

Scottish Artists 1750–1900

FROM CALEDONIA TO THE CONTINENT



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FIG. 16. David Roberts, *The Inauguration of the Great Exhibition: 1 May 1851, 1854*. Oil on canvas. RCIN 407143

tions influencing other artists and architects, such as Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson (1817–75) from Glasgow.

It was in connection with a painting of the Great Exhibition that Roberts came into direct contact with Prince Albert and subsequently experienced the interference and strong opinions of his royal patron. Having recorded the opening of the Great Exhibition in 1851 in a small oil painting (RCIN 405570), which was purchased by the Queen as a present for Prince Albert, he was then asked to paint a larger and more detailed record of the occasion. After discussion with the Queen and Prince Albert, Roberts found the subject unsatisfactory and progressed with difficulty. He had at least three further interviews with his patrons, for which he was summoned to Osborne, Buckingham Palace and Windsor, and during which alterations were suggested.

Prince Albert, in particular, requested changes to dress, decorations and uniforms, as well as the size of the figures. The painting was finally completed in 1854 (fig. 16) and Roberts commented, after disagreeing with the Prince about a proposed alteration, ‘I must decline His suggestion I was not a true Courtier, and I have no doubt so thought he for I have not been asked again to paint for the Court’.⁴⁷

Queen Victoria’s favourite Scottish painter was undoubtedly John Phillip, the artist from Aberdeen, whose vivid and colourful scenes of Spanish life and passion for Spanish culture led to him being known as ‘Phillip of Spain’. Scottish interest in Spain and Spanish art had been awakened by Wilkie in 1827, followed by the publication of travel books and, in 1848, the first critical account of Spanish art in English, *Annals of the*



FIG. 17. John Phillip, *The Marriage of Victoria, Princess Royal, 25 January 1858, 1860*. Oil on canvas. RCIN 406819

Artists in Spain, written by the Scot, William Stirling-Maxwell (1818–78). Recovering from illness and inspired by Wilkie and his subject matter, Phillip followed in his footsteps to Spain in 1851. The landscape of Andalusia and first-hand experience of Spanish paintings by Velázquez and Murillo had a major impact on his painting; on his return, his vibrant Spanish street scenes immediately made a mark at the Royal Academy. Their successful reception led to a series of royal commissions, which unquestionably helped Phillip’s career greatly. Landseer first brought his paintings to the attention of Queen Victoria, who was delighted by the ‘very clever & talented sketches & studies, of Spanish gypsies ... by an artist of the name of Philip’.⁴⁸ The Queen and Prince Albert were to acquire four pictures of Spanish subjects by Phillip, all given to each other as Christmas presents.

Victoria commissioned *A Spanish Gypsy Mother* (no. 41) and purchased ‘*El Paseo*’ (no. 42) for Albert in 1852 and 1854 respectively, and he gave the Queen *The Letter Writer of Seville* (no. 43) for Christmas in 1853. After a visit to the Royal Academy in 1858 the Queen acquired *The Dying Contrabandista* (no. 44) as a gift for the Prince for Christmas 1858.

As a mark of royal favour, Phillip received a prestigious commission from the Queen to record the marriage of the Princess Royal to Prince Frederick William of Prussia on 25 January 1858. Phillip must have felt that such an important commission, to include nearly fifty portraits, including those of all the royal family, would enhance his reputation as a successful artist. Phillip’s finished painting, which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1860, captures the joy and



FIG. 18. James Giles, *Balmoral Castle from the River Dee*, 1835. Oil on panel. RCIN 403052

excitement of the happy occasion, which took place at the Chapel Royal (fig. 17). Queen Victoria, her faith in the artist confirmed, commented, 'Philip's Marriage is out & out the best & quite resplendent'.⁴⁹ On his death in 1867 the *Scotsman* described Phillip as 'the most illustrious painter which Scotland has produced since Wilkie'; the Queen mourned 'the death of our greatest painter'.⁵⁰

Victoria and Albert had a deep and heartfelt love of Scotland and commissioned work from many artists to commemorate the scenery they cherished. Their interest in the country was stimulated by the novels of Sir Walter Scott; on their first visit in 1842, they viewed

