

'I WENT ON MY WAY REJOICING'

The celebrated writer Muriel Spark described herself as a hoarder of documents and friends. Alan Taylor remembers the literary legend with an insatiable zest for life as the National Library launches a campaign to buy the last tranche of her archive

Like a character in one of her own novels, Muriel Spark had a chameleon quality. Browsing through photographs of her that are part of the National Library of Scotland's sprawling Sparkian archive, you can't help but remark how often her appearance radically changes, how she can look dowdy one minute and extraordinarily glamorous the next.

Although she purported to hate having her picture taken, she certainly knew how to pose. At times, she might look like a harassed secretary to whom you would never give a second glance; at others, she has the self-composed air of a film star to whom there is nothing more natural than constantly being on camera. Writers are not supposed to be like this, or so we're led to believe. They are meant to be careless of their appearance, haphazard in the way they dress, indifferent to style and fashion. They'd rather read the *New Statesman* than browse through *Vogue*.

Not Muriel. When I first met her, in 1990, in the Tuscan town of Arezzo, she arrived by Alfa Romeo with her companion, the artist Penelope Jardine. Then 72, Muriel had taken her own dictum – why make a dull day even duller? – to heart, and wore a dress that would cheer up a sabbath on Lewis. It was like the floor of a tropical forest covered in yellow, black and white leaves. Her hair was red, as it had been when she was a girl growing up in Edinburgh and before it was bleached under Rhodesian skies when she was in her early twenties, and around her neck she wore a canary-yellow scarf and a string of pearls. I mentioned that I had tried with only phrasebook Italian at my command to buy a suit in Florence. If I had told her I had been diagnosed with a terminal illness she couldn't have shown more concern: "Let's ask that dishy waiter who is the best sarto in Arezzo." Duly summoned, the waiter recommended a tailor which, it transpired when I sought it out



later, charged a king's ransom for a jacket.

But then, as I soon learned, Muriel was interested in anything and everything. A decade ago, I persuaded her, over a bibulous supper in Prague, to make an appearance at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The night before she was due on stage she stayed in Melrose where in the local bookshop she said she'd found a title that had kept her up all night. It was a *Reader's Digest* DIY manual, she said, in which there was advice on how to wire plugs, change tyres, hang wallpaper, and get yourself out of quicksand. It was all manna to Muriel,

who was not at all domestically inclined. As far as I could tell, she couldn't boil an egg or make a cup of tea. I'm sure she knew how to but she didn't feel she had to. Her job was to write, which she did daily with religious application.

LITERARY GOLD

As her papers in the Library show, her interest in all aspects of life was intense. Like most writers, she was a constant note taker and addicted to the paraphernalia of a writer's life. Wherever she went she collected pens and pencils and notebooks, and her pockets were always stuffed with bits of paper on which she jotted down anything that took her fancy. She always had a poem "on the go", and would add to it whenever inspiration or inclination struck. She eavesdropped shamelessly and what she overheard often found its way into her books. Not the least of her talents was the ability to transform the seemingly mundane and clichéd into literary gold. A particular favourite of mine is the phrase, "As we go through this evening and into tonight," which is repeated several times in her valedictory novel, *The Finishing School*. Muriel heard it nightly as she listened to the weather girl on *Sky News*. In that context, it seems insignificant. In Muriel's hands, however, it is transformed into poetry and

A black and white photograph of Muriel Spark. She is leaning forward on a desk, resting her head on her left hand. She is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved sweater and a watch on her left wrist. In front of her is an open book. The background is filled with bookshelves packed with books. The lighting is soft, highlighting her face and the texture of the sweater.

The archive takes
you on a journey
from Muriel Spark's
childhood in
Edinburgh (left)
to international
literary success

**“One thing I have always known
about my well-ordered archive is
that it would stand by me, the silent,
objective evidence of truth”**

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LILIA CARLETTI/SSFAGGIONI, MALCOLM COCHRANE



philosophy. It reminds me of another of her favourite tropes: "I went on my way rejoicing." That seems in some curious way to sum her up; she was the kind of person who looked always to find joy in life.

CURIOUS QUARTERS

By any standard, her archive is immense and is, as yet, not fully catalogued. When it is, it will surely add to our understanding of this endlessly fascinating artist. "There just seem to be so many camps around this woman," says Sally Harrower, the Library's Curator for Manuscript and Archive Collections. Sally has recently returned from the Val di Chiana, Italy, where she packed up many boxes of papers that were kept in the rambling 14th-century rectory Muriel shared with Penelope Jardine.

Open any of these boxes and out fall passports, letters, restaurant receipts, food ration cards, benefit books, demands from the tax man. Here are letters from John Updike, Iris Murdoch and Graham Greene, who used to send Muriel money in the days before she found fame.

"At my ripe age," writes the Irish short story master Sean O'Faolain, "I can say that I have been thinking of you night after night." Patricia Highsmith, best known perhaps for her Ripley thrillers, writes to ask if Muriel is interested in "acquiring a black cat". That was like offering a child the keys to a chocolate factory. Muriel adored cats and, in some ways, thought of herself as one. "I pounce," she once said, when asked to describe how she starts on a new novel.

"I don't know exactly why I married this man rather than any of the younger boyfriends who took me to dances. It was a disastrous choice"



Clockwise, from top left: Muriel Spark near her home in Tuscany, Italy; Alan Taylor with Sally Harrower, the Library's Curator of Modern Literary Manuscripts; Spark as a pupil; and in London, 1947

Before she could do that, however, she was assiduous in her research. "Send me everything you've got on Mary Queen of Scots," she once faxed me. At the time she was contemplating *The Finishing School*. In it, one of the students is writing a novel of which the subject is the ill-fated queen. Who knows whether what I sent Muriel was of any use. On another occasion, when she was embarking on *Aiding and Abetting*, published in 2000, she wanted to get her hands on everything to do with Lord Lucan. After that book appeared she received letters from many curious quarters. One in her archive is from a Lady Bowman, whose husband was part of the Clermont Club set which, it was widely assumed, had helped Lord Lucan make his getaway after the murder of his children's nanny. Lady Bowman's supposition is that the dissolute lord was incapable of murder and had hired a hit man to kill his wife. Muriel's polite reply makes clear that this is a theory of which she was aware but had dismissed as unlikely.

