

## Family history resources in Special Collections

September 2021

QG HCOL005

### The Wolfson Reading Room

#### Special Collections Centre

The Sir Duncan Rice Library  
University of Aberdeen  
Bedford Road  
Aberdeen  
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### Introduction

In addition to the University's own institutional records, many individuals, families, organisations and businesses have deposited their papers with the University. As a result, it has acquired an unrivalled collection of material, not solely relating to the history and culture of the north-east of Scotland but of national and international importance. Throughout these collections there is a wealth of genealogical material available for family historians.

### Getting started

There are a number of preliminary steps which will help you get off to the best start in your research:

- Gather as much information as you can from members of your own family such as names, dates, places of birth and addresses
- Gather birth, baptism and death certificates where possible
- Read the many published and website guides on how to undertake family history research
- Utilise the many website services such as Scotland's People
- Contact your council local registrars office for guidance
- Contact your local family history society and utilise the resources they have on offer.

A key starting point for researching family history in the north-east of Scotland is the website:

Routes to your North-East Roots.

Once the core sources of information on births, marriages and deaths, coupled with the census returns, have hopefully provided you with an outline of your family tree, you can begin to start putting flesh on these bare bones. Part of the fun of tracing your family history lies in exploring all the many and varied sources of information that are available. The north-east of Scotland is fortunate in having a number of archives, local studies libraries, family history centres and other related organisations which hold many other sources of information that will greatly enrich the core records used in constructing a family tree.

### Archival Collections

#### University institutional papers

The greatest majority of family historians who contact us do so because their ancestor may have attended or been an employee of the University. It is normally possible to provide detailed biographical information from the published records and in addition there may be records of classes attended, examination results, membership of student bodies and perhaps even photographs.

As well as the University's own records there are also other institutions that have affiliated with the University and transferred staff and student records: the Aberdeen teacher training colleges and Christ's College, Aberdeen.

To locate student and staff records see the separate factsheets.

#### Family and estate papers

Special Collections is the pre-eminent centre for the study of north-east family and estate papers. Most collections contain title deeds of land owned, rentals (lists of rent owed and paid), maps and plans, records of buildings and building work, records of business or industrial interests and personal records of the landed family; for example letters, diaries, family certificates, wills and photographs. Notable examples include the Arbuthnott of Arbuthnott, Earls of Fife, Gordon of Buthlaw & Cairness, and Ogilvie-Forbes of Boyndlie.

Amongst family & estate records there are fantastically rich sources for the family historian including writs, letter books, rentals, tacks, accounts, correspondence (possibly between the owner and tenant) and plans. The survival rate for rentals is patchy but where they do, they are a wonderful record of landholding and agricultural production. And if these can be married up to an estate plan, the family historian is very fortunate. Amongst some estate papers there are also some records of staff, one example being an 18<sup>th</sup> century wage book for servants for Duff House in Banff.

See the separate factsheet.

#### Organisation papers

Institutional records of churches, charities, clubs, employers associations, political organisations, societies, trade unions and trusts are strongly represented in the University collections. Records can include registers of membership, and minute books may also make mention of members and office holders.

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Amongst the records of churches: although the statutory registers, old parish registers and census records are held and accessed at national and local authority archive services, there are some original records held within the collections, specifically for the Episcopal Church, Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney.

Also, whilst school records are deposited in Aberdeen City/Aberdeenshire Archives, we do hold some records, specifically for some 19<sup>th</sup> century Aberdeen schools and also the Demonstration School in Aberdeen. There are lists of pupils and often the records also contain notes on teachers and also pupil-teachers.

See the separate factsheets.

### **Business papers**

The University holds records of numerous businesses and they can contain board minutes, salary books, staff records and photographs. Notable examples include Aberdeen Journals, Grampian Transport and TOTAL E&P UK (Frigg Transportation System and St Fergus).

There may also be records detailing the workforce's life outwith the working day. These can be a fruitful resource and can include all manner of things, from photographs of charity events and Christmas parties, to the records of the works sports clubs.

See the separate factsheet.

### **Personal papers**

The majority of personal papers we hold are those with a connection to the University, yet there are numerous papers created and gathered by local antiquarians, architects, artists, authors, historians, journalists, poets and soldiers. The types of papers we hold include journals, correspondence, research papers and photographs.

See the separate factsheet.

