

GLIMPSE INTO A NATION'S MEMORIES

An extraordinary glimpse into a nation's memories is now on show at two venues in Edinburgh.

Items from The MacKinnon Collection – more than 14,000 images of Scotland, dating from the earliest days of photography in the 1840s through to the 1940s – are featured in simultaneous exhibitions at the Library at George IV Bridge and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery on Queen Street.

The collection covers an enormous range of subjects, including family portraits, working life, street scenes, sporting pursuits, shops, trams, tenements, mountains and monuments.

It was put together by Murray MacKinnon, who established a successful chain of film-processing stores in the 1980s, starting from his pharmacy in Dyce, near Aberdeen.

And, until its joint acquisition in 2018, with support from the



WORDS:
Stewart
McRobert

National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Scottish Government and Art Fund, it was one of the last great collections of Scottish photography still in private hands.

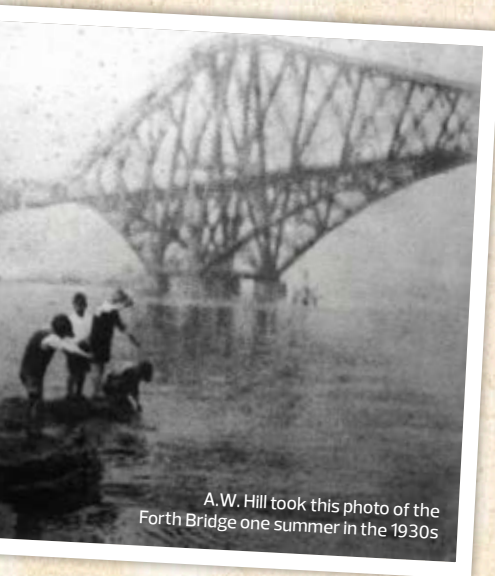
Blake Milteer is the curator of the MacKinnon Collection.

He explained: "The purchase by the National Library and the National Galleries of Scotland means this is a shared collection in perpetuity.

"For the past 15 months, we have been working vigorously on



Roger Fenton's *Hardship in the Camp* is one of the treasures the team is preserving for posterity



A.W. Hill took this photo of the Forth Bridge one summer in the 1930s

a three-year project that has four major components."

These components are:

- **cataloguing** - being carried out item by item for every photograph in the collection. Blake began the task and got through approximately 1600 items before a group of volunteers started work on the remainder.
- **digitisation** - again this involves every image and is being undertaken at both the Library and National Galleries.
- **launch exhibitions** - at the Library on George IV Bridge and at the Portrait Gallery on Queen Street. Both shows opened on 16 November and run until 16 February 2020. The Library exhibition, *At the Water's Edge*, is focusing on the theme of coasts and waters in celebration of VisitScotland's campaign for 2020.
- **tour** - an exhibition will visit three venues around Scotland during autumn 2020/spring 2021.

Blake added: "On top of these events, there will be a series of engagement programmes that will allow people to interact with the photos online and in person. These will include Gaelic-speaking activities and will involve a good cross-section of images from the collection.

"By the end of the three-year project, all of the catalogue records and digital images will go live online so everyone will be able to access the collection electronically."

Blake was hired as curator for the project in June 2018. He had previously carried out a year-long survey of the Library's photographic collections.

His role involves orchestrating the ongoing activities, a significant part of which is coordinating activities between the Library and the National Galleries. "Right from the start, we had to work out processes that would make our tasks as efficient and effective as possible, he said. "Among other things,

we had to reach agreement on aspects of the cataloguing and digitisation."

When it comes to digitisation, it was decided to base activities on existing strengths. Since the Library has extensive experience in making digital images of full volume books and albums, it is digitising the 136 photographically illustrated books in the collection. Meantime, the Portrait Gallery is digitising each individual photograph.

