MCCAIG'S TOWER AND A SCOTTISH MONUMENTAL TRADITION

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McCaig's Tower built between 1895 and 1900 is a prominent landmark that dominates the town of Oban from high on Battery Hill. Architectural historian Frank Arneil Walker described its picturesque situation as 'that hollow but haunting monumental ring of granite which gives such a memorable skyline to the distant sea-seen Oban.'[1] An odd mongrel legacy to a douce little highland town, the tower crowns the peak of the hill as a two hundred metre circumference 'Coliseum' of Bonawe granite, with two tiers of lancet arches perforating the walls. The monument, sitting above the suburbs of Victorian villas ringing the town, is presently open to the public and can be entered via a northeast-facing high round arch with flanking pointed arches in a battlemented portal. Once inside, visitors can relax in the enclosed park, or access terraces on that circumference wall for a panoramic view of the busy harbour and the surrounding west highland scenery. The position of the monument and its eclectic mix of gothic and classical architectural sources are intriguing enough, but the context for and intentions behind its construction, and the original unrealised plans for its further completion, have had strong repercussions in Scottish life and culture. This article will examine: first, what this architectural structure constitutes and means; second, how it can be understood in its context and what that context is; and finally, how the planning and building of the structure exerted influence, and what was the quality of that influence, on Scottish life.

The geographical context of the monument is the west highland port of Oban which, as an urban settlement, has a somewhat typical nineteenth-century history of progress: growth and development by patronage, planning, and expansion of both the native aristocracy and commercial interests. Originating in three very small fermtouns in the eighteenth century, the town of Oban was first planned around a new harbour by local landowners and the Duke of Argyll from

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[1] F. A. Walker, *Argyll and Bute* (London, 2000), p. 401.

1758, the latter of whom also transferred the customs house there from Fort William. Thenceforth, its growth and prosperity were sustained by agriculture, fishing and tourism. The first was given a fillip by the boom in beef trade during the Napoleonic Wars. The last was given a start by association with famous visitors who commented positively on the town – notably Boswell and Johnson, and Queen Victoria, who allegedly said 'one of the finest spots we have seen' – and by its location in the landscapes associated with the literary works of Walter Scott.[2] Later, with improvement in access and transport from the mid-nineteenth century, and coupled with an increase in disposable income, there was a substantial growth in numbers and a broadening in motivation for tourism. Indeed, Alastair Durie has observed that, 'increasingly tourism [was] no longer a middle or upper class preserve' and thus Oban came to be known as 'The Charing Cross of the Highlands'.[3] The town boomed, and expansion with new piers, public buildings, churches, and schools continued through the second half of the nineteenth century. The railway arrived in the 1880s. By the end of the century the town was alleged to have 'more hotels in proportion to its size than Edinburgh'.[4] The population growth peaked in the late nineteenth century (growing threefold between 1851 and 1901): at that point numbers stood at 5,500, while during the next half century that figure increased to just over 6,000. Built at the end point of that boom period, McCaig's Tower which had been left unfinished in 1900, 'seems at once to crown the town's rise to prosperity, and to memorialise the beginning of decline.'[5]

The question of why the tower was left unfinished and what were the intended plans for its completion remain unexplored by scholars. Work commenced on the monument in 1895. As it currently stands, the interior of the structure is now a quiet grassed lump of land dotted with shrubbery, but a contemporary article in *The Oban Times* described the original scheme:

> The tower itself will be 95 feet in height, 20 feet square at the base and 17 feet square at the top: and will be erected on a platform 20 feet high and 190 feet in diameter. The height of the whole structure will therefore be 120 feet. The tower is to be built of granite, in the old English style, and pierced with twelve ornamental windows, while inside there will be a zig-zag stair. On the top of the tower there will be a platform to contain seats for the use of the public and visitors to Oban, and as the Battery Hill stands 250 feet above sea level there will be unsurpassed prospect of the surrounding scenery.

[2] J. Boswell, 'The Journal of the Tour to the Hebrides', in S. Johnson & J. Boswell (eds), *A Journey to the Western Islands and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (London, 1984), p. 371; Walker, *Argyll and Bute*, p. 401; A. Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays: A History of Tourism in Scotland, 1780–1939* (East Lothian, 2003), esp. p. 46

[3] Ibid., pp. 45, 81.

[4] Ibid., p. 132.

[5] Walker, *Argyll and Bute*, p. 401; F. A. Walker, *Argyll and the Islands: An Illustrated Architectural Guide* (Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 137–9.
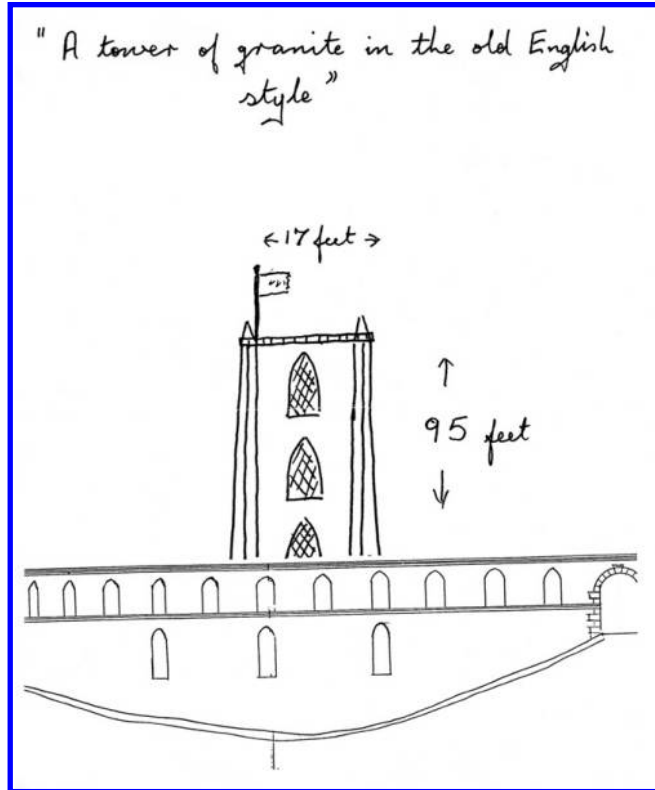
Figure 1. Sketch elevation of the proposed tower. Source: Oban War & Peace Museum.

