



**The Materiality of Monarchy of
Late Medieval and Early Modern
Scotland:**

An Introduction

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Abstract: This special issue introduction provides a contextual summary of Scottish kingship and the development of the historiography of royal culture during the reigns of the Stewart/Stuart dynasty, before summarising the articles in the special issue. These summaries are framed and structured by the methodological approaches to material culture evidence embraced by the contributing authors, who include academics, archivists, and museum professionals. Despite persistent popular perceptions of Scotland as a cultural backwater in the premodern period, the contributions outlined in the introduction demonstrate, even with limited surviving artefacts of cultural heritage for this long-lived dynasty, the depth and complexities of the royal material legacy of Scotland’s premodern rulers. In doing so, each contribution enriches our understanding of the ways in which material world was used by and shaped the interactions, whether positive or negative, between monarchs and the populous over which they ruled.

Keywords: late medieval; early modern; renaissance; material culture; cultural turn; Scotland; Stewart; Stuart

The materiality of monarchy—specifically the spaces and objects of monarchies—throughout history offer far more than the mere backdrops and props for human activities. Rather the built environment and material culture of royalty offered rulers an important means through which to define, negotiate, and express royal authority or agency (successfully or unsuccessfully), as well as carrying the potential to actively shape political, social, and cultural events.¹ To call on recent events in Britain, the funerary processions, lying-in-state, and funeral of Elizabeth II in September 2022 and coronation of Charles III and Queen Camilla in May 2023 were events in which built spaces and material objects were central to the dialogue

¹ For example, see discussions in Auslander, “Beyond Words,” particularly 1016–1018; Gerristen and Riello, eds., “Introduction: Writing Material Culture History,” particularly 2.

between the British royal family and audiences in the UK, the Commonwealth, and the wider world. There was a conscious effort by the new king to avoid unnecessary excess and champion sustainability through limiting the amount of “new” material creations and the reuse of items. This included those items that would previously have been made anew for each monarch, such as the white linen shift used during anointing. The reuse of such items from previous coronations offered a threefold benefit: sustainability, cost reductions—both of which were acutely valuable in Britain’s economic climate—and allowing Charles to demonstrate a conscious link with the past and the centuries of rulers who came before him. The mixture of old and new objects allowed the monarchy to tread the fine line between tradition and innovation. Those items that were created for the event sought to champion British-based designers or craftspeople and sought to express the new rulers’ connections to people around the Commonwealth.²

Throughout the world and across the centuries, rulers have frequently invested in patronising the creation of material trappings and built environments to represent, shape, and cement their rulership in ongoing dialogues with the populace of their realms, the wider political community beyond, and even with God. Pivotal moments, such as the power transition created at the death of a ruler, were obviously prime opportunities for these dialogues—and some of the contributions in this issue certainly consider such moments—but the use of royal materiality was a consistent and proactive concern, especially for late medieval and early modern monarchs. This special issue showcases the richness of current work from academics and collection specialists that, through various methodological approaches, engages with the ways that Stewart (later Stuart) rulers of the Scots and then of the corporate British Isles used such means to communicate in Scotland, both before and after the Union of the Crowns in 1603.

As the *Royal Studies Journal* audience is a rich and varied one that involves an eclectic range of chronological and geographic scope, we felt a brief introduction to Scottish kingship in the medieval and early modern period was important. The Stewart monarchs came to the throne with the ascension of Robert II (r. 1371–1390) in 1371. Grandson of Robert the Bruce, or Robert I, the famous king who reasserted Scotland’s independence from England, Robert II came from a noble family. Although at the

² For more on the event, see Lucinda H.S. Dean, “‘Not anointed to be served, but to serve’: Reflections on the Coronation of Charles III, 6–8 May 2023,” *News from the Centre for History*, accessed 5 January 2025, <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/cultural/centre-for-history/community/outreach/news-from-the-centre-for-history/not-anointed-to-be-served-but-to-serve/>.

