

# The Diaries of Charles Johnstone - 1849 to 1884

By Ron Cosens (PCCGB Member No.1)

Family history researcher, James Robertson from Anglesey, tracked down the Victorian diaries of his great grandfather, Charles Johnston(e) in County Down. The diaries started just after Charles' 14th birthday and continued until he was 49 years old. Charles died in 1913 but any diaries he kept after 1884 are missing.

The life the diaries describe is cultured, uninhibited and unconventional. After completing his studies in Dublin and after the early death of his parents when he was just 17, he acted as land agent for his brother William, who inherited the family estate in Lecale, County Down in Ireland.

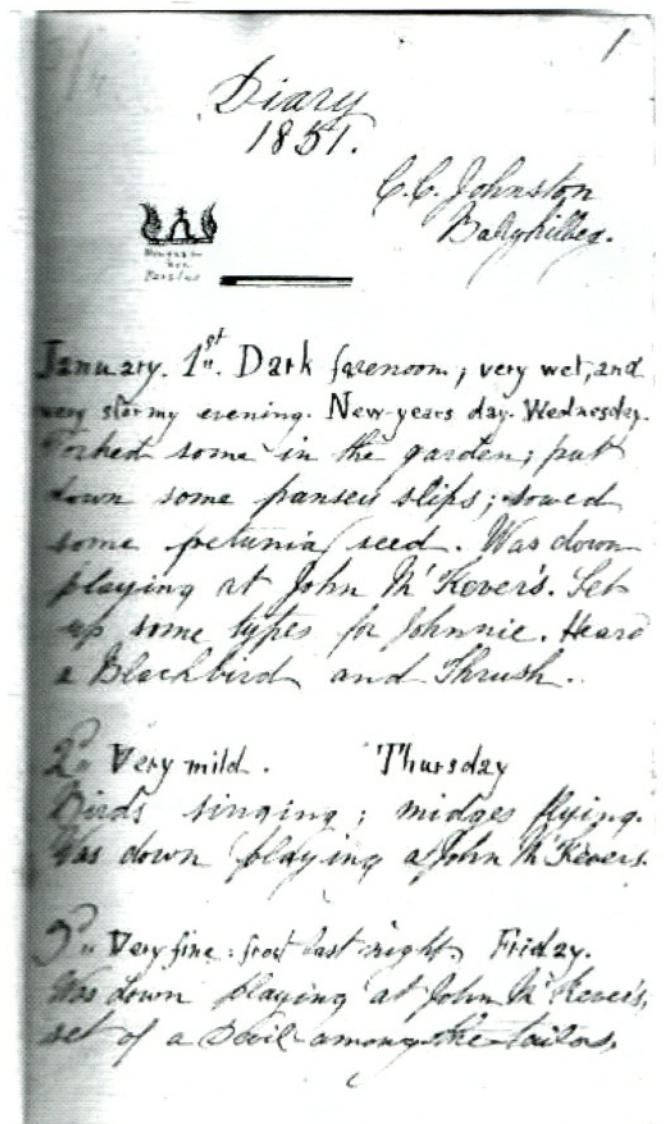
In 1863 he came into money when his grandmother, who lived in Stirling in Scotland, died and this allowed him to set up his 'gentleman's residence' near his brother's estate, close to Downpatrick. He joined the South Down Militia, which gave him a very part-time job. He enjoyed parties and drink, worked hard in the interests of family and friends, but devoted most of his energy to his family and to affairs of the heart. He established mistresses at various addresses and had to maintain a web of deception concerning his whereabouts and liaisons. He was constantly on the move, at one time having three establishments in Scotland and one in Belfast.

The childhood diaries were written in notebooks, with illustrations and secret codes which added to their charm. The 1884 diary runs to 42,000 words. He described the weather and recorded meteorological information such as comets and the aurora borealis. The farming practices of the time were described, down to the many varieties of

potatoes grown. Transport played a large part in his life and he witnessed the arrival of new railway lines in County Down and in Scotland. Political conflict, crime, illness and death are among the themes which give the diaries their historical interest.

This article deals only with entries relating to photography.

The diaries mention visits to photographers and reveal what Charles did with some of the portraits that he so treasured.



A page from Johnstone's diary for 1851.

## The Diaries

15th September 1852: "Got a sixpenny likeness of myself in Falkirk"

Charles was just 17 years old.

There is every likelihood that the 'sixpenny likeness' was not a photograph but a silhouette which was either painted or cut from black paper with scissors.

By 1855 an advert from the same person related to PHOTOGRAPHIC portraits but the minimum price was two shillings. These photographic portraits were produced as weak negatives on glass but, when backed with a dark material or black 'paint', they appeared as normal positive images: these were ambrotypes.

6th May 1856: "Went down to Belfast, got a photograph likeness of myself for Grandmother and a pin with my hair for

143  
May 23 MONDAY (143-222) 23 March 1881  
Very fine & warm: strong E. wind.  
Left Gournah by car at 8.30. A.M.  
and on to Glasgow by 9. A.M. (at-  
tention given). Posted a letter I  
had written for Maggie. Then by  
10.30 A.M. train to Glasgow. But  
on my arrival to find in the  
afternoon both Lena and Agnes  
both of whom is still with her out  
for a row in a small boat, round  
near the Brownfields. In the even-  
ing we walked up to Brisbane  
Hill for some eggs; I had tea  
with the Roplewells.

A later diary page





Here is a humorous photograph of Charles Johnstone taken around 1864. 'Ghost' pictures were uncommon and were usually produced as a form of humour. To do this, the photographer took more than one exposure on the same glass plate.

