

THE
LINEN
HALL
BELFAST 1788

ART UNLOCKED

at The Linen Hall

An exciting project to catalogue, conserve and preserve our collection of paintings, prints and drawings.



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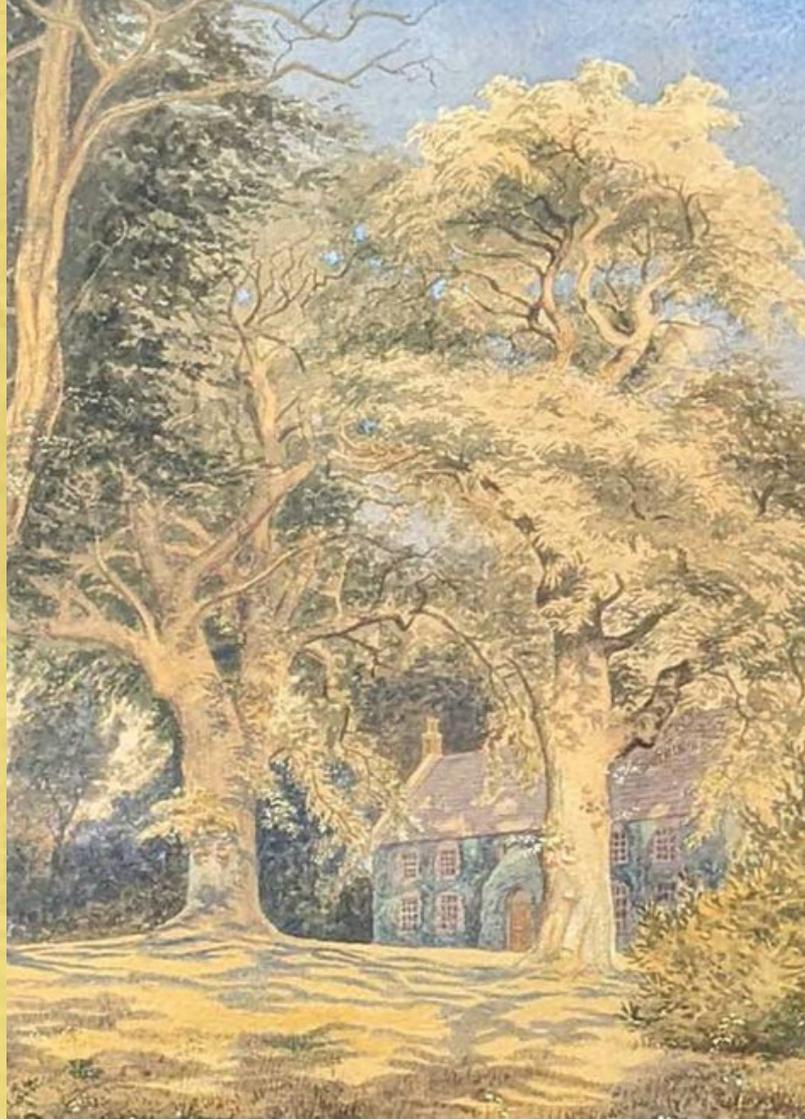
Art Unlocked is an exciting project at The Linen Hall to catalogue, conserve and preserve our collection of paintings, prints and drawings. Many of these record life in and around Belfast throughout the Library's long history. Just like the books on our shelves, the art collection is significant for the stories it holds. It is an archive of our visual culture, and a record of how society has changed. Here we reveal a selection of the treasures we have uncovered...



Cranmore

Unknown artist, 19th century

This watercolour painting shows Cranmore House in Malone, the then residence of John Templeton, curator at the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge (the Linen Hall Library) in 1792. The trees are Spanish chestnuts that were planted when the house was first built (c.1620-40). They are the oldest trees of their kind in Ireland, and local legend tells that William of Orange tied his horse to one of these trees during a respite on his way to the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.