forefront of fourteenth-century Scottish politics and declared heir apparent following Robert I’s own son, David II, the accession of Robert Stewart as king was not a given and he was in his late fifties when he came to the throne. Much of the reigns of the early Stewarts—Robert II and Robert III (r. 1390–1406)—focused on establishing the fledgling dynasty.³ While it was certainly not a given in these early decades, the Stewart dynasty would continue until the death of Anne Stuart (r. 1702–1714), queen of the British Isles. Unlike England, which saw significant displacement, civil war, and changes of dynasty during the period from the late fourteenth century onwards, the Stewart line held firm in Scotland. Individual kings certainly experienced significant challenges and the country witnessed a significant number of minorities during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but the right of the Stewart line to the throne was maintained even through the ascension of Scotland’s first queen-regnant, Mary, Queen of Scots (r. 1542–1567).⁴ Mary, raised in France from the age of five, adopted the French spelling of the surname Stuart, and her descendants, from her son, James VI (r. Scotland 1567, England 1603–1625), onwards generally took this spelling.

The Stewart/Stuart monarchy inherited the English throne following the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, and James VI of Scotland became James I of England. Upon taking this throne, James moved his court to the richer southern country, leaving Scottish culture to largely to develop under the patronage of the nobility, lairds, and urban elites who remained in the northern kingdom. There were significant efforts from London-based Stuart monarchs to influence cultural developments in Scotland, such as contested interventions over Scottish religious practices that are discussed in Dean’s contribution herein. These efforts ultimately led to the violent rejection of Charles I’s attempts to enforce an English prayerbook on Scottish worshippers and the signing of the National Covenant in 1638.⁵ However, there was only intermittent direct royal presence and patronage of material culture and built heritage after 1603. In addition to Charles I’s visit in 1633 and the work undertaken associated with it, such as the Linlithgow fountains

³ For the fullest study of the reigns of Robert II and Robert III, see Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings*. On the most recent study of the ways that the early Stewarts sought to cement power through ritual and material means, see Dean, *Death and the Royal Succession in Scotland*, 113–145.

⁴ For useful introductory texts covering this period, see Brown, “Lele consail for the comoun profite”; Stevenson, *Power and Propaganda*; Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community*. On the reign of Mary there is a wealth of literature, but useful recent texts include Post Walton, *Catholic Queen, Protestant Patriarchy*; Warnicke, *Mary, Queen of Scots*; Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots*.

⁵ For a useful introduction to the National Covenant and subsequent revolution in Scotland, see Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution*.

discussed by Rush in this issue, these interventions were limited to the preparations for and visit of James VI and I in 1617 and the more extensive cultural patronage of James VII and II, largely but not exclusively as duke of York, from 1679 to the late 1680s.⁶

The exploration of Scottish cultural history, which has witnessed significant growth in recent years, is a wide-reaching field, as the articles in this special edition attest. Despite this, popular opinion carries a long-held and lingering opinion of Scotland as a cultural backwater. Prominent Hollywood films perpetuate this incorrect image, with the 2018 film *Mary Queen of Scots* repeatedly showing the Scottish monarch holding court in cave-like rooms, with bare stone walls and little decoration.⁷ In contrast, the Tudor court of Elizabeth I is shown as wealthy and opulent—tapestries adorn the walls and luxurious materiality is at the fore. This disingenuous portrait of Scotland as a poor cultural backwater is simply not reliable. Although Scotland was less wealthy than its southern neighbour, the Stewart monarchs presided over an outward facing European court with a complex interplay of cultural influences. The Stewart monarchs flaunted their wealth, and in some cases spent far more than they had, to display the stability of their rule. European influences from the Low Countries, Scandinavia, Italy, France, and Burgundy can be repeatedly seen in Scottish culture, artwork and building projects.⁸ The Trinity Church, built by the queen consort Mary of Guelders (m. 1449, d. 1463), and the Trinity Altarpiece, depicting her son James III (r. 1460–1488) and his wife Margaret of Denmark (m. 1469, d. 1486), are excellent surviving examples of Scottish medieval material culture, which are central to the project explored in Delman and Harrison’s contribution in this issue. To understand the lingering perceptions of cultural inadequacies, it is important to recognise that as a field of study, Scottish history has developed slowly, particularly in comparison to that of its neighbour, England. As Karin Bowie has noted, while Scottish history has moved with the times there was some resistance to “the alien forces of postmodernism” during the 1990s and it has only been in the subsequent decades that the “cultural turn” has really started to shift the “debate

