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.

'A fine, genial, hearty band': David Laing, Daniel Wilson and Scottish Archaeology

Marinell Ash

On 18 October 1878 David Laing died in his eighty-sixth year. During his fifty-four year membership of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland he had become not only the Society's oldest serving member, but also one of the most influential and important figures in its history. He was active until within a few days of his death and, according to an obituary notice in the *Athenaeum* of 26 October 1878, one of his last social engagements harked back to a period thirty years before when Laing and his friend, Daniel Wilson, had saved the Society from extinction and in so doing set Scottish archaeology on its modern path:

> It was only the other day that he [Laing] gave a dinner to a number of his brethren of the Society of Antiquaries on the occasion of the visit of his old friend Professor Daniel Wilson of Toronto to Edinburgh, and it was curious to see the old man sipping his Madeira with as much relish, and enjoying the old world talk as keenly as Lockhart in his *Peter's Letters* records his doing some sixty or more years ago.[*][1]

The 'old world' David Laing had known in his youth was Edinburgh in the early years of the nineteenth century. He had been born in 1793, the son of William Laing, a successful bookseller. Laing's bookshop

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[*] References for this chapter begin on p. 112. The text includes bracketed references to *Arch[aeologia] Scot[ica]*, vols 3 (1831), 4 (1857) and 5 (1890); to the Comm[unications] to the Society, vols 3 (1800-22), 4 (1823-7), 5 (1828-9), 6 (1829-32) and 7 (1842-52); to the Corr[espondence] books, vols 3 (1785-1825), 4 (1826-28), 5 (1829-31), 6 (1831-4) and 7 (1835-43); and to the M[inute] B[ook], vols 3 (9 May 1805-28 May 1827), 4 (30 November 1827-4 May 1840) and 5 (30 November 1840-6 July 1853). The three last groups of MSS are preserved in the Society's Library, National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

was a gathering place for such luminaries as Walter Scott, Thomas Thomson (first Deputy Clerk Register), the antiquary George Chalmers and John Jamieson the lexicographer, to whom William Laing had once offered a position in his business.[2] It was probably through Jamieson that the Laings met the Icelandic scholar, Grímur Thorkelin: a link with Scandinavian scholarship which was to play an important role in David Laing's life. The Laings were representative of a number of Scottish antiquaries and historians of this period who took a deep and informed interest in the common history and culture of Scotland and Scandinavia. In the Laings' case, such an interest was also good business. For example, William Laing travelled to Denmark in 1799 to buy duplicate volumes from the Royal Library in Copenhagen.[3]

David Laing entered his father's business at the age of fifteen, after a brief period at Edinburgh University. In 1809 he attended his first London book sale. Three years later, while attending the great Roxburghe sale, he formed a close friendship with his father's friend, George Chalmers. The octogenarian Chalmers was testy, conceited and self-opinionated. It was a test of young Laing's self-effacing yet diplomatic character that they became firm friends and remained so until Chalmers' death in 1825. The letters between Chalmers and his young protégé trace the antiquarian development of David Laing. The correspondence begins with Chalmers very much the patronising superior, offering help with Laing's early projects, such as his first published work, a list of Drummond of Hawthornden's books in Edinburgh University Library (1815). By 1820 a reversal of roles had taken place. Chalmers increasingly depended on Laing for literary and historical advice, especially in the preparation of his great work, *Caledonia.* Laing was not blind to the faults of his mentor. He particularly deprecated Chalmers' violent historical likes and dislikes. In 1821 he wrote to reprove Chalmers for his frenzied attacks on those who did not share his belief in the total innocence of Mary Queen of Scots. The letter marks David Laing's antiquarian coming of age:

You wished to know what alterations I meant to suggest when I wished you to republish the Life of Queen Mary. You may not remember—but I do, many conversations we have had on the disputed point of her innocence — and whatever my sentiments may be, I have no wish, or rather have no hope to be able to influence you. What I object to therefore is expressions more than sentiments — and in particular I dislike the epithet *cats-paw* which occurs so often. I wish you press some other substitute into service for it — and to say the truth, though it be

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expressive, it is too vulgar to make its appearance in such a work. Another thing I regret to see, is your getting angry and abusing your antagonists. Now, as I said before, I wish not to enter into the merits of the case — but certainly it does not strengthen an argument in the doing so. A good cause does not stand in need of it — as it serves to throw a suspicious air over the pleadings. You will therefore easily perceive the drift of my thoughts — and what I should like would be for you carefully to revise the whole, in a dispassionate mood, and to remove such terms of reproach, or hasty expressions either respecting Mary's persecutors, or the accusers which since her own days have been endeavouring to gain the public mind.[4]

The key to Laing the antiquary was the 'dispassionate mood' he urged upon his aged mentor. In this he was the inheritor of all that was best in two centuries of Scottish antiquarian scholarship. In the past historical studies in Scotland had too often been subject to violent religious or political partisanship, but the greatest of Scotland's antiquaries shunned these extremes. They brought to their studies the disengaged mind necessary to understand the past on its own terms: in a sense their attitude was essentially scientific. For Laing, this detached attitude towards the past was not achieved without personal cost. Laing was the most self-effacing of men who never revealed the inner details of his character or feelings, but there are hints of a number of early disappointments which helped to reinforce his own retiring nature. Laing certainly aspired to success in his chosen field: 'energy and vigour will ever be preferred to sober dulness'.[5] In this instance Laing was referring to the spirit informing the early issues of *Black-wood's Magazine*, but the attitude applied as much to himself as the new journal. Many of Laing's youthful disappointments stemmed from his connections with William Blackwood. The two had been friends as early as 1815 when they applied unsuccessfully to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for permission to consult the Hawthornden MSS in their care (MB 3, 96). This was Laing's first contact with the Society in which he was later to play such an important role. In 1816 Laing journeyed to the Low Countries with James Wilson, the brother of John Wilson soon to attain notoriety as 'Christopher North' in *Blackwood's*. In Holland Laing met J. G. Lockhart, who versified Laing's attainments in an early issue of the magazine:

> David, the sagacious and the best
>   As all Old Reekie's erudites opine,
> Of Scottish Bibliophiles, who knows the zest
>   And cream of every title-page *Aldine;*
> A famous Bibliomaniac, and a shrewd,
> Who turns his madness to no little good.

On the return journey from London to Edinburgh following this continental trip, Laing accompanied William Blackwood, now full of ideas for his new magazine.

These friendships brought Laing into a circle of men whose literary high spirits, especially the notorious 'Chaldee MS.', caused something of a scandal in Edinburgh circles. Laing seems to have been tainted by this association in the eyes of some of the Edinburgh establishment. Chalmers mentions a threat of prosecution against Laing in a letter of 22 November 1817, and in a reply on 9 December Laing made his position clear:

> . . . in your former letter you refer to prosecutions — do you mean any against me? or have such rumours reached so far as London? I make it a rule never to do what I would be ashamed to stand up boldly and affirm.[6]

Clearly Laing had a strong appreciation of his own gifts and wished to find a role in life in which they could find practical expression and use, for example in the organisation of one of Edinburgh's great libraries. In 1819 he had applied for the vacant position of librarian of the Advocates' Library. Despite support from such figures as Walter Scott, he failed to gain the appointment because of 'party spirit'.[7]

Following his failure to gain the Advocates' appointment, other disappointments followed. He was blackballed when he was proposed for membership of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1820.[8] By this time Laing was taking active steps to end his close association with the *Blackwood's* circle. In 1819 he had asked William Blackwood that he should no longer receive the magazine *gratis*, but was also at some pains to assure his old friend that this request should not be 'any grounds of offence'.[9]

In 1821 Laing became a partner in his father's business, and his carefree youth was over. His abilities as a literary scholar and bibliographer were by now widely recognised. Early in 1823 Walter Scott asked Laing to be the secretary of the newly founded Bannatyne Club. By this time Laing had edited and published six volumes of literary texts, mostly poetry. The Bannatyne Club was founded to publish Scottish literary and historical texts in beautiful and accurate editions. The volumes were not just collector's items for the club's select membership; they were also intended to be accurate texts for the use of historical and literary scholars.