*Grandpapa, and a parcel of other presents to give on my birthday."*

Charles was almost 21 years old and still living in the family home in County Down which his brother William had inherited after the early death of his father in 1853. His grandparents lived in Stirling in Scotland.

Pins for neck ties, cravats etc. were common male items so this may have been what he bought. Hair was a common element of Victorian jewellery and it is believed that Charlie had striking red hair.

The type of photograph mentioned would most likely have been an ambrotype.

*14th May 1856: "Wednesday. Rainy. This is my twenty-first birthday. Gave William a new side-board, and to Haddie a silver flower stand for the centre of the table. Got a ring with the crest from William and Haddie. Got the dining room and drawing room laid out for a party. Had a great display of fireworks in the evening; had singing and some little dancing."*

*23rd May 1857: "Walter Lang took me down to his brother John's house [in Kirkcaldy] to see him take some photographs."*

*25th May 1857: "Was up in Lang's nursery. Went up to the path head*

42, QUEEN STREET, DERBY.

**M**R. SEVILLE respectfully returns thanks for the continued patronage he has received in Derby, and begs to intimate that his stay will now be very short.

EXACT

## LIKENESSES

For Sixpence; beautifully Shaded, 1s. 6d.; extra finish, in Bronze, 2s. Full length Figures, highly-finished in Bronze, 4s. each. Children, full length, 2s. 6d.


MINIATURES ON IVORY, and COLOURED LIKENESSES, at very low charges.

An advert of 1850 states a charge of just six pence.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS, AT REDUCED PRICES,

No. 51, ST. PETER'S STREET, DERBY.

Collodion Portraits from 2s. each, case included.

 Sunshine not required.

The popular carte de visite (cdv) format was not yet readily available in 1855 as it became popular only in 1860.

*with Walter [Lang] and his father to see William Saunderson; he [Lang] has taken to photographing and his flowers are all gone to pot."*

Charles was 22 years old and was staying in Kirkcaldy. It is likely that Lang was a keen amateur photographer even though there were very few amateur photographers at that time.

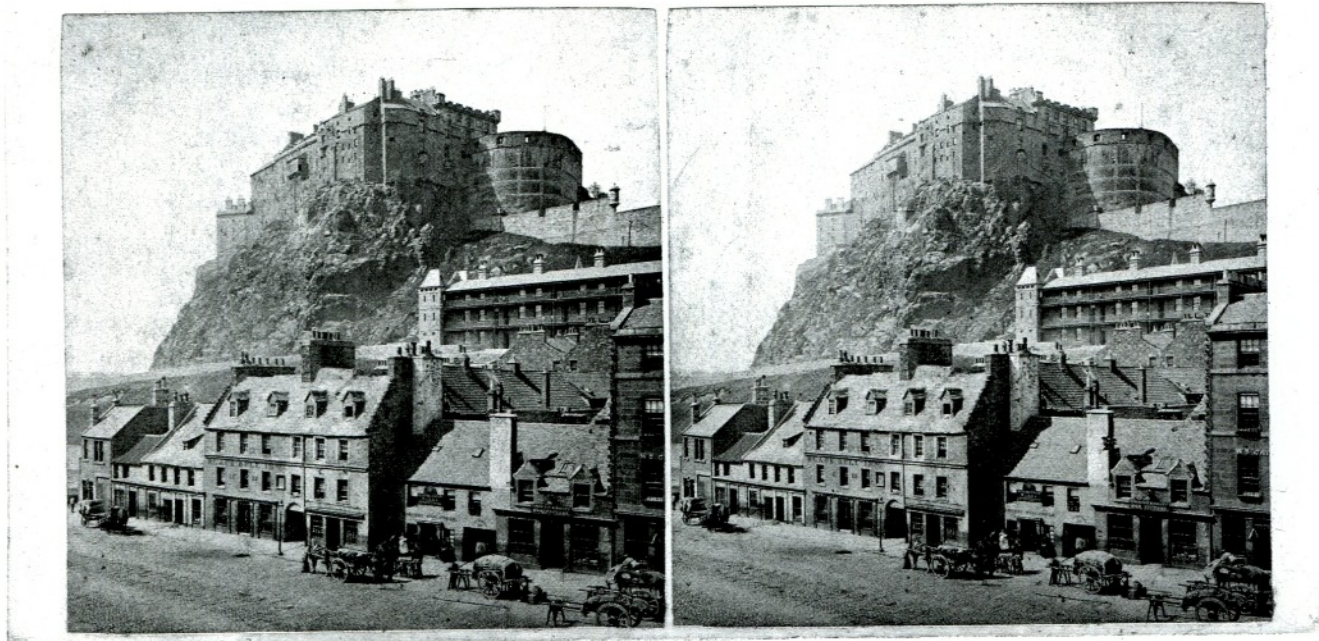
*7th November 1857: "Went into Down. [Downpatrick] Got a photograph of myself taken, also one of Robert Hunter and James Doonagan together. There are two photograph establishments there just now."*

No record has been found of any studios in Downpatrick



Ambrotype in a case.





Stereograph of Edinburgh by G W Wilson & Co.

at that time. It is possible that at least one of the photographers was an itinerant.

*17th November 1857: "Had Waites and Hildyard out to take photographs but the day turned out unfavourable."*

There is no record of a photographer called Waites around that time but there was a Walter Hildyard who opened a studio in Manchester in 1861.

*22nd February 1858: "Went to meet Susan Jane Cullen at the wee planting at Kane's Bog. Gave her my likeness. She is going to Belfast to school on Monday."*

Charles was 22 - why would he give his likeness to a young lady who was going away? Romance maybe?