⁶ On the progress of James VI and I, see McNeill and McNeill, “The Scottish Progress of James VI, 1617,” 38–51. Additionally, a current doctoral project at York is also working on a new analysis of James’s use of progresses, including the visit in 1617: Ellis, “The Progresses of James VI and I.” For useful introductions to James VII’s visits to Scotland as duke of York, see Doak, “Progresses, Print, and ‘Politik Managers’”; Mann, *James VII*, particularly 185–186; Ouston, “York in Edinburgh.”

⁷ Rourke, *Mary Queen of Scots* (2018).

⁸ An excellent example of the varied cultural influences on Scottish royal building projects can be found in those of James V: Dunbar, *Scottish Royal Palaces*, 49–54; Guidicini, “Ordering the World”; Harrison, *Rebirth of a Palace*; Rush, “The Stirling Castle Palace Exterior Sculpture”; Spangler, “Aulic Spaces Transplanted.”

in a number of traditional topics."⁹ Bowie's focus is specifically the early modern period, but the conclusion can arguably be cast back onto earlier periods. Consequently, the scholarship on Scottish rulers and their reigns from the 1970s to the early 2000s has been dominated by a focus on political histories and narratives, but the "cultural turn" has increasingly had a notable impact in the field of premodern Scottish royal history.

The existing work on the royal court and culture of Scotland emerged initially with a marked focus on textual expressions, particularly the royal sponsoring of (and, in some cases, composing) literature, history, writing, poetry, drama, and translations, and spectacles such as marriages and royal entries.¹⁰ However, the materiality of Scotland's culture is certainly not absent and is often utilised as supplementary evidence in works exploring the flourishing of Scottish renaissance culture.¹¹ As Malcolm Vale's work on the princely courts of Europe championed, drawing on "both the material and non-material" in such explorations is very fruitful.¹² Moreover, the paucity and fragmentary survival of primary evidence for Scotland's premodern past (whether material or non-material) has encouraged scholars to explore a wider source base perhaps more as a rule than as an exception. Unsurprisingly, royal materiality has been prominent in the works of notable art and architectural historians for several decades, with a particular, but not exclusive, focus on surviving built and material remains, and an increasing drive to challenge preconceptions of the sub-par nature of the Scottish royal court culture.¹³ Nonetheless, in recent years scholarship has focused more consciously on drawing the analysis of the materiality of Scotland's rulers more centrally into an active dialogue with the kingdom's

⁹ Bowie, "Cultural, British and Global Turns," 38.

¹⁰ Some examples include Carpenter and Runnalls, "The Entertainments at the Marriage of Mary Queen of Scots"; Edington, *Court and Culture in Renaissance Scotland*; Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament*; Hadley Williams, ed., *Stewart Style*; Lynch, "Queen Mary's Triumph"; Mapstone, "Kingship and the Kingis Quair"; Mapstone and Hood, eds., *The Rose and the Thistle*; McClure and Spiller, eds., *Bryght Lanternis*; Purdie, "Clariodus and the Ambitions of Courtly Romance."

¹¹ Some pertinent examples include: Mason, "This Realm of Scotland is an Empire?"; Murray, "Out of My Contree"; Stevenson, "The Unicorn, St Andrew and the Thistle"; Stevenson, *Power and Propaganda*; Thomas, *Princely Majesty*.

¹² Vale, *The Princely Court*, particularly 1–11.

