

Penlee House Photographic Collection

Penlee houses a collection of many thousands of photographs and negatives stretching from the 1860s to the present day. Some photographers have left behind extensive records, of others we have albums given to the museum, and in the case of Harry Penhaul we house all his glass plate negatives and photographs.

Penzance saw a boom in tourism when the railway reached Penwith in 1852. From the 1860s onward, photography gained a foothold with the Victorians as a cheap and popular way of swapping images. This led to a boom in studios for the production of the *Carte De Visite* (a photograph the same size as a visiting card), and postcards of Cornish scenery.

Below is a list of the best known photographers who worked locally and who are represented in our collection.

Access to the collection for research purposes is possible by appointment. Prints of the photographs can be ordered for personal use (copyright permitting). Images can also be purchased for advertising and publishing. Please contact Penlee House to discuss rates.

John Branwell (1849 – 1929)

John Branwell was the son of John Richards Branwell, who built as his home the building that is now Penlee House Gallery & Museum. The Penlee archives contain several of John Branwell's photographic albums and negatives. These give us a great insight into the family at home and also a detailed record of the building and surrounding garden.

Francis Frith (1822 – 1898)

Opened a photographic studio in Liverpool in 1850. He was a founding member of Liverpool photographic society in 1853. Selling a successful business in groceries, he travelled extensively, always keeping photographic records and in 1859 started the company 'Francis Frith and Co'. His aim was to photograph every town and village in England, with particular emphasis on historical sites. This was a huge task and Frith soon began to employ other photographers to build the postcard company catalogue.

The family of Frith carried on the business until 1968 when it was sold. After the closure of the business in 1960, Bill Jay, a photographic historian persuaded the Rothmans tobacco company to purchase the archive, believing it had significant national importance. The company was re-launched as The Francis Frith Collection in 1976, making the photographs available to the public again.

www.francisfrith.co.uk

James Valentine (1815-1879)

James Valentine founded his printing and engraving business in 1851, adding portrait photography at a later date. Valentine produced topographical views of Scotland from the 1860's and also postcards. William Dobson Valentine, son of James Valentine, trained to be a landscape specialist in the studios of Francis Frith in Surrey.

Gibson & Sons (John Gibson, 1827-1920)

John Gibson began photographing life on the Isles of Scilly in the 1860s. Owner of a small shop on St. Mary's, Gibson soon developed his amateur interest into a thriving business. His sons Alexander and Herbert John joined him and together they set up premises in Penzance, photographing landscapes, antiquities and shipwrecks throughout West Penwith. Their photographs, using large glass plate negatives, have provided an invaluable reference on buildings and businesses in the area.

The family business is still based on St. Mary's, selling work from the archive as well as producing contemporary photographs and postcards.

www.gibsonsofscilly.co.uk

Robert Preston (1838 -1933)

Robert Preston produced Carte de visites and postcards of local scenery from his studio in Penzance. His partnership in Preston and Poole (Samuel Pool, photographer based in Truro) produced the Royal Series of Cornish Views. He became well known after photographing a visit by the Prince of Wales in 1865 and allowed him to state 'by Royal appointment on his stationery. Although not a native of Penzance, his interest and investment in the town led him to become mayor in 1887.