PICTURING COLIN MACLAURIN

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On the dust jacket of Stella Mills's invaluable book *The Collected Letters of Colin MacLaurin* (Mills, 1982), there appears an engraving of the renowned Scottish mathematician.



This engraving was made almost fifty years after Colin MacLaurin's death. It is one of six existing images of him: four engravings, one oil painting, and a charcoal sketch. All were created by men who had never seen MacLaurin. Nevertheless, these likenesses are regularly licensed and used by authors, editors, and graphic designers. Many are sold commercially on greetings cards, posters, coffee mugs, sweatshirts and other sundry paraphernalia.

Are these valid depictions of MacLaurin? In this paper, we will explore their sources, provenances and authenticities. We will learn the backgrounds of the artists and what motivated each of them. And we will see that there is more to the history of the images of Colin MacLaurin than meets the eye.

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Colin MacLaurin was born in February 1698 in Clachan of Glendaruel on the Cowal Peninsula of Scotland. He was the youngest of three children (all sons) born to John MacLaurin (c.1658-1698) and Mary Cameron (1647-1707; m. 1690). Colin came from very religious Scottish Presbyterian roots. His father was the minister in the Kilmodan Parish Church from 1689-1698. Unfortunately, John MacLaurin died when Colin was only six weeks old. The three boys then moved to Dumbarton with their mother "for the more convenient education of her children" (MacLaurin, 1748, p. i)." However, when she died in 1707, Colin and his oldest brother, John, (the

middle brother having died in the interim) returned to the Cowal Peninsula to live with his father's brother, Daniel, who was the minister in Kilfinan.

Colin entered the University of Glasgow in 1709 at age eleven. (This was not an uncommon age for boys to begin their university education at that time.) He received his master's degree in 1713 for his thesis *De gravitate, aliisque viribus naturalibus* (*On gravity, and other natural forces*) (MacLaurin, 1713; reprinted and translated in Tweddle, 2007, pp. 6-43). Coming from a religious family, he immediately enrolled in the university's divinity school but withdrew the following year and returned to live with his uncle in Kilfinan. There he remained until 1717 when he was appointed to a professorship at Marischal College in Aberdeen. In 1725, MacLaurin moved to the University of Edinburgh to assist the ageing mathematics professor James Gregory (1666-1742), and there he succeeded to the professorship upon Gregory's death.

A brilliant scholar and teacher, MacLaurin was instrumental in founding the Medical Society of Edinburgh in 1731 which would later become the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In 1743 his actuarial computations helped lay the groundwork for the Scottish Ministers' Widows' Fund (Dow, 1992, pp. 33-6). With the Jacobite uprising of 1745, MacLaurin attempted to organize the fortification of Edinburgh against the approaching army of Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie). However when the defenses collapsed without even a skirmish, MacLaurin fled to York

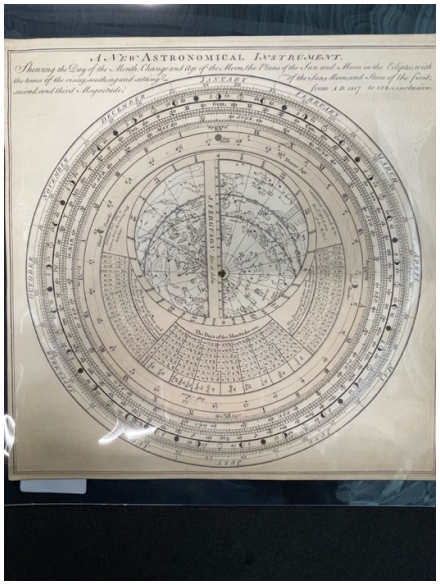
(Riding, 2017, pp. 108-17). During the trip and his return to Edinburgh the following year, he became ill and ultimately succumbed in 1746. The site of his interment at Greyfriars graveyard has been lost, but a plaque in his honor hangs on the exterior southern wall of the kirk along with a table tomb just below it.

B. FIRST-HAND IMAGES

Only two first-hand images of Colin MacLaurin (i.e. made by a contemporary who actually saw him) are known to have existed. Both are now lost.

1. A small portrait (limning) by the astronomer James Ferguson (ca. 1740)

James Ferguson (1710-1776) was a self-educated polymath and a well-known Scottish astronomer (Rothman, 2004). In 1741 he met Colin MacLaurin in Edinburgh in connection with an orrery that Ferguson had designed.[1]



[1] Photograph taken by the author by permission of the Science Museum Group.

Of this meeting, Ferguson wrote (Henderson, 1867, p. 42):

> Mr. Maclaurin received me with the greatest civility when I first went to see him at Edinburgh; he then became an exceeding [sic] good friend to me, and continued so till his death.

On a pencil and chalk sketch he made around 1795, the artist David Steuart Erskine (1742-1829), the Eleventh Earl of Buchan, wrote that he based his sketch in part "from a drawing by Ferguson the Astronomer" (see section C. SECOND-HAND IMAGE below). While in Edinburgh during 1736-1743, Ferguson drew several small portraits (called *limnings*) of various professors and students at the university. Although a partial list of these men does not include his name, it is very plausible that Colin MacLaurin might have been among the sitters because of Ferguson's close relationship with the renowned mathematician.[2]

Ferguson's limnings are ovals with dimensions 2.5 x 2 inches. Millburn and King give a list of "Miniature Portraits attributed to Ferguson in major British Collections" (Millburn and King, 1988, p. 263). Of the nineteen that are listed, only

[2] Ebenezer Henderson (1809-1879), Ferguson's biographer, gives the following list of Ferguson's limnings drawn during this period (Henderson, 1867, p. 472):

