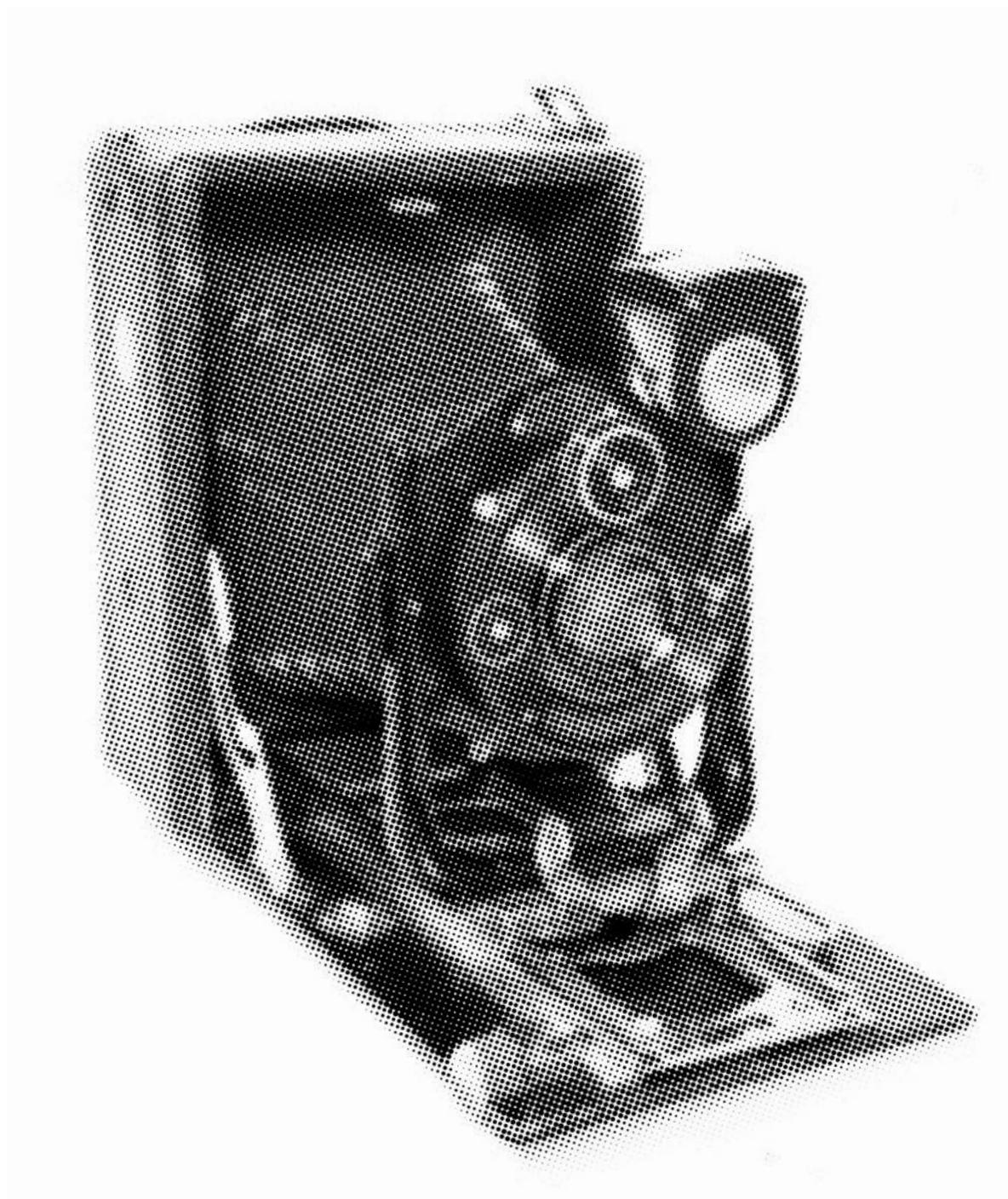


**In search of Sydney J Gearing
by Alan J Ward**

**Engagement, connection, memory
and a common cultural heritage**

In conjunction with:

Apple Blossom Court
Wallasey Masonic Hall
Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club
Liverpool Pilots and
Liverpool Pilots Retired Division
Grange Rifle and Pistol Club
Williamson Art Gallery & Museum



Using a rediscovered 98-year-old camera that documented a 1900s lost family archive of glass negatives, **Place** is the engagement strand of **Photographs from Another Place** at Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, Birkenhead, England | 6 December 2019 – 2 February 2020

Right: Priestley studio portrait of Sydney J Gearing. This is a copy Sydney made of an original print from a sitting at Priestleys. The original was taken in 1914 when he was 16, and is the equivalent of a graduation photograph as he left Wallasey Grammar School. This photograph informed the recreated pop-up studio I took to all the engagements.



Below: Alice Gearing. Hand coloured print from Priestley Studios sitting.

In an attempt to create a more realistic image, photographers and artists would hand-colour monochrome photographs to achieve this effect. It is possible in this instance that either Sydney or in fact Alice herself might have created this, as there is evidence of uncoloured prints within their collection.



Using the camera

After some experimenting, it was clear the camera still functioned and the paper, some dated from between the Wars, still produced an intriguing and beguiling result.

The challenge, and it has been just that, of using an old analogue plate camera, and not knowing if the images have been successful until developed, has in all honesty been a stressful process, and sometimes not wholly successful.

Because it was simply too expensive to make new bespoke glass photographic plates, I needed a more manageable process and with the help of heritage photography specialist, Tony Richards, we developed a set of holders inserted into the slides to use contemporary paper negatives. I also acquired a few more vintage backs to enable me to shoot 12 images without having to change paper. In many cases I've had to lock myself in blacked out cellars, toilets and cupboards whilst on location, in order to reload the backs and continue shooting. All of which has added to the collective conversation!

The exhibition prints and the scans in this newspaper are all contact prints made using Sydney's original paper, and I hope he would have approved of their final use and display in a gallery he visited in the late '20s and '30s.

2 Alan J Ward

In 2014 I purchased a collection of 1920s glass negatives on a whim, from an eBay seller in Brighton. There are 230+ in total, dating from c.1914 – c.1950s. Through a few clues offered up in the images and the original boxes they came in, I pieced together the beginnings of a substantial family history. The key photographer was Sydney J Gearing, the son of Simeon J Gearing, a manager for the Mersey-based Rea tug boat company.

Simeon was born in London, worked in the East Ham docks as a lighthouse operative (barge-man), married a girl from Wortwell, Norfolk, and moved to the Wirral to be a manager at the shipping company. Sydney was also born in London but grew up on the Wirral, and then worked for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board all his life, a one company man.

I was also born in London, moved to the North-West and my father is a Norfolk boy. Acquiring this collection appears to have been pre-destined.

Through forensic research and an almost voyeuristic obsession with this collection, I began making new photographic work and developed a re-imagined and curated narrative in the form of an installation at a gallery Sydney used to visit – The Williamson.

