

## Hidden Gems and Forgotten People Patrick Devlin 11 October 2017

At this meeting of the society Mr Patrick Devlin gave a talk entitled 'Hidden gems and forgotten people.' Mr Devlin is chairman of the Federation for Ulster Local Studies and the title of his talk referred to a project being undertaken by the Federation in conjunction with local historical societies elsewhere in Ireland.

The purpose of the project was to draw attention to and celebrate some of the lesser known but interesting places and buildings in our island, those often overlooked in tourist brochures or guided tours and the very many interesting and inspiring individuals not known outside their own locality whose stories are untold or forgotten. It is an open ended project in that it is intended to continue to add new places and people as they are identified and passed on to the Federation for inclusion.

Mr Devlin then went on to mention some of the gems and people he had come across since the project began. In total 459 people and place have been identified from all over Ireland. Of these the majority, 278 have come from Ulster. In the neighbouring town of Bangor the port office in Main Street has the Royal cipher of Edward VIII on its wall. As the King ruled for less than a year few such ciphers were erected. Bangor was indeed one of only three. Two have disappeared leaving it as the only Edward VIII cipher left.

In Comber square is a scene depicting a hare and a greyhound. It is thought that the dog represents Master McGrath, one of the most famous racing greyhounds of his day. In Saintfield near the town centre is an old milestone which shows nine miles to Downpatrick and the same distance to Belfast. Modern mileposts show the distances as being eleven miles. The difference is due to the fact that the old milestone has Irish miles which were longer than the English miles used today.

Post boxes are among the many interesting artefacts recorded in the project. Newtownards has at least one Victorian box identified by the letters VR on its front. In the republic many of these old boxes are still in use but are painted green rather than the red of the boxes in Northern Ireland.

Among the people listed in the project is Robert Huddleston, known as the bard of Moneyreagh. He was a well known Ulster poet. Another poet perhaps not as well known was Florence Mary Wilson from Bangor who wrote the poem, 'The man from God knows where' about Thomas Russell a United Irishman, hanged at Downpatrick in 1803. Another Bangor person, someone who was little known was William Claney who invented the miners, safety lamp. He got little credit for it as Humphrey is the person usually given credit for the invention.

Two other people described by the project are Aaron Copley who lived in

Belfast. In the 19th century she was the only woman registered officially as a boxing promoter. Then there was Joe Gilmore, a pioneer aviator who joined the Irish Air Corp. He also bought his own aeroplane and flew it from England to Ardglass. He was killed in a plane crash in Canada in 1945.

The project is on going. If any reader knows of any gem or forgotten people whom the feel could be included they can contact the Federation for Ulster local studies at [www.hidden-gems.eu](http://www.hidden-gems.eu)