The design of the structure is Mr McCaig's own and the work is estimated to cost between £5000 and £6000. We believe it is Mr McCaig's intention that the tower should be a source of employment for the masons and other artisans of the town when work is scarce. We also understand that at some future time Mr McCaig proposes to erect a choir chapel, a museum, and a gallery of art; these buildings to be reached from the tower by groined arcades. All that is at present proposed, however, is simply the tower and when this structure is completed it promises not only to be an ornament to the town but a considerable acquisition.[6]

Two sketch drawings held at the Oban War and Peace Museum show the proposed 95-foot tower that was never built. The museum claim that these drawings are by the hand of McCaig himself, but the authenticity of these claims is not clear, and further investigation suggests that the two sketches are by different hands.

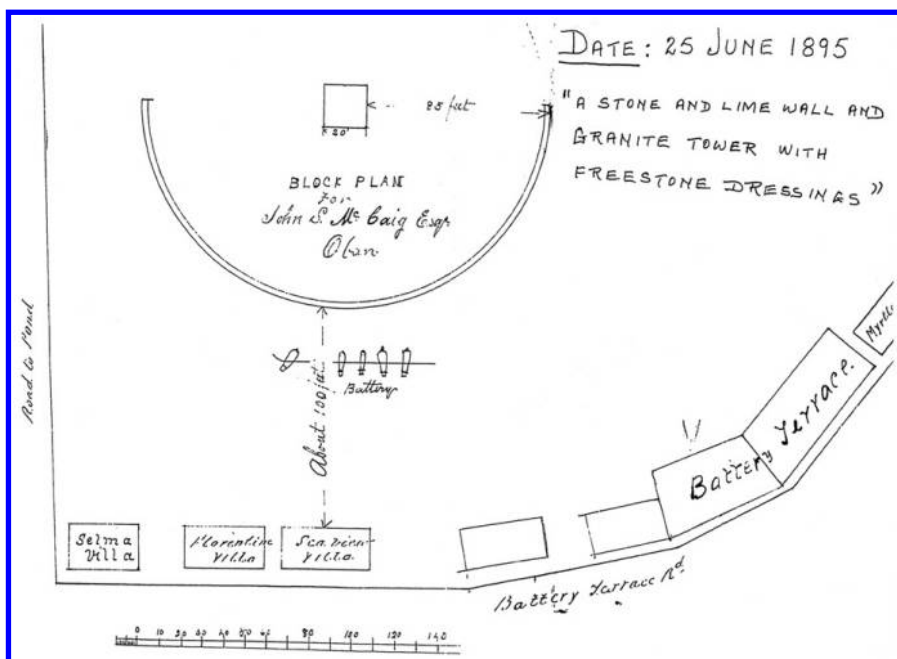[6] *The Oban Times*, 6 Jul. 1895, p. 6.

Figure 2. Sketch plan of the proposed tower and site. Source: Oban War & Peace Museum.

John Stuart McCaig of Oban (1823–1902) was a crofter's son from the nearby island of Lismore. He became the perfect embodiment of the Scots lad o' pairts, a businessman and local politician and seems to be an exemplar of the vigorously paternalistic and civic-minded entrepreneurs who abounded in Britain in general, and Oban in particular, in the Victorian Age. He owned the north pier of the busy West Highland port and, at various times, he was a local draper, a banker and bank agent, the town's tobacco manufacturer, the director of the gas works, inspector of the poor, and, among many other positions, at one time held the post of provost of the town.[7] Above the northeast facing entrance to the Tower as it was built and as it now stands, is carved in a pink granite keystone that describes McCraig, one imagines as he wished to be remembered, as an 'art critic, philosophical essayist and banker'. *The Oban Times* was convinced that McCaig designed the structure himself, confirmed by McCaig's listing as an architect the *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, although quite what training or experience he had is obscured in the historical record.[8]

To fully grasp how this unique, if unfinished, architectural monument in a quiet suburb of a small, relatively remote town can be assigned a degree of national

[7] Walker, *Argyll and Bute*, pp. 401, 411; Walker, *Argyll and the Islands*, p. 147; K. M. Norrie (ed.), *100 Cases that Every Scots Law Student Needs to Know* (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 35–7.

