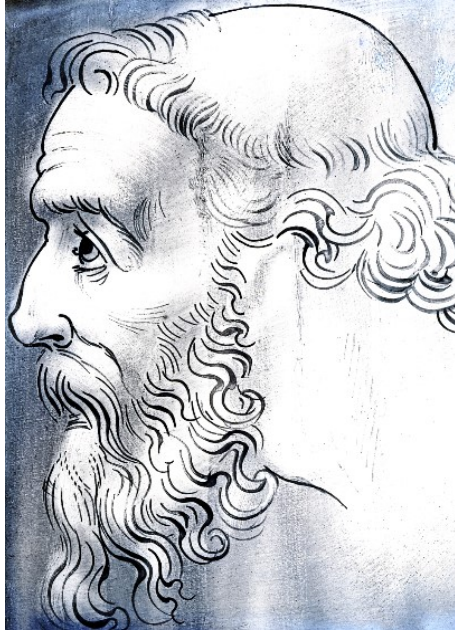
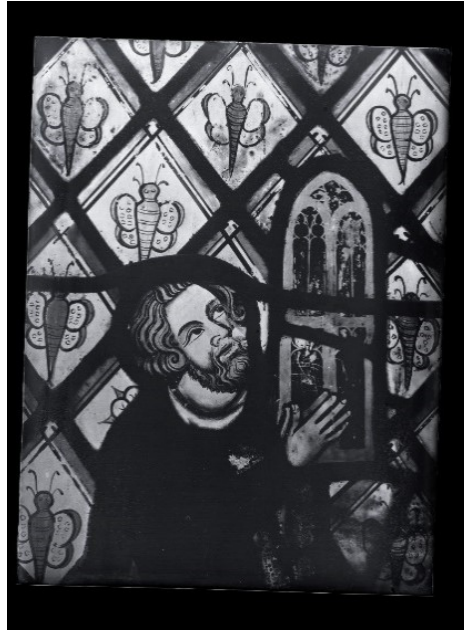


Explore J. W. Knowles & Sons



KNO/24/104: Man's head painted directly onto a glass plate, 1900s



KNO/24/334: Glass plate negative showing a donor presenting a window, north side of St Denys Church, York', 1900s

About J.W. Knowles & Sons

J.W. Knowles & Sons was a family firm of church decorators, glass painters, and stained glass restorers based in Stonegate, York. John Ward Knowles (1838–1931) founded the business in around 1861 and was later joined by his two sons, John Alder Knowles (1881–1961) and Milward Knowles (1889–unknown). Together, they worked on designs and restorations that are still admired today. One of the firm's major projects was St Lawrence Church in York, but they were also known for their work on the St William and St Cuthbert windows in York Minster. The St Cuthbert window, which John Ward Knowles restored in 1887, saw him create 10 of the 75 episodes from the life of the saint. He was also a key member of The British Society of Master Glass-Painters, founded in 1921.

Following the death of John Ward Knowles in 1931, John Alder Knowles continued the business, and spent time studying new glass manufacturing methods in the United States before the outbreak of the First World War. Like his father, he had an interest in the history of stained glass, and published widely on the subject, including on famous works of stained

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glass and the lives of glass painters such as William Peckitt.

Whilst Knowles and his sons focused primarily on glass, his daughters contributed to the family business by producing embroidery and tapestry for churches the firm worked on.

About the collection

The J.W. Knowles & Sons collection comprises around 600 volumes and bundles of documents, and over 3,000 glass plate negatives and lantern slides. It appears to have been gifted in two parts – with material from John Ward Knowles deposited with the then York Reference Library shortly after his death in 1931, and the glass plate negative collection (and presumably some of the later papers) deposited by John Alder Knowles in the 1960s. In 2015, both accessions were transferred to the archives service where they could be fully catalogued, repackaged and preserved for the future.