Her method was to read as widely and deeply as possible on the ostensible subject of a novel and then, when she was satisfied that she could do no more, she would indeed "pounce". In the Library's



collection are many of the famous spiral-bound notebooks she purchased in bulk from James Thin, the much-missed Edinburgh bookseller and stationer. These she reserved for her novels, which she wrote in a long, looping, generous script, just four or five words to a line, each line double spaced, the verso page left blank. When things were going well she wrote quickly, as if taking down dictation. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, for example, was written in a matter of weeks. "She composed symphonically," wrote her biographer, Martin Stannard, "refrains of speech patterns interlocking like music." When a critic compared her method to Mozart's, Muriel did not disagree.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Her life was not without its travails, however. Born in Edinburgh in 1918, her upbringing was typical of the period. Her parents were not well-to-do but neither were they on the breadline. Her mother, Sarah Camberg, was of the kind that stood out in the school playground. While the mothers of Muriel's classmates were socially conservative, Sarah liked to put on a bit of a show, dressing flamboyantly and tipling more than was probably good for her. Among the formative influences on Muriel were the socially divided Edinburgh of the 1920s and 1930s and Miss Christina Kay, her inspirational teacher at James Gillespie's Girls' School. In due course, in *The Prime*, Gillespie's would become Marcia Blane's, and Miss Kay would metamorphose into the charismatic but ultimately malign Miss Jean Brodie.

When she was 19, Muriel decided to leave the capital. She longed to widen her horizons, to see the world. "Perhaps," she reflected in *Curriculum Vitae*, her autobiography, "that is why I got engaged to Sydney Oswald Spark." He was 13 years her senior, a teacher who was leaving shortly for Southern Rhodesia. Whatever the reason, it was one of those decisions taken in haste and regretted at leisure. "I don't know



Clockwise, from top left: Alan Taylor with part of the archive; passport images of Muriel Spark; Taylor in the Grassmarket, Edinburgh, realm of Miss Jean Brodie; and Spark

exactly why I married this man rather than any of the younger boyfriends who took me to dances," Muriel wrote much later. "I will probably never know. It was a disastrous choice. Unbeknown to us, the poor man had mental problems, not obvious at this time."

The unreliability of men is a recurrent theme in Muriel's work. Her personal motto, she said, ought to be "Beware of men bearing flowers". Throughout her life she found men guilty of betrayal, disloyalty and dishonesty. Often, they were a distraction or a nuisance, getting in the way of her work, causing her distress and stress, making importunate demands and false claims. One such was her former lover and literary collaborator, Derek Stanford, who sold her letters to him and, when she became well known, wrote a book about her which "was, of course, packed with factual errors. These are some of the errors

MARY EVANS/MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY/MALCOLM COCHRANE

“Almost every letter received, every note I have made, every appointments book, lists of names, my correspondence – all and everything I have conserved”

that scholars and students have been taking as fact ever since.”

Ironically, however, it is thanks to Stanford and others, such as those she feuded with at the Poetry Society in London after the war, that Muriel began to amass the collection the Library has gradually accumulated over the years. “I became aware,” she wrote, “of the value of documentary evidence, both as a means of personal defence against inaccuracies and as an aid to one’s own memory.” From 1949 until her death in 2006 she threw away virtually nothing on paper. “Almost every letter I have received, every note I have made, every cheque book, every book of accounts, every appointments book, lists of names and addresses, my correspondence with publishers and agents throughout the world, with income tax departments, accountants, lawyers, turf accountants (I like racing when in England) – all and everything, I have conserved in a vast archive ... After more than 50 years, this collection has amounted to a social history in itself. One thing I have always known about my well-ordered archive is that it would stand by me, the silent, objective evidence of truth, should I ever need it.”

ADMIRERS IN HIGH PLACES

What is clear from the piles of boxes transported from Italy by Sally Harrower is that Muriel was not exaggerating. She was one of life’s hoarders. Her instinct was to keep anything and everything that might prove useful at a later date. She had a tenacious regard for facts and faith in the endurance of paper. She abhorred mistakes and knew how hard they were to correct once they were in print. Worse, though, were lies, which she said hopped about like fleas, “sucking the blood of the intellect”. Truth, which has “its own dear beauty”, was what she sought, which, with the passage of time, is never easy to nail down.

Therein lies the incalculable value of the Library’s Spark collection. Leafing through it, you begin to get a sense of who this remarkable woman was and how she came to write the books she did. She is flighty, flirtatious, feisty, fastidious, famous. She is a sophisticated, fun-loving woman of the world who was “Scottish by formation”. She had friends and admirers in high places – Jackie Kennedy, Elizabeth Taylor, Gore Vidal, the King and Queen of Greece – but was no more impressed by them than she was nameless shopkeepers, bellhops, ticket collectors and air stewardesses.

As the years progressed, she was still eager to travel and was always happy to dine out with friends in Cortona or Orvieto or Florence. But the daytime hours were reserved for writing. Nothing was ever allowed to get in the way of that.



The Muriel Spark campaign

FUNDRAISING

The Muriel Spark archive is truly extraordinary, containing everything from precious manuscripts, fascinating correspondence with leading literary figures, photographs and newspaper cuttings, to used train tickets and shopping receipts.

The National Library of Scotland holds many authors’ archives but none has so deliberately and carefully preserved such a complete record of their life.

The Library is beginning a fundraising campaign to buy the last tranche of this archive and to catalogue its entire contents. This will require significant resources. It already has hundreds of brightly coloured boxes, all carefully transported to Scotland from Muriel Spark’s villa in Italy. Until there is a full catalogue of what is in all these boxes, though, much of the detail of her archive – and the remarkable stories it tells – will remain undiscovered and inaccessible.

There is an estimated four years’ work involved in painstakingly opening every box and listing the contents, before reboxing everything in safe and secure storage. On completion, it will bring the day-to-day world of Spark back to life through the listing and describing of this comprehensive collection. It will be the guide that researchers, scholars, students and readers need to discover the detail of how one of the most significant British writers of the post-war period worked and lived.

The Library needs to raise £250,000 to complete this project. Our aim is to raise the money and catalogue the archive by 2018, the centenary of Spark’s birth. With your help we can showcase her life as it was lived.

For more information about the campaign, please email the National Library at development@nls.uk or call 0131 623 3733







This 1879 map reveals how it was believed the sound from the One O'Clock Gun would be carried across Edinburgh, and, right, the oldest printed view of the city, from the 1530s



MAPPING TIME

Wealth and destitution, culture and crime, medieval and Georgian streets – the history of Edinburgh is being mapped in an absorbing book, as its co-author Christopher Fleet explains

Edinburgh is one of the most attractive cities in the world, with a unique topography, architecture, townscape and cultural life. Historically, it has also been a city of contrasts that go beyond the striking differences between its medieval Old Town and Georgian New Town. It has at times been a place of danger, disease, destitution, violence and injustice. Maps capture these themes and disparities in a direct, revealing manner.

