



Portrait of the Month: May Alexander Gillespie (d.1855)

by W. Stevens

Gillespie was Elder for an incredible 57 years at the Presbyterian Church of England in Regent Square, London – and Convenor of the very first College Committee for the English Presbyterian College in London.



Alexander Gillespie, by W Stevens
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Alexander Gillespie was a Deacon and then an Elder for fifty-seven years in the Congregation at Regent Square, London. He was also appointed Convenor of the College Committee for the English Presbyterian College in London (which later became Westminster College), when it was formed in 1846. He was later made Treasurer as well, and he held these posts until 1858, when he resigned due to ill health.

His Memorial Minute in the 1885 Synod Minutes describes him alongside Robert Barbour as “another venerable father” and a loyal supporter of the Church who “by sagacious counsel, and by unflinching liberality, he was ever ready to promote the interests of the Church”.

His portrait, which hangs in the Library, is the only painting in the Westminster collection to show a landscape in the background. In most of the other portraits where a background is clear, the sitter is inside, and next to bookcases or a desk, looking learned, but Gillespie is comparatively flamboyant - framed by an artistically draped swag of red cloth on one side and a view of rich bucolic countryside on the other.

As well as his portrait, he is also commemorated in the stained glass in the Library windows at the College, in memory of his founding a scholarship at the College in 1872. The Gillespie Scholarship was a grant of £50 annually – by far the most generous award available at the College at that time! – and was available to second and third years studying as postgraduates at the College, and in the year after a student left as a “Travelling Fellowship”.

Portrait by W Stevens.

To see more of our paintings, visit the College page at [Art UK](#).

Helen Weller, Archivist
2020

Bibliography and Further Reading:

“Memorial Minute” in *the Synod Records of the Presbyterian Church of England 1885 Westminster College Cambridge 1899*, ed. A Halliday Douglas (PCE: London, 1900)

“Chapter VII: The College”, in *Digest of the Actings & Proceedings of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church In England 1836-1866*, by Leone Levi (c.1869)

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