J.S. Andrews

James Sydney Andrews, of the Comber milling family, was born in Belfast in the 1930s. He was educated in Lancashire, and trained for two years in England before returning to Northern Ireland to work in the family firm.

From a very young age, the sea held a fascination for Andrews. As an adult he owned and sailed a variety of small boats and sea-going cruising craft, and he wrote many technical articles and cruising stories for the yachting press under the name 'Jim Andrews'.

But an interest in history and archaeology, inspired by his grandfather Sydney, prompted Andrews to write several novels for children. Today he is best known for *The Bell of Nendrum*, published in 1969. It tells the story of 15-year-old Niall Ross who, while out on Strangford Lough during a violent storm time-travels back to AD 974. He arrives at Mahee Island, makes friends with one of the monks from Nendrum, and later gets caught up in the middle of a Viking raid.

Andrews' next novel was *The Man from the Sea* (1970), a story set in ancient Ireland in which a young boy (Euan) finds a shipwrecked stranger off the coast of Donaghadee, whose bag of bronze implements helps save Euan's village from starvation.

*Cargo for a King* (1972) is an historical tale of Radnor MacHelli's capture by pirates in the Irish Sea where he becomes stranded while trying to restore trade between the Isle of Man and Ireland.

The Bell of Nendrum is a must for all lovers of Strangford.

Carol Moore

Select Bibliography:


*Cargo for a King* (London: Bodley Head, 1972).

Moyra Donaldson

Moyra Donaldson was born and brought up in Co. Down, and currently lives in Newtownards. She attended Glenlola Collegiate School and Queen’s University, where she read English Language and Literature. She then went on to complete postgraduate qualifications in Social Work and Social Welfare Law. She currently works for the SEELB and is married with two children.

Although a few of Donaldson’s poems were issued under the title *Kissing Ghosts* in 1996, it was not until 1998 that *Snakeskin Stilettos*, her first full collection, was published. Described in *Poetry Ireland Review* as ‘quite simply a brilliant debut’, Donaldson has since gone from strength to strength. *Beneath the Ice* was published in 2001, and followed a year later by an American edition of *Snakeskin Stilettos* which was shortlisted for a ForeWord Book of the Year Award in the USA. *The Horse’s Nest* was published in 2006, a collection of poems described as ‘spirit gifts as they move between what is intuited and what remains mysterious.’

Her poetry has won a number of awards, including the Allingham Award, the National Women’s Poetry Competition and the Cüirt New Writing Award 2007. Both her poetry (1998) and her short stories (2002) have been short listed for the Hennessy New Irish Writing Awards. Speaking about her relationship to the area, Donaldson writes:

*I grew up in Bangor and Newtownards, grew up with the peninsula and its familiar litany of names, townlands and villages: Sunday drives and holidays. The twisting coast road through Greyabbey and Kircubbin, the Lough, Scrabo, all are as familiar to me as my own hand. The Mournes are a constant on my horizon. Yet it is only quite recently that I have come to recognise the place as home. I have grown into a great love for the area and its beauty; its history and its character. I increasingly turn to it for the peace and ease it brings to me and the creative energy it gives me. I feel lucky to live here.*

(Donaldson, August 2008)

**Bibliography**

*Kissing Ghosts* (Belfast: Lapwing, 1996)


*The Horse’s Nest* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2006).
Lynn C. Doyle (1873–1961)

Leslie Alexander Montgomery was born in Downpatrick on 5 October 1873. He was educated at Dundalk, and later joined the Northern Banking Company for whom he worked in Belfast, Cushendall and Keady. At the age of 33 he was transferred to Skerries, County Dublin, where he was branch manager until 1934.

But Montgomery was also a writer and dramatist. Under the pseudonym, 'Lynn C. Doyle' (a name inspired by a tin of linseed oil he saw in a paint shop), he wrote more than twenty ‘Ballygullion’ books. Set in a fictional townland in the South Down area, the tales are warmhearted caricatures of Northern Irish village life. They include Ballygullion (1908), Mr Wildridge of the Bank (1916), Me and Mr. Murphy (1930), The Shake of the Bag (1939), A Bowl of Broth (1945) and the compendium, The Ballygullion Bus (1957). Some of the later editions were illustrated by the famous Irish artist William Conor.

Montgomery’s comedy, Love and Land (1928) was produced in London at the Little Theatre. Other plays, such as The Lilac Ribbon (1928) and Turncoats (1928), were staged by the Ulster Literary Theatre. He also wrote an autobiography, An Ulster Childhood (1921). He broadcast regularly for the BBC in Belfast and for a time was a member of the Censorship of Publications Board. He died in Dublin in 1961.

Select Bibliography:

Ballygullion (Dublin: Maunsel, 1908).
An Ulster Childhood (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts, 1921).
Love and Land (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1928).
Me and Mr. Murphy (London: Duckworth, 1930).
A Bowl of Broth (London: Duckworth, 1945).
Lady Dufferin (1807–1867)

Helen Selina Sheridan, granddaughter of the Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, married Price Blackwood in 1825, and a year later gave birth to her only son, Frederick Hamilton Temple Blackwood in Florence, Italy. Her husband, a prominent Co. Down landowner, succeeded to the title of Lord Dufferin and Clandeboye in 1839. After his death in 1841, she continued to spend her summers at the family estate at Clandeboye.

