

**Reference Code:** Mss.26

**Title:** William Mitchell Collection

**Creation Date:** c.1870-1970

**Level of description:** Item level

**Extent and Medium:** 2 boxes, 35 items

**Creator:** Mitchell family

**Scope and content:**

**William Mitchell and the Foyle Line**

By 1890 only on the great ocean routes could large steel sailing ships, run with small crews, operate profitably against steam competition.

William Mitchell, who had been importing flour and grain from the USA and distributing it throughout Ireland since 1870, identified the scope for sailing vessels engaged in world trading. In 1890 he formed the Foyle Line, which by 1893 consisted of a fleet of five large steel-hulled sailing ships, four of which were built in Derry in Charles J Bigger's Foyle Shipyard. These ships, such as the 2,035-ton *William Mitchell*, were seldom seen in the home port. Sailings to Australia and then across the Pacific to the west coast of South America, with coal, and returning around Cape Horn, with nitrate, were the last remaining trade routes profitable for sailing ships. The death of William Mitchell in 1902 marked the end of the Foyle Line, as his fleet was sold off.

In *The Industries of Ireland Part 1 Belfast and Towns of the North* (published by National Publishing Company, London, 1891) William Mitchell was described as Flour Importer, Grain Merchant and Shipowner of Commercial Buildings, Londonderry. He acted as agent for the largest shippers of grain from the United States – Messrs. Gill and Fisher of Baltimore and Philadelphia. His impressive three-storey warehouse on Foyle Street, topped with a sculpture in Portland stone representing 'Commerce', built in 1883, is evidence today of William Mitchell's enterprise.

The William Mitchell Collection was donated by family members (2010).

**Additional note: Ship portraits:**

A selection of ship portraits are also in the wider art collection. Portraits of two of William Mitchell's ships which were painted by Charles Keith Miller of Glasgow (1833-1907) hang in

the Harbour House (the former offices of the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners):

*Alexander Black*, signed C K M, 1891

*William Mitchell*, signed C K M, 1892

The wider collection also includes an additional 11 ship portraits commissioned by the McCorkell Line of Londonderry, two were painted by Charles Keith Miller:

*Osseo*, signed CKM 1891

*Hiawatha*, signed CKM 1892

## Item level description

### Box 1

#### **Mss.26.1.**

Account Book (with lock and key), with index, of William Mitchell of Commercial Buildings, dated 1881. It includes accounts with Gill & Fisher, grain merchants of Philadelphia.

#### **Mss.26.2**

Book of 'Newspaper Cuttings' relating to 'William Mitchell Grain and Flour Merchant, Londonderry. Representing Messrs. Gill & Fisher, Baltimore, Philadelphia & new York'. Date Range 1891 to 1962.

#### **Mss.26.3**

Printed Book 'Industries of Ireland; Descriptive & Biographical; Facts, Figures & Illustrations' published by Historical Publishing Company, London, 1891. It details, pages 149 to 157, the mercantile houses, firms and companies in Londonderry including, page 152, 'William Mitchell, Flour Importer, Grain Merchant and Shipowner together with a drawing of his headquarters 'Commercial Buildings' on Foyle Street.

#### **Mss.26.4**

'Journal' of 'Wm Mitchell, 1881, Londonderry' with monthly, debit and credit, account details of his business from March 1881 to October 1901.

#### **Mss.26.5**

'Tallying' book for 'Superintendence of Grain Cargoes' dating from January 1884 to December 1895 which details ships and cargoes.

**Mss.26.6**

Ledger of 'Sales of Cargoes Wheat & Maize for Messrs. Gill & Fisher Baltimore' dating from September 1874 to January 1908. The ledger details quantities, price, ship's name, where loaded, destination and buyers.

**Mss.26.7**

'Shareholders' book which details names and addresses of shareholders by name of ship. The ships' names are: *Lonsdale, Garsdale, Iredale, Foyledale, Maiden City, Edenballymore, Templemore* and *Culmore*.