Launch of the Aurora

Hugh Frazer, 1839



In 1839, Hugh Frazer (1795-1865) painted the launch of the Aurora, the largest and fastest passenger ship built in Belfast by Ulster Scots shipbuilding firm Connell and Sons. Pictured on the dock are some of the 15,000 strong crowd who gathered to cheer the launch. For 19th century audiences, this oil painting was a celebration of innovation and achievement – a statement that continues to hold power today as a tribute to the legacy of shipbuilding in Belfast.



John Anderson Esq. JPFGS (1815-1905)

Ernest E Taylor, 1894

This portrait in oils, by Ernest E Taylor (1863-1907), commemorates John Anderson, Honorary Secretary of the Library from 1873-1902. Anderson was an enthusiastic book collector and is responsible for much of our fascinating collection of early Belfast and provincial printed books, which he amassed over several years during the 1870s and 1880s. A pioneer in Irish bibliography, Anderson published a 'Catalogue of Early Belfast Printed Books', on behalf of the Library in 1887, which is visible in the bottom left of the painting.

Family Portrait

Unknown artist, c.1835

This enigmatic family portrait may have been painted by Henry MacManus (c.1810 – 1878), an artist from Monaghan who exhibited a 'family portrait' with the Belfast Association of Artists in their first exhibition in 1836. Around this time, MacManus had been living with his friend, the politician and journalist Sir Charles Gavin Duffy, who founded the Belfast Vindicator. MacManus was renowned for his dark colour palettes and style of early Irish realism, which he hoped would communicate the realities of Irish life to English audiences. This mystery family inspires much speculation about family life and industry in early to mid-19th century Belfast.





Internal view of the Assembly Room at the Exchange at Belfast

Thomas Malton, after Sir Robert Taylor, c.1790

Sir Robert Taylor (1714-1788) was a prolific and prosperous architect from England. In 1776, he was commissioned to design an extension for the neoclassical Exchange and Assembly Rooms in Belfast. The rooms, captured here, by the English architectural engraver Thomas Malton, were a locus of political, social, and cultural activity.



Old Long Bridge

Unknown artist

The 21-arch Long Bridge in Belfast was built in 1682, using stone from Scrabo. It stretched across the River Lagan at Carrickfergus Bay, connecting Belfast to the then prolific industrial town of Ballymacarrett in Co. Down. It measured almost half a mile - the longest bridge in the British Empire at the time. In 1690, King William's Lieutenant, Duke Schomberg, caused lasting structural damage to the bridge when he used it to transport heavy artillery on his way to the Battle of the Boyne.

Many chroniclers noted its instability, but the bridge remained functional until it was demolished in 1841 to make way for the new Queen's Bridge. Several artists sought to record the Long Bridge for posterity, including renowned landscape painters Andrew Nicholl (1804-1886) and Joseph W Carey (1859-1937) who both completed oil paintings of the structure. This painting is very similar to a larger study by JW Carey that hangs in the Ulster Hall.

William Conor

Rowel Friers, 1946

Rowel Friers (1920-1998) and William Conor (1881–1968) are two of Northern Ireland's most iconic artists. They were contemporaries, both informed by their experiences of living in working class Belfast. This caricature, drawn by Rowel Friers, shows William Conor 'flying high' on his paintbrush, around the time he accepted full membership to the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts (RHA), 1946. Conor was a prolific artist, who sensitively captured the day-to-day lives of the working classes, earning himself the epithet 'The People's Painter'.

