

sharing agreement with Michael Collins' successors.

By the late 1960s as the Rev Ian Paisley, an ultra Unionist, he had moved centre stage in Irish politics. It was a journey the iconic 'Thompson' also made. As the 1970s opened it remained the IRA's weapon of choice before being replaced by Armalites and AK47s.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated June 18, 1921 (See Documents on Irish Foreign Policy www.difp.ie)

<sup>2</sup> Michael Collins A Biography by Tim Pat Coogan published by Hutchinson, London, 1990

<sup>3</sup> Irish Times August 14, 1940

<sup>4</sup> The Fateful Day - A Commemorative Book Of The Armagh Railway Disaster June 12, 1889 by Damian Woods

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<sup>6</sup> Belfast Newsletter January 11, 1921

<sup>7</sup> Michael Collins A Biography by Tim Pat Coogan published by Hutchinson, London, 1990

<sup>8</sup> Armagh Guardian June 3, 1921

<sup>9</sup> History Armagh (Summer 2007) 'Powerful Connections' by Marjorie Halligan

<sup>10</sup> History Ireland (July/August 2009)

'Thompson submachine-gun' by Lar Joye

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# A ripping yarn from Percy French

by Eric Villiers

Researchers, despite their best efforts to stay on the trail of their chosen subject, often get waylaid by interesting snippets, which drag them off in another direction.

While searching for information about a music hall star one member of Armagh and District History Group came across a story about Percy French and one of his young Armagh fans.

According to Brendan O'Dowda - in his 1981 book on Percy French - Jack McKenna from Armagh had contacted him with a lovely anecdote that illustrated the great man's humility. The story as told by Jack and published by O'Dowda reads:

*While a schoolboy I went to the City Hall in Armagh where Mr French had given a concert the previous night. He was tearing up the pictures he had drawn the night before during his show. I helped him and when we had them all torn up, we burned them in the City Hall yard. I have regretted it ever since that I did not ask him for one of them.*

*He mentioned in the course of our conversation that there had been a good house for his show. He asked me the price of admission and I told him it was one shilling, two shillings and three shillings. Very young though I was, it struck me that he was not a businessman for he told me that, 'the prices were a robbery for listening and watching an old man amusing himself'.*

Young Jack may have wasted his breath asking for a picture because O'Dowda points out that quick fire artists were well-known for refusing to hand out such souvenirs, which may explain why, despite producing thousands during his stage act there is a scarcity of these chalk drawings by French.

French was not always averse to distributing such sketches and around 1900 made good money doing so when he worked with two other performers at the beginning of his career in Molesworth Hall, Dublin. As the famed Abbey Theatre diarist Joseph Holloway recalled in a Daily Express interview in 1927: "While Percy played the guitar and did a turn called 'Dublin Up-to-Date,' Billie Orpen, now Sir William, used to do water-colour sketches on the stage to the accompaniment of Percy's running commentary. The sketches were sold afterwards and we made as much as £120 on one performance."

It is interesting to note that Holloway was one of two star performers from the Association of Elocutionists who made appearances at the hall - the other being Maud Gonne. At that time the President of the Association was Dr George Sigerson. [2]

[1] [The World of Percy French](#) by Brendan O'Dowda, published by Blackstaff Press Ltd. (1981)

[2] [Joseph Holloway's Irish Theatre](#) edited by Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill. Published by Proscenium Press, California. (1968)