CALL FOR MEMBERS

St Andrews is mainly known as the Scottish capital of golf – an image that does not even distantly encompass the town’s rich and diverse past, including, among other bright moments, the introduction and spread of early photography in the 1840-50s.

Through correspondence with the inventor of the calotype William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), the first Principal of St Andrews Sir David Brewster (1781-1868) learnt the process much earlier than most of his contemporaries making St Andrews one of the hotspots of early photography. Together with Dr John Adamson (1809-1870) and Hugh Lyon Playfair (1786-1861), Brewster documented St Andrews of the mid-nineteenth century using the photographic medium.

Refocus! is a cross-disciplinary postgraduate initiative that aims to refine the image of St Andrews in the eyes of the general public, and the University community in particular through research on the local (media) history of the town and the organisation of public outreach events. In the first semester we will be collecting data and brainstorming ideas that will be further employed to organise and run the following two projects in Semester 2:

1. The Early Photography Treasure Hunt is a team-building tour of St Andrews planned for incoming UG and PG students new to the town. Participants will be divided into five groups of six people and each will receive a set of seven reproductions of early photographs from the Special Collections. The teams will have to search for the places depicted in the photographs around town. In this manner, the students will get to know each other, get acquainted with the topography of the town, and learn more on the history of early photography in St Andrews from the event organisers. The treasure hunt will be tested in early February 2021 (as part of Refreshers) and then be run annually during Orientation Week.

2. As a part of The Early Photography Sticker Album project, 100 copies of a sticker album, inspired by St Andrews early photographic albums, will be handed out at the Main Library. The album-holders will be encouraged to weekly collect individual stickers with reproductions of nineteenth-century photographs from the Special Collections at the main library entrance. Each sticker will have a research-based explanation on the reverse side so that before applying it, one has to familiarise themselves with the social-historical context of the image thereby reproduced. The Early Photography Sticker Album project is provisionally planned for Spring 2021.

At the moment we are looking for postgraduate students interested in joining Refocus! In order to join the group please have a look at the technical information listed below and send the answers to the following questions to sd245@st-andrews.ac.uk by 23:59 on September 18:
- what aspects of the local / media history of St Andrews are you most interested in?
- how can you contribute to the research group?

We especially welcome individuals eager to study overlooked social group and cultural activities. The application should be no longer than 300 words in total.

All the applicants will be notified of the selection committee decision by September 21.

Eligibility
In order to join the group you have to:
- be a postgraduate (doctoral or Masters) student at St Andrews;
- be interested in the local history of the town;
- have basic knowledge of St Andrews’s contribution to the history of early photography.
Key Responsibilities
- attend weekly meetings (Thursdays 5pm-7pm, from Week 2 to Week 12) and participate in the group discussions*;
- conduct research on two photographs from the University Special Collections in their relation to the local history of St Andrews using the Special Collections archive (see https://collections.st-andrews.ac.uk/collection/early-named-photographers-collection/614898) and other relevant historical resources available via the University Library*;
- write two research-based texts for each photograph (one for the Treasure Hunt, another for the Photographic Album).

* Depending on COVID-19 restrictions, the research might take place remotely and the meetings might be held online.

Semester 1 Timeline
Week 1 – selection of group members
Week 2 – selection of group members
Week 3 – selecting photographs + first weekly meeting
Week 4 – selecting photographs + weekly meeting
Week 5 – conducting research on the selected photographs + weekly meeting
Week 6 – conducting research on the selected photographs + weekly meeting
Week 7 – conducting research on the selected photographs + weekly meeting
Week 8 – conducting research on the selected photographs + weekly meeting
Week 9 – brainstorming ideas for the Treasure Hunt trail and script + weekly meeting
Week 10 – writing the Treasure Hunt script + weekly meeting
Week 11 – writing the Treasure Hunt script + weekly meeting
Week 12 – writing the Treasure Hunt script + weekly meeting
Week 13 – testing the Treasure Hunt trail and script
Week 14 – printing the materials and rehearsing the Treasure Hunt

If you have any inquiries concerning Refocus! or the application process please contact Sofya Dmitrieva on sd245@st-andrews.ac.uk.