In 1862, she married Lord Gifford, but he died just eight weeks later. She died of breast cancer in June 1867. After her death, her son Frederick named the village and railway station built on his land Helen's Bay, and dedicated Helen's Tower on the Clandeboye estate to her (the tower inspired poems by both Tennyson and Browning). He also published Songs, Poems, & Verses by Helen, Lady Dufferin with a memoir in 1894.

Lady Dufferin had written poems and songs since childhood, and today she is best remembered for the ballad ‘The Lament of the Irish Emigrant’ which she wrote in 1845, at the height of the Irish Famine. She was inspired to write it by a chance encounter one May morning with a young man named Phelim Magennis while she was out for a walk.

He was sitting on a stile at Killowen Churchyard, and Lady Dufferin stopped to ask him why he was so sad. He explained that had just buried his wife Mary and their young son, who had both died from cholera. He was taking his leave of them before setting sail for a new life in America.

‘The Lament of the Irish Emigrant’ was made famous by the Irish tenor Count John McCormack, and continues to be recorded today.

Select Bibliography:

with Caroline Norton [her sister], Set of Ten Songs and Two Duets (London: J. Power, 1833).
Lispings from Low Latitudes; or, Extracts from the Journal of the Hon. Impulsia Gushington (London: J. Murray, 1863).
Michael Faulkner

Faulkner was born and raised in Northern Ireland but has lived most of his adult life in Scotland, first practising as a solicitor and then running a furniture business in Edinburgh. In 2002 he moved with his wife, Lynn McGregor, a professional artist, to a cabin on Islandmore which had been in the family since 1969.

His first book, *The Blue Cabin*, describes the writer’s arrival and settling in with his wife on Islandmore, and recounts how ‘two landlubbers, used to central heating and a car at the front door, settle into the first year of their new life, chronicling the ups and downs’. The cabin is situated on Ringhaddy Sound, on the western shore of Islandmore, approximately half a mile from Ringhaddy, the nearest access point on the mainland. It is the only island on Strangford Lough which is otherwise uninhabited and has boat-only access. The cabin had never been lived in all the year round, and had no mains electricity.

Suddenly I too had water around my ankles, and Allan was pointing open-mouthed at something behind me. I twisted on the balls of my feet in time to see the backflow of what had clearly been quite a few gallons of water, running out over the transom as the With pushed valiantly upwards. As she crested, paused and began to tip forward again, the stern rose and the propeller momentarily came out of the water and gave a shriek of indignation before plunging back under and driving us down onto the next wave. When we arrived, I was thrown forward off my perch and landed at Lynn’s feet, floundering like a trout in six inches of water.

from *The Blue Cabin*

Since publishing the memoir, Faulkner has contributed to a number of magazines and newspapers, and his second book, *Still on the Sound*, an illustrated sequel to the *Blue Cabin*, is due to be published in October 2009. He is also currently working on a novel.

**Bibliography**

*The Blue Cabin* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2006)

*Back on the Sound* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, forthcoming 2009)
Robin Glendinning

Robin Glendinning was born in Belfast. He taught English and History at Omagh Academy and Royal Belfast Academical Institution before becoming a full-time writer in 1992. One of the North of Ireland’s foremost playwrights, he lives on the shores of Strangford Lough at Reagh Island.

Robin Glendinning is an Irish playwright and short story writer. His stage plays include Mumbo Jumbo which was a joint winner of the Mobil Playwriting competition at the Royal Exchange Manchester where it was directed by Nicholas Hytner in 1985 and Donny Boy, also at the Royal Exchange, which won both the Manchester Evening News best new play award and best new play at the Martini Rossi Regional theatre awards in 1991. He has written over 20 plays for both BBC Radio 3 and 4. The most recent of these are The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican (2006), The Windsor Jewels and Beast at Bay (2007). He is currently working on two plays for Afternoon Theatre on Radio 4. He won a BBC Giles Cooper Award for his radio play The Words are Strange in 1991. His short stories, in both English and Irish, have appeared in Irish journals. In 2007 A Lust for Life was published in Irish Pages and Ceant agus Cnapshiúcra (An auction and lump sugar) in Comhar.

He lives with his wife Lorna on Reagh Island. His grandfather acquired Watch Hill farm in the 1930s and his aunt, Margery Glendinning, a well known local personality, farmed the land for many years.

Select Bibliography:

Three Plays by Robin Glendinning. Lagan Press.
Mumbo Jumbo and Donny Boy Warner Chappell Plays.
The Words are Strange In Best Radio Plays of 1991. Methuen.
Sam Hanna Bell
(1909–1990)

Born in Glasgow on 16 October 1909, Samuel Hanna Bell was the son of James Bell who worked for The Glasgow Herald and Jane Ferris McCarey McIlveen, both originally from Ulster. In 1918, Sam’s father died and the family returned to his maternal grandfather’s house in the townland of Raffrey, near Crossgar, for several years before moving to Belfast.

Sam Hanna Bell became a BBC radio features producer in Belfast in 1945. Learning his craft from Louise MacNeice, W.R. Rodgers and Dylan Thomas, he developed a strong regional style of radio documentary, writing or producing some six hundred programmes during a 25 year career. He also wrote novels and a play That Woman at Rathard. He was a friend of the actor, writer and playwright Joseph Tomelty who came from Portaferry.

