

## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hill and Adamson | Partnership

2017

[5:19]

### **Narrator:**

The partnership between David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson was formed in Edinburgh in July 1843, just four years after the invention of photography was announced to the world. In the four years that followed they produced a remarkable body of work that included portraits, landscapes and social documentary.

Robert Adamson moved from his home in St Andrews to Rock House, at the foot of Calton Hill, Edinburgh in May 1843 with the intention of setting himself up as a photographer. He had suffered from ill health since boyhood, which had left him too frail for his chosen career as an engineer; photography offered a less physically demanding alternative.

As Adamson was setting up his Edinburgh studio, Hill, already a successful painter, was about to undertake his most ambitious painting to date, a large-scale work depicting the signing of the declaration of the Free Church of Scotland.

With over four hundred signatories to depict, Hill faced the unenviable task of obtaining a likeness of each participant. It was Sir David Brewster who suggested that Hill engage the services of the newly arrived Adamson.

The partnership was an immediate success, quickly producing photographs that were artworks in their own right. Within a month they had announced the first exhibition of their work.

With the partnership already making great progress, Hill, together with his daughter Charlotte, moved in with Adamson at Rock House.

### **Annie Lyden:**

Adamson really was, I think, the more behind the scenes, technically proficient part of the partnership, he really knew things about photography that others didn't, and Hill said as much; whereas, Hill played down his role on the technical side of things. He really didn't understand how it worked even if it was happening under his nose.

For him, his involvement, his contribution was more in bringing the artistry to the medium. And I think, for him, that was not only knowing how to compose the scene and how to work with the sitters, but actually how to engage with them, how to make them feel relaxed. By all accounts, he was quite a congenial character, and liked to joke around, he was good company. And so, I think having a portrait session with them would have been a potentially tremendous amount of fun.

### **Narrator:**

The strong sunlight needed to produce a successful calotype meant that Hill and Adamson were required to work outdoors, skilfully employing props and furnishings to transform their garden setting into a convincing-looking interior space.

The partnership in the years that followed was incredibly productive. In addition to the photographs of ministers for Hill's painting, they produced portraits of friends, family members and notable figures from Edinburgh society and beyond. They documented the changing city and laid the foundations for social documentary in their much-lauded photographs of the Newhaven fishing community.

The partnership was cut short after only four and a half years by Adamson's untimely death at the age of only 26.

The loss of his partner and friend was a bitter blow for Hill.

### **Annie Lyden:**

It really is quite remarkable that this partnership, this perfect chemistry that Hill and Adamson had, was really only in effect for something like four and a half years. And even then, because they couldn't work outdoors every day of the year, you're really sort of condensing it down into a much shorter time period.

And yet, in that time, they produced thousands of prints, and those prints have made their way out into the wider world. Part of that dissemination was through

a kind of reappraisal and re-awareness of their work in the late 19th century by the Scottish photographer James Craig Annan, who made a series of photogravures that were then published in Alfred Stieglitz journal *Camerawork*, and effectively this brought Hill and Adamson's work to an international audience.

Their legacy is not just important to photography in Scotland, to Edinburgh, it's important to the entire history of photography all over the world. And it has its roots here, at Rock House, in Edinburgh, in Scotland, in the 1840s.

**End.**