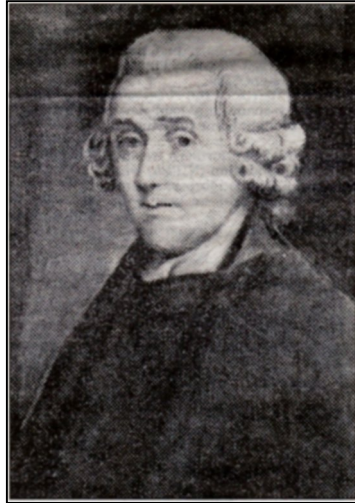


HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



FRANCIS JOY (1697 – 1790): Founder of the Belfast News Letter

Francis Joy was born on 3 August 1697, probably in Killead, Co Antrim. Family legend suggests he was descended from Captain Thomas Joy, a follower of Sir Arthur Chichester.

In 1737 Francis founded the Belfast News Letter after apparently receiving a printing press in lieu of a bad debt. Of all English language daily papers in publication today, the Belfast News Letter is thought to be the oldest continuously published title in the world. 2012 marks the 275th year of publication.

The earliest extant issue is No. 113 for 3 October 1738, printed by Joy "At the sign of the Peacock in Bridge Street". A copy of this early edition is in the Linen Hall Library in Belfast. Joy had moved to the Peacock premises in 1737 and remained there until 1746. Joy's Entry is named after Francis Joy, and is the place where he had a warehouse, near to the site of the paper's first publication.

Faced with a shortage of paper, Joy developed the family business to include papermaking, first in Ballymena and then in 1745 at Randalstown, where he installed a larger mill. He married Margaret, daughter of Robert Martin of Belfast, and had at least two sons: Henry Joy (1719/20-1789) and Robert Joy (1722-1785). Joy twice petitioned the Irish House of Commons for assistance in his paper making, eventually being granted £200, a considerable sum, in 1749. By now, however, his sons Henry and Robert were running the printing business, having taken charge of the Belfast News Letter in 1745.

Henry and Robert predeceased their father, with the Belfast News Letter being passed to Henry, Robert's son. On 15 May 1795 the paper was sold to a Scotsman named George Gordon.

Francis Joy died in Randalstown on 10 June 1790.