

Local History Series: 7



Photographic Collections

Photographs provide invaluable pieces of evidence in helping to piece together accurate views of the past and are an obvious source for local historians. It may be said that photography was invented in 1839, when Louis Daguerre introduced a process which produced a permanent photographic image on a thin metal plate. On 6 August 1840 the Northern Whig reported that a local engraver, Francis Beatty, had made a 'photographic drawing' of the Long Bridge and two years later he opened the first photographic studio in Belfast. By the 1880s photography was well established in the province. The Ulster Amateur Photographic Society was founded in 1885. In the early years, most photographs were taken by professional photographers and the subjects tended to be the wealthy and famous. According to the census reports there were 74 professional photographers in Ulster in 1881 and by 1911 the number had risen to 223. As photography became less expensive, thousands of ordinary people had their likeness taken at home, on holiday or in a studio. The development of the 'Brownie' at the turn of the century made 'do-it-yourself' photography possible, and family photographs became much more common.

Scattered throughout the collections deposited at PRONI are many photographic collections. The local historians should consult the records of the local landlord which may contain photographs of, and by, members of that particular family. For example, there are more than thirty photograph albums, c.1850-c.1906, in the Annesley Papers. Most of these were taken by Hugh, 5th earl of Annesley, who was an enthusiastic amateur photographer. The earliest photographs date from his service with the Scots Fusilier Guards in the Kaffir War, 1851-53 and in the Crimean War. The photographs include: family, friends, servants and tenants at Donard Lodge, Newcastle, and Castlewellan, including the building of the present castle and gardening improvements beside the castle. PRONI Reference **D1854** and **T3774**.

There are also major collections containing the work of the Province's leading professional photographers. Of particular interest are c.200,000 glass plate negatives which are almost exclusively the work of J.W. Burroughs and his successor, H.F. Cooper, commercial photographers working in Strabane between c.1900 and c.1960. The great majority are taken up with routine family, wedding and passport photographs; but c.20,000 cover a wide range of events, etc, largely in Counties Tyrone and Donegal, such as political meetings, Orange processions, Ulster Volunteer Force demonstrations in Strabane in particular, 'B'



*Cooper family having afternoon tea in the garden, c.1935 (PRONI Reference **D1422/B/25/42**)*

Specials, sporting functions, circuses, street scenes, mill and factory interiors, agricultural shows, harvesting, markets, railways and railway stations, etc. New prints have been made of many of the glass plates and it is these that are listed in the catalogue under the PRONI Reference **D1422**.

Another important collection of photographs is the work of the Allison family over a period of fifty years. At one time there were studios at Dundalk, Armagh, Newry and Warrenpoint, but Armagh remained the centre of the business. The Allison collection constitutes a good photographic account of provincial (urban and rural) life from the early 1900s until the Second World War. The photographs include street scenes; historic and commercial buildings; churches, shops, schools and country houses; the workplace and transport; and above all, the people of Armagh, city and country. PRONI Reference **D2886**

The Lawrence photographic collection, late 19th and early 20th century, in the National Library of Ireland is an invaluable source for the local historian. c.700 photographic prints selected from the Lawrence collection of stereoscopic negatives and relating to Northern Ireland are available in PRONI. As well as landscape scenes, such as the Antrim coast and the Giant's Causeway, there are photographs of buildings, particularly churches, and of street scenes. PRONI Reference **T2418**

c.300 glass plate negatives and c.100 photographic prints, c.1890-c.1920, largely the work of W.R. Henderson, press correspondent and photographer of Newtownstewart, Co. Tyrone. Included are views of a number of towns and villages in Cos Tyrone and Donegal; Newtownstewart figures most frequently but there are also views of Ardstraw, Plumbridge, Omagh, Bundoran, etc. PRONI Reference **D2618**

c.60,000 negatives, prints, sortie plots and traces of aerial surveys of Northern Ireland made by the RAF between 1944 and 1959. PRONI Reference **AM/1**

In **INF/7** there is also a wide selection of photographs of a more formal nature, taken for government purposes and including Ulster Covenant Day in 1912, the air raids on Belfast in 1941, and Royal visits to Northern Ireland.

