

Catherine The Great



Admiral Samuel Greig, who was in Catherine's Navy. Images © The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

The Thistle and the Eagle

As formidable a leader as Catherine the Great was, empires such as hers did not get built without a little help. A number of Scots went to St Petersburg where they played key roles, securing prestigious positions in Russian medicine, engineering, architecture, art and the military.

Throughout the Catherine the Great: An Enlightened Empress exhibition, look out for the stories of these great Scots and their special relationship with Catherine, under the banner of The Thistle and the Eagle.

Some impressed with their ideas. Dr Matthew Guthrie lived and worked in St Petersburg. He wrote a work in which he compared the Russian peasantry to the ancient Greeks. This comparison between two great civilisations naturally won favour with Catherine.

Others were men of action. Admiral Samuel Greig played a decisive role in Catherine's Navy during the Turkish Wars and was much decorated for it. When he died, Catherine ordered her architect Quarenghi to create designs for his tomb.

The advanced medical skills of Scots also came into play. Dr John Rogerson was Catherine's personal physician and tended her on her death bed. He first earned the family's gratitude by saving the life of the son of Princess Dashkova, Catherine's confidante.

The work of Scottish artists and architects did not go unnoticed. Included in Catherine's collections is the work of James Tassie, a Scot who pioneered a technique to reproduce copies of ancient cameos.

Catherine adored these, ordering thousands. Such was her patronage, Tassie was able to introduce hundreds more examples to his repertoire.

Charles Cameron was one of several Scottish architects who worked on Catherine's magnificent palaces and estates. Cameron's book on Ancient Roman Bath Houses impressed Catherine enough to secure an invitation to Russia. The Cameron Gallery still stands in the park at Tsarskoye Selo.

Discover more at this exhibition which brings more than 600 treasures from Catherine the Great's collection to Edinburgh for its only UK show.

“Scottish artists and architects did not go unnoticed”

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