

V&A Archive Research Guide

Exhibitions at the V&A

V&A

Exhibitions of objects from the Museum's collections and loans from private owners and organisations have always been held to complement the permanent gallery displays: the first recorded exhibition, 'Examples of false principles in decoration', ran from September 1852 to July 1853 in V&A's predecessor, the Museum of Ornamental Art at Marlborough House. Exhibitions are held in the V&A but there are also travelling exhibitions which tour institutions in the UK and around the world.



A list of exhibitions and displays shown at the V&A between 1852 and 1996 can be found in Elizabeth James, *The Victoria & Albert Museum: A Bibliography and Exhibition Chronology, 1852-1996*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998.

The V&A Archive has a variety of resources available for the study of exhibitions held in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington, the Bethnal Green Museum and the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. The resources available in the V&A Archive depend upon when the exhibition was held, and the amount of information about each exhibition varies, but the following record series will be of use:

Exhibition files, from 1863 (MA/28)

These files relate to the planning and administration of exhibitions held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Bethnal Green Museum and the Theatre Museum. Files may contain general administrative papers, correspondence with lenders and sponsors, object lists, press cuttings, object transportation papers, plans and designs, display photographs and leaflets, and a copy of the exhibition catalogue.

Please note that the National Art Library holds a complete run of V&A exhibition catalogues. To locate material in the National Art Library, please [search the Library Catalogue](#).

Press Office exhibition and event files, 1923–94 (MA/29)

These files relate to publicity for exhibitions. Files can include preview/opening papers, object lists, photographs of objects, display photographs, posters, and press notices.

[MA/29](#)

Nominal files, 1852-1995 (MA/1)

The Nominal File series is the main series of correspondence files in the V&A Archive, and correspondence with lenders is often found here.

MA/1

3975	"	24	Russell W. H.	That inquiries may be addressed to them.
4672	"	25	Attenborough W.	For permission to copy.
3991	"	"	Rock Rev. B.	N ^o 410. a miniature.
3999	"	27	Broadwood A. F.	For cheque for £176. 8. 0.
3987	"	22	Clayton T Bell.	With five pictures.
				Shades changes for Stained Glass.
3995	"	24	Travelyan Sir W. C.	Have no priced catalogue of their works.
				Permission to electotype his silver tazza.
3997	"		Winkworth J.	Has 12 other pieces wh: he will be willing to lend.
				Suggests that supplementary catalogues be published of objects in the Museum.
4003	"	26	Caspe E.	With description & dup: invoice of engravings from the Louvre. Asks for sketches of those awaiting description.
4690	"	25	Barthes T Lowell.	N ^o 410. books.
4692	"	27	Broadwood A. F.	N ^o 410. Oil Paintings.
4005	"	20	Delange A.	Forwards a catalogue of objects for sale & calls attention to a notice of a bas relief in marble.
4031	"	26	Robinson J. C.	Reports on crystals by Valerio Belli.
4033	"	"	do.	Suggestions with reference to the formation of a second special Loan exhibition.
4067	"	24	Hammond E.	Encl B Letter from Italian Minister for foreign affairs with list of Catalogues.

Registers of Loans in, 1858–1939 (MA/31)

The registers in this series record loans into the Museum by individuals and organisations. They contain the following information: date object was received, description of object, name and address of lender, general remarks, and date of return of object.

MA/31

Abstracts of correspondence, 1863–1914 (MA/4)

Between 1863 and 1914, Registry clerks numbered each item of correspondence which entered the Museum and recorded it, along with the name of the correspondent, date or receipt, and summary of the content's letter, in Annual Registers. Little of the earliest correspondence survives, so these Registers provide a unique resource for the reconstruction of the Museum's earliest activities.

MA/4

Exhibition publicity posters, 1954 to date (MA/23-27)

The V&A Archive has a growing collection of over 1200 posters amongst which are exhibition publicity posters from 1954 to date. These can be used, together with other ephemera, to study the history of

marketing at the V&A and the V&A brand as well as tracing the presentation of museum objects through time.

The posters collection has been arranged in the following series:

- General publicity posters
[MA/23](#)
- Exhibition publicity posters
[MA/24](#)
- Circulation Department publicity posters
[MA/25](#)
- Bethnal Green Museum publicity posters
[MA/26](#)
- Theatre Museum publicity posters
[MA/27](#)

Photographic guard books (MA/32)

The V&A Archive has approximately 900 photographic guardbooks, which contain photographs taken by V&A photographers between the 1850s and 1996; these include photographs of objects on display in galleries and images of exhibitions. These photographs were mounted in volumes in negative number order.

