

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

BY DOREEN McBRIDE



**MAUD BROWN**

When Maud Brown was born her mother thought she was a baby fairy so, hoping the fairies would reclaim their own, left her at a fairy fort somewhere in the region of Ballysillan, near Belfast. Maud's screams being heard by a passing clergyman. He brought her to the local orphanage where she grew up. Maud's arms and legs were abnormally short, a genetic defect, which had caused her mother to mistake her for a fairy! Today she would be diagnosed as an achronoplastic dwarf. At the time a common belief was that God punished people who annoyed Him so a family misfortune was felt to be a disgrace, another reason for abandoning Maud. This attitude caused Queen Victoria to keep one of her sons hidden.

When Maud was 12 years old my Granny, Lizzie Henry needed help with running her shop on the corner of Morpeth Street on the Shankill Road so she went to the orphanage looking for a young girl to give employment. Granny, a kindly woman, liked Maud and offered her a job.

In later life Maud told me she was very grateful to my Granny because she had feared she was doomed to spend the rest of her life in the orphanage as nobody would want to employ her although 'there is a perfectly normal person inside my funny wee body'. Granny said Maud was 'like a daughter to her'.

After she had been working for some time with my Granny, Maud's mother returned to the neighbourhood, heard that an abandoned baby had been raised in the orphanage, visited it and discovered Maud's whereabouts. She made contact, explained her motivation in abandoning her daughter and the two became friends. Maud nursed her mother during her final illness. An exceptionally hard working, loving, forgiving soul lived inside her 'funny wee body'