It was Bell’s early experiences at Raffrey and around the Strangford coast that led to the writing of his first and most celebrated novel December Bride (1951). In an autobiographical note to the book’s editor he wrote:
‘During the few years of childhood that I spent there I saw a pattern of rural life that had existed for three hundred years vanish under the impact of the motor bus and tractor. Districts whose inhabitants considered it an adventure to jog into the monthly cattle fair in the nearest small town were suddenly aerated by modern transport, and men and women to whom Belfast had been no more than a distant furnace glow in the evening sky were soon referring to its thoroughfares as familiarly as their own roads and loanens and loughside tracks. It was from that remote and idyllic past that I drew my novel December Bride’.

(Sean McMahon, Sam Hanna Bell, A Biography, Blackstaff Press, 1999, p 8).

Sam Hanna Bell married Mildred Ferguson Reside in 1946 and they had a son, Fergus, born in 1948. Sam died at his Knock home in Belfast on 9 February 1990, just days before the release of Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s film of December Bride, made in Strangford Lough area.

Select Bibliography

**Novels:** December Bride (London: Dennis Dobson, 1951); The Hollow Ball (London: Cassell, 1961); A Man Flourishing (London: Gollancz, 1973); Across the Narrow Sea: A Romance (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1987).
Robert Huddleston (1814–1889)

One of the most accomplished and productive of the Ulster-Scots poets of the 19th century, Huddleston was born and lived in Moneyrea, Co. Down. He was a farmer and craftsman who specialized in fitting the wooden stock to guns.

During his lifetime he wrote hundreds of poems, ballads and songs, and earned himself the nickname the ‘Bard of Moneyrea’. Huddleston was largely self-taught and had eccentric strong views on many subjects, particularly his own work. Although he wrote in the Ulster-Scots idiom, he disliked his work being described as ‘mimic-Scot’, and abhorred being compared to Robert Burns.

All he asked of the world, he said, was that it believed him to be ‘an original’:

...though I may not be a Robert Burns to the lowland Scottish peasantry, let me hope, at least, that I shall one day be a Robert Huddleston to the Ulster Irish.

Preface (1846)

Some of his work was published in two major collections of poetry in the 1840s, and he contributed verse to local newspapers and to the Ulster Magazine. He also wrote a novel in Ulster Scots, The Adventures of Hughey Funny, or, The many Tales of Love, but it was never published.

According to John Hewitt, Huddleston was one of the last folk-bards of Ulster.

Select Bibliography:

A Collection of Poems and Songs on Rural Subjects (Belfast: J. Smyth, 1844)
A Collection of Poems and Songs on Different Subjects (Belfast: [R. Huddleston], 1846)

See also:
John Hewitt, Rhyming Weavers and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1974)
Paul Kearney

Paul Kearney was born in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, in 1967. He went to a local grammar school, and then to Lincoln College, Oxford, where he read Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, and Middle English and was a keen member of the Mountaineering Society.

Shortly after leaving Oxford, he went on a solitary climbing trip to the Isle of Skye, and it was after tumbling off a mountain there that the character of Michael Riven first came to him. The first half of The Way to Babylon was composed shortly after. After his first 3 stand-alone novels The Way to Babylon (1992), Riding the Unicorn (1994) and A Different Kingdom (1993) he wrote the Monarchies of God series which ran to five volumes and The Sea Beggars which began with The Mark of Ran (2004) and tells the story of Rol Cortishane in an ocean-based adventure. A second volume, This Forsaken Earth was published in July 2006. Kearney’s latest book is a new fantasy epic entitled The Ten Thousand, based loosely on the Anabasis of Xenophon. This book was published in the UK and US in August 2008.

Kearney’s books have been translated into nine languages. In 2006 he was long-listed for the British Fantasy Award, and in 2009 for the David Gemmell Award.

In the eight years subsequent to the publication of The Way to Babylon, Kearney lived in Copenhagen, New Jersey, and Cambridgeshire, but moved to Ballyhornan, Co. Down several years ago to be close to sea. The sea is an important part of Kearney’s imagination, and local landmarks such as Guns Island and the Narrows form an imaginative source for some of his work.

Bibliography:

The Way to Babylon (1992)
Riding the Unicorn (1994)
A Different Kingdom (1993)
The Ten Thousand (Solaris UK, 2008)
Primeval: The Lost Island (2008)

The Monarchies of God (Gollancz UK & Ace US)
Hawkwood’s Voyage (1995)
The Heretic Kings (1996)
The Iron Wars (1999)
The Second Empire (2000)
Ships from the West (2002)
Hawkwood and the Kings (forthcoming, 2010)
Century of the Soldier (forthcoming, 2010)

The Sea Beggars (Bantam)
The Mark of Ran (Bantam, 2004)
This Forsaken Earth (Bantam, 2006)
Lady Londonderry
(1878–1959)

Edith Vane-Tempest-Stewart, Marchioness of Londonderry was an influential society hostess in Britain between the two World Wars, and a close friend of Ramsay MacDonald.

Born Edith Helen Chaplin in Lincolnshire, she married Charles Vane-Tempest-Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, later Marquess of Londonderry, in 1899. Together they had five children.

In 1914, after the outbreak of World War I, she was appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the Women’s Volunteer Reserve (WVR), and helped with the organisation of the Officers’ Hospital set up in her house. She was the first woman to be appointed as a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the Military Division in 1917.

In the 1920s, Lady Londonderry created the gardens at the Londonderry family estate of Mount Stewart, near Newtownards, Co. Down. She gave the gardens to the National Trust in 1957, and they are still regarded as one of the best gardens in the British Isles. She died of cancer in 1959, aged 80.

