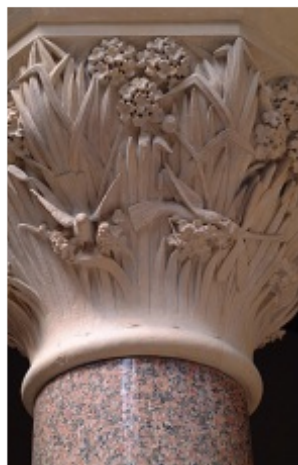


The stonework of the Museum

The court is surrounded by thirty columns, each made of a different British decorative rock. The columns are capped by intricately carved capitals and flanked on each side by decorative corbels depicting different botanical orders. Here we give further detail of the carvings and columns.

The columns surrounding the court were planned by John Phillips, first Keeper of the Museum. Each column is made of a different British decorative rock, whilst the capitals and corbels are carved into plants representing all the botanical orders. Each column was to be labelled with the name of the stone and its source, and also with the botanical name of the plant. However only the geological inscriptions were executed.

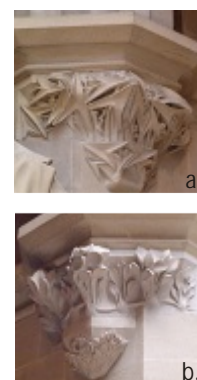
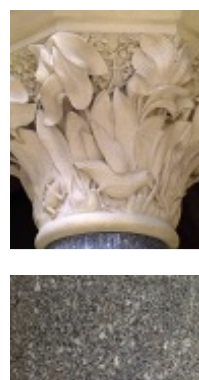
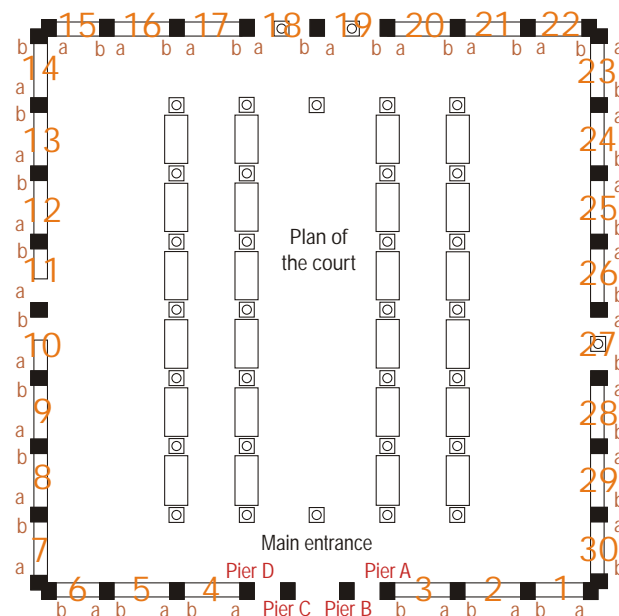


James O'Shea (left), and his brother John, were skilled stonemasons who carved the intricate floral and faunal motifs throughout the Museum (right).

The carvings were to be paid for by public subscription and forty six were completed between 1858 and 1860. These were done by the Irish brothers, James and John O'Shea, and their nephew Edward Whelan. They were exceptionally talented stonemasons and produced work of the highest quality and originality; the carvings were made from life with plants being brought up from the Botanic Garden. The other capitals were completed by 1910, although none to the standard of workmanship of the O'Sheas.

A key to the stonework in the court

Each column is topped with an intricately carved capital and is flanked by a pair of equally elaborate corbels (marked on the plan as 'a' and 'b'). Details of each column are given as in the example below.

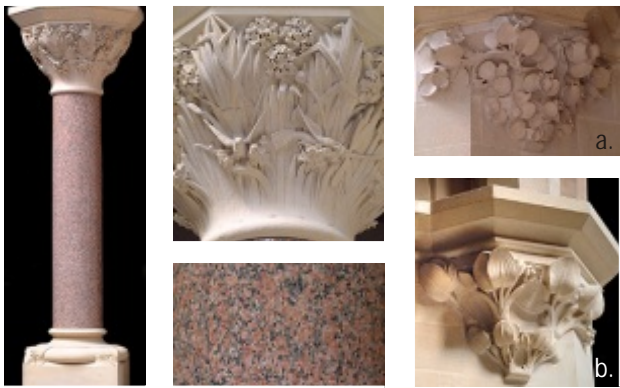


Column 1: grey granite (Aberdeen); Capital: water plantain (*Alisma plantago*) with woodcock, crayfish and frogs; a. common arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*); b. water plantain (*Alisma ramunculoides*).

