



Society of Antiquaries
of **Scotland**

The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition: Essays to mark the bicentenary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 1780-1980

Edited by A S Bell

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Erratum

In the original publication of *The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition* plate 4 'Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, 7th Bt, of Coul' was attributed to Sir John Watson Gordon. However it is now attributed to Sir Henry Raeburn.

David Steuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan: Founder of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

Ronald G. Cant

Ancestry and upbringing

David Steuart Erskine, founder of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, was born in Edinburgh on 12 June 1742, the second son of Henry David Erskine, 10th Earl of Buchan, and Agnes Steuart, younger daughter of Sir James Steuart of Goodtrees, sometime Lord Advocate of Scotland.¹

The title to which David Erskine became heir, as Lord Cardross, on the death of his elder brother (another David) in 1747, and to which he succeeded as 11th Earl in 1767, was among the most venerable in Scotland.² It was, in origin, one of the ancient mormaerdoms or earldoms that can be identified in the early twelfth century but which corresponded to very much older divisions of the kingdom. In the early thirteenth century it passed, by the marriage of its heiress, to the great family of Comyn, but the hostility that developed between this and the house of Bruce during the Wars of Independence led to the forfeiture of the title and its annexation to the crown. After two relatively short-lived grants to members of the royal family, first the notorious Alexander Stewart, 'Wolf of Badenoch', son of King Robert III, then the rather more admirable John Stewart, Constable of France, son of the elder Regent Albany, it was revived in 1469 for James Stewart, son of Joanna, queen dowager of King James I by her second marriage to Sir James Stewart, 'the Black Knight of Lorne'.

From this time the title had an uninterrupted history, but on two occasions, through the succession of a female heir, it passed to families with different surnames. The first of these changes occurred when the Countess Christian, who had succeeded her grandfather the 3rd Earl in

1551, married Robert Douglas, second son of the laird of Loch Leven, who was thereafter, in 1579, recognised as Earl *jure uxoris*. On their deaths in 1580 their son James succeeded as 5th Earl but he was to die in 1601, leaving a daughter Mary as his heir. It was when she, in 1617, married James Erskine, second son (but eldest of his second marriage) of John, 7th Earl of Mar, that the title passed to the family which has held it ever since, although on two further occasions, on the failure of the direct line, it proved necessary to seek out somewhat remotely related descendants of cadet branches to maintain the succession.

The first occasion on which this happened was in 1698 when William the 8th Earl died unmarried and was succeeded, in accordance with the arrangements made in 1617 and 1625, by his second cousin once removed, David Erskine, 4th Lord Cardross. This particular title, now to be associated with the Earldom of Buchan and customarily assigned 'by courtesy' to the heir apparent, had been created for John, 7th Earl of Mar, in 1610, but on the understanding that it should pass to some member of his second family otherwise unprovided. Thus on his death in 1634 the Earldom of Mar was inherited by the sole son of his first marriage, John, and the Earldom of Buchan having been acquired, as we have seen, by the eldest son of the second marriage, James, the lordship of Cardross descended to David, son of his younger brother Henry. On the extinction of the line of descent from Earl James in 1698 the Buchan title passed to the grandson of this, 2nd, Lord Cardross of whom, in turn, Henry David the 10th Earl was the son.

There can be little doubt that the long and complex history of the Buchan earldom and its association with so many of the most famous families of Scotland exercised a powerful influence on the mind of the young Lord Cardross. In 1781, when it seemed possible that he might have to bear most of the expense involved in securing a home for the newly founded Society of Antiquaries, he professed himself prepared for the 'sacrifice of my domestick convenience to the honour of my country and the promotion of usefull learning', adding: 'To aspire after Fame founded on the performance of noble and disinterested actions is no less than habitual to the family from which I have the honour to derive my descent.'³

Insofar as any hereditary characteristics can be attributed to his own more immediate ancestors, they might be described as an insatiable curiosity and an independence of thought and action, both quite often carried to lengths that more conventional persons considered injudicious or even eccentric. David Erskine, 2nd Lord Cardross (1616-

71), like many of his age and rank a prominent Covenanter, was one of the few to oppose the surrender of King Charles I to the English puritans in 1646. His son Henry, the 3rd Lord, suffered severely in the 1670s through his involvement in conventicles. And at a less significant level, in 1745 the newly succeeded 10th Earl of Buchan, although far from Jacobite in his sympathies, was so anxious to see Prince Charles Edward at Holyroodhouse that he narrowly escaped imprisonment and forfeiture of his estates.

It is perhaps typical of this amiable but slightly feckless man that this is almost the only episode in his life for which he is remembered. By contrast his countess, Agnes Steuart, was a woman of strong personality and high intelligence. Prior to her marriage in 1739 she is believed to have studied mathematics under the great Colin MacLaurin at Edinburgh University, like her brother, and indeed her future husband. But even if she received no formal instruction MacLaurin and such other members of the Edinburgh intelligentsia as Allan Ramsay and David Hume were frequent visitors at Goodtrees (the later Moredun), situated as it was within four miles of the capital. It was also undoubtedly from the legal expertise of her family that her two younger sons Henry and Thomas inherited the abilities that made them in later life among the most distinguished advocates of their age.

Although characterised by a profound evangelical piety, Lady Buchan was at the same time perfectly capable of employing her own and her husband's political connections, all of an impeccably Whig complexion, to assist her family fortunes. There was much need of this, for the blunt fact was that Lord Buchan, despite his possession of considerable properties, especially at Kirkhill in West Lothian which had become the principal family seat, derived an income from them that was perpetually inadequate. For a prolonged period following his succession he lived in a modest apartment in Gray's Close off the High Street of Edinburgh and then, in pursuit of an even more economical mode of life, in a rented house at St Andrews.

In these circumstances Lord Cardross received much of his early education from his parents, who encouraged him in habits of intellectual self-reliance and responsibility towards his younger brothers.⁴ He also derived much benefit from the presence in the household as 'pedagogue' or private tutor of James Buchanan, later Professor of Oriental Languages at Glasgow. From this period he emerged with a good command of English and Latin, and if his subsequent style of speech and writing was somewhat orotund, this was the fashion of the

day and it was in general very adequate for its purpose. Thereafter, between 1755 and 1763, he attended classes at three of the Scottish universities — St Andrews (1755-59), Edinburgh (1760-62), and Glasgow (1762-63), and if Aberdeen was not included in this process it nevertheless featured, like the others, among his later benefactions.⁵ At St Andrews, to which his father is said to have been attracted by 'the virtuous habits of the people and diligence of the professors', his teachers included Walter Wilson in classics, David Gregory in mathematics, Robert Watson in philosophy, and at Edinburgh his kinsman John Erskine of Carnock in civil law and William Cullen in chemistry.

It was at Glasgow, however, that the young nobleman seems to have found the most congenial milieu for his intellectual interests, now at a more mature stage of development. Not only did he take courses in jurisprudence and politics under Adam Smith, chemistry under Joseph Black, civil law under John Millar, and theology under William Leechman. He was also able to meet them socially and to enlarge his understanding of their subjects by personal discussion. But what appealed to him as much as anything were the opportunities afforded by the 'Academy of Art' established within the college precincts by the university printers Robert and Andrew Foulis.⁶ Here he studied drawing, etching, and engraving, an example of his skill being the 'view of the ruins of the abbey of Icolmkill' (Iona) attached to his account of the same in the first volume of the *Transactions* of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.⁷

In the intervals of these academic activities Cardross found time, in 1758, to visit London where he was presented to King George II and met several of the leading politicians of the day. In 1761 he made an extensive tour of the northern Highlands, much of it on foot. Here he was particularly interested in the structure of the landscape and in the distinctive culture of its inhabitants, an interest that continued thereafter, as in his gift of a library to the Synod of Glenelg, in his plan for 'a topographical and etymological dictionary of the Celtic language', and in part at least in his proposal for the recording of notable Scottish landscapes. The tour concluded with an examination of the antiquities of Old Aberdeen, the first strong indication of what was to become the main preoccupation of his later years.

In 1764 Cardross was in London once again and it was during this visit, at the age of 22, that he was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The portrait, the first of a whole series, depicts him in 'Van Dyck dress' and in a markedly theatrical posture, but it conveys the fine appearance

and eager manner of the young lord, who was so pleased with it that he had copies made (with suitable Latin inscriptions composed by himself) for presentation to the Scottish universities, Glasgow having already awarded him its LL.D. in 1763, as St Andrews and Aberdeen (Marischal College) would do in 1766. Nineteen years after this first portrait he was attractively commemorated for the Society of Antiquaries in a pencil drawing by John Brown, and in the same year (1783) his friend James Tassie executed a handsome medallion. The portrait by Alexander Runciman presented to the Perth Antiquaries in 1785 is less happy and the extraordinary set-piece by W. H. Lizars in 1808 merely absurd. On the other hand the more formal portraits by George Watson and Henry Raeburn from the same period have a warmth and dignity that do justice to the Earl's appearance in his later years.⁸

When the Reynolds portrait was painted the question of its subject's career was under active consideration. In 1762, while at Glasgow, he obtained a commission in the 32nd Regiment of Foot, his military and academic commitments being adjusted accordingly. But his father's desire was that he should obtain a diplomatic appointment, and through his friendship with the Earl of Chatham he was able, in 1766, to secure the offer of a post as secretary in the British embassy at Madrid. Cardross himself, who was anxious to extend his knowledge of Europe but was prevented from making 'the grand tour' through the straitened circumstances of his family, seems to have been attracted by the offer but is said to have declined it in the end on the grounds that the ambassador, Sir James Gray, was of inferior rank to himself. With his strong sense of the importance of his family, this is at least conceivable, and Samuel Johnson — who may have had the story from Cardross's youngest brother Thomas — not only accepted it but gave it his august approval.⁹

Yet the primary motive for the rejection of the embassy appointment given by Cardross himself is that when it was made the Earl of Buchan was mortally ill and he felt that as the eldest son and heir it was his duty to support his father and mother in this family crisis. The Earl, who had been moved south to Walcot near Bath on medical advice, there came under the influence of Methodists of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, and on his death in 1767 his widow persuaded her son, now the 11th Earl, to make public profession of the same beliefs, thereby incurring considerable ridicule which he bore with characteristic fortitude. Although he did not maintain his

Methodist principles after his return to Scotland, he had a profound respect for his mother's standpoint, being bound to her by the most exemplary filial affection until her death in 1778, and himself remained, as he consistently maintained, a devout Christian throughout his life.

