

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



HELEN WADDELL (1889-1965)

Scholar and Writer

Helen Jane Waddell was born in Tokyo, where her father was a Presbyterian missionary; Sam Waddell (the dramatist Rutherford Mayne) was her elder brother. She was educated at Queen's, Belfast, Oxford and Paris, and for a number of years worked for the publishing house of Constable (which also issued her own books).

Helen Waddell is best known for revealing to the modern reader the world of the medieval goliards (*The Wandering Scholars*, 1927), many of whose poems she translated in *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (1929). Her one novel, *Peter Abelard* (1933), is also set in that medieval world and enjoyed considerable success at the time. But her subject matter ranged wider than that; her first publication was *Lyrics From The Chinese* and she also wrote an authoritative - and readable - book on the anchorites of the Sinai desert (*The Desert Fathers*). She even tried her hand at plays; *The Spoilt Buddha*, first performed at the Grand Opera House, Belfast, is reputed to be a portrait of her brother Sam.

A wasting neurological illness put an end to her writing career in 1950. She spent her last years living with her sister Meg at Kilmacrew House, near Banbridge. She died in London in 1965

Patrick Devlin