The first publishing club, the Roxburghe, had been founded in the wake of the sale of the Duke of Roxburghe's library in 1812 to create

new, rare volumes. The Bannatyne was conceived on different terms, for it existed not just to produce rare books but useful ones as well. To be useful the books had to attain high critical and editorial standards. This was where David Laing was to play a crucial part in the club's success. Scott had chosen his man well. In early July 1824 he wrote to Laing of his hopes for the Bannatyne:

> I am . . . of decided opinion that to do the club credit and be useful to History the works undertaken by the association should be of a substantial and useful kind . . . In a word let us have the most curious of Scottish authors illustrated by the most curious of Scottish Antiquaries.[10]

Laing's attitude towards the literary and written historical records of his country *was* essentially antiquarian: he valued such survivals for their age and uniqueness as well as their intrinsic qualities. But these feelings were overlaid and disciplined by a more systematic attitude towards the texts than had characterised many literary antiquaries of the previous centuries. In order to make texts accessible to the modern reader it was necessary that they be edited with a full scholarly apparatus. This was manifest in the first volume published by the Bannatyne Club, *The buke of the howlat* (1823). Laing had been working on the text as early as 1821.[11] In the Bannatyne Club edition the text of the fifteenth-century poem was printed in full (in type beautiful enough to delight the bibliomaniacal membership) and was accompanied by full notes, an introduction (including a note by Scott), a discussion by Laing of the poem's origins and probable authorship, along with an appendix giving variant readings of the text and notes on the poem's relationship to contemporary events.

Laing's editorial and administrative abilities set the seal on the Bannatyne Club's success and made his rejection by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland something of a scandal. He was again proposed for membership (without his knowledge) and was elected on 9 February 1824 (MB 3, 287). An anonymous letter (perhaps sent to Laing in London by his father) indicates that there had been a good deal of feeling over his election:

> I do not know whether you were officially informed of your being unanimously elected a member of the Antiquarian Society — but such was the case a few days after your departure. Dr Hibbert [the secretary] is very proud of it and says that if it had been opposed he and Mr Kinnear were to have left them.[12]

By this election Laing's gifts as a scholar — and perhaps even more important, as an administrator — were brought to the service of the

Society and were to be fully employed during one of the most crucial periods in the history of the Scottish Antiquaries.

Within six weeks of his election Laing had made the first of over one hundred communications to the Society: a letter to Dr Hibbert recommending the publication by the Society of a *Numismata Scotiae* (MB 3, 290). By 1825 Laing was active in Society business, especially in the proposed recommencement of publication of the Society's *Transactions*. He was appointed a member of the publications subcommittee in November 1825 (MB 3, 315).

In the 1820s and early 1830s the Society was passing through a period of relative prosperity under a succession of energetic and able secretaries: Dr Hibbert (later Hibbert-Ware), E. W. A. Drummond Hay and Donald Gregory. Moreover in 1819 a regular curator of the Society's collections had been appointed: James Skene of Rubislaw. He spent six months arranging the Society's collection of artefacts, coins and books (*Arch Scot* 3, xvii). In 1822 a subcommittee was appointed to consider how to revive the Society's 'usefulness and efficiency' (*Arch Scot* 3, xix-xxiii). The Society was already concerned that its collections, of interest to a growing number of their fellow-countrymen, should be displayed in a more fitting manner. It was necessary, therefore, to find a suitable house for the collection, which could not be fully displayed in their current accommodation at 42 George Street.

The apartments in George Street were shared with the Royal Society of Edinburgh. During this period the Antiquaries functioned very much as the literary and historical wing of the Royal Society: a relationship reinforced by a large shared membership and a common curator for their respective collections. Both societies were anxious to enlarge their public roles. The means to this end was better accommodation than they presently occupied in flats over a perfumer's shop. Consequently both societies entered into an agreement with the Board of Trustees for Manufactures to take apartments in the new 'Building for the Societies' being constructed at the foot of The Mound (now the Royal Scottish Academy). The Royal Society took out a twenty-five year lease. The Antiquaries rented their apartments: a distinction which was to have consequences in the future.[13]

The two societies removed to their new contiguous apartments in 1826. It might have seemed that such a change would reinforce the common interests and identity of the two associations, but it appears to have had the opposite effect. A symptom of this growing divorce of interest can be seen in the story of David Laing's blackballing by the

Royal Society in 1827. His friend, fellow antiquary, and member of the
Royal Society, Sir David Brewster, wrote to him on 26 March 1827
about his failure to be elected:

> I think you have just reason to take offence on this occasion — not that five black
> balls were put in against you, for nothing is more common than to see many black
> balls at our elections, and every person is entitled to exercise his privilege — but at
> the absence of so many of your friends on that occasion, as the presence of even
> one more would have carried your election.[14]

Laing later refused election to the Royal Society when it was offered to
him, not so much due to pique at his initial rejection as because of his
recognition of the changing nature of the two societies. Years later he
said of his refusal to stand again: 'At the time there was a general
feeling for reviving its Literary Department — and I was desirous of
some stimulus to make me exert myself'.[15] If the Royal Society was
attempting to create its own 'domestic' literary wing, then the function
of the Antiquaries as its *de facto* literary adjunct was bound to decline.
The failure to elect Laing a member of the Royal Society at this juncture
meant that Laing would continue 'to exert' himself in the literary
societies to which he already belonged: the Bannatyne Club and the
Antiquaries. Laing's literary efforts in the Antiquaries led in 1831 to the
appearance of another volume of the Society's transactions,
Archaeologia Scotica, which he edited as a second to Dr Hibbert.
Laing's role was central in the revived programme of publications
undertaken by the Antiquaries in the early 1830s: a prelude to nearly
forty years' involvement in Society publications.

Another way in which the Antiquaries hoped to reinforce their
identity as an archaeological and historical body was by expanding
their museum. It was hoped that the new rooms for the museum would
encourage further bequests and make the collection more accessible to
the public. At a Council meeting of 27 November 1827 the acting
secretary, Mr Drummond Hay, 'reported on the great advantages that
had resulted to the Society's collections, from the liberal measure of
admitting the public to the museum' (MB 3, 371). In this aim of making
the museum a more public institution the Society was clearly
influenced by the work going on in Scandinavia, particularly Denmark
where, beginning in 1816, the national collections had been re-
organised, catalogued and rehoused under the direction of C. J.
Thomsen.[16] In April 1829 the Society heard a paper by Robert Bald on
the collections in the Copenhagen museum (MB 4, 32).

