

Encounters: Photograph albums and their stories

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A new photography [exhibition](#), open from 22nd October 2013 – 30th May 2014 at the Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive in Gillingham, Kent, will show a different side of the Museum's collection. Supported using public funding by Arts Council England, the exhibition '*Encounters: Photograph albums and their stories*' presents unseen photographs and albums, dating back to the 1850s, which have been chosen from a collection of over 600 photograph albums at the Royal Engineers Museum.

The exhibition explores the narratives that are told through photograph albums and scrapbooks. These hold an intriguing mixture of private photography and commercial prints and postcards. Until the end of the nineteenth century, photography was an expensive and complex process, so that the purchase of photographs was common practice. It is fascinating to see how the album compiler would personalise these prints by adding captions, further information and notes on experiences of their own travels.

The exhibition will further draw attention to the photographs themselves. Photography is seldom a clear reflection of reality as photographs are framed and their subjects arranged. A showcase will discuss the presentation of people – the way they portray themselves and the manners in which they are depicted by others. This is a particularly intriguing topic with regards to depictions of encountered cultures and natives. The aspect of colonial relations is central to the photography collection, which largely exists due to the expansion of the British Empire. Explorers, travellers and Royal Engineers were active all over the globe and used photography as a key documenting tool. The exhibition will look at the Royal Engineers and their uses of, and advances in, photography. The Royal Engineer Sir William de Wiveleslie Abney, for instance, helped to develop 'instantaneous' photography in the 1870s through a rapid gelatin emulsion process.