[8] http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=202708, accessed 23 Aug. 2012.

significance, it must first be understood the way in which McCaig's Tower stands in relation to a recognisable nineteenth-century Scottish monumental tradition. The definition of a 'Scottish monumental tradition' used here is discussed at length below, but a few preliminary notes are in order. This monumental tradition was an architectural one; that is to say that it is concerned with monuments that are buildings, and not only statues or otherwise sculpted memorials, although the incorporation of a sculpted element is often substantial. These buildings are not structures that can be described as 'monumental' purely for reasons associated with scale, material or other such physical and design factors. The monumental aspect consists in these buildings having the unique function of public or civic commemoration, and it is this aspect that differentiates this tradition from the contemporaneous flourishing of a tradition of building follies in Britain and the continent. The buildings in this nineteenth-century Scottish monumental tradition do share some essential qualities with architectural follies, but they are also distinct from them. The commemorative monuments are a uniquely distinctive feature of Scottish architectural history.

Built examples of this architectural tradition include such structures as the two Thomas Hamilton monuments to Burns in Alloway (1820) and in Edinburgh (1831), the Scott Monument in Edinburgh by George Meikle Kemp in 1846, the Wallace Monument in Stirling by J. T. Rochhead in 1869, and the 1877 Burns Monument in Kilmarnock by Robert Ingram.[9] Christopher Whatley has examined the history of raising statues to Burns across Scotland (and by Scots in the worldwide diaspora), and has related this to contemporary commemoration of literary heroes by sculpted memorials across Europe (notably in Russia for Pushkin) and Michael E. Vance has examined the history of transatlantic Burns statue building, drawing attention to some interesting American- and Canadian-led developments in form and style, and to contemporary readings of those statues in specific Scottish, British, North American and colonial contexts.[10] Whatley describes the 'resurgence of enthusiasm' for raising statues in Scotland after the centenary of Burns' birth in 1859, and identifies that 'campaigns for statues of Burns [. . .] flourished between the early mid-1870s and the 1890s'.[11] He fixes the focus of his study on when 'Britain went "statue mad" ' between 1877 and 1898, but he also places his survey of Burns statues in both a wider purview of the commemoration of heroes in general at that time, and in the political significance of that commemoration:

[9] For a discussion of the individual Burns architectural monuments in their relation to this tradition see J. Rodger, 'The Burnsian Constructs' in J. Rodger & G. Carruthers (eds), *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century* (Dingwall, 2009), pp. 50–79.

[10] C. A. Whatley, 'Memorialising Burns: Dundee and Montrose Compared' (October, 2010) available only online at http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_183298_en.pdf; M. E. Vance, 'Burns in the Park: A Tale of Three Monuments', in S. Alker, L. Davis and H. F. Nelson (eds), *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* (Surrey, 2012), pp. 209–32.

[11] Whatley, 'Memorialising Burns', p. 16.

Burns was one of a pantheon of national heroes that ranged from William Wallace and Robert Bruce, through to Sir Walter Scott. The enthusiasm there for heroic figures from Scotland's past has been incorporated fairly convincingly within narratives concerned with the 'recreation of Scotland as a nation', and 'civic nationalism' in the second half of the nineteenth century.[12]

The Scottish architectural tradition of building monuments to figures of national importance like Burns is distinct from, but not unrelated to, this phenomenon of commemoration of heroes by raising statues. However, the architectural tradition preceded the boom in raising statues to national heroes by several decades.

The first architectural monument in this tradition is Robert Adam's Hume Monument built in the Old Calton Cemetery in 1777. The phenomenon of architectural monument building can be partly explained by the influence of the culturally elite phenomenon of 'the tour' from the mid to late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, and subsequently by tourism as a mass activity, with Thomas Cook arranging organised tours in Scotland from the mid-1840s.[13] Whatley refers to this as 'the revolution in transport – the appearance of steam railways and steamship – which supported a growing tourist industry'.[14] This tourism created a demand for destinations of interest. The conditions that led to the appearance of the distinctive Scottish architectural tradition of monument building can be seen as related specifically to the boom in Scottish architectural culture in the years 1770–1830. This arose from and built upon an already existing architectural tradition strengthened by building carried out for eighteenth-century 'improvements', and was centred particularly on the planning and building of Edinburgh's New Town, the vast project which provided a myriad of opportunities of patronage for architects. The flourishing of architects at that time meant that they already had contacts with the 'urban elites who commissioned' the early architectural monuments, and were on-hand to cater for the demand for commemoration work when it arose.[15] Indeed, many of the architects associated with the building of Edinburgh's New Town were also involved in design of the early monuments in that tradition, for example, Robert Adam's Hume Monument, James Gillespie Graham's Glenfinnan Monument, Thomas Hamilton's Burns Monuments, and William Playfair's Playfair, Dugald Stewart, and National Monuments.

Of these structures, there is a prominence of specific architectural features and aspects which were often remarked upon by contemporary nineteenth-century commentators.[16] Here the stone-built tower or 'architectural temple' in classical,

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[12] C. A. Whatley, 'Robert Burns, Memorialisation, and the "Heart Beatings" of Victorian Scotland', in M. Pittock (ed.), *Robert Burns in Global Culture* (Bucknell, 2011), pp. 205, 209.

[13] M. Rackwitz, *Travels to Terra Incognita: The Scottish Highlands and Hebrides in Early Modern Travellers' Accounts, c.1600 to 1800* (Muenster, 2007); Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays*, p. 62.

[14] Whatley, 'Memorialising Burns', p. 16.

[15] Whatley, 'Robert Burns, Memorialisation', p. 222.

