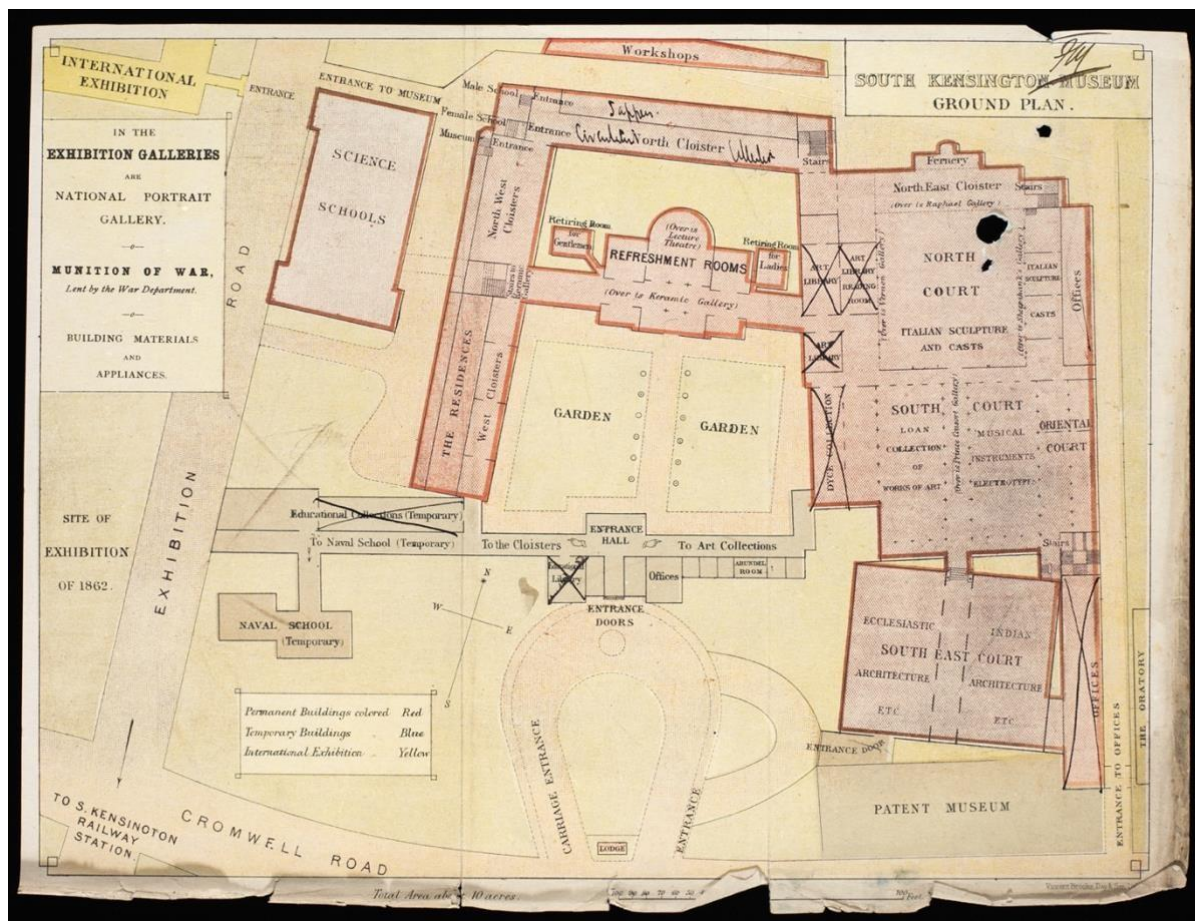


V&A Archive Research Guide

Sources for the history of the V&A's buildings

V&A

The complex of buildings that form the Victoria and Albert Museum is the result of several important architectural developments. Originally temporary sheds constructed of iron and clad in corrugated iron (they were quickly dubbed the 'Brompton Boilers' following their description as a 'threefold monster boiler' in *The Builder*), the iconic buildings that were erected in their place are recognised as objects worthy of study in their own right.



The V&A Archive holds a variety of records that aid a further understanding of the conception and development of the buildings on the South Kensington site.

Possible topics for research include:

- Design and construction of the South Kensington Museum
- Construction and decoration of the North and South Courts
- Design and construction of the Façade designed by Aston Webb
- Decoration of the interior spaces (e.g. Ceramic staircase, Leighton Frescoes, the Green Dining Room, mosaic floors)

Principal secondary sources

- Bryant, Julius. *Designing the V&A: The Museum as a Work of Art (1857–1909)*. London: Lund Humphries; in association with V&A Publishing, 2017. Copies available in the National Art Library.
- Physick, John. *The Victoria and Albert Museum: the history of its building*. London: [The Museum], 1982. Copies available in the National Art Library.
- John Physick, *From iron shed to marble halls: a history of the V&A and its buildings*. 2 vols. London: s.n., 1982. National Art Library pressmark 35.R.115-116

- *The Museums area of South Kensington and Westminster*. Survey of London, vol. 38. London: Athlone Press for the Greater London Council, 1975. National Art Library pressmark: 720.9421 MUS

Principal archival sources

Many of the archives listed below which are referenced ED 84 were formerly held at the PRO/The National Archives but are now at the V&A Archive. This series of files relates to the early history of the Museum and its buildings. Files ED 84/48-101, 254-263 and 311-312 are all relevant. The V&A's correspondence files post-1930 are voluminous and are not listed below; information about specific projects can be provided upon request.