Paper-based records

John Ward Knowles was a keen local historian. The bulk of the paper-based collection reflects this, covering his and John Alder Knowles' research interests in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The collection includes volumes of research notes on York and other themes (KNO/1 and KNO/2); York art and artists (KNO/3); Yorkshire churches, including York Minster (KNO/4); stained glass (KNO/5); York people and places (KNO/6); York music and musicians (KNO/7); acting and the theatre, including the Grand Opera House and Theatre Royal (KNO/8); and heraldry (KNO/13). The collection also includes volumes of manuscripts created by John Ward Knowles and John Alder Knowles on a variety of subjects (KNO/10 and KNO/11); as well as documents retained by them, presumably for research purposes (KNO/12).

A number of reprints of published articles by John Alder Knowles, mainly on stained glass processes, can be found in KNO/22. The collection also includes some personal papers of John Ward Knowles (KNO/25) and John Alder Knowles (KNO/26) as well as papers of their relative Christopher Milward, a former Lord Mayor of York (KNO/27) and other family members (KNO/28).

Whilst the majority of items in the collection are personal research notes, papers and articles, there are also a small number of business papers. These include correspondence files (KNO/9); and a number of account books and other volumes (KNO/23). Further business records can be found at the [Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York](#) (reference: KNOWLES).

One of the most interesting parts of the paper-based collection is the hundreds of black and white and hand-coloured drawings – original artwork for business projects (KNO/15). The locations for many of these works remain unidentified, and it's possible that some were

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never actually built by the firm, making this a currently untapped resource for researchers.

The collection also contains a small number of artefacts, including seals (KNO/14) and an extensive collection of printing blocks of stained glass windows, presumably used in publications (KNO/20).

Glass plate negatives and lantern slides

The glass plate negatives and lantern slides have been catalogued as the series KNO/24. This extensive collection of around 3,000 items has been item-listed in the order the plates were found in 2015, and includes a series of original glass paintings by J W Knowles – possibly created for his teaching role at York School of Art – and glass plates purchased and / or retained by John Ward Knowles and John Alder Knowles for research purposes.

The majority of the plates and slides, though, are thought to date from the early 20th century and document many of the restoration and design projects undertaken by the firm (including windows in York Minster, Holy Trinity Goodramgate and All Saint's North Street).

Digitising Knowles

With the support of generous grants from York Glaziers Trust, The Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass, and a private donor, Explore was able to digitise the glass plates and lantern slides in this collection between late 2017 and early 2021.

Using a specialist flatbed scanner for photographic materials, we have created thousands of digital images from the glass plates and lantern slides. These images can now be found online, on our [Explore York Images](#) website.

How to search the collection

If you are interested in the **paper-based collection**, follow these steps:

1. Visit our [catalogue website](#) and click 'Search Catalogue'
2. In the 'All these words' field type: KNO/ and type your search term in quotation marks e.g. KNO/ "scrapbook"
3. If you are looking for a specific record, type the reference e.g. KNO/1/5

Alternatively, you can browse the entire catalogue on the [Archives Hub website](#).

If you would like to view **digitised images** of the Knowles glass plate negatives and lantern slides, follow these steps:

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1. Visit our [Explore York Images](#) site.
2. In the search bar, type: KNO- and your search term e.g. KNO- church
3. If you are looking for a specific record, type the reference e.g. KNO/24/106
4. You can then click on relevant images to see them in a larger format and read their titles and captions. The 'Lightbox' button allows you to collect images for viewing later. The 'Basket' button enables you to purchase images for download and reuse.

Flickr Gallery

To browse some highlights from the collection, visit our [Flick Gallery](#).

Information and collections held elsewhere

As mentioned above, a lot of the surviving business papers for J. W. Knowles & Sons can be found at the [Borthwick Institute, University of York](#) (reference: KNOWLES).

As John Ward Knowles' handwriting is quite often difficult to decipher, his granddaughter Jill Murray has transcribed a number of the key volumes in the collection. These can be found in [Explore's open-access Local History collection](#) online.

Explore's general photograph collection contains a number of images showing workers in J W Knowles & Sons, which are not believed to have been deposited by the business themselves. These can be found on [Explore York Images](#).