Lady Londonderry wrote and edited several books, including Henry Chaplin: A Memoir (1926), The Magic Ink-Pot (1928), Retrospect (1938) and Frances Anne: The Life and Times of Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry, and Her Husband, Charles, Third Marquess of Londonderry (1958).

Bibliography:
Retrospect (London: Frederick Muller, 1938).

See also:
Michael Longley

Poet Michael Longley was born in Belfast in 1939 and educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. After reading classics at Trinity College, Dublin, he taught in schools in Belfast, Dublin and London. He joined the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 1970, working in literature and the traditional arts as Combined Arts Director before taking early retirement from the post in 1991. He was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2001.

Longley's first collection of poetry, *No Continuing City* (1969) has been followed by more than a dozen collections. *Gorse Fires* (1991) was winner of the Whitbread Poetry Award, while *The Weather in Japan* (2000) won the Hawthornden Prize, the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Belfast Arts Award for Literature. He was editor of *20th Century Irish Poems* (2002).

He has written widely on the arts in Northern Ireland, contributing to magazines including *Encounter* and *Phoenix* and has written scripts for BBC radio. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a member of Aosdána, an affiliation of Irish artists engaged in literature, music and visual arts. He lives in Belfast with his wife, the critic Edna Longley.

Although not connected to the area by birth, family or residence, he is an example of the many writers, along with Browning, Tennyson, Betjeman and Heaney who, in travelling to the area, have been moved to capture in words their experience of the place. His poem, ‘The Strangford Stone’, is from *The Weather in Japan* (2000).

**Select Bibliography**

- *The Echo Gate* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979)
W.G. Lyttle  
(1844–1896)

Wesley Guard Lyttle was born in Newtownards in April 1844 and largely self-educated. He began his working life as a clerk in a solicitor's office in Downpatrick and went on to have a varied career as a junior reporter, a school teacher, a teacher of shorthand (the first in Belfast), and an accountant.

In 1880 he took over the North Down Herald, published in Newtownards, and shortly afterwards transferred it to Bangor where it became the North Down Herald and Bangor Gazette.

Lyttle was in demand all over Ulster as an entertainer. His humorous monologues, delivered in the dialect of an Ards farmer, were published in his newspaper and later reprinted as Robin’s Readings. He also wrote three novels which were first serialized in local newspapers: Sons of the Sod (1886), Betsy Gray, or Hearts of Down (1888), and Daft Eddie; or, The Smugglers of Strangford Lough (c. 1890).

Daft Eddie, or The Smugglers of Strangford Lough, the story of Eddie’s attempts to thwart the activities of a band of smugglers calling themselves ‘The Merry Hearts of Down’, makes numerous references to places around the Lough, bringing a sense of realism to what is a fictional story.

In Betsy Gray, Lyttle ‘skillfully combines legend with local and social history’.

Betsy Gray, or Hearts of Down is based on actual events around the Ards Peninsula during the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen, and includes an account of the battle of Portaferry and the role played in it by the Reverend William Steel Dickson.

Bibliography:
- Sons of the Sod: A Tale of County Down (Bangor: [W.G. Lyttle], 1886).
- Humorous Readings by “Robin” (Belfast: Allen, 1886–92).
- Daft Eddie; or, The Smugglers of Strangford Lough (Bangor: [W.G. Lyttle], c. 1890).

Daft Eddie ... a ‘cracking good read’

John N. Maze

In Betsy Gray, Lyttle ‘skillfully combines legend with local and social history’.

Hugh Anderson

Literary Strangford is part of the Turn o’ the Tide programme, which was initiated through the Strangford Lough Management Advisory Committee, is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and is also supported by Ards Borough Council, Down District Council, The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, The National Trust and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. The Programme is being managed by the Strangford Lough Office, 028 4272 8886/ 9005, www.strangfordlough.org.
The poet Louis MacNeice was born in Belfast, the youngest son of a Church of Ireland clergyman, and was educated at Oxford. He became a lecturer in Classics at the University of Birmingham, and a few years later taught Greek at the University of London.

In 1939 he resigned from teaching to work for the BBC as a producer and journalist. He wrote several memorable verse plays for radio, notably The Dark Tower (published in 1947), translated Aeschylus and Goethe’s Faust, and produced several volumes of literary criticism.

MacNeice was closely associated with the British left-wing poets of the 1930s – W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis – and had some of his early work published in T.S. Eliot’s Criterion. His collections of poetry include Blind Fireworks (1929), Autumn Sequel (1954), Solstices (1961) and The Burning Perch (1963).

MacNeice died unexpectedly of pneumonia in 1963 after visiting a damp cave in Yorkshire. He had been conducting research for one of his own radio plays. He is buried with his mother (who died of TB in 1914) and his grandfather in the Church of Ireland graveyard at Carrowdore, Co. Down. Fellow Ulster poet Derek Mahon wrote 'In Carrowdore Churchyard' in tribute to MacNeice.

Select Bibliography:

Blind Fireworks (London: Gollancz, 1929).
The Earth Compels (London: Faber & Faber, 1938).
Plant and Phantom (London: Faber & Faber, 1941).
The Burning Perch (London: Faber & Faber, 1963)
Collected Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 2007)
Arthur Mason (1876–1955)

Arthur Mason was born and raised at Millquarter at the southern end of the coastal townland of Kilclief, Co. Down. He went to sea when he was 17 years old, and worked on board many vessels for the following twenty-four years. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1899.