Early public activities

On his succession to his inheritance the new earl was concerned to restore the fortunes of his house.¹⁰ He honourably assumed full responsibility for the burden of debt left behind by his father and did all in his power to increase the profitability of his estates, of which he had already made an intensive study from 1764 onwards. Here he proved to be not only an enlightened but a particularly successful 'agricultural improver'. To his tenant farmers he granted leases of nineteen and quite often of thirty-eight years, while on the land retained under his own management he introduced new methods of production, better breeds of livestock, 'enclosure', and tree-planting, these being combined with a general replacement of estate buildings. Having achieved solvency, he went on to acquire considerable affluence by means of which, among other things, he was enabled to embellish the grounds of Kirkhill in 1777 with a large-scale orrery, its scientific basis being obtained through his friendship with Alexander Wilson, Professor of Astronomy at Glasgow.¹¹ But although of a naturally generous disposition, in financial matters he never lost the penurious habits developed, of sheer necessity, in these early days.

An important consideration in this rehabilitation of the Buchan family fortunes by its young head was being able to promote the careers of his two brothers Henry and Thomas, four years and eight years his juniors respectively. Like himself they had received much of their early education at home, but both had in addition some formal instruction at the grammar school of St Andrews under Richard Dick, later Professor of Civil History in the university. To the university Henry himself proceeded, in 1759, to a full four years' course in Arts and thence to legal studies at the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. With the help of his elder brother he was enabled, in 1768, to become a member of the Faculty of Advocates and to embark on his long and distinguished career at the Scottish bar. Thomas, by contrast, did no more than attend certain classes at St Andrews University (without formal matriculation) as a preliminary to a military career, but



1. The Society's Charter, 29 March 1783.



2. Interior of the Museum, The Mound, ca 1890.



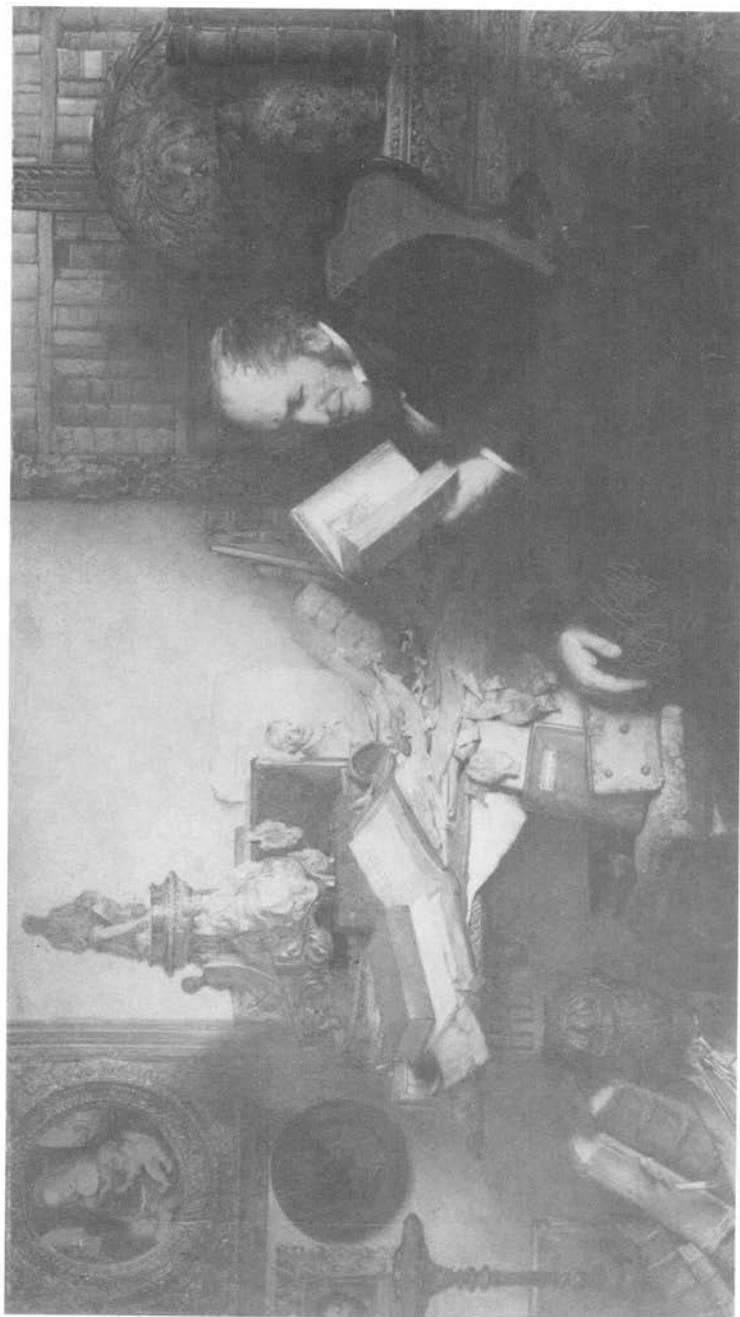
3. Museum showcase, *ca* 1890, with Joseph Anderson and G. F. Black at work.



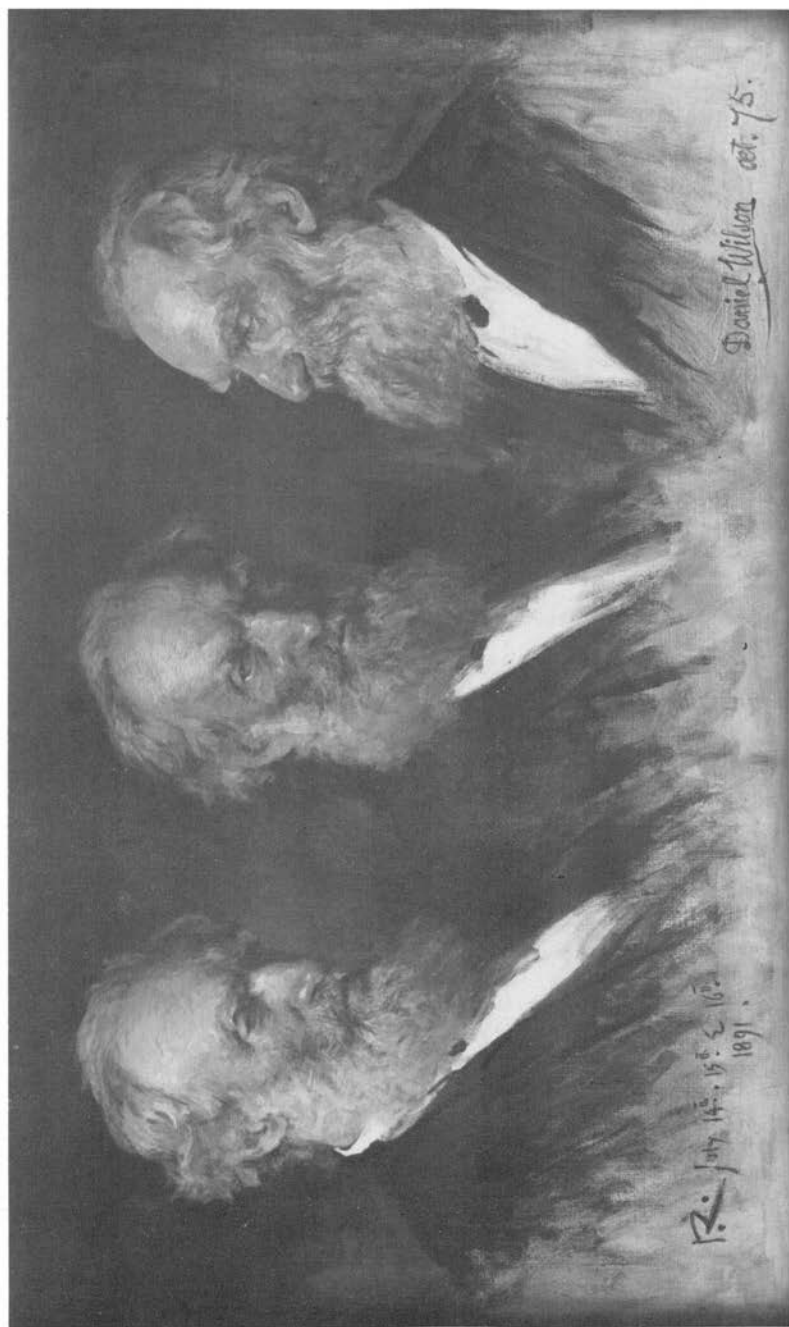
4. Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, 7th Bt, of Coul,
attributed to Sir John Watson Gordon.