HISTORY

Cataloguing of the collection takes place in the Portrait Gallery Print Room, where volunteers record details of every piece, from the photographer to a description of the subject and search terms people are likely to use when they're looking for the photo online.

This recordkeeping is important in practical terms and vital when you are chronicling work by some of the most important people in the history of photography. As Blake made clear,

these are items with enormous scientific, social, cultural and artistic significance.

He said: "The collection covers the period from the early 1840s to the late 1940s. That 100 years was crucial to the development of the mechanisation, transportation, and communication that is so much part of our world today.

"And it was the first 100 years of the photographic process. Photography was introduced to the world in 1839. The first photographs in this collection date from about 1843. Scotland was at the forefront in the early development of photographic technology; we helped lead the way."

The MacKinnon Collection includes photos by William Henry Fox-Talbot, an English photographic pioneer whose calotype process involving the creation of a 'negative' is the basis of most modern analogue photography.

In 1844 Fox-Talbot used that process when he came to Scotland to photograph sites associated with Sir Walter Scott

SAFE HOME

Though it's a shared treasure, the majority of the MacKinnon Collection will be cared for by the Library in specially controlled conditions at George IV Bridge.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

In the run up to the twin exhibitions in Edinburgh, Curator Blake Milteer, below, took time out of his hectic schedule to explain a typical day:

"Cataloguing and digitisation are the threads that will run through the whole project (we expect they'll last most of the three years) so they're my ongoing focus.

"I work with volunteers three days a week at the Portrait Gallery. I am available to them morning and afternoon to answer questions and troubleshoot when needs be, and I review all of the records they create.

"The other two days a week I spend at the Library, where most of the collection is housed. There, I number each item and organise the transport of the photographs to the Gallery for cataloguing and digitisation. At the same time, I make sure the bound volumes go to the Library's Causewayside building to be digitised.



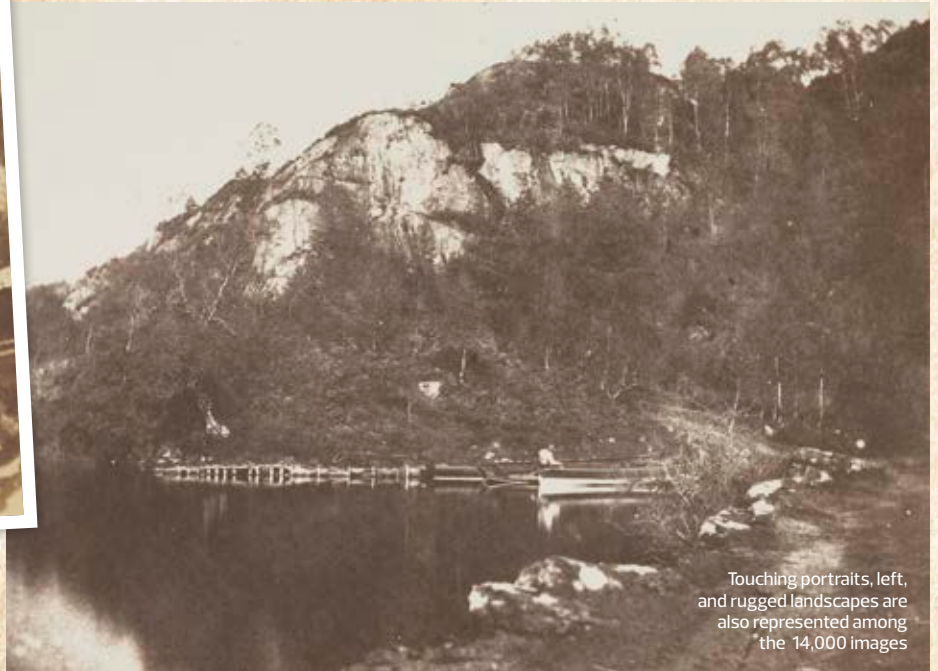
"For the exhibitions, I selected the photographs, wrote the content and worked with our engagement teams on related programmes - for the exhibitions themselves, for online activities and for the lectures/talks we'll be offering.

