Age of Oil: Artwork by Sue Jane Taylor

New exhibition at

The Gallery, The Sir Duncan Rice Library

View from Market Street, Aberdeen Harbour.

The Age of Oil exhibition was developed in association with the National Museums Scotland, where it was first displayed in 2017. It documents the changes in the North Sea that have taken place over the past ten years, with artworks depicting Aberdeen Harbour, the Murchison and Brent Fields and the Beatrice Offshore Wind Farm project in the Moray Firth.

Sue Jane Taylor succeeds in capturing the power and beauty of industrial structures that have been part of the lives of many people for the last thirty years, particularly here in Aberdeen. Her images of rigs and turbines and decommissioning vessels take on the impressive beauty of modern sculpture. Combined with this visual language are the personal stories from the workers and from Sue...
Jane herself as she visits and develops an affection for these remote offshore islands and their inhabitants. This is much more than an exhibition about gas and oil.

Sue Jane Taylor has worked in some of the most remote and challenging industrial environments in Scotland. Her paintings, drawings, prints and film pieces bring a personal and often poignant response to a unique period in human history – the Age of Oil.

The exhibition also includes a selection of objects unique to this period of modern maritime history. A sample of the first oil from Murchison Field, dated 30 September 1980, and a drilling mat – one of the last objects to be removed during the decommissioning process in 2017 – have been loaned from Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections. A “teacup-carrying device” made from spare materials by technicians on the Brent Delta platform has been loaned by Shell UK Limited and the Survitec Group has provided a Helicopter Passenger Survival Suit. These objects all help tell the personal story of the Age of Oil.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of talks, workshops and events in partnership with the Aberdeen Maritime Museum. Details will be available shortly at: [https://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/events/12599/](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/events/12599/)

Jen Shaw

**The exhibition runs from 23 March to 8 July 2018.**

**Regular Gallery Opening Times:**
- Mon to Wed: 10am–5pm
- Thurs: 10am–7pm
- Fri to Sat: 10am–5pm
- Sundays: 11am–4pm
A Fond Farewell
by Diane Bruxvoort, University Librarian

Nearly four years ago I wrote an article for the Friends’ Newsletter introducing myself to this community as I took on the role of University Librarian. With mixed feelings I now write to update you on the library and to bid you farewell as I have accepted the position of Dean of Libraries at the University of North Texas.

As I look back I ask myself what has changed in my time here, other than my much improved understanding of Doric. There are obvious and important physical changes like new carpet in the Taylor Library, wind mitigation on the plaza, and new doors on the Sir Duncan Rice Library (SDRL). There are also staff changes as we lose friends, but hire and promote others. I think, though, that the most important changes are attitudinal.

The attitudinal shift has been in our relationship with our students. In 2014 we removed all restrictions on food and drink in the libraries, and in 2015 we began opening the SDRL building 24/7 during the revision and exam periods. We also relaxed the rules for student groups wanting to use the libraries. We want our students to be comfortable using the library whether it is for research, study or socialisation. Their reaction has been to come to the library in droves. Between four and five thousand people use the libraries each day, and by late afternoon the SDRL often has over 1000 students studying alone or in groups.

The current major change is the administrative consolidation of Museums and Special Collections. Each of these areas have programmes of exhibition, conservation and outreach, and bringing them together is proving to be a fruitful exercise. Several long vacant positions are being filled along with a new professional position which will concentrate on building use of the collections by our faculty. Watch this space!

The libraries will continue to grow and change over the coming years, and I’ll be watching with interest to see where they go next. Thank you for all your support and encouragement. It has been my absolute pleasure to be your University Librarian and I will always treasure my time in Aberdeen.

Cheers,
Diane
Sir James Mackenzie Davidson, a founding father of British Radiology and alumnus of the University of Aberdeen, was born in Santo Domingo Monastery, Quilmes, Argentina in 1856 where his father was a cattle rancher. His education began at the Buenos Aires Scottish School followed by medical studies in Edinburgh, London and Aberdeen, graduating MB CM in 1882. On graduation, along with another young medic, Davidson set up an eye clinic in the east end of the city. He subsequently became assistant to Sir Alexander Ogston, Aberdeen’s famous professor of surgery, under whom he developed his surgical and teaching skills. In 1886 he was appointed physician to the Blind Asylum, Ophthalmic Surgeon to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and The Royal Hospital for Sick Children, in which posts he promoted the new “aseptic” method. He was a popular teacher among the medical students, inspiring many to excel at the same specialty. He remained in Aberdeen until 1897 when he was appointed consulting surgeon to the X-ray department in Charing Cross Hospital, London.