[16] *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1838, 'Fine Arts', vol. 164, p. 525.

gothic or neo-baronial style built on a conspicuously civic site – on a hilltop or in a central park for instance – that housed and displayed a statue to the eponymous hero was a regular hallmark. Thus the description of a 'nineteenth-century Scottish monumental tradition' in this article, does not identify a simple architectural 'style'. Indeed, the choragic monuments built to Burns by Thomson in Alloway and Edinburgh, the ecclesiastical gothic of Meikle Kemp's Scott monument, and the baronial keep of Rochhead's Wallace Monument, not to mention the 'coliseum' with lancet windows and a Norman gothic tower in Oban, demonstrate that this architectural monumentalism encompasses many styles. Such variegations may indeed be taken for evidence that these structures belong to the tradition of follies. It is true that in their striking and unusual sham historicity – and also the element of 'poor relief' in providing needed employment – these buildings are similar to the wave of architectural follies built throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, where in follies the fake or sham element is purely for ornamentation or enjoyment, in the buildings identified here the most important point about their striking design is their ability to draw attention to and commemorate some historical aspect deemed of public and/or civic importance.[17]

It is important in the context of this isolation and identification of a particular tradition of building to define exactly what is meant here by 'monumental'. Often in the work of architectural historians the meaning of the adjective 'monumental' or the noun 'monumentality' is taken as something which the reader will recognise when they see it in a building's scale, proportion, use of materials, style and so on. Thus, in their seminal publication *A History of Scottish Architecture: From the Renaissance to the Present Day*, Glendinning, MacInnes, and MacKechnie provide in their index over fifty instances of the use of the word 'monumentality' in their text, yet at no stage is a definition of that concept provided other than to hint that the 'monumental forms of Scottish elite buildings' are 'an architecture of mass'.[18] By contrast, the particular tradition of architectural monumentalism identified here is much more narrowly defined, but it is also distinct from the definition of 'monumentality' that has been articulated by recent architectural writers like James Dunnett and Clive Fenton.[19] Where Fenton's categorical definition of Scottish monumentality does take account of features important in the nineteenth-century architectural tradition it is proposed here that like the 'appeal to posterity' and 'commemoration' (particularly interesting is his discussion of Trajan's column in Rome where the commemorative function is 'graphically reinforced by relief sculpture'), his theme is a discussion of the 'monumentality' of mid- to late-twentieth century public

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[17] B. Jones, *Follies and Grottoes* (London, 1953), pp. 1–7.

[18] M. Glendinning, R. MacInnes & A. MacKechnie, *A History of Scottish Architecture: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 3.

[19] J. Dunnett, 'Tribute to a Scottish Monumentality', *Building Design*, 3 Sept. 1993, 1140:2; C. B. Fenton, 'Edinburgh University and the Monumental Tradition', *Edinburgh Architecture Research*, 26, 1999.

buildings in Edinburgh.[20] As such, these buildings may have monumentality as assessed by their scale, their materials used, their decoration and 'style' (classical), their eponymity (for example, the David Hume Tower in George Square), and above all their meaning, but these buildings also have particular day-to-day functions in a modern institution (David Hume Tower is a building used by the University of Edinburgh), whereas the buildings to which this article refers are more straightforward monuments in that they have no apparent function other than that of public commemoration.

When it is asserted here that McCaig's Tower is 'in relation to a recognisable nineteenth-century Scottish monumental tradition', the significance is that it at once both conforms to that tradition, in formal architectonic terms, and is an aberration, in terms of content and intention of the architectural programme. While McCaig's Tower clearly follows the main pattern of the tradition in terms of material, architectural style and site, it is in the provision of the final vital detail of the 'eponymous hero' that it is found wanting. Yet it is paradoxically not the fact of its failure to house and display an image of the hero that constitutes McCaig's aberration. For McCaig did indeed plan and lay out finance for the completion of his tower and the housing of statues therein. It is rather because McCaig's Tower was planned precisely to house an 'eponymous hero' that made it, in this case, also an aberration. There is thus some complexity to the case, relating both to its history and the law.

First, why this architectural 'tradition' is exclusively nineteenth-century should be considered. Britain in the early to mid-nineteenth century was at an industrial stage which involved basic and elemental forces and materials – coal, water, steam, and iron for example – whose manipulation and processing lent itself to a crude iconography of sheer strength and brute heroism.[21] The cultural obsession with heroics is typical even, or perhaps especially, to those like Thomas Carlyle, who ostensibly opposed the march of 'Mammon' and 'Mechanism'.[22] The Scots bourgeoisie, landowners and industrialists – the moneyed classes who raised the subscriptions for and/or otherwise promoted the building of these monuments and of whom McCaig was one – appear to have been eager to celebrate their own distinctive national and cultural input to this heroic age. At the same time, these classes understood the union with England as a fundamental gateway for their nation to mature and develop by participating in this global industrial power. Thus, there was a nationalism being invoked in the raising of these heroic architectural monuments, but it appears, at least on one level, to be an antiquarian nationalism and not a liberationist nationalism. The Scots bourgeoisie and industrialists apparently wanted to celebrate their part in that heroism through a vaunting of their roots and national history and mythology, but this celebration

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[20] Fenton, 'Edinburgh University', p. 4.

[21] E. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the present day* (London 1969), pp. 172–94.

