Visualizing Historical Greatness

The Architectural Frameworks and Display Strategies of the National Portrait Galleries in London and Edinburgh

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In this paper I will look at the two national portrait galleries in Great Britain and compare their strategies for presenting the collections of certain eminent men and women. Such strategies served to convey the significance of these figures both for the nation and for each museum's history. Choices of architecture, style, and decorative scheme, as well as the setting for the collection and its display, will be analysed in order to understand these institutional modes of reconstructing and visualizing national history.

The foundation campaigns of both museums had a stimulating effect on the development of the collections, including their accommodation in prominent, purpose-built edifices. The National Portrait Gallery in London (hereafter 'the NPG') was founded by an act of parliament in 1856.[1] The museum was housed at a number of locations before reaching its present home,[2] a building in the style of the Italian Renaissance (fig. 1) that opened in 1896, having been designed by Ewan Christian with funding from the philanthropist William Henry Alexander.[3] The Scottish National Portrait Gallery (today the National Galleries Scotland: Portrait), founded in 1882, opened the doors of its ornate neo-Gothic palace in 1889 (fig. 2).

One of the first custom-built exhibition spaces of its kind,[4] the structure was designed by Robert Rowand Anderson[5] on a commission from John Ritchie Findlay, a member of the Society of Antiquities.[6]

1 "Debate" 4 March 1856, cols. 1771–1780, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1856-03-04/debates/c8c31eda-278d-4605-a74e-910800a631ca/GalleryOfNationalPortraits.

2 1856–1869 at 29 Great Georges Street, 1870–1885 at the Royal Horticultural Society's buildings on Exhibition Road in South Kensington, followed by the Bethnal Green Museum, see Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 23–51.

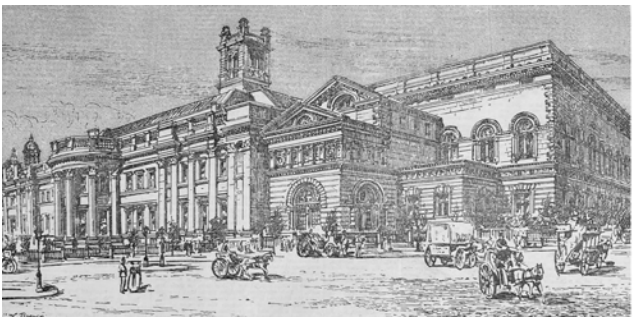
3 On the identity of the "anonymous donor": *Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1889; "The Chairman's Draft", Harding, 22 May 1889, both in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

4 See https://www.nationalgalleries.org/visit/scottish-national-portrait-gallery#.

5 "Board of Manufactures" July 1884.

6 Thomson 2011, 19–20.

Fig. 1 (left): H. W. Brewer, National Portrait Gallery, London, Perspective View of the New Buildings as They Will Appear When Complete; Fig. 2 (right): View of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery from York Place, before the sculptures had been added, ca 1890.



The formation of the NPG amid the concurrent display of portraits in Aberdeen (1856), as well as the vast loan exhibitions at the South Kensington Museum (today the Victoria and Albert Museum; 1865–1867) and in Glasgow (1868), was a driving force behind the founding of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (hereafter 'the SNPG'). The establishment of a designated building for the SNPG in Edinburgh – and the construction process as illustrated in 1887 by George Scharf, the first appointed secretary of the NPG – very likely encouraged another donor, William Henry Alexander, to offer to pay for a new building to house the London collection.[7] In the speech at the opening of the SNPG, John Inglis, Lord Justice-General of Scotland, underlined the fact of its being founded much later than its London forerunner and pointed to "a pretty strong contrast to the adventures of the London Portrait Gallery, which has been described by some of its warmest friends as 'leading a vagabond life for 30 years'". He went on to note that the "patriotic sentiment which underlies and prompts the desire of men in this country to possess authentic pictorial presentations of great and notable men and women of Scotland […] is, indeed, part of the national character" and can be traced back to much earlier days.[8] In fact, the striving for a gallery of national portraits first emerged decades earlier in the environment of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland. [▸ Breward] Among the members were David Stuart Erskine, the 11th Earl of Buchan, a keen compiler of lists and drawings of "illustrious and learned Scots" towards the end of the eighteenth century, and David Laing, the society's treasurer from 1836 to 1852, both of whom were important promoters of the idea of a national collection of portraits.[9] Laing's contact with the great Victorian historian Thomas Carlyle (fig. 3) seems to have been crucial in this matter.

7 Ibid., 32. George Scharf, *Sketch of the Temporary Gallery*, 1887, Edinburgh City Archives.

8 Watt 1893, 472, 477.

9 Ibid., 11–12.

Fig. 3: Bust of Thomas Carlyle in a roundel above the entrance to the National Portrait Gallery.

Carlyle's famous letter[10] on the value of a British historical portraits gallery is recognized as one of the two founding 'charters' of the SNPG.[11] His endeavours likewise influenced the formation of the London collection, of which he served as a trustee.[12] In publications like *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* – in which he explored his view that great men, in the sense of highly influential and unique individuals, shaped universal history through their personal contributions – he assigned a high value to pictorial representations of such persons.[13] Finding portraits to be superior to written biographies, Carlyle claimed:

> that Historical Portrait Galleries far transcend in worth all other kinds of National Collections of Pictures whatever; and that in fact they ought to exist [...] in every country as the most popular and cherished National Possession: – and it is not a joyful reflection, but an extremely mournful one, that in no country is there at present such a thing to be found.[14]

10 "Thomas Carlyle to David Laing", letter dated 3 May 1854. See also Fielding 2001, 84–90.

