie, late deacon of the Weavers of Edinburgh, seems to have won the damask prizes and also submitted diaper for the prize at Dunfermline. When his diaper was rejected in favour of that presented by two Dunfermline weavers, he asked for skilled judges to compare the entries. James Donaldson and Robert Gourley, late Deacon of the Weavers in Leith, both agreed that Howie’s entry was well wrought and bleached and was also a true diaper structure and not a damask as claimed by the Dunfermline weavers. In his report on the matter Gourlay wrote, ‘that the said table linnen is truly diaper, of a diaper figure, tho’ wrought throw a back harnish, which is the best manner of working it. That I am at present working diaper in the same manner and have been in use to practise that way of working diaper these twenty years past, and that those who employed me called it diaper and not damask, and I never heard it objected against in all my practise, that tho’ I can also work it in leaves of the same figure, yet I rather choise to doe it with the back harnish, (sic) both for my own conveniency and for the advantage of the work’ *Burghs Convention Recs*, vi, 1738–59, 20, 22.
- 19 *Burghs Convention Recs*, v, 1711–38, 629.
- 20 NLS, Saltoun Mss 17617 f55v.
- 21 Scott-Moncrieff 1911, 177. ‘For 6 dusion table napkins and 15 table cloathes bought at Innerkithen by Ms Lindsay £136 Scots.’
- 22 NG 1/1/6, 6 February 1741, 72
- 23 NG 1/1/6, 18 December 1741, 135.
- 24 NLS, Saltoun Mss 17560 f111.
- 25 NG 1/1/6, 10 December 1742, 211
- 26 *Caledonian Mercury*, 29 September 1743.
- 27 NG 1/1/7, 20 July 1744, 94. ‘Eight to Seven or five leaves’ shows that the weavers were used to weaving diaper with a variety of ground weaves with different lengths of floats.
- 28 NG 1/1/7, 1 August 1744, 101.
- 29 NG 1/1/7, 13 March 1745, 185.
- 30 *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 September 1745.
- 31 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 1 January 1750.
- 32 NG 1/1/4, 24 March 1738, 214.
- 33 NG 1/1/5, 3 November 1738, 22.
- 34 NG 1/1/6, 22 August 1740, 41.
- 35 NG 1/1/6, 4 June 1742, 177 gave directions to weavers how to make the prize coarse webs. Details changed over time.
- 36 NG 1/1/2, 2 July 1730, 93.
- 37 NG 1/1/5, 19 January 1739, 107A.
- 38 NG 1/1/6, 22 August 1741, 39.
- 39 NG 1/1/6, 4 April 1740, 2.
- 40 Saltoun Mss 17519 f195.
- 41 NG 1/1/8, 4 March 1747, 147.
- 42 NG 1/1/8, 4 March 1747, 154.
- 43 Patent No 542, 26 May 1733. John Kay and Joseph Stell later patented an early form of power loom for narrow goods. Patent No 612, 18 April 1745.
- 44 NG 1/1/9, 24 June 1748, 132.
- 45 NG 1/1/9, 27 January 1749, 209.
- 46 NG 1/1/10, 1 December 1749, 92.
- 47 NG 1/1/12, 19 January 1753, 45.
- 48 NG 1/1/10, 12 January 1750, 142.
- 49 NLS Saltoun Mss 17617 f151.
- 50 NG 1/1/12, 28 June 1754, 158.
- 51 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 10 June 1769.
- 52 Durie 1979, 65–94.
- 53 *Scots Magazine*, 17, 1755, 126. Resolutions for ‘The Edinburgh Society for encouraging Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture in Scotland.’
- 54 NAS, CC8/8/115/2. Commissary Court Records, Register of Testaments, Edinburgh, Testament of John Davidson of Whitehouse. Recorded 6 October 1755.
- 55 NAS, CC8/8/115/2. Testament of James Nasmyth of Earlishaugh. Recorded 12 October 1754.
- 56 *Scots Magazine*, 20, 1758, 607.
- 57 NG 1/1/17, 4 February 1763, 83.
- 58 *Scots Magazine*, 25, 1763, 650
- 59 *Scots Magazine*, 25, 1763, 654.
- 60 David Campbell was reputed to have made a fortune of £7000 from his linen business and

