

# Shipbuilding

## Dundee City Archives - Research Guide 12

### Background

As a major port of the North Sea, Dundee has a long history of ship building. This began with small wooden fishing vessels, until steam engines arrived in 1814 and iron ships came along in the 1820s. The coming of the railways and extension of the docks helped to encourage the ship building industry. During the nineteenth century there were many small shipyards along the riverside, but the three major shipbuilders on the Tay were: Caledon Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd (otherwise known as W B Thompson & Co Ltd), Gourlay Brothers & Co (Dundee) Ltd and Alexander Stephen & Sons Ltd.

You can find out more about these shipyards and their records below.

### Caledon Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd (W B Thompson & Co Ltd)

The company was started by William Bruce Thompson in 1866, initially as an engineering firm. They moved to shipbuilding in 1874 and named their new yard after their first customer - the Earl of Caledon. Originally called W B Thompson & Co Ltd, the company was renamed Caledon Shipbuilding & Engineering Co Ltd in 1896 after being liquidated. They also had a shipyard on the Clyde at Whiteinch from 1880-1886. They moved to the Stannergate yard after the First World War. In 1968 the company merged with Henry Robb Ltd to become Robb Caledon Shipbuilders Ltd.

Dundee City Archives holds the records of the Caledon. These are held under the reference GD324. The collection includes:

Minute Books	1896-1947	GD324/1/1/1-5
Ship Specifications (by ship number)	1900-1981	GD324/4/1/1-134
Offset books	1909-1963	GD324/5/1/1-7
List of Engines	1872-1967	GD324/5/3/1-2
Data Books	1907-1981	GD324/5/4/1-14
Photographs (by ship name)	1900-1980	GD324/6

These records came to Dundee City Archives via the National Records of Scotland. A large part of the records are listed on their [online catalogue](#). To narrow the search by ship name, click on refine search and add the ship name to the "Search for" field. Then click on "search". If any individual items, such as photographs, of this ship are held they will show up in the results. Please note that part of this collection is uncatalogued.

Ship Plans (by name and number) RHP60001-60396

These are also listed on the National Records of Scotland's [online catalogue](#). To narrow the search by ship name, click on refine search and add the ship name to the "Search for" field. Then click on "search". If any individual plans of this ship are held they will show up in the results.

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## Gourlay Brothers & Co (Dundee) Ltd

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The Gourlay Brothers started when the family bought into the Dundee Foundry, changing the name to Gourlay, Mudie & Co. In 1854 they started building iron ships in a yard at Marine Parade, but moved to the Camerdown Yard in 1870. The Company became Gourlay Brothers & Co Ltd in 1904 but folded shortly afterwards in 1908.

The majority of the administrative records of Gourlay Brothers & Co are held at the **University of Dundee Archives Service**. They are held under the reference MS57/2. You can view a list of the items in the collection on their [online catalogue](#).

Dundee City Archives holds plans of ships built by the Gourlay shipyard between c. 1859 and c.1908. There are over 120 ship plans, listed in order of yard number. There is also an index which lists the names of all of the ships, please contact us to find out more. For some ships there is more than one plan. The catalogue also contains some basic information about each ship, such as engine size, owner and eventual fate.

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## Alexander Stephen & Sons Ltd

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Alexander Stephen founded the company in 1750 in Burghead. The business was originally based on the north-east coast, eventually moving base to Dundee in 1843. In 1851 they opened a shipyard in Kelvinhaugh, Glasgow, then moved across the river to Linthouse in 1869. The Dundee shipyard was sold in 1894. The Linthouse yard continued until the 1960s and the repair side of the business continued until 1978.

As the company was mainly Glasgow based by the time of its demise, the records of the company are held at the **Glasgow University Archives**. A full description of the collection can be found via the [Archives Hub](#). Records in the collection which may possibly contain information about the Dundee operations include:

- Day books 1824-1851
- Letterbooks 1856-1932
- Family papers 1857-1886
- Diaries 1859-1899
- Photographs 1873-1960
- Presscuttings and press releases 1883-1965
- Plans 1903-1974

Some other records, mainly ledgers, journals and some plans are held at the **National Maritime Museum in Greenwich**.

A list of Stephens ships built in Dundee can be found in *Stephen of Linthouse* available in the Archives searchroom

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## Obtaining copies or viewing plans

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You are welcome to view any of the plans in the Gourlay or Caledon collections. Please [contact us](#) to make an appointment. As these plans can be quite large we need to ensure that we will have enough space in the searchroom to enable them to be properly laid out.

If you are unable to visit the Archives in person we can provide you with copies of plans. Please note that some plans are very fragile. In some cases we may not be able to copy the plans. We will advise you this at the time of request.