During the First World War, he was superintendent at the Port Newark naval shipyard. He also went mining for gold in Australia, Alaska and the western US. After the war, he turned his hand to writing and this proved to be a lucrative and successful career.

His most popular books were autobiographical fictions – seafarers’ tall tales – and in the 1920s and 1930s, Mason had many nautical short stories published in magazines such as the Reader’s Digest, Sea Stories and the People’s Magazine. He wrote two novels – The Flying Bo’sun: A Mystery of the Sea (1921) and Swansea Dan (1929) – and two volumes of autobiography – Wide Seas and Many Lands (1924) in which he recounts his boyhood at Kilclief, and An Ocean Boyhood (1927).

He was also a children’s author and one of his best loved collection of stories, The Wee Men of Ballywooden (1931), combines memories of his Strangford childhood with an imaginary world of fairies and elves. The book takes its name from a Strangford townland.

Select Bibliography:

The Cook and the Captain Bold (London: William Heinemann, 1925).
Swansea Dan (London: Ernest Benn, 1929).
Sam McAughtry

Born in the Tiger’s Bay area of Belfast in the early 1920s, McAughtry left school at 14. He served in the Royal Air Force as a rigger and then a flying officer. He worked as builder’s labourer in London after the war and entered the Ministry of Agriculture in Belfast in 1947, retiring as deputy principal in 1980 to become a full time writer and journalist.


He was a well known and respected trade unionist and Northern Ireland Labour Party member, and stood unsuccessfully for elections on a non-sectarian socialist platform. He was a founding chairman of the Peace Train Organisation which protested against the bombing of the Dublin-Belfast railway line, and was a member of the Irish Senate, a nominee of the Taoiseach.

McAughtry has made many contributions to local radio and television programmes, recounting his memories of life in Belfast as well as providing political analysis during the troubles. He moved to Comber in the 1970s and took an active part in encouraging local writing and cultural studies. He was writer in residence for several years at Newtownards Arts Centre and oversaw several anthologies of locally based writing.

**Select Bibliography**

- *The Sinking of The Kenbane Head* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1977)
- *Play it Again Sam* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1978)
- *Blind Spot and Other Stories* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1979)
- *McAughtry’s War* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1985)
- *Down in the Free State* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1987)
- *Touch and Go* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1993)

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Literary Strangford is part of the Turn o’ the Tide programme, which was initiated through the Strangford Lough Management Advisory Committee, is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and is also supported by Ards Borough Council, Down District Council, The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, The National Trust and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. The Programme is being managed by the Strangford Lough Office, 028 4272 8886/ 9005, www.strangfordlough.org.
Roy McFadden (1921–1999)

The poet Roy McFadden was born in Belfast in 1921, the same year that Ireland was partitioned. He studied law at Queen’s University Belfast, and while he ran his own legal practice in the city he cultivated his literary career.

Routledge published McFadden’s first three collections of poetry in the 1940s, during which time he aligned himself with the anti-wars poets. He also played an important part in the literary life of Northern Ireland, founding and co-editing the province’s first poetry magazine, *Rann*, assisting with the journals *Ulster Voices*, *Lagan* and *Threshold*, and presenting various arts programmes for the BBC; his own verse play, *The Angry Hound*, was broadcast in 1952.

But after the publication of *The Heart’s Townland* in 1947, McFadden published no major collection for twenty-four years. While he concentrated on building a successful legal practice, he continued to write poems, as well as reviews, short stories and articles. Over the course of his lifetime, he published more than a dozen collections of poetry.

His father’s family was from Downpatrick, and in the 1970s McFadden began to explore his family roots. This is the focus for his 1977 collection, *Verifications*, where in poems such as ‘Quail Holdings’, he follows in his imagination his long-dead uncles and great aunts as they go about their business in the streets of Downpatrick.

Select Bibliography:

* A poem: *Russian Summer* (Dublin: Gayfield Press, 1941).
* Swords and Ploughshares* (London: Routledge, 1943).
* After Seymour’s Funeral* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990).
Michael McLaverty (1904–1992)

Born in Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, Michael McLaverty grew up in Belfast. He was educated at St Gall’s School off the Springfield Road, St Malachy’s College, and Queen’s University. His professional career as a teacher of maths and physics led to the position of principal of St Thomas’ Boys Secondary School on the Whiterock Road, where Seamus Heaney also taught 1962–63.

His writing career began in 1932 with the publication of his first short story, ‘The Green Field’ and continued for 60 years. Following the publication of his first novel Call My Brother Back (1939), based in Rathlin and Belfast, he became renowned for his novels and short stories, often based on his experiences of rural life in the Lecale area of Co. Down. These include The White Mare and Other Stories (1943), The Game Cock and Other Stories (1947) and In This Thy Day (1945). Throughout his life, McLaverty corresponded with many of the best known Irish writers of the 20th century, including Mary Lavin, Seán O’Faoláin, John McGahern, Padraic Fiacc, Brian Friel and Seamus Heaney, giving and receiving advice, encouragement and support.

His short stories are regarded by many as his best work, painting portraits of the lives and ethical dilemmas of ordinary people. In his introduction to Collected Short Stories, Seamus Heaney wrote of him ‘His voice was modestly pitched, he never sought the limelight, yet for all that, his place in our literature is secure’.

He died in 1992 and is buried at St Malachy’s Church, Kilclief – a blue plaque marks the house at Killard where he spent his summers and much of his retirement time.

