



University of
St Andrews
Museums

Fully funded PhD scholarship available to research the history of the University of St Andrews museum collections.

Proposals are invited for the University of St Andrews United College Scholarship. This three-year scholarship will be awarded to a PhD project researching either the University's natural historical collections, or the collections (including natural historical specimens along with a broader range of objects) that became the Bell Pettigrew Museum in 1912.

The United College Scholarship offers an exciting opportunity for prospective PhD students to craft their own projects rooted in the University of St Andrews museum collections, and it is a collaborative award between the School of History and the Museums of the University of St Andrews. Proposals should engage actively with the opportunities that this interdisciplinary context offers: Applicants should set out initial research questions that will give the subject a broader scholarly relevance beyond the specific topics and contexts of the museums case study. They should also bear in mind that their research may impact on the museums' future plans for the interpretation and display of its collections. Further context on the university museums and collections is provided at the end of this advert and also on our website: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/museums/>.

This PhD scholarship will offer the successful applicant the prospect of shaping and pursuing an independently researched thesis exploring a particular dimension of the museum collections at St Andrews. Proposals for the dissertation could consider (but need not be limited to):

- Imperial and colonial contexts (including networks) for natural history collecting in the 19th century, including decolonisation of natural historical collections
- Digital tools and techniques for collections-based research, including perhaps spatial and network analysis of the global collecting networks that brought specimens and objects to St Andrews
- Changing scholarly and public understandings of environment, biodiversity and climate change, as seen in and through the University's botany and zoology collections and displays
- Disciplinary change in universities and in scientific research in the 19th and 20th centuries
- Changing uses of natural historical collections for teaching, and ways in which they could be actively used to engage broad audiences
- Comparative study of other similar museums and collections, which might perhaps include the D'Arcy Thompson Zoology Museum at the University of Dundee

The scholarship also offers hands-on experience working in a museums context: The student will spend a minimum of one day per week working with the Museums team on projects relevant to their PhD research, which will be arranged flexibly to fit around other commitments. The projects will be developed in discussion with the student, but might for example include:

- Provenance research on objects collected in the 19th century
- Reconciliation of the various 19th and 20th century lists and catalogues of the museum collections with the material held by the university today
- Digitisation and documentation of objects in the collection
- Digital projects connected with this collection, for example crowdsourcing transcriptions of the 19th-century documentation, or contributing metadata about and images of this collection to relevant online initiatives
- Evaluation and assessment of visitor experience in the Bell Pettigrew Museum
- Contributions to public programming, displays, or digital engagement projects of the university museums

Practicalities

- The successful applicant will have a first class/ high 2.i (or equivalent) undergraduate degree in History or a closely related discipline, and should have completed an appropriate taught-postgraduate degree (or equivalent) by September 2020.
- Applications from individuals from backgrounds traditionally under-represented in historical research or in museums are particularly welcomed.
- The PhD will be jointly supervised by Dr Catherine Eagleton (Director of Museums), Dr John Clark (Senior Lecturer, School of History), and Dr Sarah Easterby-Smith (Senior Lecturer, School of History) and based in the School of History
- The United College Studentship offers £22,000 each year for three years, to be spent on fees, living costs, and research and conference travel as the student prefers

Application process:

Applicants should apply for a PhD place via the University of St Andrews standard application process: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/pg/apply/research/> listing Dr Eagleton as the potential supervisor.

In addition, they should use the outline below to prepare and submit a research outline of a maximum of 500 words directly to Dr Eagleton at museumdirector@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Prospective applicants are warmly invited to contact Dr Eagleton, Dr Clark and / or Dr Easterby-Smith informally in advance of making an application, if they wish (museumdirector@st-andrews.ac.uk ; jfc2@st-andrews.ac.uk ; ses22@st-andrews.ac.uk).

The deadline for applications is: 5pm on Thursday 26 March

Background

From its foundation, the University of St Andrews had collections of objects, including some relating to the history of the University, and others forming a collection of “curiosities” in the University Library. In 1838, a new Literary and Philosophical Society was founded, which had among its stated aims to establish a museum supported by subscriptions from its members as well as contributions from the University. The curiosities from the Library were transferred to the Society, and the collection grew rapidly through donations and purchases of objects, relating to Fife and from around the world, many through imperial and colonial networks. Displays in the Upper Hall in United College showcased the collections, which were dominated by natural historical specimens but included also anthropological and archaeological objects.



St Andrews University Library, Photographic Collection, StAU-BPMus-1: Upper College Hall looking East, anonymous photographer, 1910

By the 1850s it was reported that there were more than 230 visitors on a summer day, with numbers rising. Through the second half of the 19th century there was increasing use of the collection as a teaching resource for scientific subjects at the University, in parallel with a decline in the membership (and funds) of the Lit & Phil Society. In 1904 the museum was formally transferred to the University, which had been paying the majority of its costs for some time.

By this time, the collections had outgrown the displays in Upper Hall, which was in 1911 described as “at present mainly a store for the preservation rather than the exhibition of its contents.” Plans for extensions of the museum display spaces had been discussed for more than 30 years, but finally resulted in a new museum opening in the Bute Medical Building in 1911, named for Professor James Bell Pettigrew, and in recognition of the generous gift from his widow Elsie Bell Pettigrew. The new displays complemented anatomy, botany and geology teaching museums in the Bute Medical building, which held collections that had built up separately from those displayed in the old museum in Upper College Hall. Despite describing the museum hall as a “spacious apartment”, the Director of the Bell Pettigrew Museum already complained in 1913 that there was not enough space to display everything. He was also concerned that the new museum was too far from United College and St Salvator’s Chapel to tempt the public to visit, even with free entry offered.



*St Andrews University Library, Photography Collections, JHW-C-117:
Bell Pettigrew Museum interior in 1915, photographed by Dr John Hardie Wilson, botanist
and prominent member of the St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Society*

By the 1950s, space for teaching was needed in the Bute building, so the upper half of the museum space was converted to become a lecture theatre, and the Bell Pettigrew Museum's displays were reconfigured. Some of the collections returned to storage, while others were transferred to other museums in Scotland or to the University departments to whose subjects they related. The Zoological collections remained in place and were redisplayed between 1964 and 1970, now firmly as a teaching museum and arranged taxonomically, rather than as a collection aimed both at students and the public. Today, apart from some minor changes in the 1980s and 1990s, the museum still looks much the same, and is regarded as a rare survivor of an Edwardian zoological teaching museum, despite the changes made to its displays in the mid-twentieth century.

Despite the scope and richness of the collections, and the well-documented institutional history of the Bell Pettigrew Museum and the university museum that preceded it, there has been little research setting these into broader historical and historiographical contexts. The Museums of the University of St Andrews are working on ambitious plans to reimagine their displays and to open up greater public access to the collections on site and online. Research into the collections and museums will provide an essential foundation for these future plans.