ULSTER-SCOTS HERITAGE

W.F. MARSHALL
THE ‘BARD OF TYRONE’

1888 – 1959: MINISTER, HISTORIAN, WRITER AND BROADCASTER OF ULSTER TRADITIONS

William Forbes Marshall was born at Drumragh, near Omagh, on 8 May 1888. His father was the principal of Sixmilecross National School and Marshall was himself educated here before going on to Dungannon Royal School and then Queen’s College, Galway before beginning theological studies in Belfast in 1908.

In 1913 Marshall was ordained minister of Aughnacloy Presbyterian Church and three years later, somewhat unusually for a Presbyterian minister, moved to his home congregation of Sixmilecross. Here he ministered until 1928 when he moved to Castlerock where he continued as minister until retirement.

Marshall was a renowned writer and became the leading authority on Ulster dialect, in recognition of which he was elected a Member of the Royal Irish Academy. He had almost completed a dictionary of Ulster dialect when sadly his pet dog destroyed it. He published several books of poetry. Probably his most famous poem is ‘Me an’ my da’, which begins, ‘I’m livin’ in Drumlister’.

His poems were not written in Ulster-Scots, but in the dialect of his native Tyrone, though he was aware of the three cultural elements that had influenced it – Gaelic Irish, English and Scots. His other works include ‘Ulster Sails West’, published in 1943 to coincide with the arrival of American GIs in Northern Ireland, which highlighted the contribution of the Ulster-Scots to the shaping of America.

Marshall died on 25 January 1959 and was buried at Sixmilecross in the burial ground beside the Presbyterian Church – the ‘plain old house of God’ as he referred to it in one of his poems.

For more about how the Ulster-Scots helped shape the landscape and culture of this region scan this QR code on any smartphone or go to www.DiscoverUlsterScots.org