

MARITIME ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY

INFORMATION SHEET 36

THE STEWART BALE LTD PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE



Devastation around the Victoria Monument 1944

Biography

Stewart Bale Ltd was a family run photographic practice specializing in commercial, architectural and industrial photography. It was based in Liverpool from c.1911 until the early 1980s, with an additional studio in London from 1949 to 1970.

The company originated with Herbert Stewart Bale FISAC (c.1859-1929), an advertising agent who emigrated from Australia to Britain and is first referenced in Liverpool directories in 1899. Initially the business offered advertising and printing services but as it was difficult to commission the high quality illustrative photography this required, Edward Stewart Bale FIBP, FRPS (1889-1944), one of Herbert's sons, was brought into the firm and trained as a photographer. The firm began to offer a photography service and eventually, due to the quality and high standard that they set, it evolved into an exclusive commercial photographic practice.

The company occupied various premises, but the two principal locations as a photographic firm were 53 Lord Street (1905 - 1931) and 13 Union Court, off Cook Street (1932 – early 1980s), both in the city centre. The company remained within the Bale family until it ceased to trade in the early 1980s.

The firm's reputation ensured that it secured significant commissions and as a result has left a visual legacy of Liverpool's built environment and industrial, commercial history during a major period of social change and development. This legacy is extended nationally, with particular emphasis across the North West, due to Stewart Bale's wide geographic client base. The range of subject matter is varied but particularly well represented is shipping (including shipbuilding, launches and fitting-out); docks and cargo handling; engineering, including the construction of both the Queensway and Kingsway Mersey tunnels; architecture, including the construction of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral; industry, including factory interiors; transport;

commerce, including shop windows and interiors; social history and World War II bomb damage.

Most of the images were commissioned by businesses, often aiming to record their advancement towards what was then modern and new, reflecting new ideas and their realisation. Stewart Bale undertook aerial photography from c.1948 to 1980; some colour photography during the 1960s onwards and a series of non-commissioned work identified by 1613 prefix. The company used large format cameras for most of their existence creating photographs of stunning clarity and detail.

In an obituary of Edward Stewart Bale, the standing of the firm is underlined: 'His photographs have been exhibited all over the world and no industrial photographer was better known or more highly respected.' The British Journal of Photography. 1944.

The Collection

National Museums Liverpool acquired the Stewart Bale Ltd. photographic archive in 1986. The collection consists of 195,445 negatives, predominately black and white; approximately one third of which are large glass plate negatives (12"x10") and two thirds are film negatives (12"x10" and 10"x8"). There is a small quantity of smaller formats, some colour film and 4,000 mostly black and white prints. The images in the collection date from c.1924 to the very early 1980s.

The original documentation consists of negative registers, 1913-1972 for Liverpool and 1949-1970 for London. There is also a set of client registers for both studios, indexed alphabetically. The documentation lists: date, negative number, client and brief job description; the number of exposures taken are noted in the client registers only. There is some additional documentation including special lists covering aerial photography and non-commissioned work. There is no original subject index.

Collection management progress; access and re-prints

On acquisition the collection required conservation, proper storage and cataloguing to create a subject index. To date over 26,000 negatives have been cleaned and placed into conservation quality storage. The entire film collection has been placed into frozen storage to preserve it and slow down its natural deterioration.

More than 15,000 images have been catalogued and a programme is currently underway to input the information from the client registers into an electronic database. Our long term aim is to digitize the collection to make it more accessible.

The collection is stored in off site storage and can be viewed by appointment only. We can make digital re-prints of images within the collection; for further information and enquiries please contact Anne Gleave @:

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or visit our website @ www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/stewartbale/