For artist Nicky Bird, a self-confessed explorer of archives and historical collections, Hospitalfield House near Arbroath, which has been home to patrons and artists ever since the 1840s, proved a veritable treasure-trove. During her recent residency in the estate, Bird set out to dust centuries of history, artifacts and life stories by immersing herself and her camera in the building, a paragon of the Scottish Baronial architectural style combining a daring range of materials with a careful use of natural lighting.

If a peek behind the screens of time at Hospitalfield House and an artistic preoccupation with the found object have informed Bird's new bookwork Imprinted Matter, 2004, it is no coincidence that it is preceded by another of the artist's signature books Tracing Echoes, 2001 – another book; another residency – investigating Dimbola Lodge, Julia Margaret Cameron's home and studio on the Isle of Wight where many of her greatest photographs were made between 1863 and 1875. The haunting portraits of young women and girls by the Victorian pioneer are the inspiration for this book, which sets out to trace the descendants of these sitters.

Tracing Echoes brings together photography, art history, and genealogy to uncover some missing histories – the living lineage, the descendants of local women and children that appear in Cameron's work – but what does Imprinted Matter hold for us? As a response to a place, it features photographs and artists' writing about personal artifacts belonging to a range of individuals who had lived, worked or passed through Hospitalfield at various times. Some of these are commonplace objects, such as a duvet belonging to a cook, while others are more ambiguous, such as a woman's abandoned love letters and a box of jewellery.

Another found object to shape the profile of Imprinted Matter is the limited edition publication, The Book of Hospitalfield, of which 14 copies were printed in 1894 as a tribute to Patrick Allan-Fraser, an accomplished artist and the estate's patron. Similarly, Bird's bookwork is an edition of 14 copies, as a contemporary companion piece revealing fragments of Hospitalfield's other, more everyday histories. Playing detective, Bird states: 'Throughout the Inside Out season at Stills, I'd like to map the whereabouts of the 19th century books and invite the owners to take away my sequel publication.' Perhaps soon after the big giveaway there will be no trace left at Stills of Bird's exhibition.

To counteract such sentiments, alongside the vanishing aura of Imprinted Matter, Bird also presents Question for Seller, 2004 – a growing display of photographic collectibles no one else has bid for on eBay. Bird has carried out her investigation into eBay, in parallel with her quest throughout Hospitalfield House, almost as an unofficial eBay artist-in-residence. Established in 1995, eBay is an online auction house, a global 24-hour shopping centre and a platform for exchange. Among the troves of eBay one can find the ordinary, the marvellous, the uncanny, the sacred, the fraudulent, the treasured, the ridiculous and the sublime. Bird is only one of the many artists and provocateurs who have been intervening in eBay's pop-cultural minesfield. "How did you come across the photos and what do you know about them?, was the recurrent question which Bird posed to the eBay sellers. Their replies appear alongside the 'unwanted' photographs arranged as an old-fashioned family album collaging discarded family histories or unidentified portraits, which have long since lost their significance. Question for Seller is partly a study of 'commodophilia' or the human urge of assigning value to valueless objects, which ostensibly cannot be for sale. What may be Bird's next thread of inquiry into consumer culture, value, ephemeral, exchange, intangibility is yet to be revealed.

2. See eBay Buy or Sell or Buy online exhibition at Pace University's Digital Gallery. Curated by artist Allan McDonald it features existing and new work by Nicholas Dumit Estevaz, Dean John Freis; Pete Igel, Keith and Mendi Obadike, Cary Peppermint and Christine Nadic Paul Ramirez Jonas, Erik Salvaggio, K.O. Thornton and Carlo Zannini. See also dot-stone.com – an artwork by artists Jon Thomson and Allison Craighead which on 15 Sept 2005, will be placed for auction on e-bay.co.uk with bidding open at £500.00p.