Public access description

The galleried display areas of the Royal Architectural Museum located in Tufton Street were covered with casts of sculptural details taken from Gothic buildings, including the cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris and Westminster Abbey. By the early 1870s, Bedford Lemere & Co., the leading English firm of architectural photographers, was granted permission to photograph the RAM collection, winning an award for the series of albumen prints at the 1873 International Exhibition at Vienna.

The photographs included in this album are mostly of casts; many of them are identified (Chartres, Rouen, Amiens, St. Albans, Wells, Hereford, Ely, Lincoln, etc). The casts include capitals, bosses, finials, brackets, rosettes, spandrels, etc. Many of the photographs capture signs wired onto the wall stating the source of the cast and name of the photographer. Bedford Lemere & Co. catalogue numbers scratched into the negatives are also occasionally visible. They were sold as sets (either mounted or unmounted), or singly, and marketed to architects, students and ‘art-workmen’. An inscription on this volume notes that this volume was given to the V&A by the architect George Gilbert Scott, one of the RAM founders.

The V&A took a leading role in the reproduction of art works to serve as models for artists and designers. When the South Kensington Museum (as the V&A was first known) was established in 1852, casts and photography were regarded as an essential part of the collection. They were viewed as educational tools, extending the visual resources of the Museum to artists and students of art and design.

Descriptive line

Photographs by Bedford Lemere & Co., Title page from the album of 64 photographs of casts in the collection of the Royal Architectural Museum, albumen prints, 1872

Physical description

Printed title page from a bound album of 60 sepia-coloured photographs of casts of architectural details.

Dimensions

Height: 37.5 cm album, Width: 26 cm album, Depth: 3 cm album

Museum number

E.663:1-2016

Object history note

The Royal Architectural Museum (RAM) was established in 1851 by a group of architectural professionals led by George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). The Museum was formed for the purpose of improving the education of architectural art-workers. Its collections were made up primarily of plaster casts of European Gothic architectural ornament, together with original examples of architectural details, and models, plans and drawings. The Museum’s first home was in Canon Row, Westminster, London where, from 1852 until 1854, it incorporated a School for Art-workmen.

Under the patronage of Prince Albert (1819-1861) the RAM expanded rapidly and in 1857 moved to the new South Kensington Museum (now Victoria and Albert Museum), where it retained its independent status and name. In 1869 it moved to 18-20 Bowling Street (renamed Tufton Street), Westminster, London.

A 1876 catalogue record holdings in excess of 6000 items. But by 1904, enthusiasm for the Gothic had waned, and the RAM was taken over by the Architectural Association. The AA’s architecture school existed within the RAM buildings until 1915 when it was decided that conditions were too cramped. The collections were dispersed (some gifted, others purchased), primarily to the Victoria and Albert Museum. The objects now form part of the reconstituted Cast Courts.

This 1872 album of photographs of the RAM cast collection by Bedford Lemere & Co. includes a printed title page with the heading ‘Professional List’. It describes the collection as the ‘first series of thirty’ photographs of the Royal Architectural Museum collection, sold as sets (either loose or bound) or as single photographs. It was marketed to professionals, students and ‘Art-workers’. The series viewed as an
important educational resource and it is noted that 'Copies have already been purchased for several Art Libraries by Sir G. Gilbert Scott, R.A.'

A hand-written inscription on the bottom of this page records that the album was delivered to the V&A by Scott.

Despite the title page reference to 30 photographs, this album contains 60 mounted photographs (each 10 x 12 inches and four loose, which likely were slipped into the volume at a later date). The content and order of photographs closely corresponds to the later 1875 album of 60 views, 'Photographs taken from Specimens in Royal Architectural Museum, Westminster, Album No. 1'. (A second album followed, 'No. 2', containing an additional 'fifty sheets of photography' from the RAM). The V&A's album appears to have been made to order rather than a pre-selected set seen in volumes in other collections. A purchase for two duplicate sets of 30 prints from the series was made 18 January 1873; another purchase of two duplicate sets of 90 unmounted photographs was made 10 June 1875.

This album was found in the Sculpture Section among archival material relating to the V&A's celebrated Cast Courts. Its discovery is part of the ongoing programme to reunite photographs scattered among the various departments of the Museum with the rest of the Photography Collection. It was probably acquired in 1872 as a sample from Scott and was kept in the Department by the earliest sculpture curators, used as a reference guide to Gothic architectural details and later as reference material for the V&A Cast Collection.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1346443/architectural-photographs-photograph-bedford-lemere-co/