

Imagining Ireland

Exploring local historic sites and recording traditional culture contributed to the search for a distinctively Irish interpretation of the present and future. At the same time, there was a fascination across Europe with 'peasant' lives and traditions. This was linked to a rejection of modern mechanisation and a desire to return to the seemingly simpler lifestyle of the past.

Imagining the past

Enthusiastic people strove to record, collect and analyse ancient sites and objects with a view to learning more about the past.

The talks and writings of F J Bigger tried to bring history to life. His interest in history and archaeology led him to investigate many County Antrim sites including Bonamargy Friary and Laidy Church.

Energetic antiquarians explored early life in County Antrim. W J Knowles from Ballymena combined excavations and collecting with active membership of archaeological societies.

Other antiquarians included Church of Ireland clergyman Reverend John Grainger of Broughshane, who wrote extensively on geology and archaeology. His remarkable collection is now held by the Ulster Museum. A Catholic contemporary, Monsignor James O'Lavery, produced a detailed history of the Diocese of Down and Connor.



Photograph of Stephen Clarke (far right) and others, archaeological site.



Collection of Bronze Age arrowheads owned by F J Bigger.



Bookplate designed by John Vinycomb from the Ulster Museum, 1906.



Note from F J Bigger to W J Knowles on Ulster Journal of Archaeology postcard.



William James Knowles
(1832-1927)

Born in Fenagh, near Cullybackey, W.J. Knowles taught in Cullybackey, Portlengone and Ballymena. He held positions as a land agent and company secretary, but his main interest was in antiquarian studies. From 1870 he eagerly explored ancient sites, was active in archaeological and learned societies and published many articles. His antiquarian collection was sold in 1924 when he left Ballymena and retired to Ballycastle.

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Rev. John Grainger
(1830-1891)

Born in Belfast, the Reverend John Grainger was ordained in the Church of Ireland in 1853 and later served as rector of Broughshane and Rural Dean of Antrim. An active antiquarian, he wrote extensively on geology and archaeology. He served as president of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club and was a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His fine collection now forms part of the Ulster Museum's holdings.

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Msgr. James O'Lavery
(1828-1906)

Born in Lecale, County Down, Monsignor James O'Lavery was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1851. Having served as curate in Adrigole and Portlengone, he worked in Belfast and was parish priest of Holywood, County Down, for over thirty years. An erudite scholar, his interest in history and archaeology was seen in his many published works and his seminal four-volume history of the diocese of Down and Connor.

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Joseph W. Carey
(1859-1937)

Born in Kilwarlin, County Down, Joseph W. Carey trained as an illustrator in Belfast and later established a business producing high-quality artwork. He was prominent in the Belfast Arts Society and was a member of the Ulster Academy of Arts. He created thirteen scenes from Belfast history for the Ulster Hall and his paintings include 'Sailing Ships off Blackhead, County Antrim'.

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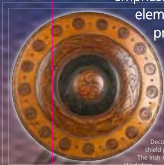
Hugh Thomson
(1860-1920)

Born in Coleraine, Hugh Thomson showed early artistic skills that were nurtured in the Belfast firm of Marcus Ward and Company. He moved to London in 1883 where he became a successful artist. Thomson illustrated many books, including classics by Mrs. Gaskell and Jane Austen, as well as books on Ireland by Stephen Gwynn. Thomson retained links with his family in Coleraine and Killea throughout his life.

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Imagining art

Interpreting the world around them led artists and craftspeople to value anew the skills of the past. The international Arts and Crafts movement emphasised the high quality of work and design. In Ireland these elements were combined with a distinctively Celtic dimension to produce wonderful artwork.



Decorative wooden plate produced by the Irish Home Industries Workshop.



Wooden bowls made by the Irish Home Industries Workshop.



Two pieces of iron work with Celtic knotwork.



One of a series of heroic poems made by the Irish Home Industries Workshop.



Fuzzer cast of a Celtic cross, eighteenth century. Irish Cross decorated with Celtic knotwork.

Artist Hugh Thomson, with roots in Coleraine and Killea, had a successful career in Ireland and England. Amongst the many works that he illustrated was Stephen Gwynn's *Highways and Byways of Donegal and Antrim*.

J W Carey trained as an illustrator in Belfast and later established his own business producing illuminated addresses, albums and bookplates. Carey was also a renowned watercolour artist and captured many local scenes.



Bookplate designed by John Vinycomb from the Ulster Museum, 1906.

Bookplate designed by John Vinycomb from the Ulster Museum, 1906.



The Burning of the Muckley Home at Cougher, County Antrim, by the 'Home' watercolourer painted by J.W. Carey.

Imagining sport

The Gaelic Athletic Association emerged in 1884 from nationalist aspirations to develop distinctively Irish sports.

A long hurling tradition, camánacht, had survived in the Glens of Antrim, although the GAA adopted the more widespread southern tradition. The Shane O'Neill club was formed in Glenarm in 1903. A hurling competition was part of the 1904 Feis na nGleann, for which Roger Casement was umpire. The victorious team, Carey Faughs, was presented with a special copper trophy in the shape of a shield commissioned by F J Bigger.



Junior Hurling Team, 1906.



Copper shield trophy and presented by Jack Murray, senior to the hurling trophy commissioned by F J Bigger.

Background image: Illustration from F J Bigger, *Closing the Bar, some post-mortem beliefs, legends and incidents connected with the bar*.