Select Bibliography (based on first editions – see bibliography for re-prints)

Call My Brother Back (New York & London: Longmans Green, 1939)

Lost Fields (New York: Longmans Green, 1941)

The White Mare and Other Stories (Newcastle: Mourne Press, 1943)

In This Thy Day (New York: MacMillan, 1945)

The Game Cock and Other Stories (New York: Devin Adair, 1947)

Collected Short Stories, (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1978)

In Quiet Places (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1989)
Maria McManus

Born in Enniskillen, McManus is a poet and playwright who has lived in Strangford Village with her family since 1996. She is currently working on her second collection of poetry through an Arts Council individual Artist Award. A pamphlet entitled The Cello Suites is soon to be published by Lagan Press.

Her first solo collection of poetry Reading the Dog was published by Lagan Press in 2006 and was runner up in the 2007 Strong Awards at the Poetry Now International Festival and was also short-listed for the 2007 Glen Dimplex New Writers Award. In 2005 she was awarded the inaugural Bedell Scholarship for Literature and World Citizenship, by the Aspen Writers’ Foundation, Colorado USA.

McManus was playwright on attachment to Tinderbox Theatre Company in 2006-07. She has written and co-written a number of plays including, Bruised, a Tinderbox Theatre Company production (2008). Previous theatre credits include His ‘n’ Hers and Nowhere Harder for Replay Theatre Company, and The Black-Out Show for Red Lead Arts.

Maria McManus:

I don’t think I would have uncovered the writer in me, had I not come to this place. The landscape and the sheer energy of the Lough nurtured that. The Lough and the area is a plasma to the blood and as a result, it is interstitial to the words and the spaces in the poems. For example, in The Cello Suites, there is a scene of gutting a fish. The Lough does not make an explicit appearance, but there it is, in a poem which documents the first fish I ever caught while out fishing with David Thompson, a wildlife manager on the Lough – a sacred fish, which we honoured by cooking and eating over a fire and off stones on Salt Island one very rainy summer.

Select Bibliography

Reading the Dog (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2006)
The Cello Suites (Belfast: Lagan Press, forthcoming 2009)
Born 1964 in Belfast, Martin Mooney was raised in Newtownards and educated at Queen's University of Belfast, graduating with a First Class degree in English and Philosophy. He was co-editor of *The Gown Literary Supplement* and *The Big Spoon*.


His second collection, *Rasputin and his Children* (2000), was later republished by Lagan Press, who also produced his third book *Blue Lamp Disco* (2003), while in 2002 *Grub* was reprinted by CavanPerry press. He has worked as a creative writing teacher, arts administrator and bartender. As well as poetry, he has published short fiction, reviews, critical articles and cultural commentary in Irish and British periodicals.

Mooney has been a writer-in-residence at the Brighton Festival and the Aspects Festival of Irish Writing (Bangor), was for two years Writer-in-Association with the London Mozart Players, and has twice been a member of resident faculty at The Frost Place poetry conferences. A number of his poems have appeared in U.S. poetry journals including *Field* and *The Gettysburg Review*.

The Resurrection of the Body at Killysuggen

To think it would happen just at the dawn of winter – querulous rooks startled from bald woods

like banknotes from a fire. We are back in our bodies if not back in our clothes, even dead children

reborn in the prime of lives they’d never had, us old-timers struck again by sex’s ambush,

the gravedigger’s shed a boudoir, but so too every headstone, obelisk, and grass-grown path,

a moss-gowned Virgin tactfully lifting her gaze over the sandstone wall towards Bradshaw’s Brae –

while hundreds of us are making love here, all in the blink of a trumpet, a single note from an eye.

**Bibliography**

*Brecht and an Exquisite Corpse: Two Long Poems* (Belfast: Lapwing, 1992)

*Grub* (Belfast: Blackstaff 1993; CavanKerry Press, 2002)

*Bonfire Makers* (Dublin: Dedalus, 1995)


Reverend James Porter (1753–1798)

James Porter was born in Donegal in 1753 and studied divinity in Glasgow. He was a schoolteacher for a period in Dromore and from 1787 he was the Presbyterian minister at Greyabbey, Co. Down.

But Porter also held strong political views and was not afraid to express them. He joined the Volunteers in 1778, and edited the first two editions of *Paddy’s Resource* (1785 and 1876), collections of United Irishmen’s songs. He produced a series of letters satirising Irish aristocracy that were first published in the *Northern Star* from 1793, and later reprinted as *Billy Bluff and Squire Firebrand* (1796). In these letters, he castigated the upper classes as a ‘fungus on society’ with ‘rotten roots, filthy stems, and spongy heads’, and portrayed Lord Londonderry as Lord Mountmumble, a caricature considered to be treasonable. *Billy Bluff* was so popular that it continued to be reprinted into the mid-19th century, and was regarded as something of a classic.

Porter’s satire and his alleged alliance with the United Irishmen were to cost him his life. He was captured at the start of the 1798 rebellion and on the word of an informer, was hanged at the rear of his own church, now the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian at Greyabbey, despite the pleas of his wife and children. His remains are buried under a marble slab in Greyabbey church.

Porter was the subject of an 1967 Abbey Theatre play, *Fall ar an bhFeart* [Opportunity of a Miracle], by Séamus Ó Néill (1910–1986), a Castlewellan playwright.

