



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

ALLISON PAPERS

November 2007

Allison Papers (D2886)

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Summary

c.1550 photographs and 34 volumes, comprising the records of Allison & Co., photographers, Armagh 1889-1953.



Herbert Allison

Herbert Thackwray Allison was born in Bradford in 1854. He and his brother came to Ireland in 1881 and set up a photographic business, trading as Allison & Allison, in Belfast, where they had branches at Donegall Square North and Queen's Arcade. Towards the end of the century, as the art and practice of taking photographs developed and expanded, the Allisons spotted a niche in the market outside Belfast and set about establishing country branches in Dundalk (1896), Armagh (1900), Newry, (1903) and Warrenpoint (1905). In May 1900, a manager was installed in the Armagh studio at 42 Scotch Street but when he left in 1903, Herbert Thackwray Jnr, who had been working in the Belfast business, was sent to Armagh where he was to remain for almost fifty years. Herbert Snr moved to live at Warrenpoint about 1905 and ran the Newry and Warrenpoint studios. Over the years, he was a tireless worker for his adopted town serving as a JP and councillor and lived there until his death at the age of 94 in 1947.



Armagh studio

However, it was the Armagh office, which became the hub of the enterprise and was generally regarded as the headquarters until it was sold to Ernest Scott in 1952. All the printing was carried out there and the custom grew up that Herbert Snr would travel weekly by train to Armagh, from Newry, with the week's work from the two Co. Down studios, collect the prints and return home.

This Armagh factor is reflected in the history and content of the archive. The Armagh studio became the final repository for the surviving glass-plate negatives from all four provincial branches before their transfer to PRONI by Mr Scott. Inevitably the greater number of those negatives which have survived relate to Armagh and the surrounding area, but the work of the Newry, Warrenpoint and Dundalk studios is represented also.



The collection

The subjects portrayed in the collection are wide and varied and provide a deep pictorial insight into the social mores of life in Cos Armagh, Down, and Louth (and to a lesser degree, Cos Fermanagh, Monaghan and Londonderry) during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. They include: transport; clerical and church; architecture and buildings; medicine; sport; musical and dramatic scenes; the Orange Order; businesses and people at work; life during the First and Second World Wars; portraits of individuals, families and weddings; agriculture; youth organisations. Even within a particular subject the nature of the photographs is wide-ranging, eg, the transport section encompasses: scenes of the Armagh railway disaster, June 1888; schoolboys entering a dental service caravan, c.1936; police transport, 1922, and a car rally at Warrenpoint, 1908, etc. Other interesting photographs illustrating the disparate backgrounds of those people captured by the Allison lens include: Michael Collins (elected as MP for Armagh in the new Northern parliament) pictured at a large Sinn Fein demonstration on 4 September 1921 and a wartime wedding, 3 July 1943, when Maureen Donnelly of Railway Street became the first GI bride in Armagh.

Another interesting and important aspect of the archive is the day-books for the Armagh studio which, apart from two, September 1911-October 1915, have survived for posterity. Allison usually inscribed an identification number on his negatives and wrote the number into the day-book. This means that, generally speaking, it takes only a matter of a few minutes to check in the day-book, not only the date of the photograph but also the name of the person who commissioned it. This is obviously an enormous advantage over almost all other photograph collections which have survived in Ireland.