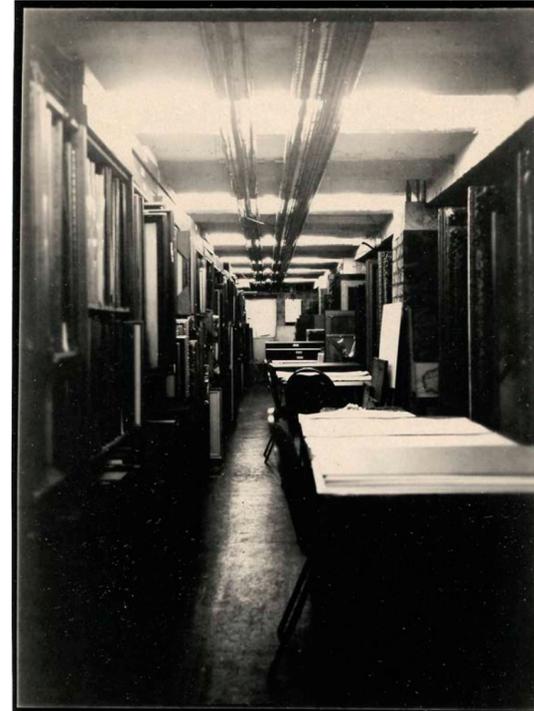
In early 2019 I was granted funding by Arts Council England to take the project and Sydney's original camera to groups on the Wirral who have connections to the stories I had discovered in the photographs. It was an engagement planned around a collective cultural heritage and inspired by the discovery of Sydney's camera three years into my research when I met Ruth, his daughter, still alive and well in Devon. On visiting her and her daughter Susan, I encountered the camera that had photographed the collection. Along with that camera there were boxes of unused photographic papers and some glass negatives. These were gifted to me to see if they were still usable. It seemed a perfect opportunity to use the camera as a focal point for discussing the original archive with people directly touched by some of the stories in the collection.

Sharing the Gearing collection with these groups and discussing their relevance has produced a series of conversations, further research, answers, images and encounters that have become a far greater aspect of the overall project than I ever imagined. The Williamson saw that potential and allocated more space to it, which has allowed me to thoroughly integrate it within the final exhibition plan.

Place is the result of those encounters.

Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

Slatey Road, Birkenhead, Wirral CH43 4UE



Williamson Art Gallery picture store

When Alan Ward first approached the Williamson about this project it seemed straightforward: a collection of negatives of local interest and a contemporary photographer's reaction to them. Artists often work within museums and galleries reinterpreting and reacting to their collections by redisplaying items in unusual or provocative ways, often integrating their own work, to view it all in a new context. This was doing it with a discrete collection, just not one that belongs to the museum.

How wrong I was. Wrong in not realising the full potential of the scheme and in underestimating the extraordinary investigative powers of Alan Ward whose sleuthing has uncovered layers of detail and stories that were waiting to be found.

What has occurred to me most forcefully is that we all have stories. Every family has rumour and legend, often going back generations, that will probably never be confirmed or denied, though the interest in family history fuelled by tv programmes and websites makes discoveries ever more likely. The catalyst for this exhibition, or rather group of exhibitions as there are separate parts that make up the whole, was the random purchase of negatives on eBay. The photographs led to newspaper research, meetings, finding documents, more photographs, objects and real people to illuminate the collection. Alan Ward's interest in exploring the context surrounding these images has allowed their stories to be told. Most of us have photographs, many of which we cannot identify because the people who really knew died before we could ask them. A forensic look at what is really an archive would tell us more, if we only had the tenacity shown by Alan in his research.

The contacts made in the development of *Photographs from Another Place* could not have been predicted. The fact that Alan identified so personally with the locations offered clearly helped spur him on to go further than many would have done. He has found relationships in unexpected places and introduced his project to people unfamiliar with the world of art, photography and design which is his day to day experience. So, by conducting historic research he has put those people in contact with a contemporary artist and given a reason for them to visit an art gallery, quite possibly for the first time. For many, still, the notion of 'art photography' is alien but I have always believed in stepping-stones and leading people by the hand into unfamiliar territory. At the Williamson we have recently taken the presentation of photography exhibitions to a new level and I see this present show as a culmination of ambition, exhibiting historic work with contemporary, and celebrating the local links articulated in this publication.

Museums' stores are veritable treasure houses of great diversity that take a lot of exploring. Having worked in one museum for a long time many of the items and their associated stories are known to me, but we make increasing efforts to communicate them to a wider audience and what is most important is that we never know what is going to bounce back. Every painting, every object, every photograph, has a story to tell but it can be a different story for every visitor because we cannot predict what a viewer brings of themselves. Therein lies the fascination of collecting and interpreting: the stories never actually end.

Colin M Simpson
Principal Museums Officer, Wirral Museums Service

Apple Blossom Court

1 Falkland Road, Wallasey

Apple Blossom Court is a care home in Wallasey providing personal care and support for its residents who have learning disabilities.

It is situated in the striking cream and brown Victorian building which was the former Priestley & Sons Photographic Studios.

Alongside the Arts Council funding, I was also granted financial assistance from The Elephant Trust to make a small artist edition multiple of the portraits on the original Gearing Ilford Tonelle Bromide postcards from the 1940s. As the family did to me, I will gift a boxset to them. I will also donate one to the Williamson's permanent collection (which holds photographs from the original studio), one to my collaborator Tony Richards and retain one for my archive.



Resident: Sandra

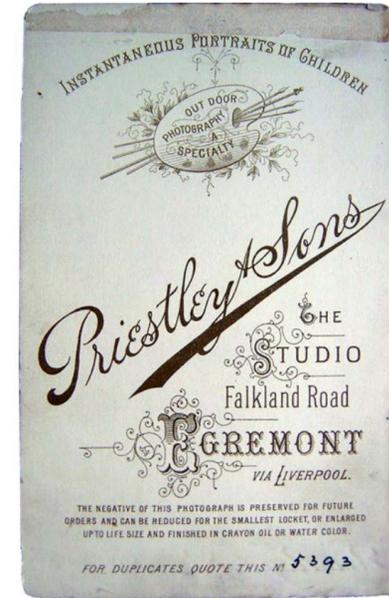
Priestley and Sons

Samuel Priestley (1826 – 1891) and his son Arthur Priestley (1863 – 1940) moved to Wallasey in 1885, establishing a studio on the corner of Falkland Road and Brighton Street. He and his son Arthur, who had completed an apprenticeship at Medrington's, in Bold Street, Liverpool, set about becoming the leading professional photography business in the town, surviving the First World War but folding just before the Second. Their day to day business was primarily concerned with sittings for family groups and events and, being just a few streets away from where the Gearings lived, it was only natural they visited for sittings.

Priestleys also took photographs of many local scenes and they accepted commissions for Cunard White Star and Wallasey Corporation amongst others.

Details taken from historyofwallasey.co.uk

Staff: Alex



Back of a Priestley studio portrait.
Courtesy of Ruth Gearing



Resident: John

Manager: Stephanie



I was approached by Alan Ward regarding his project and was surprised to discover our building's past, especially its significance to the people of Wallasey in the 1900s as a portrait studio of note.

