



# DEVELOPING PHOTOGRAPHS

10 tips to inspire visitors using  
historical photographs



NATIONAL  
TRUST *for*  
SCOTLAND

# Rosehaugh



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189

## How to use historical photographs to help visitors **CREATE CONNECTIONS** with our places

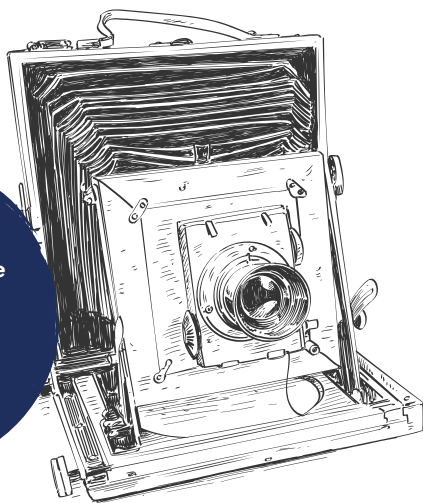
Photographs are an emotive and effective medium for engaging our visitors. More and more people have a high-quality camera in their pocket and a photo-heavy social media presence – so our visitors are comfortable looking at and engaging with photos.

Photos of friends and family – like the ones in our properties or on our visitors' phones – are visual memories and windows into the past. Historical photographs are particularly engaging, thanks to their physical nature, in a world where so much image-making and viewing is done digitally.

Jewel-like daguerreotypes, painstakingly created glass plate negatives, framed prints, much-loved photo albums and cheerful holiday snaps all have the potential to make history come alive. With a careful approach and a bit of imagination, our historical photographs can engage our visitors in conversation.

Violet Brodie had fun pasting in these photos she took at Rosehaugh House.

Album page,  
1899, Brodie Castle



Almost all our places have historical photographs, from a few snaps to archives of thousands, and they can all be used to tell stories.

These might be happy stories of friends and family, weddings and holidays. Sometimes the stories will be sadder or more complex – but these can be the most engaging stories to tell, helping us talk to visitors about difficult subjects.

Photographs are a particularly good way of engaging more diverse audiences, particularly children and young people. Photography is a familiar medium, the subjects are often easy to relate to and images are particularly suitable for online consumption.

Photographs also lend themselves to encouraging repeat visits and active audience engagement. Projects using historical photos can be run year after year with schools, while visitors can be encouraged to submit their own photos and be a part of our stories.

Thanks to the Morton Photography Project<sup>1</sup>, we now have a much better understanding of our photographic collections and how to use them. This booklet shares some of our learning.

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<sup>1</sup> The Morton Charitable Trust funded fieldwork on the National Trust for Scotland's photographic collections from 2014–21. This work raised the profile of the collections through research, articles, talks and dedicated projects. The project also involved the digitisation of photographic collections from across the Trust, leading to an updated database with high-quality images.



**A caption  
competition  
in the making.**

*A positive digital  
inversion of a film  
negative, c1935–6,  
Canna House*



## 10 TIPS

### 1 DIGITISE

Digitisation is key to unlocking the potential of historical photographs. Old photos are sensitive to light, heat and touch, so having digital or physical facsimiles will allow you, your visitors and researchers to make the most of them. Digitised photos can be shared online in stories, galleries and tweets. They can be forwarded to researchers or viewed on a computer without putting the originals at risk. They can also be turned into physical reproductions as facsimile albums or prints. For practical advice on getting your historical photographs digitised, please contact Collections Services.

### 2 RESEARCH

With digitisation goes documentation. This records what we know about our photographs: exactly what the object is, who took it, when it was taken, and what or who it is of. However, to make the best use of our photographic collections, further research is crucial. In many cases, our existing knowledge of our photographs may be minimal. By making use of online and library resources, property archives and knowledgeable members of staff, we can flesh out our knowledge. Researching our historical photographic collections also provides an opportunity to engage our visitors through crowdsourcing information.<sup>2</sup> The more we know about our photographs, the more we can use them to tell stories. The Margaret Fay Shaw collection at Canna House is a good example of a well digitised and documented set of photographs.

### 3 PRESERVE

Historical photographs are fragile. The surfaces of negatives and prints can be easily damaged by fingers or contact with other objects. Exposure to light, high temperatures or damp conditions can all have detrimental effects. In the case of nitrate film (of which we have only minimal amounts), poor preservation can lead to health and safety risks in the form of noxious gases or even combustion. To protect our photographs and the people working with them, wear gloves and store them using archival-quality materials. Please consult your regional conservator about storing photographs; examples of good storage can be found in the Photo Library at Hermiston Quay.

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<sup>2</sup> See *For Info: A Policy to Build and Share Information about Collections* on TrustNET.



