

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

LAOIS HERITAGE SOCIETY



PATRICK GERALD WARD

Portlaoise's forgotten recording star

Patrick Gerald Ward, son of Charles and Bridget Ward, was born on August 3, 1896 in Lyster's Lane, one of the poorest areas in Maryborough (now Portlaoise). The 1901 Census lists Charles as a tinsmith, and his second wife, Mary Anne, as a Hawker of Tin.

Unable to find work locally, Patrick went to England. While working as a porter in a London hotel, he was heard singing by the soprano Armilita Galli-Curci and she suggested that he go to Italy to have his voice trained. His tuition fees were paid by the soprano and the inventor Guglielmo Marconi (whose mother was Annie Jameson of the famous distillery family).

His recording career began in May 1927 and copies of his records are today held by the British Library, the Irish Traditional Music Archive and specialist collectors. Like many other tenors of the period, Patrick Ward's singing was *McCormackesque*. And therein, perhaps, lies the principal reason why he is not better known today; like other Irish tenors of the period, his talents were eclipsed by the ubiquitous genius of McCormack.

He eventually retired from the stage and took up teaching, opening studios in London, and publishing three books on the art of singing, as well as a small collection of his own compositions. Little is known of Ward's later years. He died in May 1985 and his own setting of *Ave Maria* was sung at his funeral in Holy Apostles Church, Pimlico.

A most intriguing aspect of his life was how his interest in Yoga brought him into contact with such celebrities as Gracie Fields, Edward G. Robinson, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. And that's not the half of it!

If you would like to read more of his sometimes incredible story – and listen to excerpts from his recordings – please go to <http://www.portlaoisepictures.com/patrickward.htm>

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