Connections between Scottish antiquaries and their Scandinavian

brethren had long been close, allowing for the disruption of war. In 1783 Grímur Thorkelin became the first Scandinavian to be elected to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Since then there had been a growing number of Scandinavian corresponding and honorary members of the Society. The revival of historical and archaeological studies in early nineteenth-century Scandinavia meant that a growing number of scholars came to Scotland in search of historical manuscripts or the visible remains of Viking settlement. There were similar — if less official — visits by Scots to Scandinavia. In 1819 David Laing had followed in his father's footsteps to Copenhagen to buy the library of Thorkelin. In the course of his visit he made the acquaintance, through the agency of his Danish friend Andreas Andersen Feldborg, of a number of scholars, including Finn Magnussen.[17] From this time onwards Laing remained in close touch with a number of Scandinavian scholars and was a regular point of contact in Scotland for such visitors as Sven Grundtvig, J. J. A. Worsaae and P. A. Munch. The growth of these personal contacts was complemented by the opening of formal relations between the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries in 1829 (Corr 5, 15 June 1829). Although the Danish body had been founded only four years previously, the Scottish Antiquaries were aware even before then that they had much to learn from Denmark. Especially important was the way the collection and preservation of antiquities was the concern of the state and not left to private bodies. The Scots were particularly struck by the enlightened laws governing compensation paid to those finding valuable archaeological material. In Scotland by contrast, the law of treasure trove was ill defined. When objects did fall to the crown there was no legal requirement to give compensation to the original finder. This meant that finders either attempted to hide their discoveries, sold them quickly for ready cash or even allowed them to be melted down for their metal value. By contrast Denmark had since 1752 had a law which promised 'full reimbursement' for the value of any coins or valuables of antiquarian interest.[18] From the 1820s onwards some objects which fell to the crown were handed over to the Antiquaries' Museum by sympathetic Kings' and Lord Treasurers' Remembrancers — but the basic problem of a lack of defined treasure trove law remained.[19]

Even before the move to their new apartments on The Mound there were signs of financial strain in the Society. The original rent of £75 per annum had been raised to £100. Attempts were made to collect the

large amount of arrears and, after the move, further money was made
by subletting the Antiquaries' apartments to such bodies as the Banna-
tyne Club and the Society of Arts (Corr 4, letters dated 17 November
1826, 25 January 1827). Despite these problems, however, the move to
The Mound was a justified success. The Society's collection was
growing and being seen by an increasing number of people. Tickets
allowing access (which had to be signed by members) were printed and
arrangements made for members to be in attendance on public days
'for the better security of the Museum and for the convenient oppor-
tunity of shewing attention to strangers' (MB 3, 371). In 1828 the
Society entered into a arrangement with the Royal Society for
exchanges between their respective museums (MB 4, 31). This meant
the Society of Antiquaries could turn over its natural history exhibits
to the Royal Society and confine its collection to purely historical
material.

With its elegant new home the Society ventured to assume a more
public role in the study, collection and discovery of historical material.
On a number of occasions members were asked to contribute to special
appeals for funds to buy important pieces for the Museum, an example
being the two gold bracelets found in a burial site at Alloa in 1828 (MB
4, 34). In 1829 members were invited to contribute to proposed excava-
tions at Absembal [sic] by Robert Hay of Linplum (MB 4, 103-5).
Circulars were sent by the Antiquaries to local authorities asking that
archaeological finds made in their areas be reported to the Society. In
1828 the Society played a leading role in the campaign to have Mons
Meg returned from London to Edinburgh (MB 4, 33 and 58-9).

The Mons Meg campaign was an early example of the Antiquaries
engaging in a project which had a wider application than merely to add
to the Society's collections. It was becoming clear, even in the 1820s,
that the accelerating changes taking place in Scotland would have a
profound effect on Scottish antiquities. The opening chapters of Daniel
Wilson's *The archaeology and prehistoric annals of Scotland* (1851) are
full of prehistoric finds turned up in the course of field drainage works,
and the excavation of canal and railway cuttings. With the growth of
railways, especially during the period of 'railway mania' in the 1840s,
these problems would reach something like crisis proportions, forcing
the Society to continue its role as a public spokesman for the preserva-
tion of antiquities. At the annual general meeting of 1845, for example,
the Society addressed itself to the problems posed by railway develop-
ment:

> The society expressed a hope that the Directors of the several Railways now in progress would give orders for the transmission to the Society of any Antiquities discovered in the course of excavation (MB 5, 127).

In some cases the railway companies did co-operate, but in others they did not. A major archaeological disaster struck when the Trinity College Chapel in Edinburgh was demolished (despite petitions and protests by the Society and others) to make way for the Waverley Station shunting yard. The Antiquaries were successful in organising the reinterment of the supposed bones of Mary of Gueldres at Holyrood. Having obtained their shunting yard, the North British Railway Company could afford to be magnanimous: the Society were allowed to take casts of a number of important stone carvings from the Chapel into their collection and they also purchased two gargoyles (MB 5, 224, dated 5 May 1848).

Other campaigns of the Society included one for the return of the Trinity College altarpiece to Edinburgh and the restoration of Queen Margaret's Chapel (rediscovered by Daniel Wilson who recognised it in the guise of a powder magazine in the mid-1840s). But this growing public role for the Antiquaries was played out in the 1830s and 40s against a background of crisis in the affairs of the Society: a crisis which David Laing was later to claim brought the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to the verge of extinction in the early 1840s.

Financial weakness was a recurring problem. As early as October 1828 a permanent committee of three members was appointed to audit the Society's accounts and recover arrears. One of the three members was David Laing (MB 4, 59 *passim*). The committee found that after all the expenses of the Society had been met, including the printing of the third volume of transactions, there remained a balance of £7 6s 3d. They began to try to collect arrears and to send regular notices to defaulters (MB 4, 72-4). Despite these attempts, however, the financial state of the Society became even more precarious. The situation was exacerbated by the withdrawal of many of the more scientifically orientated members, due to the growing split of interests between the Royal Society and the Antiquaries. A further problem was the death, in 1833, of the Antiquaries' treasurer, the banker-mineralogist, Thomas Allan. The decline of his business affairs (which led to the failure of the family bank within a few years of his death) may have been paralleled in his work as the Society's treasurer. What was more important, however, was the fact that he had no successor for over a year until, in what he called 'an evil hour for myself', Laing was appointed treasurer

in the winter of 1836 (*Arch Scot* 5, 20). By the following year he was receiving threatening letters from the Board of Manufactures about delays in paying the Society's rent. Laing himself was to spend the decade following his appointment as treasurer trying first to avert the threatened termination of the Society of Antiquaries and then to re-organise the Society so that it could become the useful national body he felt it should be.

Laing's first action as treasurer was to print a circular asking all members to pay any arrears owing to the Society. Because of dis-organisation in the Society's records his circulars offended many fully paid-up members, and Laing was inundated with a number of irate letters and resignations. The financial records of the Society were of little help in bringing the membership records up to date. Furthermore the secretary's minutes were incomplete due to the death of Donald Gregory in 1835 and the resignation of his successor as secretary, William Forbes Skene, in 1837. Skene was replaced in the following year by the aged Alexander Smellie, who had first acted as secretary to the Society in 1795. From 1839 to 1841, therefore, in addition to his other duties Laing also acted as assistant secretary until a replacement could be found.