- John Stewart (1712-1759) Prof. of Natural History, Univ. of Edin. (1742-1759)
- Mat[t]hew Stewart (1717-1785) Prof. of Mathematics, Univ. of Edin. (1747-1772) (succeeded Colin MacLaurin as Professor of Mathematics at Edinburgh); student of Robert Simson (1734-1741); student of Colin MacLaurin (1741-1743)
- Robert Hunter (c1703-1779) Prof. of Greek, Univ. of Edin. (1741-1772)
- John Stevenson (1695-1775) Prof. of '*Philosophice'* [Professor of Logic and Metaphysics], Univ. of Edin. (1730-74)
- George Stewart [Stuart] (1715-1793) Prof. of Humanities (Latin), Univ. of Edin. (1741-1775)
- William Wallace (d. 1786) [Assistant] Prof. of Natural History [Universal Civil History and Greek and Roman Antiquities], Univ. of Edin. (1754-1765)
- James Balfour (1705-95) Prof. of Moral History, Univ. of Edin. (1754-1764)

three of the sitters are identified, and none of them is MacLaurin. The following unidentified example comes from the collection of the Science Museum Group in London:



Could this have been Colin MacLaurin?[3]

[3] Photograph taken by the author by permission of the Science Museum Group (reference number 1992 725/2).

2. Death mask of Colin MacLaurin made upon his passing (1746)

During the eighteenth century, it was common to make a death mask of a renowned individual immediately upon his passing. Such molds were often taken to preserve the countenance of an individual which could be later used as a source of artistic design (e.g. drawings, sculptures, effigies) (Gorvett, 2024; Kaufman and McNeil, 1989, pp. 506-7; Kolbe, 1929, pp. 43-5). In addition to relying upon Ferguson's limning, Buchan also wrote that he based his sketch of MacLaurin partially upon "a cast [in the possession?] E Morton [taken?] Post Mortem" (see section C. SECOND-HAND IMAGE below).[4] Although Colin MacLaurin's death mask has been lost, here is one that was taken of Isaac Newton upon his death in 1727:



[4] James Douglas, Fourteenth Earl of Morton (1702/3-1768) was a contemporary of MacLaurin and consulted him on several cartographic projects. In addition, he was President of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh (1737-1768) and the Royal Society (1764-1768) (MacLaurin, 1801, pp. xiii-xx; Guerrini, 2004).

This wax copy is currently in the collection of the Royal Society (archive reference number S/0047).

C. SECOND-HAND IMAGE

Pencil and chalk sketch by Buchan (ca. 1795)



David Steuart Erskine (1742-1829), the Eleventh Earl of Buchan, was both an artist and a collector (Kassler, 2016, pp. 5-9). His father, Henry David Erskine, the Tenth Earl of Buchan (1710-1767), was a student of MacLaurin at Edinburgh (Chambers, 1835, vol. II, p. 223). Around 1798, John Smith of the Inner Temple[5] published *Iconographia Scotica* in which he offered biographies and images of many

[5] The Inner Temple is one of four Inns of Court to which one must be admitted in order to practice law in England or Wales. It has often been employed as an appellation, but not everyone who has used it has actually been a member. The identity of John Smith of the Inner Temple is unknown; indeed, this might have been a pseudonym.

famous Scotsmen. The last of these was of Colin MacLaurin. In it, Buchan is quoted as he laments (Smith of the Inner Temple, [1798?], article on Colin MacLaurin [unpaginated]):

> "I enquired diligently for any traces or paper, or canvass, that might remain to exhibit the resemblance of the countenance and person of a man [Colin MacLaurin] whose Works and Character I so much admired, that I might place a copy of it in my apartment.
>
> In this research I was almost finally disappointed, for I could find only a black lead drawing done from MACLAURIN, when he was a very young man, and a cast in wax taken from his face after he was dead, in the possession of the learned Earl of Morton, President of the Royal Society. With the aid of these I made many sketches with my own pencil, and put that which by the surviving scholars of MACLAURIN was though[t] to have the greatest resemblance, into the hands of C. Metz, the Painter, who after several essays, and amendments, painted the Portrait which I have caused to be engraved.
>
> This Painting has been often recognized in my numerous collection by the old scholars and acquaintance of MACLAURIN, so that no doubt can be entertained of its recording somewhat at least of the fabric that contained the bright and virtuous spirit of COLIN MACLAURIN, to whose memory I consecrate it."

This sketch of MacLaurin measures 12.24 x 10.43 inches. It is one of thirty-two of Buchan's drawings that are preserved in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh (accession number: PG 1643).[6]

[6] National Galleries of Scotland collection. Photo, National Galleries of Scotland. <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/3143?search=PG%201643&search_set_offset=0>

The following is written (presumably by Buchan) on the top left portion of the sketch:

Colin Maclaurin
from a drawing by
Ferguson the Astronomer
[&?] a cast in the possession E Morton
[taken?] Post Mortem

Buchaniae Comes
delt.[7]

N. B.
M. had
star or
defect in
his left eye

This is our closest pictorial connection with Colin MacLaurin – sketched from marginal sources half a century after his death by someone who had never met him.

[7] The Latin phrase "Buchaniae Comes" can be translated as "an Earl of Buchan," and the abbreviation "delt." is for the Latin word "delineavit" (he sketched).

