



University student resources in Special Collections

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QG HCOL040 [<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/documents/guides/qghcol040.pdf>]

The Wolfson Reading Room

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Introduction

The greatest majority of family historians who contact us do so because their ancestor may have attended the University.

A brief note on the University's history may help direct research in the first instance. Students who attended Aberdeen before 1860 attended either King's College (founded in 1495) or Marischal College (founded in 1593). These two institutions joined together in the fusion of 1860 to become the University of Aberdeen.

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

Please note that this factsheet should be consulted in conjunction with the factsheets on [QG HCOL031: School and teacher training resources in Special Collections](#), [QG HCOL037: University staff resources in Special Collections](#), [QG HCOL039: University student lecture notes in Special Collections](#) and [QG HCOL038: University student and alumni society resources in Special Collections](#).

Rolls of graduates

King's College and Marischal College (1495 – 1860)

Much of the key information up to 1860 relating to graduates, alumni and staff of King's and Marischal Colleges has been published. These are available via the Reading Room Local Collection, other libraries and some are available via the internet. The Rolls from 1495 have been digitised and are searchable here: www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/rolls-of-graduates-212.php

These published records were compiled from the extant registers at the end of the 19th century and so bring together in one place all the known information for individual students - you should not generally expect to find further details in the original records. You should note too that the information recorded in the original registers was not extensive. Generally the student's name, dates of attendance and native locale were recorded, and occasionally (more so in the Marischal College records) the name and occupation of the student's father.

The purpose of the registers was largely administrative, so they do not contain family or biographical information to any great extent. Additional information of this nature which is noted in the printed volumes was usually gathered from non-university sources.

It is also worth noting that until the mid-19th century, many students did not go through the formalities of matriculation and especially graduation. Instead, they would attend various classes and, if necessary for future employment purposes, obtain a certificate directly from individual Professors. This means that while a student may have attended the University of Aberdeen in this period it does not necessarily follow that a record will have survived in the University Archive. In 1858 the Universities (Scotland) Act made matriculation compulsory. Therefore if a person's name (or any variations of their name) cannot be found then they were not a student of the University.

King's College

Officers and graduates of University and King's College Aberdeen MVD-MDCCCLX ed. P.J. Anderson (Aberdeen: New Spalding Club, 1893).

Roll of alumni in arts of the University and King's College of Aberdeen 1596–1860 ed. P. J. Anderson (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1900).

Marischal College

Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis: selections from the records of the Marischal College and University MDXCIII-MDCCCLX ed. P. J. Anderson (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1898). Vols. 2-3.

University of Aberdeen (1860 – current)

The published records for 1860 - 1970 are noted below and list graduates only but often contain more information about the students than the earlier lists, such as courses studied, parentage, career and marriage information. The Rolls also update information on alumni in their successive volumes so you can usually trace a graduate throughout their career and life. They also often provide a cross-reference to an obituary in the Aberdeen University Review and an entry in the published Roll of Service and Book of Remembrance.

Roll of the graduates of the University of Aberdeen, 1860–1900, ed. William Johnston (AUP, 1906).

Roll of the graduates of the University of Aberdeen 1901–1925, with supplement 1860–1900, ed. Theodore Watt (AUP, 1935).

Roll of the graduates of the University of Aberdeen, 1926–1955, with supplement 1860–1925, ed. J. MacKintosh (AUP, 1960).

Roll of the graduates of the University of Aberdeen 1956–1970, with supplement 1860–1955, compilers Louise Donald & W. S. MacDonald (AUP, 1982).

The Rolls from 1860 – 1970 have also been digitised and are searchable here:

www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/rolls-of-graduates-212.php

Please note that the last published Roll dates to 1970 and for information relating to graduates from 1970 to current, enquiries should be directed to the University Registry. Also, Registry will still hold student records from as recently as the mid-20th century. For more information see the 'Access' section below.

University institutional papers

The University's institutional archives are diverse and are a key source relating to the regulation of the colleges and their teaching ([KINGS](#)) & ([MARISCHAL](#)).

Court and Senate minutes

Court papers: 1861 - current ([MSU 380](#)) and Senate papers: 1861 - current ([MSU 370](#)) (a set of minutes are also available to consult as part of the Local Collection) contain lists of graduates and also honorary graduates.