[22] T. Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London 1843); T. Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (Jun. 1829), pp. 438–59.

would also glorify the freedoms and successes granted by the union. As Tom Nairn puts it:

> in the country's unusual nineteenth-century situation, the middle class did not have to confront normal developmental problems: these had been solved for it by the economic revolution which had followed the Union.[23]

Unlike some other contemporary small countries – Ireland, Finland, Norway and Hungary, for example – nationalist mythology was not invoked by the Scots bourgeoisie in order to provide impetus for a break from the rule of a large oppressive neighbour. This attitude can clearly be recognised in the quotation from the opening ceremony of the architectural monument to Wallace (who was famed for his warrior exploits, particularly the killing of many English soldiers, in the Wars of Independence of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) in Stirling in 1869:

> Introducing the Second Resolution, Sheriff-Substitute Henry Glassford Bell declared that: 'Scotland and England are now one. Any Scotchman who now entertained animosity towards England, or any Englishman who entertained animosity towards Scotland, would be set down as simply insane (hear, hear)'.[24]

Thus, figures from the past are apparently celebrated as 'the past'; as a series of reductive, vain, emotive and sectarian images, often hailed by diminutive or pet names (for example, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Rabbie Burns, and Mary Queen of Scots). However, this operated to consign them not just to the past, but to an immature, infantile stage of Scotland's development; that is, before it took its place in the union, a mature partnership of nations trading and exerting its influence all around the globe. This evidently widespread bourgeois rejection of any mature interest to be found in Scotland's past has its roots in the Enlightenment, where it was found that the evidence of progress could not be read so clearly in a Scottish history without, for example, a Magna Carta of its own, or a legal tradition as versatile as English common law. Thus, we see that Hume, after first producing the post-Union of the Crowns volumes of his history, in 1754 and 1756 respectively, as the *History of Great Britain*, in order to make a convincing case for that progress in history, he published the subsequent volumes in 1759–61, dealing with the pre-union period, as the *History of England*. Equally, Murray Pittock, in a discussion of Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civilisation*, shows how influential was Ferguson's notion of 'infantile civilisations':

> The idea of the infancy of entire peoples, found also in Robertson, can be clearly traced in later thinkers; it occurs, for example in John Stuart Mill's

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[23] T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London, 1981), p. 175.
[24] G. Morton, *William Wallace: Man and Myth* (Stroud, 2001), pp. 78–9.

On Liberty (1859), which withholds liberty of action from 'children, or [...] those backward states of society in which the race may be considered in its nonage.' The teleology of civility had become embedded in Victorian liberalism.[25]

With the inconvenient path of Scottish pre-union history side-lined as infantile we arrive at what Andrew Noble calls 'the paradox that a country given over to "progress" can end desperately clinging to regressive make-believe' and where Marinell Ash can describe the nineteenth-century monumental operation of this vain type of antiquarian nationalism as:

an age for raising statues, and the size and the antiquity of the subject seemed to bear an inverse ratio to the declining historical consciousness of the Scottish people.[26]

Graeme Morton has argued that 'the notion of cultural infirmity as embodied in the important thesis of Marinell Ash has come to be revised as too simplistic.'[27] Moreover, Colin Kidd warns of such simple explanations as they tend:

to objectify a single valid past against which the present generation of self-satisfied historical practitioners can judge the failures of its predecessors, and it skirts the fertile particularity of bygone intellectual life, including its errors.[28]

Morton charts a few particularities in the notions and ideas of the people who built the nineteenth-century monuments, attempting to free conceptions of their work from the framework of both eighteenth and our own contemporary notions of nationhood, heroes, the relationship of the nation to state and Scottish history. Morton sees a form of nineteenth-century Scottish nationalism embodied in the building of these monuments, but suggests it was already a 'post-modern form of nationalism' because it is 'one that was sustained primarily within civil society and was therefore highly undirected precisely because it was not state created.'[29] We might add that neither was this Scottish nationalism aimed at creating a state of its own, nor was it 'undirected', because for this civic (as opposed to ethnic) nationalism there are no enemies. Morton goes on to explain that in what was a

[25] M. Pittock, 'Historiography', in A. Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 274.

[26] A. Noble, 'Versions of Scottish Pastoral: the Literati and the Tradition 1780–1830', in T. Markus (ed.), *Order in Space and Society* (Edinburgh 1982), p. 304; M. Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 144.

[27] G. Morton, 'What if? The Significance of Scotland's Missing Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', in D. Broun, R. J. Finlay & M. Lynch (eds), *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 169.

[28] C. Kidd, '*The Strange Death of Scottish History* Revisited: Constructions of the Past in Scotland, c.1790–1914', *Scottish Historical Review*, Volume 76:1, No. 201 (1997), p. 86.

[29] Morton, 'What if?', p. 167.