"I am collaborating with the tour venues to get everything in place; their requirements for hosting the material and selecting specially tailored exhibits.

"I spend significant amounts of time researching the photographers, subjects, and locations. In many cases, the subjects have not been identified so interaction with our various communities will be crucial in the collection's continued relevance.

"What I enjoy most are the photographs themselves; I value being surrounded by these images. And I'm fascinated by the vision behind the collection; Mr MacKinnon's thinking, his selectivity, what he saw in the photos, and the way the collection formed in his hands.

"But I am most enthusiastic about the programmes that we are designing to provide access to this stunning collection."



Touching portraits, left, and rugged landscapes are also represented among the 14,000 images

and his writings. Among the other pioneering photographers represented are David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. "Based in Edinburgh, they did some of the very first work that could be considered as social documentary," said Blake. "They made a famous series of photographs at Newhaven and other fishing communities along the Forth.

"They also photographed luminaries including scientists, doctors, writers, and religious figures. They began working together in 1843, but their partnership was cut short when Adamson passed away in 1848."

VARIETY

There's a wide variety of material in the collection, from individual prints to postcards and photographically illustrated books and albums compiled by keen amateurs, as well as those who were making a living from photography. Equally, there's a huge range of subject matter. This extends to military images including some taken at the Crimean War by Roger Fenton, one of Queen Victoria's favourite photographers.

Though there are concurrent exhibitions at the Library and the Portrait Gallery, their make-up and the thinking behind each is unique.

Blake explained: "With the Library, as well as reflecting the theme of coasts and waters, the emphasis is on social history and context.

"It was important to create a narrative that gives due weight to the story around these important historical artefacts – the people who created them and, as much as we can, the people who appear in the photographs.

"With the display, we have included a strong representation of the photographic albums in the collection in which visitors can get a strong sense of the cultural context of the images.

"That social history is part of the Portrait Gallery exhibition, but there you will find a strong aesthetic quality to the photographs that guides your experience as a viewer."

As with the exhibitions, so with the MacKinnon Collection; this is a rare and invaluable fund of material that gives a mesmerising insight into Scottish society.

- *At the Water's Edge: Photographs from the MacKinnon Collection* will run at the National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh.
- *Scotland's Photograph Album: The MacKinnon Collection* will be at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Queen Street, Edinburgh.

Both exhibitions run from 16 November 2019 until 16 February 2020.

LABOUR OF LOVE

Among those hard at work cataloguing and digitising the collection in the Portrait Gallery Print Room are volunteer Andrea Manning and National Galleries photographer Gabriella Lawrie.

Cataloguing requires meticulous attention to detail, and it's a task Andrea relishes. She said: "I'm a regular volunteer at the Gallery and have been involved with this project since April.

"I find it really interesting. It's diverse and you're finding out new things in

every session." Equally painstaking is the digitisation process. Gabriella explained: "We are trying to produce the highest quality digital images possible.

"Sometimes we need to take 10 or more shots of each photo to get things right. I love the challenge that represents."

Thanks to Andrea, Gabriella and their colleagues everyone will eventually have the chance to access this outstanding collection.



The images document real people's real lives

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THE ABSENCE AND PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

Our major exhibition on the Scottish Enlightenment, *Northern Lights*, continues at George IV Bridge until April 2020. Here, Dr Rosalind Carr, Birkbeck, University of London, provides perspective on women's participation in the Enlightenment

Women were not absent from the Scottish Enlightenment but nor were they entirely present.

When Scotland's contribution to this Europe-wide intellectual movement is remembered, the names that most readily spring to mind are those of men such as Adam Smith and David Hume, who are both memorialised on Edinburgh's Royal Mile. Yet we should not ignore women's marginal presence in the Scottish Enlightenment as readers, participants in public debating societies, in a few cases as writers, and as subjects of men's philosophical enquiry. This was not the women's century as some have claimed, but nor was it a time when women were silent and subjugated.

