

ANCIENT CALEDONIAN SOCIETY DRESS COAT (CIRCA 1786)



This stunning late 18th century tartan coat linked to the Ancient Caledonian Society was recently secured at auction by the Scottish Tartans Authority with generous support from The Royal Celtic Society and The Highland Society of London.

The coat is typical of late 18th century frock coats and is adorned with thirteen large brass buttons engraved with a thistle surmounted by a crown and surrounded by the Society's name. The previously unknown tartan was almost certainly designed for the Society and is unusual in having a decorative silk motif woven into it. On each of the red square there is a white rose and two buds representing King James VIII/III and the Princes Charles and Henry. The use of such obvious Jacobite iconography only 33 years after the last execution of a Jacobite leader is extraordinary and shows just how safe it had become to make such references without fear of reprisal.

This coat, or another like it, was loaned by the Banff Museum to the 1901 Glasgow International Exhibition where it was described as the 'official Dress coat of the Ancient Caledonian Society of London'. Little is known of the Society beyond the fact that it was founded in 1786. That was a few years after the Highland Society of London was founded and it is possible that at least some of the members (the great and the good of Scottish Society) were the same. Given the rarity of the coat and the fact that relatively few would have been made it may be that this and the Banff coat are one and the same.

It is hoped that further research may identify the original owner of the coat which is currently on display as part of the Wild and Majestic Exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland.