

The Roland Edgar Cooper Collection at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

GB 235 REC

Title: The Roland Edgar Cooper (1890-1962) Collection

Dates of Creation: 1913-2010

Administrative / Biographical History:

Roland Edgar Cooper was born in 1890 in Kingston-Upon-Thames, but lost both his parents by the age of four. He came to be cared for by his aunt Emma who was married to William Wright Smith, eventual Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. It was this association that was to shape Cooper's career - he travelled to Calcutta with Smith in 1907 when he became in charge of the Herbarium there, travelling and collecting botanical specimens in Sikkim, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. In 1910, Cooper and Smith returned, and Cooper took the Horticultural course at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. In 1913, Cooper returned to the Himalayas to collect plants for A.K. Bulley of Ness, near Liverpool. He travelled through Sikkim in 1913, Bhutan in 1914-15, and the Punjab in 1916.

In 1921, after the First World War, during which Cooper served in the Indian Army, he was appointed Superintendent of the Botanic Garden at Maymo in the Shan Hills of Burma, eventually returning to Scotland in the late 1920's for the education of his son. From 1930-1934 Cooper worked at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh as the Garden Curator's assistant, taking the role of Curator (Head Gardener) himself in 1934, a post he held until his retirement in 1950. Post retirement, he and his wife Emily moved to Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex.

During his career, Cooper became a Fellow of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, the Botanical Society of Edinburgh (now Scotland), the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Scottish Anthropological Society. He was also the vice-president of the Scottish Rock Garden Club, of which he was a founder member.

Scope and Content: Eight boxes of material relating to Roland Edgar Cooper who was Curator (Head Gardener) at the Royal Botanic Garden between 1934 and 1950. Material consists of correspondence, field notes, photographs and maps from his plant collecting expeditions in Sikkim, Bhutan and Punjab between 1913 and 1916, and family / genealogical information.

Listing:

REC Roland Edgar Cooper Collection

- REC/1 Roland Edgar Cooper – Plant Collecting paperwork 1913-1949
 - REC/1/1 Notebooks 1913-1916
 - REC/1/1/1 Field Books
 - REC/1/1/1/1-19 Sikkim, 1913; 19 books covering collection numbers 1-1023
 - REC/1/1/2 Plant Determinations
 - REC/1/1/2/1-3 Sikkim, Bhutan and Punjab, 1913-1916: notebooks covering collection numbers 1-6002 and summary sheet
 - REC/1/1/3 Itinerary
 - REC/1/1/3/1 Itinerary, Bhutan, 1914-1915
 - REC/1/1/4 3 numbered notebooks
 - REC/1/1/4/1 No.1: includes Sikkim itinerary, June-Oct 1913; trip to Phalut (Sikkim) Oct. 1913; Notes on witchcraft in Bengal, Feb. 1914; Notes on Bhutan travels; 1914; Notes on Bhutan forest distribution, 1915; Journal of travels in Eastern Bhutan, 1915; Misc. Notes on Sikkim and Bhutan including catalogue of Bhutan photographs.
 - REC/1/1/4/2 No.2: Notes of Itinerary of Second Tour of Bhutan 1915
 - REC/1/1/4/3 No.3: includes Notes on Topography and Vegetation of Western Bhutan, (1915?); Journal and Botanical Notes, Punjab, 1916; Misc. Notes including catalogue of Punjab photographs.
 - REC/1/1/5 Collecting books – 3 boxes containing books used to collect and number plants in the field.
 - REC/1/2 Maps- Two maps relating to Cooper's plant collecting expeditions. 1908-1916
 - REC/1/2/1 The first is of Sikkim, Bhutan, parts of Nepal, Tibet, Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam, dates to 1908 and is annotated with Cooper's routes and the legend, "RE Cooper, A- 1914 - Tour in Bhutan, July-August, Sept, Oct, Novr; B- 1915 - April, May, June, July, August, Sept."
 - REC/1/2/2 The second is of parts of Lahaol and Spiti of the Kangra District and Chamba, Punjab with portions of ... Kashmir, dates to 1913 and is annotated with Cooper's routes and the legend "RE Cooper's visit

to Kulu and Lahaol, 1916, seed collecting for A.K. Bulley, Neston, Cheshire".

- REC/1/3 Retrospective Published Writings
 1933,1949
- REC/1/3/1 Cooper's copy of "Botanical Tours in Bhutan, with Special Reference to the Occurrence of the Genus Primula", by Roland Edgar Cooper, published in Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, November 1933.
- REC/1/3/2 Cooper's copy of "Notes upon Bhutan in the Eastern Himalaya", by R.E. Cooper, published in the Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society, Vol. 74, part 2, February 1949.
- REC/2 Roland Edgar Cooper – Correspondence and Papers
 1913-1961
- REC/2/1 Correspondence and Papers – Isaac Bayley Balfour
 1913-1919
 Folder of papers presumably retained by Isaac Bayley Balfour. Includes correspondence; Notes on Environment of Plants of Seed Numbers, Gathered in Bhutan, 1914, by R.E. Cooper; List of Seeds sent by Cooper, via A.K. Bulley, Sikkim and Tibet, 1913.
- REC/2/2 Correspondence and Papers – British Museum
 1930,1952
 Folder of correspondence between William Wright Smith and Brian Burtt of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and George Taylor of the British Museum (Natural History) regarding the sending of Cooper's specimens to the British Museum for determinations - this includes plant lists. There are also two lists with duplicates: 1-2. "Determination of Indian Plants collected by RE Cooper Esq 1914- for British Museum, 1st list, Edin." and 3-4. "Identification of Plants for the British Museum. Coll. RE Cooper, 2nd list, Jan. 1930"
- REC/2/3 Correspondence and Papers – Assorted Documents
 1916-1961
 Assorted documents relating to R.E. Cooper, provenance unknown and arranged by date where known.
- Extract from letter dated 18th September 1916 from Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour to Roland Edgar Cooper [in Cooper's hand? written out on Cooper's lecture notes?] Original copy in Isaac Bayley Balfour correspondence folder: GB235rec/2/1/19
 - Typescript of two letters, the first from William Wright Smith to Isaac Bayley Balfour, 27/05/1921; the second

from R.E. Cooper to William Wright Smith, 04/06/1921 from the Botanic Garden in Maymo, Burma.

