

Sir John was born in Aberdeen in 1804, but removed to Edinburgh with his father in the following year. Having shown a taste for modelling he was apprenticed to his father as a woodcarver, and placed as a student under Graham in the Board's School of Design, at that time in Picardy Place. On the expiry of his apprenticeship he entered upon the profession of Sculpture, and shortly afterwards went to Rome, where he studied for a short time.

On returning to Edinburgh his first work was modelling the group of Alexander and Bucephalus, which has since been cast in bronze and placed in St. Andrew Square; and he was thereafter intrusted with many important commissions, including busts and statues of prominent public men, and other monumental works which have been erected not only in Great Britain, but in the Colonies and in the United States of America.

In 1838 he was appointed Her Majesty's Sculptor for Scotland, and in 1876 he was Knighted by the Queen at Holyrood on the occasion of the inauguration of the Prince Consort Memorial in Charlotte Square.

His funeral was attended by the President, the Council, and a large number of members of the Academy, and at a meeting of the Council thereafter, a minute was unanimously adopted recording their high appreciation of his professional talent and their deep regret at his loss. The Secretary was also instructed to communicate this minute to his son and to convey to the family the sympathy and condolence of the Council.

RSA Obituary transcribed from the 1891 RSA Annual Report