By 1840 the Society's debts amounted to £400. These consisted mainly of £150 rent due for their apartments, £200 outstanding on a bond entered into by various members of the Society in 1794 for the purchase of the Castle Hill house, and a loss of revenue due to the failure of the Society's claim for exemption as a learned body from assessment for the newly created Edinburgh police burgh. A further blow fell in 1840 when the Board of Manufactures refused to allow the Society to continue to sublet its rooms (*Corr* 7, dated 3 December 1840; *Arch Scot* 5, 27). In order to meet immediate expenses Laing and Alexander Smellie opened up a cash credit account for £100 on their personal security.

Laing's circular letter of 1837 had brought in some much needed funds and allowed the membership lists to be brought up to date. Out of this crisis a new Society was emerging.

Whatever its financial fortunes, the Society's Museum was becoming increasingly popular with the general public. The Museum had been seen by 4,000 people in 1841, and by even more in the following year, especially in the week Prince Albert visited the collection (MB 5, 50). In this the collection complemented the archaeological popularisation being done by such new middle-class journals as that edited by Robert

Chambers, who became a Fellow of the Society in 1844. Besides Robert Chambers, other new members included the pioneer anaesthetist J. Y. Simpson (who was also a gifted archaeologist), the photographer D. O. Hill, and the Leith merchant John Mitchell. In addition to his commercial activities, Mitchell acted as Belgian consul and had a wide range of scholarly interests including archaeology, natural history, mineralogy and Scandinavian languages. These men were bound together by their common devotion to Scottish antiquities, but they also brought new attitudes to the Society, not least of which was a strong desire that the Society should be useful to society at large. They were men of experience in many walks of life, endowed with ability and common sense, and it seemed to them that the Society was in an anomalous position; a private association engaged on what should be public business. Such a role might have been acceptable for the Bannatyne Club in its heyday under Sir Walter Scott, but it would not do for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century.

The problem was to convince the government of this truth. By the early 1840s the Society had decided to appeal to the government for a grant to pay for the running of their Museum. Their case seemed a strong one, for in addition to the Scandinavian examples many of the members had seen for themselves, grants were made by the British government to historical collections in London and Dublin. Nevertheless the Society's petition for a grant to cover their arrears of rent was refused. It seems that the Antiquaries had much to learn about the proper way to ask for government money, and not least how to phrase their requests: a petition for a remission of rent might have stood a better chance of success than a request for an outright grant. It is clear from the terms of the Society's reply to the government's initial refusal that Scottish antiquarian tempers were running very high; a further indication perhaps that the Society had yet to acquire the tact and diplomacy necessary to see such a campaign through to a successful conclusion. The Antiquaries claimed to be acting on behalf of their fellow-countrymen:

> . . . to whom they wish to preserve a museum so closely connected with their past history and most patriotic feelings. In this view of the case, the Council and Fellows of the Society consider the refusal of their application . . . as a slight offered to Scotland; and they cannot help comparing . . . the very stinted measure of support which Scientific Institutions in Scotland receive from the government, with the munificent grants of public money annually made to those in England, and still more so, to those in Ireland, a country which, while it contributes much

less than its due proportion to the public revenue, receives incontestably more
than its due proportion of the public money (MB 5, 91-2).

The Society continued to ask for support from the early 1840s, but it
became clear that if their attempts were to be met with success they
must be more tactfully presented and that the Society must give an
indication that they were indeed the national and responsible body
they claimed to be. In order to put their house in order the Antiquaries
turned increasingly to the model of Scandinavia, and in this the visit of
the Danish archaeologist J. J. A. Worsaae in 1846 was of crucial
importance. In his letter to the Society's secretary after his arrival in
Edinburgh Worsaae announced that '. . . part of my mission is to unite
the efforts of the British and Scandinavian antiquaries more than
hitherto has been the case' (Comm 8, 3 November 1846). Following his
visit, the Dane was elected a corresponding fellow of the Society, and
an exchange of objects between the Copenhagen Museum and the
Society's collection was arranged (MB 5, 156-7). It seems significant
that shortly after Worsaae's visit the Society became very much
concerned with the reform of treasure trove laws along Danish lines.
Worsaae is directly quoted to this effect in the foreword of Daniel
Wilson's *Prehistoric annals.*[20]
    In 1846 John Mitchell had journeyed to Scandinavia and upon his
return had presented two papers to the Society on the state of
archaeology in Copenhagen and Uppsala (MB 5, 131 and 134). A few
years later Robert Chambers made a similar journey and returned with
a collection of Swedish stone-age artefacts for the Antiquaries'
Museum (MB 5, 298). In 1850 he read a two-part paper to the Society,
'On the collection of objects for antiquarian museums, with special
reference to the practice in Denmark by a Gentleman connected with
the Museum of Northern Antiquities' (MB 5, 330).
    Another major Scandinavian influence on the Scottish antiquaries of
this period was the Norwegian historian P. A. Munch who arrived in
Scotland late in 1849. Munch was introduced to David Laing by John
Mitchell, and it was in the Signet Library (where Laing had been
librarian since 1837) that Munch saw the Panmure manuscript, con-
taining the earliest history of Norway. Munch formed a number of
lasting friendships amongst the Society's members, including Mitchell,
Laing and Daniel Wilson, and was elected a corresponding member
(along with three other Norwegian historians) in 1850. He contributed
a number of papers to the Society after his Scottish visit.

By the time of Munch's visit the Antiquaries were well on their way to proving their claim to be a national body, worthy of government support. The first priority was housing. In 1840 George Meikle Kemp, the architect of the Scott monument, had proposed the construction of a 'Norman Hall' beside his monument to house the Society's collection. Nothing came of this intriguing but expensive suggestion (MB 5, 11). Instead the affairs of the Society became increasingly precarious, so that in 1843 Laing was constrained to write to the Board of Manufactures:

> The Society of Antiquaries having recently made an unsuccessful attempt to obtain from the Lords of the Treasury some aid to enable them to pay the rent of their apartments . . . a proposal is about to be made as to the propriety of removing to less expensive premises (Corr 7, 21 February 1843).

Laing ended his letter with a request that the Society's lease be terminated at Whitsuntide the following year. The Board replied that they were agreeable to this, provided arrears were first paid. In fact the Board were most anxious for the Antiquaries to move, since they wished to expand the accommodation for their School of Design. In July 1843 the second appeal for government aid was turned down and Laing informed the Board that the Society were unable to pay the £150 rent still outstanding, but that the Antiquaries still wished to remove in the following year. In the meantime the Council of the Society decided to launch another appeal to the government. In fact, the genesis of the Society's salvation came from a closer and less elevated quarter, the Antiquaries' energetic new assistant secretary, W. B. D. D. Turnbull. Turnbull was an advocate who had had a somewhat erratic career as founder and secretary of the Abbotsford Club, a publishing club founded in 1833. This was due to the enthusiasms and instabilities of Turnbull himself who in the 1830s and 40s was passing through a series of religious conversions, punctuated by printed outbursts, which alienated many people in the highly charged atmosphere preceding the Disruption of 1843. Nevertheless, unlike some other projects in which he concerned himself, Turnbull's work for the Society was to bring lasting benefit.

Early in 1843 he had opened negotiations with the Edinburgh Life Association, suggesting that the Society might take up rooms in their proposed new building at 24 George Street. The rent was to be £65 per annum for three rooms: a large hall for the Museum, a library and a committee room (Corr 7, 15 February 1843). There the matter rested until the government once again refused the Society's petition for aid.