Departmental records from 1860 are a source as well. Examples include the Faculty minutes: Arts ([MSU 646](#)), Divinity ([MSU 649](#)), Law ([MSU 924](#)), Medicine ([MSU 647](#)) and Science ([MSU 648](#)).

General Council register of members

All graduates are automatically added to the General Council registers: 1860 - current. See copies as part of the Local Collection and also archive copies ([MSU 401](#)).

The registers which contain names and addresses are mainly useful for locating graduates from 1971 – current (i.e. after the last published Roll of Graduates was compiled).

Class records

As already indicated, the core information on students has been published. However, there are surviving class records (mainly from 1860) that provide additional information to the published Rolls. In general this entails academic information such as courses and exams taken.

Class lists

Class lists are particularly useful from 1860 onwards for locating students who attended classes but did not go on to formally graduate and are therefore omitted from the published Rolls of Graduates.

The core record series are:

Faculty of Arts, vol.1, 1860/61-1891/92 ([MSU 1](#)).

Faculty of Medicine, vol. 1: 1860/61-1893 ([MSU 2](#)).

Faculty of Medicine, vol. 2: 1860/61-1893 ([MSU 3](#)).

Faculty of Divinity, vol. 1: 1860/61-1893/94 ([MSU 4](#)).

Faculty of Law, vol. 1: 1860/61-1893/94 ([MSU 5](#)).

Medicine and Law: 1894-1922 and 1892-1921 ([MSU 6](#)).

Arts, Science and Divinity: 1873-1910 ([MSU 7](#)).

Medicine and Law: 1917 - 1925 ([MSU 8](#)).

Arts, Science and Divinity: 1907 – 1921 ([MSU 9](#)).

Arts, Science, Commerce and Divinity: 1919 - 1925 ([MSU 10](#)).

Medical student records

If your ancestor was a medical student you will find a great deal of information additional to the published Rolls. The medical graduate schedules contain information on classes taken, additional practical training as well as brief biographical details.

Medical graduate schedules: 1861 - 1958 ([MSU 61 – MSU 71](#)).

The records of the Anatomy Department are especially interesting as they contain records of the physical characteristics of students, often including portrait photographs: 1896 – 1984 ([MS 1332/5](#)).

Class commemorative publications

There are some classes, predominately arts and medical classes, who produced commemorative publications on the occasion of a reunion and often produced subsequent publications for many years after.

The earliest class record is from Marischal College for the class of 1787-91 but the vast majority are from the mid-to-late 19th and early 20th century. There are a long series of excellent 20th century medical class albums. They tend to contain brief biographies and sometimes photographs as well (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Bursaries and prizes

University Calendars (from 1860 - 2002) are an invaluable contextual source providing information on class prizes, medals, scholarships and bursaries (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Aberdeen University Awards provide lists of degrees, diplomas, prizes, medals and bursaries: 1970 – 1980 (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Bursary competition papers: 1852 – 1953 ([MSU 11 – MSU 41](#)).

Photographs of students

Class photographs

This core collection comprises class photographs from the Arts, Divinity, Law, Medical and Science faculties and also photographs of various groups such as student magazine editorial staff and national student bodies. Class photographs are sometimes accompanied by 'Autograph Books' which are a key to the photographs and feature a facsimile signature of each student: mid 19th century – 20th century ([MSU 591](#)).

Halls of residence

Student halls of residence photographs: 1966 – 2000 ([MSU 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: 1906 - 1998 ([MSU 301](#)) and The University of Aberdeen Students' Charities Campaign papers: 1940s – 2000s ([MSU 1073](#)).

The Sports Union photographs include student administrative officers, individual clubs and also important events ([MSU 1452](#)).

Student magazines and newspapers

The printed student publications (Alma Mater, Athletic Alma and Gaudie) from the 1890s onwards contain numerous photographs of student groups, particularly societies and sports clubs (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

In Memoriam and Roll of Service

There are two published sources; those students and alumni who served and died in World War One and those who died in World War Two.

Aberdeen Roll of Service 1914-1919 (ed. Mabel Desborough Allardyce, AUP, 1921) and *Book of Remembrance (including 1939-1945)*, (University of Aberdeen, 1952).