*26th May 1858: "Showed Walter Lang the photographs I brought of the house."*

*28th May 1858: "Bought two stereoscopic views of Kirkcaldy; gave them to Grandmother."*

Charles paid 3/- for the stereoscopic views.

*26th June 1858: "Got two stereoscopic photographs - negatives - taken of myself, by Douglas in Lough's Nursery, sitting on a rustic chair and with a stuffed deer beside me."*

Charles was in Kirkcaldy again on a visit. The only professional photographer in Kirkcaldy named Douglas was Robert Douglas at 9 Kirk Wynd. His first advertisement did not appear until 1862 but he possibly had a studio in 1858 without advertising.

*18th October 1858: "Got a package of a dozen photograph slides for the stereo-scope views about Kirkcaldy."*

The next day he wrote to Douglas thanking him for the slides, which cost 9/-. Stereoscopic images were very popu-

lar and many photographers took local views and sold them in large quantities.<sup>o</sup>

*23rd April 1861: "Went into Stirling. Got three photographs at Crowe's."*

Charles was nearly 27 years old.

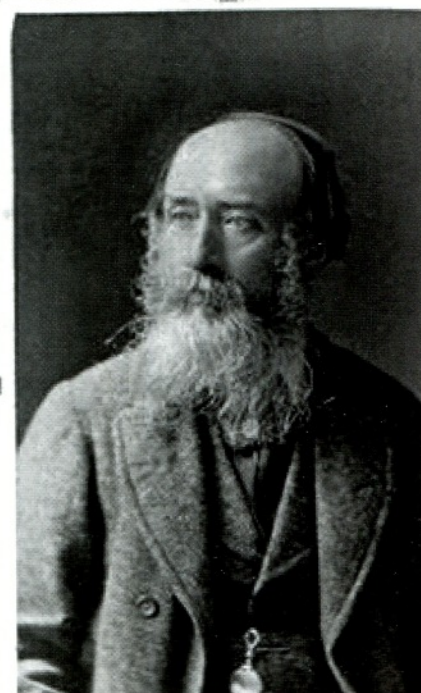
Alexander Crowe advertised his studio at 33 Murray Place, Stirling in 1859 and remained there until 1871 when he went into partnership with a Mr. Rodgers.

*4th April 1863: "William and Ina Hay were married today in St. John's Church. [Dublin] I was best man. The bridesmaids all went off to be photographed at Armstrong's."*

In those days the wedding party went to the photographer instead of the photographer going to the church.

*5th May 1863: "Got cartes taken at Ross & Thompson, Edinburgh."*

Charles is referring to the carte de visite photograph that burst into popularity in 1860. James Ross & John Thompson operated one of the leading studios in Edinburgh and were at 90 Princes Street from

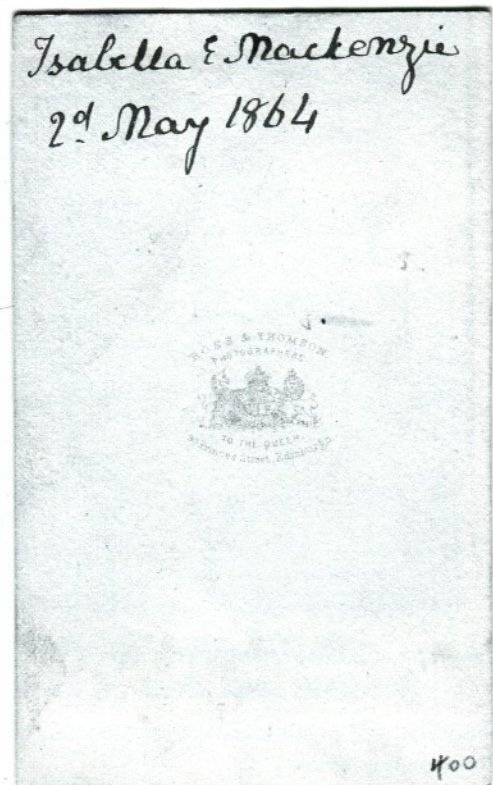


CROWE & RODGERS

STIRLING

*A rare photograph of the photographer Alexander Crowe. Produced by kind permission of Peter Stubbs at [www.edinphoto.org.uk](http://www.edinphoto.org.uk)*





Left and above: A CdV from the Ross & Thompson partnership, of 1864.

1848 to 1864. The partnership was transferred to John Ross alone in 1864.

8th January 1867: "Received a photograph of Elviston Castle from Johnnie." [brother]

12th December 1867: "Sent my own carte and Edward Eagar's to Mary Cumming on the [SS] Great Britain."

30th September 1868: "Kate & I went & had our cartes taken at Ralstons 195½ Argyle Street - myself standing & one of her sitting & another standing with hat & jacket on."

Charles was now thirty three years old.

This was a studio in Glasgow run by Peter Ralston from 1858 to 1874. It was usual to have several photographs taken at a session with the subjects posed in different ways and with different clothes.

6th October 1868: "Bought another six of my cartes."

Photographers made good profits out of providing extra copies at the time of the first order or, sometimes, many years later.

16th October 1868: "Tinted the faces of two cartes of Kate."