Alongside his medical career, James Mackenzie Davidson was a passionate and able public educator in physical sciences such as optics and electricity. He devised experiments and apparatus which he used in “lavish displays”, according to the British Medical Journal, which were greatly appreciated by the general public.

In 1896 Mackenzie Davidson realising the importance of Röntgen’s original work on X-rays visited him at his home in Würzburg, Germany. On his return he managed to access a 10-inch coil and two Crookes tubes with which to experiment and he ultimately produced probably some of the first X-rays or skiagraphs (as they were originally known) in Scotland.

Once he arrived in London he continued to develop the new diagnostic methodology in a variety of ways including inventing a new commonly used Mercury break known as the Mackenzie Davidson Break. In 1898 he presented a “cross-thread localiser” to the Röntgen Society, as well as developing the X-ray couch to which it could be attached. This made it possible through a series of Skiagraphs (X-rays)
to image a foreign body three-dimensionally, allowing the surgeon to accurately remove small/hidden objects, which was particularly useful in his own area of interest, the eye.

Mackenzie Davidson was also one of the earliest workers with Radium, noticing its effectiveness in a number of disorders including X-ray dermatitis. He endured several operations on his hands and his eventual death from heart failure may have been as a result of the long-term effects of exposure to radiation, although this remains subject to debate to this day.

As with many medical advances, the Second Boer War and World War I led to the rapid adoption of new technologies such as X-rays. The localiser, which could locate shrapnel and foreign bodies, became standard field equipment during the Boer War. In 1916 Mackenzie Davidson was appointed honorary consulting radiologist to the district of London’s military hospitals. He was consulting radiologist to the X-ray department of the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital, Moorfields and of Charing Cross Hospital; president of the Röntgen Society of London 1912-1913 and of the Radiology section of the International Congress of Medicine in London in 1913; he was made a Knight in 1912; he was president of the British Institute of Radiology 1917-19 and also had the rare honour of being an honorary member of the American Röntgen Society.

In the tributes made after his death many refer to his generosity with his time and knowledge especially with his X-ray work, his originality and his enthusiastic advocacy for the future of medicine. The Röntgen Society of London, which became The British Society of Radiology, still holds a yearly lecture called The Mackenzie Davidson Memorial Lecture, the first being given in April 1920 by the Right Honourable Lord Rutherford, OM.

Outside of work two of his many interests included photography and motoring, demonstrating his adventurous and pioneering spirit.

James Mackenzie Davidson is only one of the many interesting medical alumni that featured in the “Medicine in Wartime” exhibition that ran in the Library from November 2017 to March 2018. A challenging subject, it nonetheless received great praise from visitors, many of whom were both surprised and impressed by the medical contributions made by several notable Aberdonians. The display included material related to Sir James McGrigor, Sir Alexander Ogston and Amelia Laws and was accompanied by a sell-out series of talks from guest speakers Tom Scotland, David Rennie and John Scott.

Jen Shaw
One of the books in our collection of 231 incunabula (books printed before 1501) is a very rare and unusual book indeed. The book is an incomplete copy of Ibn Sina’s *Canon of Medicine*, printed by Adolf Rusch (ca. 1435-1489) in Strasbourg sometime after 1473.

Illuminated letter “k” for Karabe or Amber.

A “minor” illuminated initial.

One of the many excised initials.

The unbound, mutilated leaves are interesting, however, because although they lack many of their initials, they contain folio numbers on the top right hand corner and the original signature numbers at the bottom. These numbers are in an early hand. Many of the pages also contain handwritten catchwords to guide in putting the correct sections together.
However, it is the remaining illuminated initials that hold our attention. Identified as coming from an English workshop, they are beautifully executed. The main colours are rose, blue and gold with filigree details and in many cases gold leaf for highlight. The quality of these remaining minor initials cannot be overstated and when you look at the gaps in the spaces left where the larger initials were, you can only wonder at what is missing.