In March 1844 a special Council meeting was convened following this refusal, and the notification by the Board of Manufactures that unless outstanding rent was paid 'the Library, Museum, and other chattels pertaining to the Society would inevitably be distrained for payment' (MB 5, 74). Years later Laing claimed that the Society had been 'told, most distinctly, if not in such precise words, that the property of the Society would be arrested and sold off, if necessary, in order to pay the accumulating arrears' (*Arch Scot* 5, 28). That the Board was within its rights to threaten this is borne out in the clause in the original lease that the Society was to 'grant an assignation to the Board's cashier of their whole effects and Museum . . .' (MB 3, 333).

The Society and its collection were rescued from this threatened impasse by Turnbull's agreement with the Edinburgh Life Association, which made a loan for the amount owing to the Board and other outstanding debts, using the Society's apartments in their building as security. All the Society's financial liabilities were thus put into one basket, where they could be settled in a more regular manner.

Just as the affairs of the Society had to be put on a sound and regular footing, so had the basis of Scottish archaeology. The man who was to make the first attempt to do this was Daniel Wilson, elected to the Society in 1846, and elected secretary in 1847 when the aged Alexander Smellie was finally persuaded to retire.

Wilson had been born in Edinburgh in 1816, the son of a wine merchant. He had six brothers and sisters, one of whom was the chemist, George Wilson, later professor of technology at Edinburgh University and first curator of the Royal Scottish Museum. Wilson's childhood homes on the Calton Hill and later in James Square were bases for exploring and sketching trips in the Old Town of Edinburgh. The drawings done on these excursions were the sketches for the engravings in Wilson's first published work, *Memorials of Edinburgh in the olden time* (1847). In the course of his sketching trips Wilson discovered the remains of many early buildings, one of which was later the subject of his first paper to the Society of Antiquaries: St Margaret's Chapel in Edinburgh Castle (MB 5, 152). Wilson attended classes at Edinburgh University but left without taking a degree to go to London to train as an engraver. There he met the artist J. M. W. Turner and in 1837 was given permission to engrave one of his paintings. Half a century later Wilson still recalled the experience of translating the light and colour of a Turner painting into the hard steel lines of an engraver's plate as 'a lesson to me for life'.[21] The problems he faced as

an engraver were to reconcile the detail necessary for cutting the plate with the 'atmospheric effect' of a Turner painting. This necessary attention to minute detail in order to understand and render an overall effect was to spill over into his work as an archaeologist and ethnologist. His artist's eye provided a useful tool for his archaeological studies, particularly his concern for the human and social context of artefacts which is central to Wilson's importance as an archaeological pioneer and thinker.

When he had gone to London, Wilson had thought that art was 'to be in some form, my life pursuit',[22] but by the early 1840s his attention was turning towards literature. In addition to writing several books, he undertook reviewing work for such journals as *Chambers.* By the time he returned to Scotland in 1842 he was becoming increasingly interested in Scottish history and antiquities. When he was elected to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland he had already begun to contemplate the writing of his great work, *The archaeology and prehistric annals of Scotland* (1851). His work for the Society during a testing time had a direct bearing on the book.

With Daniel Wilson's election to office a new and more purposeful spirit enters the affairs of the Society. If David Laing was the last of the great traditional antiquaries, then Daniel Wilson was the first of a new archaeological breed, determined to put the Society and its collections on a more public and scientific footing. To do this he had not only to help save the Society financially, but to reorganise the study of Scottish archaeology in a systematic way. To Wilson, archaeological studies had hitherto been 'laborious trifling' but now they were to be organised so that they could take their rightful place as 'an indispensable link in the circle of the sciences'.[23] An important part of the reformation Wilson wished to bring about was to create a wider popular interest in archaeology and to generate patriotism: the social context in which the revived study of the past was to take place was of crucial importance to Wilson.

The example Wilson had before his eye was not just the popularising work of C. J. Thomsen in Copenhagen, but even more his work as a systematiser of prehistory, which was completed and popularised by Worsaae. In his *Primeval antiquities of Denmark* (1843) Worsaae had established Thomsen's tripartite division of prehistory on the basis of the materials used for artefacts: stone, bronze and iron. Wilson was certainly familiar with the work before it appeared in English translation in 1849, for on his journey to Scotland in 1846 Worsaae had left a

copy of the work (inscribed in his own hand) in the Society's Library.

The vast difference between the treatment of archaeological and historical studies in Scandinavia and their own country was a constant preoccupation of the leaders of the Scottish Antiquaries in the later 1840s. Further petitions for state aid were contemplated but no government aid was likely to be forthcoming at a time when the Irish potato famine (and the famine closer to home in the Scottish Highlands) was taking up so much government time and resources. Gradually a feeling grew up within the Society that the answer was not government help, but rather a transfer of their collection to the care of the state. It was recognised, however, that if this end was to be achieved the Society must (literally) put their house in order. By early 1848 the Society had begun to campaign for a return to The Mound, where a new building was being planned for the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Scottish Academy (MB 5, 190, 214-16). As part of this campaign Daniel Wilson undertook the 'pure labour of Love'[24] of compiling a synopsis of the Museum's collection along the lines of the tripartite division (MB 5, 290). Wilson was not, however, a slave to this system any more than Worsaae had been. The tripartite division of prehistory had to be modified to fit local conditions. After his visit to Scotland Worsaae had gone to Ireland, where he addressed the Royal Irish Academy on the subject of his system and its local application. Shortly after it was delivered, a copy of his paper arrived in the Library of the Scottish antiquaries, where Wilson must have seen it.

Worsaae saw Ireland as the closest non-Scandinavian parallel to the archaeological history of Denmark. Ireland had not been conquered by the Romans and its prehistoric development before the iron period was largely indigenous. This meant that there were striking parallels — but not exact identities — between the artefacts and structures produced in the stone (and even more in the bronze) period in Ireland and Denmark. Like the best Enlightenment social philosophers, Worsaae argued that cultural development was conditioned by the state of Society: roughly similar societies produced roughly similar artefacts and structures.[25] Wilson took this concept and gave it practical expression in his *Synopsis.* The tripartite system was used, therefore, in its 'freest signification'. The stone and bronze periods, for example, were 'classed under the general head Celtic'.[26] Already Daniel Wilson was concerned with what might be called the 'atmospheric effect' of archaeological periodisation: the cultural, social and linguistic context of artefacts. The key to understanding context was Man himself.

Wilson recognised the social basis of his thought in his claim that Sir Walter Scott was the source of the 'zeal for Archaeological investigation which has recently manifested itself' because the past he created in his novels was peopled by real men and women.[27] The budding ethnologist in Wilson was also apparent in the *Synopsis*, for in the foreword he makes comparison between Scotland and the stone and bronze age periods in Assyria, Egypt and Mexico. These were some of the earliest steps Wilson took towards the study of comparative ethnology which was to occupy so much of his time in his later years in Canada.