The thought of Alan setting up a photographic studio and bringing the building's former use back to life for a day with our residents was a lovely idea. The afternoon photographic session was engaging for residents and staff alike, as we got to learn about the home's past history.

Setting up the scene for the shoot was an eye opener with the backdrop, and especially learning how the original camera worked.

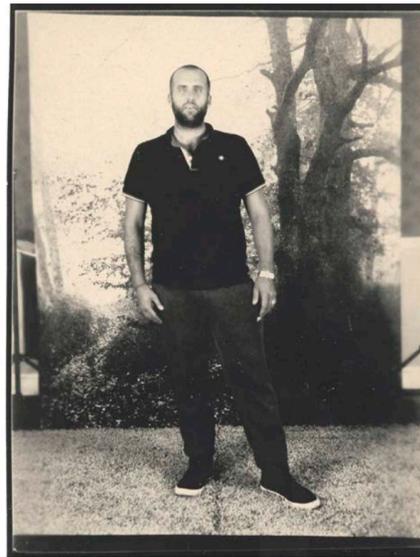
The afternoon was spent talking about the history of the building and Sydney Gearing whilst having our pictures taken, learning that the space we were in was once where they had processed the negatives in darkrooms.

We all felt we knew the house a little better and we're all looking forward to visiting the gallery and seeing the results.

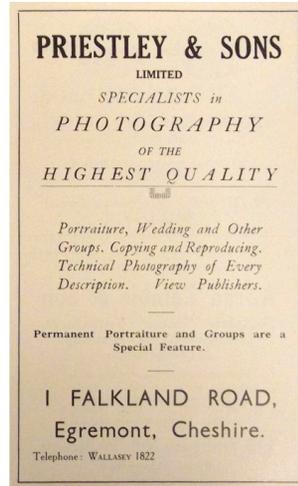
Stephanie Mills



Resident: Carol



Staff: Chris



Newspaper advert



Priestley studio portrait of Hilda, Simeon and Alice. Courtesy of Ruth Gearing

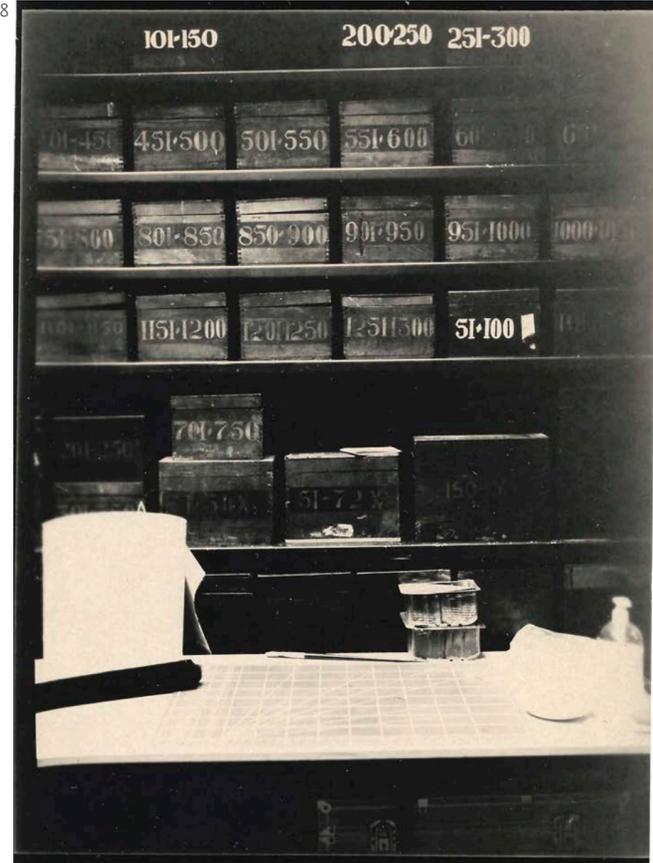


Resident: Laura

I'd always hoped to have the opportunity to make a self portrait as Sydney within the former Priestley building where his 'graduation' picture of 1914 was taken.

After I had taken everyone's pictures - splitting my suit trousers beyond saving in the process - Chris and resident John assisted me in making this photograph.



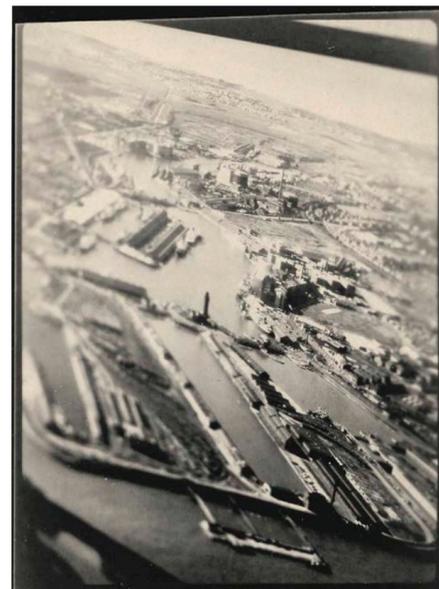


In the depths of the Williamson Gallery, there is a wall of boxes with stenciled numbers – it is an archive of glass photographic plates from the Cammell Laird shipyards. They reminded me strongly of a book I own called *Library of Dust* by David Meisel.

The contents of the Williamson boxes is a great deal less traumatic, but they also have a sublime beauty. Meisel like Sebald (another favourite author of mine), references Sir Thomas Browne who says 'all knowledge is enveloped in darkness. What we perceive are no more than isolated lights in the abyss of ignorance, in the shadow-filled edifice of the world. We study the order of things, but we cannot grasp their innermost essence.'

Quote from *Urn Burial*

This framed photograph hidden away in the far corner of the Williamson picture store, was a reminder that this was the place that Sydney presided over during his working life. But also, it's such an incredible reference to the ever changing and evolving landscape on the Wirral.



Wallasey Masonic Hall

Manor Road, Liscard

The Wallasey Masonic Hall was constructed and opened in 1911 as a purpose-built Masonic Hall. It was designed by J.W.B. Harding an architect who had a particular forte in the design of cinemas, which during the Edwardian period were then replacing music halls. That Edwardian grandeur can be seen in the interiors of the principal rooms of Wallasey Masonic Hall.

My first engagement with the Wallasey Masonic Hall began back in 2015, when I made contact, to try and work out whether Simeon, Sydney's father, was a member of Lodge 4312, which was referenced in the archive photographs.

Grosvenor Lodge Grand Officer, Hugh Fleetwood replied to say that Simeon hadn't been a Mason there but that his son had. This then led to me giving a talk at a lodge meeting about the photographic collection, and so began a series of interactions, that included a heritage week event, the loaning of several works by the Williamson to the Hall and a collaboration on an artist film.*

There was a particular Cabinet Card photograph from Ruth Gearing's archive of an unnamed Mason (see overleaf), that I was keen to know more about and respond to. Hugh suggested that I contact the Museum of Freemasonry in London to see if they could help identify him.