¹³ A selection of such research includes: Campbell, "Franco-Scottish Architectural Exchanges"; Campbell, "James IV and Edinburgh's First Triumphal Arches"; Dunbar, *Scottish Royal Palaces*; Fawcett, *Scottish Architecture*, 301–330; Guidicini, "Municipal Perspective, Royal Expectations"; Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries*; Rush, "French Fashion in Sixteenth Century Scotland"; Murray, *Imaging Stuart Family Politics*; Murray, "Raising Royal Bodies"; Rush, "The Stirling Castle Palace Exterior Sculpture"; Rush, "The Stirling Heads." Other important scholars in this area include Charles McKean, Richard Oram, and Lizzie Swarbrick.

socio-political history, which has also seen a wider embracing of material culture-driven methodologies in the study of Scottish royalty.¹⁴

It is also essential to note the important role of the various heritage and museum bodies, as well as the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, in pushing these agendas forward.¹⁵ A useful example of this is the work led by Historic Environment Scotland (formerly Historic Scotland) on the palace at Stirling Castle, as it proactively pushed the vibrancy and materiality of the Scottish Renaissance court centre stage through collaborative reinterpretation work.¹⁶ This project, and subsequent work on Linlithgow Palace—another Historic Environment Scotland property—facilitated a new path of research into the materiality of the Renaissance for one of our contributors, Sally Rush, emphasising the potential of such collaborative relationships in ongoing development of research.¹⁷ With this in mind, we firmly encouraged contributions from those working with heritage, archives, and museums for both the Kings and Queens 10 conference and this Scottish-focused special issue. This issue thus contains contributions from a curator, an archivist, and a co-authored piece with the Heritage Partnerships Co-Ordinator from the University of Oxford, as well as contributions from historians and an art historian working in academia, each of whom has collaborated to varied degrees with external partners either for their article herein or research elsewhere.

Putting the materiality of the Scottish monarchy at the heart of this collection of articles means that it engages with a range of interconnected methodological approaches. One of the challenges existing for the research of premodern Scotland, as previously mentioned, is the paucity of various material and non-material sources. This has an impact on methods incorporated in these articles, but it does not limit their

¹⁴ In addition to those listed in footnote 11, see examples such as: Dean, “‘Richesse in Fassone and in Fairness’”; Dean, *Death and the Royal Succession*; Ditchburn, “Rituals, Space and the Marriage of James II”; French, “Magnificence and Materiality”; Westerhof Nyman, “Livery and Dule”; Westerhof Nyman, “Mourning for Madeleine and Margaret.”

¹⁵ For more information about the important work of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and their *Proceedings* publications, see the *Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* website, accessed 11 January 2025, <https://www.socantscot.org/>.

¹⁶ Historic Scotland, *Stirling Castle Palace: Archaeological & Historical Research*, accessed 26 February 2025, <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20190911021636/http://sparc.scran.ac.uk/home/homePage.html>.

¹⁷ For example: Harrison, *Rebirth of a Palace*; Rush, “French Fashion in Sixteenth-Century Scotland”; Rush, “The Stirling Heads.” Some of the work on Stirling Palace project has only been relatively recently made available, however, pointing to the challenges faced by such organisations in bringing data and information from even some of their largest commissioned pieces of work into the public sphere, e.g. Rush, “The Stirling Castle Palace Exterior Sculpture”; Rush, “The Stirling Heads.”

creativity nor the wealth of understanding that emerges from their investigations. Our first two contributors—Bess Rhodes and Alison Rosie—have championed a methodological approach that is often used fruitfully by historians in relation to material culture: using textual records “in the absence of objects.”¹⁸ For Rhodes, the significant losses of pre-sixteenth-century Reformation Catholic material culture in Scotland and the subsequent destructive periods, such as the Covenanting movement of the 1630s and 1640s, means that documentary evidence offers a useful means of combating such absences when analysing the pre-Reformation investment in religious materiality by James IV (r. 1488–1513) and James V (r. 1513–1542). Using inventories and financial records, Rhodes develops an overview of ecclesiastical vestments, altar hangings, and other valuable liturgical textiles used in the pre-Reformation chapels of these two kings. The article explores the interest that both James IV and James V had in developing their collections of ecclesiastical textiles, demonstrating the range of the collections held, and the messages such textiles projected, both religious and political. For Rhodes, these textiles offer examples of both genuine piety on behalf of these monarchs but also indicate their keen awareness of the propagandizing potential of textiles in publicly proclaiming the piety, wealth, and power of these two rulers. The article demonstrates that the loss of physical cultural objects should not distract from the importance they held within Scottish culture, and the textual reconstruction of such objects from inventories and financial records can hold considerable historical value.

