

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

THE NORTH OF IRELAND FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

LISBURN BRANCH

SIR SAMUEL KEIGHTLEY, POET AND NOVELIST

Sir Samuel Robert Keightley (1859-1949), barrister, poet and novelist, was born in Belfast and educated at Queens' College, where he studied classics and law. He was called to the Irish Bar in 1883.

Keightley wrote and published 'A King's Daughter' and other poems while still a student, but he was better known for his historical novels. His subjects, which ranged from the English Civil War and the siege of Londonderry to the 1798 rebellion in the Ards peninsula, conveyed the spirit of the times and received good reviews in the Times, Guardian and Vanity Fair. Published titles included; 'The Cavalier's', 'The Crimson Sign', 'The last recruit of Clare's', 'Heronford', 'A Man of Millions', 'A Beggar on Horseback', 'Barnaby's Bridal' and 'The Pikemen'. The historical novels proved popular. 'The Cavaliers', 'The Crimson Sign' and 'The Pikeman' ran to a fourth, third and second edition respectively.

Keightley also published and introduced, 'Among the Guns, Intimate letters from Ypres and the Somme', written by his son Captain Phillip Russell Keightley, Royal Garrison Artillery. In the political arena he was unsuccessful in two parliamentary elections: South Antrim in 1903 as Independent Unionist and South Derry in 1910 as a Liberal candidate. He was a member of the first senate of Queen's University. He received his Knighthood in 1912. In 1892 he married Gertrude Emily Smith, who died in 1929 having borne him two sons and two daughters. He later married Anne, widow of Col. Vowell

During World War I Sir Samuel and Lady Keightley lived at The Fort, Lisburn, a former Barbour family home. The family moved to Drum House, Drumbeg in 1918. Sir Samuel died at Stradbally, Co. Leix, at the age of ninety.