bourgeois, locally self-governed Scotland, the gap between the legitimated civil society and the British state 'allowed great intricacy and complexity in Scottish identity.'[30] In addition to the 'economic revolution' and with which the union gave the Scottish bourgeoisie the chance for progress, the mid–nineteenth-century Victorian political organisation was also characterised by decentralisation (and a suspicion of centralisation). This meant that in terms of urban policy and decision-making – for example, housing, sanitation and health in the rapidly expanding urban centres – the local bourgeoisie were strongly empowered to govern without interference through local authorities and voluntary associations.[31] As there was no overbearing centralised state in Westminster, there was no need for the bourgeoisie to mobilise for such an alternative national state in Edinburgh. The intricacy and complexity in identity emerges when we examine the operation and use of symbols for those present at the time and discard approaches that assume constants with eighteenth-century views of history and/or parallels with our own time. Morton makes some interesting contentions when he directly addresses the nationalist beliefs and opinions of those involved in raising those local monuments. Wallace and Bruce, for example, besides appearing as bold and daring inspirations for the nineteenth-century Scottish soldiery in the van of the British imperial expeditions, could be perceived as harbingers of British constitutionalism inasmuch as they represent successive levels of freedom found in the British Isles. In their resistance to centralised and tyrannical power Wallace and Bruce could be deployed as proto-representatives of Protestantism, despite their medieval Catholic context.[32] Morton identifies four themes in the attitudes of the monument builders, sourced in obituaries and in speeches made concerning the preparations for the Scott Monument in Edinburgh, and he calls them 'complementary national identities'. They are:

> (i) Scott the 'genius author'; Scott and the 'civilised world' (ii) Scott as a great British literary figure (iii) Scott as the Universal man, and (iv) Scott as both the great chronicler of Scotland's past, and the writer who instigated pride in, and recognition of, the Scottish nation.[33]

It is notable that none of these national identities were, or could be, exclusive of Scotland's relationship with England: 'Sir Walter Scott was a Scottish icon forged in a society locked in a Union with England.'[34]

Morton has also demonstrated that Wallace was celebrated in the nineteenth century as an antecedent and an inspiration for the Scottish soldiers fighting for

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[30] Ibid.

[31] G. Morton, *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 22–48.

[32] Morton, 'What if?', pp. 162–5.

[33] Morton, *Unionist Nationalism*, p. 171.

[34] Ibid.

the British army. For at least one important faction (that led by Charles Rogers) in the raising of the Wallace Monument in Stirling this Scottish patriot hero was also celebrated as one of the forces enabling the union with England. For it was only, so reasoned one speaker at the meeting to lay the foundation stone to the monument, by virtue of Scotland's becoming independent in the fourteenth century due to the exploits of Wallace and Bruce, that Scots could enter freely and independently into the successful union with England in 1707.[35] Thus Lord Elgin had opined on the inauguration day of the movement to build the Wallace Monument: 'England owes Wallace and Bruce a debt of obligation, only second to that which is due them by Scotland.'[36] Morton terms this tradition of positive assertion of Scottish nationalism within the union by elites as 'unionist nationalism'. He poses it as a characteristic stance of the years 1830–60, both against the subsequent era from the 1870s when power became more centralised in Westminster (as with the Scottish Education Act 1872 and the Scottish Office set up in 1885 the system moved towards the more modern model of the British state), and also against the previous 'Anglo–British' era of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment when 'it appears that Scotland had accepted the role of a junior partner' in the union.[37]

If it is to this monumental tradition that McCaig's Tower belongs, then it is in its iconographic aspects that we find the key to its aberrancy. It is true that by 1890 the heroic period of British industrial success had largely passed, and in terms of efficient and refined production technology had been overtaken by Germany and the USA.[38] However, industrial development in Scotland does not fit this pattern. T. M. Devine has shown that some important heavy industries were expanding through this period, including 'shipbuilding, which in the second half of the nineteenth century became the strategic heart of the West of Scotland's heavy industrial economy'.[39]

Democracy was slowly making progress in the centralising British state: the vote had come to some of the working classes in 1867–8, and was extended further in 1884–5. In Scotland, there were also more specific reasons for a change in attitude to heroes. The 1880s split the powerful and influential Liberal party in Scotland over the issues of home rule and land reform (in Ireland). This led to the dissolution of the alliance between whigs and radicals in that party and, in turn, to the formation of the Liberal Unionists. With the departure of establishment and aristocratic figures like the Duke of Argyll over those issues the remaining Liberal party was, as Devine puts it, 'able to move in a radical direction and hence maintain its support amongst industrial workers, crofters, and farm servants.'[40] Just as British industrialists and central authorities had begun to examine and improve

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, pp. 177–8.
[37] Ibid, p.17.
[38] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp. 172–94.
[39] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700–2007* (London, 2006), p. 256.
[40] Ibid., p. 304.

under various such social and economic pressures, the final Burns architectural monument at Mauchline, completed in 1898 without a prominent statue of the hero displayed on the tower, was incorporated in a scheme of housing for poor folk, emphasising Burns' symbolic worth as a social activist rather than a national hero. This more austere, anti-iconic, socially-committed type of monument also signals further complication of the attitude to the heroic in late nineteenth-century Scotland. It can be viewed as a reaction by the predominating liberal ethos in the country to earlier attempts by conservatives to capture the memory of Burns for their cause, with commemorations of extravagantly iconic and ritualistic content that portrayed the poet as a conservative or apolitical peasant everyman.[41] By contrast with the Mauchline monument, McCaig's Tower with its proposed statuary and its lack of enduring social and charitable aims is at least a very late example of particular style, if not an outright anachronism. Nonetheless, it is argued here that its true aberrant nature lies not just in the tardiness of its production or its unfashionably uncharitable spirit, but in the unusual end to which the outdated heroic style is, or rather would have been, bent. At his death in 1902 only the outer walls of the tower were complete, and it has remained in that state since. In his will, McCaig left money to his only surviving relative (a younger sister, Catherine), not only to complete the tower in Oban but also to construct several similar towers on 'prominent places in nearby estates' and 'for the purpose of erecting monuments and statues for myself, brothers and sisters on the tower or circular buildings called the Stuart McCaig Tower.' He specified who in particular should be modelled by 'Scotch sculptors' and 'young and rising artists', and suggested prizes should be awarded for the best statues of:

> All my fiv brothers and myself [. . .] and of my father [. . .] and of my mother [. . .] and of my sisters [. . .] and that these statues be modelled after photographs. And where these may not be available, that the statues may have a family likeness to my own photograph or to another member of my foresaid family.[42]

James Coleman has argued that 'a monument does not project meanings – it operates as a screen on to which meanings are projected by the viewer.'[43] What, then, makes it so difficult for the viewer to determine the significance of the unfinished McCaig monument is that there is no 'screen' upon which to project. Rather, the monument is a void. This is, of course, similar to the mystery that the viewer encounters with another unfinished Scottish monument, the National

[41] A. Tyrrell, 'Paternalism, Public Memory and National Identity in Early Victorian Scotland: The Robert Burns Festival in Ayr in 1844', *History*, 90: 297 (2005), pp. 42–61; L. Davis, 'The Robert Burns 1859 Centenary', p. 189–91.

[42] *The Scotsman*, 7 Dec. 1905, p. 7.

[43] J. Coleman, 'Unionist-Nationalism in Stone? The National Wallace Monument and the Hazards of Commemoration in Victorian Scotland', in E. J. Cowan (ed.), *The Wallace Book* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 153.

Monument on Calton Hill. We can see, nonetheless, that it is the very identity of the eponymous heroes themselves proposed for representation in stone on McCaig's Tower that constitute an aberration from the monumental tradition. For McCaig's Tower is not part of a *national* project, but was a *personal* vanity project. While all these architectural monuments can be understood as vanities, in the sense that they generally vaunt or are overly proud of their creators' appearance, past, or achievements, McCaig's monument can also be covered by the further and fuller meanings and the etymology of that word, in the sense that his aims turned out to be futile; in the end the monument remained *vanus*, or empty.

Yet how could the salient factor in McCaig's architectural aberration be the nature of its statuary, if those statues were never built? McCaig's legacy – the completion of the tower – was implicated in a deal of what Dickens in *Bleak House* calls 'wiglomeration'. McCaig was survived by only one sister, Catherine, and she 'expected to inherit'.[44] Catherine McCaig thus challenged McCaig's will by taking to court the trustees appointed by her brother, the University of Glasgow. At the Court of Session – the highest civil court in Scotland – in 1907 Catherine challenged the will on the basis that 'a will or a trust that disinherits an heir on intestacy will be struck down if there is no person who benefits from its provisions in place of the heir, or if its provisions are so wasteful as to be contrary to public policy.'[45] As the only surviving family member of the deceased John, Catherine McCaig would have been the heir in the event of intestacy (that is, if no will had been left). The judge in the case, Lord Dundas, avoided a decision on whether using the legacy to complete the tower was against public policy, but rejected the trustees' argument that the workmen and artists were the beneficiaries of the will. The judge argued that the latter were too remote from the will and were not direct beneficiaries. The will was thus struck down and the estate fell into intestacy, leaving Catherine as the nearest heir.

Six years later, in 1913, Catherine McCaig herself died and left an estate worth £69,593.[46] In an apparently perverse turn of events, which is accounted for by the speculation of her 'probably having spent the intervening years wracked with guilt for having denied her brother's last wishes', Catherine herself left a will with similar instruction about the tower and statues to the one her brother had left. In order to 'buy eternal forgiveness', Catherine went even further and stipulated that the statues of the family were to be made of bronze rather than stone and that, once placed within the circular plan tower in Oban, the building would be sealed and entrance forbidden to the public.[47]

Once again, however, wiglomeration confounded the completion of this would-be 'cloistered and undisturbed vale of death', for the trustees of some

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[44] Norrie, *100 Cases*, p. 35.
[45] Ibid., p. 36; McCaig v. University of Glasgow 1907 S.C. 231
[46] *The Scotsman*, 8 May 1914, p. 6.
[47] Norrie, *100 Cases*, p. 36.

other smaller parts of the legacy – money left to promote the Gaelic language and maintain some public buildings in Oban – again challenged the will.[48] Again the case was heard in the Court of Session, which was reported in *The Scotsman* as an occasion for some egregious banter from their lordships in session and for much laughter from the public gallery.[49] Lord Salvesen, the Lord Justice Clerk, noted of some pieces of 'monstrous' monumental architecture (he cited obelisks in Haddington and Linlithgow) that 'it would be useful if Zeppelins would come and knock them down'. He also wondered about the possibility of a judicious treatment of the proposed statue of the youngest McCaig brother, Peter, who had died in infancy. Perhaps, he said, they could get a prize baby from which to make a copy. When Lord Guthrie opined that if such statues were put in place the tower would be known as 'McCaig's Folly', Lord Salvesen commented drily: 'It is called that already'. Although the ambitions of the will were again struck down by the court, the judgement this time was different from the first because Catherine McCaig had no heirs to disinherit. In this case the ruling was as a result of the notion of public policy inasmuch as the judges held that it 'was contrary to public policy [. . .] for the law to enforce a provision that was extravagant and wasteful in the sense that it benefitted no-one and used up large amounts of money in doing so.'[50]

The judges' opinions in the case are worth relating.[51] Lord Salvesen stated: 'Even the public would have no right of access to the inside of the tower, for special provision was made for keeping them out by means of railings', and that as 'there were no descendants of any member of the family alive who might take pleasure in contemplating (if he were permitted to do so) the proposed representations of the forms and features of his relatives' then 'it could not be of benefit to the public'. He further thought that it was 'an absurd whim which had neither reason nor public sentiment in its favour', and that:

> the prospect of Scotland being dotted with monuments to obscure persons who happened to have amassed a sufficiency of means, and cumbered with trusts for the purpose of maintaining these monuments in all time coming, appeared to his Lordship to be little less than appalling.