The idea that societies at similar stages of development display similar characteristics was a legacy from the Enlightenment social thinkers of Scotland. This belief, transferred to archaeological theory, meant that societies at similar stages of development produce similar artefacts. The new arrangement of the Antiquaries' Museum reinforced this general theme of similarities (but not total identity) between different peoples in roughly similar stages of development. For example, the first case in the Museum contained British and Irish stone arrowheads and axes, labelled with their provenance (where known), donor and date. The next case contained Danish stone age artefacts, part of a gift from the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries and the Danish Crown Prince who had visited the Society's Museum in 1844. The comparisons afforded in the Museum did not end with Europe, however, for the same case also contained American Indian and South Seas exhibits. Cases three and four contained stone vessels, earthenware and personal ornaments from Britain, along with bone and ivory amulets from Africa 'for the purposes of comparison'. The concern with comparative exhibits is stressed by a letter to Wilson (probably from Robert Chambers) in which the writer tells him to locate Scandinavian objects in the Museum 'so that they may be contrasted as well as compared with the analogous or rather similar objects drawn from Scotland' (Corr 8, 21 October 1849).

The *Synopsis* of the Society's Museum appeared in 1849 and was a sketch for Wilson's great work of systematisation of Scottish prehistory which would appear two years later. In both the *Synopsis* and *Prehistoric annals*, Wilson went beyond the strictly prehistoric (or preliterate) periods to deal with the relics of medieval and more modern times. Aside from the 'Celtic' and iron age exhibits, the Museum contained Egyptian, Roman and Greek material, medieval items, Jacobite relics, mementoes of Sir Walter Scott, 'Jenny Geddes' stool', and the Edinburgh guillotine, 'The Maiden'.

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The range of the Society's collection revealed in the *Synopsis* strengthened the Antiquaries' claims for the national character of the Museum. As soon as the possibility of being again housed on The Mound had arisen, Daniel Wilson had gone to London to pursue the matter. There his main contact was William Gibson Craig, the politician brother of a leading Scottish antiquary, James Gibson Craig. At the time Gibson Craig (a Lord of the Treasury) was involved in the enquiry into the state of the arts in Scotland that led to the proposal to build a National Gallery on The Mound. In a letter of 23 June 1848 Wilson made a progress report to David Laing:

> I have been very courteously and kindly received. Government officials say, what was to be expected — that there is no money at present to spare. But Mr Gibson Craig heartily acknowledges the reasonableness of our claims and holds out fair though indefinite promises for the future.[28]

By the following year the Society had gained some more allies. Early in 1848 Charles Cowan MP promised help in presenting the Society's claims for accommodation in the new building on The Mound. Another Parliamentary ally was the radical MP Joseph Hume. For him the campaign for the Society to be given government support had an added ideological significance: the Museum was to be 'considered as a training school for the mass of the working population' (Comm 8, memorial to Lord John Russell, 28 March 1850). It was at Hume's suggestion that Wilson drew up a memorial, which the MP undertook to present to Lord John Russell. After explaining that a large proportion of their funds had always been devoted to the exhibition of a National Museum of Archaeology in the Scottish capital, and that the extent of their success rendered their private income insufficient, the memorial concluded:

> Should her Majesty's Government be pleased to provide them with suitable accommodation such as has long been enjoyed by the Society of Antiquaries of London in Somerset House, they will be pleased to place their valuable Archaeological Museum on the same liberal footing for the gratification and instruction of the People as other National Collections (Comm 7, 6 December 1849).

Hume delayed presentation of this memorial until he could discuss the matter with the Prime Minister, and accompanied it with a letter of his own, making additional points informally:

> If your Lordship . . . therefore will enable the Society to get suitable rooms, they intend to *present the Collection of 70 years formation* to the government for the use of the public forever . . . (Comm 8, 28 March 1850).

Hume went on to suggest that the collection should again be housed on The Mound and enclosed a copy of the Society's rules and accounts, now happily on a sound footing. In April 1851 B. F. Primrose, secretary of the Board of Manufactures, wrote to David Laing:

> . . . by certain mutual arrangements and exchange of apartments, accommodation in the Royal Institution Building could be provided for the Society after the completion and opening of the new National Gallery [EUL MS.]

Laing met with the Board on the following day and final arrangements were made. At a meeting of the Antiquaries' Council on 5 May these arrangements were agreed. In return for accommodation in the Royal Institution Building for their Museum and meeting hall, the Society made over their collection and all subsequent additions to form the basis of a national archaeological museum, reserving the 'charge and management' of the collection to the Society, subject to the Board regulations and directions, as approved by the Treasury. There was a last-minute hitch when the Treasury attempted to demur at the Society's request for free accommodation and free access for all Fellows to the Library and collections (MB 5, 407). An agreement with Gibson Craig was finally reached, leaving the question of access unspecified. At an extraordinary general meeting (with Robert Chambers in the chair) held on 5 May 1851 the Society agreed to these terms (MB 5, 382-3). A copy of the deed of conveyance was laid on the table at the annual general meeting in November and agreed to (MB 5, 420). The Board was to be responsible for all new display cabinets and the employment of staff. The Society was to look after arranging the collection and appointing the curator, and it also retained the power to exchange duplicates for new materials. (MB 5, 277 *passim*). The transfer was finally effected in 1858.

The campaign to transfer the Society's collection to government control had brought other changes in its wake. Once again Daniel Wilson was the main innovator. He began a series of popular evening conversaziones during which Fellows and their guests heard short talks or had the chance to view interesting finds and exhibits. At the first conversazione held under Wilson's direction in 1848 D. O. Hill exhibited calotypes of 'Scottish topographical antiquities and portraits', perhaps the earliest instance of the use of photography in archaeological studies (MB 5, 205).

The growth of railways in the 1840s meant that the Society for the first time was able to hold meetings and undertake archaeological

excursions outside Edinburgh, thus increasing the 'national' scope of its activities. Amongst the earliest such excursions was one to Inchcolm in 1848 (MB 5, 182, 239 and 248). A less admirable railway excursion was a day trip to excavate a tumulus at Duntocher in the same year. (MB 5, 183, 285; Corr 8, 18 January 1848). In June 1849 an excursions committee was appointed, consisting of Robert Chambers, David Laing and Daniel Wilson, charged with arranging summer trips for the Fellows (MB 5, 290).

There was also a new scientific spirit abroad amongst the Society's membership, reflecting the interests of many of the new members. In 1850, for example, David Laing requested that several bronze objects found at Duddingston and presented to the Society in the year following its foundation should be subject to chemical analysis (MB 5, 331).

Meanwhile the Society's Museum continued to attract a growing number of visitors. On New Year's Day 1851 the Museum (still in its inconvenient upstairs premises in George Street) was opened to the public and was '. . . inspected by 1330 visitors, almost entirely of the working classes without the slightest injury to the Collections' (MB 5, 360). In the previous year over nine thousand people had visited the Museum.