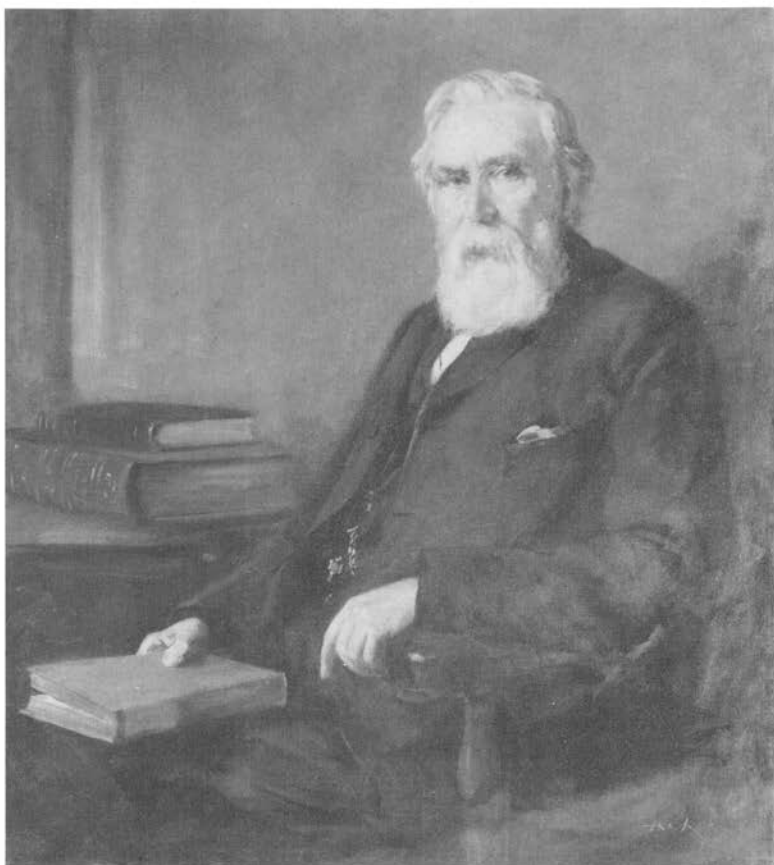
5. William Smellie, by George Watson.



6. David Laing, by Sir William Fettes Douglas.



7. Sir Daniel Wilson, by Sir George Reid.



8. Joseph Anderson, by Henry Wright Kerr.



9. R. W. Cochran-Patrick,
by W. Graham Boss.



10. Adam Black Richardson,
by W. Graham Boss.

unfortunately his father could not afford to purchase a commission for him, so that he entered the navy instead as a midshipman. In 1767, however, his eldest brother was able to obtain a commission for him in the army, in which he served for no less than eight years (1767-75) before proceeding to Cambridge University and Lincoln's Inn to begin a career at the English bar which was to culminate in his appointment as Lord Chancellor in 1806.¹²

Having discharged his initial obligations to his brothers — to whom he continued to be deeply attached throughout the whole prolonged period of their common lives — the Earl, now in his thirtieth year, made the marriage expected of all holders of hereditary titles. If it seems ungenerous to speak of his betrothal to Margaret Fraser of Fraserfield in 1771 in such terms, it would appear to have been motivated more by a sense of dynastic responsibility and family association — the bride being his own second cousin — than by the kind of intense emotional attachment that generally characterised Buchan's personal relationships. Although the marriage was quite amicable in its way, and the Earl was profoundly distressed when it ended with his wife's death in 1819, it failed to produce the desired heir. Indeed, one of the first duties that fell to the new countess was to provide a home for an illegitimate son of her husband born in this very same year. Who the mother may have been is not known, but David Erskine was brought up as a member of the family and provided with a commission in the army, in which he eventually achieved a professorship at the Royal Military Academy and a knighthood. Finally, when his father died, being succeeded in the title and entailed estates by his brother Henry's eldest son, he arranged for Sir David to inherit all his other properties including his principal residence of Dryburgh Abbey.¹³

After his succession to the Earldom Buchan assumed the natural authority and responsibilities that pertained to a member of the great nobility in the eighteenth century. He had a strong sense of duty and wished to play his due part in public life but, although a vigorous upholder of the integrity of Hanoverian Great Britain, it was within that part of it embracing the ancient Scottish kingdom that he wished to exert his influence, and in as comprehensive a range of activities as possible. In his political standpoint he adhered to the Whig principles traditionally supported by his family, but while his two brothers were active in party affairs and came to hold government office, he himself preferred to concentrate on broader issues.

Typical of such was his criticism of the method of electing the Scottish representative peers in the British House of Lords. On the first occasion after his own succession, in 1768, Buchan found that it had long been the practice for the government of the day to send down a list of the candidates expected to be returned. By a most vigorous protest, repeated in the parliamentary elections of 1774 and 1780 and in a by-election in 1781, he eventually established the principle of free and unrestricted choice.¹⁴ While this issue was at its climax, it led to his being approached by the 'Yorkshire Committee' formed in 1779 to secure shorter parliaments and more equal representation between Commons constituencies. Similar committees were in course of formation in various parts of Scotland but Buchan, while assuring the promoters of his 'most strenuous efforts . . . to meet the virtuous wishes of the Constitutional Friends of Liberty', pointed out the limitations of activity open to 'one of those wretched anomalous beings called Peers of Scotland'. This concern for 'constitutional liberty' was one of his most enduring passions, sometimes leading him into what might be regarded as dubious and dangerous associations, as in his early enthusiastic support for 'Wilkes and Liberty' in the 1760s and his membership of the Society of the Friends of the People in the 1790s.¹⁵

Another issue in which the young lord became involved in his earlier life concerned the status of the British colonies in North America. His interest in it seems to have derived initially from his friendship with Benjamin Franklin, originating perhaps in the course of the latter's visit to Scotland in 1759.¹⁶ What is certain is that in 1764 Cardross had several conversations with Franklin in London on the question of Britain's 'foolish and oppressive conduct towards the colonies'. This conduct he held to be 'radically fixt in the complexion of a mercantile nation and an ambitious and grasping system of monarchical administration', so that it came as no surprise when, in due course, it led to open revolt and a declaration of independence.

No doubt Buchan was here inclined, as so often, to simplify the issues, but he showed considerable shrewdness in his estimates of the British politicians involved, as well as commendable courage and consistency in his support of the American cause. He was very conscious of the fact that his own great grandfather the 3rd Lord Cardross had settled for a time in South Carolina, and as the War of Independence drew to a close in 1782 he himself seriously considered emigrating to the United States and involving himself in the public affairs of this new sanctuary of 'truth and freedom'. As it was, he remained in Scotland,

but he conducted a prolonged and notably cordial correspondence with George Washington, for whom he had a particular admiration and whose birthday he publicly commemorated for many years.¹⁷ At a more practical level his recommendations of Scottish academics for appointments in American colleges were marked by good sense and a concern for the educational wellbeing of this country which came second only to Scotland in his affections and interests.

Foundation of the Society of Antiquaries

It was in 1780 that the Earl effected what he at the time held to be and many have since regarded as his most memorable contribution to the cultural identity of Scotland, the foundation of its Society of Antiquaries.¹⁸ The considerations that prompted his initiative are explained in the printed *Discourse* read by him at the initial meeting held in his house at No. 21 St Andrew Square in the New Town of Edinburgh on 14 November of that year: 'It has long been a subject of regret that no regular society for promoting antiquarian researches has subsisted in this part of Great Britain.' In his letter calling the meeting he said that he had 'for some years past meditated' the formation of such an organisation, but with a modesty with which he was not often credited he insisted that there were many persons better qualified than himself for 'suggesting a plan' and hoped that those present would 'prepare their opinion on this subject' for a subsequent meeting. In the meantime he set out his own thoughts 'concerning what has already been done, and yet remains to be explored, in the line of our Scottish History and Antiquities'.¹⁹

These 'loose thoughts', as he termed them, show the speaker as possessing a remarkable grasp, for the period in question, alike of the historical development of Scotland and of the earlier scholars involved in its elucidation back to the time of Hector Boece, John Major, and George Buchanan. What is particularly interesting is his identification of a group of historians and antiquaries of the early eighteenth century who persuaded Sir James Dalrymple to publish his *Collections* in 1705. Dalrymple himself detailed some of these, headed by Sir Robert Sibbald, in his own preface, but Buchan's list is more comprehensive, including such personalities as Alexander Gordon, pioneer in the study of Roman antiquities, James Anderson, compiler of the *Diplomata Scotiae*, David Crawford, Historiographer Royal for Scotland, Alexander Nisbet, the heraldic expert, and the great Latinist, editor and librarian, Thomas Ruddiman.

