



WILLIAM GREENHILL LYTTLE (1844-1896)

Writer and Entertainer

Wesley Greenhill Lyttle is thought to have been born near Newtownards, County Down, in 1844.

An accountant, a teacher of shorthand and an elocutionist, Lyttle was above all an entertainer, often in the guise of his alter-ego "Robin", a jovial country farmer who regaled his audiences in Ulster-Scots. Lyttle had been a lecturer in Dr Corry's Irish Diorama Company, which toured Britain and America with a show entitled *Ireland, its scenery, music and antiquities*. For most of the 1870s he lived in Belfast where he began to write and perform his humorous monologues. In 1880 he established the *North Down Herald* in Newtownards. In 1883 Lyttle moved the newspaper to Bangor and added the additional title of *Bangor Gazette*.

Lyttle was the author of a great many poems and sketches in Ulster-Scots. His humorous monologues, recited in the speech of an Ards farmer, were reproduced in his newspaper and subsequently published as *Robin's Readings*. *Betsy Gray or Hearts of Down*, his most popular work, originally appeared in serial form in the newspaper. It was printed in paperback in 1888; a third edition came in 1894 and an illustrated sixth edition was published in 1913 by Robert Carswell, revised by the antiquarian Francis Joseph Bigger.

He wrote two further novels, *Sons of the Sod* and *Daft Eddie or the Smugglers of Strangford Lough*. He regularly performed at various public events as "Robin Gordon of Ballycuddy".

Lyttle died on 1 November 1896, and is buried in the grounds of Bangor Abbey. His memorial there reads: "...a man of rare natural gifts, he raised himself to a high position among the journalists of Ireland. He was a brilliant and graceful writer, a true humourist and an accomplished poet. Robin was a kind friend, a genial companion and a true son of County Down."

Patrick Devlin