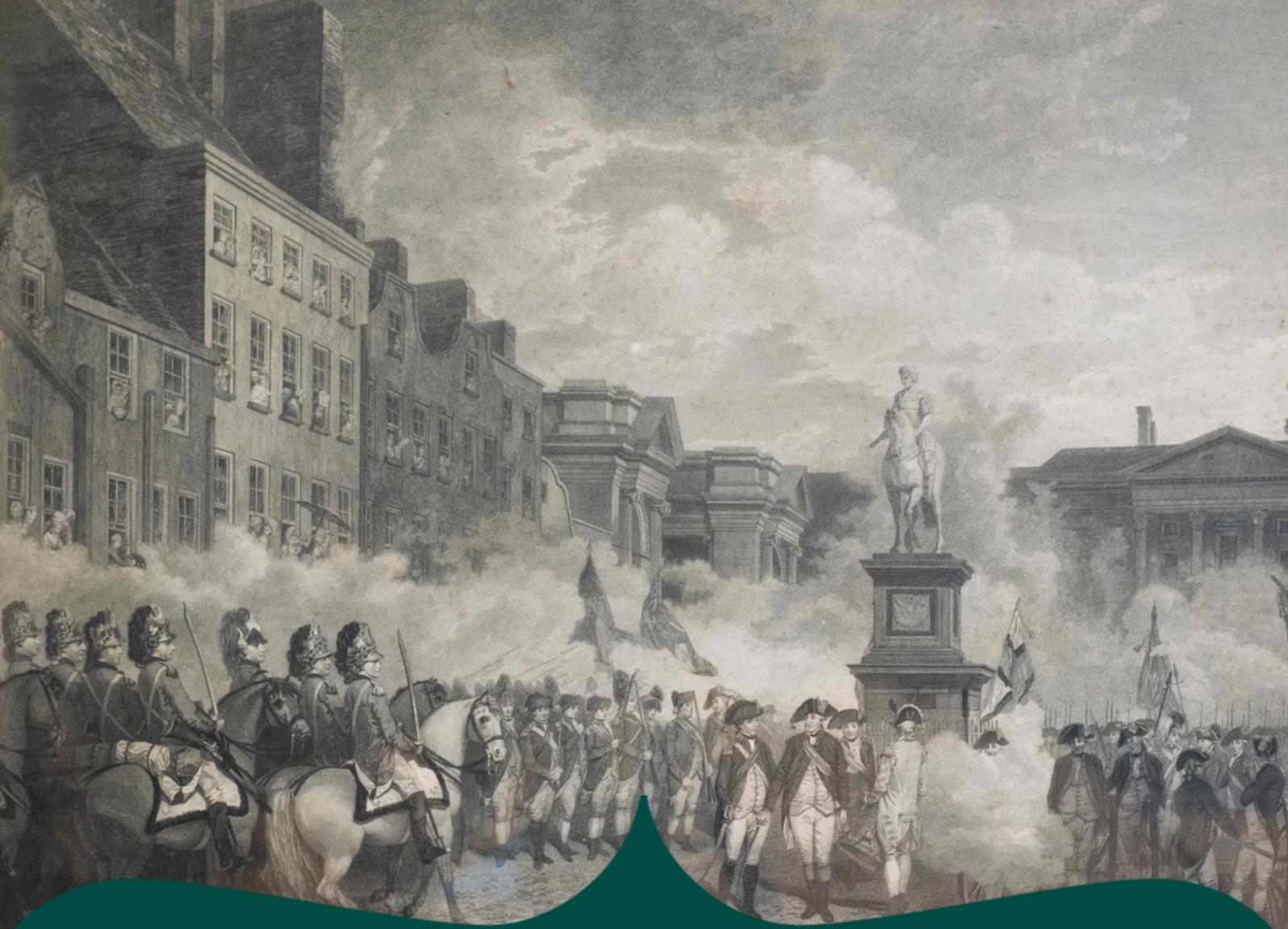


Edward Bunting

William Brocas Jn, 1811

Edward Bunting (1773-1843) was a musician and composer, who devoted his life to the capture and celebration of traditional Irish music, following an opportunity to transcribe the musical performances at the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival in the Assembly Rooms. This caricature by William Brocas (c.1794-1868) coincided with the second edition of Bunting's book, 'A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music', which was published by the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge (the Linen Hall Library) in 1809.





The Dublin Volunteers on College Green, 4th November 1779

Joseph Collyer, after Francis Wheatley, 1784

This line engraving depicts the Dublin Volunteers firing a salute around the statue of King William III in College Green to commemorate the King's birthday and his landing in England. The Dublin Volunteers were a local militia organised to defend and preserve order in Ireland after the British had withdrawn to fight in the American Revolution.