Buchan states further that these and others of like interests 'formed themselves into a society which had regular meetings'.²⁰ If so, the Scottish society of 1780 might have had a precursor in the same general period as the Society of Antiquaries of London initiated in 1707. But the latter had itself a precursor of yet more venerable origins. According to the 'Historical Account' introducing the first volume of its *Archaeologia*, 'there was a society of antiquaries so early as the reign of Elizabeth'. Said to have originated in 1572 and acquiring as its acknowledged leader the great William Camden, whose *Britannia* was published in 1586, in that same year it 'resolved to apply to the Queen for a charter of incorporation', but what became of this or the society is not known. The later tradition was that it was dissolved by King James or at least 'ceased to exist publickly for fear of being prosecuted as a treasonable cabal'.²¹

If the second explanation seems rather extraordinary, the apparently innocent and recondite study of history and antiquities might well have political implications, and it is interesting to note that William Smellie, in his parallel account of the origins of the Scottish society, gives as a reason for the delay in bringing it into being the consideration that 'till we were cordially united to England, not in government only, but in loyalty and affection to a common Sovereign, it was not perhaps altogether consistent with political wisdom to call the attention of the Scots to the ancient honours and constitution of their independent monarchy'.²²

Such talk of 'ancient honours and constitution' indicates the wide area still thought to be embraced by 'antiquarian studies' in the later eighteenth century, an area given more precise definition in the stated objectives of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland when it came into being towards the end of 1780 but even so of considerable extent. The fact is that 'antiquities', when the term began to be used in the sixteenth century, were regarded as a branch of history, the visible evidence in documentary or structural form of an older way of life. This meant that they might include the reconstruction of ancient codes of laws, political and ecclesiastical constitutions, economic activities, and social customs, these being studied, very commonly, on a strongly topographical basis. Indeed, the first recognisable 'antiquaries' tended to be topographers, like John Leland and William Camden in England, Élie Vinet (the friend of Buchanan) in France, Johan Bure and Ole Worm in Scandinavia.²³

In Scotland the development of antiquarian studies owed most to

three personalities, as remarkable for their longevity as for the range of their interests — Sir John Scot of Scotstarvit (1585-1670), Sir Robert Sibbald (1641-1722), and Sir John Clerk of Penicuik (1676-1755). There were, of course, many others, as Lord Buchan emphasised in his *Discourse*, but it was Scot who did most to preserve the cartographic and topographical work of Timothy Pont, as later of Robert and James Gordon, and secured its eventual publication in the Blaeus' great atlas of 1655, so providing a comprehensive and reliable base on which further studies could be made. It was Sibbald's role alike to extend the scope of these investigations, as in his *Scotia Illustrata* of 1684, and also to deepen it by his detailed study of his own homeland of Fife and Kinross. And it was under Clerk's patronage that there took place what might well be termed the first archaeological investigation of Roman remains in Scotland, undertaken by Alexander Gordon and published in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale* in 1726.

At the same time, Clerk's interest in antiquities had something of a dilettante quality, and he must take part at least of the blame for the situation from which Lord Buchan hoped his new society might rescue the 'name of antiquary' as 'the butt of fashionable and humorous stricture'.²⁴ On the other hand he himself developed somewhat fanciful notions on the kind of enterprises that the society should promote. But such occasional vagaries were perhaps unavoidable in an age when cultural developments depended as much as they did on the noble patron, and it can be conceded that the variety of well-considered schemes far outweighed ventures that were either quixotic or merely absurd.

Apart from the benevolent support of individual aristocrats for particular projects, the relatively small size of their order and the close ties that existed within it on the basis of intermarriage or personal friendships meant that new ideas circulated with comparative speed and a fair assurance of positive support. While no Scotsmen seem to have been involved in the early informal meetings of the Society of Antiquaries of London from 1707 onwards, or in its more regular constitution in 1717-18, from the 1720s quite a few were to be found among its fellows, including Sir John Clerk, elected in 1724, while his protégé Alexander Gordon (also a fellow from 1724) served as its Secretary between 1736 and 1741. Buchan himself became a fellow, as Lord Cardross, in 1764 and regularly attended its meetings — with those of the Royal Society, of which both he and his father were likewise fellows — when he was in residence in London.

It is clear from these links, and from direct references in Buchan's own *Discourse*, that the London society provided much of the inspiration of the Scottish society inaugurated in 1780. But there were other considerations to which the founder also referred, in particular an acute awareness on his part of the dangers inherent in a reliance on the enterprise of individual scholars whose collections, laboriously assembled during their lives, might be dispersed thereafter and lost to posterity.²⁵ It was in any event apparent that the inspiration which had produced the remarkable group of Scottish antiquaries of the early eighteenth century already mentioned had long since faded or, with some notable individual exceptions like Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes (1726-92), had moved into areas less directly concerned with history and antiquities.²⁶ Hence the establishment of a society expressly committed to this area, holding regular meetings, and having a building of its own for these and for housing a museum, was particularly timely. And yet, according to William Smellie, in his *Account* of the foundation of the society, 'though these and many other advantages were to be derived from an institution of this nature, it continued to be the subject of speculation only' until the Earl of Buchan arranged for the crucial meeting of 14 November 1780.²⁷

Buchan's general proposition was that the society should concern itself with 'the antient, compared with the modern state of the Kingdom and people of Scotland', and this in the most comprehensive manner. The primary objective would be to compile what would now be termed an ethnographic survey resting on an accurate topographical basis and including particulars of natural resources and their use, population, language, and social customs. But beyond these there was to be an examination of constitutional, military, and ecclesiastical organisation. Admittedly this was to include the recording of such tangible survivals as castles, mansions, and mote-hills, churches and religious houses, coins, seals, and weapons, though equally of portraits and other more miscellaneous particulars, 'and, in general, every thing that may tend to compare our antient with our modern attainments, and to show us how happy we are in the midst of all our losses.'²⁸

As regards organisation, it was envisaged that the 'Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland' should comprise no more than fifty members who should meet on each St Andrew's Day to elect (by ballot) a President, four Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, and a Secretary, and on eight or nine other occasions during the winter to receive 'communications' on topics within the wide range of its interests. Remarkably, there was

to be no annual subscription, the original notion being that the published *Transactions* should be financed by *ad hoc* 'associations' among the members of the society and its 'house' — including residential quarters for the Secretary as well as a hall for meetings and adequate accommodation for 'books, records, and antiquities' — by individual benefactors acting through a trustee.²⁹

Of the thirty-seven persons invited to the meeting on 14 November fourteen actually attended, including such prominent Edinburgh figures as Alexander Tytler (later Lord Woodhouselee), Hugo Arnot, historian of the city, William Creech, bookseller, and William Smellie, printer and principal creator of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1771). The others, headed by the impressive judicial triumvirate of Lord President Hope, Lord Kames, and Lord Hailes, and comprising celebrities as varied as Sir William Forbes, Dr Hugh Blair, and Dr Gilbert Stuart, mostly 'sent letters highly approving of the scheme',³⁰ although James Boswell, for his part, having heard 'a ridiculous account of the meeting, wrote next day a card evading the Society'.³¹ Despite this discordant note, it was agreed by the majority that there should be a further meeting in Lord Buchan's house on 28 November, at which those present 'unanimously resolved to meet on the 18th day of December in order to form themselves into a regular and permanent body under the designation of THE SOCIETY OF THE ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND'.³²

It was, then, at this third meeting, held in the rooms of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in Wariston's Close off the High Street, that the Society of Antiquaries was officially constituted. The founder, who had kept a record of all the earlier proceedings entered into what came to be the first minute-book of the Society, had also prepared a list of potential members and obviously had the main influence in the choice of the initial officers. These were: President — The Earl of Bute; Vice-Presidents — The Earl of Buchan, Sir John Dalrymple Hamilton M'Gill, John Swinton of Swinton, Alexander Wight, and William Tytler of Woodhouselee; Treasurer — Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo; Secretary — James Cummyng. In addition to the fifty ordinary or 'constituent' members, who were now to pay a subscription of one guinea *per annum*, there were to be corresponding and honorary members, the first of whom were elected at the inaugural meeting.³³

The founder and the Society, 1780-1790

Since Buchan was the unquestioned founder of the Society and had acted as *praeses* of all the meetings that brought it into being, it must seem strange that he was not its first President, all the more so in view of the charges of personal vanity that were directed against him throughout his life. But the fact is that if he sometimes appeared aggressively self-assertive it was because of an overwhelming sense of public responsibility and quite often with little concern for his own position. In the case of the Society of Antiquaries he wished to provide Scotland with the most effective means of safeguarding its national heritage and felt that this demanded the presence at its head, even if only nominally, of the most influential Scotsman in the public life of the day.

That John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, should be viewed in this light may seem almost more curious than Buchan's own self-effacement in his favour, all the more so in view of the latter's earlier criticism of his political conduct, but despite the hostility and contempt which Bute aroused among the London politicians of his time, his elevation to the premiership in 1762 had been due as much to his parliamentary status and skill as to his influence with King George III. By 1780, at the age of 67, he was something of an elder statesman. He was also a known friend of cultural enterprises, being largely responsible for the formation of the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, as later in finding a new site for its more venerable Edinburgh counterpart, and in securing government pensions for Samuel Johnson and the Scottish playwright John Home. Beyond this, he was the controller of immense personal wealth through his marriage to the heiress of one of the greatest fortunes of eighteenth-century England.³⁴

Bute did in fact attempt to decline the presidency of the Society on the grounds that he would be unable to take much, if any, part in its work, but was persuaded by Buchan to accept and indeed continued in office until his death in 1792. In his absence the direction of the Society's affairs fell to Buchan himself as senior Vice-President. As such he had perhaps as much influence as if he had been President but seems to have been far more concerned with his responsibilities than with his status. His supreme desire was that the Society should develop a vigorous identity of its own, that it should be financially viable, and generally in a position to embark on a wide range of activities to conserve and record everything that contributed to the distinctive identity of Scotland.