**Pupils in Forfar had great fun taking modern versions of historical photos to learn about their town.**

*Top: Photographic print, c1950s, Angus Folk Museum; bottom: digital photograph, 2019, Paul Reid Photography*





A photograph collected in Japan by Scottish artist E A Hornel for use in his paintings.

Photographic print, c1890–c1921, Broughton House & Garden

#### 4 RE-CREATE

Create physical facsimiles of your photographs. Before digital photography, photos were inherently physical, as well as visual, objects. The earliest photos took hours of hands-on labour to produce, and in the case of daguerreotypes were presented in tactile, decorative cases. Compiling a photograph album was another intrinsically physical act, as was showing it to friends and family. The physical nature of images is something we now experience much more rarely. By creating high-quality prints of historical photos or by re-creating albums (as we have done at Kellie Castle and Castle Fraser), we can reintroduce the sense of touch to the photographic experience. For many people today, this will have an engaging novelty or nostalgia value.

#### 5 EXHIBIT

We have a huge and diverse audience of people who are comfortable looking at, understanding and interacting with photographic material. We can use this familiarity to our advantage by exhibiting our historical photos (either as originals or facsimiles) in our places or encouraging our visitors to share theirs in response. Be truthful in your interpretation, but don't be afraid to be humorous.

We've all had a chuckle at our own family photos and connecting visitors with our historical photographs can also be done in a light-hearted way, if appropriate.



## **6 INTERACT**

Being easy to reproduce and relate to, photographs are uniquely well placed to be shared and explored online. Whether through stories and galleries on our website, articles on other websites, or through social media applications, our historical photographs are a valuable tool for encouraging audience interaction. This is particularly the case for social media. Twitter and (especially) Instagram provide valuable platforms for sharing images and interacting with online audiences. You can see examples of these sorts of posts on the NTS Collections Twitter account (@NTSCollections) and main Trust Instagram account (@nationaltrustforscotland) from 2020. It's possible to run simple competitions – like the Morton Short Story Competition in 2019<sup>3</sup> or other activities online using historical photographs,<sup>4</sup> which encourage audience interaction. We can also inspire our visitors to respond to our historical photos via their own online presence and, when appropriate, to take and share their own photos of our places.

## **7 REACH OUT**

Although digital reproductions are a good way to make our photographs available to a worldwide audience, the physicality of historical photographic material such as glass plate negatives is particularly engaging, and something many of our visitors may be less familiar with today. Unlike large oil paintings or big pieces of furniture, photographs are reasonably portable and easy to transport. This potentially allows for external exhibits advertising our properties and collections, or hands-on engagement activities such as school projects. Even if it's not possible to transport originals, facsimile prints or albums can be nearly as effective.

## **8 COLLABORATE**

Scotland has a rich and varied photographic history. The universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen, National Galleries Scotland and the National Library of Scotland are just some of the institutions that hold major photographic collections relating to the history of Scotland. Why not get in touch with them to make use of their collections and expertise? It's also worth seeking out any local organisations or archives that might be good to work with. They may have knowledge or collections of their own that could augment or throw light on our collections. Working with partners also has the potential to open up bigger, new, more diverse audiences. Working with other institutions also raises the possibility of running symposiums, exhibitions and school projects to engage new audiences with our collections.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/morton-writing-competition-part-i-the-pend-farpais-sgr%C3%ACobhaidh-mhorton-p%C3%A0irt-i-am-bealach>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nts.org.uk/learning/morton-school-activities>



