

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hill and Adamson | Place

2017

[6:00]

Narrator:

Edinburgh and St Andrews both play a significant role within Hill and Adamson's work. St Andrews, as Adamson's home where he learned his craft, was photographed frequently while the view of Edinburgh from Rock House presented a wealth of photographic opportunities.

The pair made ambitious plans to produce a series of six publications, each with a different theme. Although the publications did not see the light of day, one of these themes took Hill and Adamson to Newhaven, a small fishing village on the outskirts of Edinburgh, resulting in some of their most enduring images.

The men and women of Newhaven were known throughout Edinburgh and beyond. Their distinctive costumes and reputation for bravery helped make the fisherfolk a part of popular culture, featuring as characters in the literature of the period, such as Scott's *The Antiquary*.

These photographs are not merely the result of a casual day out at the shore; they are the product of a working photographic studio (albeit portable) where a great degree of control is exerted over the scene and sitter.

There was an implicit narrative in all of the Newhaven photographs, whether it was scenes showing the fisherfolk gathered around the minister, or groups of women reading letters, the community was represented as both religious and literate.

Hill and Adamson could not capture the boats at sea, so most of the men are portrayed beside their beached boats or tending to their fishing lines, implying a sense of time by portraying the before and after, having just come ashore or preparing to head out to the North Sea again.

The mid 1800s was not only a time of religious and social change in Edinburgh, but also of physical changes to the city. When Hill and Adamson began their partnership, construction of the Scott monument had been underway for two years. This gothic tribute to Sir Walter Scott, the largest monument to a writer in the world, has since become an iconic part of the Edinburgh landscape.

Hill and Adamson photographed the monument's architect, George Meikle Kemp, who tragically died before its completion when he fell into the Union Canal and drowned. They also photographed John Steell, the sculptor commissioned to produce the statue of Scott that stands at the monument's centre.

Annie Lyden:

We have Hill and Adamson making photographs of the Scott Monument as it is being built, and for those of us who live in Edinburgh, it has this feeling that it's just always been there. And when you look at these photographs where you see it partially complete, it's actually quite breath-taking to see it in this unfinished state. And that's one of the things that the partnership was doing, was recording was the changing face of Edinburgh. And whether it was the Scott Monument going up on Princes Street, or whether it was the tearing down of buildings and making way for the Railway Station that eventually would become Waverley Station. These are all documented through their photographs and it gives us insight into this quite exciting time in Edinburgh's history. It's this sort of forward and backward looking happening simultaneously.

A lot of the photographs take place in Greyfriars churchyard, which had a particular resonance in 1840s Edinburgh, particularly with the breakup of the Church of Scotland and the formation of the Free Church. For many of those ministers who were breaking away, they were looking back to John Knox and the early covenanters as inspiration for their own cause, now in the 19th century. And many of those men, those covenanters were buried at Greyfriars. If anyone's ever visited, it is this very lovely setting right in the heart of the Old Town, not far from the castle, and it sort of affords you these views out to the castle and to Heriot's hospital. I think that that too was appealing.

Narrator:

Greyfriars churchyard features in a great number of photographs by Hill & Adamson. It was a location that had previously been the subject of a painting by

Hill. The photographs depict groups of people (often friends and family members) gathered among the monuments, with Hill often present on both sides of the camera.

This photograph is the only one by Hill and Adamson to show photographers at work. We cannot be certain if the two figures bent over the camera are Hill and Adamson, but if they are then the image may have been made by their valued assistant, Miss Jessie Mann.

Hill and Adamson's photographs document Edinburgh as a changing city. Looking forwards as well as backwards, showing us not only what has been lost but also what has endured.

End.