11 Watt 1893, 14.

12 North 2015, 497.

13 Lee 2004, 136–140; Thomson 2011, 14; North 2015, 468–469.

14 "Thomas Carlyle to David Laing", letter dated 3 May 1854.

Such a gallery appealed to him as "a Pantheon, a house of all the National Divinities where […] the better part of the soul of all men might worship".[15] In Carlyle's view, a portrait gallery operated as a means of cultivating "national identification and self-congratulations",[16] and this meant a growing feeling of national superiority and unifying patriotism in Britain and Scotland alike.[17] The need for such an institution recalls the letter of the donor John Ritchie Findlay, stating: "It has often been remarked of Scotland, that no modern country of like limited area & population has produced so many men of far more than local eminence in literature, science, arts & arms; yet Scotland has no National Portrait Gallery".[18]

Indeed, it was widely "believed that the viewing of portraits of the great and the good would stimulate self-exertion".[19] When, in 1856, Arthur Philip Stanhope proposed to the House of Lords that a national collection of portraits be established in London, he stressed its educational potential. He and the earl of Ellenborough promoted such a collection portraying "the most eminent men in British History" as a tool both for historical and moral instruction, especially with the 'industrious classes' in mind: a way of promoting the arts in general and portraiture in particular, as well as a model for portrait painters and a source of aesthetic pleasure for the public.[20] In support of this idea, Prime Minister Henry John Temple summarized the functions of the future gallery in the following way:

> There cannot, I feel convinced, be a greater incentive to mental exertion, to noble actions, to good conduct on the part of the living, than for them to see before them the features of those who have done things which are worthy of our admiration, and whose example we are more induced to imitate when they are brought before us in the visible and tangible shape of portraits.[21]

Apart from the assumed social benefit of the institution, Stanhope sought "to continue the aristocratic tradition of the ancestral gallery when the upper classes failed to do so" and to "form a gallery of the new, nationally defined 'family' of Britain".[22]

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15 Wilson 1929, 41.

16 Prescott Nuding 1989, 30–36. The genre of portraiture relates equally to a museum focused on national identity "because it offers a mix of interests, historical, artistic or aesthetic, which are often difficult to balance. Such institutions have inherited a long tradition of collections of portraits of the illustrious of the members of royal families, or great men, defined at the enlightenment"; Poulet 2015, 98.

17 Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 14.

18 "Copy of the letter John Ritchie Findlay to Sir Willliam Fettes Douglas", 23 November 1882; in this letter Findlay offered anonymously 10,000 pounds towards the founding of the National Portrait Gallery.

19 Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 15.

20 "Debate" 4 March 1856, cols. 1772–1783, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1856-03-04/debates/c8c31eda-278d-4605-a74e-910800a631ca/GalleryOfNationalPortraits. Lord Stanhope also read an extract from "Thomas Carlyle to David Laing", letter dated 3 May 1854.

21 "Debate" 6 June 1856, col. 1120, https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1856-06-06/debates/1c1235ac-cb2c-464c-87d9-13e01ef545e0/Supply%E2%80%94MiscellaneousEstimates.

22 Kornmeier 1998, 108.

Undoubtedly, in their first decades of collecting, both portrait galleries had a strong focus on depictions of the ruling elite, though quite different statements were made regarding collection policy. Stanhope pleaded for a gallery "containing portraits of men honourably distinguished in war, in statesmanship, in art and science"[23] throughout British history. Regarding the SNPG, Carlyle had advocated for the inclusion of renowned historical figures or characters, that is, "whoever 'lives' in the memory of Scotchmen, whoever is yet practically recognizable as a conspicuous worker, speaker, singer, or sufferer in the past time of Scotland".[24] However, the early display at the SNPG consisted of "images of people of such fame that there could be not argument that they were worthy of representation in the collection",[25] like Mary Queen of Scots (r. 1542–1567), the later Stuart kings, David Hume (1711–1776), and Robert Burns (1759–1796); in the beginning, such figures were represented with plaster casts of coins and medals. The institution's strong attachment to the Society of Antiquities is evident in the bequest of David Laing's twenty-six historical portraits.[26] Portraits displayed in the first room of the National Gallery in Edinburgh were gradually transferred to the SNPG, like Ramsey's portrait of David Hume.[27] Acquisition policies concerning the national identity of the historical figures were never formerly defined, but the SNPG clearly moved to illustrate Scottish history, including persons who had played an important role in the history of Scottish art.[28] In contrast, the NPG, having begun with the so-called Chandos portrait of Shakespeare, incorporated portraits of Scottish heroes, such as Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns, into their account of British literature.[29]

Contemporary discussions about the aesthetic qualities and historical values of portraiture had a strong influence on collection policies.[30] Although it had been emphasized by Carlyle, among other promoters of collections of historical portraits, that the identity of the depicted subject, as well as the authenticity of the portrayal, would outweigh the artistic qualities of any portrait, it became apparent that the aesthetic dimension needed to be considered insofar as it elicited a response in the viewer and therewith activated the image's didactic function.[31] One "cannot have good portraits […] without having good pictures", as James Caw, the inaugural director of the National Galleries of Scotland, expressed in 1903.[32] The wish for artistically valuable portraits undoubtedly caused problems in the collection policies, and the aspirations more generally, of the national portrait galleries. Indeed, concerned about the loss of portraits as historical documents, in 1856 Charles Eastlake, director of the National Gallery, London, had remarked "that a gallery

23 "Debate" 4 March 1856, col. 1774, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1856-03-04/debates/c8c31eda-278d-4605-a74e-910800a631ca/GalleryOfNationalPortraits.

24 "Thomas Carlyle to David Laing", letter dated 3 May 1854.

25 Thomson 2011, 115.

26 Goudie 1913, 134–136; Murray 1914, 357–358. Regarding the complex relationship between the SNPG and the Museum of Antiquities, see Smailes 1985.