A section of Adolf Rusch’s typeface. Until he was identified by name, Rusch was known as the “Printer of the R-bizarre” – the characteristic capital R can be seen clearly here.

So, why would this mutilation have happened? We know that the book once belonged to the Coventry School in England, which was a free school founded in 1545. Their library dates back to 1602 when a number of books were donated by wealthy locals. The library fell into disrepair and the bulk of the books, including this one, were sold at auction at the beginning of the 20th century. The book was given to the University, we think, by John Tattersall who was a writer and antiquarian. It would appear that it was Tattersall who had the
book bound in two sections. Curiously, there are also some leaves of the book in other locations. There are leaves in three separate Cambridge University libraries, one in the original Coventry School (now King Henry VIII School) and another in the National Library of Qatar.

In addition to the illuminated initials, the book is filled with hundreds of pen-flourished initials in blue and red ink.

As we said, the library of the Coventry School was once in quite considerable disrepair and the books housed there in poor conditions. The book could easily have been plundered for its beautiful initials at this point for personal collection or for selling on. Certainly the book had been mutilated before it went to auction. It wasn’t (and still isn’t) uncommon for books such as this to be taken apart and the individual leaves, and sometimes initials, sold on.

So our book is perhaps only a shadow of what it once was. Certainly, because it is a printed book there are other copies available in other collections of incunabula in libraries around the world. Much has been written on the printing of various editions of the *Canon* and there is fascinating information on Rusch the printer. However, each copy of this edition is unique – each has initials added by a different scribe from a different workshop and individual owners have left their own annotations.

It certainly looks as if our copy was used as a medical reference work because of annotations written in English which translate the names of the plants and mineral substances which can be used in medicines, perhaps before it was gifted to the Coventry School. It must have been a beautiful book and a wonderful example of 15th-century English illumination. It remains one of the most intriguing books in the University Collection.

A close-up image of one of the remaining illuminated minor initials.

Jane Pirie
Last year marked the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation. At Aberdeen, we have a book with a binding decorated with images of four individuals who helped shape the Reformation in some way.

The book, printed in Italy in 1525, is a collection of plays by the ancient Greek comic playwright Aristophanes. The binding was made, in or after 1545, in Wittenberg in Germany, the town where Martin Luther wrote and published his 95 theses which initiated the Reformation.

So what’s on our book? Starting at the centre, what you notice is a date, 1545, but there are also depictions of four of the nine Muses. We have Thalia, the muse of comedy – appropriate to the text perhaps – Terpsichore, the muse of dance, Euterpe, muse of ancient poetry, song and dance, and Calliope, muse of epic poetry. There is also a depiction of the god Apollo, teacher of the muses. All quite fitting for a Humanist Greek text.

Framing this central design is a roll containing roundels with portrait heads. Closer observation shows them to be key figures in the history of the Reformation. We have Jan Hus, Erasmus, Melanchthon and Luther. It is a “family tree” of reformist thought.

Wittenberg was the city of the workshops of the painter Lucas Cranach the Elder. Cranach, a close friend of Luther, not only produced paintings but set up his own print shop to produce broadsheets.

The covering is made from tawed pigskin. Tawing is a process of preserving using alum salts, amongst other things, to cure the skin. Alum-tawed pigskin is one of the best skins to decorate. If you dampen the surface of a book freshly bound in alum-tawed skin, it is easy to emboss it with metal stamps or rolls. It then dries to an extremely hard surface that holds the decoration for hundreds of years.
and pamphlets which distributed the message of the Reformation throughout Europe. Cranach was a canny businessman who realised the power of the image when distributing a message and specialised in woodcuts and wood engravings to illustrate his printings. It is quite possible that the stamps made for this binding were also made in these workshops. Certainly, when we compare them to portraits by Cranach, we can note a similarity in style. The influence of Cranach is strong, and even if not his workshop’s handwork these images are of exceptional quality for a binding.