The progress of human society was a crucial consideration in Scottish Enlightenment thought, and women

loomed large in this philosophy. Reflecting a Eurocentric and white supremacist outlook, philosophers such as John Millar (a student of Adam Smith) applied assumptions about women's position in society to chart various human societies' progression from the 'savage' to the 'civilised' state. Projecting their views on to different cultures, they deemed women in 'savage' societies (e.g. North American First Nations people) to be oppressed, whilst those in commercial 'civilised' societies (e.g. Europe) were considered to be respected by men. This philosophy, known as stadial history, tells us very little about indigenous peoples but does demonstrate the importance of ideas about women to Enlightenment ideas of culture, society and progress, as Jane Rendall's research has shown.

Developing this philosophical framework, Millar wrote: "When men begin to disuse their ancient barbarous

practices, when their attention is not wholly engrossed by the pursuit of military reputation, when they have made some progress in arts and have attained to a proportional degree of refinement they are necessarily led to set a value upon those female accomplishments and virtues which have so much influence upon every species of improvement and which in so many different ways serve to multiply the comforts of life." (1779).

As well as intellectual texts such as Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, these ideas were disseminated via popular works such as William Alexander's *History of Women*. This work aimed to provide a female readership with rational education and offered an alternative to novels which many believed had a corrupting influence on women. Believing that "[n]ature seems not to have intended them for the more intense and severe studies" (1779),



Alexander explained in his preface that he had used plain and simple language. In Alexander's work we glimpse the condescension that framed many male writers' attitude towards the female intellect. John Gregory in his popular prescriptive text *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* accepted that women could be intelligent but encouraged them to suppress this, informing his female readers that "[t]he great art of pleasing in conversation consists in making the company pleased with themselves. You will more readily hear than talk yourself into their good graces." (1774).

The idea that women could possess intelligence but that they should maintain, in Gregory's words, "modest reserve" lest they usurp men and destabilise the gender hierarchy also informed debates in intellectual societies. For instance, in January 1756 the exclusively male Select Society debated the question, "Whether can a Marriage be happy when the Wife

is of an Understanding superior to that of the husband?"

Here we see an acceptance that women could possess superior intellect, but the framing of the question also reveals an anxiety that this could invert the usual patriarchal hierarchy within marriage. Intelligent women could be destabilising because it was feminine women of sensibility (possessing refined emotion rather than reason) who were deemed to symbolise 'civilised' society and who, importantly, refined men, softening their manners. As Hume claimed in his 1742 essay *Of the Rise and Progress of the*

Arts and Sciences: "As nature has given man the superiority above woman, by endowing him with greater strength both of mind and body; it is his part to alleviate that superiority, as much as possible, by the generosity of his behaviour, and by a studied deference and complaisance for all her inclinations and opinions." (*Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, [1777] 1987).

As Katharine Glover's research revealed, Hume sought out women of the social elite to read drafts of his work before publication. This was not because he considered them intellectually equal to men but rather because he sought their feminine perspective. Like many other thinkers, Hume did not deny female intellect but considered it to be different to that of men. This assumption that true 'civilised' womanhood was defined by a feminine sensibility was commonplace across the European Enlightenment

● The great art of pleasing in conversation consists in making the company pleased with themselves ●

JOHN GREGORY, *A FATHER'S LEGACY TO HIS DAUGHTERS*

NORTHERN LIGHTS

and challenged at the end of the century by English writer Mary Wollstonecraft in her 1792 work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Women in Edinburgh challenged this too. Although most intellectual clubs in Enlightenment Scotland were exclusively male, women did forge a participatory space. One stand-out occurrence was the demand to participate in the Pantheon Society made by some women via *The Weekly Magazine* in 1775, a demand that they won.