27 Thomson 2011, 116–119.

28 Ibid., 94.

29 Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 24.

30 Thomson 2011, 93.

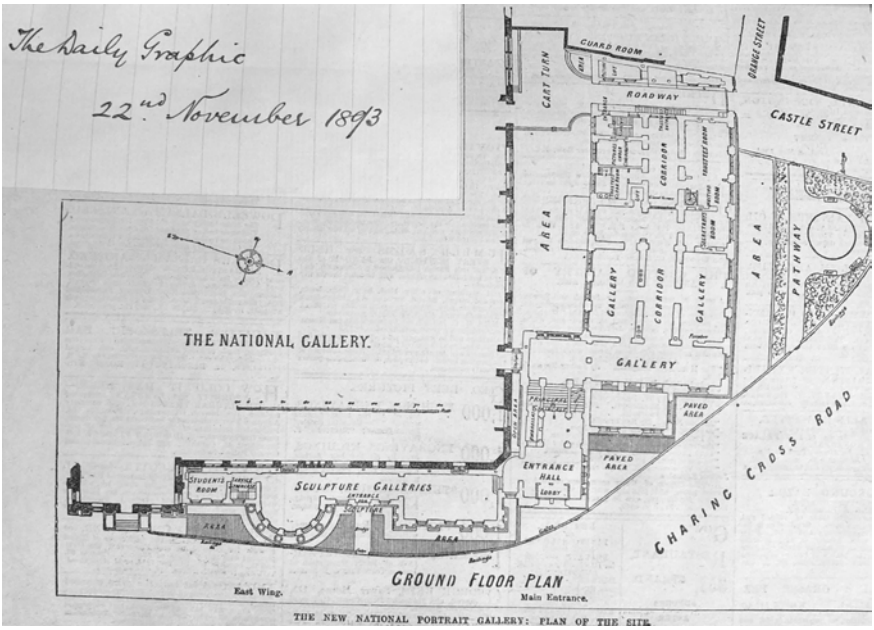
31 Barlow 1997, 219–238.

32 "Report by Departmental Committee" 1903, 39.

could be formed exclusively for authentic likenesses of celebrated individuals, not necessarily with reference to the merit of the works of art".[33]

Nevertheless, the quickly growing collections both in London and Edinburgh, each struggling with a lack of adequate space for display, prompted the search for dedicated and permanent housing. For both portrait galleries, a location at the very heart of the city was allocated – a site corresponding to each gallery's perceived significance for the nation. There can be no doubt that the NPG benefits from the large visitor flow heading towards the famous collection of the National Gallery, London, to this day. However, this government-proposed location for the NPG (fig. 4), in the area of St Martin's, caused great concern.[34]

Fig. 4: Plan of the new National Portrait Gallery site.



THE NEW NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY: PLAN OF THE SITE.

Objections were made on the issue of noise and pollution,[35] but principally on the close relation to the National Gallery building,[36] whether in terms of depriving the old

33 Quotation from "Charles Eastlake's letter to Sidney Herbert, January 1856, by Lord Stanhope", in "Debate" 4 March 1856, col. 1774, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1856-03-04/debates/c8c31eda-278d-4605-a74e-910800a631ca/GalleryOfNationalPortraits.

34 "Trustees' acceptance of a site next to the National Gallery offered by the Government", Lord Hardinge, 25 May 1889, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

35 Robinson 1889.

36 In the "General thought as to requirements for a permanent National Portrait Gallery in London, 25th MAY, 1889", the following is specified: "No communication whatever to exist between the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. Very solid walls will be required to separate

gallery of space allotted to it for an expansion project, the clash in architectural style between the two buildings, and the risk that the NPG building would diminish natural light in the National Gallery exhibition spaces.[37] Ewan Christian's ingenious architectural solution, which I will discuss later in this paper, reconciled the two buildings' architectural styles. Despite the requirement that "the institutions […] be kept perfectly distinct with separate entrances and […] floors […] without any communication between them",[38] the building plans had the disadvantage of undermining the independent status of the NPG.

Fig. 5: View of the north-east corner of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery's main façade, present day.

In contrast, the SNPG (fig. 5) is a distinctive landmark on Edinburgh's Queen Street, a grand, neo-Gothic building in red sandstone, which stands out against the surrounding plain, rectangular, Georgian-style structures of Edinburgh's new town. But in spite of its free-standing and imposing building, the SNPG could not convey its prominent collection profile to the public. This resulted in part from the circumstance, lasting until 1995, that the collection of the Society of Antiquities had to be housed in the other half of the

them. All police and watching arrangements to be totally distinct in both Institutions"; in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

37 For clash of styles, see Layard 1889. For space and light, see "Report trustees of the Treasury", 6 September 1890, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896"; Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 56–57.

38 "George Scharf to Lady Verney, letter dated 4 July 1889", in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

building.[39] This meant that the two institutions tended to merge into what was known simply as 'the museum', in spite of all conscious attempts on the part of Findlay and the donor to keep the SNPG and the Museum of Antiquity distinct by preventing any porosity between their different spaces on the building's first and top floors, respectively.[40]

Fig. 6: Robert Rowand Anderson (designer), Mount Stuart House, Isle of Bute, 1880–1885.

