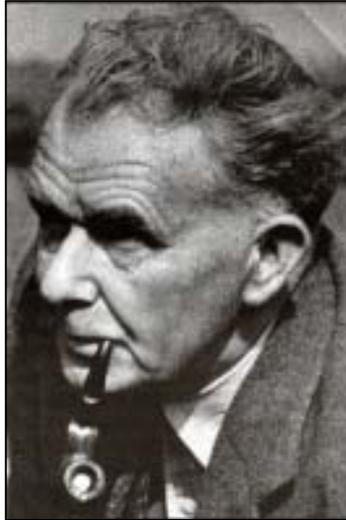


ULSTER HISTORY CIRCLE



JOHN CLARKE (1889-1980)| Potato breeder

John Clarke was born on 1 February 1899 at Lamnagh Beg, Ballintoy, on the North Antrim coast, son of Daniel and Margaret. He attended St. Mary's Primary School at Ballinalea, but due to the need to help with the family farm in Broughgammon, he obtained no further formal education. Despite this, by dint of extensive reading in Ballymoney Library and ongoing research and experimentation throughout his life, he became a recognised expert on the science of potato breeding, producing dozens of varieties, some of which are still widely produced. John's father was known to have tried to produce new potato varieties but it was John who pursued this activity much beyond what his father had achieved.

When John married Angela Hayes, a local schoolteacher, in 1947 the couple set up home in a farm close to the Giant's Causeway. The farmhouse, named Innisfree and buildings are now part of the National Trust Complex at the Causeway and is the site of the Educational Centre close to the Causeway.

In 1923 Daniel and John had their potatoes certified by the Ministry of Agriculture's Seed Classification system. John specialised in the first early varieties, harvested in June and July. His first variety Ulster Monarch was certified in 1936. Over the next 51 years he was to have 33 varieties certified, of which the first 30 had the prefix Ulster.

John was respected by his contemporaries and by specialist scientists such as Dr. R.N. Salaman and Dr. H. Howard. Dr Salaman F.R.S. was a leading expert on diseases of the potato and lived near Cambridge, running a botanical research centre. Salaman researched and promoted resistance to viruses in potatoes and set out to multiply virus-free stocks to supply outlets throughout the UK. John Clarke worked closely with Dr. Salaman in this endeavour, setting up greenhouses in Broughgammon and Innisfree.

John won many accolades. He was awarded the Lord Derby Gold Medal in 1948, a Master of Agriculture Degree by QUB in 1950, the John Snell Medal by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany, Cambridge in the mid-1950s and in 1957 the Belfast Telegraph Cup for Outstanding Achievements in Agriculture. John was awarded the OBE in 1969. He died on 28 May 1980.