Scotland through Scott's eyes and his romantic descriptions of the land and its inhabitants shaped their own views of the country. The Queen described the Highlands, on seeing them for the first time, as 'inexpressibly beautiful; such high Mountains, sometimes richly wooded, & at other times wild & barren'.⁵¹ Further visits in 1844 and 1847 convinced the Queen and Prince Albert of the desirability of acquiring their own 'Highland Home', and in 1848 the Prince took on the lease of the Balmoral estate on Deeside (fig. 18). This had become available on the death of Sir Robert Gordon, the previous leaseholder, and Sir Robert's elder brother, George Hamilton-Gordon, the 4th Earl of Aberdeen, recom-

mended the property to the Prince. The Aberdeen artist James Giles had worked for both Sir Robert and Lord Aberdeen, and it was his views of the old castle of Balmoral that were shown to the royal couple and persuaded them to take on the lease without inspecting it. On first viewing the estate in 1848, the Queen and Prince Albert were delighted, prompting Victoria to write: 'The Scenery all round is the finest almost I have seen anywhere. It is very wild & solitary & yet cheerful and beautifully wooded.'⁵² Following a walk on their first day at Balmoral, the Queen commented that 'It was so calm & solitary as one gazed around, that it did one good & seemed to breathe freedom & peace, making one forget the world & its sad turmoil'.⁵³

Giles was probably introduced to the Queen during the royal couple's visit of 1848, as she commissioned him to paint two oil paintings, of Balmoral and Lochnagar (nos 45, 46) as Christmas presents for Prince Albert, together with five watercolours. The following year Giles encountered difficulties with his royal patron when the Queen asked him to paint three more views of the surrounding area, as records of happy expeditions she had made to these places. She was very specific about the viewpoints for the three landscapes, which Giles did not always think most suitable and which were not easy to work from, but he wryly observed: 'Royal orders must be obeyed'.⁵⁴

Away from the private pleasures of Balmoral, Prince Albert engaged with the art establishment in



FIG. 19. James Giles, *Balmoral: realized design for the south-east front of the new Castle*, 1853. Watercolour and bodycolour. RCIN 452813

36 **David Roberts (1796–1864)**
A View in Cairo, 1840

Oil on canvas
23.5 x 35.4 cm
Signed and dated: *David Roberts. 1840*
RCIN 403602

PROVENANCE

Purchased by Queen Victoria for 100 guineas at the Royal Academy in 1840.

REFERENCES

Guiterman 1990, p. 44, fig. 2; London 1991a, no. 72; Millar 1992, I, no. 584; London 2010, no. 51.

David Roberts was born into poverty in Stockbridge, near Edinburgh, but became the leading topographical artist of the mid-nineteenth century. He trained initially as a house painter and decorator before moving to London in 1822 to work as a theatrical scene painter at Covent Garden and Drury Lane. He first exhibited at the Royal Society of British Artists in 1824, becoming its President in 1830, and also at the Royal Academy between 1826 and 1864. He maintained his links with Edinburgh, exhibiting in 1822 at the Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Scotland, and at the Royal Scottish Academy between 1829 and 1865. Roberts's primary inspiration was drawn from the journeys he undertook to Spain (1832–3) and the Middle East (1838–9). As only the second British artist to explore Spain, and the first to travel to the Middle East, he provided the British public with views of Spain and the Orient that were almost entirely new to them.

In 1838, when David Roberts visited Egypt, Syria and the Holy Land, this area was still undiscovered by the artistic community despite being the focus of contemporary scholarly interest. The scenes he observed

inspired 55 oil paintings of this region, painted by Roberts over the following years.

This view of Cairo shows the district of Bab Zuweyleh (also known as Metawalea), at the heart of which lies one of the three medieval gates leading into the city. Above it tower the fifteenth-century minarets of the mosque of Sultan Mu'ayyad Shaykh. Roberts relished painting the mosques of Cairo, observing that 'some of the mosques are of the most extraordinary description, of which there are not less than 400. To be the first artist that has made drawings of these Mosques is worth the trouble of a little inconvenience'.¹ This



FIG. 41. David Roberts, *The Gate of Metawalea, Cairo*, 1843. Oil on panel. Victoria and Albert Museum, London FA.176[o]



painting was one of the first to be seen in London after Roberts's return and was purchased by Queen Victoria soon after it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1840.