We can look at them in some detail and compare them to Cranach portraits. Jan Hus, the Czech reformer, died in 1415 and so was long dead by the time this binding was made. Hus, however, was seen by Luther as one of the predecessors of the Reformation and there were many woodcuts available of his likeness. Cranach, in fact, made this woodcut of Hus and it is quite reasonable to suggest that this roundel was certainly influenced by these.

This portrait of Erasmus from Cranach’s workshop dates from around 1533. Cranach never met Erasmus but copied this portrait from a miniature by Holbein. There is much more of the wiggly line of Cranach rather than the solid still hand of Holbein in the binding portrait.

Phillip Melanchthon was well known to Cranach and he produced more than one portrait of the wiry, shy friend of Luther. Melanchthon was also the teacher and friend of two of the owners of our book.

And lastly Luther himself painted many times throughout his life by Cranach and here shown in jowly relief on our binding.
So already we can see this is a great binding. Interesting materials, well-made, intriguing designs. We can place it: Wittenberg; date it: 1545 or later; and, rather wonderfully, we know the name of the person who bound it.

Hidden in amongst the roundel portraits is this depiction of an owl mobbed by two other birds and the initials C. N. This has been identified as Conrad Neidel, a bookbinder who worked in Wittenberg until his death in 1568. It has been suggested that the owl was his symbol, a pun on the German for bird of prey, Neidvogel. Neidel is listed amongst tradesmen of Wittenberg becoming a Master Binder in 1542 but as with many craftsmen, there is no other information about him. However, it is still remarkable to be able to name the binder of such an early book. There are at least three bindings by Neidel in British libraries. All three bear the date of 1545 and have the medallion portraits.

Perhaps the date merely states when the binding was completed – but there is another possible reason. 1545 was the year that the Council of Trent first met as an organised, firm response to the Protestant Reformation: the beginning of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. It is hard not to speculate that this binding, with the medallion portraits of four of the foremost recognised Reformers, might be a piece of propaganda, reminding people of the significance of, or even celebrating, the achievements of the Reformation? If Luther and his followers were the first to successfully and comprehensively use the power of print to promote their cause, why not use book bindings too?

Jane Pirie
Leaves of Leaves: Conservation and Housing of a Book of Sub-Himalayan Fern Specimens

Eleonora Lazzari has recently completed a two-month conservation internship at the Special Collections Centre. She is a student at the Cr Forma paper and book conservation school in Cremona, Italy and due to complete her diploma in Spring 2018. While at the University of Aberdeen, she worked on several projects including a 19th-century herbarium. Eleonora worked on this project with our Book Conservator, Brannah Mackenzie, and our Paper Conservator, Louisa Coles.

“A Herbarium is a collection of preserved plants stored, catalogued and arranged systematically for scientific study by professionals and amateurs. [...] Herbaria are used to aid plant identification, to help understand biodiversity and used in support of conservation, ecology and sustainable development.” (Standards in the Care of Botanical Materials)

Every herbarium must have written data accompanying the specimen. Data should include information on where and when the specimens were found and on who found them. This data is as important as the specimen itself; a specimen with no data has limited scientific value.

With this in mind, we can understand how unusual this herbarium is. Indeed, it seems to be unfinished. It is a large (625x460x650mm) 19th-century binding, with no print. The only text is a manuscript title in ink on the first page. Pages are not numbered, and there are no identification labels. There are only specimens, approximately 110 in total. The book has many blank pages at the end and some between one specimen and another.

The herbarium is what is called a local herbarium. It is a collection of ferns from the sub-Himalayan region. It is part of the Thomson of Banchory Collection and, unfortunately, not a lot is known about its background.
From what we know of him, Alexander Thomson did not travel to India and so did not personally collect the specimens himself. However, the binder, Edmond, based in Aberdeen, was one of the two that Thomson usually used. It therefore seems probable that Thomson obtained the fern collection and either mounted the specimens himself or arranged for someone else to do so.

**The herbarium condition before the treatment**

John Edmond, the Aberdeen bookbinder, produced bindings that ranged in quality according to price, and this is an example of his poorer quality binding. The book is a half bound leather and cloth tight back binding on boards with raised bands (bands that are raised from the spine with the leather glued directly onto them). The 19th-century brown leather is very poor quality: brittle, worn, stained and abraded. As a result of how the leather was commonly processed during the 19th century, it is now very acidic and has lost too much collagen to keep elasticity and cohesion.

