

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



PATRICK JOHNSON (1881-1974) - Seanachie

Patrick Johnson was born in Ballinlassy, Fardrum, Athlone, (close to Castledaly village) County Westmeath in 1881

Patrick was a noted Seanachai in the area and was regarded as a brilliant observer of life in the rural setting, his attention to detail and his interest in human behaviour and the flora and fauna of the local area were unmatched, whether it was observing the behaviour of the hare in their local habitat or the life cycle of the salmon as they journey up the nearby Bore River on their way back to the sea via the River Shannon, these phenomena were carefully noted in Patricks mind and ever ready for recounting in great descriptive detail when called upon.

He was the possessor of endless stories of local happenings and had an abundance of facts and legends. Whether it was stories of the unusual happenings among locals or sightings of the Ban Shee, the pouring out of this detailed information was second nature to Patrick; he was the 'google' of his time. In addition to his unique talent of storytelling he was an accomplished seanos singer and played the melodeon. He had an unusual collection of rare songs which depicted many rare happenings in town and village in his time. Patrick also possessed a cure for burns and there are many testimonials to the proof of his gift with some people after seeking medical assistance for serious burns or scalds, but to no avail, then resorting to Patrick's cure whereby they found favourable results.

Patrick died in 1974 at the age of 93 but not before he was recorded for many hours of valuable stories and songs by Irish folklore collectors between the mid sixties and the early seventies. In addition he was featured in a short heritage film made in the late sixties. He willingly assisted some local historians who were compiling books and made a contribution to a study of the Irish brown hare when approached by an academic.

While Patrick was appreciated during his lifetime and his recordings reside in the archives of the folklore section in UCD, by and large Patrick's memory has dimmed in the environs of Westmeath and a revival of his memory through the exposure of his recordings would be fitting to celebrate the legacy of this forgotten man's contribution to our history.

Val Connaughton