

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



WILLIAM GIBSON (1838-1913): Goldsmith and Philanthropist

William Gibson was born in 1838, the son of a small farmer in Drombroneth, Dromore. As a small boy he was apprenticed to his brother-in-law, James Crozier, who had an establishment in North Street, Belfast. At age 27 he set up his own business, first in North Street and then in Castle Junction at Gibson's Corner. His range widened to include silver and gold objects of very high quality. He exhibited in the U.S.A. and Paris, where he won prizes. He had his own registered assay mark. He presented elaborate silver cups to the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society and the new mace for Belfast Corporation, first used in 1913 for the tercentenary of the granting of the its Charter by James 1. He also presented Queens University with a gold mace in 1909 to commemorate its new status as a University. Both maces are still in use today.

The business expanded rapidly and was eventually formed into a limited company with premises in Regent Street London which ultimately became the Goldsmith and Silversmith company, the leading jewellery firm in the UK, producing goods of the highest quality. The company was acquired by Mappin and Webb for whom the late James Warwick, Headmaster of Belfast College of Art worked as a designer before World War II. Mappin and Webb was taken over by Garrards, the present (2006) Crown Jewellers. He purchased the farm in Drumbroneth, Dromore where he had been born, and built a large house there, Drumbroneth House, in which he lived while on business trips to County Down

Gibson in his will set up The Gibson Trust Fund. The scholarships, for the promotion and encouragement of education in agriculture and the cultivation and management of land for profit, are awarded to undergraduates and postgraduates of Queens University who were born in Northern Ireland. Preference is given to students born in County Down or County Antrim

Gibson died on the 1st November 1913 at Hove, Sussex.

Patrick Devlin