In a lavishly illustrated book, *Edinburgh: Mapping the City*, my co-writer Daniel MacCannell and I have selected 71 maps of Edinburgh from 1530 to the present, underpinned by stories of the political, commercial and social life of Scotland's capital. Our definition of maps has been deliberately broad, including views, profiles, plans, sketches and even an aerial photograph, focusing on their common purposes and meanings.

We have selected maps promoting the accomplishments of the people who made them, especially those who lived and worked in the city. Several leading surveyors were based in Edinburgh, which from the 18th century became a centre of expertise in engraving.

As this expanded in the 19th century to include lithographic printing, the Edinburgh map publishers Bartholomew, and W & AK Johnston, became justly world famous.

Edinburgh's importance as a centre of map production also reflected its unique academic, intellectual and political background. Mathematicians, geographers, sociologists, engineers, geologists, physicians, public health officials and town planners all created – and used – maps as part of their work.

MAPPING THE SPEED OF SOUND FOR THE TIME GUN, 1879 (LEFT)

A 5ft 6in (1.7m) time ball was constructed in 1852 on top of Lord Nelson's Monument on Calton Hill, but it was only in 1861 that a gun was also set up on Mills Mount Battery in the castle to synchronise with the ball. Charles Piazzi Smith, the Astronomer Royal in Scotland, was the main scientific brain behind the time ball and its connection to the castle by electric cable. This striking map aims to show the number of seconds after the Edinburgh One O'Clock Gun was fired that its sound would be heard across Edinburgh. The smoke of the gun, which is still fired today, could be

seen immediately. Stand on Calton Hill, though, and you would hear the sound about four seconds later, while in Leith and Newhaven, a couple of miles away, it would be heard 11 seconds later. In reality, the speed of sound was influenced by wind direction, air temperature and atmospheric pressure, contrasting with the neat concentric circles shown here.

EARLIEST PRINTED VIEW OF EDINBURGH, 1530s (PAGE 25)

This woodcut, based on a drawing by exiled Scottish Lutheran theologian Alexander Allane (1500-1565), has strong claims to being the earliest surviving printed view of Edinburgh. It first appeared in the 1550 Latin edition of *Cosmographia*, an encyclopedia of the world by the German cartographer Sebastian Münster. While initially unrecognisable as Edinburgh, this view from the north shows several buildings - primarily monasteries and churches - in correct relation to one another, besides a stylised representation of the castle and the dormant volcano Arthur's Seat.

Allane drew the sketch from memory after fleeing persecution in 1530s Scotland. Influential and popular, *Cosmographia* gave literate European society its first visions of Edinburgh.

“Edinburgh’s importance as a centre of map production also reflected its unique academic, intellectual and political background”

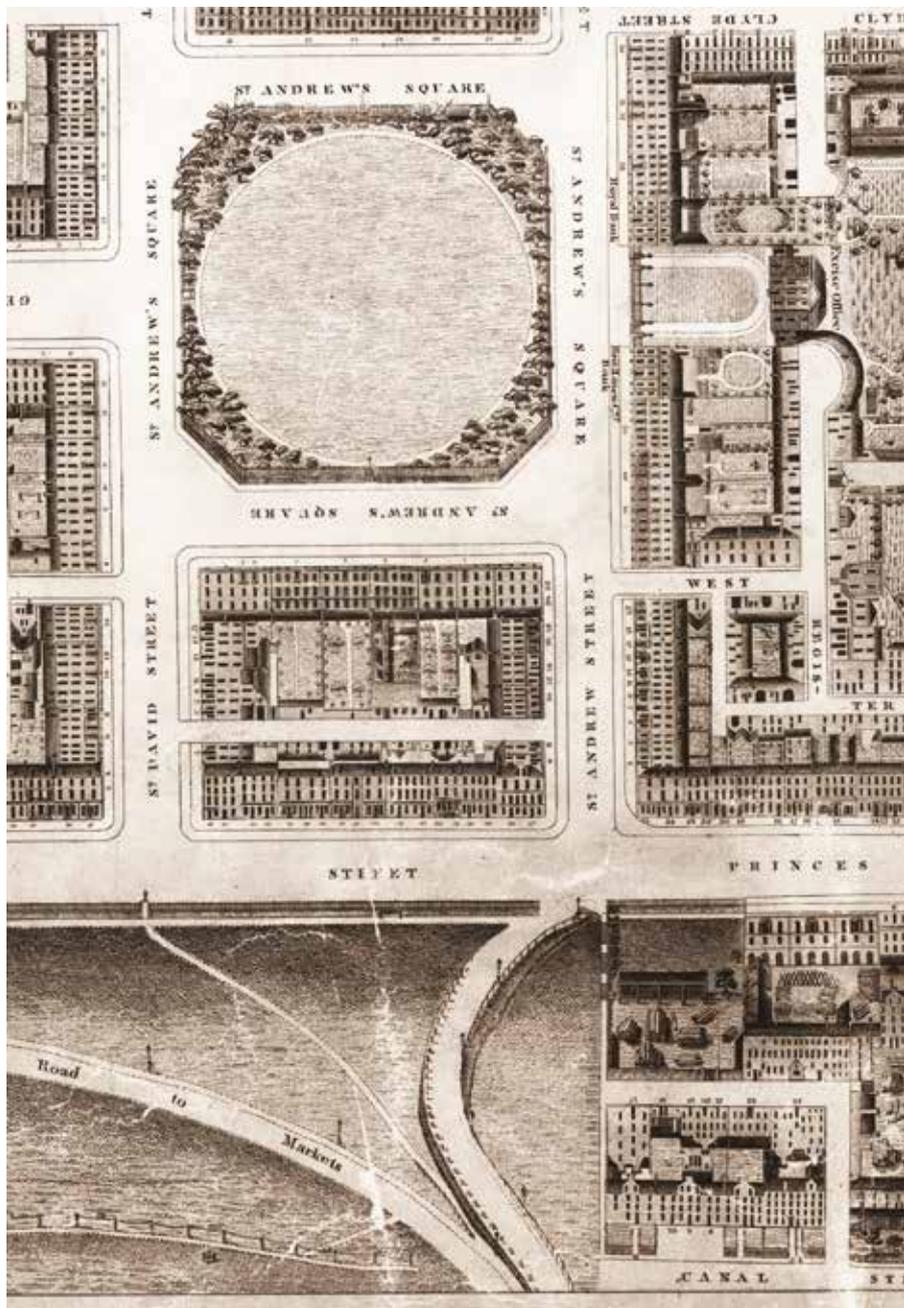
EAST END OF PRINCES STREET, 1819 (RIGHT)

This beautifully-engraved graphic by Robert and James Kirkwood flattens all the elevations of New Town buildings into a conventional overhead plan, compressing three dimensions into two. This area, where the Balmoral Hotel now stands, attracted major litigation from the 1770s, culminating in a House of Lords decision a year before this map was published. The issue was whether the south side of Princes Street could be built on.