The first meeting of the Society after its formal inauguration was held on 16 January 1781 with Buchan in the chair, when it was agreed that in addition to the officers already elected there should be a committee of seven to deal with routine matters or to give preliminary consideration to questions of major importance, the two groups together constituting what came to be known as the Council. A communication on 'The Antient State of Agriculture in Scotland' was read by Mr Roger Robertson and the first donations to the museum were received.³⁵ Since the development of the collections is the subject of a separate study, this account of the early history of the Society will be concerned with other aspects of its work in which its founder was involved. Most urgent at the outset was the securing of the 'house' to which Buchan had referred in his inaugural *Discourse*. The building in question was located towards the west end of the Cowgate and belonged to a Colonel Charles Campbell of Barbreck, although for some time in use by the Post Office. While it was originally thought that it could be acquired for £800, in the outcome it cost £1,000, most of the sum involved coming from Buchan himself.³⁶

Once the Society had consolidated itself and settled in its new home it was considered 'that in order to secure and perpetuate the valuable and multifarious property so early acquired a Royal Charter was the only effectual measure'.³⁷ On 21 May 1782 accordingly a petition to this effect was signed by Buchan as *praeses* of the special meeting of the Society and James Cummyng as Secretary. The petition set out the objects for which the Society had been founded, namely, 'for investigating antiquities, as well as natural and civil history in general'. It was on the second of the interests specified, natural history, that the Society now ran into difficulties that might well have been foreseen.

At the centre of the controversy was the complex personality of William Smellie, already noted as one of the leading members of the group involved in the inauguration of the Society of Antiquaries. Five years before, in 1775, he had been an unsuccessful candidate for the Chair of Natural History at Edinburgh University. It was accordingly not surprising that the University should have been deeply offended when in 1781 Smellie was not only appointed Keeper of the natural history collections which it was planned to add to the more strictly 'antiquarian cabinet' of the new Society but, with Buchan's encouragement, proceeded to give a course of lectures on natural history in its hall. The upshot was that when the Society presented its petition for a royal charter the University objected. In these objections it was joined

by the Faculty of Advocates on the grounds that if the Society proceeded with its plan to collect documents relating to the history and antiquities of Scotland, they would be lost to the Advocates' Library in which they had tended to be deposited, in large measure, during the previous hundred years.³⁸

If it is difficult to be certain about the sincerity of these objections, the arguments advanced undoubtedly carried some weight. Both groups of objectors emphasised that Scotland was too small a country to divide its cultural resources between competing institutions, and there was much sense in the University's proposal that instead of granting a charter to the Antiquaries the King should be persuaded to incorporate a single 'Royal Society' embracing all concerned to promote scholarly research. As it was, the Society of Antiquaries received its charter on 6 May 1783 with monarch as its Patron, but on the same date the members of the Philosophical Society, predominantly though not exclusively of scientific interests, were incorporated as the Royal Society of Edinburgh. At the height of the controversy Buchan, who was extremely upset by the whole affair, resigned his membership of the Philosophical Society, but Smellie found no difficulty in transferring from the old organisation to the new while continuing as an active member of the Antiquaries.³⁹

In his handling of this situation the Earl undoubtedly showed a certain lack of judgment. The simple truth is that once he had brought the Society of Antiquaries into being he saw it as the instrument for the realisation of all his plans for Scotland, often with insufficient regard for the interests of other organisations and even for its own primary function. His energy in the direction of its affairs was equalled by the variety of the enterprises which flowed from his fertile and ingenious imagination and in which he sought to involve the Society. In the first three years of its existence over ninety meetings were held, at all but a handful of which Buchan himself presided. He made a particular point of delivering a special address at what he himself termed 'the anniversary meeting', held on 14 November, the date of the first meeting in his own house in 1780 and conveniently about two weeks before the annual election of officers on St Andrew's Day.⁴⁰

In practice, relatively little progress was made on any of these projects during the period of Buchan's involvement in the Society of Antiquaries, one of the reasons being the ambitious character of so many of them and the fact that while their promoter was splendidly equipped to invent and expound them, he was very much less effective

in creating the necessary organisation to put them into operation. To be fair, he was usually prepared to set an example by himself contributing to the ventures in question but, as he was to find, this was not enough.

In the case of one of the earliest and most interesting of the projects Buchan seems to have appreciated that this difficulty might be surmounted by means of an existing organisation, or at least of its individual members, the ministers of the Established Church. This was the plan for a 'general parochial survey' which Buchan had apparently thought of as early as 1761 and which was the subject of a notice inserted in the press on behalf of the Society of Antiquaries early in 1781. For the form of this notice William Smellie was later given the credit by his biographer Robert Kerr, but when in July of this same year Buchan presented his own account of Uphall to the Society it was said to have been 'drawn up in conformity to the plan prepared by his lordship for a History of the Parishes of Scotland'.⁴¹

In the actual publication of this account in the first *Transactions* of the Society, delayed until 1792, it was accompanied by others of Liberton, Aberlady, and Haddington by the ministers of these parishes, by now involved in the scheme for a *Statistical Account of Scotland* inaugurated by Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster two years previously. But it is evident that these accounts, together with the articles on the antiquities of Lewis by Colin Mackenzie and of Orkney by Principal Gordon of the Scots College in Paris, derived from Buchan's earlier initiative. As he and Sir John were reasonably good friends, no conflict was involved, and the use of the parochial ministry for this kind of work had precedents extending back to Sir Robert Sibbald's time. But Sinclair's success in producing a complete survey in no more than a few years (1791-9) with the backing of the General Assembly contrasts with Buchan's failure to achieve his comparable objective through the Society of Antiquaries. In fact, the two schemes were somewhat different in character, for whereas history and antiquities formed a relatively small part of the *Statistical Account*, they were to be a major concern of the other project which might thus have produced something more akin to the *Origines Parochiales* of Cosmo Innes (far more extensive but likewise incomplete) a full two generations before that great venture.⁴²

In addition to this 'topographical survey', Buchan also wished to compile a *Biographica Scotica* in the form of a series of volumes containing accounts of the lives of eminent Scots. Towards this he himself

provided a study of John Napier of Merchiston, the inventor of logarithms, enlisting the help of a brilliant young scientist Walter Minto to deal with the mathematical problems involved. The work was published in 1787,⁴³ Minto in the meantime having emigrated to America where he secured a professorship at Princeton on Buchan's personal recommendation. The study reflected considerable credit on both its authors but no further volumes were published in the projected series, although Buchan himself returned to the scheme in later years, as he did to the parallel concept of an *Iconographia Scotica* to reproduce the best portraits of Scottish celebrities. This latter plan was a more practical version of the quaintly titled 'Temple of Caledonian Fame', originally envisaged as a room within the Antiquaries 'house' containing portraits and busts of persons adjudged worthy of this special recognition. More pleasing altogether was a set of drawings by John Brown of the first members of the Society headed by the founder and executed at his expense.⁴⁴

Another of Buchan's projects was his plan for building up, under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries, as comprehensive an assemblage as possible of 'old Scottish documents'. He was anxious that this should include such previous collections as that gathered together earlier in the century by James Anderson for his *Diplomata* and transcripts of documents in repositories outside Scotland like the Vatican, the Scots College in Paris, and other continental archives. Arguably, however, it would have been better for all this to be added to existing Scottish collections such as those in the Advocates' Library or the official Record Office for which at this very time a splendid new building was being provided in Robert Adam's General Register House (1772-89).

After his own acquisition of Dryburgh Abbey in 1786 Buchan made a special plea at the ensuing 'anniversary meeting' of the Antiquaries for the compilation of a *Monasticon Scoticanum* embracing collections of documents with historical accounts and illustrations of the fabrics.⁴⁵ The proposal was in fact a revival and enlargement of one made in the first days of the Society by Lord Hailes, the most distinguished Scottish historian and antiquary of his time, and was appropriate to its interests. But whereas Hailes, with his special knowledge of the difficulties involved, planned to proceed one step at a time, Buchan wished to advance on as broad a front as possible. It can at least be said that he was firmly, and most sensibly, opposed to the use of the Antiquaries' own *Transactions* for the printing of papers delivered at its meetings

when these might be of no more than ephemeral or minor importance. In 1783, when urging William Smellie to produce his promised account of the foundation and early history of the Society, he referred to 'the pompous circulation of the papers . . . among the censors' and suggested 'that it would be much better to publish on a smaller scale and to give only select papers such as may tend to augment the reputation of the society'.⁴⁶

But if he wished in this way to concentrate on matters of major and lasting significance, his plans were unduly ambitious and far beyond the resources of the Society as it existed in the 1780s. When it was being formed, Lord Hailes had warned its enthusiastic founder of the inherent apathy of most Scotsmen for cultural enterprises of this kind, and by 1786 Buchan was himself beginning to feel that his fellow-countrymen would only support projects which offered some financial or other advantage to themselves.⁴⁷ Yet the ideas which he propounded were eventually taken up by others, some within his own lifetime, though even the combined resources of a whole succession of government commissions, learned societies, and individual scholars have not attained more than a proportion of his objectives after two centuries of almost continuous endeavour.