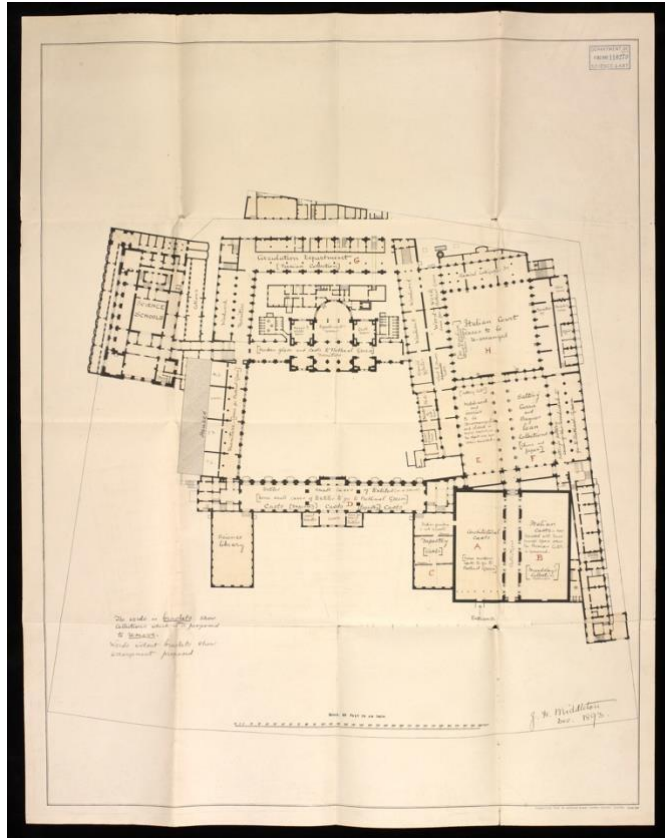
- Précis minutes of the Board of the Department of Science and Art, 1852–99
ED 84/35-43
- Annual reports of the Department of Science and Art, 1854–99 (available in the National Art Library)
- Entry book of tenders and acceptances for works and services, 1859–73
ED 84/3-7
- Miscellaneous letter books, reports etc, 1860–91
ED 84/10-15
- Report on the Commission on Heating, Lighting and Ventilation, 1869
ED 84/22
- Correspondence: construction of Museum buildings, 1857–1930
ED 84/54-59
- Correspondence: heating, lighting and ventilation, 1859–1930
ED 84/60-66
- Correspondence: alterations, decorations and repairs, 1863–1934
ED 84/67-71
- Correspondence: plans and designs, 1864–1929
ED 84/72-73
- Correspondence: site and adjoining property, 1858–1952
ED 84/254A, 254B, 312
- Office of Works/Property Services Agency (PSA) files, 1870–1988, are at The National Archives in WORK 17

Plans

- Relatively few 19th-century MS plans survive. Those that do may be consulted in the Prints & Drawings Study Room at the V&A and may be located by reference to the artist's name: viz. Francis Fowke, Owen Jones, Frank Moody, John Liddell, Aston Webb, Edward Burne-Jones, Reuben Townroe, Godfrey Sykes, Alfred Morgan, William Bell Scott, and Richard Redgrave.

Printed plans are scattered through the ED 84 files in the V&A Archive, including:

- Plans c.1870 of the South Kensington Museum
[ED 84/47](#)
- Block plan of buildings at South Kensington [ED 84/52](#):
- Plan of new building, 1865
[ED 84/55/1](#)
- Plan of buildings in progress, 1869
[ED 84/52/2](#)
- Plan of entrance
[ED 84/59](#)
- Plan of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1905
[ED 84/190](#)
- Plans of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1909
[ED 84/195](#)
- Plans showing scheme of arrangement of the collections, 1909
[ED 84/197](#)
- Plans, drawings and elevations, principally from Aston Webb's office, 1900–26, are at The National Archives in class WORK 33. A copy of the list is available in the V&A Archive.
- Some plans are held by the National Monuments Record (NMR), the public archive of English Heritage
- Plans c.1970 onward are held by V&A's Projects & Estate Department; where these have been added to project files, they may be in the custody of the V&A Archive.



Photographs

Photographic material is dispersed mainly between several sections of the V&A, including:

- The Photographs collection, accessible via the [Prints & Drawings Study Room](#), holds mainly early photographs of the Museum, especially under the pressmark X601.
- Some historical images of the construction of the V&A, and of its exteriors, interiors and gallery spaces, are freely available to view via [V&A Images](#)
- The V&A Archive holds over 900 photographic guardbooks, 1853–1996, which include images of the South Kensington site and Museum interiors. The index to these volumes is held by the V&A

Archive; staff can check these for any negative numbers relating to your area of research. With these negative numbers, it should be possible to identify the relevant guardbook(s). Some of these volumes have been digitised and the images linked to the relevant [guardbook record](#) on the online catalogue. The V&A Archive also maintains ring binders of V&A site images in the guardbooks (and elsewhere in the V&A's collections), which you can search in the absence of negative numbers.

Press cuttings

- Press cutting albums for 1837 to 1955 are held by the V&A Archive [MA/49](#)

Useful links

- [History of the Building](#)
- [The National Archives](#)
- [V&A Images](#)

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

Ground plan repro. in Guide to the South Kensington Museum (1871). V&A Archive, ED 84/233. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Ground plan (1893). V&A Archive, ED 84/154. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London