The resident tailors, mechanics and a major coach builder here formed an interesting social contrast to the other New Town residents. This detail also shows how the newly widened North Bridge, following an Act of 1816, opened up the view to Register House, designed in the 1770s as an elegant store for Scotland’s public records.

TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT PROPAGANDA POSTER, 1923 (RIGHT)

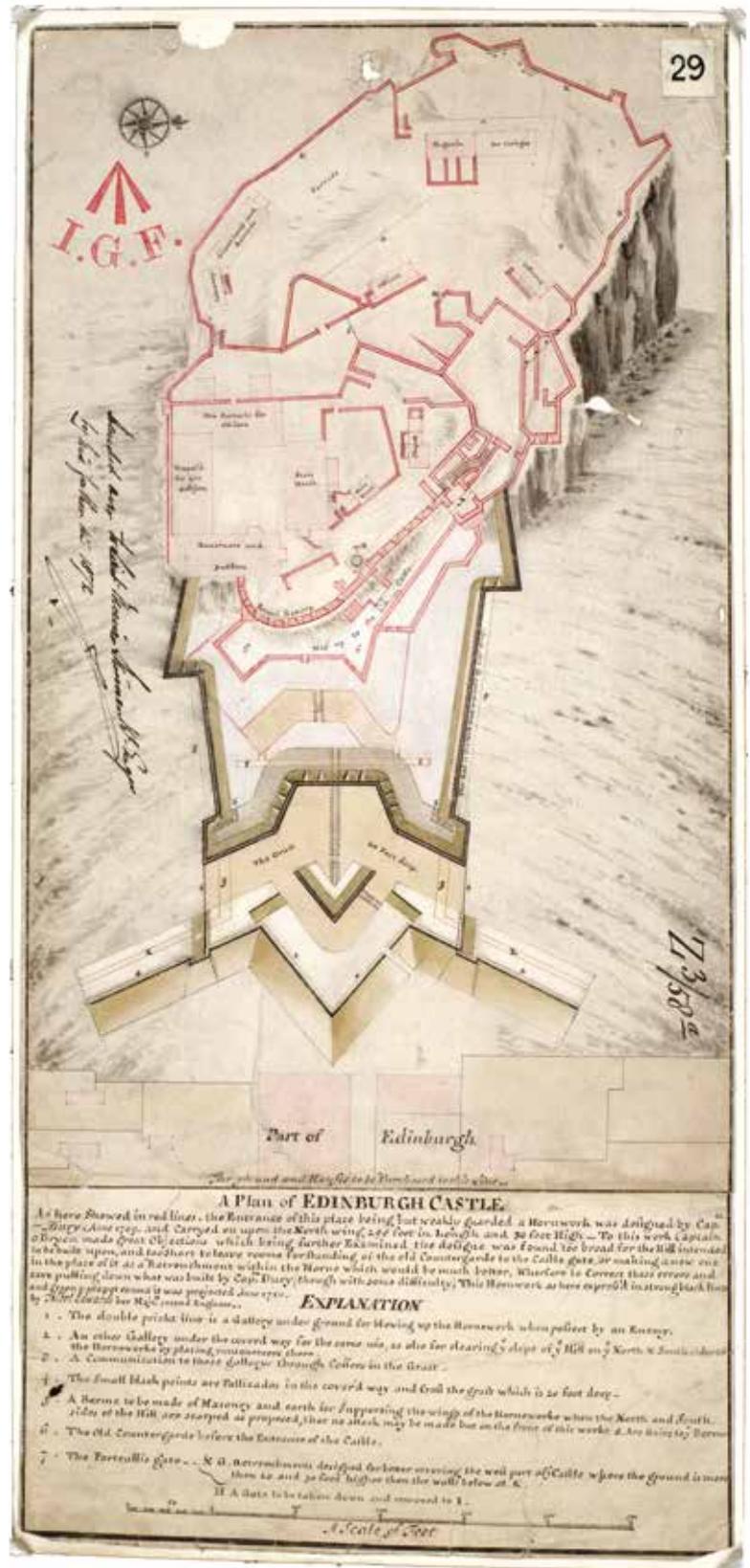
This map is a powerful example of cartographic propaganda, as well as illustrating the importance of the temperance movement at the height of its influence. While all maps ‘lie’ in the sense that they select and distort the reality of the world, some do this better than others; Bartholomew’s clever selection of this particular part of Edinburgh, and their stark red symbolisation



THE WRITER



Christopher Fleet is a Map Curator at the Library. He is co-author of *Scotland: Mapping the Nation*



on a plain background of streets, creates a striking graphic with a clear message. Under the Temperance (Scotland) Act of 1913, voters in local wards were allowed to hold a poll on whether their area remained 'wet' or went 'dry'. If more than 10% of voters supported the latter, a formal poll was then held with three options: No Change; a 25% limitation in licences to sell alcohol; or No Licence, the abolition of all licences. This poster was displayed at polling stations across Edinburgh on 1 December 1923 – although in the event, its promoters failed to convince the majority and, by a 2:1 margin, Edinburgh voted to stay 'wet'.

DESIGN FOR REFORTIFYING EDINBURGH CASTLE, 1710 (ABOVE RIGHT)

Military concerns were paramount in the mapping of Edinburgh before the mid-18th century. This striking manuscript plan of Edinburgh Castle, orientated with west at the top, shows draft designs for impressive external defensive works on its vulnerable side facing the town.