Rosie considers the jewellery of Mary, Queen of Scots, through the inventories associated with Mary’s will-making while heavily pregnant in 1566. Jewels and their display have been firmly associated with Renaissance elites and the way they communicated with others, both in terms of sartorial display and the opportunities these items offered for gift exchange and diplomacy.¹⁹ Whilst there are some rare surviving examples of jewellery believed to be associated with Mary, there are significant challenges in confirming their ownership by the queen.²⁰ This textual survival offers a means of engaging with objects that Mary owned even if they no longer survive. Utilising inventories that record the jewels amassed by Mary, Queen of Scots, Rosie explores this

¹⁸ Richardson, “Written Texts and the Performance of Materiality,” 43–4.

¹⁹ For some recent important examples in the study of the Stuarts, see: Field, *Anna of Denmark*, especially Chapter 4; Field, “A ‘Cipher of A and C set on the one Syde with diamonds’: Anna of Denmark’s Jewellery and the Politics of Dynastic Display”; Groundwater, ed., *Decoding the Jewels* (various chapters).

²⁰ The National Museum of Scotland has recently produced a useful new volume exploring such challenges: Groundwater, ed., *Decoding the Jewels*. See also: Groundwater, “Materialising Mary in a Museum.”

jewellery collection both for what it represented in terms of the contemporary fashioning of a queen, but also the queen’s gifting intentions, through her plans to bequeath these items to others, and what this can reveal. Giorgio Riello argues that inventories require a distinct level of caution in their analysis, as they offer us a snapshot of time and there are challenges with why and how they are constructed.²¹ However, Rosie aims to better understand what was most important to the queen at this specific juncture, when she genuinely feared death in childbirth, so these textual survivals with annotation in the queen’s own hand are invaluable. Rosie’s analysis of these extant texts “in the absence of objects” offers an understanding of the personal choices about who received what objects and thus provides important insights into the manner that the queen fostered and nurtured the networks around her using material things.

Our other four contributions take an object-centred approach starting with either a surviving object, a small collection of objects, or a partially surviving building, and their approaches reflect a diversity of methodologies. Rush’s article on the Linlithgow fountain and Dean’s work on the Scottish coronation ampulla focus on a single object and weave together object analysis with that of the surviving textual records of their making, remaking, and use. As well as being grouped by methodological approach, these articles both consider objects associated with Charles I’s coronation visit to Scotland in 1633. Charles’s English coronation had occurred at Westminster in 1626 following his accession in 1625 but, as the first king to succeed the combined thrones of England and Scotland after the Union of the Crowns in 1603, there was no established process. Discussions about a Scottish visit and coronation had started soon after and planning for such began in earnest in 1628, so this was a long-awaited and much-debated event. Rush’s work is rooted in extensive research and collaboration with and for Historic Environment Scotland on the statuary at their sites, particularly Stirling Palace and Linlithgow Palace. Her contribution focuses on the Linlithgow Palace fountain, which was originally made in the reign of James V (r. 1513–1542) and has long been associated with the Renaissance magnificence of this period.²² However, this is an object with a complex biography of being made, remade, and restored through the ravages of time. Rush argues that, based on both the evidence from the fountain itself and the documentary sources, the fountain has more to tell us about the seventeenth century—a period with which it has rarely been

²¹ Giorgio, “Things Seen and Unseen.”