D. THIRD-HAND IMAGES

1. Oil painting by Conrad Martin Metz (ca. 1795)



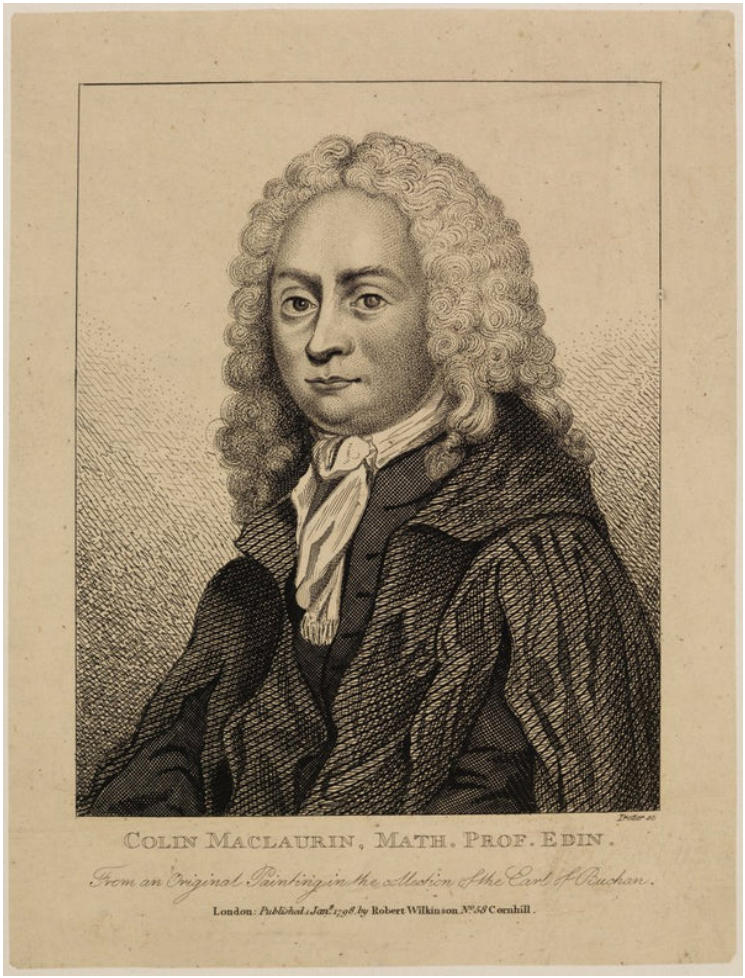
As mentioned in the preceding section, Buchan commissioned the German-born artist Conrad Martin Metz (1749-1827) to paint a portrait of MacLaurin based largely upon his sketch. This portrait was to become part of Buchan's collection at Dryburgh House, Berwickshire. It is the largest of the known images of MacLaurin measuring 15.00 x 12.38 inches. Metz was a painter and engraver who had moved to London and began his studies at the Royal Academy Schools in 1772 under direction of the eminent engraver Francesco Bartolozzi (1727-1815) (Royal Academy Collection, [undated]). The portrait currently hangs in the Kelvin Room

of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.[8] A copy of it is on prominent display on the pulpit of the Kilmodan Parish Church along with a commemorative plaque honoring the MacLaurin family:

[8] Reproduced with permission of The Royal Society of Edinburgh (reference number RSE-2017-01-ACQ01).


IN MEMORY OF JOHN MACLAVRIN,
MINISTER OF KILMODAN WHO DIED 1698.
A FAITHFVL PASTOR OF GREAT PVBLIC SPIRIT, LITERARY
ABILITY AND BVSINESS TALENT.
HIS ELDEST SON JOHN MACLAVRIN,
MINISTER OF NORTH WEST PARISH, GLASGOW.
BORN AT KILMODAN OCT 1693. DIED SEPT 1754.
A MAN OF EXTRAORDINARY ZEAL AND PIETY. THE MOST
PROFOVND AND EDOQVENT SCOTTISH THEOLOGIAN OF THE
18TH CENTVRY.
HIS YOVNGEST SON, THE CELEBRATED
COLIN MACLAVRIN, M.A., F.R.S.
PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS VNIVERSITY
EDINBVRGH. BORN AT KILMODAN FEB 1698. DIED
VITH JVNE 1746. ONE OF THE MOST EMINENT AMONG THE
MATHEMATICIANS AND PHILOSOPHERS THAT GREAT BRITAIN
HAS PRODVCED. HE WAS NOTED FOR BENEVOLENCE AND
VNAFFECTED PIETY AND RENDERED DISTINGVISHED SERVICE
TO HIS COVNTRY AND TO THE CAVSE OF RELIGION.
ERECTED BY SIR JAMES RVSSELL, LL.D.
AND LIEVT.-COLONEL A. F. RVSSELL, C.B.C.
NATIVES OF KILMODAN

2. Line engraving by Thomas Trotter (ca. 1798)



Trotter sc

COLIN MACLAURIN, MATH. PROF. ED.
From an Original Painting in the collection of the Earl of Buchan.
London: Published 1 Jan^{y}. 1798, by Robert Wilkinson N^{o}. 58 Cornhill

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Buchan's sketch served as the model for three subsequent engravings of Colin MacLaurin. In eighteenth-century Great Britain, these engravings were often commissioned for biographical encyclopedias. This one is by Thomas Trotter (1756-1803) who contributed six other engravings for *Iconographia Scotica* by John Smith

of the Inner Temple.[9] It measures 9.92 x 6.50 inches. According to Smith (article on Colin MacLaurin [unpaginated]):

> The Portrait in this collection is taken from [Buchan's sketch, Metz's painting,] and from a drawing in black-lead by Ferguson the Astronomer.

Trotter specialized in engravings with Scottish or church connections. Many were based upon his own drawings (Alexander, 2014, pp. 102-19; Alexander, 2021, pp. 921-3).

[9] The "sc" after Trotter's name in the caption is the abbreviation for the Latin word "sculpsit" (he engraved).

3. Stipple engraving by Edward Harding, Junior (1799)[10]



COLIN MACLAURIN
Pub^{d} 1 Dec^{r}. 1798 by Edw^{d}. Harding 98 Pall Mall.