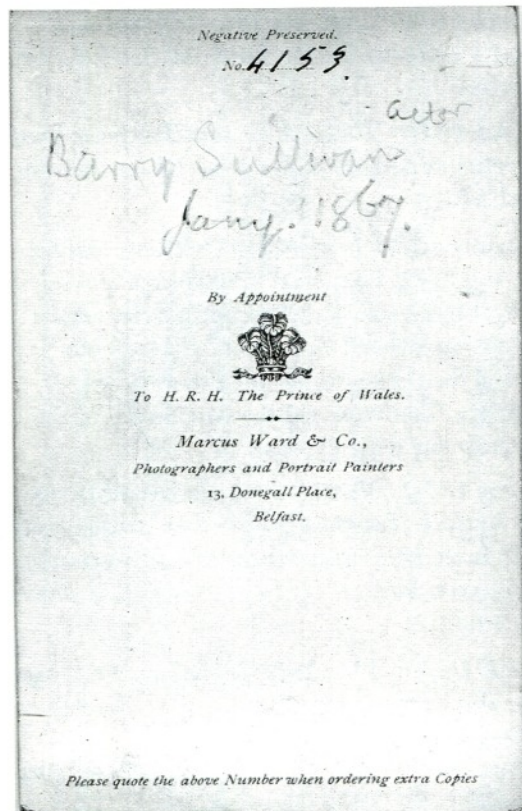
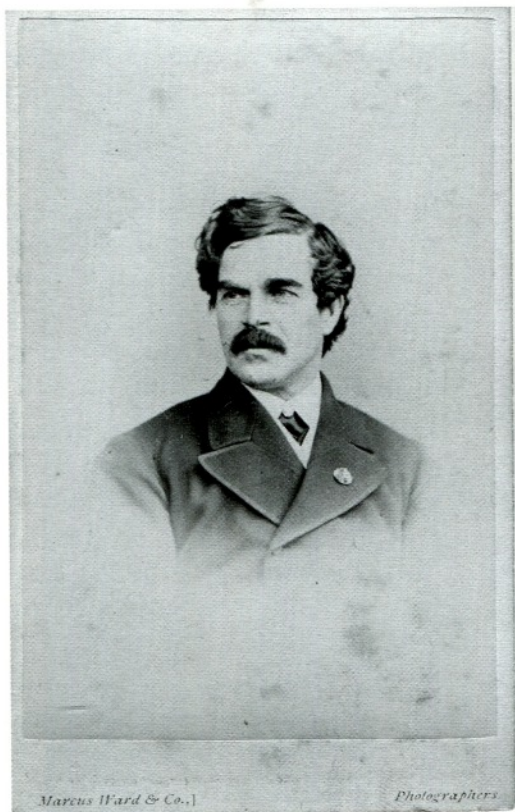


An example of a Ralstons CdV taken in the mid/late 1860s.

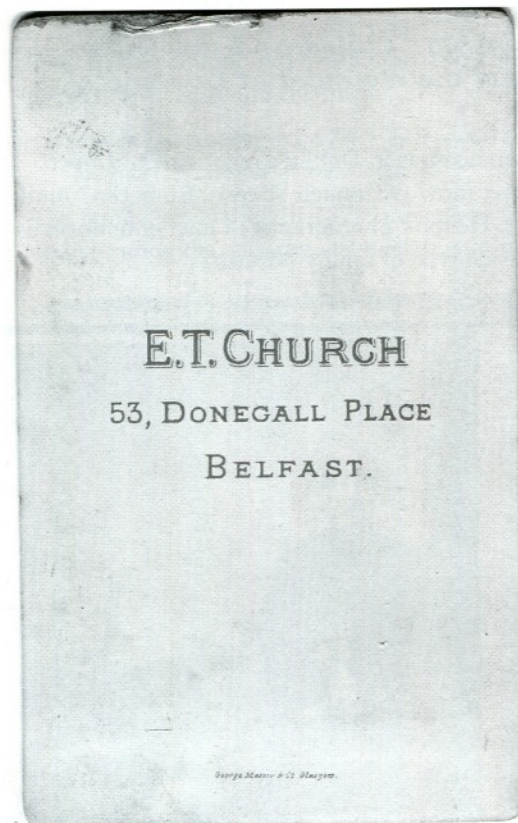
Unusually, Charles has tinted the photograph himself rather than having it done professionally.

13th March 1869: "Got three cartes of William at Marcus Ward's."





Front and back: Vignette CdV by Marcus Ward & Co.



Front and back: An example of a CdV by E T Church.

Marcus Ward & Co was a leading photographer in Belfast and had a studio at 13 Donegall Place, High Street from 1865 to 1870.

22nd March 1869: "Went into Belfast, got three cartes of William - vignettes."

Vignetting was popular at this time. It consisted of producing a photograph by softening the edges of the subject.

10th January 1870: "Left my photograph of Gibraltar at Burke's to be mounted and framed." [Dublin]

Burke does not appear to be a photographer.

1st March 1870: "Went up to Pesa [in Constantinople] where we bought a lot of photographs."



25th April 1870: "Left my photographs of Constantinople to be framed at Burke's on Aston Quay".

24th June 1870: "Called to see the proofs of some cartes of the children at Church's in Donegal Place"

These were Charlie's children by Maggie McKeever; Eddie, Lillie, Charlie and Edith. Edmund T Church was at 53 Donegal Place and was a high quality outfit operating in Belfast from 1869 to 1890. It was usual to have photographs taken and then return to see the proofs before ordering the prints. Charles visited the same studio again three years later to buy more copies.

26th June 1870: "Wrote to Ralston photographers Argyll Street, Glasgow to enquire if they still had the negatives of Kate's and my cartes taken in October 1868." [see 30th September 1868]

30th June 1870: "Wrote to Ralston, photographers, Glasgow, enclosing 5/- postage stamps to get six of my cartes and six of Kate's. Bought a little book of photographs of Dunkeld."

9th July 1870: "Sent a little book of Dunkeld photographs to Kate."

7th July 1871: "Called and saw photographs of the regiment at Lawrence's." [Dublin]

William Lawrence was in Dublin's main street - Upper Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) - from 1867 until at least 1892. He took photographs of men in uniform as well as the usual type of family portrait.