Lord Guthrie set out a number of reasons why he thought the provisions in the will 'unnatural, not customary, and unreasonable'. Among those were that 'it was an inappropriate place in relation to the people to be commemorated' and that it 'would be impossible to make non-ludicrous representations without abandoning likeness to these people' (that is, that there were no photographs of some of them, and also the death in infancy case). Nevertheless, the Court of Session did allow

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[48] Ibid; McCaig's Trustees v Kirk Session of the United Free Church of Lismore, 1915 S.C. 426.
[49] *The Scotsman*, 21 Jan. 1915, p. 9.
[50] Norrie, *100 Cases*, p. 36.
[51] *The Scotsman*, 6 Feb. 1915, p. 7.

for the setting up of the trust to promote Gaelic and to keep certain buildings for public use in Oban.

Thus, McCaig's Tower endures to this day as a 200-metre circumference wall of granite. It is a most un-Empedoclean circumference with no centre but an incidental lump of grassed land serving as an enclosed park. The park interior is quiet, secluded and calm, but not, as the 'absurd whim' of Catherine McCaig would have had it, 'sealed off completely in death'. Thus, as the highest court in the land and the legal establishment who sat in judgement there ruled, certain arrangements of buildings and statuary could not be considered as customary or reasonable as monuments in Scotland. Their implicit critique of the Scottish monumental tradition appears not dissimilar to this explicit one, for their definition evidently turned on the nature of the building in its public/private aspects and in its situation and on the type of statuary, how it was displayed, the persons who are represented, and how well they are known to the public. In this article a distinct architectural tradition has been highlighted by setting out a positive list of existing identifiable characteristics shared by a number of buildings constructed over a certain period. The judges' discriminations, on the other hand, do not lead to the indication of any exemplary instances of a plausible and distinct category of objects, but are entirely negative, ruling out the possibility of one specifically proposed object, McCaig's Tower, as belonging to such an otherwise undefined category by dismissing it as 'absurd', 'inappropriate', ludicrous', and 'appalling'.

A reading of the judges' speeches may, however, offer us some understanding of the problems in describing McCaig's Tower as a folly. The legal principle to be drawn from the case is that 'while property ownership gives the owner the entitlement to be as extravagant and wasteful as he or she wishes during life, the law does not lend its good offices to extravagance and waste on death.'[52] McCaig's biggest mistake then – the final aberration as it were – was to himself go beyond the mortal circumference too early, and to leave his intended worldly extravagancies to the immortal judgement of the wigs. If 'extravagance' can be understood as a form of catering for personal enjoyment rather than for public good, then his lordships seemed to be limiting the legitimacy of creating a special type of folly building to the period of the creator's or visionary's lifetime. If it is purely for *personal* enjoyment alone then clearly no one can enjoy it once the creator/visionary has died. This would not be the case with a monument designed for the public commemoration of a figure of national importance, like Robert Burns or Walter Scott, whose images carry symbolic content in the public realm. Thus we arrive again at the argument that a fully authentic building in this Scottish monumental tradition displays an element of enduring public or civic, and not just personal, commemoration. We might like to bear in mind the cautionary sentence on overestimating the power of the law delivered by one subject of the

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[52] Norrie, *100 Cases*, pp. 35–6.

monumental tradition, Sir Walter Scott, himself an advocate and a sheriff. He wrote that 'the Scots seem to conceive Themis the most powerful of goddesses.' Scott went on to characterise such conceptions of the power of the law as 'wild views', a description which could equally apply to some evidence of the 'taste' of both John Stuart McCaig and Lord Salvesen.[53]

There are many distinct architectural styles employed in the constituents of the nineteenth-century monumental tradition. McCaig's Tower is demonstrable as an aberration with or without its proposed statues actually in place: the judges made sure its full aberrant nature never became immediately apparent, but they did not thereby alter that aberrant status. A socially and intellectually optimistic reading of the court proceedings might note that the final case took place in the year of publication of Patrick Geddes's *Cities in Evolution*, and could see the judges' discourses on taste and public policy as a timely contribution towards the articulation of the Aristotelian breadth of Geddes's conception of the study of civics.[54] A more cynical reading might take into account the fact that Edinburgh University-educated Lord Salvesen was a Scottish unionist (he had previously stood twice (unsuccessfully) as a Liberal Unionist parliamentary candidate), and wonder whether this would make for a political explanation of his apparent personal animus in opposition to further commemoration of the 'obscure' provincial McCaig, a supporter of crofters' rights, land reform, and the Gaelic language.[55]

[53] W. Scott, *Sir Walter Scott's Journal*, D. Douglas (ed.), (Edinburgh, 1891), p. 36.
[54] P. Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (London, 1915).
[55] E. T. Salvesen, *Memoirs of Lord Salvesen*, H. F. Andersen (ed.), (London, 1949), pp. 58–9.