Another view of the *Gate of Metawalea, Cairo* was purchased from Roberts by the collector John Sheepshanks (1787–1863) in 1843 (fig. 41). In both cases, deep contrasts in light and shade and the addition of colourful foreground figures demonstrate Roberts's ability to transcend the merely topographical in the interests of dramatic effect. William Thackeray (1811–63) predicted

that there was 'a fortune to be made for painters in Cairo, and materials for a whole Academy of them'.² This proved to be correct in Roberts's case: his Middle Eastern works fetched high prices and met with great acclaim, ensuring his election to membership of the Royal Academy in 1841.

1. Guiterman 1978, p. 10.

2. W. Thackeray, *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, ed. M.A. Titmarsh, 2nd edn, London 1846, p. 205, quoted in London 1986, p. 205.

John Phillip
'El Paseo', 1854

Oil on panel
 53.4 x 42.6 cm
 Signed and dated: JP [in monogram] 1854
 RCIN 404597

PROVENANCE

Purchased by Queen Victoria and given to Prince Albert for Christmas in 1854.

REFERENCE

Millar 1992, I, no. 556.

'The Promenade' which gives the painting its name ('*El Paseo*') is suggested not only by the two Spanish girls, artfully posed in the sunlight in the foreground, but by the couple (possibly their parents) strolling in the distance beyond them on the right. Paintings like this, which captured the exotic flavour and colour of Spain, had become the mainstay of Phillip's work after his return from Madrid and Seville in 1852. They catered to the public appetite for glimpses of a country that had been inaccessible to foreigners during the Spanish War of Independence (1808–14) and had been romanticised in the popular imagination by literature such as Lord

Byron's *Don Juan* (1819) and Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen* (1845).

Phillip's Spanish subjects were very well received when they were first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1853, one critic describing how their 'colour and masterly execution astonished everyone'.¹ John Ruskin (1819–1900) alone voiced concern when he viewed '*El Paseo*' at the Royal Academy in 1855, stating that 'Mr Phillip's work ... has become vulgar'.² Ruskin's objection stemmed perhaps from the coquettish glance and gesture of the girl on the left, who raises her fan to protect herself from the glare of the sun. The 'wayward, half melancholy mystery of Spanish beauty' that Ruskin longed to see instead was to be explored further by Phillip during successive visits to Spain in 1856–7 and 1860–61.

Queen Victoria bought '*El Paseo*' for 120 guineas and gave it to Prince Albert for Christmas in 1854. It was placed in the Prince's Dressing Room at Windsor Castle.

1. Anonymous annotation in manuscript inserted in 40th Annual Report of the RSA, 1867, quoted in Aberdeen 2005, pp. 34, 87.

2. Ruskin 1856, p. 7.



49

James Giles
Sketchbook, 1848–56

Quarterbound sketchbook with black leather spine, marbled binding, 115 folios, open at fol. 31

Pen and ink

41.4 x 26.8 x 1.7 cm

RCIN 932572

PROVENANCE

Purchased by HM The Queen in 1993.

REFERENCE

Millar 1995, I, p. 29.

This sketchbook contains working studies in ink by James Giles, dated between 17 February 1848 and the end of September 1856. Many of the sketches are of deer and some relate directly to Giles's work for Queen Victoria: those on fol. 106 were used for the painting *A View of Lochnagar* (no. 46). Giles's accompanying notes often give an indication when they relate to his royal work: fol. 16, for example, is inscribed 'drawings for the Queen'. Studies of stags (fol. 34) stated to be 'for the Queen's drawing' were used in the watercolour *The Dubh Loch* (no. 48). Some of Giles's inscriptions comment on the weather – 'Commencement of a snowstorm/very cold indeed' – and his health: on one occasion he noted that his eyes were 'very, very weak' (fol. 34, dated November 1849).