The Hon. Charles James Fox

Samuel William Reynolds, after
John Raphael Smith, 1802

Charles James Fox was a Whig politician, the first British Foreign Secretary, and supporter of American and Irish independence from Britain. Despite his notoriety as a gambling addict and a womaniser, Fox's defence of civil liberty, his campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade, and his charisma made him very popular. Inspired by the Dublin-born statesman Edmund Burke, Fox advocated for religious tolerance, and his political views were supported by the United Irishmen who were prominent members of the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge. This portrait was considered a great likeness, and following Reynold's engraving, became one of the best-known images of Fox.

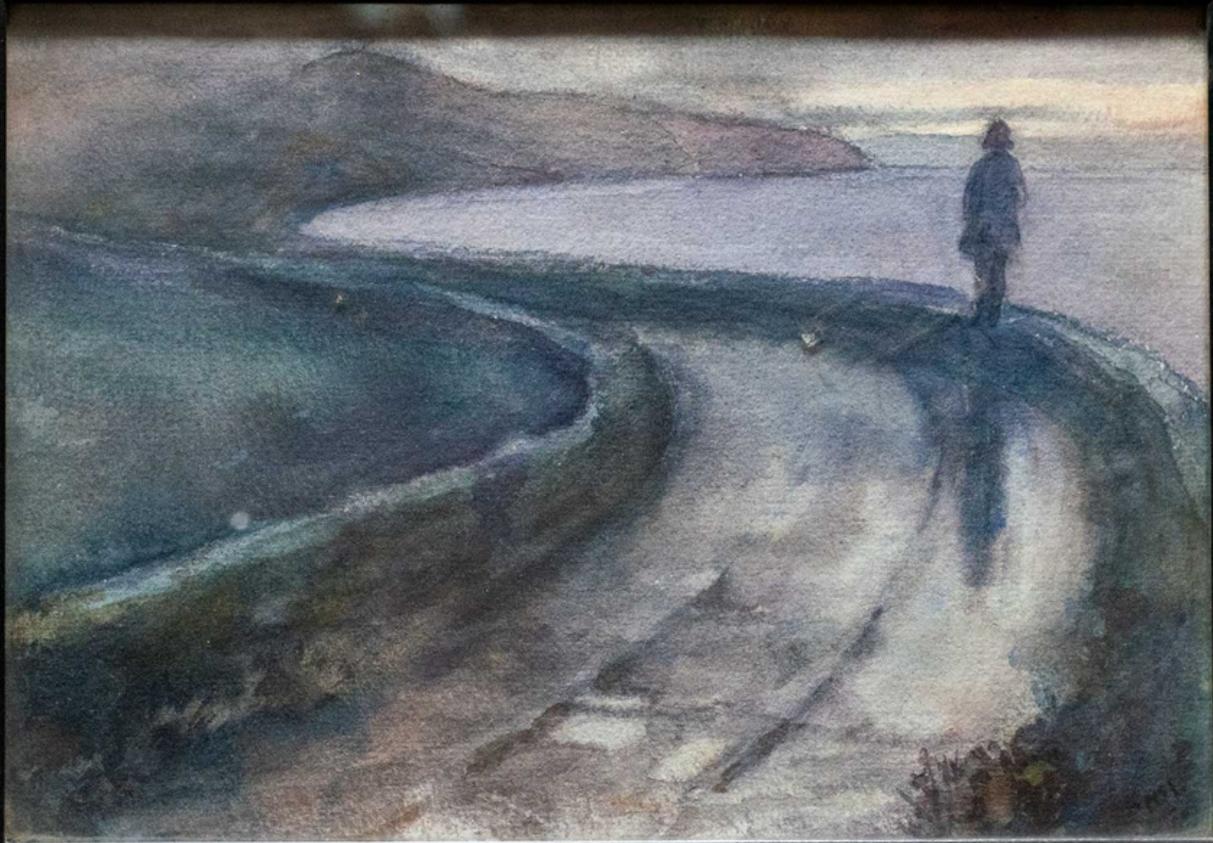


A Portrait Sketch

Ethel Gunning, 1914

Ethel Simpson Gunning of Cedar Grove, Cregagh, exhibited at the Belfast Art Society from 1912-14. Like this drawing, her works were typically preoccupied by elegant depictions of women and children. She was an accomplished singer, actress and playwright of radio plays which were inspired by Ulster history and life in Belfast.