The selection of a neo-Gothic style for communicating the particular role of SNPG – as a national institution reclaiming Scottish history and culture[41] – is significant. Firstly, the building style must be seen in the context of the romantic movement and medievalism of the nineteenth century. One of the major players in the building's development was John Crichton Stuart, 3rd Marquess of Bute[42] and a member of the Society of Antiquities, which, guided by its antiquarian pursuits, must generally have steered the architectural conception. Stuart had become acquainted with the Gallery's architect, Robert Rowand Anderson, through their membership in the society and had given him the commission for his neo-Gothic palace Mount Stuart in 1880–1885 (fig. 6).[43]

39 See "Treasury" 1884.

40 Thomson 2011, 71. The donor expressed "that in the new building the Antiquaries should have accommodation equal to that devoted to the Portrait Gallery" and "insist[ed] also that the Portrait Gallery should be kept by itself, so to speak, as to entrances, elevations, and other arrangements, so distinctly as to avoid all possibility of its being confounded in the mind or eye of the public with any other Institution accommodated in the same building"; "Board of Manufactures" November 1884.

41 On his donation, in 1895, Findlay also articulated his desire "to make the National Portrait Gallery Building, as far as I possibly can, worthy of the purpose to which it is dedicated – the illustration of Scottish History and of the men, who made that history", see "Mr J. R. Findlay" 3 December 1895.

42 Thomson 2011, 21.

43 McKinstry 1991, 78–80. Anderson was a Gothic specialist who had collaborated also with William Burges.

In addition, the literary treatment of the nation's medieval heritage in the work of Sir Walter Scott, and its role in shaping Scottish identity during the nineteenth century[44] – commemorated by one of the most prominent Gothic Revival monuments[45] near Edinburgh's main station – may have strongly influenced the stylistic decision. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Gothic Revival had generally been recognized as a British national style, linked to the origins of the nation and to its values, particularly the constitution and the underlying idea of freedom.[46] What could therefore be more appropriate than to work in an architectural style, associated with such iconic and historically evocative buildings as Westminster Palace, that would speak to the importance of the institutionalized display of Scottish history undertaken at the SNPG. When Anderson designed a regular building block, repeating his design of Mount Stuart on a larger scale,[47] with turrets at the four corners in the style of, in his own words, the "Secular Gothic of the latter half of the thirteenth century",[48] he may have taken as a model Gothic residences in France like the *Maison du Grand Veneur*,[49] which he had seen on his continental tour. However, perhaps equally inspiring to him were the Gothic Revivalist buildings of his former employer in London, George Gilbert Scott, well known for the design of the imposing, polychrome elevation of the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras.[50]

An extensive decorative scheme characterizes the SNPG building,[51] elevating the expectations of the visitor and preparing him or her to experience the collection therein. In this sense, the façade acts like the outside of a medieval shrine. Between the clusters of twinned windows, as well as around the corner towers, twenty-eight statues (erected 1899–1906) appeared in canopied niches, interspersing royals, including Queen Mary, presented with two courtiers and James IV, as well as philosophers of the Enlightenment, the reformer John Knox, four Renaissance poets, an admiral, a general, and the painter Henry Reaburn.[52] Findlay suggested identifying the sculpted figures with inscriptions, but this never gained acceptance; therefore, the illustration of Scottish history

44 Brooks 1999, 92–93; Gottlieb 2004, 187–207; and Glendinning and MacKechnie 2019, 133–162.

45 Colston 1881.

46 Brooks 1999, 42–45; Bradley 2002, 332–340.

47 McKinstry 1991, 111.

48 Watt 1893, 476. Anderson also explained that the Gothic style had been adopted for "Considerations of utility as well as beauty", allowing also for flexible fenestral arrangements; McKinstry 1991, 111.

49 Anderson recorded secular and domestic Gothic architecture, "most of which was little known outside France and Italy". His publication *The Domestic and Street Architecture of France and Italy* (1868) featured prominently buildings in the styles of the early and geometric Gothic, such as the *Maison du Grand Veneur* in Cordes-sur-Ciel. See McKinstry 1991, 24–25.

50 McKinstry 1991, 21–22; Brooks 1999, 324–325.

51 The sculptures were meant as part of the general plan of decoration by which the presence of the building was to be "beautified and ennobles all the rest", as Anderson stated, see Smailes 1985, 37. Lord Justice-General also expressed "that the union of sculpture and architecture is most desirable"; Watt 1893, 476.

52 Thomson 2011, 47–53. In the opening speech on the genesis of the National Portrait Gallery, Lord Justice-General pointed out that "it surely would be most appropriate that these niches should be filled with statues of eminent Scotsmen of times past". See "Opening of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery" 1888–1889, 248; Watt 1893, 476.

on the façade remained somewhat vague.[53] Moreover, the figural sculptures reproduced the personalities portrayed inside the building, and this had the effect of turning the collection inside out. The figures' positioning high on the edifice, and their sheltering under elaborated baldachins, made apparent their elevated ranks, a device well suited to indicating the value of the portrait collection. In the manner of the figural programme of a church façade representing the communion of saints – the *ecclesia* – the statues evoke the heart and body of the nation.

Fig. 7: View of the central portal of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

The central portal (fig. 7), with its textural richness, outlines what constitutes the nation, its character, and its values. Under the figure of History sits Scotia, accompanied by the allegories of Industry and Religion, while relief panels alluding to Fine Art and

53 Thomson 2011, 52. Even in the 1930s, the lack of any indication as to whom the statues represented was an issue, and the placement of an inscription was considered, see "Letter" 14 July 1932.