This followed the inclusion of women in Dundee's Speculative Society. These were both public debating societies, and although women attended the public debates and voted on questions posed, they did not speak in the debates. Earlier in the century there may



POET
ALISON
COCKBURN
WAS ON THE
PERIPHERY

have been a female-led intellectual society, The Fair Intellectual Club, but it is difficult to determine whether they existed in reality or only in print.

The primary evidence we have is a pamphlet published in 1720, and, whilst it alerts us to the club's existence, it may be a call for women's intellectual collaboration rather than evidence of it. Whatever the case may be, The Fair Intellectual Club and women's later participation in public debating societies reveals that women did claim a space in the flourishing intellectual culture of the Scottish Enlightenment.

There were not many published Scottish women writers in the 18th century, and those who did publish, such as Jean Marishall and Joanna Baillie, tended to do

so in London, however both had connections with, and support from, Edinburgh's male literati. Although Edinburgh lacked a female intellectual network akin to London's Bluestocking circle or the female-led salons that helped shape the intellectual culture of the French Enlightenment, there were intellectual hostesses, most notably the poet Alison Cockburn. In a way, Cockburn symbolises women's place in the Scottish Enlightenment; they were present but peripheral.

Dr Rosalind Carr is the author of *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), and is a lecturer in History and Gender Studies at Birkbeck, University of London.

Dr Carr will deliver a talk on 'Women in the Enlightenment' on 3 March 2020 at George IV Bridge, Edinburgh. Booking will be available from January – check our website for details.



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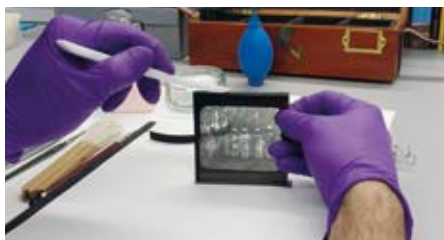
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FROM JULIE BON, HEAD OF CONSERVATION



I hadn't expected, when I joined the National Library this year, that photographs would form such a huge part of the collection, and simultaneously be such an urgent priority for treatment.

This year's annual appeal seeks to remedy that. Photographs – 376,000 of them – exist across all parts of our collections. They are glued into family albums and personal scrapbooks, enhanced and reproduced in early souvenir publications, treasured in lockets, and discovered in boxes of loose prints. They were prized possessions and are irreplaceable accounts of history

as it unfolded. Yet the stories they tell are at risk of being lost.

Photographs are inherently fragile and vulnerable, and sadly many of those in our collections have suffered some degree of decay and need immediate conservation treatment. Calotype portraits produced by the earliest pioneers of photography are unstable, salt prints of ground-breaking engineering projects are fading, and newspaper records are brittle and becoming torn.

In this condition, the collection cannot be issued to and enjoyed by the public.

We are asking you to make a contribution that will allow our expert conservators to painstakingly remove surface dirt and mould, slow gradual fading and discolouration, and house the material in a suitable way so that it can be accessed and treasured for years to come.

Help us safeguard Scotland's irreplaceable photograph albums for future generations.



One collection which is a conservation priority captures the work of Patrick Geddes.

These are photographs of the Old Town of Edinburgh collated by the prolific town planner, botanist and educator for the 1890s Cities Exhibition.

Beautifully sharp images of architectural projects including the Scott Monument and Holyrood Palace are punctuated by photographs of the trades and tenements chaotically packed into closes and wynds of the Royal Mile.

The prints were neglected before the Library received them by donation, and mould, surface dirt and decaying adhesives are evident in this collection.



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Her Century

**Dr Emily Munro,
National Library
of Scotland**

The footage preserved in the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive helps to document the role of women in Scottish society throughout the last century.

In a new touring programme dedicated to women on screen, *Her Century*, we are showcasing some of the contributions made by women to Scotland, spanning the Edwardian era to the Thatcher years.

