


# Scottish Artists 1750-1900: From Caledonia to the Continent

A future king in a dress, a Carmelite monk lighting a cigar  for a Spanish resistance fighter and a wintry scene by an artist rejoicing in the nickname of *Frozen Mutton Farquharson*; these are just three of the paintings featured in a spectacular new exhibition, ***Scottish Artists 1750-1900: From Caledonia to the Continent***, at **The Queen's Gallery, Holyroodhouse**.

The exhibition includes over eighty works of art acquired by monarchs, from George III to HM Queen Elizabeth II. It's not all portraits of royal personages either; it was in this period that artists began to travel to Europe, and the works their trips inspired gave the British public its first views of Spain, Italy and even Egypt, Syria and the Lebanon.



But first, that future king and his frock. **Allan Ramsay's** charming portrait of a two year old **Prince William**, painted in c 1767, shows the prince, who would eventually succeed his

brother George IV to the throne, wearing 'coats', a type of long dress imposed on young boys at the time. Ramsay has caught William's soft baby face and plump little arms so well that you want to cuddle him. He is playing a toy drum; across the chair is a fur blanket or stole. Ramsay was a court artist and a pre-eminent figure of the Enlightenment, maintaining close friendships with David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He had already produced the definitive state image of George III and the magnificent ***Queen Charlotte and her Two Eldest Sons***; his portrait of Prince William demonstrates his skill in painting intimate domestic scenes.



Two vivid depictions of daily life, ***Blind-Man's-Buff*** and ***The Penny Wedding***, each commissioned by the Prince Regent (later George IV), illustrate the early career of **Sir David Wilkie**, a Fife artist born a year after Ramsay's death. In *Blind-Man's-Buff* adults and children join in the game, and although they are clearly not affluent everyone looks happy and well-fed; *The Penny Wedding* nostalgically records the tradition of guests all contributing a penny towards the costs of the event – a custom that was already dying out when the painting was completed in 1818. George IV was very taken with Wilkie's ability to give everyday subjects a greater significance; the King's patronage soon led to public enthusiasm, and Wilkie

became hugely popular in his own lifetime.



Allan Ramsay had travelled to Italy, mainly painting portraits for people doing the Grand Tour, but Wilkie's trips to the Continent – between 1814 and 1828 he visited France, Holland, Belgium, Italy and Spain – transformed his art. He was the first British artist to go to Spain after the Spanish War of Independence and was fascinated by Catholic icons, priests and imagery; although the British public still harboured a deep post-revolutionary mistrust of such matters, they overcame their suspicions when they saw their King collecting Wilkie's works, and embraced the broader themes and colours of his new paintings. ***The Spanish Posada – Council of War*** shows a meeting of revolutionaries in a remote inn; again small details create interest – a dwarf plays a guitar; under the table, a sheep sleeps. And in another of Wilkie's Spanish-themed paintings, ***The Guerilla's Departure***, we find the Carmelite monk offering a light to a resistance fighter – a gesture full of meaning, once more showing Wilkie's ability to draw broader significance from a simple incident.

Wilkie's strikingly simple 1837 study of Queen Victoria, using only a few plain colours, was made in preparation for a full-length figure in ***The First Council of Queen Victoria***, which may be the earliest painting of her as a reigning queen. Prior to this he had painted the future queen as a child, being presented at a 'Drawing Room' at St James' Palace for Queen Adelaide's birthday. Although the Queen is supposed to be the main focus here, the young Victoria manages to dominate the foreground, her white dress and red sash making her stand out from the crowd even at the age of twelve.




In 1822 George IV became the first reigning monarch to visit Scotland in 200 years. The King's programme was devised by **Sir Walter Scott**, with ceremonies designed to confirm George IV as the legitimate King and latest in a long line of Scottish monarchs. In a fascinatingly detailed study, **Alexander Naysmith's *View of the High Street Edinburgh and the Lawnmarket*** shows the demolition of a 14th century weigh house to make way for George's procession up to the Castle. The painting is a wonderful record of Edinburgh street life, full of street vendors, children, dogs, carriages – and washing hung from poles sticking out of top windows (don't try this at home – they didn't have Health & Safety in those days...) David Wilkie witnessed many of the events in the royal programme, and his ***Entrance of George IV at the Palace of Holyroodhouse*** captures the impressive scene as nobles gather round the King – who looks remarkably boyish for someone already pushing 60. The painting, however, suffers from areas of *craquelure* where Wilkie used too much mastic paint mixed with oil paint; he was trying to copy effects achieved by Rembrandt and other Dutch painters whom he admired. It's quite a relief to know that even he got some things wrong – and still managed to serve as Painter in Ordinary to three successive monarchs.