Science.[54] With the life-size statues of the knight William Wallace and King Robert the Bruce flanking the entrance, welcoming the visitor, strong emphasis is placed on national sentiment in connection with the Wars of Scottish Independence (1296–1357). Armorial bearings play a major role in the decorative scheme of the building: continued within the entrance hall, these underline a medieval aristocratic heritage and thus a rather romantic view of Scotland's heroic history.[55]

The architecture of the NPG (fig. 8) tells a different story. In taking care that the character of the proposed building be consonant with that of the National Gallery, the architect Ewan Christian, rather a committed 'Goth', resorted to a variable classical vocabulary.[56] In order to master the problems of the site, with its north-south slope, Christian created three linked but visually distinct components – the east block, the entrance block, and the north block.[57] The entrance block, in the style of a Florentine Renaissance palazzo with rusticated banding,[58] and based on the layout of the fifteenth-century façade of Santo Spirito in Bologna (fig. 9), is designed to join together the neoclassical pilaster front facing Charing Cross Road and the three-storey block in the south. In terms of the stylistic orientation, he followed a continental trend in the architectural conception of fine-arts museums[59] – as reflected in the galleries in Munich (*Neue Pinakothek* / New Pinacotheca, 1846–1853) and Kassel (*Neue Galerie* / New Gallery, 1871–1877) – while at the

54 Thomson 2011, 47.

55 Gilbert Stuart's influential work *View of Society in Europe* (1778), emphasizing the importance of feudal notions of knighthood and chivalric duty in medieval and constitutional history, appealed to the Romantics, with Scott as a leading protagonist, see Allen 2021, 31–34. It may also have been foundational for the historical scheme of the SNPG. The concept "carried strong late-romantic overtones of nationalism and heroism", as noted in McKinstry 1991, 111.

56 "Charles Hardinge to David Punket, letter dated 21 February 1889", in the *Daily Graphic*, 22 November 1893, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896". Hardinge's concern is that "the elevation of the New National Portrait Gallery should be in harmony with the existing elevation of the National Gallery". For Ewan Christian, see Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 76–77; Stamp 2014, 92–93.

57 "The eastern wing, facing Chandos-street. It is a continuation of the façade of the National Gallery along the depth of the building, […] To do this satisfactorily was extremely difficult, owing partly to the rising of the ground from Trafalgar-square, but chiefly to the awkward shape of the piece of land at disposal"; *Daily News*, 5 September 1892, 3.

58 Referring to the eastern façade as "Florentine in some of its characteristics"; ibid., 3. See also "Volume of Architectural Plans".

59 "Mr. Christian visited several Continental picture galleries and found many of the best-shown pictures were lighted by windows"; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 July 1891, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896". See also Ewan Christian to George Scharf, letter dated 24 November 1890: the former proposed the tower design, which had raised questions in Parliament about the overshadowing of the National Gallery. Christian also suggested a cabinet system resembling ones he had seen at the *Neue Galerie* (New Gallery, 1871–1877) in Kassel; the *Sempergalerie* (Semper Gallery, 1847–1854) in Dresden; the *Alte Nationalgalerie* (Old National Gallery, 1862–1876) in Berlin; and the *Städelsches Kunstinstitut* (Städel Art Institute, 1878) in Frankfurt, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

same time alluding to famous Renaissance patrons and collectors like the Medici, which in turn assigned importance to the portrait collection housed in such an edifice.[60]

Fig. 8 (left): View of the National Portrait Gallery's main entrance, joining the east and north block, present day; Fig. 9 (right): Façade of Santo Spirito, Bologna, fifteenth century.

The donor William Henry Alexander, who had insisted on Christian as the architect for the project, suggested that the building be as well designed as possible while remaining plain and devoid of lavish ornamentation (fig. 10).[61] According to these specifications, and to save money, the possibility of a sculptural frieze of figures in scenes from British history had to be abandoned.[62] As principal elements of the ornamentation and as a unifying design, eighteen busts were applied in roundels around the top of the façade, proceeding from the entrance towards the north block. This display of worthy individuals differs distinctly from the decorative scheme, and the associated ideas, of the SNPG in portraying not historical subjects but rather the major players responsible for the existence of the London portrait collection.[63] Above the entrance can be seen Earl Stanhope, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and Thomas Carlyle, the key promoters of the NPG, followed by biographical writers and historians, among them James Granger and Horace

60 Leo von Klenze, architect of the *Alte Pinakothek* (Old Pinacotheca) in Munich, recognized the Renaissance gallery as a predecessor to Munich's New Pinacotheca, and the Medici's *Palazzi Pitti* as a prototype for picture collections generally. See Plagemann 1967, 84.

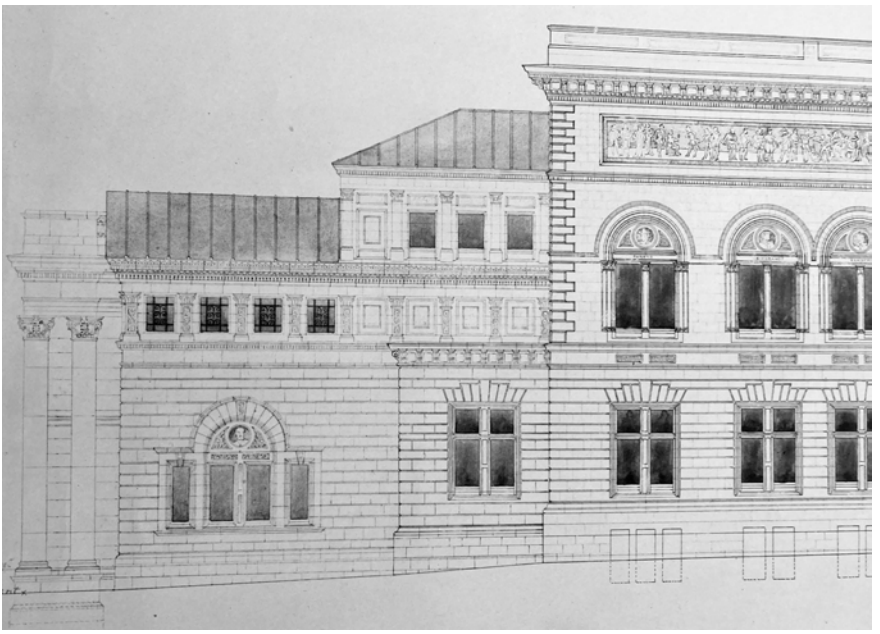
61 *Daily Graphic*, 22 November 1893, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

