

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

THE NORTH OF IRELAND FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

LISBURN BRANCH

MAJOR FRANCIS CROSSLEY

Major Francis Crossley [born about 1787] was the son of John Crossley, a merchant who lived in Bow Street, Lisburn, and Elizabeth Alcott.

In the winter of 1804 Robert Owenson, a dramatist and actor, came to Lisburn with his company of strolling players, which included his two daughters, Sydney and Olivia. It would appear that Francis fell in love with Sydney Owenson, but did not have the means to support himself and a wife. Francis obtained a position with the East India Company, being first with the Madras Infantry, and then the civil service. He progressed well, but unfortunately his letters home to Sydney, with money to pay her passage to India, arrived too late. Sydney had become a celebrated authoress and in August 1812 at Baronscourt, Co. Tyrone, she married Sir Charles Morgan M.D., an aged medical man.

Francis returned home a Captain in 1824 and in August that year he married Jane Poyntz Stewart, daughter of Dr. William Stewart, Castle Street. She died in childbirth on 1st March 1828. By 1835 Francis Crossley was back in Ireland, now a Major, and living at Glenburn in Dunmurry. He married Elizabeth Helen Irwin in 1837 and had three sons and a daughter.

Two of his sons, Francis William [1839 – 1897] and Sir William John M.P. [1844 – 1911] in 1867, in Manchester, set up the firm of Crossley Brothers. They developed gas-fuelled engines, “oil” engines and Diesel engines, which were eventually used in motor cars. Crossley Motors Ltd. was first registered in 1906. The third son, Thomas Hastings Henry [1846 -1926], became Professor of Greek at Queen’s College, Belfast and Bristol University.

Major Francis Crossley died on 17th September 1846 and is buried in Lisburn Cathedral Graveyard. His wife, Elizabeth, died 9th February 1891.