In January 1787, during one of the founder's now fairly frequent absences from meetings of the Society of Antiquaries, it was decided to sell its house — at a loss of £235 on the fabric and certainly very much more in total cost. Despite this, and his increasing depression regarding the prospects of the Society, Buchan did what he could to obtain alternative accommodation, first, without success, in the Palace of Holyroodhouse, and then, for a time at least, in rented rooms in Milne's Square off the High Street. While his attendance at ordinary meetings was now only spasmodic, he gave his accustomed 'anniversary address' in November of this year, as also in 1788, and 1789, but when the time for it approached in 1790, on 14 November, he sent a letter to say that not only would he be making no address but would be submitting his resignation from the Society.⁴⁸

This was a decision apparently taken after much thought, but one might even so have expected some attempt on the part of the Society which he had founded and in which he had been the principal moving force thereafter, to dissuade him from this course. A letter to this effect was in fact prepared but, for whatever reason, it was never sent, and on 14 December, almost ten years to the day from the institution of the Society, it was agreed to accept his resignation. Insofar as any explana-

tion can be offered for this apparently ungenerous decision, it would seem that there were quite a few members of the Society who found Buchan's domination of its affairs oppressive and his management of its finances both arbitrary and questionable. In addition, he for his part had made clear his feeling, which even his supporters did not feel able to dispute, that he could accomplish nothing further for or through the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Undeniably, his plans for it had been unduly ambitious and advanced over-much on his own initiative and without enlisting sufficient support from those who might have co-operated in their implementation. And yet his intentions were, for the most part, to be admired. Without him the Society might never have been founded, or at least not at this particular time, and its endurance after his withdrawal — if sometimes by the narrowest of margins — confirmed the relevance of its primary declared purpose of investigating and preserving the antiquities of Scotland.

When the first volume of the Society's *Transactions (Archaeologia Scotica)* was at long last published in 1792, two years after the Earl's withdrawal but nevertheless with his assistance, it had included since its inception 107 Ordinary Members drawn mainly from Edinburgh and its vicinity, 181 Corresponding Members from elsewhere in Great Britain, 81 Honorary Members, including quite a few foreigners, and 23 'Artists Associated', embracing not only painters and engravers but architects, surveyors, and booksellers, and in all categories men not only of intellectual distinction but sufficiently devoted to its interests to ensure its survival into more propitious times.⁴⁹

Later life and associations

In the course of the 1780s Buchan came under increasing strain and perplexity regarding his place in public life. As we have seen, he had always viewed his responsibilities with unusual seriousness and the fertility of his imagination led to his promoting schemes of such number and variety that it was inevitable that only a few would reach fruition. But beyond this circumstance — which explains his eventual discouragement with the Society of Antiquaries, with which most of them tended to be connected — it is clear that he was never entirely at his ease within the social and other conventions that applied to men of his rank at this time. His low opinion of contemporary political activity is well attested, and the alternative group of activities in which he became involved reached a climax in the decade which also

witnessed his own transition from early manhood to middle age.

This unsettlement and frustration provided the context of his notion, already mentioned, of leaving Scotland for America in 1782. In the end, however, and as his disillusionment with corporate antiquarian activity increased, he found a solution for his predicament by a withdrawal from public affairs for a life of seclusion at Dryburgh Abbey. This ancient Premonstratensian foundation had earlier associations with his family which had held it as commendators from 1541 and then from 1604 as part of the secular lordship of Cardross, raised in 1610 to the dignity of a peerage. In 1682, however, the third holder of the title, having been accused of organising, or at least of tolerating, conventicles within its bounds, had disposed of it on emigrating to South Carolina. Having himself rejected the notion of a second family migration to the New World, his great-grandson took the opportunity to re-purchase Dryburgh in 1786. During the next two years he enlarged and remodelled the mansion house adjoining the abbey ruins in an appropriately romantic style and entered on what was to prove to be a forty years' residence in 1788.⁵⁰

In withdrawing to Dryburgh Buchan certainly seems to have had thoughts of a retirement from the world of 'publick affairs' in which he had been so much involved, *more suo*, during the previous twenty years. But it was impossible for a man of his physical and intellectual vigour to cut himself off altogether from the kind of activities in which he had hitherto been engaged. As we have seen, his interest in politics was limited to general issues, and he had no greater opinion of the parliamentarians of this next period, such as the younger Pitt, than he had held of their predecessors. He still participated regularly and conscientiously in the election of Scottish representative peers but otherwise limited himself to correspondence, writing directly to King George III and members of his family to express his views on current issues.⁵¹ As with his correspondence with George Washington,⁵² continued throughout the 1790s, he entertained notions that it rested on some distant kinship, but the fact is that Buchan had never been inhibited from speaking his mind on any matter to any person if the occasion seemed to demand it, his motivation in most cases being his acute sense of public responsibility rather than presumption or mere eccentricity.

His main interest in these years, however, was still with the antiquities of Scotland. Although he never resumed actual membership of the Society of Antiquaries after his resignation, he maintained his interest in its wellbeing, and no fewer than four papers by him — his

accounts of Iona Abbey and Uphall and memoirs of his kinsman Sir James Steuart Denham and of the accomplished instrument-maker James Short — were included in the long-delayed initial volume of its *Transactions*.⁵³ His 'Remarks on the progress of the Roman Army in Scotland during the sixth campaign of Agricola', like so many of his writings originally put out as a pseudonymous article in a periodical, had by now been published in a more definitive form in John Nichols' *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*,⁵⁴ while his account of Dryburgh Abbey, with appropriate illustrations from his hand, was included in Francis Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland*.⁵⁵

Beyond this involvement in the Antiquaries' *Transactions*, when William Smellie became Secretary in 1793, after a short period of inactivity and confusion, Buchan made a point of writing to him to enquire how matters stood with the Society. In his reply Smellie paid tribute to the Earl's role in bringing it into being and assured him of its revival, as a symbol of which it had been able to rent 'a noble house' belonging to the Hume Riggs of Morton in Gosford's Close off the Lawnmarket.⁵⁶

Buchan also continued to assist, in a private capacity, in the promotion of various enterprises with which he had been associated when Vice-President of the Antiquaries. One was the scheme for the publication of reproductions of portraits of famous Scots which had engaged the interest of the ingenious but unreliable John Pinkerton, as well as of the Antiquaries, in the 1780s. It was eventually brought to a conclusion by Pinkerton in 1797 under the title *Iconographia Scotica*, yet much of the biographical detail, together with several of the illustrations, and perhaps the actual title, were the contribution — but scantily acknowledged — of his collaborator.⁵⁷

Another of the Earl's notions was to continue the biographical series inaugurated by his *Napier*, publishing a pair of essays on Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun and the poet James Thomson⁵⁸ and contributing short studies of George Heriot, William Drummond of Hawthornden, and of his own progenitor John 7th Earl of Mar to his favourite periodical *The Bee* in the same general period.⁵⁹ Beyond these he had thoughts, in 1794, of including such more recent figures as Francis Hutcheson, Lord Kames, and the brothers Robert and Andrew Foulis for whom, as we know, he had an early and enduring admiration. He also considered extending the scope of the enterprise to embrace such 'inventors and benefactors of mankind' as Copernicus, towards a biography of whom he invoked the assistance of John Robison, Pro-

fessor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh. But of all this there was nothing in the end, partly because, with the passage of time, the ingenious promoter of these enterprises — too numerous and varied in any event — lost the sheer physical energy which had sustained him in their earlier phase.

So far as Buchan allowed himself to be involved with any actual antiquarian organisation in Scotland after 1790, it was with the Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth founded in 1784. In 1785 he accepted an invitation to become one of its honorary presidents, took part in some of its early meetings, and made several donations to its collections. He was much concerned that it should, like the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, embark on a systematic programme of publication and was full of admiration for the initiative of the Morison family in publishing historical works relating to the locality.⁶⁰ In the outcome, however, the Perth society's *Transactions* were even longer in appearing than those of its precursor, the one solitary volume being published only in 1827 at the very end of Buchan's own life.⁶¹

In his eager and far-ranging circle of interests the Earl was aware of the great progress made in 'northern antiquities' in the later eighteenth century and their relevance to much of early Scottish history. As we have seen, Denmark and Sweden had been in the forefront of antiquarian studies in the early seventeenth century, and in 1745 and 1753 respectively new organisations were brought into being in both countries to assist their further development. In Norway and Iceland, too, contained for so long within the Danish cultural orbit, the creation of comparable bodies in 1760 and 1791 symbolised a revival of interest in their own distinctive identities.⁶²

Buchan was elected to honorary membership of the Royal Danish Society in 1785 and of its Icelandic counterpart in 1791, these developments being of special interest since they were the product of a close and enduring friendship with the great Icelandic scholar Grímur Jonsson Thorkelin that had begun, through correspondence, in 1783. As Assistant Keeper of the Royal Archives in Copenhagen Thorkelin was anxious to locate documents relating to Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic 'antiquities' in British repositories. Buchan, for his part, wished to secure copies of Scottish source-material from abroad, especially from countries having strong historic ties with his own. There thus began an amiable interchange of letters, books, and transcripts, and between 1786 and 1791 Thorkelin took up residence in London in pursuit of his researches. There he formed a close friendship

with George Dempster of Dunnichen who arranged for him to visit Scotland in 1787. Buchan and Sir John Sinclair — who had met Thorkelin in Denmark — helped by providing introductions, and in Buchan's case the encounter of the two men was followed by a more intense and cordial correspondence that was to continue for a further twenty years.⁶³

