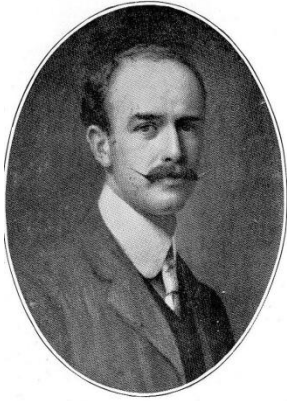


Prominent Portrush Men at the beginning of the 20th Century Part 2 by Robert Corbett

Information on a number of prominent individuals from Portrush in the first decade of the twentieth century can be gleaned from the short biographies of approximately 900 contemporary distinguished Ulstermen presented by W. T. Pike in his book *Belfast and the Province of Ulster in the 20th Century*, published in 1909. In the previous article on this subject, attention was drawn to individuals covered by Pike who were leading lights in the commercial life of the town. This article focuses on three men with Portrush connections, an artist and two journalists, who feature in the chapter of Pike's book entitled 'Literature, Music, and Art'.

The artist in question was William James Watt McLernon. He was born in 1871 at Coleraine, the son of Robert and Martha McLernon. William's father, a baker and confectioner, ran a coffee and refreshment business at Main Street, Portrush, where the family resided before moving to live at White Hall, Dhu Varren, during the first decade of the twentieth century.



Mr. W. J. W. McLernon.

In 1892 William entered the Herkomer Art School, based in Bushey, Hertfordshire, England, where he studied under its founder the distinguished Bavarian-born British painter, Sir Hubert von Herkomer. McLernon was primarily a portrait and miniature artist, but he also painted landscapes, seascapes and interiors in oils and water colours. Among the subjects of the portraits he painted were the Rev. Jonathan Simpson, the first minister of

Portrush Presbyterian Church, Rev. Francis Petticrew, Professor of Systematic Theology, Magee College, Londonderry, and Dr J. C. Martin, the first surgeon at Hopefield Cottage Hospital. McLernon visited Philadelphia in 1901, where there was an exhibition of his paintings.

William McLernon, The Studio, White Hall, Dhu Varren, died on 5 April 1945 at the Route Hospital, Ballymoney, aged 74. He was survived by his wife, Elizabeth. William is buried in an unmarked grave in Ballywillan Cemetery. In October 2010 a watercolour by McLernon of a young woman reading, signed and inscribed 'Dhu Varren', was sold at an auction in Glasgow.



Watercolour by William McLernon



The journalists with a Portrush connection featured by Pike were Alfred Stewart Moore and James Mercer Russell. One of them, Moore, was born in the town but lived and pursued his career in Belfast, whereas the other, Russell, was a Scotsman who came to live in Portrush to follow his profession.



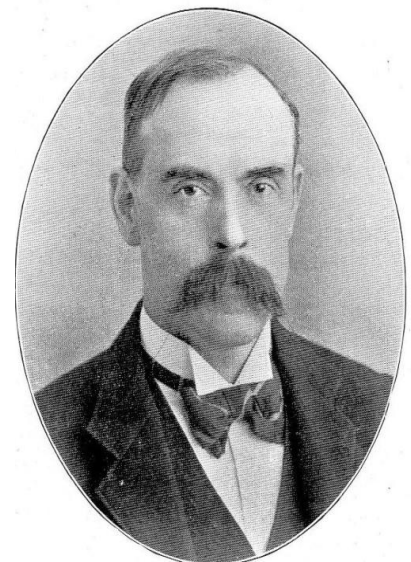
Mr. A. S. Moore.
("Nomad").

Born at Portrush on 30 June 1871, Alfred S. Moore was educated in Belfast. Having received his early education at the Model School and the Royal Academical Institution, Moore studied medicine at Queen's College, Belfast, for four years before abandoning the course to follow his interest in journalism. He initially rose to prominence while writing for the *Ireland's Saturday Night* paper in the mid 1890s. In 1898 Moore founded in Belfast a satirical magazine, *The Magpie*, which he edited under the pseudonym 'Nomad' and wrote for under a variety of pen names. Moving on from *The Magpie*, in 1899 Moore began publishing a new magazine in Belfast titled the *Nomad's Weekly*. A caustic commentary on local affairs, *Nomad's Weekly* was a very popular and successful venture which ran until 1914. During this period Moore founded two

other journals, namely the *Investor* in 1901, which became the financial and insurance journal of Ireland and ran until 1914, and *The Motorist* in 1908. He also found time to write other works, including the burlesque *A Straggler from Saturn*, published in 1908, and *Linen from Field to Factory* in 1913, as well as contribute articles to a number of leading English publications.

Moore's literary career was interrupted by service during the First World War, but in 1922 he published a book entitled *Linen*. This reflected his specialism in textiles and later he became the linen correspondent with the *Belfast News Letter*. Moore was also an authority on the history of Belfast and in 1951 published *Old Belfast*. He died on 10 November 1961 and is buried in Belfast City Cemetery.

James M. Russell, born in 1851, was the youngest son of John Russell of Craigrothie, near Cupar, Fifeshire, Scotland. James began his career in journalism as an apprentice with the *Fife Herald*, where he obtained a practical knowledge of every aspect of newspaper production and became its district reporter in Dunfermline. Subsequently, Russell moved to England to further his career as a journalist, working in various places for local newspapers. In the early 1880s he took charge of the *Kent Messenger and Maidstone Telegraph* and in 1881 published a history of Maidstone.



Mr. J. M. Russell.



While living in Maidstone, Russell married Miss Mary Ferguson, niece and adopted daughter of the Rev. Dr Martin. Although Dr Martin was also a resident of Maidstone at this time, he was a member of the well-known Co. Londonderry family, the Martins of Myroe, and had previously been minister of Crossgar Presbyterian Church.

In 1883, Russell came to Ireland on his appointment as editor of the *Coleraine Constitution*, which in 1908 merged in the *Northern Constitution*. When he took up this post the newspaper was owned by a number of shareholders, but Russell later acquired a controlling interest. He also established the *North Antrim Standard*, which ran from 1887 until 1922. Russell remained editor and chairman of the *Northern Constitution* until his death.

A feature of the *Northern Constitution* during Russell's long occupancy of the editorial chair was his articles on local historical subjects. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, he also published several books, including *Notable Men in Derry and Antrim* and a *Pictorial Guide to the Giant's Causeway and the North East Coast of Ulster* in 1885 and 1890 respectively.



Captains' Board at Royal Portrush Golf Club

Russell was a founder member of Royal Portrush Golf Club and served as a member of the Council and a trustee of the property from its formation. In June 1891 he became Honorary Secretary, a position he held for seven years. In 1921 he was persuaded to become captain, an honour which previously the members of the Club had frequently wished to bestow upon him but which he resolutely declined.

James Russell died on 26 October 1927 at his home, Bemersyde, Dhu Varren, aged 76. He is buried in Coleraine Cemetery. His son, Ivan Martin Russell, followed his father's footsteps into the *Northern Constitution*, eventually becoming editor and managing director.

These brief biographical entries provide only a glimpse into the lives of these men. They deserve to have their stories told in more detail to ensure that their achievements are not forgotten.

Portrush Heritage Group would like to thank Robert for this excellent contribution to our series of Heritage Newsletters.

16th January 2021