All these changes were pointers towards the future role of the Society and its Museum, once it had been taken into state ownership. At the anniversary meeting in the November following the agreement to transfer the Museum, Daniel Wilson took the opportunity not only to look at the changes that had already come about but also to consider the changes necessary for the future. Although he was clearly pleased and relieved by the transfer, he recognised that there was still a long way to go before the Museum could be full and comprehensive enough to bear comparison with the great continental collections. The creation of the National Museum was 'only the first instalment of an act of tardy justice'.[29] Amongst the problems which would have to be dealt with urgently was the reform of the treasure trove law. The question of treasure trove had been an intermittent or implicit concern of the Society since the reorganisation of its Museum in the 1820s. Not only did the Society's leaders wish to have the law clarified and strengthened as part of the transfer of their Museum to the state, they were also concerned by the destruction of archaeological material in the wake of such changes as railway development. Daniel Wilson deplored the practical effects of the ill-defined legal situation which, as he said, '. . .

frequently compels the students of a liberal science to pursue their re-
searches with the stealth and secrecy of the lawless spoiler or resetter
. . .'[30] A major reason for the transfer of the Museum to state control
was the hope that the collection would thereafter be endowed with
objects falling to the Crown, but given the ill-defined nature of the law
of treasure trove there was no guarantee that this would happen. Until
finders of valuable historical material were given compensation for
their finds, as was done in Scandinavia, many chance discoveries
would not be reported or would be lost or destroyed. In the wake of
Worsaae's visit Wilson had raised the matter at a meeting of the Society
on 8 February 1847 and was delegated to raise the question with
the Lord Advocate (*Arch. Scot.* 4, App. 38). Following the reading
of a paper on the archaeological Museum in Copenhagen on 11
March 1850, Wilson read a paper on treasure trove to the Society
(*Arch. Scot.* 4, App. 45). Eventually, besides writing to the railway
companies asking them to report any chance finds, the Society asked
the Queen's Remembrancer to write to Procurators Fiscal asking them
to claim finds so that they could be deposited in the Museum. The
Society also planned to place advertisements in Scottish newspapers.
The success of all these plans is somewhat doubtful: certainly there are
no railway finds listed amongst the Society's accessions in this period.
The reform of the treasure trove law was never fully carried out as
Daniel Wilson would have wished it to be, although the national status
of the Museum after 1851 did ensure that more material was deposited
there both by private donors and the government.

In his 1851 talk Daniel Wilson proposed another innovation which
was more successful: the commencement of a regular series of printed
proceedings of the Society dealing not only with the activities of the
Antiquaries but with Scottish archaeological matters in general. This
series, to be called *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of
Scotland*, would appear regularly (unlike the irregular transactions,
Archaeologia Scotica) and would be funded by the money which had
hitherto been taken up with running the Museum (MB 5, 366). The
editors of the *Proceedings* were to be Wilson and David Laing (MB 5,
453). According to a plan laid down by Wilson, the new journal was to
include an abstract of the year's proceedings, along with illustra-
tions of objects of particular interest. Papers of a general interest were
to be printed from time to time (at the behest of the Council) in
Archaeologia Scotica (MB 5, 425).

All of these innovations were part of the process of transferring the

Society's collections to government care and were intended to con-
solidate the Society's position as the national archaeological body. But
Daniel Wilson had one further service to render to Scottish
archaeology. He recognised that the study of Scottish archaeology
could not proceed further until it was given some sort of order. It is no
coincidence that Daniel Wilson's *The archaeology and prehistoric
annals of Scotland* appeared in the same year as the future of the
Society's Museum was assured. The work was revolutionary in many
respects, not least for its introduction of the word 'prehistoric' into the
English language.[31]

A major influence on Wilson while writing the *Prehistoric annals*
had been the visit of P. A. Munch to Scotland. The Norwegian quickly
joined in the convivial antiquarian circle of Edinburgh. He seems to
have been an especially welcome visitor in the Wilson household. A
good deal of the discussion between Munch and Wilson concerned the
projected book on Scottish archaeology.[32] The text and notes of
Wilson's book make it clear that Munch was consulted by letter on a
number of points in the course of the writing of *Prehistoric annals.*
Later Wilson confessed in a letter to Munch that he had thought of
dedicating the work to him:

> . . . but I have made so many attacks in it, not only on our own native theories of
> Danish origin for our Antiquities, but also some directly traceable to Copenhagen
> that I thought it would be a questionable compliment.[33]

Munch's sceptical and rather distrustful attitude towards his Danish
colleagues is not the least of his legacies to Wilson. On the whole,
however, his influence in *Prehistoric annals* is much more positive and
beneficial. His hand can be detected in the wide-ranging evidence
Wilson brought to bear in his survey of early Scotland. For Munch the
past could only be reconstructed by a thorough knowledge not only of
the literary sources, but also of other evidence such as place-names,
inscriptions and field monuments. An example of this technique occurs
in his notes in *Prehistoric annals* on the standing stones at Stennis in
Orkney (after leaving Edinburgh Munch had gone to Orkney where he
was shown local sites by the antiquary George Petrie). It was a
commonplace to attribute these standing stones to a Viking origin.
Wilson dismissed this claim and as part of his evidence used place-
name and literary evidence produced by Munch during his visit to
Orkney: the name *Steinsnes* (promontory of the stones) was given to
the place by the Viking settlers, for it occurred in the account of the
death of Earl Havard in 970 according to the saga of Olaf Trygvesson:

. . . in other words . . . the standing stones belonged to the population previous to the Scandinavian settlement'.[34]

Munch was also decisive in shaping Wilson's concern for exact terminology. Like modern Scots who resent being called English, Munch abhorred the general use of the term 'Danish' to describe any field monument of the Viking period. The term might be exact in an English context, but it was misleading in Scotland. As a patriotic Norwegian Munch deprecated its general use by his Copenhagen colleagues and others, but even more he disliked it because it was inaccurate. Wilson followed his Norwegian friend in deprecating the use of this adjective (in the face of archaeological and literary evidence to the contrary) to describe anything showing 'any remarkable traces of skill distinct from the well-defined Roman art'.[35] There was also an element of patriotism in Wilson's dislike, since the use of the term for any non-Roman art implied that native Scottish craftsmen were incapable of producing anything of distinctive quality without outside help or influence. Wilson's final objection to 'Danish' was simply that it was wrong and was one of those 'convenient words which so often take the place of ideas and save the trouble and inconvenience of reasoning'.[36] If there is a key to understanding Wilson's method in the writing of *Prehistoric annals* it was this desire to do away with convenient (and misleading) words and begin to look directly at the past, and try to understand it on its own terms.

To this work Wilson brought all of his considerable gifts as a writer, artist and ethnologist. He refused to be bound by any preconceptions, not even the neat and beguiling simplicity of the Scandinavian tripartite system. For Wilson the tripartite system was a useful concept but it was not holy writ, as it often seemed to be to Scandinavian archaeologists. Wilson recognised the usefulness of the system as a tool for getting beyond the classical and literary bias of so much Scottish antiquarian and archaeological thought, but his first priority was understanding the past on its own terms rather than imposing an ill-fitting or extraneous system upon it. To do this he had to recognise that there were major differences between the archaeologies of Scotland and Scandinavia.

A major feature of Scandinavian archaeological thought had been the 'purity' of Scandinavian prehistory, untouched as it was by Roman penetration or settlement. In the early nineteenth century, with the disastrous effects of the Napoleonic Wars on Denmark, this 'purity' was seen as a great and patriotic virtue. In Scotland the reverse was

true. Although Scotland had not been settled by Roman civilians, she had been garrisoned by Roman soldiers. This 'imperfect' Roman period seemed to many Scottish antiquaries, most notably Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, a kind of national disgrace. A corollary to this attitude was that any native artefacts or structures untouched by Roman influence were *ipso facto* inferior. Wilson dismissed this kind of value judgement in history and attempted merely to present the past as it was.