Hugh, Ian and Trevor had been so helpful with my research and had been generous and open to my questions around ritual and performance – an interest from my Catholic upbringing no doubt – that I was keen to photograph them in the style of the Cabinet Card with Sydney's camera, and in the case of Hugh and Ian with their partners, the unseen 'better' halves.

* see the film 'Some Thoughts on Masonry and its Degrees' showing as part of the exhibition or at vimeo.com/266526746



Susanne and Hugh Fleetwood

Married to a Mason

Thirty three years ago I met and subsequently married a Freemason.

I had several misconceptions about Freemasonry; funny handshakes, rolled up trouser legs, unbuttoned shirts not to mention the goat!

In the early days I pestered my husband relentlessly about this secret society as I thought it was a weird boys' club.

It is a boys' club that provides a setting for like-minded gents to meet, enjoy each others company and most importantly raise money for charity which is not that weird. Surely, that is the same for such organisations as The Round Table, The Rotary or even the Women's Institute – so why the secrecy?

Comparisons are made between Masonry and Religion and as any church goer will confirm, the Mass is a celebration of God and Christianity, the congregation sit, stand and kneel at certain intervals after particular cues and the guy running the show tends to wear a dress! Masonry is similar in that, although not a religious society, it is steeped in tradition and basically re-enacts the story of ancient times and the building of temples, when illiterate stone masons needed a sign in the form of a handshake to prove they were 'time served' in their profession.

The rolling up of the trouser leg is to show that the joining member is a free-man (not wearing a shackle) and finally the baring of the left breast shows that the member is indeed a man (and not a Woman from the Institute!).

Masonry has suffered blows to its reputation which is unfortunate as the Society raises huge amounts of money for charity and unlike other organisations these funds are raised from members themselves – you do not see Masons advertise or ask the public to contribute.

It is a hobby that takes a lot of work, time and commitment (sometimes more than I would like) however, having the secrets is probably one of the reasons that sets it apart and makes it feel special to its members.

Masonry, like our nation, has evolved over the last 30 years becoming more family orientated and, having met so many Masons and their partners during this time, I have seen proof that these are everyday people raising money for charity whilst enjoying the social interaction (where no goat has ever been present or harmed!).

Susanne Fleetwood – Oct 2019



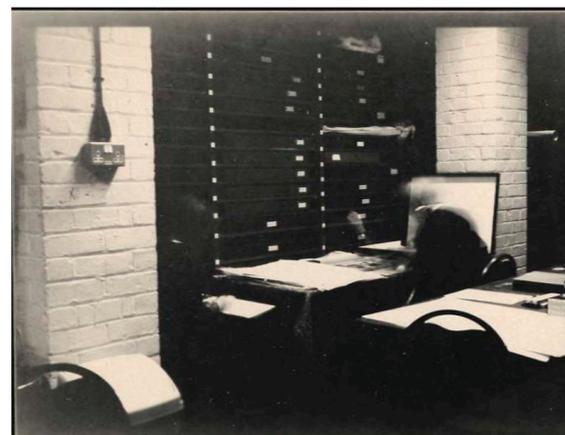
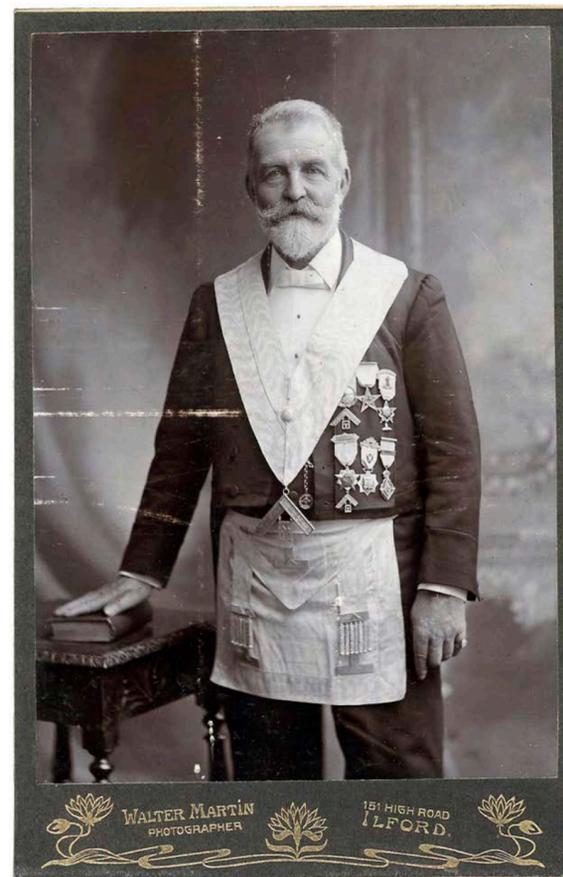
Colin Andrew Dallinger and Ian Dallinger

Simeon J Gearing and Zodiac Lodge, Lodge 2615
 Simeon was a member of a lodge in London until he moved to Birkenhead. He continued to pay his subscriptions for some time afterwards but didn't join a lodge locally. With the help of the Museum of Freemasonry, Covent Garden, and the possible clue that Zodiac Lodge might be linked to the photograph, certain medals were identified which suggest the portrait is of W.Bro James Boulton, G.P. What we don't know is whether he was just a friend or the Mason who recommended him for membership of the brotherhood.

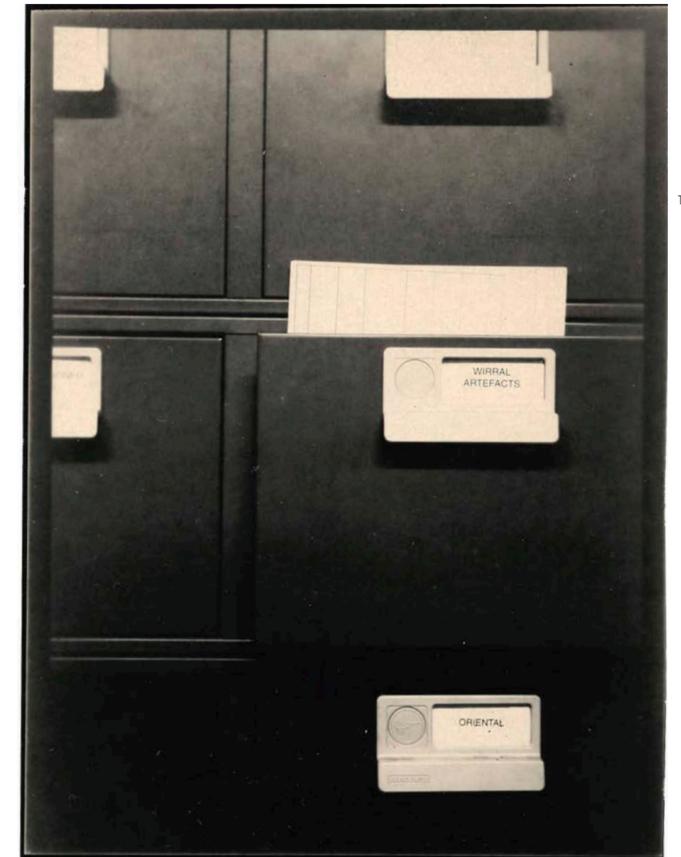


Trevor Harrison

Cabinet Card, studio portrait by Walter Martin, photographer. Courtesy of Ruth Gearing



One can only imagine the delights that are catalogued in the drawer marked Wirral Artefacts.



Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club

Central Park, Wallasey

Parkfield Liscard was founded as St John's (Egremont) Cricket Club in 1907, and so the fortunes of this team and the team Sydney played for overlap. Sydney played for Liscard St Mary's and his grammar school old boys' team during the late '20s and early '30s and would have known many of St John's players.

There were in fact four teams that frequented Central Park at one time, with their outfields overlapping on match days. It must have been quite chaotic.

On visiting the current Parkfield Liscard clubhouse, team pictures from the inter-war years were discovered. Within these were several familiar faces from Sydney's team photographs.

Liscard St Mary's underwent an upheaval in 1934 when they left the church affiliation and changed their name to Liscard Central following a row over the sale of Irish sweepstake tickets.

Parkfield and Liscard Central merged in 2004 to form Parkfield Liscard.



Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club First XI, 3 August 2019

Back row: Uzair Shafiq, Nadeera Rupasinghe, Gareth Roberts, Zaighum Abbas, Josh Courtney, Kamran Hussain
Front row: Niaz Khan, Steve Lewis, Patrick Finnegan, Nuwan Chathuvanga, Grant Hughes

With the assistance of Chris Davies at the club, we identified where several images from Sydney's archive were taken, as Liscard St Mary's wicket no longer exists. This informed the location of the team picture.

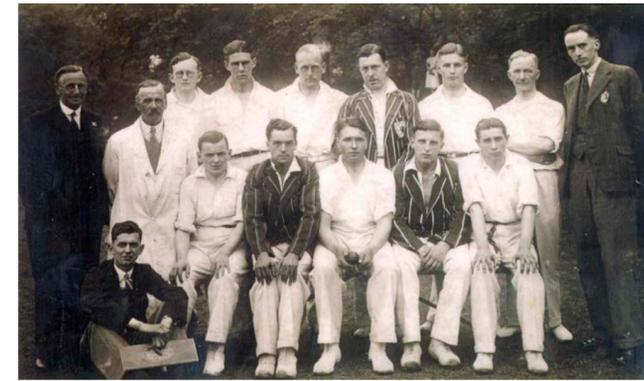


My day with the First XI was not altogether successful, they suffered a batting collapse that meant the match was pretty much lost before it was their turn to bowl, I couldn't photograph the players quick enough as they were skittled out. I felt my presence had brought them bad luck.

But also my limited camera skills let me down, as the individual portraits were underexposed. I discovered that the shutter was a little inconsistent in its timing compared to my exposure calculations, a harsh lesson learnt.

In addition, whilst taking the team picture I caused a light leak as I took the slide off the camera back, however the overall picture was successful.

Using the website colourise.sg, I experimented with how it might have looked, had it been hand coloured at the time.



St John's (Egremont) Cricket Club First XI, 1937

Standing: unknown, P. Hale (umpire), G. T. Smith, Ken Corfield, unknown, unknown, unknown, W. D. McGregor, unknown (treasurer)

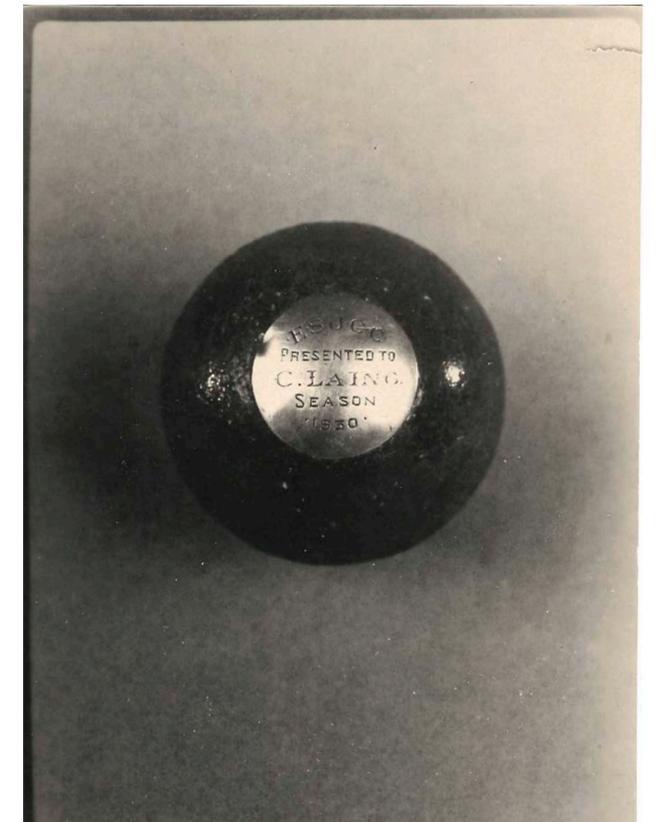
Sitting: unknown (scorer), unknown, C. Lane, D. Ellis (captain), unknown, Bowen Evans

Image courtesy of Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club



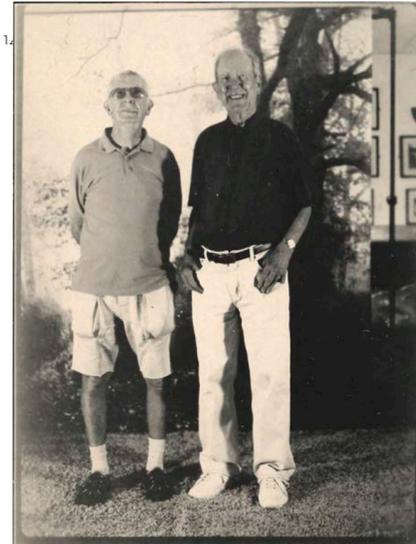
G. T. Smith with Sydney

Ken Corfield with Sydney. Possibly in a Wallasey Grammar School Old Boys team dating from 1926



This ball was a cricket prize awarded to C. Laing in 1930 or Charlie Laing who was one of Egremont St John's notable players between the wars. Laing appears on the above 1937 team photograph along with Sydney's other identified team mate, although he has been incorrectly identified as C. Lane.

Cricket ball courtesy of Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club



John and Norman Costain

Saturday 3 August
A conversation with Norman and John Costain

Alan Ward: Just talk about the people that you know in these two pictures, and how you know them.

Norman Costain: Well it was way before our time, and the ones I'm looking at from you I don't recognise facially and sadly the names aren't there as I think I'd recognise some names.

A: This photograph is late twenties, perhaps slightly later. I believe these are of the Liscard St Mary's team before it folded. I was able to identify Corfield and Smith from the pictures hanging in your clubhouse.

John Costain: Geoff Smith obviously played pre-war as he's in the 1937 photograph, and played post-war and Norman and I both played in the same team as him. He was a businessman, and as a matter of interest, he had a big Bentley, and used to take about eight of the team round to matches because of the size of this Bentley he had. He was very involved with St John's Church, and he was a member, and played post-war. He was still involved with the club up until 1962 when we decided to break away from St John's church so we could play Sunday cricket. Geoff was a staunch member of the church so he then resigned from the club in 1962.