Both printed sources have been digitised and are available on-line:

www.abdn.ac.uk/library/roll-of-honour/

Student societies and sports clubs

For a list of societies and relevant archive collections see separate factsheet [QG HCOL038: University student and alumni society resources in Special Collections](#).

Oral history collections

University of Aberdeen Oral History Archive: comprises nearly 200 interviews with individuals connected with the University ([MS 3620](#)). There are many interviews with students reflecting on the student experience.

Other relevant printed collections

Calendars

University Calendars (from 1860 - 2002) are an invaluable contextual source providing information about teachers, courses, classes, timetabling, course reading, regulations and information on class prizes, medals, scholarships and bursaries (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Theses

Staff may also have submitted a thesis (PhD and research MLitt and MSc): 1880s - current. Early students of King's and Marischal submitted graduation thesis and some are held as part of the printed book collections. Please search the library catalogue to identify individual items:

www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/search-catalogues/index.php

Student guides/handbooks (various types)

Student Guides were issued to students and contain term time addresses for students: 1893 – 1975 (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

There have also been various handbooks which provide background information, often provided for students starting University. Examples include Regent: 1948 – 1969 (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Student and University magazines and newspapers

There have been numerous student and University publications, starting in the late 19th century, the main ones being: Aberdeen University Magazine, Alma Mater, Athletic Alma and Gaudie. These are key resources for researching student life (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Departmental publications

There have been numerous relevant publications and notable examples include Arbor (Forestry Society), Orb (Geographical Society) and Zodiac (Medical Society) (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Aberdeen University Review (including obituaries) from 1913 to current

Obituaries have often been cross-referenced from the published Rolls of Graduates and are an invaluable resource for finding additional information and testimonials on alumni. A part index is available in the Reading Room (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

The Review also contains many articles on University history, student life and notable students.

Affiliated institutions

Aberdeen teacher training colleges

There are extensive records of students including published sources for the church run colleges. See separate Factsheet [QG HCOL031: School and teacher training resources in Special Collections](#).

Christ's College and predecessor bodies

Aberdeen Free Church College was founded in 1843, closing in 1986 when teaching was removed to the University. The archives were transferred and include student records ([MS 3241](#)). There is also a published volume of students for the early years:

The Church College in Aberdeen: Free Church College, 1843 - 1900, United Free Church College, 1900 - 1929; complete roll of alumni, 1843 - 1929 (AUP, 1936).

North of Scotland College of Agriculture

The College (founded in 1904) merged with the University in 1963 to form the School of Agriculture. The College prior to merger and then as a University School, issued their own publications such as Calendars. These list students awards and research activities (see copies as part of the Local Collection).

Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health

The Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health founded in 1913 merged with the University in 2008. The archive is extensive and contains sources relating to students and researchers: 1913 – current ([MSU 1451](#)).

Other relevant collections

NHS Grampian Archives

The archive dates from the founding of Aberdeen Infirmary in 1739 and contains substantial material relating to 18th and 19th century hospital provision, notably general and specialist hospitals, cottage hospitals and asylums. There are many relevant collections relating to medical education and the connections with the University.

www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/nhs-grampian-archives-72.php

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. There are many relevant collections relating to medical education and the connections with the University. 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.

www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/the-aberdeen-medicochirurgical-society-256.php

Access

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

www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/search-catalogues/index.php

For information relating to graduates from 1970 to current (i.e. after the last year of the published Rolls) enquiries should be directed to the University Registry. Registry also still hold student records from as recently as the mid-20th century.

Please note that some records noted above may contain personal information of students and may be closed for 75 (for adults) and 100 (for children 16 and under) years under the Data Protection Act (1998).

Further reading

For further reading please 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*.

Peter John Anderson (ed.), *Studies in the History and Development of the University* (AUP, 1906). This also contains the most detailed bibliography relating to the Universities.

R. D. Anderson, *The Student Community at Aberdeen 1860-1939* (AUP, 1988). See also the other publications as part of the Quincentennial Studies series.

Colin McLaren, *Aberdeen Students 1600-1860* (Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen, 2005)

W. Douglas Simpson (ed.), *The Fusion of 1860: A Record of the Centenary Celebrations and a History of the University of Aberdeen 1860-1960* (Aberdeen University Studies No. 146, Oliver & Boyd, 1963)

Links

National Register of Archives

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>