

**C DIWS**                      **Items relating to Thornton-Varley Ltd., c.1900-c.1968**  
**department store**

**Accession number:** 23/25

**Historical Background:** The business was founded in 1870 by Mr. Richard Thornton and was known as R. Thornton, General and Family Drapers, located at 23 and 24 Prospect Street, Hull. The family and a number of the employees lived on the premises at this time. For family reasons, Richard Thornton went on to change his name to Richard Thornton-Varley. In October 1907 Thornton-Varley Ltd. was formed and specialised in the sale of piece fabrics, household textiles, fashion wear and accessories.

After serving an apprenticeship in Doncaster, Manchester and the West End of London, Richard's eldest son, Arthur, joined his father in running the business and expanded it over the years to comprise all the activities of a modern departmental store.

At the start of the Second World War the Thornton-Varley department store occupied a large block facing Prospect Street, Brook Street and North Street. On the night of May 7th 1941 the premises was devastated in an air raid. Temporary arrangements were made, and the department store was housed in the Royal Institution on Albion Street. However, in June 1943 the Royal Institution was completely burned out by incendiary bombs. The business then continued running for a short time from the stock rooms of the Royal Station Hotel. In early 1944 some of the departments of the original store moved back to Prospect Street, but the ladies fashion departments moved to the Gas Show Rooms at the corner of Storey Street and Prospect Street.

On 14th April 1950 Thornton-Varley became a public company and in January 1953 it became part of Debenhams.

**Custodial history:** Deposited at the History Centre by Mr. Stuart White in June 2023. Mr. White inherited the glass plate negatives from his father who had worked for Thornton-Varley (later Debenhams) for 42 years as the maintenance manager until he retired in c.1985. When Debenhams took over the store Mr. White was asked to reorganise the rooms and during this time he discovered the glass plates negatives. Management of the store at the time agreed he could keep them.

**Description:** Includes 11 glass plate negative photographs showing internal and external views, a typescript brief history, an advertisement for R. Thornton general and family draper, a typescript editorial copy of a full page advertisement feature regarding the centenary celebrations of Thornton-Varley Ltd., and a sketch of the external view of the planned reconstruction of Thornton-Varley.

**Extent:** 15 items

**Access conditions:** Access will be granted to any accredited reader

Hull History Centre: Items relating to Thornton-Varley Ltd

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| C DIWS/1 | <p>Glass plate negative photographs of the Thornton-Varley department store</p> <p>Includes external views of the original and reconstructed store, which provides views of the window displays. Internal views show various departments and items for sale including fabric and household textiles, as well as ladies garments such as coats, dresses and tops.</p> <p><b>Please note we are unable to provide access to glass plate negatives. We hope to be able to provide digital copies in the future.</b></p> <p>11 items</p>  | c.1900s     |
| C DIWS/2 | <p>Items relating to Thornton Varley department store</p> <p>Includes a typescript brief history of the company from its foundation in 1870 to when it became part of the Debehams franchise in 1953 and the new store refurnished and replanned in 1968, a copy of an advertisement for R. Thornton general and family draper, a typescript editorial copy of a full page advertisement feature regarding the centenary celebrations of Thornton-Varley Ltd. dated Monday 14th September, and a copy of a sketch of the external view of the planned reconstruction of Thornton-Varley.</p> <p>4 items</p> | c.1900-1968 |