62 Image of the design in the *Westminster Gazette*, 31 July 1893, and *Daily Graphic*, 22 November 1893, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

63 "External Decoration: Portrait busts within circular frames are let into the north and east wall and represent artists and authors who have contributed so much to the formation of the Gallery and to perpetuate our National Worthies. 'Artists', on the one hand, through whose pencil or chisel we are enabled to realize the physiognomy and appearance of those represented within, and, on the other hand, 'Author and Historians' through whose pen (narrating the events of their lives and uttering their thoughts) we are convinced of the worthiness of the portraits selected for public distinction in the Gallery"; "Thirty-Sixth Annual Report – 1893", in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

Walpole, and concluding with a succession of famous portrait painters such as Lawrence, Reynolds, Hogarth, Lely, Van Dyck, and Holbein.[64] The clearly labelled scheme refers to portraits as a vehicle for enacting British history and pays tribute to a cultural awareness of the historical value of such a collection, while the SNPG focuses on the leading figures of history itself. In addition, the more abstract, self-reflective scheme of the NPG is apparent in the presentation of busts in the form of memorial plates, in contrast to the life-size figures on the SNPG façade, which, similar to an effigy, evoke the past in a more tangible way.

Fig. 10: Robert Rowand Anderson, National Portrait Gallery, Detail of the North Elevation.



Altogether, in Edinburgh a rather romantic concept seems to have taken hold, particularly in the way the building harkens back to the nation's preindustrial past. Like columns supporting the building's structure, the statues act as guarantors of a prosperous Scottish history. An equivalent perspective, looking into the glorious past, is taken up inside the SNPG. Entering the gallery, the visitor is welcomed by the spacious Great Hall (fig. 11), in the tradition of medieval residences.[65] Designed in a high Gothic style, the space is decorated with a procession of 155 full-length figures of famous Scots, who march in reverse chronology, clockwise, from Thomas Carlyle to a Stone Age axeman along the

64 North side: Chantrey, Lawrence, Reynolds, Hogarth, Roubiliac, Kneller, Lely, Van Dyck, Holbein; north side of the principal entrance: Lodge, Faithorne, Granger; east side of the principal entrance: Macaulay, Stanhope, Carlyle. See the *Daily Graphic*, 22 November 1893, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

65 Anderson again took recourse to his design of Mount Stuart, which shows a great hall similar to the entrance hall of the SNPG.

first-floor balustrade.[66] Central focus is placed on a seated female Caledonia (fig. 12), towards whom the Stone Age figures turn "with a suggestion of veneration".[67]

Fig. 11 (left): View of the entrance hall of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; Fig. 12 (right): View of the north side of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery's entrance hall, with mosaic frieze (central figure of Caledonia) and night sky ceiling.

In order not to tarnish the story of a successful and prosperous nation, the proposed figure of Oliver Cromwell was not included, and the defeat of Charles I was edited out.[68] Assigned greatness by being elevated in such a grand space, as well as by being set against a golden mosaic ground, a particularly dignified materiality, the assembly is bound to generate veneration and, with it, the emulation by the beholder. Presented below the night sky of the Northern Hemisphere painted on the ceiling,[69] the vast decorative scheme carried out by William Hole (fig. 13) – which also includes a series of large-scale murals on the first floor – shows scenes from Scottish history, with a tendency towards the warlike.[70] The main hall provides a breathtaking introduction to Scottish history, but one that is clearly embedded in the aristocratic tradition, as manifested in the prolific heraldic scheme, which bestows on the space the venerable air of a 'hall of the ancestors'. Tangible right from the beginning is Carlyle's notion that individual great men (and occasionally great women) shape the history of a nation. As a unified whole, the almost holy procession, framed by the zodiac signs in the sky, suggests greatness and significance on a universal and eternal level. The golden backdrop, a device by which the saints are dignified in medieval painting, signals a pseudo-religious idealization of the worthies of the nation.

66 Thomson 2011, 53.

67 Ibid.

68 Louis 2022.

69 Thomson 2011, 61.

70 "Subjects for the decoration": "3. The Battle of Largs", "4. The Battle of Stirling Bridge", "5. King Robert Bruce single-handed fight with the three Macdougalls", "6. The Battle of Bannockburn".

Fig. 13: View of the ambulatory of the entrance hall, with William Hole's murals; to the west: The Defeat of Haakon, King of Norway, by Alexander III at Largs, A.D. 1263.

There can be no doubt that Hole's murals, with their muted tones and gold grounds, are guided by the concept behind Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's work in the *Panthéon* in Paris, which set an important precedent with its statement of national renewal based on the life of Sainte Geneviève.[71] [▸ Strunck] Both programmes share the deliberate purpose of glorifying the nation's history and of elaborating its own myth.

Thus prepared, the visitor enters the SNPG (not the Museum of Antiquities, however, which is separated from the hall). Early on, the collection was confined to the first-floor gallery,[72] which consisted virtually of one large room divided by an arcaded wall (fig. 14), continuing the noble architectural layout of the hall with strong reference to the traditional 'long gallery' found in grand houses. Stained glass, with the small armorial bearings often used in Gothic Revival schemes to evoke a venerable heritage, was also employed in the gallery's early decoration.[73]

71 Hole was probably looking to the vision of an ideal past evident in Puvis de Chavannes's *Le Repos* or his Sainte Geneviève cycle at the *Panthéon* in Paris, see Willsdon 2000, 278. Reynolds has also pointed the close artistic connection between Edinburgh and Paris, see Reynolds 2016, 37–44.