Continuing in the tradition of engravings for biographical encyclopedias, this one is by Edward Harding, Junior (1776-1796), "… stipple engraver of considerable

[10] This is the image on the cover of Stella Mills's book.

promise who was signing plates in his teens and died young" (Alexander, 2021, p. 420).[11] The image appeared in John Pinkerton's *Scotish* [sic] *Gallery* (Pinkerton, 1799, article on Colin MacLaurin [unpaginated]).[12] It measures 7.48 x 5.71 inches and is one of fourteen engravings in the book that are attributed to him, four of which are explicitly identified as based upon an original by Buchan. Harding, Junior was the nephew of the book's publisher, Edward Harding (1755-1840) (O'Donoghue and Desmarais, 2004).

[11] Edward Harding, Junior was no more than twenty when he passed away, and this image was published posthumously. For more examples of his engravings see <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=edward&keyword=harding&keyword=junior>.
[12] John Pinkerton (1758-1826) was an eccentric and frustrated Scottish publisher (O'Flaherty, 2015).

4. Stipple engraving by Robert Page (1814)

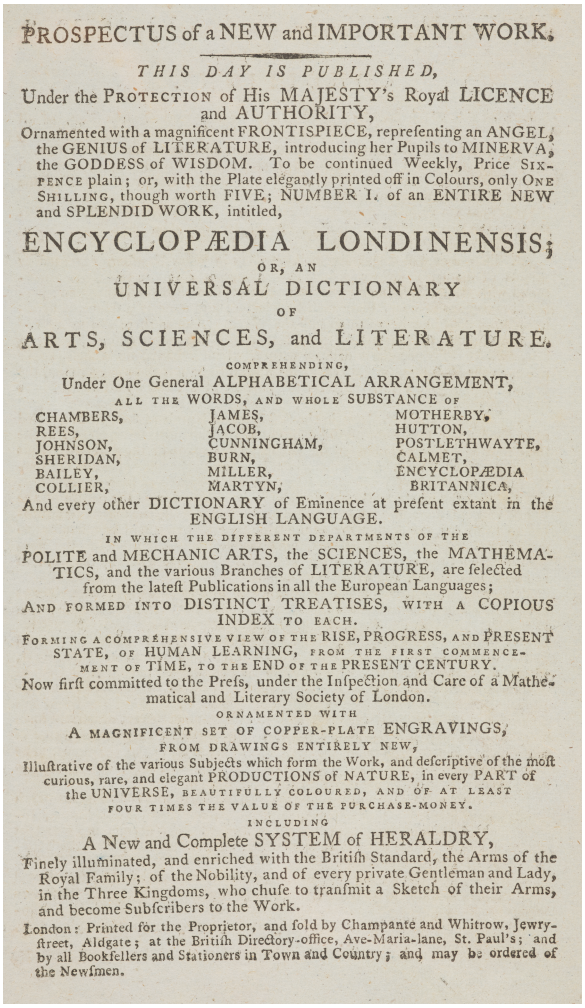


Page Sculp
MACLAURIN
London Pub[d]. as the Act directs Nov[r]. 1[st]. 1814 by G. Jones.

This engraving first appears in John Wilkes's *Encyclopædia Londinensis* volume xiv (Wilkes, 1816, between pages 46 & 47). The engraver was Robert Page

(c.1784 - 1839/40) whose works included eminent Scotsmen as well as several biblical scenes (Alexander, 2021, p. 672; Hunnisett, 1989, p. 69). A 1795(?) prospectus[13] for subscriptions to *Encyclopædia Londinensis* advertised that its forthcoming twenty-four volumes would be:

> …ornamented with a magnificent set of copper-plate engravings, from drawings entirely new, illustrative of the various subjects which form the Work, and descriptive of the most curious, rare, and elegant Productions of Nature, beautifully coloured, and of at least four times the value of the purchase money…



PROSPECTUS of a NEW and IMPORTANT WORK.

THIS DAY IS PUBLISHED,

Under the PROTECTION of His MAJESTY's Royal LICENCE and AUTHORITY,

Ornamented with a magnificent FRONTISPIECE, repreſenting an ANGEL, the GENIUS of LITERATURE, introducing her Pupils to MINERVA, the GODDESS of WISDOM. To be continued Weekly, Price SIXPENCE plain; or, with the Plate elegantly printed off in Colours, only ONE SHILLING, though worth FIVE; NUMBER I. of an ENTIRE NEW and SPLENDID WORK, intitled,

ENCYCLOPÆDIA LONDINENSIS;

OR, AN

UNIVERSAL DICTIONARY

OF

ARTS, SCIENCES, and LITERATURE.

COMPREHENDING,

Under One General ALPHABETICAL ARRANGEMENT,

ALL THE WORDS, AND WHOLE SUBSTANCE OF

CHAMBERS,	JAMES,	MOTHERBY,
REES,	JACOB,	HUTTON,
JOHNSON,	CUNNINGHAM,	POSTLETHWAYTE,
SHERIDAN,	BURN,	CALMET,
BAILEY,	MILLER,	ENCYCLOPÆDIA
COLLIER,	MARTYN,	BRITANNICA,

And every other DICTIONARY of Eminence at preſent extant in the ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

IN WHICH THE DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS OF THE POLITE and MECHANIC ARTS, the SCIENCES, the MATHEMATICS, and the various Branches of LITERATURE, are ſelected from the lateſt Publications in all the European Languages;

AND FORMED INTO DISTINCT TREATISES, WITH A COPIOUS INDEX TO EACH.

FORMING A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT STATE, OF HUMAN LEARNING, FROM THE FIRST COMMENCEMENT OF TIME, TO THE END OF THE PRESENT CENTURY.

