

IMA FORUMS 2012— Photographic Collections, National LIBRARY of ireland. November 30th.

## ABSTRACTS

### MARY CLARK AND ELLEN MURPHY, DUBLIN CITY LIBRARY & ARCHIVE

Dr. Mary Clark is the Dublin City Archivist. She was a member of the inaugural National Archives Advisory Council, 1987-97; honorary secretary of the Irish Society for Archives, 1981-85; and a member of the steering group for the Local Archives Survey in 1994. She has published widely on the history of Dublin and has worked on several exhibitions, including *The Story of the Capital* at Dublin's City Hall and *A Vision of the City: Dublin and the Wide Streets Commissioners*, with Niall McCullough.

Ellen Murphy is senior archivist at Dublin City Archives, where she has worked on several exhibitions and special projects, including the North Strand Bombing Oral History Project, and the establishment of the Dublin City Sports Archive. She is currently newsletter editor of the Irish Society for Archives.

#### The Greene Collection of Glass-plate negatives: A Conservation and Cataloguing Project

The Greene Collection was donated to Dublin City Library and Archive in 2005 and consists of 220 gelatine dry plate-glass negatives, many which were originally published in the *Dublin Evening Mail* in the 1930s. This illustrated talk describes a project involving this collection which encompassed digitisation; preservation management of the original glass-plate negatives; research and identification of subject-matter; selection of software for cataloguing and the process of data-input; and finally selection of software for exhibition of the photographic images. The process of caring for this collection provided an invaluable blue-print for the archive service in developing procedures for management of Dublin City Library and Archives wider photographic collections which currently includes over 10,000 images.



### ZOE REID, NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND

Zoë Reid has a degree in Art History and Paper Conservation from Camberwell College of Arts, London (1991) and an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester (2001). In 2002 she was appointed conservator in the National Archives of Ireland.

She became an accredited conservator through the Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works in Ireland (ICHAWI) in 2000. She is serving her second term as Chair of Irish Professional Conservators' and Restorers' Association (IPCRA).

#### Conservation of historic "mug shots" at the National Archives of Ireland

During the last 10 years extensive work had been undertaken by conservators at the National Archives of Ireland to improve the housing and provide access to three historically important collections of police and prison records, which include mug shots of suspects and prisoners.

The Fenian Suspect files (1866-1872) included 375 albumen photographs and represented the first large-scale use of photography for police purposes in Ireland. The General Prison Board (1881-1927) was established in 1877 to run the prison system in Ireland. These records include basic identification information, details about their crime, and a record of their health and behaviour during incarceration. The practice of photographing prisoners was used to provide a visual record of prisoners entering and moving through the system. Over the course of four years 11,500 photographs were conserved and re-housed. The Mountjoy Jail photographs are a collection of 13,000 mug shots taken in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that is currently being re-housed.

This presentation will discuss the condition of the photographs prior to conservation and the treatments implemented. Housing choices and surrogate options, which have been made to ensure access to the collection whilst safeguarding the material, will also be detailed.



### **DAVID SNOOK, CURATOR, IRISH MARINERS**

David Snook was born in Bristol in the 1940s. He has a degree in Mechanical Engineering and made his career working in the manufacturing industry in Avonmouth until 1982 and then in Dublin until retirement in 2001. David received an M.Litt from University College Dublin in 2003, where he did his thesis on Irish merchant seamen from the Great War period

David's grandfather served in the Royal Navy from 1904 to 1919, including the Dardanelles and Jutland. He subsequently became a merchant seaman, but spent most of his working life as a docker at Avonmouth.

#### Irish merchant seamen from the Great War period: Identity card photographs and developing their stories

Details of 23,000 Irish born seamen were extracted from the Southampton Archives record cards, which include a passport style photograph, for over 300,000 merchant seamen from the 1918-21 period. A searchable website database was created, [www.irishmariners.ie](http://www.irishmariners.ie) (on line since 2008 and currently getting 800hits/month) , and a series of exhibitions for local coastal communities covering 'their' seamen and seeking feedback to develop their stories, throughout 2009—2012. In particular , the presentation will focus on exhibition and on-line booklet created for Dundalk County Museum, featuring about 350 seamen and Rush, Co Dublin, where close relations with the local historic society enabled us to target the descendants.

