

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

### ULSTER HISTORY CIRCLE



#### **BEATRICE GRIMSHAW (1870-1953)**

In her autobiography *The Blue Book* published in 1949 Beatrice said

*I am a Victorian. I was born in the 'Seventies, in a big lonely country house five miles-a whole hour's journey-from Belfast.*

*I was governessed and schooled and colleged. I was taught to ride and play games. I was taught to behave. To write notes for Mamma. To do the flowers. To be polite but not too polite, to Young Gentlemen. To accept flowers, sweets and books from them, but no more. To rise swiftly with the rest of the six daughters and sons when Papa came into the breakfast-room, to kiss him ceremoniously, and rush to wait upon him. He liked it, and we liked it.*

*I went to dances, and waltzed to "The Blue Danube," "Sweethearts," and "Estudiantina." I went to afternoon parties. I was chaperoned. My three sisters were good girls, and content.*

*But I was the Revolting Daughter--as they called them then. I bought a bicycle, with difficulty. I rode it unchaperoned, mile and miles beyond the limits possible to the soberly trotting horses. The world opened before me. And as soon as my twenty-first birthday dawned, I went away from home, to see what the world might to give to daughters who revolted. What it gave me first was the offer of a journalistic post.*

*There were maps of far-away places, maps with tantalizing blanks in them; maps of the huge Pacific, coloured an entrancing blue. I swore that I would go there.*

Beatrice Grimshaw was born at Cloonagh, near Dunmurry, County Antrim on 3 February 1870. She was educated at Margaret Byers's Ladies' Collegiate College, Belfast, in Caen and in London. She was a keen cyclist, and broke the women's world 24-hour record by five hours. As a journalist in Dublin from 1891 to 1899 she became sub-editor of *Irish Cyclist* and from 1895 edited the *Social Review* for four years. Until 1903 she was a freelance journalist, a tour organiser and an emigration promoter. In that year she went to the Pacific, and from 1907 to 1934 lived in Papua New Guinea, where she ran a coffee plantation for several years. She had many adventures in the South Seas, related in her autobiography, especially in New Guinea, which was then the home of Headhunters and Cannibals. She was the first white woman to ascend the Fly and Sepik rivers and narrowly escaped capture by headhunters. Sixteen of her novels are set in Papua, and nine on other Pacific islands. She published several travel books, including *In the Strange South Seas*, (illustrated by her own photographs) 1907; *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands*, 1907 and *The New New Guinea*, 1910. Among her novels are *When the Red Gods Call*; *Guinea Gold*; *The Mystery of Tumbling Reef* and *South Sea Sarah*. In all she published forty-two books. She also published ten volumes of short stories and contributed articles to *The National Geographic*. She prided herself in writing for 'the-man-who-could-not-go' and said of herself: 'I have no new range of rivers to my credit, though I have mapped a few odd corners here and there, and often met natives who had never seen a white person - that is easy in Papua.'

She died in Bathurst, New South Wales on 30 June 1953.