Theodore Dury, the Chief Engineer in Scotland, called this work "le grand secret". It illustrates the

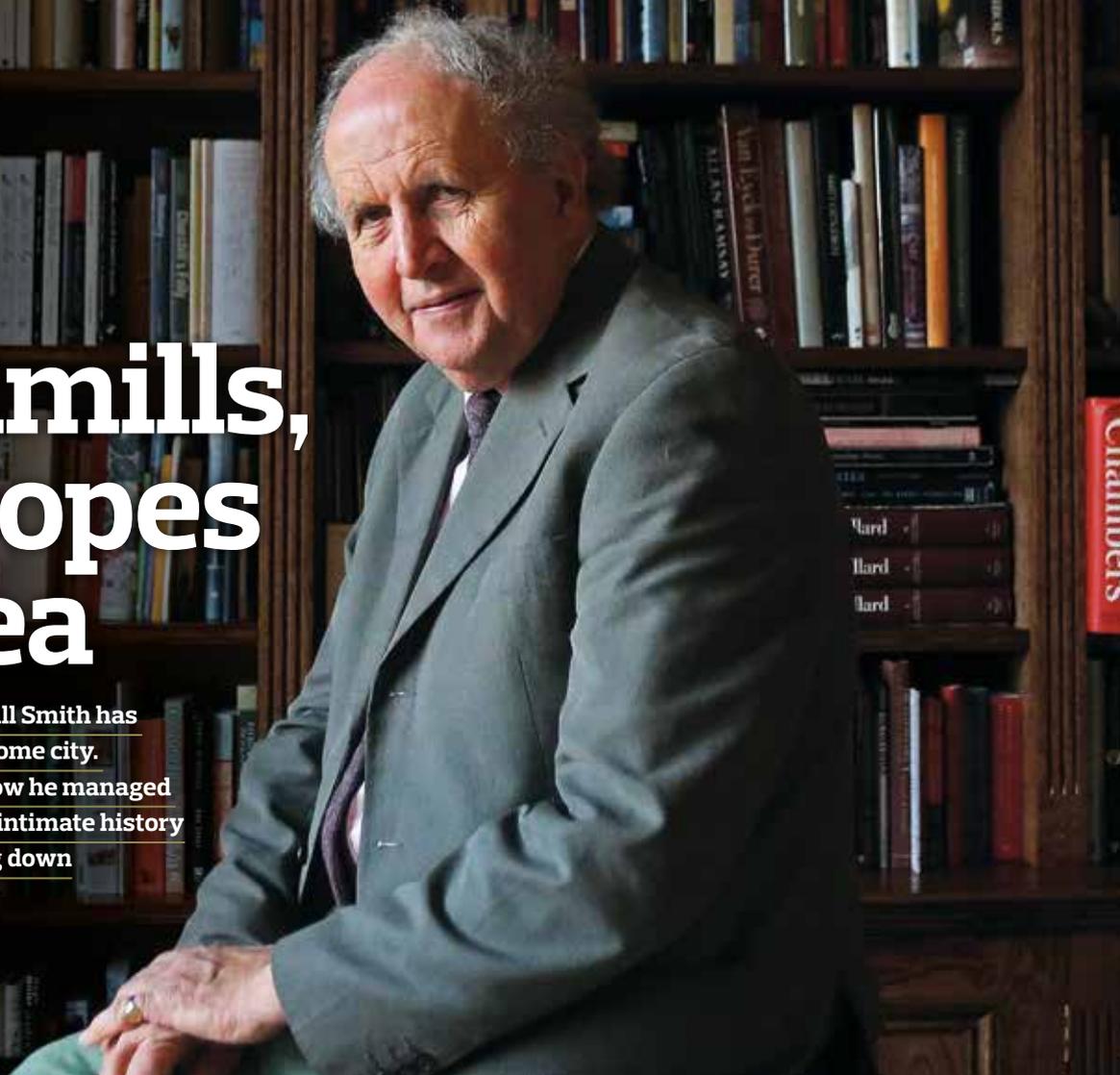
Main map: The East End of Princes Street in 1819 before construction of the Balmoral Hotel; above, 1710 plans for the refortification of Edinburgh Castle; left, propaganda for the Temperance Movement in 1923

application in Scotland of the latest principles of military engineering. Nevertheless, the Board of Ordnance – responsible for defending Scotland's forts and royal castles following the parliamentary union of 1707 – struggled with costs, and the work was never finished. The castle was nearly taken by Jacobite forces during the 1745 uprising, provoking a major strengthening of defences.

Edinburgh: Mapping the City, by Christopher Fleet and Daniel MacCannell, is published by Birlinn in association with the National Library of Scotland, £30. See page 9 for a chance to win the book

Treadmills, tightropes and tea

The author Alexander McCall Smith has written a love letter to his home city. He tells Kathleen Morgan how he managed to draw breath to write this intimate history – and why he avoids looking down

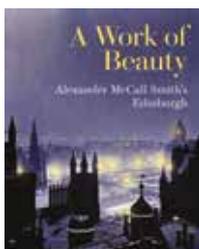


By the time Alexander McCall Smith sits down for a mid-morning cup of tea in the library of his Victorian home, he has already taken his daily 10,000 steps on the treadmill and been to the dentist.

Shortly, he will settle back into his 1,000 words-an-hour routine, hurtling through one of the novels due for publication in 2015 – the next *Isabel Dalhousie* novel, or perhaps the latest instalment of his 44 *Scotland Street* tales. Recently published are his adaptation of the Jane Austen classic *Emma*, and the latest in his Botswana-based series, *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*.

Now there is *A Work of Beauty*, a tome tracing Edinburgh's history – and his love affair with the city – through an array of personally-chosen archive photographs, illustrations and maps. When you are one of the world's best-loved novelists, it seems, time is of the essence.

"I was up about half past five this morning," he says, sitting at the window of his family home in Merchiston, Edinburgh. "I have been doing a bit of writing of the two radio plays I do each year for the BBC based on the Botswana books, and I've been to the gym. I've done my 10,000 steps today



A Work of Beauty reveals Alexander McCall Smith's love for his home city traced through maps and pictures

and had a tooth dressed. So I find the early hours of the morning pretty useful."

The 68-year-old former professor of medical law whose novels have attracted a global readership seems distinctly unfazed by deadlines. His ability to produce four or five books a year, write for radio, tour extensively and, most recently, collaborate with the writer and historian Ben Macintyre on an opera about the spy Anthony Blunt, is impressive. He also inspired – and is chairman of – the Great Tapestry of Scotland, the 143 metre-long artwork touring the nation.