**Mss.26.8**

Notebook with information on the Foyle Line which includes registration details of ships *Alexander Black, John Cooke, Foyledale, William Mitchell* and *William Tillie* together with details on chartering, instructions to Captains, port charges, insurances, painting ships and ship requirements including rope.

**Mss.26.9**

Book, with blue cover, published by *Londonderry Sentinel*, 1888, 'In Memory of Bartholomew McCorkell' of Londonderry firm of William McCorkell & Co, shipowners and general merchants. Bartholomew McCorkell, was born 7 July 1805 and died 6 January 1887; his father William McCorkell was the founder, in 1798, of the firm that bears his name.

**Mss.26.10**

Book, with grey cover, published by *Londonderry Sentinel*, 1888, 'In Memory of Bartholomew McCorkell' stamped 'Wm Mitchell Ltd, Flour and Feeding Stuffs Importers, Londonderry' and comment 'the author of the introductory memoir may well be Wm Mitchell (1842-1902), since the galley-proofs, with his corrections are enclosed in this family copy. Jill Mitchell 1970.'

**Mss.26.11**

Small book containing 'Grain & Flour Tables' compiled in Londonderry in September 1884 for 'William Mitchell, Londonderry.'

**Mss.26.12**

'Memorandum Book', date range 1857 to 1872, apparently written by William Mitchell (1842-1902) 'when he first became an apprentice in the office of W. McCorkell, Derry.' It includes a table which names 7 McCorkell Line ships registered in port of Londonderry: *Mohongo* (registered February 1851); *Zered* (January 1857); *Prima Donna* (February 1855); *Mary Stewart* (May 1840); *Minnehaha* (October 1860); *Stadacona* (April 1863); and *Village Belle* (August 1863). See [www.mccorkellline.com](http://www.mccorkellline.com) for more details about McCorkell Line ships.

**Mss.26.13**

Notebook of 'Flour Tables compiled by Wm A Galbraith Londonderry 1/1/87'. At back of this book is a list with names and addresses of shareholders of ship *John Cooke*.

**Mss.26.14**

A bundle of letters (in stamped envelopes) addressed 'Wm Mitchell Esq. Londonderry' 'Re. partnership Jno Cunningham'.

**Box 2****Mss.26.15**

Book 'On The Banks of the Foyle: Historic photographs of Victorian and Edwardian Derry' by Brian Mitchell (published by Friar's Bush Press, Belfast, 1989). It includes photographs, p7, of William Mitchell's Commercial Buildings on Foyle Street, and, page 30, McCorkell Line fleet berthed at McCorkell Mill, Derry in 1881.

**Mss.26.16**

Ledger stamped 'Wm Mitchell Ltd, W.M. Ltd Foyle Street Derry' with insurance policy details including William Mitchell Ltd Open Policies pp159-164, 167-176, 184-188, 195-198 and 201. It also contains Apprentices Register pp2-3; Provision Dealers pp17-19; Dry Dock companies pp41-42; Agents Brokers pp49-57; Towing Companies pp63-65; Stevedores pp79-82; Ship Dockers p87; Port Charges pp101-108; Masters Applications p127; Charter Terms pp147-152; New York p155; Phialdephia p156; Foreign Shipbrokers pp165-166; Apprentices *Alexander Black* p301; Apprentices *John Cooke* p305; Apprentices *William Tillie* p309; Apprentices *William Mitchell* p313; Apprentices *Foyledale* p317; Barque *Alexander Black* Voyages pp335-336; Ship *John Cooke* Voyages pp339-340; Ship *William Tillie* Voyages pp343-344; Ship *William Mitchell* Voyages pp347-348; Ship *Foyledae* Voyages pp351-152; Particulars of Ships pp357-358; and Prices of Shares p359.