Spain was not the only country being opened up to the British public through contemporary art; in 1764 Alloa-born **David Allan** travelled to Rome, where he was to spend over ten years drawing the sights he saw there. Exhibited here are some of his depictions of street life in the city; ***Piazza Navona, Rome*** shows a crowd watching a storyteller relate the Miracle of Saint Antonso, whilst another declaims The Death of Julius Casear. Buildings are meticulously detailed; next to them grand carriages wait. Allan is particularly good at facial expressions – in the foreground a begging friar has a look of pained resignation as a woman kisses his hand.

Louis XVI's youngest brother Charles-Philippe had been in exile ever since the Revolution when he turned up at Holyroodhouse in 1796. He had run up huge debts on the Continent and was taking advantage of the Palace's status as a debtors' sanctuary. Lack of funds didn't stop him spending, and in the same year he commissioned two beautiful mahogany writing tables from Edinburgh cabinet makers **Young Trotter and Hamilton**. Did Charles-Philippe – future king of France – ever settle the bill? How impolite of you to ask...



A pedestal clock made by **John Smith of Pittenweem** and presented to the Duke and Duchess of York in 1923 creates a stunning centrepiece in the Gallery; the clock is both an automaton and a musical box, with three dials (time, lunar phases and tides) and 16 tune titles. Another interesting item of furniture in the exhibition is the **Tam O'Shanter chair**, which was made from beams from the old Alloway Kirk when it collapsed. Much of *Tam O'Shanter* is set in the very same 

kirk, and the chair celebrates Burns – words from the poem are engraved on its brass plates.

Queen Victoria was very concerned about the welfare of soldiers returning from the Crimea. **Sir Joseph Noel Paton's *Home: The Return from the Crimea*** was right up her street, showing as it does the wounded man in the humble family home, old mother and young wife embracing him, Bible open on the table, baby sleeping in the crib. Christianity, it suggests, will bring solace to all; whether it will bring them an income sufficient to survive is another matter.



The Queen was famously fond of Scotland; she commissioned landscapes of **Dubh Loch** from **James Giles** after visiting the area – and poor Giles had to battle through snow and sleet to get the sketches done. More interesting, perhaps, is Giles' sketchbook, with its charming ink drawings of deer and farm buildings. In 1873 the Queen appointed **Gourlay Steell** her Animal Painter for Scotland – his ***Highland Cattle in the Pass***

*of Leny* is shown here – and she also commissioned **William Simpson's *The Ballroom, Balmoral***, which shows a ghillies' ball with the entire royal entourage sitting in an alcove, watching the staff strutting their stuff. You'd have to know your reels from your flings. And how about being the royal drawing master? **William Leighton Leitch** was just that for Queen Victoria and her children, and his ***Moonlight Lesson*** shows three demo pictures along with his detailed handwritten instructions on the painting of a ruined abbey.

✘ In 1840 few Westerners had travelled to the Middle East; **David Roberts'** paintings of Egypt and its neighbouring countries were entirely new to the British public. ***A View in Cairo*** shows the area of Bab Zuweyleh, with its mosque and city gate. Women in flowing burqas, men smoking hookahs, the soft terracotta and cream stripes of the minarets, the whole scene bathed in a hazy light. Roberts' works became some of the most popular and influential images of the Middle East when they were published in volumes of lithographs dedicated to Queen Victoria, and in this exhibition we see one of these huge and captivating books.

And so finally to **Joseph Farquharson** – proud bearer of that ✘ memorable moniker, *Frozen Mutton Farquharson* – whose ***Flock of Sheep Approaching Through A Blizzard*** has graced many a mournful Christmas card. Farquharson was the son of the laird of Finzean and liked nothing more than to celebrate the resilience of animals, especially sheep, in the face of hostile nature. One does wonder what James Giles would have made of that sentiment as he trudged back to his studio with his soggy drawings of Lochnagar. Scottish artists travelled far and wide to record the world, for their monarchs and also for the public at home. In return, generations of kings and queens have seen support of the arts as part of their royal duty; in this excellent exhibition we are able to enjoy some of the fruits of that ongoing patronage.

***Scottish Artists 1750-1900: From Caledonia to the Continent*** is

at **The Queen's Gallery**, Holyroodhouse until 7th February 2016. The Gallery is open every day (except 25th and 26th December); for times and ticket prices please see The Royal Collection Trust's website [here](#). All images of art works: Royal Collection Trust (c) Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2015.