The presentation will highlight some of the individual and group stories that developed the above projects.

### **LESLEY SIMPSON, KEEPER OF COLLECTIONS, DOWN COUNTY MUSEUM**

Lesley is Keeper of Collections at Down County Museum, where she has been working since 1986. She began her career as a librarian in Yorkshire but after graduating from Queen's University in 1975 she worked as an archaeologist on sites in Staffordshire, Cornwall, London, North Wales, Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire and Carrickfergus. While writing up the results of the last site she was based in the Ulster Museum, where there were great opportunities to research ceramics, which remains a specialist interest.

Publications include archaeological papers as well as articles and books based on the Down County Museum Collection. The most recent is a catalogue of the museum's fine art collection.

#### The Down County Museum Photographic Collection: 50,000 images from the late nineteenth century to the present day

Established in 1981, the museum collects objects, photographs and information relating to County Down. There is no date limitation but we concentrate mainly on human history. The photographic archive comprises about 50,000 images – glass plates, film negatives, prints and digital, dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

In many cases, we don't know who the photographers were. However, there are substantial collections by Thomas Gribben of Loughinisland, Pat Hudson of Kilkeel, Cecil Newman of Belfast and Dick Jennings, Daniel J McNeil and Eric Malone, all of Downpatrick. Since 1981, the museum's own photographers have been adding to the archive with more recent images as well as copying old ones.

The museum has a planned digitisation programme, in order to make images more accessible. In addition to their use in exhibitions, the website and for other organisations and members of the public we have a very active publication programme. Examples of this can be seen in three volumes of the Museum's yearbook, *Down Survey – Our DJ, Photographs by D J McNeill, Down on the Farm* and *Inside Story, the photographs of Thomas Gribben of Loughinisland*.

This presentation will illustrate not only the content of the archive but how the museum cares for, and makes the collection accessible.



### **NATASHA MARTIN, DARAC**

Natasha has been working in and around the museum sector for the past 4 years, and this year took a year to go back to university and complete a Masters in Digital Humanities at NUI Maynooth, my special interest being Local & Social Irish History. Prior to this, Natasha worked as an intern in Monaghan County Museum, where she got her taste for digitisation. Darac is a specialist museum picture framing business, based in Co. Monaghan.

### Beyond the image - the real story of Digitisation

Digitisation is the new buzz word in the culture and heritage sector, with more and more university departments and research groups looking at the benefits of this relatively new technique and what it can offer to us in the business of preserving the past. Natasha Martin will show that digitisation need not be an overly costly exercise and can be done on a small scale as and when it suits your institution.

She will look at two case studies; first the digitisation of a 5000 piece photographic slide collection in Monaghan County Museum, and secondly the digitisation of a 10 year 19th century landed estate rent book, she will bring you through what is involved in the digitisation of these objects, and others like them, and what it can mean to an institution. Finally, Natasha will give you an insight into what she believes will be an integral part of the museums of the future.



#### **DONNA KIERNAN, FREELANCE CURATOR**

Donna Kiernan is a freelance curator specialising in photographic exhibitions and education. She is enrolled in MAVIS and is Curator of Educational Programmes for PhotoIreland. She also created the annual Grad Talks programme, an informal talk programme on photographic theory proposed by recent graduates based on their thesis research. Her exhibition interests involve contemporary photography and photographic practices in Ireland with a particular interest in critical theory and visual literacy through both education and professional development.

### You may document the exhibition, you may not record the experience.

A man walks into an exhibition. Holding the press release, he pauses to read the wall text. He seems comfortable in his surroundings with no trace of apprehension at the complex imagery around him. He pauses briefly to take in the space and moves to the appropriate position, taking care to begin at the beginning. After a brief moment of squinting at the image he leans back and it begins. His hand closes around the lens of his digital SLR, maintaining his footing, he arches back in order to fill the frame and click. Shuffling toward the next image he disregards its value until the third image and once again – snap. Captured. So it continues until he is sated.

We possess the ability to record our every whim but how is this photography effecting our ability to meaningfully engage with exhibitions? Has the opportunity to possess an artwork on individual terms broken boundaries in encouraging new audiences or are we indulging a new barrier between the viewer and the work? Should photography be deterred or encouraged? Could we stop it if we tried? Are we recording an experience or documenting an exhibition and who, if anyone, is benefiting?