"If I started to think about it I could become worried, but I don't," he says. "I sometimes use the example of walking on a tightrope – I can't of course walk on a tightrope." He giggles. "But you look ahead and don't look down."

LOVE LETTER

A Work of Beauty: Alexander McCall Smith's Edinburgh is engagingly personal, described by the writer as a love letter to the city. It involved McCall Smith trailing through the archives of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). Although it is a history of the capital, the narrative and captions



"In my books, place is one of the main characters. You don't need to describe it in detail. A few brushstrokes are all that's needed. Scotland can be described in a paragraph"



the Firth of Forth from the New Town in the *Scotland Street* novels, or the curious world of Botswana's finest female private detective.

"In my books, place is one of the main characters," he says. "You don't need to describe it in detail. A few brushstrokes are all that's needed. Scotland can be described in a paragraph."

This sense of place is hardly surprising. He was born in Bulawayo in the former Rhodesia, where his father was the colonial public prosecutor. He moved to Edinburgh at the age of 18 to study law, making the city his home, though his first job was as a law lecturer in Belfast. He later taught in Swaziland, helped found the law school at the University of Botswana, and has been a visiting professor in America and Italy.

His grandfather, George McCall Smith, was a Highlander who worked as a GP in Edinburgh and Perth before emigrating to North Island, New Zealand, where he established a system of free medicine. McCall Smith visited the hospital his grandfather had set up in Hokianga for the first time last summer. The largely Maori community which had taken George to its heart a century before embraced Alexander with equal gusto.

"It was the most moving experience," says McCall Smith, describing how he and his wife Elizabeth, a retired GP, were warmly welcomed. "My grandfather was a great hero in that part of New Zealand. He was a devoted doctor who made it his business to look after these people."

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

As a writer, McCall Smith is able to satisfy his wanderlust, meeting his readers on the international book tour circuit. "It's interesting to see the feeling for Scotland abroad, which I see all the time," he says. "I meet a lot of readers of the books all over the world, and it's interesting that Scotland has a place in the heart of a lot of people. There are things in Scotland that are capable of chiming with people elsewhere."

He has been described as having a benign writing style – no one dies in his *Scotland Street* novels, set in a gently bohemian quarter of the New Town. He tackles the accusation head on: "If you present the world as irredeemably flawed, that encourages a nihilistic view and people would say, 'Why bother to go on?' The correspondence we get about my Botswana books is very moving, and I take it seriously." He adds, "If you look at my books you'll find the sorrows of this world are there, though not necessarily centre stage."

While international in his outlook, McCall Smith is obviously grounded in his beloved Edinburgh. Its landmarks are his emotional touchstones. Arthur's Seat, the "higgledy-piggledy" medieval Old Town, the reassuringly uniform Georgian New Town, Edinburgh Castle – and the backdrop to his student days, the National Library.

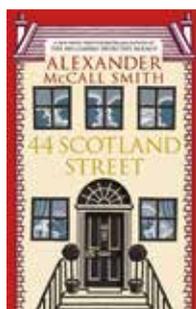
are infused with the writer's personality and steeped in his memories.

In one section, McCall Smith remembers studying as a postgraduate student in the National Library. "The reading room on George IV Bridge was a magnificent place to work," he explains now, surrounded by his own library of books at home in Merchiston, Edinburgh.

"So many libraries have become bustling, noisy places but the reading room of the NLS remained quiet and calm. I always had the feeling that time somehow stopped or at least proceeded at a different pace once one was seated at one of those long tables. It was remarkable to have such a rich collection of books at one's fingertips."

After being asked by RCAHMS to write *A Work of Beauty*, McCall Smith was uncharacteristically flummoxed at first. "At the beginning I wasn't sure what they wanted," he says. "When I realised they wanted something personal, where I could write about my feelings for the place rather than just the history, everything fell into place and it was a sheer pleasure to write about Edinburgh."

McCall Smith gives his readers an intense sense of place – whether it's the reading room of the National Library in *A Work of Beauty*, the view to



Glimpses of Edinburgh from the RCAHMS archives and, above, the 44 Scotland Street novels are set in the city's New Town

A Work of Beauty: Alexander McCall Smith's Edinburgh is published by RCAHMS and Historic Scotland Books. Visit www.rcahms.gov.uk/rcahms-books/a-work-of-beauty. The Great Tapestry of Scotland is at Stirling Castle from 31 January-8 March. Visit www.scotlandstapestry.com

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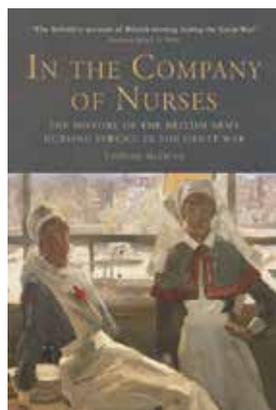
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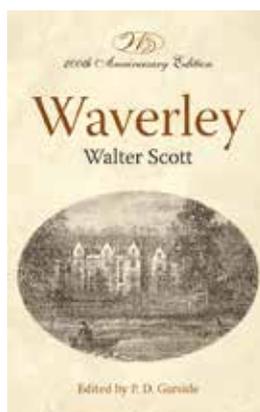
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Walter Scott

Edited by P. D. Garside



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The Library has a vast range of electronic resources, including digital versions of reference works, massive full-text facsimiles and business databases (see the next page for a list). Many of these resources are

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Additionally, recent legislation has given the Library and the other five legal deposit libraries in the UK the legal right to collect, store and preserve the nation's memory in the digital age. There will be a mixture of electronic content available including websites in the UK domain web archive, and articles/chapters from e-books and e-journals. This material can be viewed on Library computers within the reading rooms if you are a registered user.

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The Visitor Centre at the George IV Bridge building was opened in 2009. It features an exhibition space, a shop selling books, stationery and gift items, a café and PC terminals with access to Library catalogues and other digital facilities.

FOCUS ON

Scottish Screen Archive

Preserving more than 100 years of history on film and video, the Scottish Screen Archive is the nation's definitive collection of moving images. From newsreels to amateur footage and documentaries, the archive houses more than 32,000

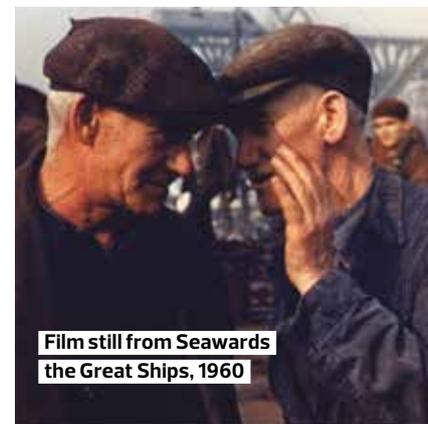
mostly non-fiction items that provide an invaluable record of the lives of Scots across the generations.