- [William Wright Smith?] to R.E. Cooper, 28/06/1929 regarding identification of plants.
- R.E. Cooper's collecting numbers - brief summary by Cooper with two copies, 03/03/1931.
- Modern list outlining Cooper's ethnographic donations to the National Museums of Scotland in 1931-32.
- Partial copy of John Anthony's "Remarkable Alpine Lobelia from Bhutan" published in the Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, July 1936.
- List of determinations of Bhutan grasses sent on loan to Dr. Bor of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 01/05/1948. "R.E. Cooper's collection"
- letter: R.E. Cooper to Harold Roy Fletcher, 10/10/1961
- Three pages of Collection Numbers entitled "Cooper's Bhutan Collection" - undated.
- "Cooper's Saxifragas, etc." arranged according to Engler et Irmischer Monograph - undated.

REC/3 Roland Edgar Cooper – Cooper's Writing
c.1930-1948

REC/3/1 "Abnormal Cyclamen Growths" [Cyprus] by R.E. Cooper with two accompanying photographs by Robert Moyes Adam. Written 1933? [Intended for Notes of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh but never published?]

REC/3/2 "A Scented Hybrid of *Lilium Bulbiferum* *Croceum* (*Aurantiacum*)" by R.E. Cooper, reprinted from the Lily Year Book 1948.

REC/3/3 Unpublished paper on Seed Morphology in the Genus *Primula* - text and 14 plates of photographs and illustrations. [Written in the 1930s?]

REC/3/4 Unpublished 10 page typescript entitled "The work of William McNab, landscape gardener, 1780-1848, The Royal Botanic Garden at Inverleith"; covers a history of the Inverleith site, Cooper's opinion of McNab's skill in laying out the Garden, a diagram of sightlines in the south west corner, and 9 of Cooper's photographs taken in the Garden.

REC/3/5 "Received with Thanks" the unpublished autobiography of R.E. Cooper. Added to the collection in August 2020 after being donated to RBGE.

Cooper wrote extensively - the archive collection only includes a small sample of what were presumably the author's own copies. See Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Library catalogue for the rest of his output.

- REC/4 Roland Edgar Cooper – Photographs
1913-1961
The Cooper Photograph Collection has been collated from a number of sources; some have been held in the RBGE Archives for some time, some have been donated and some purchased at auction.
- REC/4/1 Photographs – RBGE
1913-1932
Envelope of 13 photographs which have been historically filed in the archives with Cooper's correspondence, etc. including one of Cooper in 1913; Edgar Cooper and son Bill at Rangoon House, 1924-5; plants and scenery in Bhutan, including two plants collected by Cooper and growing at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in the 1930s.
- REC/4/2 Photographs – Auction Lot
c.1880-1959
Set of four photograph albums and an envelope of family photographs and correspondence purchased at auction in 2009 and stored together in one box.
- REC/4/2/1 1. Photograph album of Himalayan views, people and plants. Undated [1913 onwards?]
- REC/4/2/2 2. Photograph album of Himalayan views, people and plants. Undated [1913 onwards?]
- REC/4/2/3 3. Photograph 'album' compiled by Cooper - "Photographs of the Robes worn in a Tibetan Priest Play and also some Movements of the Dance". Photographs by R.E. Cooper at Tongsa and Tashigong Djongs and others in the Eastern Himalaya, 1915.
- REC/4/2/4 4. Album of photographs taken at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, all taken by Cooper except for two taken by Garden Photographer Robert Moyes Adam, with accompanying poetry [written by Cooper?], [c.1934-1950?]
- REC/4/2/5 5. Envelope of family photographs, correspondence, genealogical information relating to Cooper / Wiedhofft family, newspaper clipping with family information and pencil drawing of unknown face. Includes two Himalayan photographs, one of Rhoomoo Lepcha, Sikkim, 1913 with *Meconopsis paniculata*, and the other of *Rhododendron griffithianum*, Bhutan, 1914.
- REC/4/3 Photographs – Donation
c.1913-1950
These photographs were donated to the RBGE Archives in 2010 from a private collection. There are only three original photographs amongst them; the rest were digitised and returned to the owner and are represented in the collection by a cd and a set of modern prints.

- REC/4/3/1 Birthday card dated 15/06/1950 sent to May Kerr by R.E. Cooper including a poem by Cooper and his photograph of Rhoomoo Lepcha with *Meconopsis wallichiana* (Bhutan 1914).
- REC/4/3/2/1-11 Set of 11 digitised photographs from a private collection showing Cooper, his family including wife Emily and son Bill, the Kerr family and Cooper and William Wright Smith with King George V and Queen Mary; c.1937-1949.
- REC/4/3/3/1-2 Two original photographs showing a snake charmer in Calcutta in 1913.

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