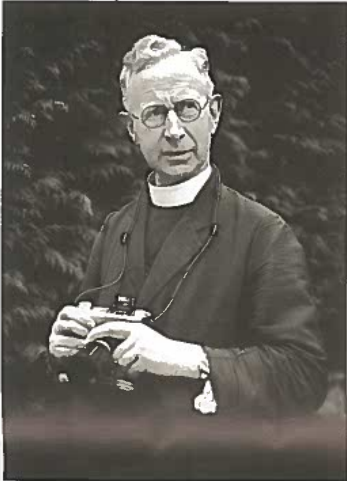


The life of Fr Browne SJ was as remarkable as his photography. The text on this page merely serves as an introduction to one of Ireland's most fascinating artists.

AIB has been privileged to play a key role in saving the work of Fr Browne. This calendar, along with a series of exhibitions, is part of a continuing drive to bring his work to a wider audience. I hope the evocative images contained in these pages bring you pleasure throughout a happy and prosperous 1997.

Tom Mulcahy, Chief Executive, AIB Group



Hidden treasure

For more than a quarter of a century a large metal trunk lay buried under a mass of documents in a Dublin basement. Fr Eddie O'Donnell SJ had often glimpsed the trunk in the bottom of a press as he worked in the Jesuit Provincial House.

One day in February 1988, he decided to look inside. It was an event later described as the 'photographic equivalent of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls'. For inside the trunk were almost 42,000 negatives taken by Fr Francis Mary Hegarty Browne SJ between the years 1897 to 1957.

The images captured life in Ireland and the world during one of its most turbulent eras. But this archive was under threat - the negatives were on an unstable cellulose nitrate base, a compound similar to the explosive TNT.

Photographer and restorer David Davison was called in to assess the discovery and give expert advice on restoring the negatives. The news was not good - it would cost more than £40,000 to save the collection.

Fr O'Donnell contacted AIB who agreed to finance the salvage operation. David Davison and his son Edwin went on to transfer the negatives to safety film and enter the captions on a database.

Ark Life, AIB's life and pensions company, provided the first opportunity for the Irish public to view Fr Browne's photographs with a touring exhibition of AIB bank branches in 1992.

Today, with a series of exhibitions around the world and this the second AIB Fr Browne calendar, his work is more accessible than ever before.

Master photographer

Corkman Frank Browne was a passionate advocate of photography who devoted the best years of his life to capturing the life of Ireland. He once wrote that even in a 'land of hazy distances and chequered sunlight, artists could be found to catch the elusive softness of her light.'

This love for his homeland is reflected in his work. But it is not exclusively Irish. Featured in this calendar are photographs of Britain - where Fr Browne worked as a missionary and also on commissions for the Church of England and The British Museum. Also included are pictures of Spain and Australia - just two countries from the many he visited.



But what made Frank Browne a master photographer? David Davison says: 'His interests were broad but people were undoubtedly his greatest interest and subject. Workers, tramps, lords and ladies, clerics, children and the elderly are recorded in varied treatments and yet never devoid of human dignity.

'The skilful structure and timing capture something of the experience of the moment. Fr Browne's pictures grip the imagination, convey atmosphere and mood and challenge the viewer to engage in thought. It is this artistic achievement which places Fr Browne in the company of the great photographers of the twentieth century.'

War hero

In 1916, as the First World War entered a critical phase, Fr Browne volunteered as an army chaplain and joined the Irish Guards. He served on the front line in France and Flanders until the end of the war. It was distinguished service - his commanding officer said he was the bravest man he had ever met. Frank was injured five times, mustard gassed once and won the Military Cross and Bar, the *Croix de Guerre* and was honoured by the King of the Belgians.



Chronicler of the Titanic

Frank Browne's strict and studious young life was enlivened by occasional trips abroad - organised by his uncle Robert, Bishop of Cloyne. In April 1912, he travelled first class on the first and last voyage of the Titanic from Southampton to Cherbourg and then to Cobh.

An American family offered to pay his fare for the third leg of the journey to New York. But when he asked permission from his Jesuit superiors, the response was short and to the point - 'Get off that ship - Provincial'.

Frank left the ship at Cobh. Days later, his photographs on board the doomed liner became front page news all over the world. For the first time, but not the last, he was famous for his skill with the camera.