### **Oral history collections**

There are two major collections:

The University of Aberdeen Oral History Archive comprises nearly 200 interviews with individuals connected with the University.

The 'Lives in the Oil Industry' Oral History Archive & associated records is a major collection of sound recordings which was completed between 2001 and 2006 and includes interviews with nearly 200 people, totalling nearly 800 hours of recordings.

For more information see the separate factsheet.

### **Other relevant collections**

#### **Scottish Catholic Archives, Historic Archives**

The Historic Archives of the Scottish Catholic Archives predominantly relate to the Catholic Church from the 12<sup>th</sup> century prior to the restoration of the Scottish Catholic Hierarchy in 1878.

The collection contains material of regional, national and international significance and provides evidence of the survival of Catholicism both in

Scotland and abroad through the archives of its missions, seminaries and colleges. There are also extensive collections relating to prominent Catholic families many in the north-east of Scotland (SCA).

#### **NHS Grampian Archives**

The archive dates from the founding of Aberdeen Infirmary in 1739 and contains substantial material relating to 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century hospital provision, notably general and specialist hospitals, cottage hospitals and asylums. These have information not only on the administrative and financial affairs of the hospitals but also on individuals who were patients, staff or managers.

There are also records of members of the general public who contributed to local hospitals in the time before the National Health Service by means of annual subscriptions, donations or legacies.

As some of the capital of the larger hospitals was tied up in land, estate papers are also to be found among some hospital records. In addition there are records from three local poorhouses which in 1948 became hospitals in the newly-formed NHS (GRHB).

#### **Medico-Chirurgical Society**

The Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society was founded in 1789 in response to the perceived lack of medical teaching offered by both King's and Marischal Colleges. Its members contributed to the development of medical teaching and practice in Aberdeen and beyond and the archive contains some patient records that complement the NHS Grampian Archives. For more information see the website but please note that although the catalogue is available via the University, the papers are held by the Medico-Chirurgical Society (AMCS).

### **Online resources**

Many of our collections are now being made available in digital format. Of particular relevance are the extensive photographic collections of George Washington Wilson & Co. and Aberdeen Harbour Board and The University Roll of Honour and Rolls of Graduates.

### **Printed collections**

The Local Collection of printed material, geographically speaking, covers the north-east corner of Scotland and is available to consult on open-access in our Reading Room.

- Local area histories
- Plans and maps
- Reports of local institutions
- Statistical accounts
- Postal Directories, from 1824 (alphabetical lists of residents, many include trade sections and street lists)
- Aberdeen Almanack from 1754, 1773 – 1952

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- Student & University publications, such as the student newspaper Gaudie and Alma Mater, Athletic Alma etc.
  - Antiquarian publications, such as those of the Spalding Clubs
  - Genealogical publications, including those published by the Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society
  - Various family histories deposited by genealogists.

Also in the Local Collection you will find a number of local newspapers which are a valuable source of information, largely for their obituaries and death notices. **Many of these can only be consulted in the Reading Room on microfilm.**

## Access

Materials are available, upon request, for consultation in the Reading Room. Please search online catalogues to identify individual items.

## Further reading

For further reading please also see the studies of a number of manuscripts, printed books and collections in the journals *Aberdeen University Library Bulletin*, *Aberdeen University Review* and *Northern Scotland*.

Bigwood, Rosemary, *Tracing Scottish ancestors: a practical guide to Scottish genealogy* (Glasgow, 1999)

Cory, Kathleen B, *Tracing your Scottish ancestry* (Edinburgh, 1990)

Diack, H. Lesley, *North East Roots: a guide to sources* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen & North-East Scotland Family History Society, 1999)

Hamilton-Edwards, Gerald, *In search of Scottish ancestry* (Chichester:, 2nd ed., 1983)

Holton, Graham S. & Winch, Jack, *My ain folk: an easy guide to Scottish family history* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997)

Irvine, Sherry, *Your Scottish ancestry: a guide for North Americans* (Salt Lake City, 1997)

James, Alwyn, *Scottish roots* (Edinburgh: Saltire Publications, 1995)

Moody, David, *Scottish family history* (London: Batsford, 1988)

Sinclair, Cecil, *Tracing your Scottish ancestors: a guide to ancestry research in the Scottish Record Office* (Edinburgh: Stationery Office, 1997 and updated versions).