

Cardiff Naturalists' Society

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate use

TITLE – Fantastic Early Bird Photography Saved for the Nation and put Online

SUB – Through the efforts of the Cardiff Naturalists Society and with support from his son Hugh, and the staff of Amgueddfa Cymru /National Museum of Wales the collection of glass plate negatives and associated archive of Colonel H Morrey Salmon has been conserved and made available for everyone to see via Amgueddfa Cymru collections online.

The Cardiff Naturalists' Society had, since the 1980s, been the owner of the historically important photographic collection created by Colonel H. Morrey Salmon CBE, MC, DL, DSc, (1890-1985) 72nd President of the Society.

Morrey, as he was known to all, started his photography in 1908 principally of the birds of Wales and amassed a large collection of extremely high-quality glass plate negatives. These were held in secure storage along with an archive of documents that relate to him and his photographic partner Geoffrey C. S. Ingram at Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales.

The photographs include extensive pictures from the Cardiff and Vale area, but also include many scientifically and historically important pictures from the rest of Wales, especially the Pembrokeshire islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm. It includes species that are now very rare in Wales and the UK.

There had not been a means, until now, for the Society to make the images and information contained within the collection available to scientists, conservationists, and those interested in birds, the history of photography and for general cultural study.

The Society and the Salmon family agreed to transfer ownership of this collection to the Museum, and under their guidance, members of the Cardiff Naturalists' spent thousands of hours cleaning, conserving, digitising and identifying the birds in the photographs and transcribing the often hard to read paper information to create a useable archive and valuable biological records.

With generous funding from Hugh Salmon, the CNS contracted the museum to scan them into their systems and make the pictures available to everyone via their online system see this link

https://museum.wales/collections/online/?field0=string&value0=morrey%20salmon&field1=with_images&value1=1

With the challenges that the camera systems had at the time Morrey had issues with low light and long exposures, from the total of 3500 glass plates the Society selected for the museum to publish online 1000 images that showed the best of the birds and/or had the most interesting historical aspect (such as the 1934 International Ornithological Congress (IOC) where the birders were ferried around Welsh islands in 2 Royal Navy destroyers, and some very early colour wildlife photography).

All 3500 were digitised by the society and given to the Museum along with a digital archive of the project to ensure that there was a good record for future photographers and ornithologists to work with.

An exhibition featuring his camera equipment, some of the pictures and information about the IOC congress in 1934, and information about the project is currently on display at Amgueddfa Cymru

Additional documents and supporting information is available via the Society website at <https://cardiffnaturalists.org.uk/htmfiles/Salmon.htm>

This effort and the success of the project have already gained significant praise

Iolo Williams (wildlife presenter - <https://iolowilliams.co.uk/>)

I was aware of ornithologist Colonel Morrey Salmon, known for his work saving the Red Kite in Wales during the last century, but he was not just a conservationist he was an important early bird photographer. Pioneering techniques such as photography for Gannet colony counting on Grassholm and “high speed” flash of swifts in Aberedw.

He left a legacy of thousands of fragile glass plate negatives and an archive of important historical biological records which have been in storage and have not been looked at since the 1980s.

It's wonderful that a selection of a thousand of these early important bird photographs have been cleaned and linked to their records and are being made available for everyone though the incredible efforts of the Cardiff Naturalists Society volunteers in conjunction with the staff of Amgueddfa Cymru, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in birds or early photography to take a look at them.

David Tipling (one of the World's most widely published wildlife photographers renowned for his artistic images of birds, OMSystem Ambassador - <https://davidtipling.com/>)

A true pioneer of Welsh ornithology, Morrey Salmon devoted much of his life to inspiring public curiosity about the natural world. His evocative bird photography became a powerful tool for education and inspiration. Today, this archive stands not only as an important chapter in history but also as a glimpse into a remarkable life and the legacy of one of the early pioneers of bird photography.

Tensi Ward (Wildlife photographer, OMSystem Ambassador - <https://www.tesniward.co.uk/>)

It's so fantastic to see such an exquisite selection of images, taken at a time when wildlife photography was such a significant technical challenge and rarely attempted.

It's a joy to see them brought back to life from their original glass negatives so people can once again see and appreciate them and they're captured in such a way that it's very difficult to replicate with modern cameras.'

Hugh Salmon (Son of Colonel H Morrey Salmon)

I need to express my gratitude to the Cardiff Naturalists' Society.

First the volunteers who spent many months carefully preparing and cleaning my father's photographic glass slides numbering over three thousand. Their magnificent endeavours has enabled the National Museum Wales in Cardiff to commence the work of digitising them for anyone to see.

Secondly, my sincere thanks to the members of CNS Committee. It was this Committee that conceived the idea of finding a way to make my father's bird photographs available to a wider public.

I believe my father was modest about his photographs of birds, especially those taken in the first half of the twentieth century. He was a very practical man which I am sure helped with some of his innovative work.

I doubt he appreciated that many years later his pioneering photography would create such interest.

Mike Dean (President Cardiff Naturalists' Society)

At the onset of the project some 7 years ago, the name Col. Morrey Salmon was just a name on a piece of paper. However, during the project I felt I got to know a remarkable man.

Firstly, as an ardent naturalist and then as a wildlife photographer but especially of birds using initially large heavy equipment without all the facilities we now take for granted even in the cameras on our phones. His determination and tenacity knew no bounds to get what he regarded was the best possible photograph. He also kept a detail diary which gives an amazing insight into life during the early 1900's. Of course, to round it off, he also had a distinguished career in both world wars.