Note the very poor quality of the leather.

As a result, the book spine was in such bad condition that it lost pieces of leather every time it was opened or moved. The sewing and the text block are still in good condition and the specimens inside are, in general, well preserved. They are attached with paper tabs of two colours, grey and white. The white tabs appear to be a more modern paper and are therefore likely to have been applied later.

Condition before the treatment (clockwise from top left): broken tabs; detached fragments; a specimen that has become completely detached and adhered to the facing page; a later white tab.

Some specimens have lost some little pieces, some tabs are broken or partially detached. Two specimens were completely detached and one of these had become adhered to the facing page.

Historically, herbarium specimens were often treated with chemical applications. These could contain harmful components such as mercury, arsenic and lead. Before the treatment was started, we contacted our Health and Safety Officer for advice. He recommended that nitrile gloves were used for handling
specimens and that extraction was used during the dry cleaning process. He also suggested that we could carry out XRF (X-ray fluorescence) analysis in order to identify a number of these elements. XRF is an analysis method to identify many chemical elements present in an object. A handheld XRF instrument was provided by the Geology department, and the analysis was carried out on two detached fragments from separate pages by a lecturer from the same department, Dr Dave Kemp.

There was no detection of mercury, arsenic or lead, which was reassuring. However, the presence of other substances such as barium and naphthalene, which were also used in some herbarium treatment recipes, cannot be identified using XRF. Therefore, as a precaution, we recommended that nitrile gloves are used by readers and staff whenever this volume, or any other containing plant material, is handled.

The treatment

The primary aim of the treatment was to secure the loose specimens and to preserve the historical integrity of the book. A second aim was to consolidate the binding, so that the book could be safely consulted.

Some pages suffered from heavy surface dirt, so the first step was to remove this with a chemical sponge and a soft brush.

The decision about how we would address the broken and partially detached tabs was straightforward. First we toned some archival paper. A tone was selected that was pretty near to the page colour, but recognisable as different. We made new tabs with this paper and we used them to reattach the specimens. The old broken tabs were left in place, to recall the original structure. The old tabs that were partially detached were reattached.
We consulted different people to understand which should be the best solution for the loose specimen housing: curatorial staff, an academic who consults herbaria in the course of his research, and conservator colleagues with experience of working on herbaria.

It is common practice to house loose pieces in non-adhesive paper packets called capsules. We considered five possible solutions for housing these. In selecting the best solution, two principal factors were considered: the safety of the specimens themselves and the requirement to view them next to the bound specimens. The final decision was to number the pages to provide a reference, then attach numbered capsules to individual sheets of paper and gather these sheets in a folder. This allowed for detached parts to be viewed next to the specimen from which they had come, without introducing any additional risk to the attached specimens.

Making capsules and folder.
A tray of the same height and width of the book was made, to contain the folder. A piece of plastazote was cut to the same size as the box, and a cut-out made to enshrine the folder and limit movement.

The spine before and after treatment.
Prior to starting the treatment of the pages and specimens inside, the leather of the binding was consolidated with two different products, to make sure that it could resist the stress introduced by opening as much as possible. Despite this, due to the brittle nature of the leather, it remained vulnerable to further deterioration. Therefore, on

The capsule shown beside the specimens.
completion of the work on the specimens and text block, we inserted a strip of Usumino (a strong, long-fibred, Japanese paper) underneath the crack on the spine to provide additional support during future use. The areas of leather that had lifted from the spine were then re-adhered.

Stages in the repair of the spine.

Finally, a box was made to house both the book and tray containing the folder.

The book and the folder in the box.