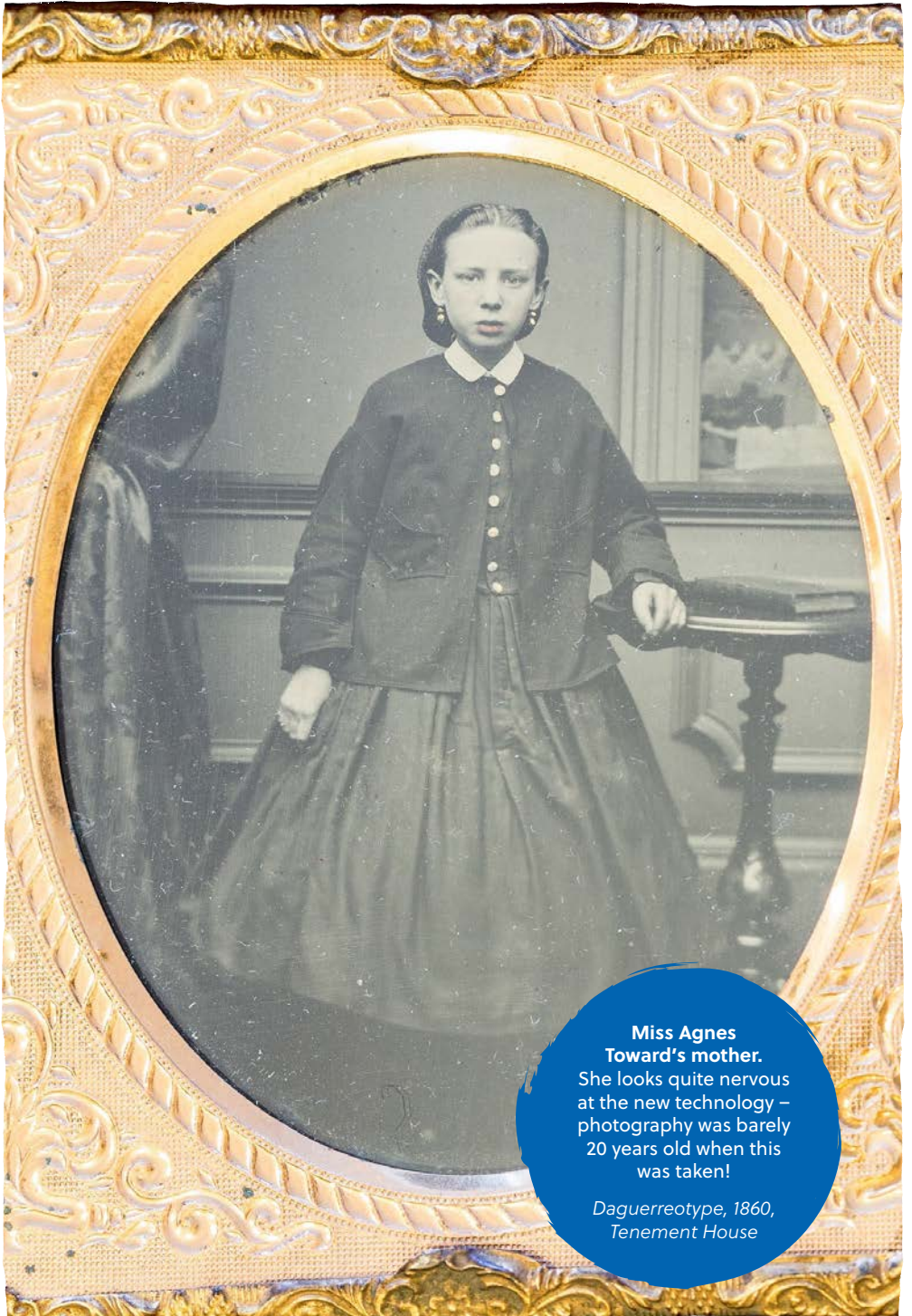
## 9 **EMPOWER**

Give staff and volunteers at properties the chance to engage personally with photographic collections. Members of your team may well be photographers (amateur or professional) or have a keen interest in photography, or they might just want to learn more about aspects of life at a property. They're also likely to have a lot of knowledge about the property and related collections, which can be used to improve the documentation of our historical photographs. Remember that photos are just as engaging for the people who work or volunteer at our places as they are for our visitors.

## 10 **CLARIFY**

If the person who took our photographs is still alive or died less than 70 years ago, the photos will still be in copyright. If the photographer has been dead for more than 70 years, it's likely that the photos are out of copyright altogether, unless copyright has officially been assigned to us. The Trust does hold the copyright for any digital images we make. It's worth checking if there is anyone who should be asked before digitisation or publication (even just as a courtesy). If in doubt, please speak to Collections Services, or seek internal legal advice.





**Miss Agnes  
Toward's mother.**

She looks quite nervous  
at the new technology –  
photography was barely  
20 years old when this  
was taken!

*Daguerreotype, 1860,  
Tenement House*

## **PEOPLE WHO'LL BE ABLE TO HELP YOU:**

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### **CONSERVATOR**

To advise on appropriate use, conservation and storage of historical photographic material.

### **CURATOR**

To advise on what historical photographs we have, as well as think of any stories they might tell that are specifically related to your property and the people who lived and worked there. Your regional curator can also advise on exhibiting, interpreting and engaging people with photographs, both as part of what you offer now and as a way of increasing your visitor offer.

### **POLICYTEAM**

To advise on Trust policies and approaches to access, interpretation, conservation, copyright etc.

### **ARCHIVIST**

To advise on what photographs might be in the archives, and archival information that might be linked to or shed light on photographic material. To advise on digitisation where appropriate.

### **COLLECTIONS SYSTEMS MANAGER**

To provide object information, help locate existing digital copies of photographic material and keep track of collections being moved.

### **LOANS REGISTRAR**

To give guidance on photographs which might be on loan and advise of any restrictions on handling or use, and to liaise with lenders if you'd like to exhibit a loaned photograph.



**Cover Image:**  
Margaret Fraser in Aliwal  
North, South Africa.

*Photographic print in an  
album, 1902, Brodie Castle*



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