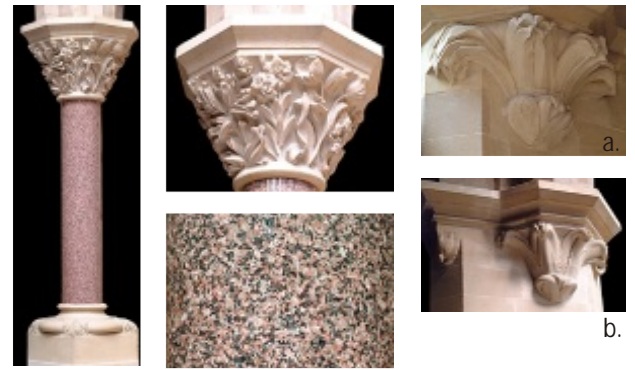
What is 'Learning more'?

'Learning more' presents a series of articles about the Museum and its collections. It is designed for older students, teachers, researchers, and anyone who wants to find out more about particular aspects of the Museum's work and its history.

'Learning more' articles are free, and available to all for educational, non-profit purposes. Unless otherwise stated, the Museum retains copyright of all material used in this leaflet.



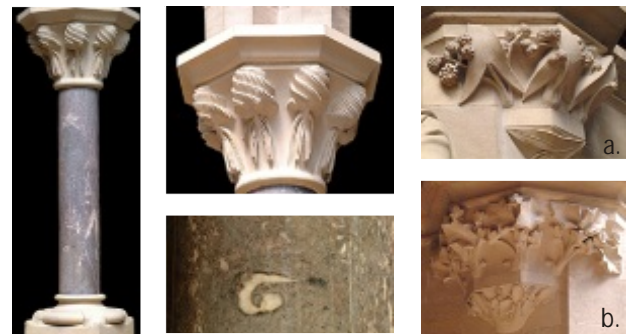
Column 2: red granite (Peterhead); Capital: flowering rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) with birds and dragonflies; a. velvet leaf (*Limnocharis* sp.); b. velvet leaf (*Limnocharis* sp.).



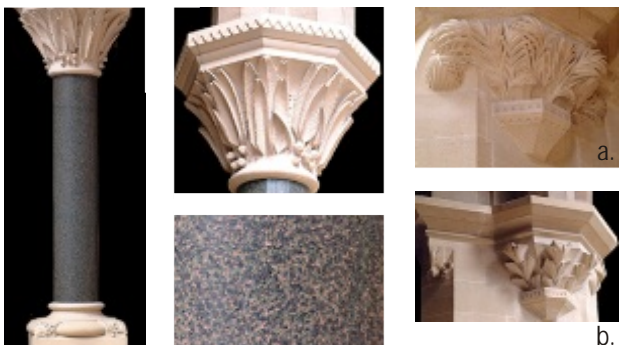
Column 6: red granite (Ross of Mull); Capital: madonna lily, tulip and a variety of lily (*Lilium candidum*, *Tulipa* and *Fritillaria*) with a bird; a. *Yucca* sp.; b. *Aloe* sp.



Column 3: porphyritic grey granite (Lamorna, Cornwall); Capital: date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) with animals; a. fan palm; b. fan palm.



Column 7: Devonian limestone (Torquay, Devon); Capital: screw-pine (*Pandanus* sp.); a. arrowhead (*Sagittaria* sp.); b. *Cyclamen* sp.



Column 4: pink and green syenite (Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire); Capital: coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*); a. date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*); b. palm (*Caryota* sp.).



Column 8: Carboniferous limestone (Cork); Capital: branched bur-reed (*Sparganium ramosum*); a. bulrush (*Typha* sp.) with two woodcock; b. bulrush (*Typha* sp.).



Column 5: mottled granite (Ben Cruachan, Argyllshire); Capital: pickerel weed and a variety of lily (*Pontederia cordata* and *Colchicum*) with a bird; a. spiderwort (*Tradescantia* sp.); b. *Dracaena* sp.



Column 9: Carboniferous limestone (King's County); Capital: dragon arum (*Dracunculus vulgaris*); a. *Pothos* sp. and *Arum* sp.; b. *Caladium* sp.



Column 10: green serpentine or 'ophicalcite' (Galway); Capital: arum lily (*Calla aethiopica*); a. *Pothos* sp.; b. golden club (*Orontium aquaticum*).



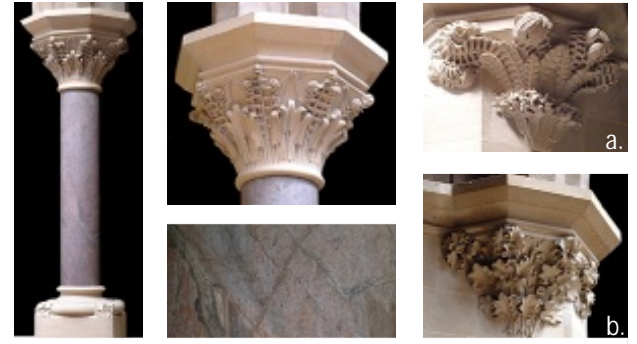
Column 11: green serpentine or 'ophicalcite' (Galway); Capital: a variety of sedge (*Cyperus rigidus*); a. *Papyrus* sp.; b. sawgrass (*Cladium* sp.).



