



Society of Antiquaries
of **Scotland**

THE RHIND LECTURES **2026**

**Martial Fervour: The Representation of Scottish
Officers and Highland Regiments During the
Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815**

By Professor Vicky Coltman



Friday 19 to Sunday 21 June 2026

Free and open to all – registration required

Attend online or in person at Augustine United Church,
41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1EL

Please visit www.socantscot.org
to see event details and book a place

THE RHIND LECTURES 2026

Martial Fervour: The Representation of Scottish Officers and Highland Regiments During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815

These martial decades (1793–1815) have been extensively studied by military historians, and the 2026 Rhind Lectures pursue a complementary trajectory by offering a cultural history. They consider the mortal wounds sustained on the battlefield by Scottish Commanders-in-Chief, before turning to oil-on-canvas martial portraits and miniatures. They explore the idealised martial body alongside hairstyles that were similarly subject to military regulation and, wherever possible, integrate the first-hand experiences of those who bore arms with the broader reception and commemoration of wartime Britain as a nation at arms.



Vicky Coltman is Professor of Eighteenth-Century History of Art at the University of Edinburgh, where she specialises in material culture – or ‘knick knack’ history – during the second half of the long 18th century in Scotland. Vicky is the author of four academic books and editor of two volumes. She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Society of Antiquaries of London, and the Royal Historical Society; a trustee of the Jacobite Studies Trust, the Runciman Apse Trust and a member of the advisory board of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. She also edits a series with Edinburgh University Press.

Booking: Tickets are free and popular so booking early is advisable, especially for in-person tickets.

All times noted in the event programme are British Summer Time (BST).

Friday 19 June

5pm ‘The Scotch were never so national as now’: The Cultural Afterlife of the Battle of Alexandria, 1801

Lecture One explores the cultural impact of the Battle of Alexandria, fought in Egypt on 21 March 1801. Despite being a significant land victory for British troops, the battle was marked by the mortal wounding of the Scottish-born commander-in-chief, Sir Ralph Abercromby. In Britain, the contribution of the 42nd Highland Regiment was quickly lionised, and public responses combined grief with triumph, creating a powerful mix of condolence and commemoration which the lecture traces in its visual and material culture manifestations.

6.30pm ‘Fortunate for his Reputation that he fell’: Rehabilitating John Moore’s Memory After the Battle of Corunna, 1809

Lecture Two focuses on Sir John Moore, who served with Abercromby in Egypt in 1801 and his mortal wounding at the Battle of Corunna in January 1809. It asks if the London portrait painter Thomas Lawrence was correct when he surmised in a private letter that it was ‘fortunate for [Moore’s] Reputation that he fell’ in the field while commanding the British army to victory following a disastrous retreat in which thousands of his men died.

– *Followed by a drinks reception*

Saturday 20 June

3pm ‘The Scotchmen – “these men without breeches” – have the credit of the day at Waterloo’

Lecture Three reconsiders the contribution of the Highland regiments at Waterloo, not in order to support or refute, in incremental terms, Robert Southey’s letter of 2 October 1815 claiming that the Scots ‘had the credit of the day’. Instead, it argues that their martial participation was represented (or misrepresented) across a series of interpenetrating cultural spheres: visual and literary.

4.30pm Portraiture and the Professions: The Art and History of Henry Raeburn

Lecture Four interrupts the chronological sequence of the preceding three lectures to introduce the practice of Edinburgh’s leading wartime portrait painter, Sir Henry Raeburn. It privileges a social history approach over the traditional art-historical focus of the artist’s biographers and cataloguers, examining the professions of his male sitters — particularly the many medical practitioners, university professors, and legal figures who sat to Raeburn and with whom he interacted as fellow members of Edinburgh’s many clubs and societies.

Sunday 21 June

3pm The Martial Portrait I: Oil on canvas

Lecture Five foregrounds the martial portrait within Raeburn’s prodigious output, particularly during the wartime generation of 1793–1815. It challenges the longstanding characterisation of Raeburn as the in-house portrait painter of the Scottish Enlightenment by demonstrating how his officer sitters traversed the globe, participating in campaigns in the East and West Indies, Egypt, and the Peninsula.

4.30pm The Martial Portrait II: Miniatures

The final lecture focuses on the miniature martial portrait, typically painted in watercolour on ivory, but also on paper and on glass. Six unpublished miniatures of Scottish-born army officers painted during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars for female family members back home in Britain will be introduced, accompanied by the affectionate correspondence in which their commission, transport, viewing and display is discussed by the sitter and their female recipient.

Major James Macdonell, c.1804–09, by Henry Raeburn © Museum of the Isles

The RHIND LECTURES, a series of six lectures delivered annually on a subject pertaining to history or archaeology by eminent authorities on the subject, have been given since 1876. They commemorate Fellow Alexander Henry Rhind of Sibster (1833–63) who left a bequest to endow the lectures which perpetuate his name. To find out how to leave a gift your Will, visit www.socantscot.org/support/legacies



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Cover image: *The Battle of Alexandria, 21 March 1801 (1803)* by Antoine Cardon after Jacques-Philippe de Loutherbourg © Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection



Founded in 1780, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland is an independent heritage charity with a global Fellowship. We facilitate research through grants and awards, advocate as a voice for heritage, and share knowledge of the past through events, publications and projects.

Anyone who is interested in Scotland's past can apply to become a Fellow.

In addition to helping to support the Society achieve its aims and charitable objectives, benefits of Fellowship include exclusive access to all articles in the most recent annual *Proceedings* – the Society's peer-reviewed journal – the use of FSAScot postnominals, discounts on Society publications (20%) and some events, and invitations to Fellows-only tours and online Fellows' meetings.

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