Caroline Butler, Natural Sciences department Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum of Wales

It has been very rewarding to be able to create archival and preservation grade digital versions of Morrey Salmon's original photographs. The state-of-the-art digitisation process carried out by the museum and subsequent digital darkroom conversion of the glass plate negatives, has enabled the beauty and craft of Morrey Salmon's photographic practice to be preserved and now enjoyed, at exceptionally high resolution, by contemporary audiences.

Alongside information about each image, including references from Morrey Salmon's own notebooks and diaries, the images are now on display through Amgueddfa Cymru's Collections Online platform, where they can be admired by a whole new generation.

Andy Kendall (Former President of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society and project coordinator - <http://www.shenstone.me.uk/>)

The challenges that he overcame to get such excellent pictures are immense, One frame and then you have to change the plate and wait sometimes hours for the bird to return for the next photograph.

It is superb to be able to put the work of this pioneering Welsh wildlife photographer and conservationist back into the public awareness, to tell his story and to secure his work for the people of Wales and the world.

##Ends##

Notes to editors

Pictures that may be used in conjunction with this release are available at this location

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/o2ww3rf3v7x9jatbm2gw3/AK4jmN66kRStNITA1qEl8jE?rlkey=hcbg994jm41tqyr8h5t7i9i8h&st=7p0cu86v&dl=0>

- The black and white photographs should be credited
From the H. Morrey Salmon Collection, © Amgueffa Cymru
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About Harry Morrey Salmon 1891-1985

There is more information about Colonel Morrey Salmon on the Cardiff Naturalists' Society website at <http://www.cardiftnaturalists.org.uk/htmfiles/150th-05.htm>

Summary...

He was born and lived in Cardiff. Although he served with distinction in two World Wars and was a Director of his family business, in peacetime his abiding interests lay in the fields of photography and ornithology developing and using his own designed and built camera and flash equipment.

Additionally, he had a very long association, covering more than sixty years, with the National Museum of Wales.. He is also remembered for his gallantry as a company officer in The Welch Regiment in France and Flanders in 1916-1918 and for his energetic and imaginative leadership as a senior RAF staff officer and de facto commander of the RAF Regiment throughout North Africa and the Mediterranean theatre from 1942 to 1945.

His achievements as a conservationist, naturalist and bird photographer, which began in his early youth, were widely recognised. Comments made about him and published in 2011 in a biography written by his sons Hugh and Norman (**Footprints in the Sands of Time** <https://nation.cymru/culture/revisited-footprints-on-the-sands-of-time-the-life-of-colonel-harry-morrey-salmon-by-norman-and-hugh-salmon/> included: -

“Col. Morrey Salmon must now be regarded as the father of British bird photography” (**Eric Hosking OBE**. Bird photographer).

“He was a legendary figure from way back in the early days of conservation in this country” (**Sir Peter Scott** CH, CBE, DSC & Bar, FRS, FZS, Founder of the WWT and WWF).

“Morrey Salmon – by quite extraordinary efforts well outside what might be regarded as a norm – made a major contribution to RAF operations in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Balkans. His dedication and professional competence set a standard which has been reflected in RAF Regiment operations ever since” (**Air Vice-Marshall Donald Pocock**).

“He was a great Naturalist and a great Welshman” (**Roger Lovegrove** RSPB).

"Ask him about a record of any Kites nest in any year and he usually could give you details of its success or failure. He knew everyone who ever had a hand in kite protection since 1903, and he kept a file on all egg collectors too" (**William Condry** MA, MSc. RSPB Warden and conservationist)

About the Society

The Cardiff Naturalists' Society was founded in 1867 to promote the study of natural history, geology, the physical sciences, archaeology, art, literature and other related subjects, and to support the development of museums in Cardiff. Its members participate in programmes of field visits and lectures, and the Society has strong links with local academic institutions.

Members of the Society were key to the establishment of Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum of Wales in Cardiff and still have strong ties with the Museum. The Society has built a library of over 10,000 volumes including through exchange with other organizations worldwide. Today, the library is still housed in the National Museum Cardiff.

Members of the Society were also instrumental in the creation and preservation of a number of local wildlife reserves such as the Forest Farm / Glamorgan Canal Reserve and in Morreys case Kenfig

More recently, the Society has been involved in wildlife surveys of important and threatened sites and has discovered rare crickets and orchids whilst doing these surveys.

Since 2011, the Society has presented the annual prize for the best 2nd year student fieldwork in the Biosciences Department of Cardiff University, therefore cementing a long-standing commitment to environmental education <http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.co.uk/p/biosciences-award-winners.html>

in 2017-18 the Cardiff Naturalists' Society celebrated its 150th Year with a series of events including an Exhibition at the Cardiff Story Museum opened by Cllr Bob Derbyshire – the Lord Mayor and a sell-out lecture by Iolo Williams at the Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum. See <https://cardiffnaturalists.org.uk/htmfiles/150th-00.htm>

For further information about the Cardiff naturalists' Society please visit our website or via social media: -

Website <http://cardiffnaturalists.org.uk/>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CardiffNaturalists/>

Blog <http://cardiffnaturalists.blogspot.com/>

Bluesky <https://bsky.app/profile/cardiftnats.bsky.social>

For further details about the society and it's work or for interview requests please contact: -

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For further information on Museum work on this project please contact: -

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To see the Iolo Williams BBC programme relating to Morrey Salmon see this article on the BBC (in Welsh) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cymru/fyw/erthyglau/c78ddqwp0xgo> and BBC iPlayer

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