



*In the picture: Tom Wood at his home in north Wales*

## Tom Wood *Photographer*

**'I didn't want to go anywhere else than Ireland as there was material there for me'**

By KAREN WRIGHT  
*Portrait by STEVE PEAKE*

The photographer Tom Wood lives in a former courthouse outside Caerwys, a small village in north Wales. His studio extends throughout the house. A repository of his huge archive of negatives and prints in a cupboard in the front hall is testament to a career – almost an obsession – that began in the early 1970s.

Downstairs, his darkroom occupies a former holding cell, authentic with thick door and barred window. Upstairs on the top floor is a room containing a large computer on which he is currently working on digitalizing some of his archive of video film.

Having lived in Liverpool for 25 years, Wood moved to north Wales in 2003. His wife, Lorna, a midwife, was determined not to move back to Ireland, where he was born in 1951,

so he chose to compromise, moving closer to the land of his birth.

Wood does not drive so deliberately chooses to visit areas he can get to on foot, bus or train, visiting and revisiting the same places over and over again, photographing ordinary people going about their everyday lives in the scenery that they inhabit.

It is Wood's skill that makes the ordinary extraordinary. When I ask why he chose to leave Liverpool, he admits that, "I wanted a change of scene having photographed the same places for 25 years."

He returns to his birthplace in the west of Ireland on a regular basis. "I didn't want to go anywhere else in the world because there was material there for me even if there was nothing there." Having chronicled his extended family, their appearance in his book on Ireland is not unsurprising.

His mother never reconciled herself to his career – telling him off about it on her deathbed. His father and uncle Norman appear and reappear in this exhibition. "I'd just go every year and photograph this landscape, sometimes the people." His father, a man who loved the land was forced off it financially, eventually working in a car factory near Oxford. Tom followed his father by working in the factory until he was encouraged to study art by a friend. "I was gonna be an artist. I didn't think I'd be a photographer."

Wood starting collecting found photographs and albums when he was a young man in Cowley. Haunting the charity shops would provide a rich source of family albums. He collaged the photographs over all his walls and ceiling. Some of these images find themselves in his recent books, alongside photographs from other family albums donated to him.

Wood's work is instantly engaging. He is clear that it is not documentation but art. "I'd rather be in an art gallery with other artists rather than just a photography one, myself." But he admits it is not easy: "Lisette Model said that 'photography is the easiest art form', which perhaps makes it the most difficult."

*Tom Wood - Landscapes, Mostyn, Llandudno (01492 879201) to 5 April*