Untitled

Chattie McIldowie, early 20th century

Chattie McIldowie (1895–1975) was a member of the Belfast Art Society, assisting with the life drawing section and exhibiting watercolour paintings from 1915-1918. In 1918 she withdrew her involvement from the society when she received an opportunity for a West End performance in *Love in a Cottage*. She starred in many stage and film productions after this under the pseudonym Moyna MacGill – a talent she evidently passed down to her daughter, the late Dame Angela Lansbury DBE.

James Watson Esq, Brook Hill, Co. Antrim

J W Giles, after Charles
Hancock, early 20th century

James Watson (1767-1850), known as 'The Young Commodore', was a popular magistrate at Hillsborough, Lisburn, and Belfast, and a resolute Loyalist, adopting a position as Captain of the Brookhill Yeomanry. Watson was a keen sportsman for much of his life, winning the County Cup on his favourite mare, Violet, during his last race in 1825 at the Maze racecourse in Co. Down. Violet was nearly 20 years old. Watson was 60. The race marked a retirement from racing for both. This engraving was commissioned as a gift for Watson from his friends. It shows Watson in his later years while on a hunt with his hounds.



Burns in the Storm of 1793

George H Every, after James
M Scrymgeour, c.1855

This mezzotint engraving depicts Robert Burns in the company of his friend John Syme during one of his Scottish tours. The scene shows the two men battling a storm on their way to Kenmuir Castle, the home of John Godwin. Many of Burns' poems were inspired by the wild highland weather, and regular rides through wind and rain are reflected in poems such as 'Winter: A Dirge' (1781) or 'Tam O'Shanter' (1790). This painting is part of the Gibson Collection at the Linen Hall – one of the largest collections of Burns material outside of Scotland.





Flora and Fauna of Rathlin Island

Barbara and Catherine Gage,
c.1840-50

Barbara and Catherine Gage were the daughters of Reverend Robert Gage, Curate and then Rector of Rathlin Island. The two sisters had inherited a great love of natural history from their mother, and together set about making comprehensive watercolour drawings to carefully document all wildlife and flower species on the island (including those in their own greenhouse). These beautiful drawings are preserved in three large scrapbook albums.



Untitled view of Church St, Ballymena (reproduction)

Margaret and Matilda Knowles, 1894

Margaret and Matilda Knowles were two sisters from Ballymena. From an early age they attended meetings of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club with their father and illustrated his archaeology writings between 1877 and 1907. They exhibited their drawings at the Belfast Art Society from 1892-1921. Matilda Knowles pursued a career in botany – she was a pioneering woman in science and the founder of modern studies of Irish lichens. Margaret Knowles, who is the likely artist of this painting, continued her career in art, achieving membership of the Royal Ulster Academy in 1933. Sadly, her success was short lived. Both sisters died two days apart in April 1933. They were buried together at Deansgrange cemetery in Dublin.



Progress of the Toilet

James Gillray, 1810

James Gillray (1756-1815) was one of the best-known satirists of the Georgian period, thought to have produced over a thousand cartoons during his lifetime. This set, 'The Progress of the Toilet', parodies the unnatural measures that women were expected to take to attain the then socially approved standards of femininity. The scene is replete with objects and accessories, where disposable fashions even extend to literature and art. The lady's bookshelf contains copies of the feminist novel 'Delphine', and 'The Monk', an erotic Gothic romance.



