

Photographic resources in Special Collections

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QG HCOL010

The Wolfson Reading Room

Special Collections Centre

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

With material dating from the 1850s, the University of Aberdeen's photographic collections illustrate the history of north-east Scotland and beyond through its people, landscapes, industries and travel. Throughout the archival collections, photographic materials often form integral parts of larger groups of materials. These materials include glass plates, lantern slides, stereoscopic cards and prints. The two largest collections, 'George Washington Wilson and Co.' and 'The Aberdeen Harbour Board' collections account for over 40,000 glass plate negatives. Smaller collections include the University of Aberdeen's own institutional photographs and deposited collections such as Dr William Clark Souter, Grampian Regional Transport Ltd and the Cairngorm Club.

Major collections

George Washington Wilson and Co.

The George Washington Wilson and Co. photographic collection consists of over 37,000 glass plate negatives produced by the Aberdeen firm between the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The University of Aberdeen has made high resolution digital images from the collection available online.

The collection has much related material, which includes research papers, sales catalogues and a collection of the company's commercial products. These products include lantern slides, stereoscopic cards and prints.

Aberdeen Harbour Board

The 'Aberdeen Harbour Board' collection consists of approximately 6,000 glass plate negatives, dating from the 1880s to the 1930s, taken by the Board's engineering staff as a record of port developments and activities.

The University of Aberdeen has made high resolution digital images from the collection available online with the continued support of the Aberdeen Harbour Board.

University institutional collections

Throughout the University's institutional archives there are rich photographic sources depicting buildings, staff, students and important occasions.

Student photographs and academic portraits

This core collection comprises academic and class photographs from the Arts, Divinity, Law, Medical and Science faculties. This collection also includes portraits of prominent individuals connected with the University, including teaching staff, benefactors, and some photographs of various groups such as student magazine editorial staff and national student bodies (UNIVERSITY 591).

Halls of residence photographs: 1966 – 2000 (UNIVERSITY 1455).

Student bodies and sports clubs

There are other collections which include photographs of students: The Students' Representative Council (S.R.C.) and Union Management Committee papers (UNIVERSITY 301) and The University of Aberdeen Students' Charities Campaign papers (UNIVERSITY 1073).

The Sports Union photographs record the development of the various sports clubs from their beginnings in the nineteenth century to the present day. The photographs include staff and student administrative officers, individual clubs, buildings and important events (UNIVERSITY 1452).

Aberdeen Colleges of Education

This major institutional archive of the teacher training colleges (from the Church of Scotland in 1874 to the Northern College of Education in 2001) includes numerous photographs of staff, students, buildings and events (UNIVERSITY 1421).

Other selected collections

Dr William Clark Souter

Comprising 51 annotated prints, this collection illustrates Dr William Clark Souter's Antarctic voyage aboard the Terra Nova, as ship's surgeon, to free the ice-bound Discovery from Winter Harbour in 1903 – 1904.

Grampian Regional Transport Ltd

This extensive archive, from the nineteenth century up to the present day, documents the rich history of Aberdeen's transport history and features views

of trams, buses, city street scenes and related images (MS 3508).

The Cairngorm Club

The Cairngorm mountaineering club, formed in 1887, covers all aspects of mountaineering with specific relevance to Scotland. The photographic collection consisting of many hundreds of images and includes views of mountain ranges, climbers, maps, landscapes and club events. The originals are primarily lantern slides but are available digitally upon request (MS 3405).

Printed collection highlights

The Special Collections Centre's printed collections also hold key works which document the history of photography. Early examples include William Henry Fox Talbot's eminent **Pencil of Nature**, one of the first photographically illustrated books, published in 1844. Robert Hunt's **Researches in Light**, also published in 1844, and **A Manual of Photography** from 1853 capture the emerging theories of photographic practice. The output of modern masters such as Ansel Adams' **The American Wilderness** compliment Hunt and Talbot's classic texts whilst reflecting the continuing development of photographic practice.

Access

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

Please note that due to the fragile nature of many of the photographic collections, access to originals may be restricted on some occasions. There are also specific handling guidelines for photographic material and there may be a requirement for advance notice before consultation.

***Please note that the original glass plate negatives from both the George Washington Wilson & Co. and Aberdeen Harbour Board collections are not available for consultation and that access is only via the digitised online versions.**

Further reading

Taylor, R (1981), *George Washington Wilson: Artist and Photographer (1823 – 1893)*, Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen.

Reilly, J.M. (2001) *Care and identification of 19th century photographic prints*, Eastman Kodak Co., Rochester.