72 "The Scottish National Portrait Gallery" 1889, 44.

73 Findlay suggested that "the Windows in the Hall, ambulatory and staircase, or a certain number of them, might filled with painted glass, illustrative of scenes and personages in Scottish History"; "Mr J. R. Findlay" 3 December 1895. He had been opposed to such decorations for the gallery windows in the interest of maximizing light, see Thomson 2011, 59.

Fig. 14: View of the ground-floor gallery of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, ca 1900.

A shortage of space for hanging pictures soon became a problem, particularly owing to the main walls being broken up by arcades and large windows, and therefore mobile wooden screens were inserted.[74] Further, the undivided space was not conducive to the display of the portraits in subgroups. Because, according to the catalogue, neither a stringent chronology nor another systematic arrangement was applied in the installation, and because the labels accompanying the portraits only indicated the identity of subject and artist, it seems that the gallery implemented a mode of display that was prevalent in private collections.[75] Even though a published catalogue provided extensive biographies of both the sitter and artist, along with the provenance of the painting, the installation's approach to Scottish history was geared towards an emotional and intuitive reception. This would seem to follow the prescriptions laid out by Findlay, namely, "that the Gallery should be started in a popular & effective style".[76]

The NPG's hanging policy seems to have been more didactic and educational in character. The main gallery (fig. 15) on the three floors of the north block were generally arranged in chronological order, or else the portraits were grouped according to profession, which included eminent women, albeit in a separate room.[77] Scharf classified the

74 Thomson 2011, 63.

75 Gray 1890.

76 "Copy of the letter John Ritchie Findlay to Sir William Fettes Douglas" 22 December 1883.

77 "On the TOP FLOOR the Portraits are arranged CHRONOLOGICALLY as far as possible beginning in Rooms I. and II: at the N.W. angle of the building and ending in Room XI. The large portraits in Room XII. Are not arranged chronologically on account of their size. […] On the FIRST FLOOR the Portraits are grouped in classes, as far as they allow, Artists […] Statesmen, Divines, Eminent

pictures on artistic merit as 'A', 'B', or 'C', advising that "the best pictures require the best light" and should be hung on the top floor, "lighted with skylights".[78] This systematic display was supported by the layout of the room, consisting of a series of cabinets running along a central floor.[79] Altogether, it seems that the concept followed the contemporary standards of fine-arts galleries concerning systematic display with the purpose of underlining the value of a portrait collection, in this case for the British nation. This included providing a catalogue with information on the sitters and on the provenance of the artwork and fixing large tablets to the frames to give extra biographical details, all of which facilitated the study of the portraits and of the nation's history.[80] The use of different colours for the walls of the display spaces served to break up the monotony that resulted from the uniform artistic genre. At the same time, the choice of wall colours was also guided by the necessity to create a neutral background that would allow for a flexible hanging, whether in chronological order or otherwise.[81] To create a display similar in scale and decoration to a domestic interior[82] – where the works on view often came from, in fact – the scale of the rooms was kept of modest size; no grand rooms were planned. Moreover, the interior was rather soberly treated, with originally proposed furnishings such as oak panelling ultimately excluded, in order to retain as much hanging space as possible.[83] The space was geared towards a didactic purpose, allowing the visitor to view the portraits without being distracted by architectural splendour.

Women, having separate rooms. […] On the GROUND FLOOR a room is allotted to Portraits of Judges. On the Upper Basements will be found the large pictures of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Visitors desiring to follow the historical sequence of the Portraits should ascend at once to the Top Floor"; in "Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Trustees of The National Portrait Gallery, 1896", in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

78 "Scheme for moving and hanging pictures" by George Scharf, 10 January 1895, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

79 Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 132.

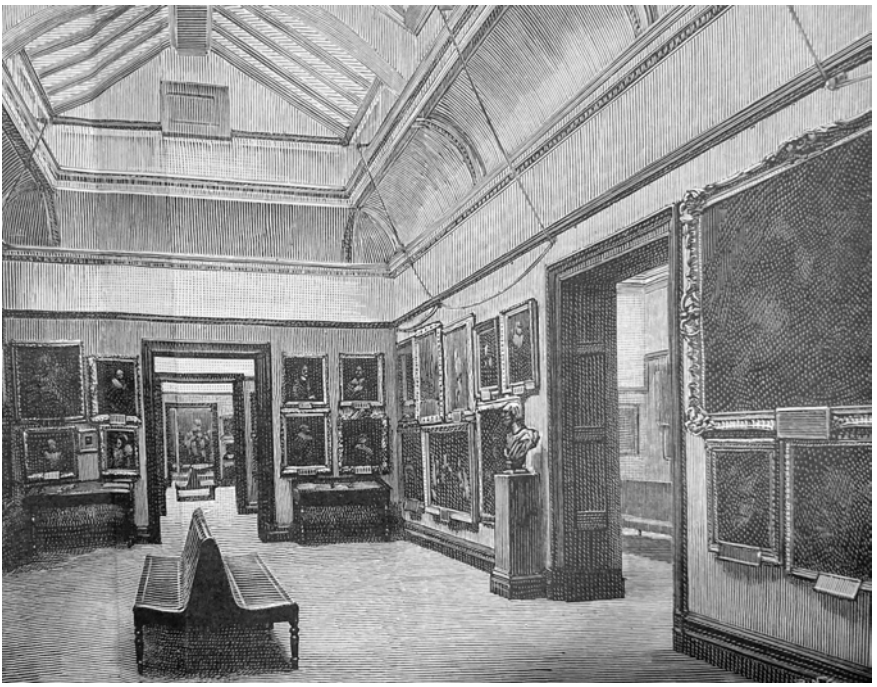
80 "The new catalogue of the collection […] will be an epitome of national biography. We would advise visitors to get this catalogue if they wish to enjoy their inspection of the pictures, but it is not necessary to obtain it to distinguish who the pictures represent, as tablets affixed to the frames explain fully the subject of the portraits"; *London Gazette*, 2 April 1896, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

81 "Extract from a letter addressed by Sir George Scharf to Ewan Christian, 13 February 1895", in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896": "I would rather see the pictures up first on a dull neutral colour quite plain, some reddish (not brickly but crimsony) some greenish some brownish + some grey. No blue. Our arrangements of the pictures may require shifting and hanging, as the pictures must be hung chronologically, the colour of the wall cannot guide us".