Column 12: Carboniferous limestone (County Limerick); Capital: wheat, barley, oats, maize and sugar cane with sparrows; a. brome (*Bromus* sp.) with birds eating seeds; b. rice and canary grass with buntings, canaries, quail and a snake.



Column 13: Carboniferous limestone (Cork); Capital: golden leatherfern (*Acrostichum aureum*); a. Fern (*Platycerium* sp.); b. maidenhair fern (*Adiantum* sp.).



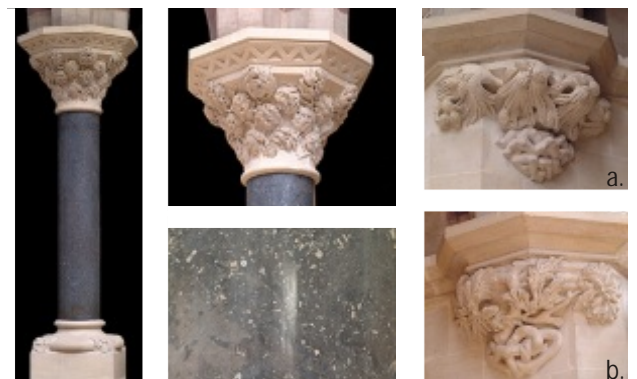
Column 14: Devonian limestone (St Marychurch, Devon); Capital: varieties of fern (*Scolopendrium vulgare*, *Blechnum boreale*, *Lastraea felix-mas*) with a moth, frogs, a snake and a bat; a. Hart's Tongue and another fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium* and *Lastraea cristata*); b. mallow (*Malva* sp.).



Column 15: trap rock (Killerton, Devon); Capital: *Dion edule* and a variety of animals; a. Japanese sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*); b. as in a.



Column 16: quartz porphyry or 'Elvan rock' (Treceice, Cornwall); Capital: *Zamia horrida* or *Encephalartos horridus*; a. *Encephalartos* sp. b. *Encephalartos* sp.



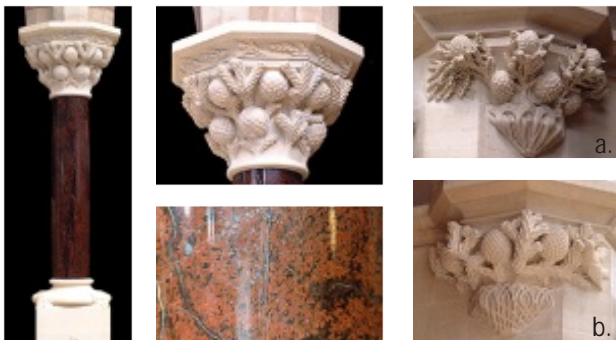
Column 17: schorlaceous rock (Roche, Cornwall); Capital: a red cedar (*Thuja siberica*); a. giant redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*); b. coastal sequoia (*Sequoia sempervirens*).



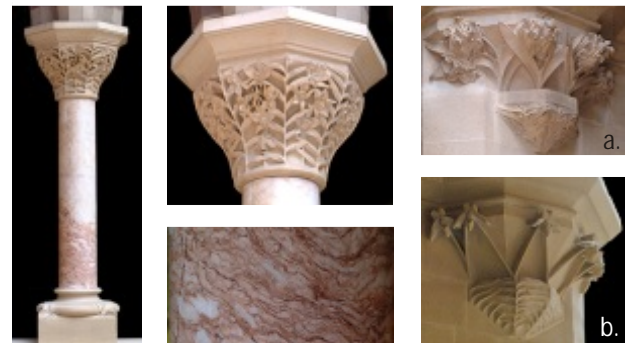
Column 18: green and red serpentine (Lizard, Cornwall); Capital: Norway spruce (*Abies excelsa*); a. stone pine; b. cluster pine.



Column 22: black serpentine (Lizard, Cornwall); Capital: black bryony (*Tamus communis*); a. small-leaved bryony; b. elephant's foot (*Dioscorea elephantipes*).



Column 19: red serpentine (Lizard, Cornwall); Capital: monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria imbricata*); a. Moreton Bay pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*); b. *Araucaria braziliensis*.