²² See Guidicini, “The Political and Cultural Influence of James V’s Court on the Decoration of the King’s Fountain in Linlithgow Palace.”

associated until now—than has previously been appreciated. Through considering the stonemasons identified as associated with the fountain, and particularly those involved in “dichteris and dresseris of the fontane” in the 1630s, Rush provides important analysis of these craftspeople, allowing for more appreciation for their workmanship backgrounds and the object’s improvement ahead of the king’s visit. The second half of the article focuses more on the object and its key features, along with the comparable Cross Well, situated by the market cross in Linlithgow, which was also transformed to feature as a complementary starting point in the processional welcome for Charles that ended at the fountain in palace. Rush analyses the remodelling of these two objects within the wider context of Charles’ coronation in 1633 and the visit of his father, James VI and I, in 1617 to reflect on the intersections of ideologies of divine kingship, ceremonial and performative magnificence, and the restoration of visual culture previously attacked in the Scottish Reformation.

As with the post-coronation visits to Scotland of Elizabeth II (June 1953) and Charles III (July 2023), the Scottish coronation of Charles I offered a vital opportunity for the king to visit his northern realm. However, in all three instances the presentation of monarch to this Scottish audience needed to be carefully negotiated as it had the potential to cause friction or even sow seeds of rebellion. Ritual actions at Charles I’s Scottish coronation attracted criticism from his contemporaries as well as later historians. However, recent research into the ceremony and materiality of the coronation locations have demonstrated the challenges in navigating the complex expectations and issues of tradition between the king’s northern and southern realms.²³ In her article, Lucinda Dean adds to these discussion of Charles’s Scottish coronation through a focus on one important ritual object: the gold ampulla which held the anointing oil for the coronation. Drawing upon various material culture methodologies, particularly those focusing on the four zones of interaction (intimate, personal, social, and public), Dean adds an exploration of oral and olfactory senses to those of vision and tactility to analyse the role of the ampulla and how it impacted witnesses to the coronation. As Dean notes, contemporary criticism of what was surely a contentious object due to its connotations of Catholic ritual is surprisingly minimal from the largely Presbyterian audience. Through her detailed analysis she concludes that although the ampulla’s effect on observers’ senses was significant, its association with an event as rare as a coronation was deemed to have little impact on day-to-day Presbyterian worship. This indicates that commentators

²³ Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries and Festivals*; Shaw, “St. Giles’ Church and Charles I’s Coronation,” 497.

thus deliberately kept their criticisms to those aspects of Charles’s religious ceremony that were deemed threatening to the Presbyterian way of worship.

Sensory engagement with objects is also central to Anna Groundwater’s contribution, which centres on an analysis of relics of James VII and II and focuses almost entirely on extant relics associated with the Jacobites, who supported the “king-across-the-water.” As was the case for Charles I, the later Stuart monarchs sought to emphasise, embody, and advance the ideals of divine kingship laid down in James VI and I’s *Basilikon Doron*. This goal had mixed results in terms of their popularity in post-Reformation Presbyterian Scotland. Despite the rejection of the proclaimed-Catholic James VII and II from 1688 to the early 1690s, particularly following the birth of his Catholic son, there were many who remained unwaveringly loyal to this long-lived monarchical line—and indeed the divinity vested in it. Groundwater’s contribution to this special issue offers an object-focused analysis of Jacobite memorabilia, with a particular focus on the heart-shaped silver locket reliquary recently acquired by the National Museum of Scotland, purported to contain human remains of James VII and II. As the first of the Jacobite kings-in-exile, James VII and II is a well-known historical figure about which there has been much debate, particularly following his defeat at the hands of his daughter, Mary (II), and nephew, William (III), of Orange.²⁴ The cultural legacy, material and otherwise, of James, his immediate successors, and the courts-in-exile over which they presided has also generated a variety of scholarly interest.²⁵ In particular, there has been a keen interest in the manner that Jacobite supporters subtly (or not so subtly) utilised material culture to signal their allegiances and how these rulers in exile used material means to perpetuate long-term loyalty and support.²⁶ For Groundwater, this specific curious artefact—the locket reliquary—acts as the catalyst for an analysis that encompasses a range of objects, such as touchpieces and jewellery, with a focus on the relic-like qualities of these commemorative pieces, as well as exploring the tangible affective and haptic affordances of such items. In doing so, she argues that it is possible to look beyond such material culture as expressions of political loyalty and religious affiliation to consider how these

²⁴ For some useful introductions, see Mann, *James VII*; Szechi, *The Jacobites*.

