University of Sheffield Library. Special Collections and Archives

Ref: MS 51, 67, 150, 234, 235, 323

Title: Sorby Collection

Scope: Documents relating to Henry Clifton Sorby, Sheffield scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society, in the period 1845-1906.

Dates: 1845-1906

Level: Fonds

Extent: 9 boxes plus 2 vols.

Name of creator: Henry Clifton Sorby

Administrative / biographical history:

The collection consists of architectural photographs, diaries, a letter, and a set of reprinted papers by Sorby with his manuscript amendments. The eight boxes of architectural photographs taken by Sorby on his travels contain mostly examples from all over England (Prehistoric to modern) but there are a smaller number depicting styles in foreign countries (Norway, Italy, France and elsewhere). There are also specimens of half-timbered work. The eleven diaries, written in pencil, cover the years 1859-1908 (with some gaps), and there is a further diary in ink thought to be by his father Henry Sorby for the years 1845-1846. The printed papers with manuscript amendments appear to include instructions to the printer intended to produce revised versions.

Henry Clifton Sorby (1826-1908) was born on the 10th May 1826 into an old Sheffield family, being the grandson of a Master Cutler. After completing his education both at Sheffield Collegiate School and by private tuition he devoted his life to scientific research, being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society at the early age of 31. His published papers, which number over 150, include research in chemistry, metallurgy, biology and geology. His best known work was in the last of these fields, in particular in microscopy. He pioneered the basic techniques of microscopic petrology and of modern metallography, and invented the microspectroscope.

Sorby took a keen interest in education and during the 1860s had taken a leading part in an unsuccessful attempt to found a Technical School in Sheffield. Soon after the establishment of Firth College he became its Vice-President in 1881, President from 1882-1897, and Vice-President of the new University College, Sheffield, 1897-1905. With the inauguration of the University of Sheffield he served as a member of its Council from 1905 until his death on 9th March 1908.

The name of Sorby is perpetuated in the Sorby Chair (formerly of Geology, now Earth Sciences) in the University, the Sorby Research Fellowship of the Royal Society, and the Sorby Society of Sheffield. A biographical study by Norman Higham: A very scientific gentleman: the major achievements of Henry Clifton Sorby (Oxford, 1963) made much use of the diaries.
Related collections: Sorby Research Institute Collection

Source: From various sources

System of arrangement: By category

Subjects: Architecture - Great Britain; Geologists - Great Britain; Scientists - Great Britain

Names: Sorby, Henry Clifton, 1826-1908; Sorby, Henry, d. 1847; Firth College, Sheffield; University College, Sheffield; University of Sheffield

Conditions of access: Academic researchers by appointment

Restrictions: None

Copyright: University of Sheffield; according to document for published materials.

Finding aids: Listed

Associated material: Other material exists elsewhere in the University and in Sheffield City Archives
Sorby Collection  Itemised list

Architectural photographs  (MS 150)
    Prehistoric
    Roman
    Anglo-Saxon
    Norman
    Transitional
    English Gothic
    Norman and English Gothic (Addenda)
    Manuscripts, etc.
    Sorby’s drawings etc.
    Foreign
    Half-timbered work
    General views
    Renaissance
    Modern

Diaries  (MS 67)
1. 1859-1865
2. 1865-1870
3 1883-1885
4. 1885-1887
5. 1887-1889
6. 1889-1891
7. 1891-1894
8. 1896-1897
9. 1898-1900
10. 1900-1902
11. 1905-1908
12. 1845-1846.  (MS 235)

This diary is written in ink, and appears to be by Henry Sorby (d.1847), father of Henry Clifton Sorby and owner of an edge-tool manufacturing firm
Letter  (MS 51)

Date: 15 Feb 1901

Henry Clifton Sorby to Dr A.W. Rowe, requesting the favour of the loan of the photomicrographs “of chalk fossils as shown at the Royal Society last May, for exhibition at our next conversazione, to be held” at the Cutlers Hall, Sheffield, on Thursday, 28 March; and assuring Dr Rowe that “for over 30 years (the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society) has had an annual conversazione attended by upwards of a thousand members. This has been the means of introducing the chief modern inventions and discoveries to the inhabitants of the populous city...”

Address: Broomhill, Sheffield
Manuscript, autographed
1f.
Purchased 1962

Printed papers  (MS 234)

These papers are bound up in 2 volumes, the titles below appearing on the volumes.

[1]. Zoological, Mineralogical and Metallurgical Papers. II. (10763)

Many of the papers in this volume have manuscript notes and additions to the text in Sorby’s hand either within the printed text or as pasted-in notes. These include instructions to the printer.

[2]. Various Scientific Papers. II. (10760)

Natural History, etc. Included in this volume is a loose typed list of ‘Popular Lectures at Firth College Sheffield, by Henry Clifton Sorby’, for the period 1883 to 1900.

Sorby Bequest, 1908

Portraits of Sorby (MS 323)

These photographs are included in Higham’s biography, with the following captions:

[1]. “...a floating laboratory”. (Shows Sorby on board ship)

[2]. “1898. Not knighted but portrayed in oils”