82 "There are large rooms and small ones; […] nearly all have a certain air of cosiness and domesticity. As far as appearances go, in the possession of a person of wealth and taste"; *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 4 April 1896, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

83 "Trustees minutes, 21 March 1892", in: Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 127.

Fig. 15: Russell and Sons, Top-Floor Gallery, Room Containing Portraits of the Stuart Period, National Portrait Gallery, engraving.



Nevertheless, for the entrance and staircase (fig. 16) a more decorative scheme was desired.[84] The entrance featured a mosaic floor and an elaborate timber frame roof, while the staircase, imperial in form, was marked by round arches at the entrances.[85] The designs were modelled on Renaissance architecture, a style that conformed with the exterior of the building and stimulated the required mindset of appreciation for the historical value of this portrait collection. The topmost leg of the central flight was flanked by round arcades and foliated capitals.[86] Together with the tunnel vaulting of the stairs, the decoration seems to refer back to the medieval heritage of the British nation and to the earliest paintings in the collection.[87]

84 "Staircase architecturally ornamental, to occupy the full height of the building, and to be lighted from the top"; "General thought as to requirements for a permanent National Portrait Gallery in London, 25th MAY, 1889", in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

85 Hulme, Buchanan, and Powell 2000, 129.

86 Ibid., 130.

87 "Something of gloom, something of frigidity struck us one first visit. There is none of the lightness and splendour which dazzles in the vestibule of the adjacent and older building. Perhaps there is a certain rawness that chills in every edifice which has not yet been used; but the deep red line of the wood of the parquet flooring, the sombre tones of the pavements in the corridors, and the heavy round arches combine to give a vault-like effect to the interior, for which the exterior of the edifice hardly prepares us"; *The Echo*, 2 April 1896, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

Fig. 16: View of H. W. Brewer's The Imperial Staircase from the NPG's Royal Gallery, drawing.

Conclusions

The buildings of both national galleries demonstrate the wish of the founders to provide for their portrait collection, creating an architectural framework that reflects the significance of the collection for its nation. And although the collections are also similar to each other in the range and type of portraits they contain, very different approaches were taken to conveying the importance of these holdings by means of architectural and decorative schemes as well as display policies. The Edinburgh building – with its Gothic façade, solemn entrance hall, and picture display in a grand, undivided space – points to Scotland's glorious past, dating back to medieval times. Particularly crucial for the understanding of this collection is the gallery's entrance hall, which further expanded the romantic conception of the 'great man' theory, alongside feudal notions of knighthood and chivalry. Here, the SNPG enacts a truly sensual and emotional appeal to the visitor, setting the tone for the reception of the collection. [▸ Beck]

The NPG shows a more rational approach, grounded on Enlightenment ideals and visualized by a classical architectural formula. The façade does not celebrate the worthies of the nation, who are presented in the collection itself, but rather represents the formation of an institution as a progressive stride to educate the nation. Similarly, inside the gallery the visitor is not distracted by grand spaces nor by elaborate decoration. The entrance is designed to direct him or her immediately to the central staircase, which leads to the different levels of the exhibition space. There, the visitor is guided through a systematic, institutionalized hang of portraits. In fact, the NPG controlled the viewing and

interpretation of the collection through aspects of the hanging. The contemporary press's censure that the NPG had failed in its purpose to celebrate the imperial idea reveals a paradigm shift concerning the decorum of collection display for the nation, namely, towards refraining from epic pictorial cycles with their recourse to a glorious past and their patriotic trappings.[88] That, at last, becomes clear in the way both galleries commemorate their donors, who through their generous support provided each collection with a permanent and prestigious housing. The NPG commemorates William Henry Alexander with a modest, mainly informative, plaque on the landing of the first-floor mezzanine. Findlay, for his part, receives his own memorial (fig. 17) in the entrance hall, with a portrait at the centre, thereby singling him out as the only contemporary in the assembly of the worthy on the frieze.

With this monumental memorial, the SNPG again uses magnificence and a tangible visual representation to engage the visitor. Shifting from Gothic to Renaissance styles with this sumptuous tabernacle-framed memorial, the programme aligns Findlay with famous Florentine donors – and the SNPG itself with the famous collections at the *Uffizi* and the *Palazzo Pitti*.

88 "[…] it cannot been said too strongly that, while the building is plain and unaggressive, it is certainly not beautiful, not well adapted to the purpose for which it was built, and quite unworthy of the imperial idea it should have embodied. The galleries are small and narrow and not half high enough for the method of lighting that is rendered necessary by the elevation, they scattered, too, over several storeys; and the connecting staircases are more suggestive of Clapham Junction than of a Walhalla of the Great, and although the pictures are as well arranged as space permits, there is so little space that many can only just discerned in the gloom."; *Westminster Gazette*, 2 April 1896, in: "National Portrait Gallery, New Building 1889–1896".

Fig. 17: View of the entrance hall of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, with Georg Reid's John Ritchie Findlay-Memorial (1899).

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