

CASE STUDY: Records at Risk

Craig & Rose

Paint manufacturers, Edinburgh / Dunfermline

In September 2023, the Business Archives Surveying Officer for Scotland was invited to the headquarters of Craig & Rose, a paint manufacturer that had long roots with Leith, Edinburgh. Its history could be traced back to its foundation in 1829, when two young men in their twenties came into business together, James Craig, and Hugh Rose. They originally began their business by supplying whale oil to light the streets of the city, primarily operating as oil merchants and dry-salters, before later adding the manufacture of paints and oils to their portfolio of work, with chemistry and the role of laboratories increasingly playing a part in the business.

The expansion of the business is evident through changes in premises over its first forty years. Following its first warehouse in Clyde Street, Edinburgh, a move was made to Leith Street. However, by 1872 they were outgrowing the site, and so three acres were secured in Leith Walk leading to the opening of the 'Caledonian Oil and Colour Works', where they remained for over another 100 years. Over the century, the company was awarded several major contracts including the painting of the Forth Rail Bridge, manufacturing paint for St Paul's Cathedral, as well as the South American railway.

The company remained family owned until the 2000s, before later being bought by Dulux Group (Australia) in 2016, which was acquired by Nippon Paint Holding Co. Ltd in 2018.

The company had left Leith and relocated to Dunfermline for production around 2000, and it is in these premises that the archive was being stored. No previous inventory of any

As the business was based in Dunfermline it wasn't on our radar, so we were not aware that the site was closing. The reason we were contacted by the Surveying Officer is because prior to their move to Dunfermline in 2000, Craig and Rose had been in Leith, since 1829. With the site closing, there was a fear that the unique records would be lost forever.

The Surveying Officer was able to provide us with a survey list, giving details of the records held and their condition. They were also able to provide information on the size of the collection. This meant that we could plan for pick up and storage.

The Surveying Officer was able to liaise between ourselves and a representative of the company, until we formed our own relationship and we were able to build on the trust that the company had in the Surveying Officer. Thanks to the Surveying Officer the whole process went smoothly and we now have nearly 20 linear meters of records which include paint recipe books, photographs, and business records.

Jennifer Hogg
Senior Records and Archives Officer,
Edinburgh City Archives

records was known, and an entry could not be located on the National Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS).

The historical records of the company had been well-cared for and stored securely by a long-standing member of staff who recognised their historical importance and value to the business. The survey yielded some fascinating results and showed the archive of Craig & Rose to be a wonderfully vibrant, colourful, and varied collection dating from the late 19th century through to the present day. The majority of those that had survived dated from 1870 onwards, possibly a reflection of the several premise moves in the first few decades of the company operating.

The archive included laboratory volumes covering 1891-1962, stock registers and certificates, a large collection of colour cards throughout the 20th century, as well as a significant collection of photographs, promotional and marketing material, and records relating to the painting of the Forth Rail Bridge, such as correspondence and newspaper cuttings.

Their records were found to be of both local and national archival value, whilst a search of the UK National Archives Discovery database found the surviving records of only eight other paint manufacturers across the whole of Scotland either retained by the business, or in the care of local repositories. This emphasised the importance in preserving the records of a firm like Craig & Rose, in order to represent and tell the story of the paint and oils industry in Scotland as it becomes an industry of the past.

In addition to records, a number of significant objects and larger items were located, such as old products including paint and oils tins, as well as colour cards and silverware. Most impressive was a very large miniature model set displaying in intricate detail factory life in Leith, with different stages of the manufacturing process depicted. However, measuring approximately 2 metres in length, it was likely to be difficult to re-home despite its importance in providing an insight into the life of the company's workforce and processes.

Following the survey, we were also encouraged to contact members of the Rose family who,

Recognising the importance of the historic objects as well as archival material, the surveying officer alerted National Museums Scotland to the fascinating model of the C19th Craig & Rose factory.

This is a challenging object due to its size and fragility, but it is historically very interesting, and it was clearly important to Craig & Rose staff that it was cared for when they left their Dunfermline site.

The surveying officer's continued interest and enthusiasm supported and eased the transfer of the model to NMS's ownership, and we are delighted to have acquired such a striking and evocative object.

Ellie Swinbank
Senior Curator, Technology
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although were no longer involved with the company, may have had additional records relating to Craig & Rose. The Surveying Officer had a very successful visit to the family home in November 2023 which identified a number of items including varnish manufacture books, a samples book, another laboratory book dating from 1891, and an order book, 1941-1960, as well as some notebooks and paint pots. The family were delighted there was interest in such records and that a home could be found for them at Edinburgh City Archives, ensuring they would be kept in the city where the company had operated for such a long time.

In early 2024, not long after the onsite survey had taken place in Dunfermline, the Surveying Officer was made aware that the company's production site was in a vulnerable position, which raised questions as to the future and security of the archive. Thankfully, due to the recent survey, the Surveying Officer still had up-to-date contact information and was able to reach out to the records custodian and facilitate discussions round having the collection deposited safely with an archive repository.

It was agreed that Edinburgh was the rightful home for the collection due to Craig & Rose having been located in Leith for nearly two centuries. Following the earlier small deposit of records from the Rose family, Edinburgh City Archives were also delighted to provide a home to the larger business archive, along with a few objects in October 2024. However, a big question remained on finding a home for the miniature model, which due to its size, would be a big ask for any repository. We are very grateful for the support and help provided by colleagues within Technology at the National Museum of Scotland for undertaking an on-site assessment of the model, in order for it to be discussed by the Museum's Collections Committee. A few weeks later, we were delighted to receive the news that it fitted the Museum's collecting remit, and it was transferred to quarantine in November 2024 in order to be assessed by the NMS conservation team.

As of the end of 2024, production of Craig & Rose paint ceased in Scotland, with only retail stores in Glasgow and Edinburgh retaining the company's presence in the UK. However, the preservation of its rich and varied archive in Edinburgh City Archive means the long history of the company and its industrial contribution in Scotland will long remain.