**Mss.26.17**

Four 'Statement of the Affairs' of Alexander Wilson & Co, Flour Dealers of Londonderry inside envelope addressed to Wm Mitchell Esq, Londonderry. William Mitchell, owed £2159, and William McCorkell & Co, owed £9448, were 'unsecured creditors'.

**Mss.26.18**

Accounts and Balance Sheets (inside plastic wrapper) for William Mitchell Ltd, Foyle Street, Londonderry for 1893-1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1919, 1937, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1959 and 1963.

**Mss.26.19**

Balance Sheets (inside plastic wrapper) for William Mitchell, Merchant, Foyle Street Londonderry for 1877, 1878, 1886, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1905, 1906, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914 and 1915. In addition there are Shipping Balance Sheets for 1900, 1901 and 1902.

**Mss.26.20**

A large collection of black and white photographs, inside orange box, with title 'Photographs of ships and of William Mitchell himself'. The portrait of William Mitchell (together with that of his wife Mary McVicker) hung in the family home at Liscloon, Castlerock. There is also a memorial photograph of William Mitchell taken by Alexander Ayton of Kennedy Place, Londonderry. Many photographs of ship *William Mitchell* and of life on board this ship in 1926/1927. The collection, for example, includes a photograph of ship *William Mitchell* in full sail from A D Edwardes Collection in State Library of South Australia, of *William Mitchell* docked in port from National Maritime Museum Greenwich and figurehead of ship *William Tillie* from San Francisco Maritime National History Park. It also contains the business card of 'Foyle Line of Steel Sailing Ships William Mitchell Shipowner'.

**Mss.26.21**

Book 'I remember the tall ships' by Frank Brookesmith (published by Seafarer Books, Dunmore Press, New Zealand, 1980). Life on board the ship *William Mitchell* in 1924 is recounted in Chapter III, pp21-28. The *William Mitchell* was one of the last square-rigged sailing ships as detailed in handwritten note extracted from 'The Twilight of Sailing Ships' by Robert Carse; she was sold to ship-breakers in 1928.

**Mss.26.22**

Book 'Crowded Hour' by Sjovald Cunyngham-Brown (published by author, 1975). Life on board the ship *William Mitchell* sailing out of Melbourne recounted in Chapter 3, pp24-33; it includes 2 photographs on board the *William Mitchell*.

**Mss.26.23**

Paper copy of photograph (inside plastic pocket) of 'The Port of Londonderry in 1881, Showing the Celebrated "Minnehaha" (McCorkell Line) and other Derry-owned Ships of that date' from 'a Photo, lent by Capt. Rodgers, R.M.S. " Duke of Argyll"'.

**Mss.26.24**

Three-page typed history (inside plastic folder) of William Mitchell's Foyle Line which consisted of *Alexander Black*, built at Dunbarton in 1891; and the following ships, built at Mr C. J. Bigger's Shipyard at Pennyburn – *John Cooke* (1891), *William Tillie* (1892), *William Mitchell* (1892) and *Foyledale* (1892). 'These ships, although not fast, were splendidly built, and were a credit to Mr Bigger's Shipyard.'

**Mss.26.25**

Collection of photocopies of newspaper cuttings (inside plastic pocket) about tracing Irish Roots plus photocopy of a photograph which is believed to consist of William Mitchell, crew members of one his ships and shareholders.

**Mss.26.26**

Blue document folder containing information on the ship *Foyledale* which includes 'Bill of Sale' to purchase 1/64<sup>th</sup> share of *Foyledale* by Laura Mitchell wife of William Mitchell in 1896 from the late Captain Brocklebank of Maryport; 'Declaration of Ownership by Individual' of 2/64<sup>th</sup> share of *Foyledale* by William Huey of Drumskeellan Muff P.O. County Donegal; and Statement of Sixth Voyage Account of *Foyledale*.

