

ARDBOE LITERARY, PHOTOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



WILLIAM JOHN DEVLIN 1940-2002

Wee Willie Devlin was born on 5 July 1940 in the townland of Aneeternmore, parish of Ardboe, Co Tyrone, on the western shores of Lough Neagh. The family distinguishing-name: Devlin (Robin) originated from his grandfather's flaming red hair. The Robin Devlins were the bards of the Devlin clan and had their own tradition of composing songs and poems as well as re-telling the local tales of the bad times of the landlords. Tales of evictions, of priests and the poor, of unrequited love and emigration and of the struggles of the Lough Neagh fishing families. This all went hand in hand with an affinity to nature, including the hunt, the chase, the breeding of grews (greyhounds) and the livelihood wrested from Lough Neagh. Wee Willie, Lough Neagh fisherman and net-maker, was totally steeped in this tradition. If Steinbeck had encountered Willie, then *Aneeter Shore* would surely have been the Irish equivalent of *Cannery Row*. Willie thrived in company; there was a twinkle in his eye, a perpetual smile of welcome on his face, and a boyish skip in his step. He loved the countryside. He claimed that walking was the single best exercise a person could do, and he was always seen on his faithful old racer. He valued the fireside atmosphere and "the ways of the oul people".

He set store by rituals, rites of passage, the symbolism of holly and rushes, Lammas, Hallowe'en, Old Christmas, the phases and powers of the moon. He suspected that retribution for evil deeds would fall on future generations. He was often solitary yet he blossomed in company, for Willie simply liked talking and listening to people.

Willie died suddenly on Wednesday 2 January 2002, aged 61 years. Long may his inimitable and guileless spirit roam along the Loughshore.