

Map and plan resources in Special Collections

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The Wolfson Reading Room

Special Collections Centre
The Sir Duncan Rice Library
University of Aberdeen
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Introduction

Special Collections have extensive holdings of maps and plans which illustrate the history of north east Scotland and beyond. They provide invaluable source materials for the study of the history of cartography, architectural history, environmental history, archaeology and genealogy amongst many other disciplines.

Archival collections

Throughout the archives, maps and plans often form integral parts of larger collections. Examples dating from the 17th century to the 20th century can be found in the papers of estates, the University, businesses, organisations and amongst personal collections. The creators of these maps and plans include estate factors, surveyors and architects, who utilised such charts for various purposes. The range of uses resulted in the development of multiple formats for maps and plans such as printed with annotations, manuscript, sketches and presentation works.

University institutional papers

The University's collection of plans relating to King's College, King's College Chapel, Marischal College and the University of Aberdeen is a rich resource charting the history of the University's buildings. The plans range from the detailed architectural drawings of James Cromar Watt to utility plans used by the estates teams. This extensive collection dates from the 1850s through to the mid 1960s; unfortunately many of the items are not dated: 1850s – 1960s (UNIVERSITY 1494).

Collection of prints, drawings, photographs and plans of buildings at King's College and Marischal College: 19th century – 20th century (MS 2920).

Family and estate papers

Estate papers usually contain maps and plans, sometimes annotated with tenants and often indicating the location of quarries, commonities and proposed railway developments. Here are some notable examples:

Duff House (Earls of Fife) papers contain over 500 plans and related maps of lands owned by the Earls of Fife across the north-east: 19th century - 20th Century (MS 3175).

Fraser family of Castle Fraser and Inverallochy papers includes maps and plans for the castle and its surrounding estate. The collection also includes maps and plans from locations across Europe: 17th century - 20th Century (MS 3470).

Gordon of Cluny estate plans comprises material from estates in the north-east of Scotland, South Uist, Benbecula and Barra: 19th century - 20th Century (MS 3600).

Ogilvie-Forbes of Boyndlie papers include plans from Boyndlie, Buchan, Fraserburgh, Ross and Kincardine: 17th century - 20th Century (MS 2740).

Business papers

Archives of businesses such as surveyors and lawyers can be a rich resource and types can range from utility, built environment and land.

Davidson and Garden, advocates, Aberdeen. This extensive collection contains records of some 200 families, estates, businesses, trusts and other organisations which the firm represented and includes a section of maps and plans: 18th century - 20th century (MS 2769).

F. A. MacDonald and Partners, engineers and surveyors (incorporating Walker & Duncan, Aberdeen) is the principal archive map collection. This is an extensive collection of maps and plans amassed by the firm Walker & Duncan and dating primarily from the late 19th century. It consists of approximately 5000 maps, specifically of the wards of the city of Aberdeen and parishes in Aberdeenshire stretching from Kincardineshire to Banffshire but also including maps and plans of areas across Scotland: 18th century – mid 20th century (papers MS 2626 and maps and plans (MS 3860).

Personal papers

The archives hold a number of collections of personal papers of a variety of professionals such as those of architects and antiquarians.

These plans have been collected as part of research for commissions.

Abredoniae novae et veteris descriptio
(A description of new and of old Aberdeens, with the places nearest adjacent) by James Gordon of

Rothiemay (map with manuscript annotations): late 17th century - mid 18th century ([MS 3894](#)).

Kelly, William, architect, plans which relate to various architectural projects. The collection comprises predominantly local views of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The largest series of materials relate to the architecture of St Machar Cathedral, St Ninian's Church and The Aberdeen Savings Bank. In addition, the collection includes items from England and international locations including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain: 19th century - 20th century (MS 3859).

Simpson, William Douglas, historian and archaeologist. His collection comprises maps and plans created by himself, William Kelly, the architectural historians Thomas Ross and David MacGibbon and many other sources. The content of the material is mainly architectural and archaeological from Scottish sites, with an emphasis on castles and churches. Most of the material dates from Simpson's lifetime but some items have been gathered from earlier sources: 19th century - 20th century (MS 3759).

Printed collections

The Local Collection, accessible via the Reading Room, also contains relevant printed material and also has an open access collection of local reference maps and plans. Another informative series of publications are local estate auction sales which often include detailed plans of estates.

The printed collections include some of the most important atlases ever produced from the 16th and 17th centuries as well as early printed volumes in which maps and plans were inserted to inform or to embellish. Special Collections holds around 600 printed maps, atlases and plans. These encompass topographical maps, city and town plans and nautical maps and cover a chronological range from the 15th century to the present day and are representative of the printed cartographic history of Europe and Scotland.

The earliest printed atlas is a 1482 reworking of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* by Nicholas Germanus, and there are several further 16th century examples of maps in the Ptolemaic tradition. Works by some of the most significant map makers such as Blaeu, Mercator, Ortelius, and Hondius are represented, some of particular significance to Aberdeen University.

One example is Joan Blaeu's *Theatrum orbis terrarum* presented by Blaeu to the cartographer Robert Gordon of Straloch who was to work on the fifth volume of the atlas producing some of the most detailed 17th century maps of Scotland. There are also many other examples of Scottish map making represented by Adair, Brown, Moll, Kitchin, Taylor and Skinner, Thomson and Wood.

There are also named collections of relevance:

The MacBean Jacobite Collection contains maps and plans, some relating to the military surveys completed after the Jacobite rebellions.

Maps and plans relating to the formation and alteration of several of the independent railway companies prior to nationalisation can be found in the **O'Dell Railway collection**.

There is also an extensive reference collection of maps and plans as part of the modern collections on the 1st floor of the Sir Duncan Rice Library. The collection includes Ordnance Survey maps, topographic, land use, economic and political maps from Aberdeen to the Antarctic. There is particular coverage of Aberdeen, Scotland and Britain. Facsimiles of 16th and 17th century engraved maps of various English towns are also held in this collection. Around 3,000 maps are held with a date range of 1800 to 2000.

Access

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

Further reading

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

A number of the above papers were highlighted in: Beavan, Iain; Davidson, Peter; Stevenson, Jane. *Library and archive collections of the University of Aberdeen: an introduction and description*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press with the University of Aberdeen, 2011)

Stone, Jeffrey C., *The cartographic treasures of Aberdeen University Library*. (Tring : Map Collector Pub., 1986)

Stone, Jeffrey C., *The Blaeu atlas of Scotland*. (Tring : Map Collector Publications, 1980)