**Mss.26.27**

Red document folder containing information on the ship *William Tillie* which includes: Bills of Sales of shares in the ship to William Mitchell by J William Moore (Rossville Street, Derry), John Cooke (Waterloo Place, Derry), and Alexander Gillies of Glasgow; Bills of Sale of shares in *William Tillie* to John Clarke Dick, James Martin and Robert McCulloch; and Statement of Voyage 6 of *William Tillie*.

**Mss.26.28**

Blue document folder containing information on the ship *William Mitchell* which includes: Bills of Sales of shares in the ship to William Mitchell by John Cooke (Waterloo Place, Derry) and James McCardie Martin of Bath; photocopies of photographs of ships *William Mitchell* and *William Tillie*; and a typed document with 'an incomplete list of voyages of *William Mitchell* between 1900 and 1915'.

**Mss.26.29**

Blue document folder containing information on the ship *John Cooke* which includes: hand written account of third voyage of 1894/1895; printed statements of account of second and fourth voyages; list of owners of *John Cooke* which details names, addresses and number of shares held; Bills of Sale; and Declarations of Ownership.

**Mss.26.30**

Two newspaper articles inside plastic envelope: 'Old Foyle Line. Memories of Sailing Ship Days. Adventures of the John Cooke' in *Londonderry Sentinel* of Tuesday 13 October 1936; and 'The Foyle Line – Addition to the Tonnage of the Port' in *Londonderry Sentinel* of Saturday 19 November 1892.

**Mss.26.31**

Red document folder containing information on the ship *Alexander Black* which includes: Statement of Account of fifth voyage; and list of Shareholders of *Alexander Black* dated 12 March 1900 which details names, addresses and numbers of shares held.

**Mss.26.32**

Red document folder containing 'original correspondence between Wm Mitchell (Born 1944) re. ships of Foyle Line with A B Finnegan and S Cunyngham Brown, Aunt Joan Saunders, Ken Morrow'.

**Mss.26.33**

One-page typescript 'Public Records Office: Northern Ireland report for 1960-65' details the donation, catalogue D1665, of c. 50 documents by Mrs Helen O'Neill which includes: letters from Captain William Mitchell to his family and to his employers J & J Cooke, 1842-55; and log book of William Mitchell's barque *Barbara* 1852-55. 'D1725 comprises genealogical notes re various families incl. Mitchell'.

**Mss.26.34**

'Presentation Issue The North of Ireland Illustrated Londonderry' with details, pp17-19, of business of 'Mr William Mitchell, Flour Importer, Grain Merchant and Ship Owner, Commercial Buildings, Londonderry' which includes photographs of ships *John Cooke* and *William Mitchell*.

**Mss.26.35**

Miscellaneous and varied collection of documents relating to the business of William Mitchell inside plastic pockets which includes: business transactions which predate William Mitchell setting up independently of his early partner John Cunningham: correspondence from Lloyd's Register of Shipping; Stock list of 1 January 1883; credit note from Gill & Fisher of Baltimore dated 4 June 1894 to William Mitchell; notification with 'Wm Mitchell Londonderry' stamp of 'Sales of 268 Negro Slaves' by Liverpool shipowners John Cole & Co, dated 'Kingston, in Jamaica, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1764'; Share certificate confirming purchase of 10 shares in Merville Steamship Company by William Mitchell; original document dated in 'Port Louis Mauritius 29 November 1852' confirming shipment in good order of sugar bound for Cork in ship *Barbara*, captained by William Mitchell; 'Particulars of the Claim of William Mitchell' against 'Charles Joseph Bigger a Bankrupt' dated 2 May 1893; William Mitchell seeks election to Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners dated 8 December 1900; Foyle Line 'Contract for Docking, Painting etc.'; copy of 'Finnegan's letters' which is a 30-page account of the voyage of the ship *William Mitchell* from Melbourne in 1927 which was written by A B Finnegan, ordinary seaman; and copy of 'diary of a man who had earlier sailed on *William Mitchell*' who joined the Royal Navy in November 1927.