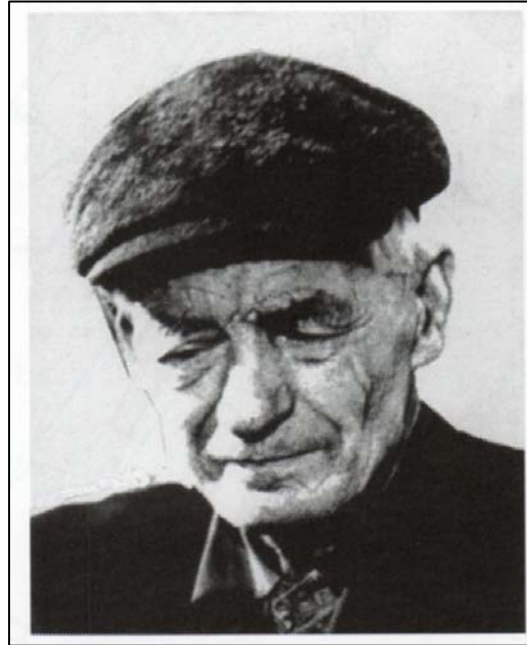


**BALLINASCREEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



**GEORGE BARNETT (1876-1965)**

Anyone who lived in, or passed through, the Sixtowns district (about 3 miles west of Draperstown) during the early 1960s or before, would not have been surprised to see a small, thin man, wearing a peaked cap and Wellington boots, walking vigorously along the road or across the fields. His slightly stooped frame and piercing eyes would have alerted the onlooker to the fact that Geordie Barnett was always acutely observant with regard to botany, geology, archaeology or, indeed, anything unusual. Although he had received little formal education, his curiosity about his surroundings had led to detailed study and his advice was much sought after. As an historian, archaeologist, botanist, geologist, folklorist and poet, Geordie had spent sixty years studying all aspects of the Sperrins.

Born on 11 February 1876 Geordie was the second of nine children brought up on a small farm in the townland of Owenreagh. His father, also George, was known as Big Geordie and, consequently, the son was known throughout his life as Wee Geordie. Three of the family died from tuberculosis and when Geordie was only twelve years old his mother died. From then on there was no more schooling and Geordie was helping on the farm. He never enjoyed farm work, but it wasn't until his father died in 1931 that the bachelor farmer was able to fully pursue his local studies. His writings became more extensive and his field of activities widened. Ongoing correspondence with academics often led to visits from leading figures in the universities, and other dignitaries. They, in turn, would often bring groups of students, or club members, to meet Geordie and buses would often be seen stopping at his primitive homestead in Owenreagh to pick up the best-informed, and most entertaining, guide to the Sperrins region. Prominent writers, broadcasters, politicians and academics were among his friends and Lord Wakehurst, while Governor of Northern Ireland, made several visits. Perhaps he will be best remembered for the discovery of the Beaghmore stone circles in County Tyrone. This very significant archaeological site was discovered by Geordie during peat cutting in the 1930s.

Geordie was actively pursuing his studies until a couple of days before his death on 10 April 1965. He is buried at St Anne's Churchyard in Cavanreagh, not far from his home. His life-long friend and, perhaps, Ireland's most distinguished historical geographer, Professor Estyn Evans, wrote a most comprehensive and eloquent obituary where he described him as "a man of rare quality who, with little formal education, won more than local fame for his knowledge of field archaeology, botany and geology".