WILLIAM LAWRENCE.

5 & 7, Upper Sackville St.  
DUBLIN

23rd September 1871: "Found a lot of letters, one from Margaret Rooney enclosing a carte for Jessie." [his daughter by servant Bella Rooney]

1872: Diary missing.

31st March 1873: "Called at Church's photographer, and left two of my cartes to be copied." [Edmund T Church in Belfast]

3rd May 1873: "Sent the die of the coat of arms to Archer, Belfast, to put it on the new photograph album."

5th December 1873: "Saw, by a fluke, a photograph of Lizzie taken in the Isle of Wight at Ryde, with a baby on her knee!!" [His sister-in-law]

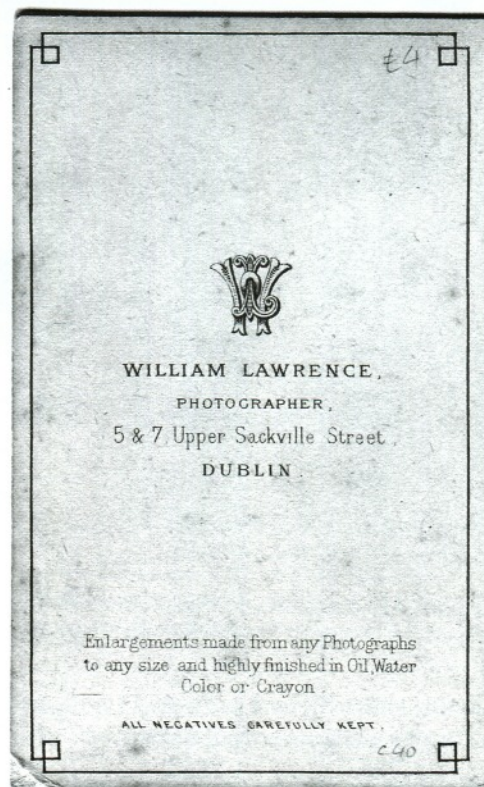
27th December 1873: "Wrote to Arthur Debenham, photographer, Ryde, for two cartes of Lizzie."

The Debenham family was extensively involved in the photographic business and had nearly 100 studios mainly in southern England and on the Isle of Wight.

31st December 1873: "Walked into town; [Dublin] called at Carty's, and put a ring to my locket with poor wee Billy's likeness."

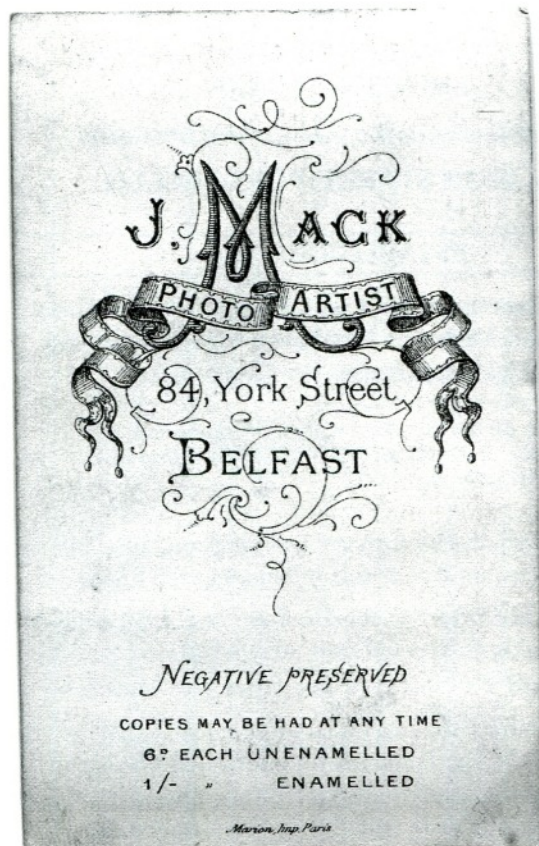
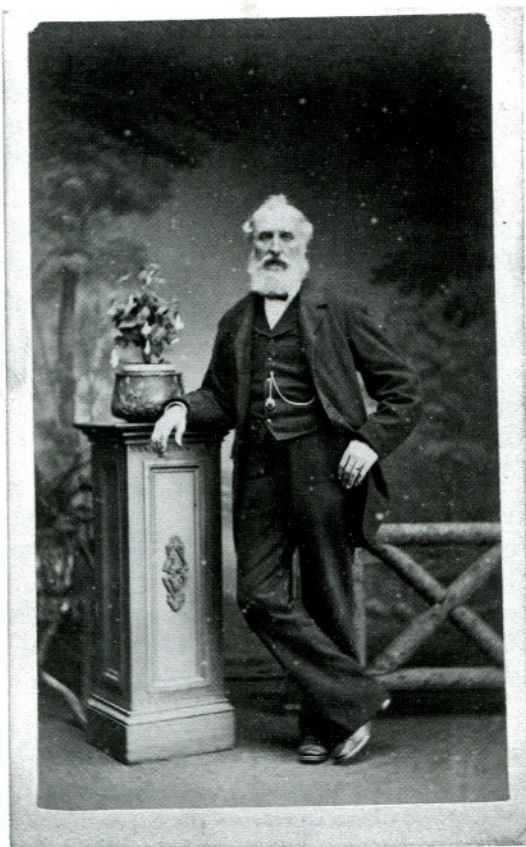
13th August 1874: "Wrote to Dr Vesey sending him 1s 6d in stamps for photo of Regiment."

