

The Society's archive collection

At the centre of the collection are the administrative papers of the Society (SANT/ADM). These cover all the activities of the Society from its beginnings in 1813 to the present day and give a fascinating insight not just into the running of a provincial antiquarian society but also the character of the members and the important issues of the day. In addition to the usual, minutes, correspondence and financial records, various committee records survive.

Committees were established to deal with specific issues or events; perhaps one of the most important being the Northumberland County History Committee founded in 1890 which was responsible for the production of the fifteen volume History of Northumberland between 1893 and 1940. (SANT/CHC).

Over the years the Society has received many bequests and the major ones are listed in the catalogue. Papers belonging to the first secretary of the Society, John Adamson, include a volume on the great flood of 1771 which swept away all the bridges on the River Tyne except the bridge at Corbridge (SANT/BEQ/1/1/5). This lists individuals who suffered in the flood and gives details of their property. His papers also include plans for the bridge at Hexham.

Robert Blair's bequest (SANT/BEQ/2) is one of the major collections belonging to the Society. He was a South Shields solicitor and became the Society's Secretary in 1883. His twenty seven sketch books cover the period 1877 to 1913 and the drawings in the sketch books are individually listed. The sketch books are a very valuable source for local historians showing buildings that in some instances no longer exist. Another folder contains sketches by Hilda Blair. His loose drawings include views of buildings in Belgium made in 1897. His papers also include a notebook describing a tour of the Roman wall in 1800.

In 1894 John Crosse Brooks (SANT/BEQ/4) gave his twenty-six volume collection of portraits, letters and autographs to the Society. It is a large collection of papers relating to individuals who were highly thought of in the Victorian era, it includes bishops, kings and American presidents as well as 'eminent commoners'. Some of the people featured are almost forgotten today. There are pages devoted to Victorian Members of Parliament, generals and members of the aristocracy and also many references to people in the arts, actors, painters, poets and sculptors. There is a wealth of biographical detail contained in notes and contemporary newspaper cuttings.

Sons of John Bell, a bookseller and land surveyor, John and Thomas Bell are important figures in the history of the north east. They were avid collectors of books and manuscripts but unfortunately their collections were dispersed after their deaths and can now be found in various archive repositories in the North East. John, the elder of the two brothers, was the Society's Librarian until his death in 1864. His records (SANT/BEQ/6) include five volumes that record the early history of the Society. (Originally there were six volumes covering the period 1812-1856 but unfortunately one volume 1840-1843 has not been found and may have strayed when the archives were moved from the Black Gate for safe-keeping during World War Two). There is also correspondence and notebooks on local history. His records contain printed papers relating to the murder of Joseph Hedley (Joe the Quilter) in the early nineteenth century which include a plan of the victim's house. It is rare to find plans of working class housing at this date. There is also a very interesting volume of newspaper cuttings called 'Gatherings on Railways and their fever in 1845'.

Thomas Bell (SANT/BEQ/5) left notebooks and manuscript notes to the Society which had been used

by Aeneas Mackenzie and the Reverend John Hodgson in their Histories of Northumberland. Some of his books are in the Society's library and some that have manuscript additions are in the archive collection; these include volumes on Newcastle Town Moor, political posters and accounts of balloon ascents. From 1826 Thomas Bell was land agent to the duke of Northumberland and as a result travelled widely in the county drawing up maps and plans, taking notes and making surveys. Like many of his contemporaries he did not waste paper and so his notes are written on the back of old bills, advertisements and other interesting documents. There are thirty one portfolios of maps and plans relating to Northumberland and a large number of related notes and surveys. These were listed in the 1960s but they are currently being catalogued in detail by a volunteer who has expert knowledge of surveying and is also knowledgeable about historic paper.

The Reverend John Hodgson (SANT/BEQ/18), whose history of Northumberland was published in 1825, left his notes for his history, original documents, pedigrees and transcripts to the Society. His notebooks contain valuable information and sketches of Roman sites. It is a large collection which includes a volume on the visitation of the county in 1828 with engravings of the churches in Northumberland by William Davison of Alnwick and collections of original documents arranged by church deanery.