The final box

We would like to thank all those who offered their time and advice in the examination, treatment and re-housing of the herbarium:

Roberta Bolzoni (Technician in the restoration of books, prints and documents);

Professor David Burslem (Personal Chair, Biological Sciences);

Emma Le Cornu (Conservator, Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum; formerly Conservator at Kew Gardens);

Lee Hampson (Clinical Scientist, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary);

Dr David Kemp (Lecturer, Geology & Petroleum Geology, University of Aberdeen);

Dr Allan Petrie (Health & Safety Advisor, University of Aberdeen);

Jane Pirie (Information Officer/Rare Books Catalogue, Special Collections Centre, University of Aberdeen)

Eleonora Lazzari, Louisa Coles and Brannah Mackenzie
Friends of Aberdeen University Library
Annual General Meeting
Thursday 26 April 2018, 6pm
Special Collections Centre, Seminar Room, The Sir Duncan Rice Library

The AGM for Friends will take place at 6.00-6.30pm. The meeting will be followed by a talk by Jen Shaw, Exhibitions Officer for the Special Collections Centre.

**Behind the Scenes of an Exhibition**

A behind-the-scenes look at how an exhibition is curated. Jen Shaw gives a glimpse into how an exhibition comes about: from deciding on a subject or theme, through to the selection of objects, and finally to the week of installation. Fun, fascinating and, at times, frantic!

Jen Shaw is the Exhibitions Officer for the Special Collections at the University of Aberdeen. After studying History of Art at St Andrews University, she went on to complete an MA in Museum & Gallery Studies at Manchester University. Her first job was as the Touring Exhibitions Officer in Dumfries. She followed this post with a curatorial position as Keeper of Art at Bolton Museum & Art Gallery and Arts Development work in Cheshire. Following 5 years living in the USA where she was the Gallery Coordinator for two contemporary spaces in Chicago, she returned to the UK and took up the post in Aberdeen in 2015.

This talk will draw on Jen’s 20 years of curating exhibitions in museums, galleries and other spaces on a range of subjects from Japanese netsuke to contemporary ceramics and Charles Dickens. She will be looking at the processes involved in getting the idea for an exhibition from the drawing board into a finished design in the gallery and showing examples of different types of exhibitions and their particular challenges.

A light-hearted and entertaining look behind the scenes of exhibitions.
2018 May Festival at the Special Collections Centre & Library

At this year’s May Festival the Special Collections Centre and the Glucksman Conversation Centre will again hold two of their most popular events. The 2018 May Festival will take place from 25 to 27 May. The Festival Programme will be launched in April and booking for events, including those hosted in the Sir Duncan Rice Library, will open soon thereafter.

Collections Close-up event
Friday 25 May 2018, 2.30-4.00pm

View at close hand some of the magnificent illustrated botanical books from the Special Collections. Each of our curators has chosen a favourite botanical book from the University’s collections. They will be on hand to turn the pages for you and to answer questions about the books. The event is timed to coincide with the end of the tour of the Cruickshank Botanic Garden.

Bookbinding Workshop and Talk
Saturday 26 May 2018, 10.30am-12.30pm

Come to the Special Collections Centre for a morning of bookbinding. Learn practical skills from our Book Conservator and make your own mini-notebook in the Glucksman Conservation Centre. Then discover the beautiful rare bindings in the Special Collections with expert guidance from our Rare Books Cataloguer.
Artist’s Talk: Age of Oil

Saturday 26 May 2018, 2.00-3.00pm, The Gallery

Find out what it was like working as an artist on an oil platform. Sue Jane Taylor has worked in some of the most remote and difficult conditions whilst documenting Scotland’s offshore industry. This talk is part of the exhibition “Age of Oil” developed in association with National Museums Scotland.

The Brent Field, 2016, Shell UK Limited.

Murchison control room, 2014.
Upcoming exhibition at King’s Museum: Growing Up

Postgraduate students on this year’s MLitt “Curating an Exhibition” course will explore the theme of “Growing Up” and the different journeys we take through childhood. The exhibition opens on 13 June 2018.

Information for visitors:
King’s Museum is open Tuesday–Friday, 1.00–4.30pm. Entry is free. The current exhibition, “The Scottish Warrior”, is running until 26 May 2018.

Note from your Editor
Dear Friends,

Please let us know what news, information and/or stories you’d like to read more about in your newsletter. Any comments and feedback are very welcome. Please email me, editor of the Friends’ News, at isabel.seidel@abdn.ac.uk

Thank you, Isabel.