As the eighteenth century drew to a close and he himself approached his sixtieth year Buchan became convinced that his life's work was done and that he owed it to posterity to explain what he had been attempting to achieve in his various public activities. To this end, as early as 1794 he began to assemble his papers in a 'depot' or depository and gradually enlisted Dr Robert Anderson, editor of *The Poets of Great Britain* and author of several major literary biographies, as his collaborator in a projected publication. If, however, this was to be a single work, it would seem to have been envisaged less as a conventional biography or autobiography than as a series of 'literary memoirs' containing copious reproductions of the correspondence of 'antiquaries, typographers, and bibliographers' with whom the Earl had been associated during his life.⁶⁴

In the outcome, although both parties to the arrangement were to live for many years after the project was first broached, Buchan until 1829 and Anderson until 1830, no real progress was made towards its completion, mainly because of its promoter's imprecise and ambivalent attitude towards it. At no time, indeed, does Anderson seem to have been specifically commissioned to undertake the work, while its subject alternated between thoughts of his own impending dissolution and a round of activities that were to continue, albeit with decreasing intensity, for a further thirty years.

Many of these activities were concerned with the embellishment of Dryburgh where he liked to entertain distinguished visitors, as well as old friends and neighbours, in the manner of a cultured patrician landowner. In 1791 he began to adapt the abbey chapter-house as a setting for his still persisting notion of a Temple of Caledonian Fame but, perhaps fortunately, carried it no more than a short distance. In 1791, however, he erected a memorial *stèle* nearby 'in honour of his ancestors' whom he envisaged as including Hugh de Moreville, founder of the abbey, King James I, and King James II. He also built on an eminence above the Tweed a classical temple in honour of John Thomson as well as an obelisk on Ednam Hill above his birthplace. It was characteristic of the Earl's intense enthusiasms that he should have

become obsessed to this extent with one literary figure. As early as 1791, indeed, he had instituted an annual festival in his honour, but after the death in 1796 of Robert Burns, who had visited Dryburgh in 1787 and provided a special poem for the inaugural commemoration, he added a tribute to his memory in succeeding ceremonies. A more ancient Scottish hero who came to form the subject of a landscape feature of the locality was William Wallace, of whom an enormous statue by the self-taught sculptor John Smith — who had also designed 'the temple of the muses' — was inaugurated in 1814.⁶⁵

By this time Buchan was a man of advanced years and impaired vitality. In 1801, during a visit to London, an accident had deprived him of the sight of one eye, and he now spent rather more time in his town house in Castle Street in Edinburgh, reserving Dryburgh for his summer residence. But despite his disabilities he managed, in 1811, to complete a vast epic poem on the *Irish Chiefs*, a strange mixture of ancient mythology and contemporary political philosophising, yet not devoid of literary merit. In the following year, having attained the allotted biblical span of 70, he decided to publish the first of what was intended to be a series, or at least a pair, of volumes containing his *Anonymous and Fugitive Essays collected from various periodical works* duly acknowledged and authenticated by himself.⁶⁶

He was now growing undeniably eccentric, a tendency that became more pronounced after the deaths of his brother Henry in 1817 and of his wife in 1819. It was in the latter year that there occurred the extraordinary episode involving Walter Scott and cited by his son-in-law and biographer Lockhart as typical of Earl David's vanity and general absurdity. Buchan had in fact known Scott since he had examined him as a schoolboy in 1783 for a prize which he awarded to pupils of the High School of Edinburgh for proficiency in translation of Latin verse.⁶⁷ In 1791, shortly after the Earl had settled at Dryburgh, he made over the ancient burial-place of the Haliburtons in the abbey to Scott's father and uncles as heirs of this family through their mother. Thereafter, as Scott grew to fame, Buchan became increasingly concerned that he should be buried here, and when Scott became gravely ill in a house not far from the Earl's in Castle Street in Edinburgh the old man tried to force his way into the sickroom, as he said, 'to embrace him before he died' and to assure him that he would personally supervise all the funeral arrangements and pronounce an appropriate oration.⁶⁸

As it so happened, Scott outlived Buchan, if only by some three years, and having attended his funeral at Dryburgh on 20 April 1829

entered in his diary the oft-quoted observation: 'Lord Buchan is dead, a person whose immense vanity, bordering on insanity, obscured, or rather eclipsed, very considerable talents'.⁶⁹ The biographical memoir in *The Gentleman's Magazine* was rather more sympathetic and that in the *New Scots Magazine* — used by Robert Chambers for his *Biographical Dictionary* — paid due tribute to his many excellent qualities.⁷⁰ The fact is that the exaggerations and undoubted absurdities of conduct that characterised Buchan's life must be seen in proportion and as part of his entire personality. Only at the very end of his immensely long career did they eclipse, as Scott said, his 'very considerable talents'. Next, it may be said that these failings were due less to vanity or an exaggerated sense of his own importance than to an ebullience of temperament inclined to advance proposals in such abundance and with so little concern for the difficulties involved that they were too often destined to failure. And yet in themselves these proposals were the product of an unusually alert, imaginative, and well-informed intelligence motivated by a strong sense of patriotism and public service and allied to an admirable magnanimity of temperament.

To many of his contemporaries Buchan was altogether too 'enthusiastical', he and Sir John Sinclair — in their very different ways — being often regarded by Scott and others as the supreme bores of their age.⁷¹ But when set in a more extended context, their enthusiasms appear most timely and meritorious. If Buchan had done no more than found the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland it would still entitle him to the gratitude of his countrymen, but this achievement can be seen as part of a general and truly commendable concern to preserve and enhance every aspect of the historic identity of his native land.

NOTES

1. This paper, while offering a fresh assessment of its subject, does not claim any particular originality of research. Written at relatively short notice, its preparation has been considerably assisted by the kindness of Dr J. G. Lamb in permitting use to be made of his thesis, 'David Steuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan: A Study of his Life and Correspondence', submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of St Andrews in 1963. It has also benefited greatly from the encouragement and advice of Mr R. B. K. Stevenson and Mr A. S. Bell.

2. Particulars of the Buchan peerage and Erskine family have been obtained from Sir James Balfour Paul (ed.), *The Scots Peerage* (9 vols, Edinburgh 1904), ii.250-80, and G.

E. Cokayne (rev. V. Gibbs and others), *The Complete Peerage* (13 vols, London 1910-40), ii.373-84.

3. S[ociety of] A[ntiquaries of] S[cotland], minutes.

4. Details of Cardross's education and early life, with the quotations cited, are drawn in great measure from his own diary and letter-books collected by Dr David Murray and presented by him to Glasgow University Library.

5. In particular the institution in Marischal College in 1769 of the Greek prize competition for what came to be known as 'The Earl of Buchan's Silver Pen' (R. S. Rait, *The Universities of Aberdeen*, Aberdeen 1895, 317-18).

6. D. Murray, *Robert and Andrew Foulis and the Glasgow Press, with some account of the Glasgow Academy of Fine Arts* (Glasgow 1913).

7. D. S. Erskine, Earl of Buchan (hereafter 'Buchan'), 'Account of the Island of Icolmkill', *Arch[aeologia] Scot[ica]*, [*or Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*] i(1792), 234-41.

8. Scottish National Portrait Gallery catalogue, with additional information through the kindness of the Keeper, Mr R. E. Hutchison. The original of the Reynolds portrait is now thought to be in the South African National Gallery, Cape Town. Among the copies is one by James Wales, presented by him to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1781.

9. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell (6 vols, Oxford 1934-50), ii.177 and n.

10. For this section the Buchan papers in Glasgow U.L. (Murray MSS) continue to be of importance; also the MS collections of the National Library of Scotland.

11. Buchan, 'Account of the Parish of Uphall', *Arch. Scot.* i(1792), 139-55.

12. A. Fergusson, *Henry Erskine, his kinsfolk and his times* (Edinburgh and London 1882).

13. Sir David Erskine, *Annals and Antiquities of Dryburgh* (2 ed., Kelso 1836).

14. *Speech of the Earl of Buchan, intended to have been delivered at a meeting of the Peers of Scotland October 17th, 1780* (Edinburgh 1780).

15. Buchan papers, Glásgow U.L. The reply to the Yorkshire Committee is printed, with other details, in C. Wyvill, *Political Papers* (6 vols, York 1794-1802), iv.523. Buchan also published, anonymously, *Letters 'on the partiality and injustice of the charges . . . against Warren Hastings'* (London 1786) and 'on the impolicy of a standing army in time of peace' (London 1793).

16. 'Letter from Benjamin Franklin to the Earl of Buchan, 1783', *Gentleman's Magazine* lxiv (1794), 587.

17. *The Earl of Buchan's address to the Americans at Edinburgh on Washington's birthday, February 28th 1811* (Edinburgh 1811).

