

HASTINGS PIER CHARITY

HASTINGS
PIER

Photography in Hastings



Group of Edwardian visitors to the Pier, photographed by W J Willmet, early 1900s (HPC004.032a)



Supported by
The National Lottery®
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



www.hastingspier.org.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY

From the 1880s instant-photography with tintype cameras meant professional photographers could leave their studios and go to the beach to find customers. The photographers carried portable dark rooms on handcarts and offered a 'while you wait' service. This was particularly suitable for day-trippers, who could return home with their instant portraits. Tintype prints were fast and cheap and cost as little as sixpence.

The Boyd family, originally from London, have been photographers in Hastings on and off since the 1890s. Gifford Boyd was from the third generation of the Boyd family to be involved in the business when he opened a photographic studio and camera shop in Hastings in 1946. He had promenade rights to take photos on the seafront, where he had a kiosk, and a pink elephant. He also had a kiosk on the Pier in the 1960s, and one in Warrior Square. He employed a number of photographers with Leica cameras, who would take pictures of people on the beach and on the pink elephant. He lived in Carlisle Parade, where he had a darkroom.

Francis Frith was a Victorian photographer of the Middle East and many towns in the United Kingdom. He journeyed to the Middle East on three occasions between 1856 and 1859, to Egypt, Palestine and Syria. He then set up Francis Frith & Co., the first photographic publisher, and embarked on a project to photograph notable historical or interesting sights in every town and village in the United Kingdom.

Francis Frith journeyed to the Middle East on three occasions between 1856 and 1859, to Egypt, Palestine and Syria. He then set up Francis Frith & Co., the first photographic publisher, and embarked on a project to photograph notable historical or interesting sights in every town and village in the United Kingdom. As success came he hired photographers to take photographs for him and set about establishing his postcard company, which became one of the largest photographic studios in the world.

Photographer - William John Willmetts (1869-1956)

William John Willmetts was born in Chelsea, London, in 1869, the youngest child of Helen Georgiana Pearce (born 1833, Chelsea), a dressmaker, and Joseph Hill Willmetts (1818-1873), a pastry cook. **Joseph Hill Willmetts**, William's father, was born in West Teignmouth, Devon and early in his career he worked as a baker in Exeter, Devon. (The surname of Willmetts is rather unusual and originates from Devonshire). Joseph Hill Willmetts took up employment in London as a confectioner and pastry cook and in 1853 he married Helen Georgiana Pearce in Chelsea, Middlesex. William John Willmetts was the youngest of six children and was brought up in the Chelsea/Pimlico area of London.

William John Willmetts worked originally as a licensed victualler. On 10th February 1897, William John Willmetts married a thirty-three-year-old widow Mrs Jenny Manders (nee Barrett). Jenny Barrett was born in Battersea, London around 1863. She had married Richard Donald Manders in 1889, but he had died in 1895, aged 32.

By 1899, William John Willmetts was running the 'Lord Palmerston' public house in Staines Road, Hounslow. The 1901 census records William J. Willmetts as a "Licenced Victualler", living with his wife Jenny at the 'Lord Palmerston Inn', Staines Road, Hounslow, Middlesex. The couple were still running the 'Lord Palmerston' public house in 1906. On 13th February 1906, William John Willmetts's wife Jenny died at the 'Lord Palmerston' hotel at the age of 48.

After the death of his wife, William John Willmetts moved down to Hastings where he established a Fancy Repository business at 14 Pelham Crescent. William John Willmetts is listed as the proprietor of the Fancy Repository at 14 Pelham Crescent, Hastings in the Sussex trade directories of 1911 and 1915. In the Trades Section of Kelly's 1918 Directory of Sussex, W. J. Willmetts is listed under the heading of "Photographers", with a studio address of 14 Pelham Crescent, Hastings.



W J Willmetts's photography studio in Pelham Crescent. (HPC085.004)

In 1920, William John Willmetts married Fanny Louisa Meek (born 16th September 1887, Belper, Derbyshire), the daughter of Lillian and Herbert Meek, a professional photographer who had run studios in Twickenham, Middlesex and at Deal in Kent. Herbert Meek (born 1866, Richmond, Surrey) was the eldest son of Ferdinand James Meek (1843-1886), a professional photographer who had operated a studio in Richmond, Surrey in the 1880s. William and Fanny Willmetts became the parents of a son, whom they named John within a year of their marriage. [The birth of John R. Willmetts was registered in Hastings during the third Quarter of 1920].

William John Willmetts died on 14th February 1956 at St Helen's Hospital in Hastings. William J. Willmetts was aged around eighty-six when he died.

As W. J. Willmetts was based in Hastings from around 1910 to 1956, his career as a Hastings photographer might have been lengthy. The photographs by W.J. Willmetts in my collection appear to date from the period around the First World War. W.J. Willmetts was not listed as a professional photographer in trade directories until around 1918, but it is quite possible that he took photographs as a sideline to his "fancy repository" business, taking studio portraits at his shop premises in Pelham Crescent on Hastings seafront or taking his camera on to the beach or Hastings Pier.

<http://www.photohistory-sussex.co.uk/HastingsPhtgrsW4.htm>

www.hastingspier.org.uk

Please note that this information is provided free of charge and whilst Hastings Pier Charity makes every effort to keep the information on the website accurate, the majority of the information comes from the general public and volunteers. We therefore disclaim any warranty or representation, express or implied about its accuracy, completeness or appropriateness for a particular purpose. If there are any errors, please contact Hastings Pier by email info@hpcharity.co.uk

www.hastingspier.org.uk