

James Anderson, *Selectus Diplomatum et Numismatum Scotiae Thesaurus*, 1739

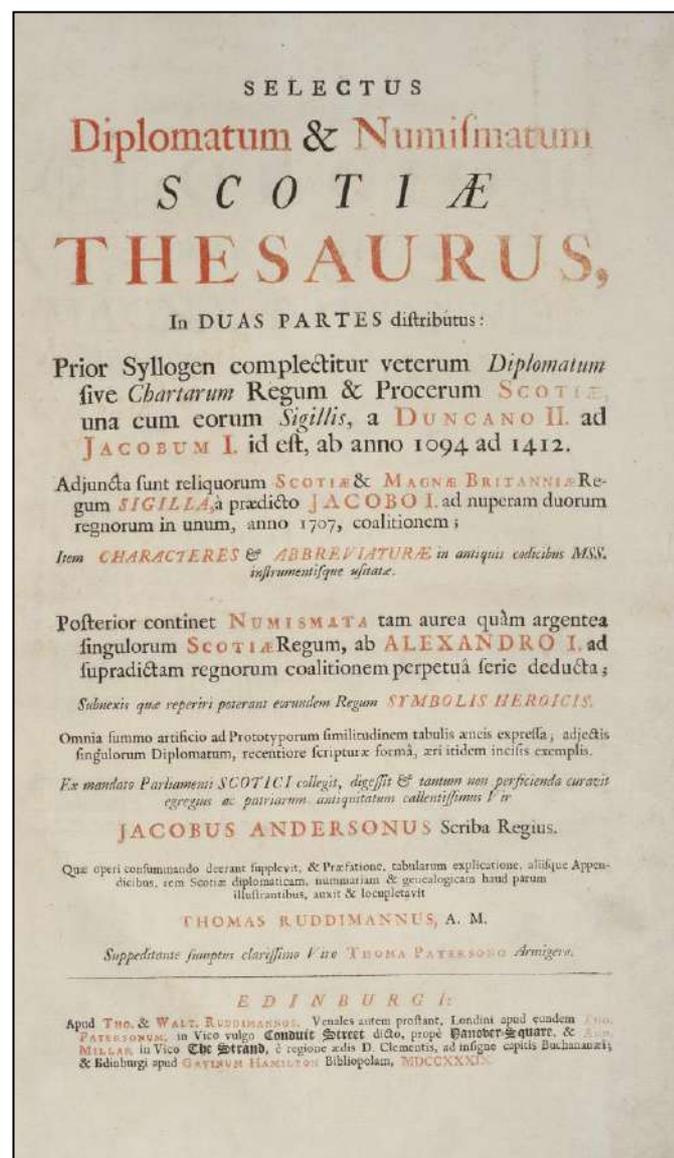
Special Collections featured item for November 2013
by Dr. Esther Mijers, Lecturer in British History,
University of Reading

James Anderson, 1662-1728. *Selectus diplomatum & numismatum Scotiae thesaurus ...*
Edinburgi : apud Tho. & Walt. Ruddimannos ... , MDCCXXXIX[1739] OVERSTONE--SHELF
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James Anderson (1662–1728) was a Scottish historiographer and antiquary. Born in Edinburgh on 5 August 1662, the son of a Presbyterian minister, he studied law at the University of Edinburgh from 1677 until 1680. As a lawyer, he was required to study old charters and documents, and became interested in antiquarian scholarship, eventually abandoning the legal profession altogether. He was part of a group of well-known Edinburgh antiquaries,

including the virtuosi Sir Robert Sibbald, Sir James Dalrymple, and Captain John Slezer, author of *Theatrum Scotiae* (1693). He first gained notoriety from his involvement in the polemics over the Act of Settlement (1701), which was passed in England to ensure a Protestant succession after the death of Queen Anne, but not in Scotland. It raised questions with regard to Scotland's independence and formed an important episode in the lead-up to the Union of Parliaments in 1707. Anderson's contribution was his *Historical Essay Shewing that the Crown and Kingdom of Scotland is Imperial and Independent*, a patriotic refutation of William Atwood's *The Superiority and Direct Dominion of the Imperial Crown of England, over the Crown and Kingdom of Scotland*, which had argued in favour of the continuing superiority of the English crown over Scotland.