Another question Wilson had to deal with was change. He recognised (just as Worsaae had done) that, though change in early societies might follow broadly similar lines, the rate and nature of change could vary very widely, not only between different areas but within homogeneous cultures as well. His account of the results of the chemical analysis David Laing had asked to be carried out on the Duddingston finds showed this:

> The results will be found to differ very markedly from that ideal uniformity which had been supposed to establish the conclusion of some single common origin for the metal, if not indeed for the manufactured weapons and implements. The experiments have been made in the laboratory and under the directions of my brother, Dr George Wilson, whose acknowledged experience as an analyst is sufficient guarantee for the accuracy of the results.[37]

The archaeology and prehistoric annals of Scotland is a pioneering work in many ways, not least in its attempt to deal with the relativities of the past: to show that change was merely change and not imbued with moral or philosophical qualities.

But if the working out of the structure of prehistory must be done without preconception and bias, Wilson was less disengaged when he came to consider the feelings he wished to be engendered by reading his work or visiting the new national Museum. Wilson saw both as means for creating patriotic feelings:

> In Dublin . . . as in Copenhagen, a keen spirit of nationality and patriotic sympathy has been enlisted in the cause of Archaeological science [but in Scotland] our native nobility have stood aloof from us . . . [and] we mourn the decay of the old generous spirit of nationality, which is evinced by the array of names of our nobility, members of Parliament, and Scottish gentry, figuring in the lists of the more fashionable Societies of London.[38]

The Museum was to be a focus of patriotic sentiment, but already in 1852 Wilson was feeling that in this goal he had failed:

> . . . I grieve to say it, our Scottish nationality, which was once so fervid and healthful an element of action, has degenerated into a species of empty vanity and conceit, little less ridiculous than that of the 'slickest nation in all creation'. I have

tried to enlist it on behalf of an object I had much at heart, the establishing of a Museum of National Antiquities here. In Copenhagen a genuine nationality has been awakened on this; and it is wonderful what has been effected in Dublin. But Scotsmen seem to me beginning to be ashamed of Scotland — surely a woeful symptom.[39]

Despite this disappointment, Wilson did succeed in most of his other aims for the Society and its collections. It is interesting to speculate what the future of Scottish archaeology and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland might have been if Wilson had remained in Scotland. In 1853, however, he was offered the chair of history and English literature at the University College of Toronto (MB 5, 477, 480).

Wilson was to have a long and distinguished career in Canada, both as a pioneer ethnologist of Canadian Indians and as a university administrator, but he never lost his interest in the Society nor abandoned hope that one day he might return to live in his beloved Edinburgh. In 1858 he wrote to David Laing after receiving the news that the Society was about to move to its long-promised apartments on The Mound:

I learn, both from the newspaper, and from private sources, that the long pending negotiations for the proper accommodation of the Museum of Antiquities have at length been happily brought to a close; and that they will be speedily transferred to the rooms of the Royal Institution. Mr Stuart [the secretary] also tells me of your probably acquiring the Pennyciuck [sic] Collections; and I doubt not than many more will follow. I wish I was amongst you once more to catalogue and arrange them anew.[40]

He went on to list the places where new exhibits for the Museum might be found:

Backed by the plea of your collection now being national property, your secretary ought to play the beggar to good purpose. I presume also that you will now be able to expend a larger portion of the Society's income on printing; though if what I learn is correct, I suspect you have been too modest in your demands on government for an annual allowance. But that can be amended hereafter . . . Altogether I imagine the Antiquaries and Antiquities of Scotland are in such a flourishing condition as at one time you little hoped to see them.[41]

Early in 1878 Wilson looked back again to those exciting days for himself and the Society, when he and David Laing and other friends had fought the good (but losing) fight to save Trinity College Chapel. Of all his associates from those days only one remained:

. . . David Laing, who was an author before I was born . . . He is a wonderful man; an old bachelor, still busy with his pen and among his books. But he cannot survive long; and if I still remain, it will be [as] the sole representative of what was

once a fine, genial, hearty band of fellow-workers in the by no means barren field
of antiquarian research.[42]

The two friends had one more meeting at the antiquarian dinner Laing
gave for Wilson during his visit to Scotland in 1878. Shortly after his
return to Toronto Wilson had to write in his diary: 'News of the death
of my old friend David Laing, to whom I dedicated my "Reminiscences
of Old Edinburgh".'[43]

The circle was broken, but Scottish archaeologists ever since have
been deeply in the debt of this 'band of fellow-workers' who brought
their gifts as antiquaries and archaeologists to the reformation of mid-
nineteenth-century Scottish archaeology and the Society of Antiquaries
of Scotland.

NOTES

1. D. Murray, *David Laing, Antiquary and Publisher* (Glasgow 1915), 23.
2. Edinburgh U.L., MS.La II 453/1.
3. G. Goudie, *David Laing, LL.D., A Memoir of his Life and Literary Works*
(Edinburgh 1913), 8.
4. E.U.L., MS.La II 453/1, Laing to Chalmers, 12 March 1821.
5. *Ibid.*, dated 9 December 1817.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Goudie, *David Laing*, 26.
8. *Ibid.*, 25. Goudie, reprinting Laing's own memoir, puts the date of Laing's black-
balling by the Antiquaries in '181—'. The Society's Minute Books show that Laing was
proposed at a meeting on 10 January 1820, but failed to gain election at the meeting of
14 February.
9. National Library of Scotland, MS.4004, ff.167-8.
10. E.U.L., MS.La IV 1, Scott no. 13.
11. E.U.L., MS.La II 453/1, dated 8 January 1822.
12. E.U.L., MS.La II 453/1.
13. E. Gordon, *The Royal Scottish Academy* (Edinburgh 1976), 70.
14. Goudie, *David Laing*, 253.
15. *Ibid.*, 25-6.
16. O. Klindt-Jensen, *A History of Scandinavian Archaeology* (London 1975), 50
and *passim*.
17. E.U.L., MS.La IV 18, no. 2 and Feldborg, 1 October 1819.
18. Klindt-Jensen, *Archaeology*, 34 and *passim*.
19. P[roceedings of the] S[ociety of] A[ntiquaries of] S[cotland] i (1855, for 1851-4
sessions), 4-5.
20. D. Wilson, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (Edinburgh
1851), xix.

21. Sir Daniel Wilson's diary, University of Toronto Library, Department of MSS. (typescript of extracts made by H. H. Langton for his *Sir Daniel Wilson*, 1929), 153.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals*, xii.

24. Wilson Diary, 173.

25. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 1847, 328-30.

26. *Synopsis of the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1849), 1.

27. Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals*, xi.

28. E.U.L., MS.La 17, Daniel Wilson no. 2.

29. *PSAS*, i.3.

30. *PSAS*, i.4-5.

31. This point has been discussed by Glyn Daniel in *The Origin and Growth of Archaeology* (London 1967), where it is shown that the term first appeared in French in 1833. There is, however, no evidence that Wilson knew of this French precedent. Indeed in a letter of 1865 to Sir Charles Lyell (Edinburgh U.L., Lyell MSS. no. 1) he claims to have coined the word 'prehistoric'.

32. *Laerde brev fra og til P. A. Munch* (3 vols, Oslo 1934-71), nos. 217, 234.

33. *Ibid.*, ii, no. 256.

34. Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals*, 112n.

35. *Ibid.*, xiv.

36. *Ibid.*, xv.

37. *Ibid.*, 245.

38. *PSAS*, i.4.

39. National Library of Scotland, MS.2623, f.135.

40. E.U.L., MS.La 17, Wilson no. 6.

41. *Ibid.*

42. H. H. Langton, *Sir Daniel Wilson, A Memoir* (Edinburgh 1929), 193-4.

43. Wilson Diary, entry for 5 November 1878.