An online access catalogue allows you to search for titles available to view, hire or buy, and build a personal list of screen favourites using the 'my films' feature.

The Scottish Screen Archive also casts its own curatorial eye over the collection and has a

frequent programme of events and outreach activities. Alongside this, DVD compilations pick out particular highlights, including the works of the great Orcadian filmmaker Margaret Tait, and portraits of life, love, work and leisure in Scotland that, in many cases, have disappeared.

For more information go to ssa.nls.uk



Film still from *Seawards the Great Ships*, 1960

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This arresting 1920s poster was used by the Soviet government to tell the public of predicted increases in social welfare and industrial production

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GOVERNMENT AND OFFICIAL

A wealth of political information can be viewed online, including House of Commons Parliamentary Papers – includes reports of committees and outside bodies on public affairs; Public Information Online and The Making of Modern Law – Legal Treatises 1800-1926.

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Find this striking Soviet poster, published around 1928, in the Library's digital collection. Visit <http://digital.nls.uk/soviet-posters>

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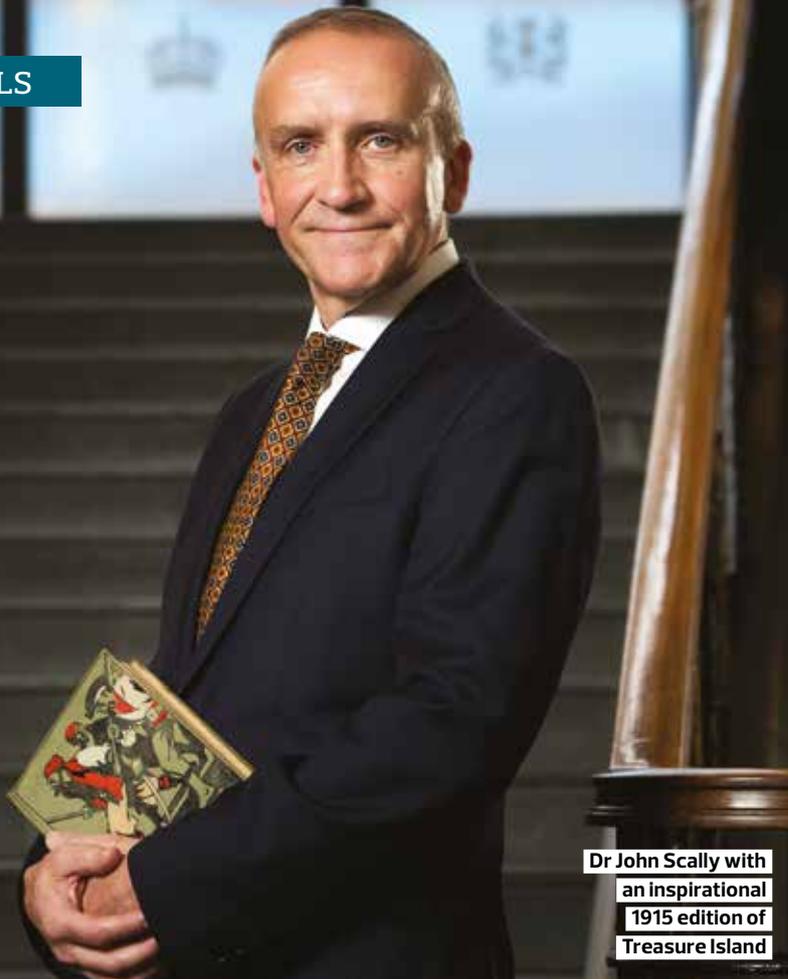
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Dr John Scally with
an inspirational
1915 edition of
Treasure Island

Treasure trail

As he takes the helm at the National Library, Dr John Scally is rediscovering a wealth of material in its world-class collections, from precious medieval manuscripts to cheap pamphlets

Libraries are special places. When I was seven years old a new library opened near my home in Paisley, starting a lifelong love of libraries that has grown and intensified over the years. Now I am Scotland's National Librarian and I could not be more thrilled.

The beating heart of the National Library is the legal deposit privilege which allows us to claim a copy of every book published in the UK. We are the only library in Scotland that can do this and, through legal deposit and the collections that have been built around it, we tell the country's story. I like the idea we are a guarantor for Scotland's people. You pay your taxes and we guarantee that each successive generation is represented in our collections. Every period of the past can be excavated using our collections.

My second library job was at the National Library which I joined in 1993 as a trainee curator. Working with these wonderful collections, getting involved in exhibitions, accessing the strongrooms, purchasing new collection material – it was all hugely

exciting for a young librarian and that joyous sense of discovery has never left me.

I could talk all day about the amazing things in the collection and not even scratch the surface, but I'll focus on a few things that are particularly special to me. One of my favourite books is a relatively cheap edition of *Treasure Island* from 1915 with a striking cover of three menacing pirates (shelfmark: J173.C). I came upon the book in the Library stacks while researching for a Robert Louis Stevenson exhibition in 1994. It featured in my book that accompanied the exhibition *Pictures of the Mind: the Illustrated Robert Louis Stevenson*. The cover is the work of a little-known Edinburgh artist, John Cameron, and seems to be his only surviving work. *Pictures of the Mind* is full of the great book illustrators of the last 150 years, but Cameron trumped them all.

