


National Library of Scotland

A selection of Scottish treasures from the National Library of Scotland's archives will form part of a new worldwide online catalogue of cultural merit.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have selected four pieces from the library to help launch the new UK version of its Memory of the World Register. The register is a global catalogue of heritage, focusing on artefacts of outstanding universal value, with a remit to preserve and promote them.

A film depicting the last days of human habitation on a remote island, a selection of maps from a 16th Century cartographer, the earliest surviving book printed in Scotland and documents highlighting the demise of Scotland's capitalist aspirations of empire, will form part of the register, the first part of which goes live today.

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Martyn Wade, CEO of the National Library of Scotland, said: 'To have one artefact included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme would have been very exciting, to have four is beyond our greatest expectations and truly endorses the quality of our archives here in Edinburgh. I am confident that this endorsement from UNESCO will both strengthen our appeal here in Scotland and establish us internationally.'

One of the selected artefacts is a film, offering an insight into one of Scotland's most remote communities in the years immediately preceding its demise. The 17-minute 'St Kilda, Britain's Loneliest Isle 1923-1928' captures scenes of a community that was soon to disappear. The tiny Gaelic speaking population was forced to migrate in August 1930 bringing an end to 2,000 years of human habitation on the island.

UNESCO also selected more traditional artefacts with the

drawings of pioneer cartographer Timothy Pont and works from Scotland's first printers Walter Chepman and Andrew Myllar impressing.

Pont's maps include more than 9,500 named locations, incorporating drawings of castles and tower houses, and often naming the land owners offering a uniquely important insight into this time period. His maps form the first comprehensive survey of Scotland and were instrumental in the production of the first Atlas of Scotland.

The 11 pieces of printing in the 'Chepman and Myllar Prints', are all known only from these copies, including the earliest surviving dated book printed in Scotland: John Lydgate's 'The Complaint of the Black Knight', 4 April 1508.

Joining the St Kilda film, Pont's maps and the literary products of Chepman and Myllar is the archive of the Company of Scotland. The letters and documents it contains chart the history of the Company of Scotland's plan to establish trading a colony on the Isthmus of Darien in Central America in the 1690s, a bold attempt at establishing a Scottish empire.

Subscriptions came in from the aristocracy, tradespeople, farmers, professionals and the burghs, and totalled £400,000. Despite the financial strength of the venture it turned to failure and can be viewed as a component in Scotland's move toward the 1707 Union with England.

The UK Memory of the World register was established this year with the aim of highlighting some of the UK's lesser-known items of historical interest by awarding them with the globally-recognised 'Memory of the World' status.

'We were incredibly impressed by the diversity and richness of the first nominations to the register,' said David Dawson, Chair of the UK Memory of the World Committee. 'Given the UK's rich documentary history, I'm sure these winners are just the tip of the iceberg. We hope this will encourage more people to get involved with their local archives and museums.'