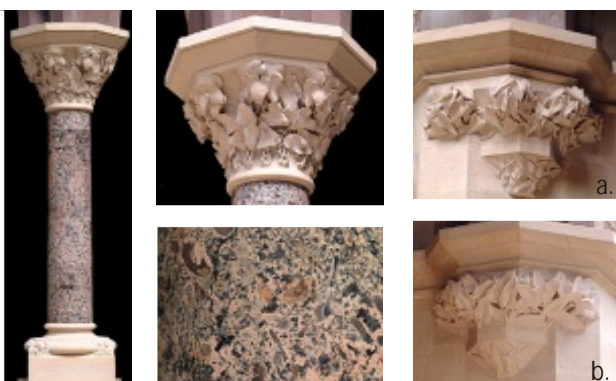
Column 23: gypsum (Chellaston, Derbyshire); Capital: a variety of orchid (*Dendrobium calceolaria*); a. a variety of orchid (*Epidendron cochleatum*); b. lady's slipper (*Cypripedium* sp.).



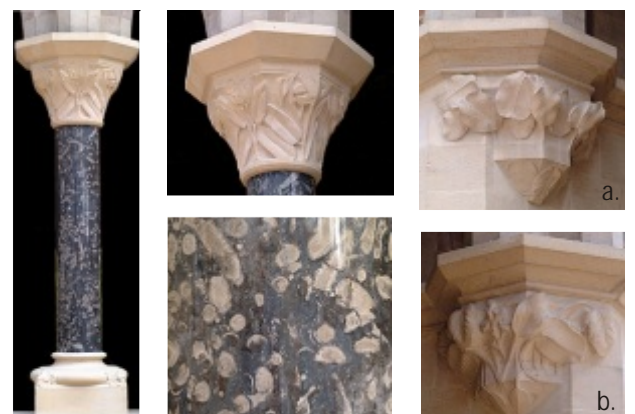
Column 20: red, feldspathic porphyry with hornblende (Inverary); Capital: English yew (*Taxus baccata*); a. a variety of pine (*Dacrydium* sp.); b. *Salisburia* sp.



Column 24: Carboniferous limestone (Menai Straits); Capital: banana (*Musa* sp.); a. banana (*Musa* sp.); b. bird of paradise (*Strelitzia* sp.).



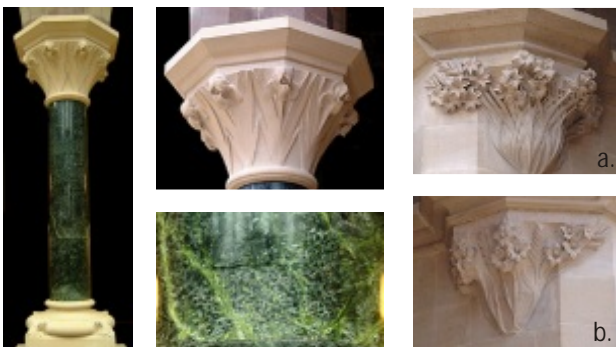
Column 21: Schorlaceous porphyritic rock (St Levan, Cornwall); Capital: *Smilax sarsaparilla* with two birds; a. prickly ivy (*Smilax aspera*); b. bamboo vine (*Smilax pseudochina*).



Column 25: Carboniferous limestone (Frosterley, Durham); Capital: *Maranta* sp.; a. *Maranta bicolor* b. *Heliconia* sp.).



Column 26: Triassic calcareous breccia (Mendips, Somerset); Capital: a variety of ginger (*Alpinia nutans*); a. a variety of ginger; b. broad leaved ginger (*Zingiber zerumbet*).



Column 27: green serpentine 'ophicalcite' (Anglesey); Capital: bearded or German iris (*Iris germanica*) (*Araucaria imbricata*); a. a variety of lily (*Schizostylis* sp.); b. *Gladiolus* sp.



Column 28: Carboniferous limestone (Hotwells, Bristol); Capital: wild daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*); a. *Narcissus macleanyi*; b. *Narcissus aurantiaca*



Column 29: Carboniferous limestone (Garsdale, Yorkshire); Capital: *Amaryllis johnsoni*; a. Scarborough lily (*Vallota purpurea*); b. a variety of snowflake (*Leucojum* sp.).



Column 30: Carboniferous limestone (Dent, Yorkshire); Capital: pineapple (*Ananassa sativa*); a. pineapple (*Ananas comosus*); b. tiger lily (*Lilium lancifolium*).



The piers at the entrance to the Museum

Pier A (north): sweet chestnut leaves and fruit (*Castanea sativa*); pier B (south): sweet chestnut with catkins (*Castanea sativa*); pier B (north): oak leaves and acorns; pier C (south): oak leaves, acorns and two squirrels; pier C (north): possibly aspen; pier D (south): possibly aspen.

Find out more

A series of 'Learning more' articles cover the full history of the building. 'Ruskin's influence on the Museum' and 'The architecture of the Museum' outline its design and construction. For further information on the statues found in the gallery and the lives of the scientists represented, 'The statues in the court' may be of interest. All articles are listed in the 'Learning more' section of the Museum's website