Title page of *Selectus Diplomatium et Numismatum Scotiae Thesaurus*

Although written in haste and with a polemical purpose, Anderson's *Historical Essay* displayed a critical attitude towards historical sources and a skilful application of palaeography and diplomatic techniques, which 'represented a completely new approach to the study of Scottish history'.¹ Influenced by the French scholar Jean Mabillon (1632-1707), the founder of palaeography and diplomatics, Anderson's work set a new benchmark for antiquarian pursuits in Scotland.



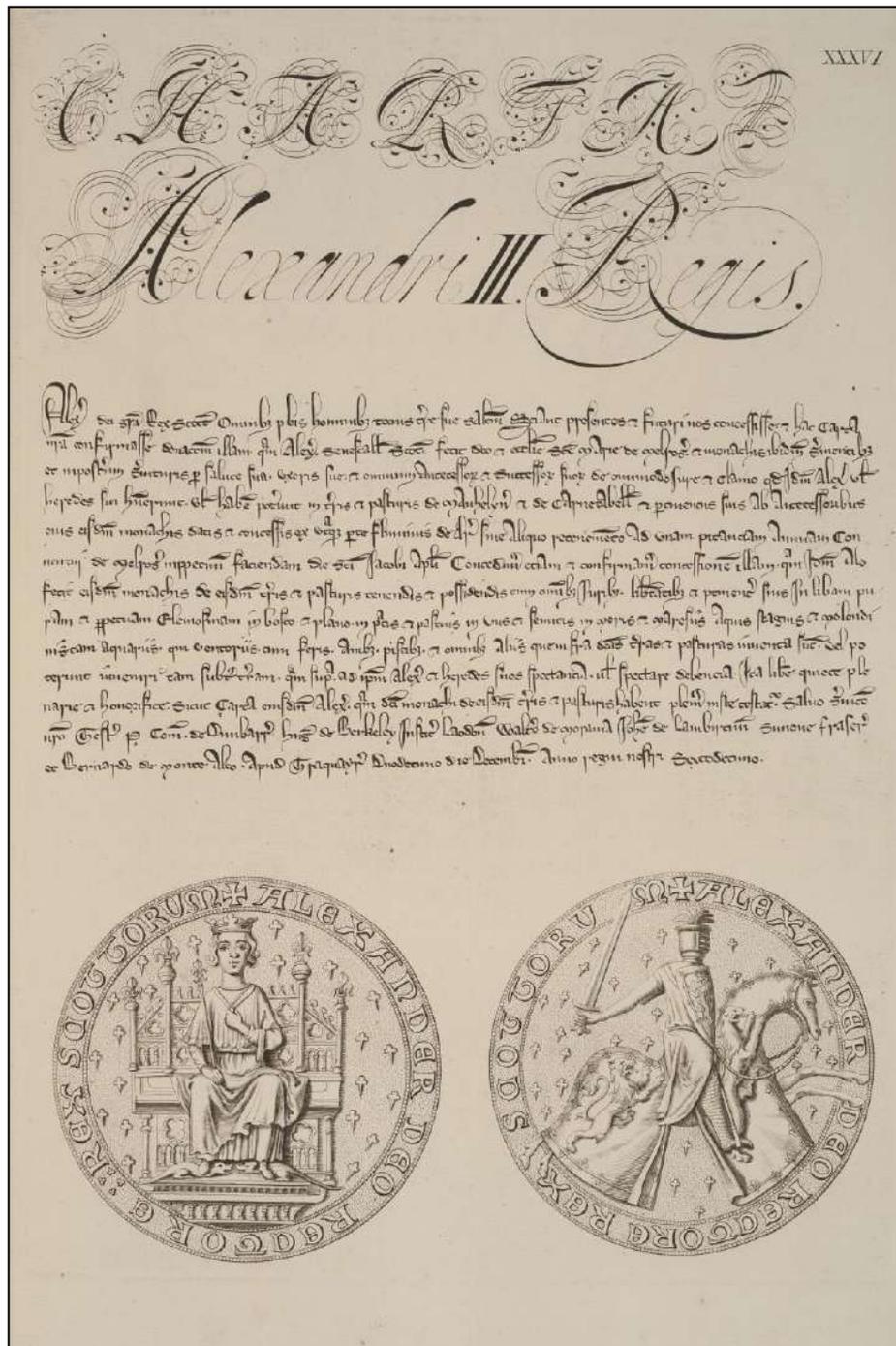
Engraved frontispiece from Selectus Diplomatum et Numismatum Scotiae Thesaurus

Upon its publication, the *Historical Essay* was received with patriotic enthusiasm, and in 1705 Anderson was awarded £4800 Scots by the Scottish Parliament to assist him in further studies. Encouraged, Anderson started on his great work, the projected *Diplomata Scotiae*, which involved the collection and engraving of all available medieval Scottish charters and seals. In 1706 Parliament granted him a further £3600 Scots in order to continue the work, although he received none of this money. After the Union of Parliaments (1707), the new British parliament in London was unwilling to spend any more on Anderson's project. Much of the rest of his life was spent in London, unsuccessfully trying to secure the financial help he needed.