Also in the sketchbook are drawings of cows, dogs and birds as well as ships, coastlines, houses and figures.



James Giles, *Sketchbook*, 1848–56. Pen and ink. Fol. 34



79 **John Smith (active 1770–1816)**
Pedestal clock, 1800–1808

Gilded oak, glass, gilt brass, brass and paint

143.5 x 60.4 x 50.0 cm

Inscribed: JOHN SMITH PITTENWEEM NORTH

BRITAIN 1804

RCIN 2918

PROVENANCE

Presented to the Duke of York (later George VI) and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon on the occasion of their marriage on 26 April 1923, by the citizens of Glasgow.

REFERENCES

Smith 1921, pp. 363–4; Jagger 1983, pp. 189–92; Hudson 1985, pp. 440–78.

This magnificent large-scale automaton and musical clock with three painted dials was made by John Smith, who came from the small fishing village of Pittenweem, in the East Neuk of Fife. By the late eighteenth century there was a strong tradition of clockmaking in Scotland, particularly in the larger towns and cities such as Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, but there were few clockmakers working in Fife. Little is known of Smith's life; in 1775 he stated in an advertisement that 'he was bred in the trade and had never been out of the country'.¹ Despite the fact that Pittenweem was tucked away in a remote corner of Fife, Smith established a successful business specialising in the manufacture of clocks with highly complicated mechanisms and distinctive dials. The tradition of clockmaking in this area of Scotland continued after his death.

The main dial, on the front of the clock, shows the time and has subsidiary dials for the month, date and day of the week, with a control for music, chiming and silence. In addition, there is a seconds ring, a lunar phases display and, in the arch, a tidal dial. The musical



dial, on the left side, shows 16 tune titles arranged in two concentric rings, set against a background of landscape scenes. The outer ring has eight marches to accompany the processions on the automata dial, such as 'God Save the King' and 'The Duke of York's March'; the inner ring has eight tunes, including 'Yellow Hair'd Laddie' and 'East Neuk of Fife', played on the hour. The automaton dial, on the left-hand side, shows two processions of figures, the upper one of 15 members of the royal family, the lower one a similar number of members of the household, who march every three hours across the exterior of a mansion, possibly intended to be a palace. The painting of the landscapes and other scenes has been attributed to the Edinburgh artist Alexander Nasmyth, who began his career apprenticed to a coach painter (no. 27).²

In 1808 John Smith is recorded as having exhibited this clock in London, together with another automaton and musical clock (NMS, H.NL 88). While he was there he had the pedestal clock valued at £900, but failed to find a purchaser for either clock. He returned to Edinburgh and in 1809 put the clocks up for sale by lottery, together with a number of other pieces. Despite making tickets available for six months, Smith only realised £500 for all the items, less than half of the expected sum. The purchaser was not recorded but in the early twentieth century the clock was acquired by William B. Smith, of Glasgow, an antiquarian and keen collector of clocks. It was exhibited in the Glasgow Exhibition of 1911 and purchased by the citizens of Glasgow in 1922. The following year it was presented to the Duke of York and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon on the occasion of their marriage.

1. Hudson 1985, p. 440.

2. Smith 1921, p. 354.)



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and works of art in the Royal Collection, visit
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Harvesters*, 1881 (detail). Oil on canvas. RCIN 409023

Page 4: Alexander Nasmyth, *View of the High Street
Edinburgh and the Lawn Market*, 1824 (detail). Oil on
canvas. RCIN 403133

Page 6: Allan Ramsay, *Queen Charlotte with her Two
Eldest Sons*, c.1764–9 (detail). Oil on canvas. RCIN
404922

Page 33: James Giles, *The boundary between Balmoral
and Invercauld, below the Keeper's House*, 1848 (detail).
Pencil and watercolour with touches of bodycolour.
RCIN 919616

Front cover: Sir David Wilkie, *The Penny Wedding*, 1818
(detail). Oil on panel. RCIN 405536

Back cover: James Giles, *A View of Balmoral*, 1848
(detail). Oil on panel. RCIN 405007

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