Now firſt committed to the Preſs, under the Inſpection and Care of a Mathematical and Literary Society of London.

ORNAMENTED WITH

A MAGNIFICENT SET OF COPPER-PLATE ENGRAVINGS,

FROM DRAWINGS ENTIRELY NEW,

Illuſtrative of the various Subjects which form the Work, and deſcriptive of the moſt curious, rare, and elegant PRODUCTIONS of NATURE, in every PART of the UNIVERSE, BEAUTIFULLY COLOURED, AND OF AT LEAST FOUR TIMES THE VALUE OF THE PURCHASE-MONEY.

INCLUDING

A New and Complete SYSTEM of HERALDRY,

Finely illuminated, and enriched with the Britiſh Standard, the Arms of the Royal Family; of the Nobility, and of every private Gentleman and Lady, in the Three Kingdoms, who chuſe to tranſmit a Sketch of their Arms, and become Subſcribers to the Work.

London: Printed for the Proprietor, and ſold by Champante and Whitrow, Jewry-ſtreet, Aldgate; at the Britiſh Directory-office, Ave-Maria-lane, St. Paul's; and by all Bookſellers and Stationers in Town and Country; and may be ordered of the Newſmen.

[13] *Prospectus of a new and important work*, [1795?], p. 1. British Library shelfmark HS.74/1984(39)

While this engraving was also based upon Buchan's sketch, it included a novel miniature scene with a seated lady, a telescope, a scroll, books, two globes and a wall chart. (All of Page's biographical engravings for *Encyclopædia Londinensis* had the same dual format.) It measures 6.57 x 4.53 inches.

5. Stipple engraving by Samuel Freeman (1801)

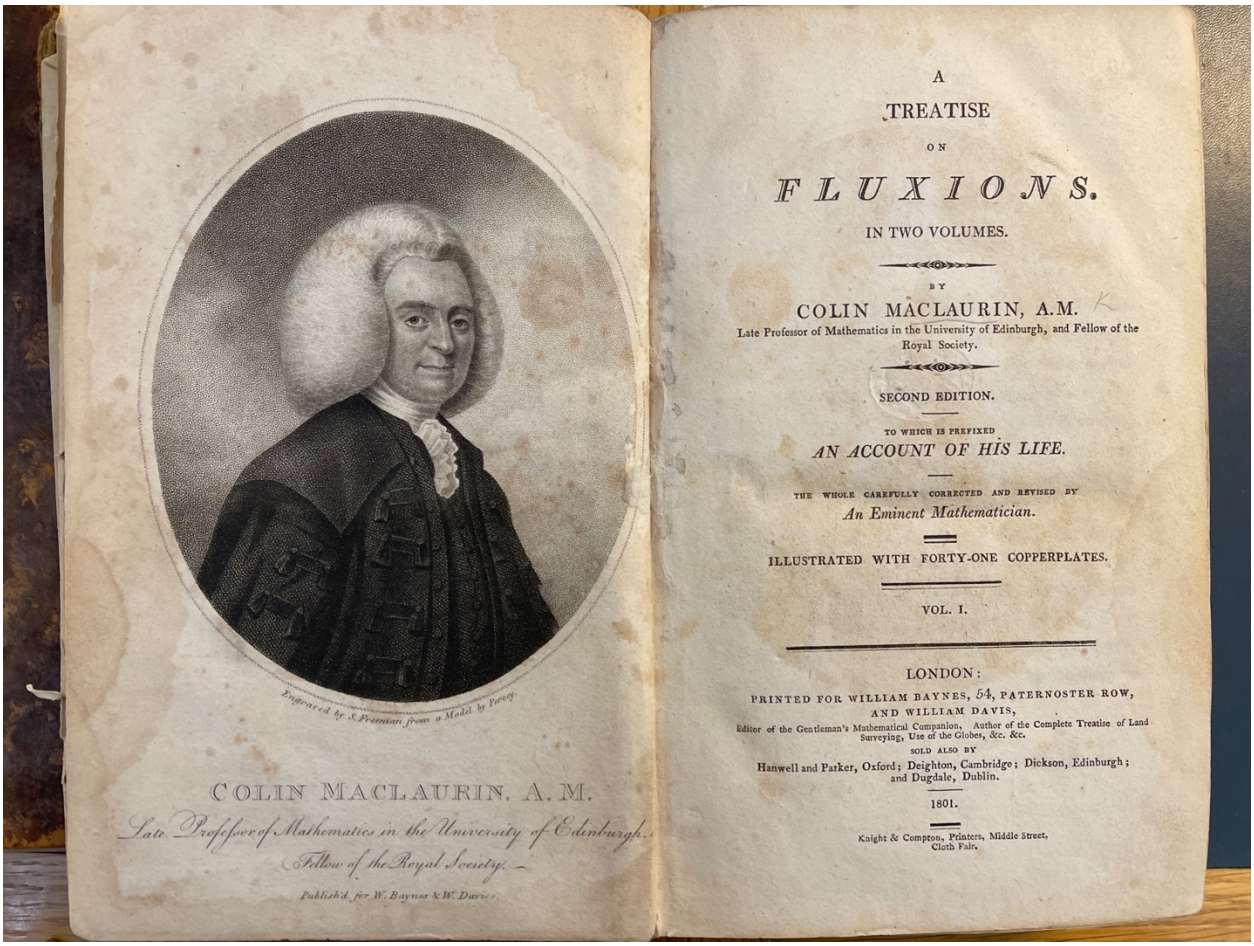


Engraved by S. Freeman from a Model by Percey.