### Bibliography:

*Billy Bluff and Squire Firebrand; or a sample of the times, as it appeared in five letters, with a selection of songs from ‘Paddy’s resource’* (Belfast: Northern Star, 1796).
Hugh Robinson

Born in 1942, Robinson is an author, broadcaster and storyteller who lives in Newtownards at the head of Strangford Lough. He has been writing for almost thirty years, and broadcasting his work with Walter Love on BBC Radio Ulster for seventeen years.

The loss of his father, killed in action during World War II, and his mother before he was seven years old, meant that he was raised by his grandparents on a small farm in the towland of Ballyhay near Donaghadee. Writing about how his early experiences influenced his writing, Hugh says:

I developed a great love for the countryside, the characters who peopled it and the life eking a meagre living when times were hard and money scarce. Weekly visits with my grandfather to Newtownards at the head of Strangford Lough revealed to me much of the life and the characters in the market town. My grandfather was no stranger to the farmers and livestock dealers who frequented the town on a Saturday, nor to the many public houses into which he somehow secreted me during his frequent drinking sessions. I didn’t know then, but what I was seeing and hearing, in town and country, would soon disappear forever. (Robinson, August 2009).

A desire to capture and re-kindle these memories led Robinson to start writing. His words came to the attention of Sam Hanna Bell, then editor of the *Ulster Tatler’s* ‘Literary Miscellany’, who invited him to enter a short story competition. He submitted ‘The Public Speaker’ and the story was one of the winners. Robinson went on win other high profile competitions including the prestigious Ian St James Award which saw him published nationally by Collins. Since then he has written a memoir in Ulster Scots, *Across the Fields of Yesterday* which became a best seller – the book was later re-written in English as *Back Across the Fields of Yesterday*. He has published two further books and is in constant demand as a broadcaster and storyteller.

Bibliography:


*Across the Fields of Yesterday* (Belfast: Ullans Press, 1999)

*Back Across the Fields of Yesterday* (Donaghadee: Ballyhay Books, 2002)

*The Book of 1,000 Beautiful Things* (Donaghadee: Ballyhay Books, 2003)

*Yarns from the Ards: Tall Tales and True Stories* (Donaghadee: Ballyhay Books, 2005)
George Francis Savage-Armstrong (1845–1906)

George Francis Savage-Armstrong was born at Rathfarnham in Dublin and educated at Trinity College Dublin. In 1870, he was appointed professor of history and English literature at Queen’s College, Cork, a post he held until his death.

He produced his first volume of verse, *Poems Lyrical and Dramatic*, in 1869 and during the course of his lifetime published an eclectic range of work. It included *Tragedy of Israel* (1872–76), *Stories of Wicklow* (1886), *Mephistopheles in Broadcloth: A Satire* (1888), *The Savages of the Ards* (1888) – a genealogical study of his mother’s family, originally from Portaferry Castle – and edited several volumes of his brother’s work.

Some of his contemporaries saw him as a potential candidate for the English Poet Laureateship, but others, most notably W.B. Yeats, were severely critical of his work. He died at Strangford House, Strangford in July 1906.

His 1901 collection, *Ballads of Down*, draws on family legends, as well as English and Scottish literary influences. The poem ‘Macananty: Fairy King of Scrabo Hill’ tells the story of the fairy king who is said to have his palace under the sepulchral cairn of Scrabo at Newtownards.

Select Bibliography:

- *Queen-Empress and Empire* (Belfast: Marcus Ward, 1897).
- *Ballads of Down* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901).
Damian Smyth

Damian Smyth was born in Downpatrick in 1962, and educated at Queens University Belfast where he received his doctorate in contemporary philosophy. He is the former deputy editor and arts editor of Fortnight magazine and former editor of Causeway, the journal of cultural traditions. He is currently head of Drama and Literature at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Smyth’s debut collection Downpatrick Races, was published by Lagan Press in 2000 and is a collection of poems embedded in the county town of his birth and the surrounding townlands. Stephanie Conn reviewed the collection for Literary Strangford, noting the numerous references to Strangford, Downpatrick and the surrounding area: ‘Clough, Bright, Tyrella, Ballynoe, Saul, Bishops court, Collins’ Corner, Quoile River, Audleystown, Killough, Ardglass, Kilclief, Quoiamstown, Struell, Raholp, Marfield, Echlinville, Innishargy, Ballydonnity, Inch...’

I know these people. Their faces are mine and I take my place by the vacant graves
because the bones of your people count
and because the shadows of their features pass
across your own down a hundred years and happiness and heartbreak simply count.

from ‘Cemetery Sunday’, Downpatrick Races

His second collection The Down Recorder is based on stories and events taken from Downpatrick’s weekly newspaper in the 19th and 20th centuries. Two new collections are to be published in Autumn 2009 – Market Street and Lamentations. These works, alongside a stage play that was launched in 2002, Soldiers of the Queen, marks Smyth, alongside Tomelty, as one of the writers most intimately connected to the area, its people, landscapes and stories.

Smyth was also a former reviewer of theatre in Ireland for the London Independent and has written extensively on theatre in Ireland as well as on literature, visual arts and cultural politics for a variety of publications and for television and radio. He has edited John Hewitt: Two Plays (1999), Tomelty’s All Souls’ Night and Other Plays (2002), and Martin Lynch: Five Plays (2002).

Select Bibliography

Downpatrick Races (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2000)
Soldiers of the Queen (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2002)
The Down Recorder (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2004)
Market Street (Belfast: Lagan Press, forthcoming)
Lamentations (Belfast: Lagan Press, forthcoming).
Joseph Tomelty (1911–1995)

Joseph Tomelty was born on 5 March 1911 at 22 Shore Street, Portaferry, the eldest of seven children. He left his local primary school at 12 and was apprenticed to the trade of housepainter. He later moved to Belfast where he attended the Belfast Technical College and became involved in theatre as an actor and playwright.

