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Scotland's first university

About the Special Collections Department

Our primary role is to facilitate the teaching and research activities of the University. Our staff are pleased to share their expertise by providing guidance and suggestions to help you to pursue your research more effectively. It is expected however, that you will conduct your own research, and there is a limit to the amount of time our staff can spend on each enquiry. There is an extensive reference library to help you.

Opening Hours

Termtime: Monday – Friday 9.00 am – 6.00 pm
Saturday 9.00 am – 12.30 pm
Vacation : Monday – Friday 9.00 am – 5.00 pm

The Special Collections Reading Room is to be found downstairs on Level 1 of the University Library. There is no charge for access. When you first arrive you will be asked to register as a reader and photo ID will be requested. No bags are allowed in the Reading Room and only pencils are to be used. Original materials are fetched for you upon request. If you are visiting on a Saturday or are likely to require specialist advice, please enquire beforehand. Wheelchair access is available – please ring in advance.

Department of Special Collections

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St Andrews

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University Library Guide for Family Historians



About Family History Research

The Special Collections Department of the University of St Andrews Library is a frequently used centre for research into family history. This leaflet briefly describes the most commonly consulted sources available here, and offers some basic advice on how to go about your search.



Where do I start?

Consider joining a local family history society. Be aware that genealogical research is never simple or easy, and requires significant time and personal dedication. You should not expect to make a quick visit to a library or archive and immediately find all the answers! It is always better to work backwards from the known to the unknown. Start your family history search by talking to your oldest relatives and look at family records such as birth, marriage and death certificates, bibles and wills. Beware of family traditions, however, unless or until you have documentation to back them up. Once you have worked out the facts of a basic family tree with as many names, dates and places as possible, you can start to look at original records. These will allow you to check your information, flesh out the bare facts and lead you back to earlier generations. Much of our material relates particularly to St Andrews and North East Fife.

Genealogical Resources in the Special Collections Department

Copies of the Census returns for Fife, 1841-1901, are held on microfilm. The census returns for St Andrews, 1841-1871, have been transcribed and indexed.

Manuscript Sources

- Church Records: The Church of Scotland Kirk Session records of the congregations of the former presbyteries of Cupar and St Andrews are held here on deposit from the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. They can contain communion rolls, lists of heads of families, details of illegitimate births, payments to the poor, and records of baptism, marriage and burial. A full list of holdings by parish is available. We also hold Presbytery records and archive material from a number of secession and independent churches.
- University Muniments: These include information on former staff and students of the institution from the 15th century onwards. Although they do not often contain personal or family information, they can nonetheless provide useful details not available elsewhere. Some of the older material has been published.
- Burgh records for North East Fife: These can include lists of inhabitants, voters and population, apprenticeship, burgess and property valuation rolls, and craft and guildry records. Other manuscript holdings relating to trades include volumes from St Andrews baxters, cordiners, fleshers, and hammermen (1548-1861). The burgh register of sasines for St Andrews (1673-1809) has been microfilmed.
- Family and estate papers: These might include rentals and tacks (leases) or genealogical compilations, family history notes etc. which could help in your search. You will need to know the farm or estate on which your ancestor lived.
- Individual items or small collections: Some of these are of significance to family historians, such as the minute book of the Anstruther Easter Mortsafe Society, 1830-1874 and the St Andrews Sea Box Society records, 1643-1974.

Printed Sources

- Valuation rolls list proprietors, tenants and occupiers (head of family only). Our holdings cover Fife for 1864-1975 with some gaps - a full list is available.
- Trade and Post Office Directories for St Andrews (12 editions between 1894 and 1975) and for Fife and all of Scotland may be consulted.
- Bound copies of some original Scottish newspapers are held by the Library, including: *St Andrews Citizen* (1870 to date), *Fife News* (1870-1937), *Fife Herald* (1822-1937) and *Fifeshire Journal* (1833-1892). These are particularly useful for accounts of public events and obituaries. Some newspapers are also held on microfilm.
- Other printed material of genealogical interest, e.g. monumental inscriptions, family histories, maps, Fife Family History Society publications, local lists and indexes are also available, and the University Library also contains an extensive general reference collection.

Our databases and catalogues are constantly under development. More information can be found on the departmental website.