COLIN MACLAURIN, A. M.
Late Professor of Mathematics in the University of Edinburgh &
Fellow of the Royal Society
Publish'd for W. Baynes & W. Davies

This engraving by Samuel Freeman is the most enigmatic of all the likenesses of Colin MacLaurin. It made its debut in 1801 as the frontispiece in Volume I. of the second edition of MacLaurin's *A Treatise of Fluxions*, published by

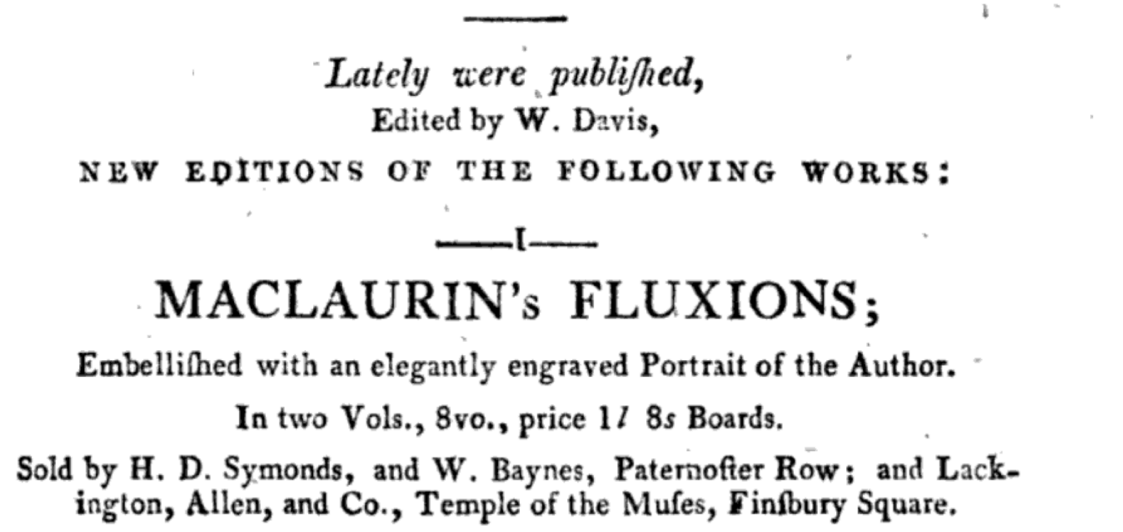
William Baynes and William Davis (MacLaurin, 1801).[14] Its caption states "... from a model by Percey."



However, the surnames of Davis and Percy are misspelled here as well as the book's title which reads "*A Treatise on Fluxions*."[15] An advertisement in the second edition of *The Gentleman's Mathematical Companion for the Year 1803* (also published by Davis) describes the second edition of *Fluxions* as "Embellished with an elegantly

[14] MacLaurin published the first edition of *A Treatise of Fluxions* in 1742 (MacLaurin, 1742). Davis's second edition was published fifty-five years after he died.
[15] There are additional errors in pagination.

engraved Portrait of the Author" (Davis, 1809, following p. 90; Archibald, 1929, pp. 377-400).[16] It is the smallest of all the known images of MacLaurin measuring 5.19 x 4.13 inches.



Lately were publiſhed,
Edited by W. Davis,
NEW EDITIONS OF THE FOLLOWING WORKS:

—I—

MACLAURIN's FLUXIONS;

Embelliſhed with an elegantly engraved Portrait of the Author.

In two Vols., 8vo., price 1*l* 8*s* Boards.

Sold by H. D. Symonds, and W. Baynes, Paternoſter Row; and Lackington, Allen, and Co., Temple of the Muſes, Finſbury Square.

Samuel Freeman (c.1773-1857) produced numerous engravings for several publishers (deGategno, 2004). Among them are fifteen for Robert Chambers's four-volume *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (Chambers, 1835). Impressions of these along with 245 others may be found in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum (Alexander, 2021, pp. 359-60; Hunnisett, 1989, p. 38).

[16] On 3 March 1803, William Davis presented a "Portrait of Colin Maclaurin, A.M. engraved by S. Freeman" to the Royal Society ("Presents received by the Royal Society from November 1802 to June 1803", p. 512).

Samuel Percy (1750-1820) was "… one of the best, if not the best, of English wax-modelers, and exhibited many works at the Royal Academy between 1786 and 1804" (Gunnis, [1953], p. 300; Ord-Hume, 2012, pp. 103-17).

> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, low relief portraits in wax became popular in Britain and they were often exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Society of Artists and elsewhere. Waxes were used in a similar way to prints and medals, in order to disseminate the image of the sitter, or, like miniature paintings or silhouettes as portable mementoes.[17]

Born in Dublin, Percy moved to London around 1777 and by 1786 had produced over 800 wax models, all with serial numbers (Pyke, 1973, pp. 103-5). In 1857 at the Alton Towers sale of the Earl of Shrewsbury's estate, over a hundred of Percy's works were auctioned. However, the image of MacLaurin does not appear in the catalogue (Christie & Manson, 1857, pp. 85-92; Gunnis, [1953], p. 300). Although Percy's wax model of Colin MacLaurin has today been lost, Pyke identified it in 1973 as being in the private collection of "Dr. P. D. Fergusson in London" (Pyke, 1973, pp. xlviii, 104).[18]

Arguably the most striking difference between the Freeman/Percy and the Buchan-based images of MacLaurin is the style of the wig.[19] It was not uncommon

[17] Victoria and Albert Museum, 17 March 2004 < https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O97090/an-unknown-man-relief-percy-samuel/>.
[18] This may well have been Patrick Drummond Fergusson (1919-1997), a London medical practitioner. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-dr-patrick-fergusson-1238536.html>.
Roscoe et al. (2009) listed 232 works of Percy of which the MacLaurin image was number 60 (p. 973).
[19] It should be noted that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most men shaved their head in order to better accommodate false hair. Thus, the wig would not be an indication of the wearer's natural hair or style (Pointon, 1993, pp. 107, 117).

