

Werner Kissling – A Retrospective

A remarkable collection of photographic images by the ethnologist Dr Werner Kissling.

This selection was made by Dr Kissling himself for an exhibition held at Dumfries Museum exactly thirty years ago. Now cared for by the museum, the archive is a poignant reminder of a way of life that has all but disappeared. It includes scenes reflecting the traditional customs and crafts of peoples ranging from the Maori of New Zealand to the crofters of Eriskay and South Uist and the farmers and fisherfolk of Dumfries and Galloway.

Werner Kissling was born in Silesia in 1895. He was the third son of a wealthy, aristocratic brewing family. He served both in the army and the navy during the Great War, becoming a diplomat for the new Weimar Republic in 1919.

The rise of the Nazi movement influenced his decision to resign from the German diplomatic service in 1931 to become a scholar and photographer. He spent the summer of 1934 on the island of Eriskay, where as well as taking many photographs, he made the first ever film using the Gaelic language, "Eriskay: A Poem of Remote Lives"

As a former German diplomat, Kissling was interned in the Tower of London and on the Isle of Man between 1939 and 1942.

In 1968 Kissling moved to Dumfries where he continued to photograph traditional rural crafts and ways of life until he was almost ninety.

He died in 1988, never having returned to his native Germany. His gravestone is inscribed with the words: SOLDIER, DIPLOMAT, SCHOLAR, GENTLEMAN