Untitled view of the Greeves Family House

JW Carey, 1911

Joseph William Carey (1859-1937) was a popular landscape artist and illustrator who featured among the Belmont social circles. The Carey family regularly held parties attended by friends including Percy French and William Conor, where games involved sketching and writing verse. The Greeves family, who built their wealth in the linen industry, lived nearby, and in 1911 they commissioned Joseph Carey to paint their large house and grounds at Bernagh.

Sketchbook

JW Carey, 1911

Joseph Carey painted many illuminated manuscripts and excelled in capturing small details in miniature works. This tiny sketchbook is an exquisite example of Carey's attention to detail, his warm sense of humour, and mastery of the watercolour medium. Repurposed from an autograph book, the sketchbook accompanied Carey on his travels, and features perfect miniature landscapes of Cave Hill, Killarney and the Scottish Highlands. Each artwork is framed, captioned, signed, and dated, showing Carey's meticulous care with his work.



Every dog will have his day

James Gillray, c.1809



This satirical illustration presents a commentary on Colonel Richard Martin, Irish politician, and early campaigner for animal rights. Martin entered the Irish House of Commons in 1776, and in 1809 supported Thomas Erskine's attempts to introduce an 'Act to Prevent Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals'. The Bill was passed in the House of Lords but rejected in the House of Commons. Undeterred, the men repeatedly brought the Bill before parliament for 12 consecutive years, until finally 'An Act to prevent the cruel and improper Treatment of Cattle', was approved in 1822.



Delina Delaney takes breakfast with Lord Gifford and Madam-de-Maire

George Morrow, c.1898

George Morrow (1869-1955) was a prolific cartoonist and illustrator from Clifton Street, Belfast. Like his brother, renowned illustrator Albert Morrow, George found success in London. In 1906, he produced the first in a regular contribution of cartoons to Punch and would contribute over 2700 cartoons during his career. In 1930 he graduated to the position of art editor, a role he held for 7 years. In his early days in London, George Morrow illustrated more than 70 books, including this illustration for 'Delina Delaney: a novel' by Drumaness born author Amanda McKittrick Ros.

The Post Car

JB Yeats, c.1908

This wood block illustration was prepared by Jack Butler Yeats (1871-1957) for Cuala Industries, a small craft workshop run by Yeats' sisters Elizabeth and Lily to provide employment for women. Cuala Press played an important role in the Celtic Revival, and in creating a new romantic visual for Ireland, in contrast with the 'Drunken Irishman' cartoons of the day that were regularly circulated in the British press. This was the second in a series of prints and broadsides illustrated by JB Yeats for his sisters.



Untitled

Mabel Annesley, 1921

Lady Mabel Marguerite Annesley (1881-1959) was a wood engraver and watercolourist; the daughter of Hugh, 5th Earl Annesley of Castlewellan. Following the deaths of her husband in 1913 and her brother in 1914 she studied wood engraving, the story goes, because she could never work in colour again. Many of Mabel Annesley's wood engravings were inspired by rural landscapes, and in particular her home beneath the Mourne in Castlewellan and Newcastle.

Shaw's Bridge

John Luke, c.1934

This linocut by John Luke RUA (1906-1975) is one of the artist's rare works in black and white, and is strikingly different from the colourful, decorative frescos we typically associate with him. With characteristic precision, Luke presents a masterful, texturally rich, and rhythmic scene at Shaw's Bridge. The print was originally exhibited at the Ulster Unit exhibition held at Locksley Hall, Belfast in 1934. In the catalogue, he explains his purpose, 'to arrange and represent in a personal and orderly manner the spatial relations of form and masses as perceived in nature or imagination'.



Belfast Field Naturalists' Club

Neill Speers, 2011

The Belfast Field Naturalists' Club, later the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, formed in 1863. It was a product of the Victorian fascination with natural sciences, and members toured archaeological sites across Ulster to document their observations of nature via collecting, photography, and sketching. John Templeton, Irish naturalist, and curator at the Linen Hall Library, was a notable member of the Field Club. This painting by artist, playwright, and poet, Neill Speers, was worked from a photograph by Robert Welch. The scene shows Field Club members gathered during a trip to the Giants' Causeway.

