

.....Before the Lens.....

Joseph Kinsey 1852 - 1936

Sir Joseph Kinsey was a well-educated man of varied interests and abilities.

He was mountaineer, philanthropist, amateur photographer, as well as being a prominent businessman in early Christchurch.

Born in Plumstead, Kent in 1852 and educated at the Royal Naval School, Greenwich, His interest in the sea was life long. In 1880 he and his wife sailed for Lyttelton on the vessel 'Jessie Redman' arriving on 22 October.

Kinsey's first position in Christchurch was with the firm of Edward, Bennett and Co. However, within a year he had left this company to form a partnership with Joseph Ward (later prime-minister) as shipping agents. In 1882 F H Barnes joined the firm, and Kinsey, Barnes and Company was formed but this partnership only survived until 1889. Following Barnes' departure the company reverted to Kinsey and Co.

Joseph Kinsey was a prominent and well respected figure in Canterbury and was involved in many public causes over the years including support of the arts and education.

In 1889 he was the Canterbury Commissioner for the 'South Seas Exhibition' in Dunedin and between 1894 - 97 was governor of the Board of Canterbury College. He was a prime mover in its building development programme.

Being a man of character and at times what his contemporaries would have viewed as an eccentric, he gathered around him interesting companions and acquaintances. He often hosted visitors to New Zealand as varied as Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw and Jean Batten.

In the early years of this century Kinsey developed a keen interest in Antarctic exploration and acted as an agent and attorney in New Zealand for both Captain Scott and Sir Edward Shackleton. He hosted and entertained both explorers and their parties when they visited Christchurch. In 1914 he was awarded the Scott Medal of the Royal Geographical Society and in 1917 was knighted for the role he played in the two explorers' expeditions.

As a keen photographer he was found behind the camera recording his family, friends and acquaintances, often at garden parties held at his Clifton residence or on mountaineering expeditions to the Southern Alps. However Kinsey was also frequently the model for other amateur photographers, particularly his daughter May. Many of the images that have survived and that are now in Canterbury Museum Kinsey collection are thought to have been taken by her.

Over many years Sir Joseph Kinsey was a connoisseur of art and on his death in 1936 his considerable collection was bequeathed to the city of Christchurch to be housed in Canterbury Museum and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

The Gallery received initially a collection that included work by such artists as Anders Zorn, Frank Brangwyn, Norman Lindsay Francis Dodd, Henri Fantin-Latour and many others. This bequest is especially important as it formed the foundation of the British and European works on paper collection.

All photographs processed and printed by Lloyd Park after images held in the Kinsey collection, Canterbury Museum.