There are nine references to Dr. Vesey in the 1879 diary, and on one occasion Charles visited him at home in Rhostrevor. Their relationship was based on the South Down Militia connection. Dr. Vesey appears to have been an amateur photographer.



Front and back: Military cdv by William Lawrence of Dublin.





Front and back: CdV by John Mack mid/late 1870s.

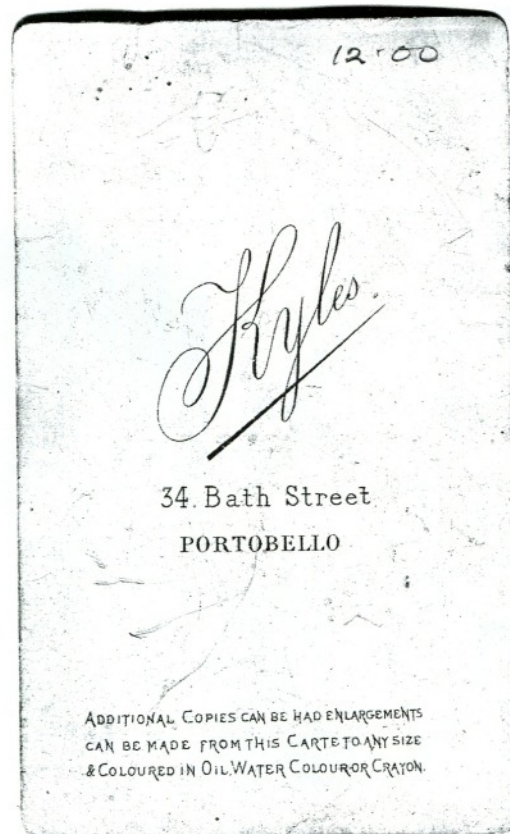
16th August 1874: "Heard from Vesey with a photo of part of the Camp, officers tents."

7th December 1874: "Left the photo of old Robert Hunter and Dunagan at Mack's in York Street to get cartes of Robert taken for his daughter Catherine."

This was a common practice to buy extra copies of photographs for friends and relatives.

24th December 1874: "Got cartes of old Robert Hunter from Mack"

The family left Dublin in 1874, moving at first to Glasgow, and spending the summer at Innellan, and in May 1875



Front and back: an example of a lady dressed as a fishwife and taken by Kyles in Portobello,



## MOIR & HALKETT

### PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Private Grounds for Groups and Machines)

106, HIGH STREET, PORTOBELLO

ESTABLISHED 1862

**NB – Costumes are kept on the Premises for taking Ladies and Misses as Newhaven Fishwomen and Highland Dresses for Gentlemen**

Peter Stubbs, on his excellent website <http://www.edinphoto.org.uk> shows an 1895 advert including the service of "Fishwife Pictures".

moving to Church Hill Cottage, Duddingston, a backwater outside the city, on the far side of Duddingston Loch.

*3rd March 1875: "Called at Mack's photographer [Belfast] and got my original photograph of Robert Hunter and Doonegan."*

John Mack advertised as a photographer in 1870 in Coleraine in County Londonderry but by 1875 he had obviously moved south to 84 York Street, Belfast in County Antrim as there would have been many more potential customers. He definitely advertised in Belfast from 1877 to 1890. By 1894 he had returned to Coleraine and re-opened a studio there. Here is an example of his portraiture in the mid/late 1870s.

*16th April 1875: "Walked with Maggie up Sauchiehall Street [Glasgow] to Ralton's to see about getting Walter and Flora photographed."*

*Saturday 22nd May 1875: "We all went down to Portobello where we got photos taken at Kyles of Walter and Flora together and Walter alone, also Maggie alone, and then with Eddie and Lillie in the costume of a Newhaven Fishwife."*

Charles, at the age of 40, was writing up increasingly detailed diaries, reflecting the complexity of his life. In this year his diary runs to more than 36,000 words.

William Kyles was a prolific photographer in Edinburgh with studios in Bath Street, Portobello from 1865 to 1877. Previously he was in partnership with James Law t/a Kyles & Law and in 1877 he went into partnership with William S Moir t/a Kyles & Moir.

Customers could use studio props to dress as fishwives as the local fishing industry was particularly important. This was a particular speciality of William Kyle and his partners. Many fishwife photographs were of genuine fishwives who were paid to pose so that the photographer could duplicate their images and sell them to visiting tourists.

*7th June 1875: "Drove with Dick Nelson and brought Maud [Lambert] and Nannie Severs to camp where they remained and drank champagne till after six. Lord Newry took two photographs of us."*

Lord Newry appears to have been a keen amateur photographer according to the quote from the novel 'The Looking Glass House' by Vanessa Tait. It says "Lord Newry... stood up from the wheelbarrow that he was filling with his photographic apparatus"

On the 1st. November 1875 Charlie moved his family from Duddingston, to Grange, a more convenient location



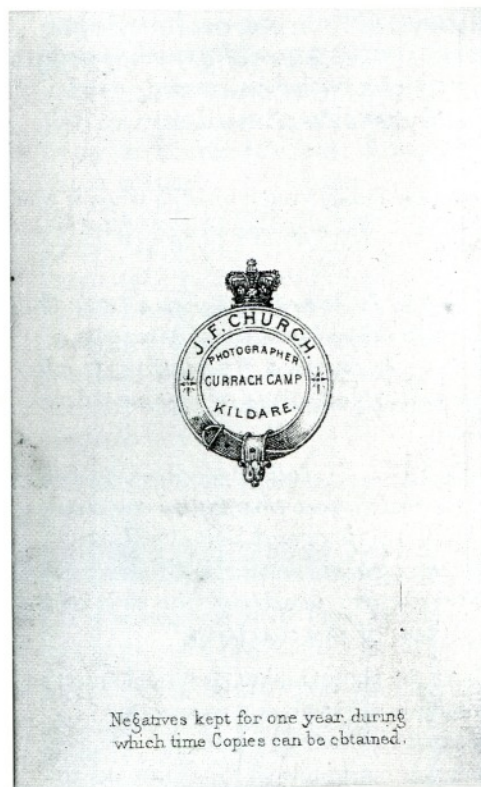
This framed and hand-coloured photograph is a very touching memorial to Wassie, a greatly loved boy.