By 1929 Tomelty was a founder member of the influential Group Theatre and became its general manager in 1942. He wrote many short stories that were published in newspapers and broadcast on radio, and worked as a freelance journalist for the Irish Times and Irish Press during World War II. His career as a character actor developed rapidly and, by the late 1940s, he had a successful stage and film career underway. In 1948, he was commissioned by the BBC in Belfast to write a weekly radio serial and The McCooeys was born. His own playwriting accumulated – Barnum Was Right (1939), Idolatry at Inishargie (1942), a controversial political play, The End House (1944), Is The Priest At Home? (1954), and his masterpiece, and classic of Irish theatre, All Souls’ Night (1948), the same year as his Ards-based novel Red Is The Port Light was published. It was a tremendous creative output, sadly cut short by a car accident while filming in England in 1954. The artist recovered as an actor and famous personality, but was never as prolific after that event.

'I moved to the Portaferry area five years ago from Bristol, and had heard of Joseph Tomelty but didn't know anything about his work. For the Literary Strangford project I read 'All Soul's Night'. It was very clear to me that Tomelty's play is a work which is rooted in the area; parts of the town and the Lough are the setting for the drama and the characters themselves use words and phrases, patterns of speech which are recognisable still in the area. I enjoyed the play very much and have since gone on to find out more about Tomelty and to read more of his work. Janette Birch (Reader, Literary Strangford)

The townlands and place names of the Ards are memorialised in Tomelty's work. Barholme, Marfield, Bankmore, Ballyweird, Inishargy, Ballyquintin, even Rock Angus in the very mouth of the Lough, are marked out in the plays, novels and stories of the peninsula’s most renowned creative artist.

Tomelty died on the 7th June 1995 and is buried at Ballyphilip Graveyard, Portaferry.

Select Bibliography

Novels: Red is the Port Light (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948)
The Apprentice (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953)

Plays: Barnum was Right (1939); Idolatry at Inishargie (1942); Poor Errand (1943); Right Again Barnum (1943); The End House (1944); All Soul’s Night (1948); The Singing Bird (1948); Down the Heather Glen (1953); April in Assagh (1954); The Drunken Sailor (1954); Is the Priest at Home?
Florence Mary Wilson
(1870–1946)

Very little is known about the poet Florence Mary Wilson. She was born in Lisburn in 1870, but lived most of her life in Bangor with her solicitor husband and their five children. She was an associate of Alice Milligan, the prominent Irish nationalist and writer.

Wilson was a regular contributor to many local papers and magazines, such as the Irish Homestead, the Northern Whig, T.P's Weekly, and the Ulster Guardian.

She published her only collection, The Coming of the Earls and Other Verse, in 1918, but nowadays is remembered as the author of 'The Man from God Knows Where', a ballad about the United Irishman Thomas Russell who was hanged in Downpatrick in 1803.

The poem opens with a description of Russell's activities in Co. Down during the winter of 1795 when support for the United Irish movement was growing, and goes on to depict 'the time of the Hurry' when, in 1798, people 'quet from mindin’ the farms’ to fight under McCracken and Munro. The poem refers to the execution of the Reverend Archibald Warwick of Kircubbin who was hanged along with the Reverend James Porter of Greyabbey, and concludes with Russell’s own death at Downpatrick gaol.

Bibliography:

The Coming of the Earls and Other Verse (Dublin: Three Candles, 1918).
Filson Young (1876–1938)

Alexander Bell Filson Young was born in Ballyeaston, Co. Antrim, the son of Reverend William Young and Sarah Filson of Portaferry. In 1877, when Filson was only one, the family moved to Manchester, but while he was a child he returned to Portaferry each summer to spend the holidays with his mother's relatives.

The sea was to be a strong presence in Young’s life. During the First World War, he served in the Navy, and afterwards he carved out a career as a journalist, writer and broadcaster. He edited the Saturday Review for three years, and worked as a reader for Grant Richards (it was he that recommended they publish James Joyce’s Dubliners). He worked for 15 years in the world of radio broadcasting, both as a presenter and as an adviser to the BBC.

He wrote a wide variety of books – musical criticism, motoring guides, eyewitness accounts of famous murder trials, books about wars on land and sea, and dozens of articles and autobiographical essays originally published in journals and magazines of the day. He is said to have written the first book on the Titanic: it was published 37 days after the Titanic sank.

He also wrote a number of novels. The Sands of Pleasure (1905), about an Englishman’s affair with a Parisian prostitute, was a great success because of the scandal it caused. His 1908 novel, When the Tide Turns, takes its title from The Narrows of Strangford Lough, the setting in which its central character, the artist Rupert Savage, grows up and to which he returns on the death of his aunt.

Filson Young married twice and had innumerable affairs. He died of heart failure when only 61.

Select Bibliography:

The Relief of Mafeking (London: Methuen, 1900).
The Complete Motorist (London: Methuen, 1904).
The Sands of Pleasure (London: Grant Richards, 1905).
When the Tide Turns (London: Grant Richards, 1908).
Titanic (London: Grant Richards, 1912).
With the Battle Cruisers (London: Cassell, 1921).
Trial of Frederick Bywaters and Edith Thompson (Edinburgh: Hodge, 1923).