18. A difficulty of timing is created by the fact that the title-page of Buchan's inaugural *Discourse* in N.L.S. is dated 1778. It may well be that he intended to deliver it then and had copies printed for circulation among prospective members. But there can be no doubt that the first meeting to form the Society, and the delivery of the 'discourse', actually took place two years later, in 1780, albeit on 14 November, a date to which the Earl seems to have attached particular significance. This interpretation, which owes much to discussions with Dr I. G. Brown, is supported by a ms. alteration of '1778' to '1780' on the title-page of the New York Public Library copy.

19. Buchan, *Discourse delivered at a meeting for the purpose of promoting the*

institution of a Society for the investigation of the History of Scotland and its Antiquities, November 14, 1778 (Edinburgh 1778); R. Kerr, *Memoirs of the life, writings, and correspondence of William Smellie* (2 vols, Edinburgh 1811), ii.32-4.

20. Buchan, *Discourse* (1778), 18-19.

21. 'Introduction, containing an Account of the Origin and Establishment of the Society', *Archaeologia, or miscellaneous tracts relating to Antiquity published by the Society of Antiquaries of London* i (1770), iii, xv.

22. W. Smellie, 'An historical account of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland' (incorporating earlier accounts, separately printed: part I, Edinburgh 1782; part II, Edinburgh 1784), with a list of members since the inception of the Society, *Arch. Scot.* i (1792), iv.

23. The treatment of early antiquarian activities here has benefited from the studies by I. G. Brown, 'Critick in Antiquity: Sir John Clerk of Penicuik', *Antiquity* li (1977), 201-10; A. Graham, 'Records and Opinions, 1780-1830', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* cii (1970), 241-84 (especially 241-6); A. Graham, 'The development of Scottish antiquarian records: 1600-1800', *PSAS* cvi (1975), 183-90; Ole Klindt-Jensen, *A History of Scandinavian Archaeology* (London 1975), especially chs. 2 and 3; S. Piggott, *Ruins in a Landscape: Essays in Antiquarianism* (Edinburgh 1976), especially chs. 1, 3, 6 and 7; S. Piggott and M. Robertson, *Three Centuries of Scottish Archaeology* [exhibition catalogue] (Edinburgh 1977).

24. Buchan, *Discourse* (1778), 23.

25. *Ibid.*, 20.

26. R. H. Carnie, 'Life and Writings of Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes', St Andrews University Ph.D. thesis, 1954, St Andrews University Library.

27. Smellie, 'Historical Account', *Arch. Scot.* i (1792), v.

28. Buchan, *Discourse* (1778), especially pp. 28, 31.

29. *Ibid.*, 24-8.

30. Smellie, *op. cit.*, vi.

31. J. W. Reed and F. A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck, 1778-1782* (New York 1977), 271.

32. Smellie, *op. cit.*, vi.

33. SAS minutes.

34. J. S. Watson, *The Reign of George III* (Oxford 1960), 69-70.

35. SAS minutes.

36. *Ibid.*, and C. B. Boog Watson, 'Notes on the Names of the Closes and Wynds of Old Edinburgh', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* xii (1923), especially 131-2.

37. Smellie, 'Historical Account', vii.

38. For details of this controversy from the point of view of Smellie and the Society of Antiquaries, see R. Kerr, *Memoirs of . . . Smellie* (1811), ii.33-44; and from the point of view of other parties, including the Royal Society of Edinburgh, S. Shapin, 'Property, patronage, and the politics of science: the founding of the Royal Society of Edinburgh', *British Journal for the History of Science* vii (1974), 1-41, especially 15-36. It is typical of Buchan that having been involved at the height of the controversy in a violent personal confrontation with Principal Robertson (Shapin, 27-9; Piggott and Robertson, *Three Centuries of Scottish Archaeology* 1977, no. 51), he should then have instructed Smellie, in preparing his annual report for the Society of Antiquaries, to omit 'any remarks whatever . . . on the business of the opposition to the charter',

adding, with regained dignity and restraint, 'The memorials and answers speak for themselves' (Kerr, *Memoirs of Smellie*, ii.62).

39. Kerr, *Memoirs of Smellie*, ii.41-4.

40. SAS minutes.

41. Kerr, *Memoirs of Smellie*, ii, 83-4; SAS minutes.

42. Sir John Sinclair (ed.), *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (21 vols, Edinburgh 1791-9). The early accounts prepared by Buchan were, understandably, curtailed for publication in Sinclair's compilation. C. Innes, *Origines Parochiales Scotiae* (2 vols, Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh 1851-5). It is interesting to note that the Society of Antiquaries later returned to Buchan's plan in its circular letter requesting information on 'monuments of antiquity' from 'the parochial ministry of Scotland' in *Arch. Scot.* ii (1822), xvii-xviii.

43. Buchan, and W. Minto, *A account of the life, writings, and inventions of John Napier of Merchiston* (Perth 1787).

44. They are listed in Kerr, *Memoirs of Smellie* (1811), ii.85-6, and are now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, on loan from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

45. SAS minutes.

46. Kerr, *Memoirs of Smellie*, ii.61-2.

47. E.U.L., Laing MSS; J. Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* (8 vols, London 1817-33), vi.514.

48. SAS minutes.

49. Smellie, 'Historical Account', xxi-xxxiii.

50. The Buchan papers in Baillie's Library, Glasgow, Edinburgh U.L. (Laing and other MSS), Glasgow U.L. (Murray MSS) and N.L.S. are of great importance for this section which also depends, even more than the others, on the pioneer work of Dr J. G. Lamb (see note 1 above). See also Nichols, *Illustrations* (1817-33) and, for Dryburgh, Sir David Erskine's *Annals* (see note 13 above).

51. A. Fergusson, *Henry Erskine* (1882), 492 ff.

52. *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. J. C. Fitzpatrick (39 vols, Washington, D.C., 1931-44), especially vols 29-36.

53. Buchan, 'Memoirs of the life of Sir James Steuart Denholm', *Arch. Scot.* i (1792), 129-39; 'Account of the Parish of Uphall', *ibid.* 139-55; 'Account of the Island of Icolmkill', *ibid.* 234-41; 'Life of Mr James Short, optician', *ibid.* 251-6.

54. Buchan, 'Remarks on the progress of the Roman army in Scotland during the sixth campaign of Agricola' [by 'Albanicus'], in J. Nichols, *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, vi. no. 6 (London 1786).

55. Buchan, 'Dryburgh Abbey'; description and two plates in F. Grose, *The Antiquities of Scotland* (2 vols, London 1789-91), i.101-9.

56. Kerr, *Memoirs of Smellie*, ii.63-5.

57. J. Pinkerton, *Iconographia Scotica, or Portraits of illustrious persons of Scotland, engraved from the most authentic paintings, &c., with short biographical notes* (Edinburgh 1797).

58. Buchan, *Essays on the lives and writings of Fletcher of Saltoun and the poet Thomson* (London 1792).

59. A complete list of Buchan's multifarious contributions to this periodical, almost all anonymous or pseudonymous (though the identity of 'Albanicus' must have been

generally known) is provided in a special appendix to Dr Lamb's thesis (see note 1 above). Most of those of major significance were however published in a more definitive form, and it was their writer's intention to include all such in successive volumes of his collected *Essays* (see *The Anonymous and Fugitive Essays of the Earl of Buchan collected from various periodical works*, i, Edinburgh 1812).

60. R. H. Carnie, *Publishing in Perth before 1807*, Abertay Historical Society Publication no. 6 (Dundee 1960).

61. *Transactions of the Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth* i (1827).

62. O. Klindt-Jensen, *History of Scandinavian Archaeology* (1975), ch. 3.

63. Many of Thorkelin's letters to Buchan and other Scottish correspondents are among the Laing MSS in Edinburgh U.L.; others are in the Murray MSS (Glasgow U.L.) and the MSS collections of N.L.S.

64. Biographical notice of the Earl of Buchan, *New Scots Magazine* ii (1829), 494.

65. This statue, still extant, is said to have been based, somewhat improbably, on a contemporary French water-colour ('Note on the Wallace statue at Dryburgh', *Gentleman's Magazine* lxxvii (1817), 621). In the memorial *stele* the figure of James I is clearly derived from the sketch of James II by Jörg von Ehingen, used as the basis of a painting at Kielberg in Swabia. In consequence, the figure of James II on the Dryburgh *stele* seems to be largely conjectural (see Pinkerton, *Iconographia Scotica* 1797; *The Diary of Jörg von Ehingen*, ed. and tr. M. Letts, London 1929; also Sir David Erskine, *Annals of Dryburgh* 1836).

66. Buchan, *Irish Chiefs or the Harp of Erin* [by 'an Irish gentleman'] (Edinburgh 1811); *Anonymous and Fugitive Essays* (1812) (see note 59 above).

67. *Letter from the Earl of Buchan to his brother, the Hon. Thomas Erskine, on the subject of education, accompanying a Latin address to the Rector of the High School of Edinburgh and one in English to the boys in the highest class of the school* (Edinburgh 1782); *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford 1972), 552n.

68. J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* [1839] (10 vols, Edinburgh 1902-3) vi.83-5.

69. Scott, *Journal* (1972), 550.

70. *Gentleman's Magazine* xcix (1829), 75-8; *New Scots Magazine* ii(1829), 494; R. Chambers, 'David Steuart Erskine, Earl of Buchan', *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (4 vols, Edinburgh 1835) ii.217-19.

71. Scott, *Journal* (1972), 198.