

Report of Lecture : 25th Sept. 2025 – Cameron Robertson

**‘On the road with W.H. De Lan and his Photographic Family**

The Dunse History Society was entertained and much interested by a talk entitled ‘Early Photography in the Borders’ presented by Cameron Robertson on 26<sup>th</sup> November. He looked particularly at the life and works of William De Lan and his family, early pioneers of photography, often controversial and with strong local connections. William De Lan (1844 - 1905) changed his name from Delaney to make it sound more French, the country that invented photography. He left his native Bradford in around 1860 in his mobile photographic studio and travelled to County Durham where he met and married Rebecca Wilson, the daughter of a fellow travelling photographer, in 1861. The couple moved around the NE of England and SE of Scotland photographing mostly ordinary people at the fairs and markets that they attended. The horse drawn mobile studio was used to prepare the emulsion for the glass photographic plates, to take the photographs and develop and print them. William and Rebecca had three daughters, Mary (1865 - 1943), Julia (1866 - 1923) and Henrietta ((1868 - 1936). Rebecca died suddenly in 1879 aged only 32. As the De Lan sisters came of age they all developed their skills and took on roles in the mobile studio becoming proficient photographers as they passed through North Northumberland. In 1901 the family parked the mobile studio in Tweedmouth at the end of the Old Bridge. William's health forced them to settle down and they moved into a house nearby but continued to work from their caravan studio. William died in 1905 and Mary, Julia and Henrietta, none of whom married or moved away, continued to operate the business until the early 1920s. William and his daughters are all buried in Tweedmouth Cemetery. There is an exhibition 'The Light of Days Past: Photography in Berwick 1840 - 1980' currently showing at the Granary Gallery Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Donald Ritchie