The National Library attracts researchers from all round the world because of the richness of our historical archives. I have a special interest in the period from the Union of

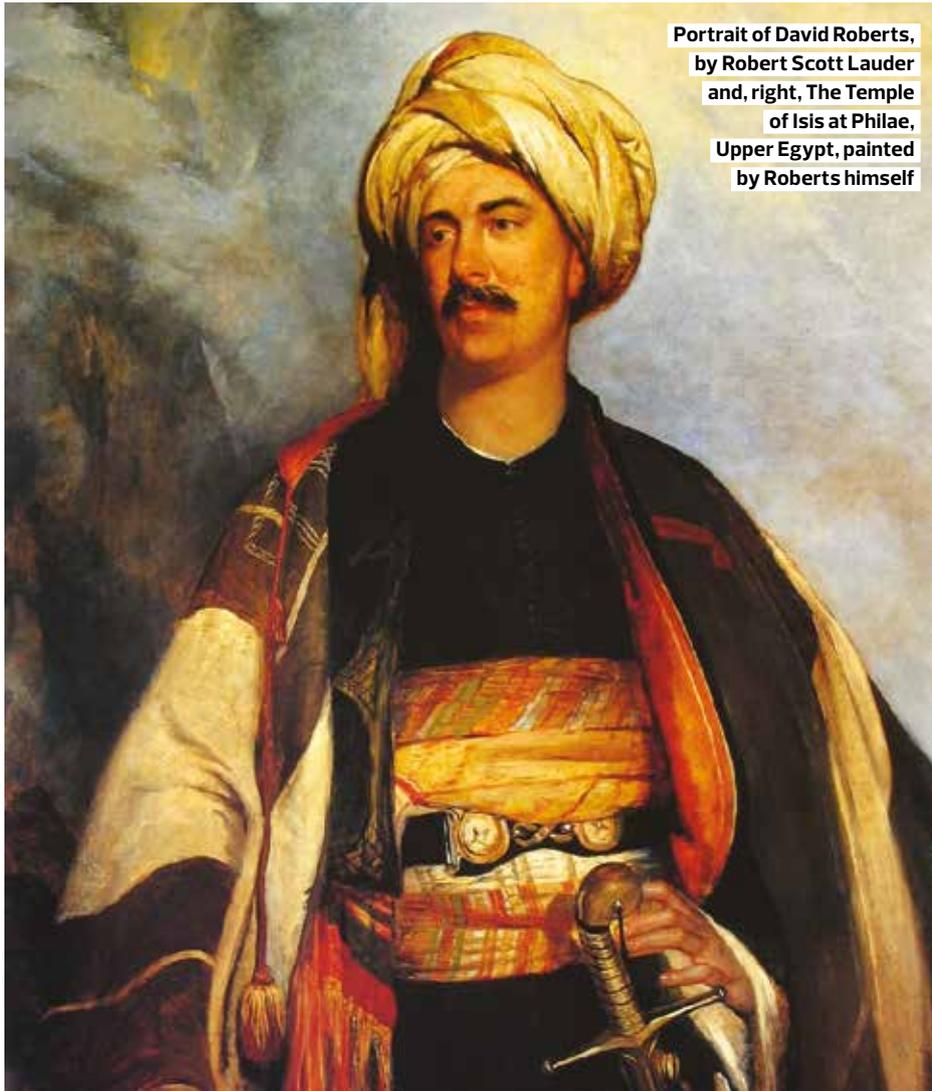
“Chapbooks and cheap pamphlets are often dirty, badly printed and appallingly illustrated but they tell us much about how life was lived in Scotland of the past and can be marvellously entertaining”

the Crowns in 1603 to the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. Around 10 years ago I discovered in the collection the only surviving parliamentary diary of this period. At that time, historians believed no such diary existed. However, within the Library's manuscripts, there was a book the catalogue described as an account of the Scottish convention of estates. The entry was misleading and it was, in fact, the parliamentary diary of James, First Duke of Hamilton (1606–1649), one of the most powerful politicians of the time. Reading his account of the parliament of 1648, written in his own hand, is as close to history as you can get. I am currently editing the diary and hope to publish it before too long.

Although I adore the many beautiful medieval manuscripts and early printed books in the Library, I also have a great regard for manky items that have survived. Broadside ballads, chapbooks and cheap pamphlets are often dirty, badly printed and appallingly illustrated but they tell us much about how life was lived in the Scotland of the past and can be marvellously entertaining.

I find the films in the Scottish Screen Archive a wonderful source of information and memory. I recently discovered a film of Scotland's victory against Czechoslovakia at Hampden Park in 1961, a football match my father attended which has nice personal memories for me. It also reminds me how important it is that the National Library continues to act as Scotland's memory bank by collecting, preserving and making accessible as many aspects of our life and culture as possible, from masterpieces of literature, to historical documents, diaries, documentary films and more.

Libraries are special places and this one is more special than most.



Portrait of David Roberts, by Robert Scott Lauder and, right, The Temple of Isis at Philae, Upper Egypt, painted by Roberts himself



The artist David Roberts began as a humble house painter. Now, 150 years after his death, his legacy endures

The art world lost one of its most distinguished and colourful figures when David Roberts died in London on 25 November 1864.

Born into poverty in Stockbridge, Edinburgh, in 1796, Roberts climbed the artistic ladder from humble house painter to theatrical scenery artist.

In this he achieved great success and his ability enabled him to move to London, where he worked at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. During this time he turned to easel painting, concentrating

on picturesque topography and architectural subjects. He exhibited frequently at the Royal Academy, becoming a full Academician in 1841.

Although London became the centre of his artistic world, Roberts never forgot his roots, frequently returning to Scotland to paint and socialise.

At the end of his life he was working on views of the Thames, but in his mind Edinburgh remained "the queen of cities". Wherever he was, often in locations rather more exotic, he would say he painted views "on the spot, à la

Roslin". Rossllyn Chapel and Roslins Glen remained among his favourite sites.

Roberts's reach was wide. By 1842, he had shot to international fame with the publication, as lithographs, of drawings made during his celebrated travels through Egypt, Sinai, Syria and the Holy Land.

More than any other artist, Roberts made the romance and exoticism of the Near East available to a wide public through original oil paintings and published reproductions. He brought Egypt, Petra and Palestine into the Victorian drawing room and library. He was also an important force in making Spanish subjects fashionable – in recording Iberian architecture and scenery he expanded traditional British cultural and artistic horizons. Roberts also painted in the Low Countries, France and Germany but, remarkably for an artist, left exploration of Italy until the 1850s.

Gregarious and affable, Roberts was well liked and connected. Friendships in art and society are reflected in his correspondence.

The National Library, which has collected his letters and papers since 1935, is the first port of call for anyone studying the life and world of Roberts. The greatest accumulation of his papers is there, ranging from single letters acquired for their subject interest to important groups of correspondence with old Scottish cronies, individual patrons, contemporary artists and fellow travellers. His manuscript *Eastern Journal*, of 1838–39, is frequently consulted.

Roberts scholars hope it might, one day, be possible to publish a complete edition of his letters and journals. If so, the National Library collection will almost certainly be the key source.

THE WRITER

Dr Iain Gordon Brown is a Fellow of the National Library of Scotland and the Library's former Principal Manuscripts Curator



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