Charter of David I (1084-1153) (detail of Plate XII)

Despite the patronage of the Duke of Argyll and other well-placed friends, Anderson ended his life in poverty, seemingly the victim of political controversies over his various historical projects. His staunch Whiggish and Presbyterian allegiances proving a hindrance in post-Union Britain. In 1718 he tried to raise funds for the *Diplomata* project by subscription, but insufficient interest doomed the idea. He died in London, of apoplexy, on 3 April 1728.



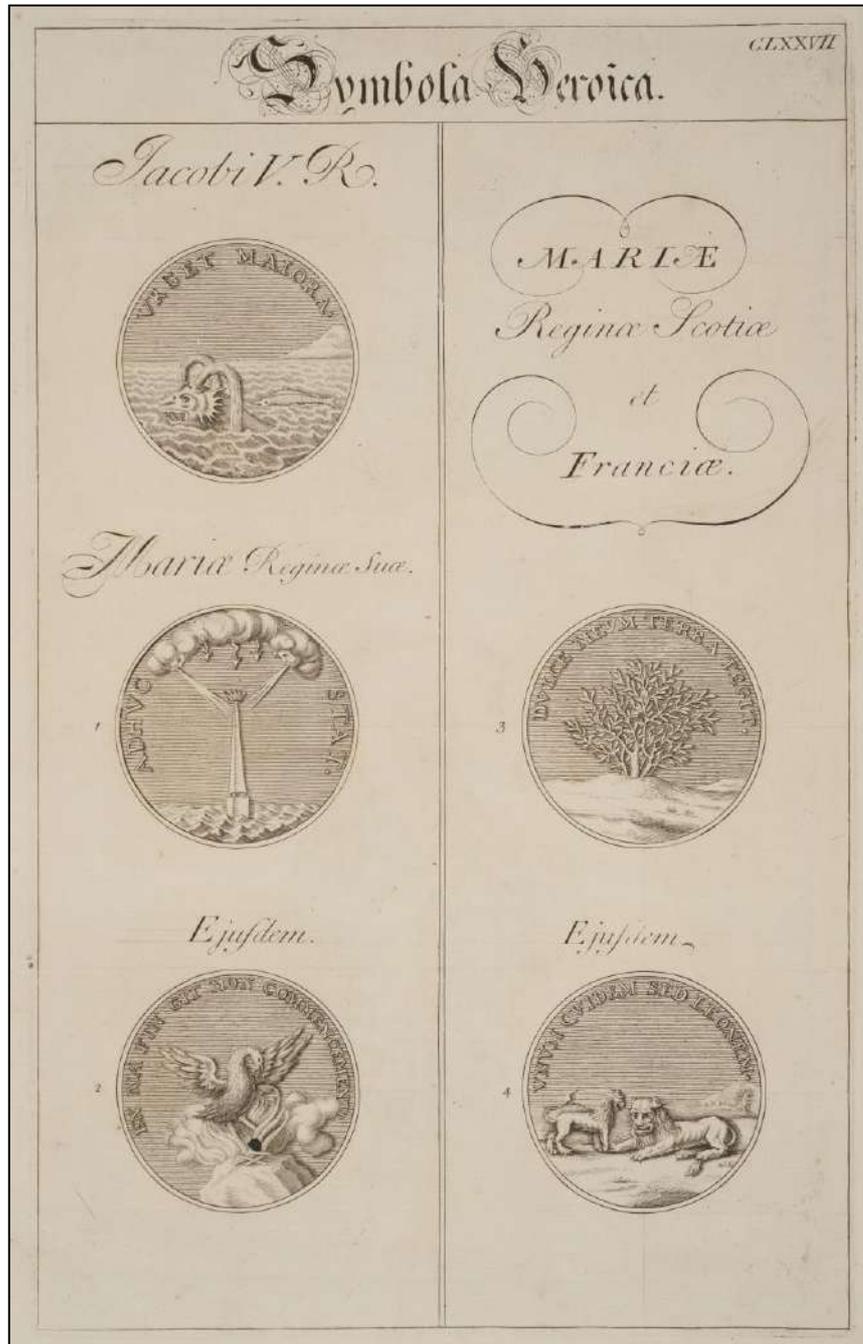
Charter of Alexander III (1241-1286) (detail of Plate XXXVI)