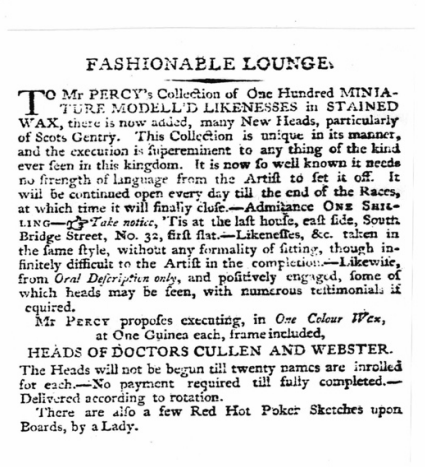
for Percy to take artistic license in his depiction of his subjects' wigs (Hughes, 1955, p. 1255):

> Wigs were boldly modelled in a style which Percy made entirely his own, and ruffles were delicately chiselled.

During the early-eighteenth century, the design of a man's wig often reflected his profession or status in society (Cox, 1983, "Wigs as a Sign of Status" [unpaginated]; Cross, 2008, pp. 20-2; Morrison, 2021; Powell, 2022). The full-bottomed periwig depicted by Buchan would have been indicative of MacLaurin's academic position at Edinburgh (Festa, 2005, p. 59). By the mid to late eighteenth century, the smaller bagwig as seen in the Freeman/Percy image became more stylish and ultimately yielded to the elimination of men's wigs altogether in preference to showing one's natural hair.

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of this engraving is determining the identity of the source from which Samuel Percy derived his wax model. MacLaurin's death predated Percy's birth by four years, and there is no indication of the artist's specific inspiration for this image. Percy had spent April-December 1791 in residence in Edinburgh. His advertisement in *The Caledonian Mercury* (16 July 1791) stated:

> Mr PERCY proposes executing, in One Colour Wax, at One Guinea each, frame included, HEADS OF DOCTORS CULLEN AND WEBSTER. The Heads will not be begun till twenty names are inrolled for each. – No payment required till fully completed. – Delivered according to rotation.



FASHIONABLE LOUNGE.

TO Mr PERCY's Collection of One Hundred MINIATURE MODELL'D LIKENESSES in STAINED WAX, there is now added, many New Heads, particularly of Scots Gentry. This Collection is unique in its manner, and the execution is supereminent to any thing of the kind ever seen in this kingdom. It is now so well known it needs no ſtrength of language from the Artiſt to ſet it off. It will be continued open every day till the end of the Races, at which time it will finally cloſe.—Admitance ONE SHILLING—☞*Take notice*, 'Tis at the laſt houſe, eaſt ſide, South Bridge Street, No. 32, firſt flat.—Likeneſſes, &c. taken in the ſame ſtyle, without any formality of ſitting, though infinitely difficult to the Artiſt in the completion.—Likewiſe, from *Oral Deſcription only*, and poſitively engaged, ſome of which heads may be ſeen, with numerous teſtimonials if equired.

Mr PERCY propoſes executing, in *One Colour Wax*, at One Guinea each, frame included,

HEADS OF DOCTORS CULLEN AND WEBSTER.

The Heads will not be begun till twenty names are inrolled for each.—No payment required till fully completed.—Delivered according to rotation.

There are alſo a few Red Hot Poker Sketches upon Boards, by a Lady.

Although no wax models of either man are known to have existed, it has been speculated that Doctor Cullen was the well-known physician William Cullen, M.D. (1710-1790) who held a Professorship in Medicine at the University of Edinburgh from 1751 until shortly before his death (Ord-Hume, 2020, pp. 148-58; Bynum, 2004). The mezzotint of Cullen (1772) by Valentine Green (1739-1813) shown below bears a strong resemblance to the Freeman/Percy engraving:[20]



[20]<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Cullen._Mezzotint_by_V._Green,_1772,_after_W._Cochra_Wellcome_V0001369.jpg>

Could “Cullen” have been confused with “Colin” by the time Freeman encountered Percy’s wax model? In the second edition of *Fluxions* with its numerous misspellings and typos, might there also have been a misidentification of the frontispiece?[21]

[21] It should also be noted that Colin MacLaurin had a son with the same name (c.1740 – ?) who would have been a contemporary of Percy. He also had a grandson with the same name (1770?-1833) who was a well-known poet, lawyer and playwright (MacLaurin and MacLaurin, 1812). Could either have been the sitter for Percy’s wax model and, over the years, their identities became muddled?

E. MODERN COLORIZED IMAGES

Colored engravings made by applying various pigmented inks to engraved plates existed as early as 1780 (MapForum, 2022). This often involved applying watercolors by brush or employing "a la poupee" techniques (using dabbers to apply color). However, modern technology (e.g. laser engraving, digital colorization) has now made it possible to expertly colorize original black-and-white engravings (Pieti, 2020).

Three of the above engravings of Colin MacLaurin have recently been colorized. This colorization is often aimed at increasing marketability of the engravings to various editorial and educational customers.[22] The Samuel Freeman stipple engraving (1801) was colorized in 2009 by Science Source, a Manhattan-based supplier of over a million stock images.



[22] Personal emails from Steve Gerard, Director of Science Source (14 April 2025) and Laurence Heyworth, Managing Director of Look and Learn – Historical Picture Archive (20 May 2025).