The bequests also contain the records of important local architects such as J P Pritchett (SANT/BEQ/33), who restored the church of St. Cuthbert's Darlington, C C Hodges (SANT/BEQ/35), who worked on the restoration of Hexham and Abbey, C I Greenhow (SANT/BEQ/36), a leading Newcastle architect and W G Footitt (SANT/BEQ/37) who worked on restoration at Durham Cathedral.

The history of Gateshead is documented in the extensive collections of Thomas Wilson (SANT/BEQ/26) who collected volumes of manuscript and printed material on the development of the town.

The records of the Clephan (SANT/BEQ/11) family include descriptions of the Unitarian Church in Stockton on Tees and photographs of Stockton in 1864. James Clephan was editor of the local paper 'The Gateshead Observer' 1838-1860 and so his papers contain good descriptions of Gateshead but also there is a photograph of a cannon being fired from the roof of the Castle Keep in Newcastle c.1860 when there was a proposal to have a cannon fired regularly from the Keep as happens in Edinburgh.

William Woodman (SANT/BEQ/28) was town clerk of Morpeth and collected volumes of manuscript, printed material, plans and drawings relating to the history of the town. He also collected old county maps and correspondence.

Other bequests such as those of the Reverend and Canon James Raine (SANT/BEQ/24) and C D and T W Marley (SANT/BEQ/23) contain valuable genealogical material

The Society also has a large collection of loose bookplates. It also has four large volumes of bookplates collected by John Hodgson and two other volumes of bookplates. (SANT/BPS)

The County History Committee was formed in 1890 and its records are part of the administrative history of the Society but are sufficiently extensive to warrant a separate section in the catalogue. They form an interesting background to the publication of a major county history and include original documents, drawings and postcards. (SANT/CHC)

Drawings, maps and plans form an important part of the collection. Drawings are found within the bequests and in the general body of the collection; they vary from detailed architect's drawings to rough and in some cases unidentified sketches. In addition to the drawings in the archive collection the Society has framed paintings and drawings many on loan to local museums and art galleries.

The map and plan collection contains mainly eighteenth and nineteenth century plans including one from the 1740s showing the length of Hadrian's Wall and the surrounding country side. Some of the nineteenth century plans show the development of central Newcastle. There are also some very fine mining plans in the collection.

The extensive collection of deeds and legal documents (SANT/DEE) owned by the Society contains some deeds dating back to the twelfth century. Most of the deeds date from the late medieval period onwards and many relate to land and property ownership but there are some interesting exceptions. Some relate to the ownership of ships, one is concerned with slavery and one is a pardon granted by Elizabeth I to local rebels in 1570. A commission in bankruptcy of 1727 lists the stock of a linen draper in Sunderland and the various wills within the collection give an idea of the social standing and assets of many northerners. The property deeds also often give details of boundaries and sometimes it is possible to work out exact locations and layouts.

Within the general section of the catalogue (SANT/GEN) are documents which were often given as individual items and they cover most aspects of local history including a very interesting collection of local small pipe music. There are also collections of playbills and tickets for a local lottery. Political posters for the disputed election of 1826 and other Parliamentary elections are numerous.

The Society has an interesting collection of newspaper cuttings (SANT/NEW), some of which date to the early nineteenth century and give valuable information on the anti-slavery movement in the north. They also reflect the customs of the day and contain very detailed information .

The genealogy section of the catalogue (SANT/PGH) contains information on many northern families with many pedigrees and family trees. There are also some fine drawings of heraldic shields.

The photographic collections (SANT/PHO/) are extensive and are composed of photographs in albums, loose photographs, negatives (of various types) and glass slides. The subject matter is very varied. Although many of the photographs and slides are of Durham, Newcastle, Northumberland and the Roman Wall there are also many continental views from the early years of the twentieth century. There is a view of the Black Gate c 1860 and a view of the Durham Railway viaduct under construction and many late nineteenth century views of Newcastle. There is also a view of nineteenth century excavations in Egypt and slides of the Great Wall of China.

A detailed paper catalogue of the collection is available in the Society's library.

S Bird, August 2013.