N: Yeah there were about half a dozen who did that, the older blokes.

J: The majority did carry on – Geoff was the only one I can remember who opted to break away from the club completely.

A: Just describe what we have outside in terms of the pitch. There were more than one club playing here pre-second war. I was told there were three pitches?

J: There were four actually.

N: After the war, cricket was first played here after the war in forty-nine, during the war it was all dug up for allotments. And then I think it was at least half were church members, and then slowly it seemed to go away from the church.

J: There were four actual pitches before the war, and three from 1949. There were three until 1970. A team called Egremont left. Funnily enough their pavilion burned down. Our pavilion burned down. And Liscard Central's pavilion got burned down, all in the 70s. Luckily we rebuilt ours, Egremont CC left, and there were then two teams playing side to side with the wickets as a boundary, so we ran across each other's pitches. Then when we amalgamated with Liscard in 2004, they became our third team and then there was one pitch from that time onwards.

LISCARD ST. MARY'S II. v. SILCOCK'S.		Oxton's attained 1 home fix whom the Wickenheer recalled, the Com wickets for batsmen 1 R. P. alone of double fig waving came qui and Mid second of dismissed later, the A. R. S maining for 54, in minutes. for eight parativel for 18 ru Scores --	
12	N Fielding b Riding	2	W A Taylor, W Dodd, Bebbington, and N Riding did not bat.
14	C Mitchell b Hughes	4	
7	R H Poole b Riding	6	
113	R D Hartley b Riding	8	
2	S J Gearing b Hughes	1	
143	H Lewis b Hughes	2	
87	W J Jones b Riding	0	
1	E C King b Riding	0	
8	J H Roberts b Riding	0	
241	J Howlands not out	4	
65, A y, and	E Tomlinson b Riding	1	
	Extras	1	
	Total	29	
SILCOCK'S.		R P F S M F A W N Nutter K E F C A A R S Wils T C V H Gos C J B R W I	
	S Glover st Gearing b Tomlinson	28	
	A E Knight b Jones	1	
	J Bradshaw c Jones b Tomlinson	11	
	H K Bayliss b Jones	4	
	F J Hughes lbw b Lewis	5	
	J K Paton lbw b Lewis	6	
	Brookes not out	2	
	Extras	7	
	Total (6 wks.)	64	
ST. JOHN'S (EGREMONT) II. v. KNOWSLEY RECS. II.			
	Played at Knowsley on Saturday. St. John's batted first, and scored 82, the chief scorers being Winstanley (20) and Dawson (18). Knowsley scored 16, Costain taking 6 wickets for 7 runs, and Amson 2 for 7. Scores: --		

The Wallasey News from research at Wirral Archives

A: So going back to our man with the Bentley. You said he was a local businessman. What did he do?

N: I can't remember.

J: We're not sure. He worked in town and he played midweek. He was always suited and tied.

N: Yeah it was always known that he had a good job in town, you know.

J: But going back to Liscard St Mary's. After the First World War, two Costains played for St John's: that was John Lawrence known as Jack Costain, and Walter. John Lawrence was our father... he always told us he was a bowler. On the bottom of an article you shared, it said "Costain took six wickets for seven runs" and that's our father, Jack Costain!

A: I will have to go back and look through my research for that one.

J: It was on the bottom of one of your sheets, and it just mentions Liscard St Mary's playing a team and they were bowled out for 26. And this Costain – they didn't give his first name – but we presume it was dad, because the other brother wasn't a bowler.

The last Costain – we had five brothers – and we all played for St John's and then Parkfield – and the last Costain to play was Alan Costain, and incidentally he was 67, and he ended up with 1100 wickets for the club, so that was exceptional. I recollect that the last time he played was 2007, so that was the last time a Costain played.

Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club Second XI team members, 24 August 2019



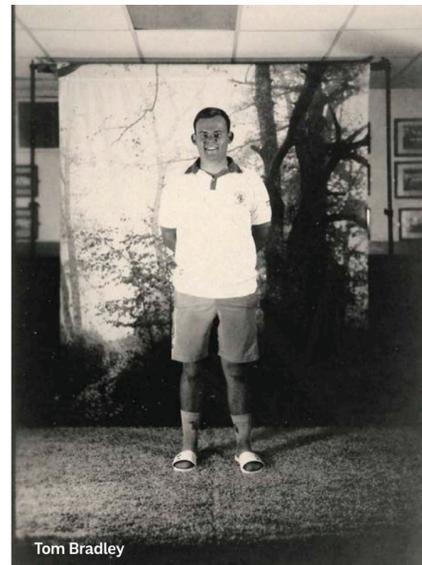
Daz Smith



Rob Courtney



Daz Craven



Tom Bradley



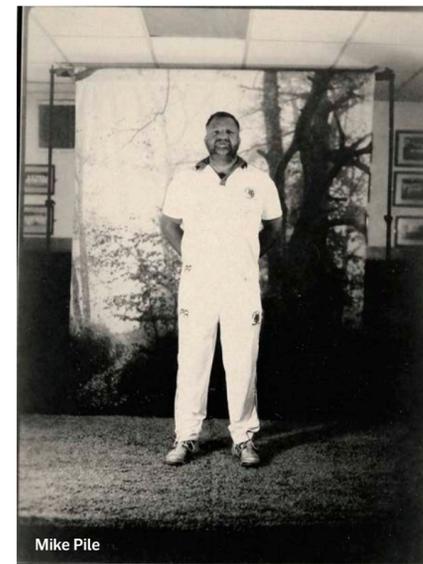
John Warrington



Ben Kelly



Josh Courtney



Mike Pile



Ben Ellis

Liverpool Pilots

Woodside Business Park

Liverpool Pilots is an Industrial and Provident Society founded in 1766 and re-established in 1997 owned by the individual pilot member shareholders, working as a co-operative to provide Pilotage Services within the compulsory Pilotage district of the Port of Liverpool under a contract for services with the port owners Peel, who are also the Competent Harbour Authority.

During my Gearing family research there have been many interesting maritime stories revealed. One of significance is the family connection to the story of John Lewis, who was the father of Sydney's wife Hannah.

16 Sydney probably never knew Lewis as he died tragically in 1917. There is a blog about his fate on the website blog liverpoolmuseums.org.uk *Remembering the loss of the Alfred H. Read pilot boat, 1917*. This is an edited extract.

John Lewis was one of the Masters of the Alfred H. Read, a pilot boat that had a dual role during the war. She acted as a pilot boat, but was also used by the Royal Navy Examination Service, screening ships at the Mersey Bar before they were allowed to enter Liverpool waters. This meant that in addition to her usual contingent of crew and pilots, there were extra wartime crew on board – Marconi wireless operators, Examination Officers and Royal Garrison Artillery army signallers.