The films selected for this programme are as wide-ranging as their subject matter. They include educational and promotional material, amateur footage, and propaganda.

The women represented include crofters, campaigners, factory workers, psychologists, mothers, pilots and educators. They show great variation in women's roles over time.

The last century was a time of rapid social change in which 'a woman's place' was contested and redefined. I wanted to steer away from the 'monumental' moments of suffrage and the two world wars, drawing instead on the variety of ways in which ordinary women and girls have been represented on film, as scholars, workers, mothers and friends.

I'm interested in how women's identities are renegotiated through processes of transmission, reflection, recovery and contradiction. For many women, the end of the Second World War meant stepping back into the shadows and embracing the model of housewife and consumer. But the late 20th century also saw the

emergence of new freedoms and possibilities.

It was important to showcase female filmmakers in the selection. Their place in Scotland's film story is still being discovered and has yet to be written. *Her Century* includes work by professional documentarians such as Sarah Erulkar, Budge Cooper and Jenny Gilbertson as well as amateur footage from Grace Williamson, which is seldom celebrated.

The programme is as much about learning what we might be missing as what we are able to look back on.

**THE FOLLOWING ARE
EXTRACTS FROM THE
HER CENTURY ZINE, WHICH
INCLUDES RESPONSES
TO THE FILMS.**

"Salt is a magical thing, imbued with deep meaning. It can be 'of the earth',



used for protection and preservation, but must never be spilled. For me, this one intertitle flashed for a few seconds [in the film *Herring Harvest at Yarmouth*, c1910], encapsulates why *Her Century* is so special. By preserving the stories of working-class women's lives – their work, homes, relationships, struggles and victories – their stories can travel."

Hannah Walters

"No housework I have ever done has been invisible. Every speck of dust removed, dish washed and T-shirt folded has been itemised within my head, the tale to be recanted at the soonest possible moment, to any soul who would listen to my strife.

"The sound of a Hoover still plays like a lullaby. It reminds me of my childhood, coaxing myself back to sleep of a Sunday morning, as my Gran cleaned. [...] I wish now

that I had had the chance to let her doze to the sound of the Hoover, because as an adult, I realise the work she was doing was hard. She would have liked a long lie, but she didn't have one."

Katie Skinner

"My great-grandmother was a maid in a big house and later a barmaid when her children grew older. She had seven children, just like her mother. When I think of their lives, I feel privileged to have had the choices and opportunities I am given. I can decide whether I want children or not, what career I want, I have access to information and opportunity they could never have imagined. I have freedoms and chances they never did.

When I see the faces of the women in the *Her Century* film programme, I wonder about what they wanted, what they were able to achieve, how the world held them back – the opportunities for life and learning they had and the ones they were denied."

Mel Reeve

"As well as being fantastically entertaining and a joy to watch, *Her Century* can challenge us. By making visible the expectations and understandings of girls and women that continue to impact the culture we live in, it can provoke us to ask questions about the way girls

and women have been (and continue to be) portrayed. It can also challenge us to think about who we don't see in the footage, and what it tells us about who is and isn't valued in our culture."

Amanda Ptolomey

FORTHCOMING SCREENINGS OF HER CENTURY

More tour dates are planned across the country, so keep up-to-date on filmhubccotland.com or by following #HerCentury.

