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A SCOTTISH ROCOCO BOOKPLATE AND ITS PEERS

IAN GOW

THE BOOKPLATE of William Lockhart of Craighouse, in spite of its diminutive size, has sufficient stature as a work of art to suggest that there may have been a late flowering of rococo design in Scotland (fig. 1). The cartouche is immediately striking in its asymmetry but also for the degree of detail packed into its mere 1 7/8" x 2 1/4". Studying its ornaments is rather like taking a stroll through a rococo garden diversified by the liveliest of incidents both architectural and botanic. There are no less than four vases of differing forms spouting fountains, vapours or nosegays, while the thistles at the foot give way to roses and a variety of floral sprays. Although the design might be criticised for a certain 'busyness', the etcher has a certainty of touch which is the more impressive in this tiny compass and the forms are built up with both control and clarity.

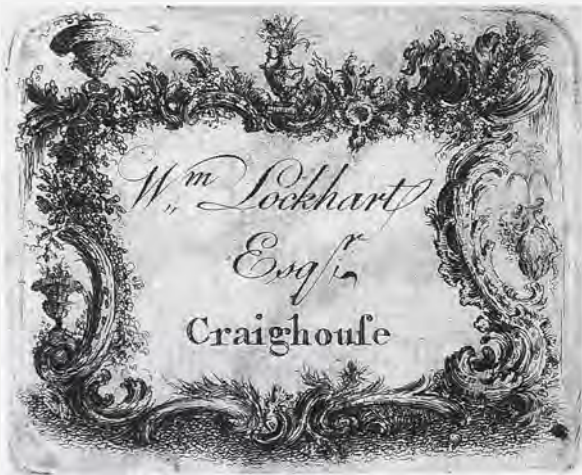


Fig. 1. Bookplate of William Lockhart of Craighouse. (Private Collection.)

Sadly this bookplate is neither signed nor dated. William Lockhart must have been a relation of Sir Alexander Lockhart, Dean of the Faculty of



Fig. 2. Rococo cartouche engraved by Patrick Begbie for James Craig's design for St James's Square, Edinburgh, 1773. (National Monuments Record of Scotland.)

Advocates, who is known to have held Craighouse in the eighteenth century and was presumably connected with the Lockharts who had given their name to nearby Craiglockhart several hundred years before.¹ It is very disappointing not to know the name of the master of the Lockhart bookplate, but his style is sufficiently distinctive to extend the hope of discovering peers.

The closest parallel in the collections of the National Monuments Record of Scotland is the cartouche on James Craig's design of 1773 for St James's Square in Edinburgh (fig. 2). Although this design has a boldness imparted by the difference of technique required to engrave a copper plate, the same asymmetry, vase-forms and vegetation predominate. Happily this plate is signed 'Begbie'. Craig's tolerance of this rococo caprice comes as no surprise because his architectural drawings were often marked by a similar skittishness. Both the festoons on his country house design at Crawford Priory,² and the floral wreath on the pedestal of his design for Provost Kincaid's monument

for Greyfriars in 1783,³ have a lack of substance that would have challenged his stonecarvers.

The St James's Square cartouche follows on from the resplendent rococo ornament that proudly headed Craig's engraved plan for the New Town of 1767, which is also signed by Begbie, although its publishing history is complex (fig. 3).⁴ The finesse of this cartouche, whose purpose was to frame the poetry of Craig's uncle, James Thomson,⁵ must surely stem from the skills of the engraver rather than the architect. Although it is positively action-packed with every conceivable attribute of architecture and two hazy visions of the elegant new city that was to arise upon the rough farmland realistically depicted in the foreground replete with central thistles, the design is a close relation of the Lockhart bookplate. Indeed, were it not for the calibre of the bookplate's etching it would be easy to make a case for the New Town cartouche having formed a direct model for the former, down to the necessary reversal in execution.