On the night of 28 December, 1917, the Alfred H. Read was on duty at the Mersey Bar. It is likely that most of the pilots on board would have been asleep, awaiting the arrival of inward bound ships. It was a bitterly cold but clear night, with a fresh breeze and choppy sea. At about 3.15am, the ship struck a mine that had been laid by a U-boat. Pilot boat no.3 Queen Victoria was half a mile away, and her crew heard the huge explosion.

The lights of the Alfred H. Read had disappeared. The Queen Victoria hastened to her location, but in just a short few minutes, the Alfred H. Read had sunk, only the top of her main mast was visible above the waterline.

The Queen Victoria picked up three survivors. These were junior Marconi Radio Officer Edward Becket (who had been in the temporary radio shack on the top deck of the pilot boat) and pilot apprentice (also known as a boathand) John Sweetman. Boathand Alf Davies was picked up but sadly later died.

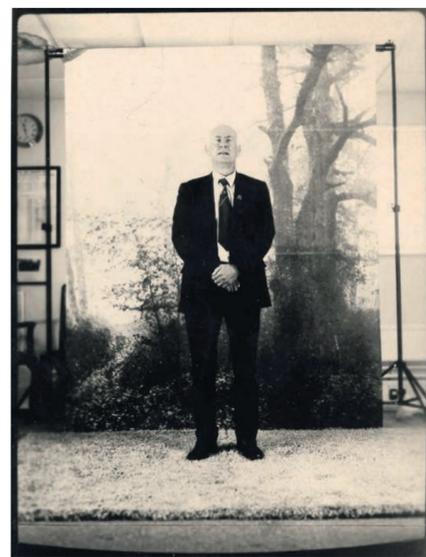
Tragically, everyone else on board lost their lives including John Lewis. Most sources list 39 men. From the pilot service, this included 19 pilots (including the two ships masters), eight boathands, two engineers, three firemen, and the cook. The Royal Navy personnel lost included two Examination Officers, two Signallers, and two Marconi radio operators. It is possible that there was an additional Marconi radio operator on board, which would make 40 lost lives.

The Pilot Service had its own Benevolent fund – for instances where a pilot died in service, so they could provide some money to the pilot's widow and family. Such a huge disaster like this (The Liverpool Pilots Service suffered the worst wartime losses of any pilot service in the country in the First World War) and the financial implication was such that there were not the funds to cover all those affected. But in a mark of the respect to which the pilot service was held locally, over £5000 pounds (the equivalent of over £200,000 today) was raised from local ship owners which allowed all the families to receive assistance.

The Benevolent Fund register has been loaned to the Williamson and features in a vitrine in the adjacent gallery.



This portrait of John Lewis is from Ruth Gearing's family archive is the same as the one used in the exhibition 'In safe hands' at Merseyside Maritime Museum in 2016-2017.



John Slater, Jaime Curry, Gavin Hoe-Richardson

Kevin Walsh



Matthew Henderson, David Evans, Alastair Singleton

Martin James, Paul Schoneveld, Iolo Thomas



Martin Baxter, Chris Thomas

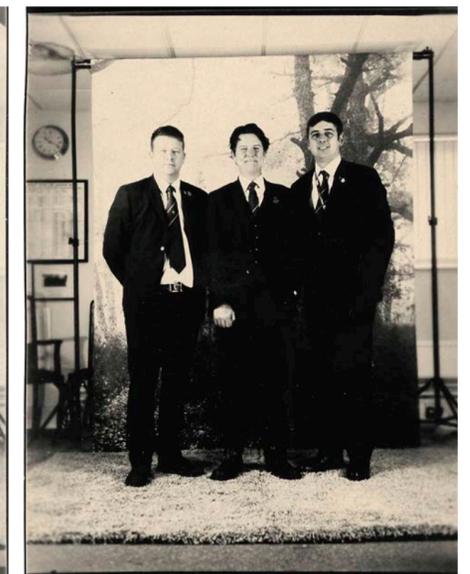


Liam Thompson, Chris Gatenby, Mark Arnold

David Roberts, Tom Farrell

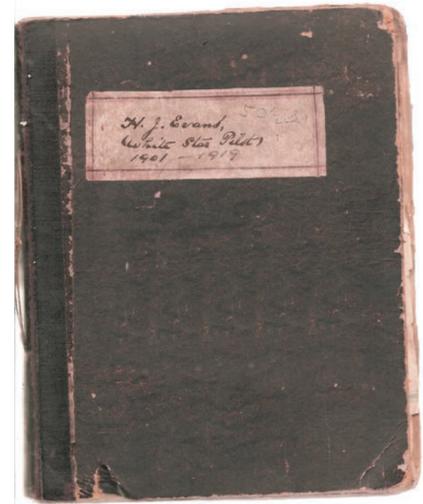


Robert Irvine, Julian Gram, Scott Birrell



When visiting the offices of the Liverpool Pilots to meet Alastair Singleton, I was immediately drawn to the framed collaged 'muster' portraits of former pilots. There is one that features John Lewis from the early 1900s, which has been loaned for the exhibition.

My photography session was a mustering of the pilots at their monthly meeting.



Within the artefacts and records that the Retired Pilots Division hold, there are scans of a scrapbook by H. J. Evans, a friend and colleague of John Lewis. Within its pages there are pictures of Lewis visiting his family home, his mother, wife and Hannah Lewis's older sister, Elizabeth (Bett). These photographs were taken before Hannah was born.

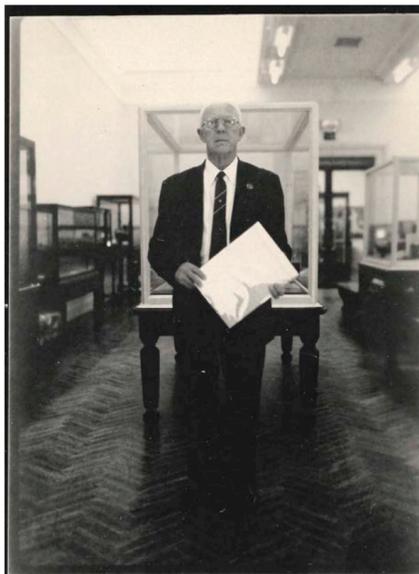
Apparently John Lewis sailed to Australia before becoming a Master locally. This might possibly explain the rather lovely framed lithograph displayed in this exhibition from Ruth's family archive. Maybe Simeon and John knew of each other and that in part explains the move north to the Wirral.



During a meeting with Geoff Topp, I was presented with a box of glass negatives, the same size as Sydney's. They are of Liverpool and North Wales – distant echoes of themes in Sydney's collection. The quality of the negatives is of a professional photographer, who is sadly unnamed. Each is individually enveloped, indicating location and in most cases date and exposure times.

Interestingly, two show Dale Street in Liverpool with the 1902 coronation decorations very evident. Just up on the left of the Dale Street image (above) number 81 Dale Street is where Sydney's camera was purchased from W. H. Tomkinson, a photographic dealer at that time.

As retired pilots, it seemed appropriate to meet within the Williamson's permanent maritime gallery for a portrait session.