CdV by J F Church of a soldier from Curragh Camp.



across the Meadows from the heart of Edinburgh. They moved into a substantial Victorian villa at 20 Dick Place.

*4th March 1876: "Wrote to Lizzie, returning the one of Jackie's cartes which I did not care for."*

*20th May 1876: "Nine copies of poor Wassie's carte came from Kyles, from Portobello. It will be just a year on Monday since it was taken, oh dear! Oh dear!"*

*22nd June 1876: "Went into town by tramway and down to Portobello by 3 p.m. train and ordered two enlarged photos of my dear wee Wassie at Kyles."*

When the picture was cleaned in 2015, a sheet of newspaper was found dated November 1877. The diaries include this entry on 22nd November 1877 "Maggie & I went out in the middle of the day, down to Patrick Street & ordered some porter; also ordered two frames at the German shop, for the two cabinet-size pictures of my darling I have got for Ballydugan." Charles brought the frames back on 29th November 1877 and took them to Ballydugan on 3rd December 1877.

*26th June 1876: "Left one of [Wassie's] cartes at Lunny's to be coloured."*

*27th June 1876: "Called at Lunny's but the photo was not coloured. Drove to Waverly station and left my luggage and then down to Portobello by 4.40 train and called at Kyles to see the enlarged photos of my darling but did not see them."*

*28th June 1876: "Lena went on into Edinburgh, but I got out at Portobello*

*and called at Kyles to see the photo proofs and then on by tramway."*

The framed photograph illustrated came to family researcher James Robertson via the family home in Lecale, County Down. Interestingly, Charles seems to have done the framing and colouring himself.

*25th July 1876: "Grant and I had our cartes photographed in full dress at Churches' in the morning before parade."*

By this time, Charles was 41 years old. Grant was a fellow officer in the South Down Militia and was on training exercises in Kildare.

J F Church had a studio at the Curragh Camp in Kildare and would have taken many pictures of soldiers and their families. Studio operating dates are often picked up from trade directories but Church does not appear to have advertised. This is not surprising as he had a captive market. He was definitely there between 1874 and 1876 but almost certainly for several years outside those dates as well.

*12th August 1876: "Extremely fine & warm. Wrote to Church, photographer at the Curragh, ordering ten more copies of my cartes taken in uniform; also to Kyles, photographer, sending a lock of darling Wassie's hair."*

*16th October 1876: "Got back from 'school' about 2 am having given GAP [his mistress Georgina Alexina Peppard] the photo case I bought her from Edinburgh."*

*9th January 1877: "Called at Kyles, and ordered an enlarged photo of Maggie and wee Wassie as a baby; also another of darling's wee face, medium size."*



27th January 1877: "Went on to Kyles & Moir; & brought back proof copy of Maggie & wee Wassie as a baby enlarged; and also carte of vignette of my dear, enlarged."

This was the studio the family visited in 1875 when it was run by William Kyles. It was now operated by Kyles & Moir.

10th March 1877: "Went to Kyles & saw the enlarged colored [sic] photo of Maggie & dear wee 'Bap' & chose a frame for it; also some other enlarged ones of my wee darling's head."

28th March 1877: "Tried the coloring [sic] of one of the enlarged photos of my darling, but did not succeed very well, so I sponged it off again. Was out to the post. Wrote to Mrs Orson, sending her one of the vignette cartes, of my darling."

It was usual to have the photographer, or his colourist, add colour to a photograph; especially if it was a costly enlargement. Enlargements were coloured with oils, pencil or pastel chalks. It was most unusual for a customer to add colour and sponging it off would seem to be potentially injurious to the image.

10th July 1877: "Called at Robinson's [stonemason, Belfast] about wee Jasper's head stone, it is finished but not set up yet; called at Mack's to see photo of it, but did not like it, as he has merely done it in front and not showing the shape of the stone. He is to do another."



Here is a modern photograph of little Walter's head stone. The broken column symbolises a life cut short, and the dove on the left-hand side of the column symbolises purity and love.

15th August 1877: "Wrote to Church, photographer at the Curragh, for six of my cartes."

Later Charles records that he paid 3/- for them.

17th Sept 1877: "Went up to the Cemetery [the Grange, Edinburgh] after breakfast, washed and cleaned my darling's monument, [to Walter] and blackened the letters with Indian ink where they were growing white. Kyles came at half past ten from Portobello and took two photographs of it; he admired it very much."

23rd March 1878: "Started with Maggie & the four children, & walked to Portobello by the Park; we went to Kyles & Moirs, and got cartes taken of Lillie alone, Charlie & Edith standing together, Flora standing & sitting, Maggie standing, two positions & myself standing & vignette. Moir did them, as Kyles has left & gone to Dundee."

The studio was still at 34 Bath Street, Portobello, Edinburgh in business under the name of Kyles & Moir and remained so until 1882. The comment 'gone to Dundee' may well refer to a personal visit only as there is no record of Kyles working as a photographer in Dundee. He did, however, open a studio in his own name at 29 Newmarket Street, Ayr by 1880.

