

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



WILLIAM ALFRED GREEN (1870-1958)

Photographer

W.A. Green was born into a Quaker family in Newry, Co Down. His father had a tea and grocery business and his great uncle, Forster Green was a successful Belfast tea merchant whose family's fatal experience with tuberculosis prompted him to endow the Hospital that bears his name on the outskirts of Belfast.

Green was a boarder at Friends School in Lisburn. When his parents died, he moved to Belfast and was employed for a while by his great uncle. It is thought that ill health caused him to leave the business. He was a keen member of the Belfast Naturalist Field Club and was later a Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.

Green was apprenticed to Robert John Welsh (1859 - 1936), a professional photographer, before starting his own photographic business, first in Belfast in 1910 and later in Antrim after he moved there in 1924. He published two series of postcards of "Irish Views", called the "Wagtail" series, a pun on his initials. His work ranged from lantern slides for educational purposes to photographs for postcards, advertisements and book illustrations

Although his former work is still much admired, Green is perhaps better known today for the photographs he took in pursuit of his personal interest in old rural crafts and customs; scenes of country life, of flax and corn processing, carpet, wool and linen weaving, clay pipe and china production, fishing around Lough Neagh. He carried out much work of this type in the area around Toomebridge, County Antrim. The high quality of his work is demonstrated by its continued publication.

Green and his wife suffered a personal tragedy with the accidental death of their only child, Edmund, in 1921. He retired in the mid 1930s, remaining in Antrim until his death in 1958.

His collection is now in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, County Down.

Acknowledgement: [Northern Ireland: A Wealth of History](#)