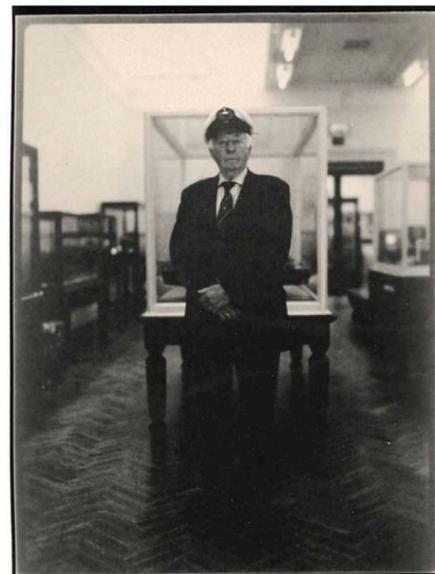


Geoff Topp with local chart



Bernard Dabner

Ron Bradford, with his scale model of the Liverpool Pilot Boat No.1 'Sir Thomas Brocklebank'



Geoff Rafferty



Ron Bradford's Mariners portable brass sundial compass

Grange Rifle and Pistol Club

West Kirby, Wirral

The Grange Rifle and Pistol Club is a private members shooting club situated in West Kirby on the Wirral. The club was established over 70 years ago and is still welcoming newcomers to shooting sports today.

The Grange is a Home Office approved club, and is affiliated to most of the major shooting organisations. Grange offers many types of shooting including air rifle, pistol, gallery rifle, smallbore rifle, fullbore rifle and archery.

They have NRA approved Range Officers and experienced members who offer full training and assistance to all new members.

As a private members club, they are run by the members for the members, and nobody gets paid. All fees are put back into the club to make it better for the members.

It is the only club that still exists on the Wirral like the one Sydney was a member of in the '20s and '30s.

When I first gave a talk about the project to club members, several remembered shooting at Breck Quarry, the outdoor range that Wallasey Rifle Club used, and they were able to immediately answer one long-standing puzzle for me.

There are a series of rifle and pistol photographs that appear to document a collection. These to my untrained eye appeared to be quite an interesting and varied assortment of armaments and one that probably couldn't have been a personal collection of Sydney's. Through competition match reports I'd identified that a fellow team member was W. C. Carswell, a local gun maker of some repute. I felt that Sydney had probably photographed his collection for him. However I was unable to find any existing photographs of him to refer to and compare with the team shots until one member of Grange was able to point him out.

Members' knowledge of historic guns enabled me to identify and list the different makes in many of Sydney's photographs. There was much discussion and debate around particular modifications and refinements over several weeks.

On the following spread, an example of one of these photographs is reproduced alongside two photographs showing items from club member's collections.

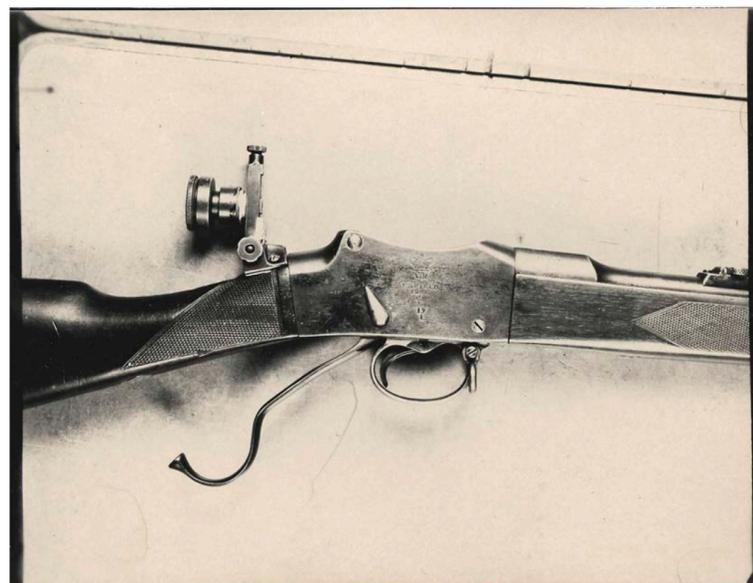


Sydney Gearing won the 'Ambidextrous Challenge'* organised by the Liverpool Miniature Rifle Association in its inaugural year, 1929. With the enthusiasm of Roland Marlow and the club, an anniversary competition was arranged, loosely based on the original rules. When Sydney won it he was positioned prone (lying down), Roland felt it would be better to shoot standing, but follow all other rules as we understood them.

In the spirit of the competition I acquired a Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs silver medal from 1929 as the competition prize.

* see exhibition cabinet in adjacent gallery for more on Wallasey Rifle Club.

The Martini Henry IV rifle. Courtesy of Peter T



A history of a club member's competition gun: The Martini Henry IV rifle.

The Martini Henry rifle was first issued to the British Army in 1871 until replaced by the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield in 1895.

This rifle is a Mark 4 made at Royal Small Arms Factory Enfield in 1886 as per the markings on the right hand side of the action and was at one time issued to the Kings Royal Rifle Corps as also seen on the butt branding: V 3 KRR 59!

[Queen's Crown]
VR
Enfield
1886
Ordnance Acceptance mark
IV (model type mark 4)
I

On the left hand side of the action it says:
Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs
Match [emblem] Rifle
motto

Converted by The London Small Arms Company Ltd
for The Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs

It has been converted from its 557/450 military calibre to .22 for The Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs* by The London Small Arms Company Ltd as a match rifle, to conform to the Society's rules and be suitable for competition shooting.

* The Society was formed in 1903 and in 1947 it changed to the NATIONAL SMALL-BORE RIFLE ASSOCIATION (N.S.R.A.) and the London Small Arms Co. Ltd. traded from 1866 until 1930 and it is most likely the conversion took place some time between the early years of the Society and the First World War.



Sydney J Gearing
'Ambidextrous Challenge'
1929, score unknown



Andy Theobald
Winner of the 'Ambidextrous Challenge' 2019, with a score of 79 / 100



²⁴ Acknowledgements

To all participants, thank you for your time and the sharing of your knowledge and enthusiasm. For widening the scope of my understanding of Sydney's place in the geography of the Wirral, I'll always be very grateful.

Stephanie Mills and everyone at Apple Blossom Court

Wallasey Masonic Hall, in particular Hugh Fleetwood, Ian Dallinger and Trevor Harrison

Chris Davies and Parkfield Liscard Cricket Club

Alastair Singleton, Liverpool Pilots and Geoff Topp, Chairman, Liverpool Pilots Retired Division

Roland Marlow and everyone at Grange Rifle and Pistol Club

Colin Simpson and team at Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

David Gaffney, Arts Council England for advice and support in realising the funding for the engagement

Elephant Trust for their financial support in realising the pop-up Edwardian photography studio and the creation of an artist limited edition multiple

Tony Richards for his zen-like heritage photographic knowledge and darkroom support throughout, I simply couldn't have done it without you!

And finally, thank you to Linda and Seb, for assisting on the engagements, and documenting the process as I struggled with the camera.

alanjward.co.uk

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WILLIAMSON



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