27th April 1878: "We went to Kyles & Moir's & ordered copies of cartes of myself & the children, last taken. Paid old account. Maggie got taken, three positions again, on trial, and I got taken with the Turkish fez on."

The Turkish fez is not something that is commonly seen on cartes de visite; was this anything to do with Charles' trip to Constantinople in 1879? Most photographers kept interesting accessories for their grown up customers as well as various toys for use when taking children - it helped the youngsters to relax and resulted in a more acceptable likeness.

25th June 1879: "Vesey took a few photos [of South Down Militia] and left."

24th June 1880: "The cabinet-sized photo of Maggie is the best ever done."

Maggie was living in Edinburgh and almost certainly using Kyles, Portobello.

3rd April 1881: The census date.

The 1881 census shows - Charles Johnstone, army officer, 45, Margaret Johnstone, wife, 40, daughter Lillie, 17, son Charles, 15, daughter Edith, 14 and daughter Flora, 8. A servant, Elizabeth Doherty, 35, lived with the family. Birth places given for the family - Stirling, Perth, Ayr, Glasgow, Rothesay and Glasgow - are all invented. Charles had transformed the family, who were all born in Ireland, into a Scottish one. Elizabeth Doherty is shown as having been born in India, avoiding an Irish link there as well.

5th June 1881: "Heard from Colonel Forde, sending me likeness of Gladstone in a donkey's head."

26th September 1882: "Wrote to Maggie enclosing a lot of photographs of our own family, [and of friend Robert] Dunlop, [his son]

Howard, [his mistress] Annie McCallum &c. and to let them be seen at [his sister's home at] Stewartstown [Co Armagh].

Friday 11th May 1883: "Went after and got Charlie's photograph taken at Smart's in Viewfield Place."

Charles was almost 48. George Smart had his studio at 5



Viewfield Place in Stirling in Scotland. The photographer was a 56 year old man living there with his wife Helen, daughters Agnes aged 23 and Mary aged 16 and son Robert who was ten.

*23rd October 1883: "Immediately after the ceremony, we had two photographs taken outside the hall door, by Mr. Smart, who was in attendance."*

This was at the wedding of Lillie, the oldest daughter of Charles and Maggie. It took place at Viewfield Lodge, Stirling.

*27th November 1883: "Two dozen photographs of Lillie's wedding party &c. came from Smart in the evening."*

Most of the diary entries for the end of 1883 refer to photographs of the wedding. The couple emigrated to North America and sent photos from there.

*15th January 1884: "Heard from Lillie, from Minnedosa, on 28th Dec, after getting my first two letters there. [his first sent on 29th Nov] There were also letters from her of date Xmas eve to Charlie & Folie, with photos of Indians at Winnipeg, and a Minnedosa paper from George, with account of their arrival, and of a dinner he had given."*

The entry below is for the day that Charles' son Charlie was laid in his coffin. It is interesting to note that photographs were involved in their sad farewell.

*4th October 1884: "Fine; cloudy. Mr. Coldwell arranged that Mr. Duthie should*

*come on Tuesday for the service in the house here, at dear Charlie's funeral. The coffin came in the evening for my dear boy: I held his dear head, and poor Lewie Hay [his cousin] his feet; dressed his dear face round with white flowers; placed a photo of his poor mother & one of myself over his heart with locks of our hair, wee sonnie's, Edith's & Foley's. Kissed his dear cold brow, over & over again, & then he was hid away from our eyes forever. Before he was moved, cut off some of his hair. The coffin was lined with zinc, & soldered up inside."*

This is the last of the diary entries to mention photography.

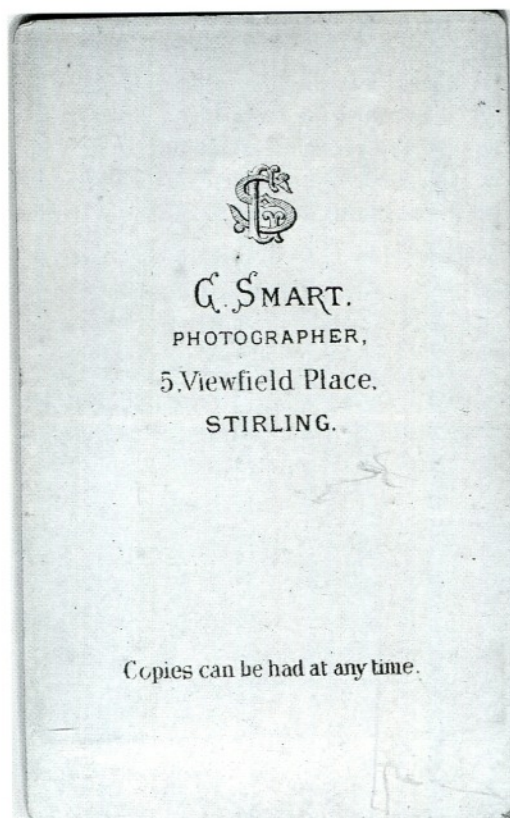
## Acknowledgements

We have so much to thank those people for who kept diaries in the past; - especially Charles Johnstone!!

If readers can locate any of the photographs referred to please contact James Robertson at [jamrobertson@gmail.com](mailto:jamrobertson@gmail.com)

This article would not have been possible without the enormous help from James who provided the diary entries and the family background information. Thanks also to Jayne Shrimpton ([www.jayneshrimpton.co.uk](http://www.jayneshrimpton.co.uk)), professional dress historian and author, who introduced James to me in the first instance.

Also thanks to Peter Stubbs for giving permission to reproduce images from his excellent website [www.edinphoto.org.uk](http://www.edinphoto.org.uk)



Front and back: CdV portrait by George Smart, Stirling.