Despite his lack of funds, Anderson worked on the *Diplomata* all his life. The eventual publication of the work after Anderson's death was largely due to his friend Thomas Paterson, who asked Thomas Ruddiman (1674–1757) to finish the project.



The volume also contains engravings of coins from the reigns of Scottish monarchs (detail of plate CLXIX depicting coins of James VI and Charles I)

Ruddiman was a Jacobite printer, classical scholar, and keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. Despite his political views, he was highly regarded as a scholar and arguably did more than anyone to further antiquarian and classical studies in post-Union Scotland. In 1737, he agreed to complete and publish Anderson's *Diplomata*. The completed work appeared in folio in 1739, entitled *Selectus Diplomatum et Numismatum Scotiae Thesaurus*, with an eighty-five-page introductory essay by Ruddiman, which may have been based on material left among Anderson's papers, and 180 leaves of plates. It stands alone as a *tour de force* of antiquarian scholarship.



The volume also contains engravings of the emblems of Scottish monarchs (Plate CLXXVII)

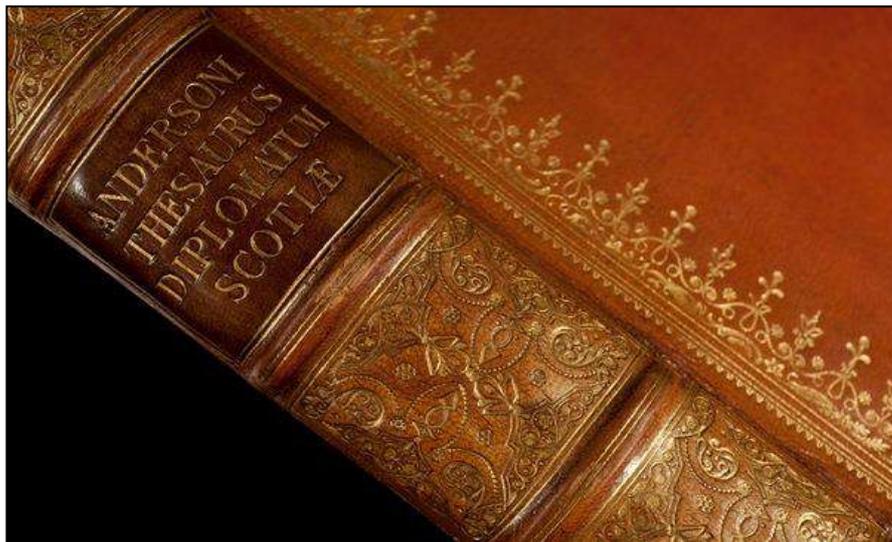
The volume contains some exceptionally fine engravings of charters, seals and coins. The artist responsible for these engravings was John Sturt (1658–1730) [portrait shown below], a highly skilled English engraver. Sturt produced illustrations for many of the religious and artistic publications of the early eighteenth century, including Andrea Pozzo's *Rules and Examples of Perspective* (1707) which has been the subject of a previous Featured Item on the University of Reading Special Collections website (<http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/special-collections/featurepozzo.pdf>).



Portrait of John Sturt, 1774.

Mezzotint by William Humphrey after William Faithorne the younger

The copy of *Selectus Diplomatum et Numismatum Scotiae Thesaurus* held at the University of Reading is from the Overstone Library, a fine example of a 19th century gentleman's private library, displaying a concern for good copies and the best editions. It is particularly notable for its holdings of 18th and early 19th century English and French bindings. This volume has a particularly fine 18th century gilt tooled binding [see detail of binding below], and is signed on the front flyleaf with an inkstamp which reads 'Bound by J. Clarke'. 'J. Clarke' is possibly John Clarke of Essex Street in the Strand, London who traded as a bookseller, publisher, bookbinder and stationer between 1730 and 1755.



1. Ferguson, 9.

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Seal of Charles I - detail of Plate XCIV