- later retired to Edinburgh. Henderson 1879, 475.
- 61 NG 1/1/22, 17 December 1777, 28
- 62 NG 1/1/24, 7 March 1785, 260.
- 63 NG 1/1/21, 18 December 1776, 251.
- 64 NG 1/1/25, 21 November 1785, 108.
- 65 NG 1/1/22, 15 December 1780, 334.
- 66 NG 1/1/20, 10 August 1774, 268.
- 67 NG 1/1/21, 31 January 1776, 154.
- 68 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 10 March 1792.
- 69 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 October 1771, where Gairdner noted 'What is more proper or genteel than having the arms or crest of the family displayed on the tables of such as are entitled to use them?' He continued to weave coats of arms, cyphers, mottoes and crests on commission and opened a warehouse in the Strand, London in the 1790s.
- 70 *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 11 April 1786.
- 71 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 5 December 1774, 17 December 1774, 24 December 1774, 11 January 1775, 23 January 1775.
- 72 NAS, C3/20/178. Calendar of Scottish Patents and Specifications 1712–1812.
- 73 NG 1/1/21, 9 August 1775, 120.
- 74 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 13 February 1823.
- 75 NAS, Morton Mss, GD 150/2443, Dalmahoy Yarn and Linen Book. William Cheape's customary work included napery for Lady Milton in November 1750, 'I have herewith sent thirteen napkins of your yarn being of those you Commissioned or ordered to be wove first And I have still Twenty eight Spindle and three hanks of your Ladyships Yarn which indeed I think is by very much too fine for weaving into Damask which I think does not answer the expense as Courser Yarn makes as good an appearance in Table Linen', Saltoun Mss 16670 f65.
- 76 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 28 March 1801.
- 77 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 January 1812.
- 78 NG 1/1/31, 165, 24 November 1802. Premium results were recorded annually in the Trustees Minute Books. Robert Plenderleath, a manufacturer with showrooms in the centre of Edinburgh, was praised by the Board of Trustees for his damask in 1803 – 'One suit only was produced, but so extremely well manufactured, and the pattern so elegant as fully to entitle the Manufacturer Robt Plenderleath of Edinburgh to the Premium'. NAS, NG 1/1/31, 23 November 1803, 246.
- 79 NG 1/1/32, 23 November 1808, 224.
- 80 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 16 November 1811.
- 81 NG 1/3/23, 27 January 1825, 112.
- 82 NG 1/3/23, 1 August 1827, 352.
- 83 NG 1/64/29/16. Judges' Reports on the Annual Premiums, 1825.
- 84 SC 70/1/27, 375. Commissary Office, Edinburgh Sheriff Court, Register of Testaments. Testament of James Thomson, Recorded 8 August 1822.
- 85 *Post Office Annual Directory 1825–6*, 77.
- 86 *Post Office Annual Directory 1826–7*, 77.
- 87 Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren, 1761–1841, 72.
- 88 Chalmers 1844, Plate vii opposite p355. The mechanism is explained on p359.
- 89 Cavallo, 1963b, 61. Cavallo illustrates a sketch for a table cloth drawn by Paton which gained second prize in the Board of Trustees annual competitions in 1836.
- 90 Census 1841, Edinburgh, parish of St Cuthberts, 685(1) Heriot's Bridge, Grassmarket
- 91 NG 1/1/34, 25 November 1823, 437. The accession number of Guthrie's tablecloth is HH 2126/61.
- 92 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 29 August 1822.
- 93 *ibid*.
- 94 Information from David Scarratt, Keeper of Applied Art for the City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries. Other chairs and sofas in the ballroom were 'covered with blue and finished with gold coloured fringes, corresponding with the draperies of the windows' and also 'a number of arm-chairs, crimson and gold, corresponding with three of the same pattern placed on each side of the throne', possibly made by Trotter. Minute Book of the Managers of the Assembly Rooms, G1/377/6, 23 January 1823, 27 January 1823. Assembly Rooms Vouchers G1/377/42, 23 January 1823.
- 95 Guthrie napkin, National Museums of Scotland accession number A.1876.45. At the levee of August 20, the King kissed '500 ladies of the most distinguished rank, fashion and beauty in Scotland' including Lady Dundas, who wore a 'very beautiful tulle dress, trimmed with blond, embroidered with white silk forming stripes of ivy leaves and terminated by a most elegant

border of the same kind. Mantle and girdle of lilac satin. Headress, feathers and diamonds'. Mudie 1822, 175. Lady Dundas may have been the donor or a relative of the donor of the Guthrie napkin.

- 96 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 28 November 1822. Apart from Guthrie's table cloth many other gifts and examples of Scottish manufactures were presented to the King during his visit, the impact of which was felt for several years after the event. In the collections of the Museum of Edinburgh is a commemorative silver punch-bowl made by Robert Winter inscribed, 'MADE IN 1825 OF THE 1st & 2nd COINAGES OF GEORGE III IN COMMEMORATION OF HIS VISIT TO EDINBURGH AUGUST 15th 1822 THE FIRST VISIT SINCE 1651'. Accession number HH 3987/72. There is also an undated silver ladle made by George Mchattie, set with a half crown dated 1823.
- 97 I am indebted to Linda Woolley of the Victoria and Albert Museum for information about the Guthrie tablecloth in their collections, Register number T 136–1969.
- 98 *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 26 February 1824. Prebble 1988, 313.
- 99 NAS, SC 70/1/149, 1. Recorded 1 July 1870. Jane Thomson Guthrie died 29 May 1870.
- 100 Catalogue of the Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Practical Science, 36, 50.
- 101 Census 1851, Edinburgh, Parish of New Greyfriars, 725(5). Grassmarket.
- 102 NG 1/3/17, 24 October 1795, 268.
- 103 Patton 1813, 29 and quoted in Cavallo 1963a, 57.

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