Sunday 10 November
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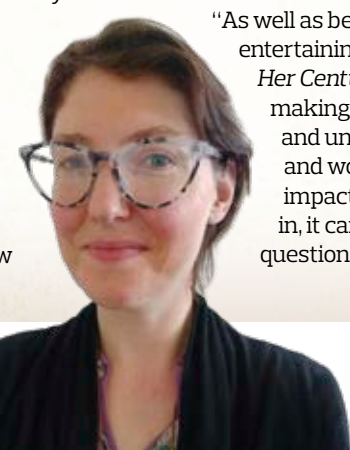
Thursday 21 November
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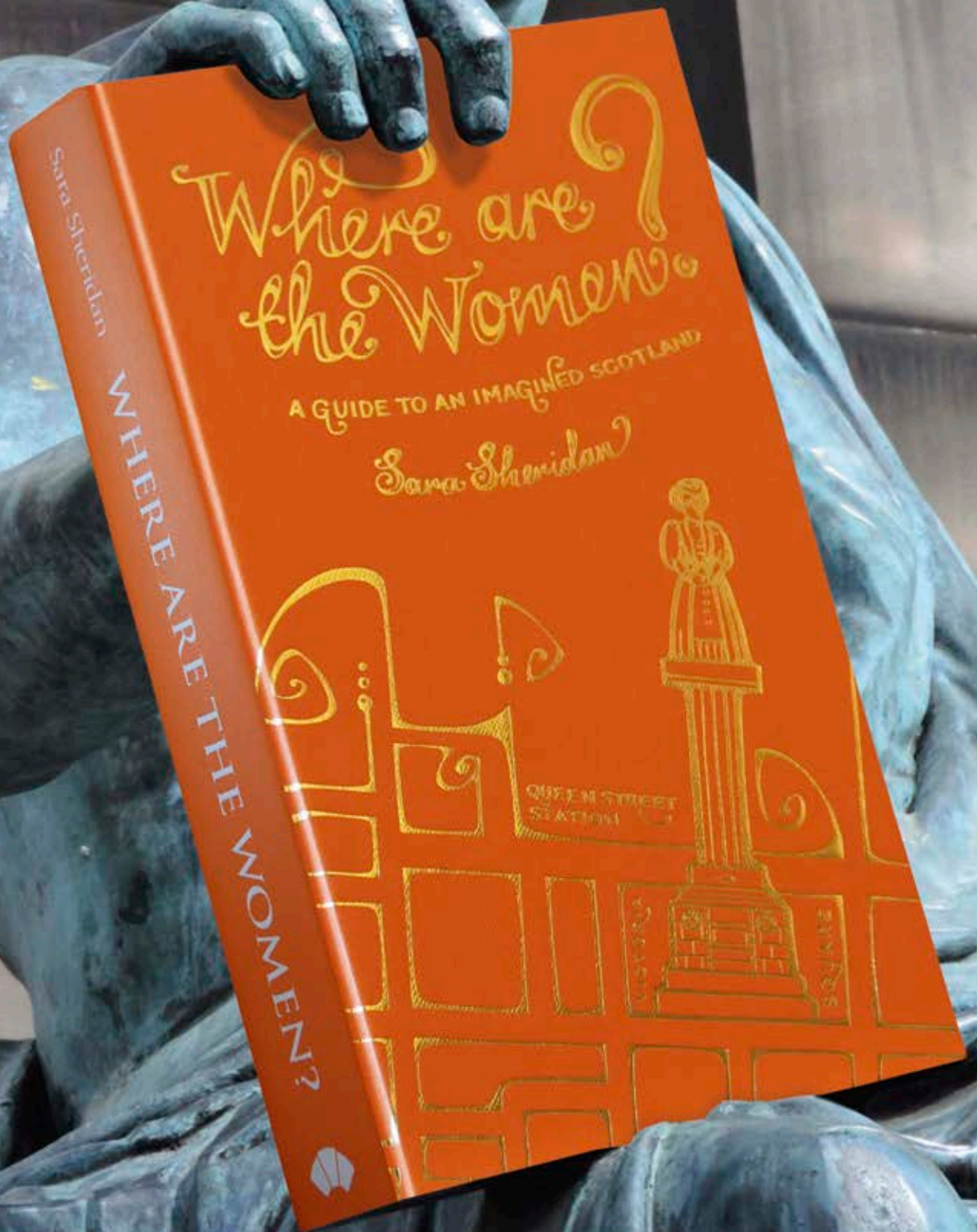
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BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION

London: John Murray, 1859. First edition

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