In comparison with the suavity of the New Town

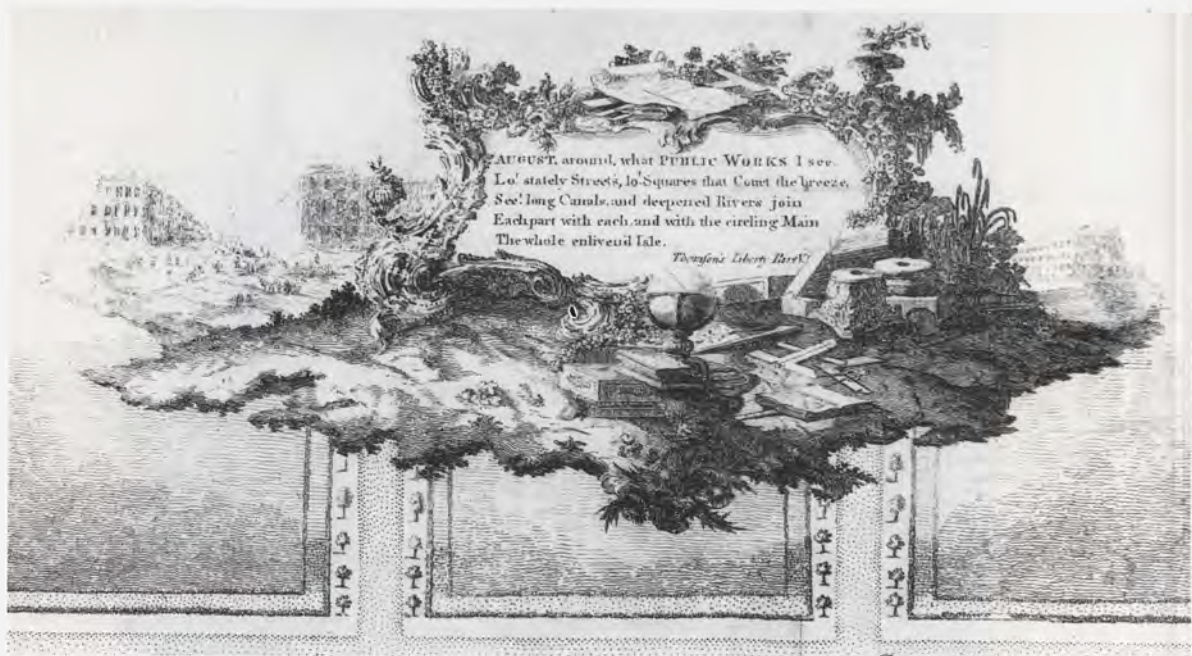


Fig. 3. Cartouche engraved by Patrick Begbie for James Craig's Plan for the New Town of Edinburgh, 1767-68. (*National Monuments Record of Scotland.*)

GD 150/3292

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Brown Ditta	10	Draperies the Russian manner	1/1 1/2 1/6
Strong Linn Linen 2 1/2 to wide	7 1/6	Respers or Pique Sheet	4 8
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Ditto 2 1/8	4 10	Diaper in the piece from	1/7 1/6
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Ditto Hard wide	11 9	Diaper Table napkins doz 12	30
Ditto Military Sherting	8 1/2 1/2	Tamask Table Cloths 10 to 12 q. 5	60
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Cambric Holland	3/ 7	Toweling 12. 12. Napkins	1/2 1/2 1/6
Cambric	2/6 1/2	Washed tea Napkins doz 20	60
Long Lawn	1/4 6	White Towels 3 q. wide from	1/2 5 1/2
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Fig. 4. Engraved advertisement for the Linen Hall at Moray House, Edinburgh, 1774. (Scottish Record Office, GD 150/3292/1/40.)

cartouche, which must have owed a great deal to Craig's vigilance in ensuring the most polished result, the final design in this series can only be classified as outrageous. With the printed advertisement for the Edinburgh Linen Hall we necessarily enter a world of the deliberately eye-catching in the service of commerce rather than of honouring the muses (fig. 4). And yet, the Linen Hall established at Moray House (which is depicted in the upper vignette) had close links with the impressive national endeavours to improve trade promoted by the Board of Manufactures.⁶ In 1760 they had established their own School of Design in Edinburgh. If the Lockhart bookplate can be compared to a stroll through a landscape garden, close inspection of the Linen Hall ticket is more like a strenuous hike through a full-blown rococo park. The ticket is not signed, but the reverse was used as a receipt for twenty yards of linen purchased on the premises on 4 February 1774.

It is tempting to attribute this entire *oeuvre* to Patrick Begbie, especially when so little is known of his life that there is as yet no fear of contradiction. The bare facts were set out by Bushnell in 1949.⁷ In 1773-74 Begbie was resident in Blyth's Close, Castlehill. A bookplate signed by Begbie in Edinburgh for Dr Boswell is illustrated in H. W. Fincham's *Artists and Engravers of English and American Bookplates* (1897). Although it differs in format (being based around a portrait bust in a circular frame) it has – like the Lockhart plate – a degree of incident out of all proportion to its size. Begbie's skills were sufficiently valued for him to be entrusted by Robert Adam, who was notoriously difficult to please, with the engraving of several of the plates for *The Works in Architecture* during the 1770s.⁸ It may be significant that Begbie was responsible for plates depicting the intricacies of Adam furnishings, like the celebrated decorative study of the Kenwood sideboard loaded with Neo-Classical silver, rather than bolder architectural designs. Like many masters of the rococo, whose ranks include the

furniture designers Thomas Chippendale and John Linnell, first-hand contact with the antique manner of Robert Adam seems to have precipitated a shift in style. In March 1779 a slim volume entitled *Vases after the Manner of the Antique* by P. Begbie was published.⁹ This may have been intended to promote his removal to London where he is recorded at Duke's Court, St Martin's Lane, from 1777 to 1780. The etched plates reveal that Begbie was quite incapable of buckling down to the rigour demanded by the Neo-Classical style. His vases totter on the most insubstantial bases and the ornaments include dragons whose tails whiplash around the handles. A greater sobriety was necessarily imparted to his plates for John Wood's *Series of Plans for Cottages or Habitations of the Labourer* (1806). The researches of William Johnston in the files of the *Scots Magazine* suggest that Begbie died at Tinian near Dunfermline in January 1820.

The vitality of these rococo engravings invite speculation as to whether the style extended to other media at this period. There is a close parallel in the bookbindings of James Scott of Edinburgh, whose rococo designs date from the late 1760s and early 1770s, although these are always symmetrical.¹⁰ His repertoire includes the same spouting vases, thistles and botanical forms. Almost nothing, unfortunately, survives to document Scotland's endeavours in the field of textile design, which would have been an ideal outlet for this kind of fanciful rococo ornament. In the artist, William Delacour (fl. 1740s-1767), Scotland possessed a living link with rococo France and from 1760 to 1767 he held the potentially influential position of Master in the Board of Manufactures Drawing School.¹¹ Between 1741 and 1747 he had published his *Eight Books of Ornament*. Although these cover a wide variety of applications, his designs for jewellery such as watchcases show a mastery of miniaturised ornament that he may have imparted, at first hand, to Begbie.¹²

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 2 Photographic copies in National Monuments Record of Scotland.
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- 12 See particularly *The Eighth Book*, 1747 (copy in Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York).