²⁵ For example: Corp, “The Exiled Court of James II and James III”; Corp, *A Court in Exile*; Corp, *The Stuarts in Italy*; Szechi, “The Image of the Court.”

²⁶ For example: Guthrie, *The Material Culture of the Jacobites: Monod, Jacobitism and the English People*, particularly 70–92; Nicholson, “The Tartan Portraits of Prince Charles Edward Stuart”; Novotny, “Polite War”; Pittock, *Material Culture and Sedition*; Vullings, “Fit for a Queen.”

artefacts actively fostered emotive connections between the owners and the absent Stuart rulers, despite—or even because—of their physical absence.

Our final contribution takes the conversations about the materiality of the Stewart and Stuart rulers into the realms of heritage preservation, conservation, and promotion in the present, through an exploration of a project focused on the Trinity Apse in Edinburgh. The Trinity Apse is a reconstructed section of Trinity Kirk, a stunning building built in the Gothic tradition by Queen Mary of Guelders (d.1463), widow of James II and mother to James III. Mary’s foundation proclaimed the queen’s piety and made a visible statement about her intentions to live the rest of her life in Scotland, where the queen was acting as leader of the minority government for her young son. Despite the important architectural nature of this building, as well as its function as a burial site for the queen and possibly others, the Kirk was demolished in 1848 to make way for an extension to Waverly Train Station. The bricks of the Kirk were numbered and placed upon Calton Hill with the intention that it be rebuilt in a more suitable location. When the rebuild finally commenced in 1872, only one-third of the stones remained and they were used to reconstruct a version of the original building’s apse. Delman and Harrison offer detailed discourse on the controversy the Kirk’s demolition caused, and the public discourse surrounding the reconstruction. However, most of this article focusses on the value of the Trinity Apse as a potential heritage asset today, calling for full recognition of both the building’s historical significance and its potential to meet multi-stakeholder needs within an urban environment. The article explores research on the power of authenticity and historically informed storytelling to meet impactful heritage experiences. The authors argue powerfully for the place that the Trinity Apse and its royal origin story could play in public engagement with history in modern-day Edinburgh.

From destructions caused by religious reformations to those associated with the march to modernity in the Industrial Revolution and the present-day threats to the conservation and preservation of Scotland’s past for future generations, there has been much physical loss in terms of the material culture and built environments patronised and created by and for the Stewart/ Stuart monarchs of Scotland and the British Isles. These are not unique issues faced only by scholars of Scotland’s royal cultural past; they are shared across a global context in which the threats can often be far more critical and urgent, such as found in various warzones across the modern world. However, the continued propensity—particularly in wider popular perceptions—of Scotland being a

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cultural backwater in the Renaissance and early modern period is another kind of threat to protecting what survives for the future. Many of the contributors to this special issue already play a proactive role in taking such knowledge beyond the confines of scholarly publications, but it is equally important to share such conclusions within the field of royal studies and beyond to continue developing an understanding of how material assets were used by and in support of the kings of Scots. By embracing a wide variety of methodological approaches to material culture, the contributions in this special issue demonstrate that it is possible to further reveal the depth and complexities of the royal material legacy of Scotland’s premodern rulers, even with limited surviving artefacts. In doing so, each contribution enriches our understanding of the ways in which the material world was used by and shaped the interactions, whether positive or negative, between monarchs and their subjects, and robustly continues to challenge perceptions of Scotland as a cultural backwater.

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