[MA/32](#)

Press cuttings albums (MA/49)

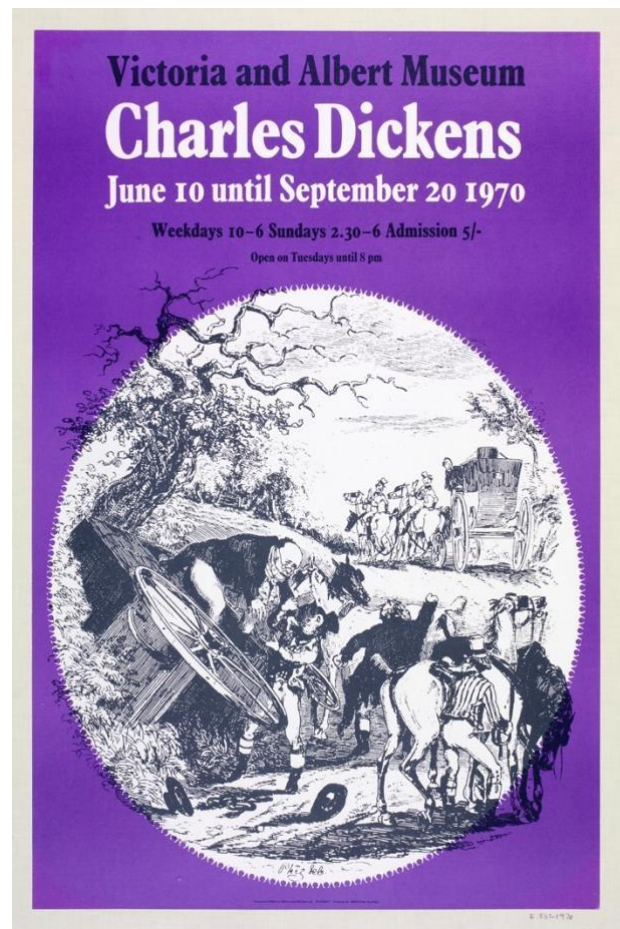
These cover the period 1831 to 1955 and include cuttings relating to a wide variety of events, including exhibitions. Some of the albums are devoted solely to V&A exhibitions.

[MA/49](#)

Files relating to the early history of the Museum and its buildings (ED 84)

This series includes notices to the Press, papers relating to the arrangements and regulations for exhibitions, and files for exhibitions held at the V&A.

[ED 84/322-367](#)





Records of the Circulation Department, 1909–77 (MA/6-19)

Established in the 1850s, the V&A's Circulation Department was responsible for organising exhibitions which were loaned to provincial Museums, Art Galleries and Schools. These exhibitions drew upon the Department's own extensive collections (separate from those of the main Museum departments but covering the same fields) and placed a particular emphasis on contemporary work. The following series are relevant:

- 'Set' files which were routinely produced by the Circulation Department as a working record of the V&A's touring exhibitions. The files contain information on the "sets" of objects assembled for each particular exhibition.
MA/13
- Exhibition and loan collection prospectuses
MA/17
- Exhibition catalogues and handlists
MA/18
- Photographs and press cuttings
MA/19

Exhibition attendance figures

A list of attendance figures (when known) for exhibitions that were held between 1863 and 2001 is available in the V&A Archive. More recent statistics are included in the [Museum's Annual Reports](#).

Other V&A sources

The V&A Prints and Drawings department has a number of early museum posters which can be viewed in its [Study Room](#).

Exhibitions since 2000 have a [microsite on the V&A website](#).

Access to the V&A Archive

You can search the catalogue of the V&A Archive [online](#).

Access to the V&A Archive is available by appointment on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 11.00–16.30 in the National Art Library at the V&A. We recommend providing a minimum of two weeks' notice when booking your appointment.

If you have any questions about the V&A Archive or would like to make an appointment to see material in the archive, please [contact us](#).

Images

Alexander McQueen - Savage Beauty, 14th March - 2nd August 2015. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Abstract of J. C. Robinson's letter – suggestion with reference to the formation of a second special Loan Exhibition. V&A Archive, MA/4/1. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Exhibition poster for Charles Dickens, 1970. V&A Archive, MA/24/67. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

William Morris exhibition photograph. V&A Archive, MA/32/231, neg. 69955. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London