The Edward Harding, Junior stipple engraving (1799) was also colorized by Science Source in 2013:



The Robert Page stipple engraving (1814) has recently been colorized (artist and date unknown):



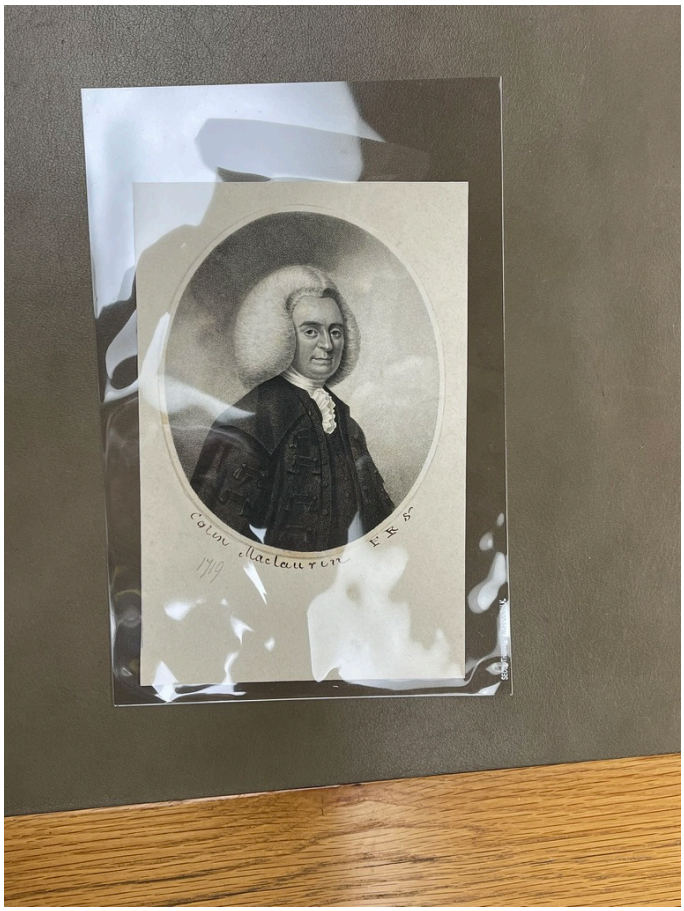
F. ODDS AND ENDS

During the eighteenth century, British citizens were passionate about collecting engraved prints (Pointon, 1993, pp. 53-78). As Marcia Pointon observes (pp. 54-5):

> Biographical personal history, mediated through the discourses of portraiture, bridged the conceptual gaps between the identification of the personal and definitions of the social. Moreover, it functioned as part of a wider symbolic structure of regulation through which the public – and by extension the national – were defined and understood.
>
> As a consequence of the work of portrait painters and of engravers, Britain was understood by the 1730s to have compensated for its shortcomings in comparison with other European nations and made up for some of its alleged cultural backwardness. The alliance between leading portrait painters and engravers was particularly productive…

One result of this pastime was that bound volumes were decimated in pursuit of amassing large personal collections of engravings and portraits of renowned individuals. An extreme example of this can be seen in the collection of John Peter Gassiot, an electrical researcher from Clapham Common (1797-1877) (Harrison and Morus, 2004). Having been elected to the Royal Society in 1841, Mr. Gassiot set out to accumulate as many engravings as possible of its fellows from its earliest times. In this endeavor, he pillaged hundreds of books by cutting out just the oval images of fellows' faces and pasting them in five bound scrapbooks. By the time of his death, Gassiot had accumulated 973 such portraits. His collection then came into the possession of James Rimell & Son, a London book and print seller who

subsequently sold it to the Royal Society in 1878. The Society proceeded to slice apart Gassiot's scrapbooks and place each page into its own plastic sleeve. Here is the Society's Freeman image of MacLaurin that Gassiot had excised from the second edition of *Fluxions* (Royal Society Reference Number IM/002901):



While the authenticities of the original sources for the six likenesses of Colin MacLaurin remain unclear, there exists a line engraving of his eldest son, John (1734-1796), that has a slightly more substantiated history. It appeared as the frontispiece in a posthumously published volume of John MacLaurin's poems, songs and essays (MacLaurin, 1798, Volume I) and measures 4.25 x 3.44 inches.



G. Watson Pnix[t]. E. Mitchell Sculp[t].

The artist is Edinburgh-based Edward Mitchell (c.1773-1851)[23] whose engravings include portraits, landscapes and anatomical prints. This one is based upon the work of Scottish painter George Watson (1766/7-1837)[24]. Both men would have been contemporaries of John MacLaurin.[25] In 1788, MacLaurin became a Senator of the College of Justice with the title of Lord Dreghorn (named for an estate that he owned at the time). The miniature just below the portrait contains Dreghorn's coat of arms consisting of a shepherd's crook supported by two tritons (MacLaren of MacLaren, 1984, pp. 121-2).

Might there be a family resemblance here?

The images of the renowned Scottish mathematician Colin MacLaurin that have come down to us were all made over fifty years after his death by artists who had never seen him. Will we ever be certain of his true likeness? Unless Ferguson's limning or Morton's death mask are tracked down, the answer is probably not. Moreover, this suggests the more general question about the authenticity of any

[23] See Alexander, 2021, pp. 626-7. The "Sculp^{t}." after Mitchell's name in the caption is the abbreviation for the Latin word "sculpsit" (he engraved).
[24] See Thomson, 2004. The "Pnix^{t}." after Watson's name in the caption is the abbreviation for the Latin word "painted" (he painted). This seems to be a misprint; the correct abbreviation should read "Pinx^{t}."
[25] Another portrait on which Mitchell and Watson collaborated is of Scottish engraver Andrew Bell (1726-1809), co-founder of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Scottish National Portrait Gallery accession number SP IV 14.1) < https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/23722 >.

historical likeness from the distant past. What may be one thing in the eye of the beholder may be something else in the eye of Aletheia.

"History embraces only a portion of the truth."

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