

## Hidden Gems and Forgotten People

### STEWARTSTOWN & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



**BILL GREER**

What were you doing when you heard Kennedy was dead? To those of us who lived through the 1960's, that question usually evokes an accurate and immediate response as the news spread across a shocked and horrified world that John F. Kennedy 35th President of the United States had fallen victim to an assassin's bullet. But to one person, born just outside Stewartstown, County Tyrone, the assassination had a deeply personal traumatic effect which was to impact on the rest of his life. William (Bill) Greer was at the wheel of the presidential car on the day Jack Kennedy died.

William Greer was born in 1910 in the townland of Ballyveeney, two miles north of Stewartstown. He received his early education in the local primary school at Ballymaguire, after which he emigrated at the age of seventeen to Canada. He worked as a farm labourer before moving to Boston where he found employment as a chauffeur. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Greer joined the U.S Navy. He was assigned to the presidential yacht in May 1944.

At the end of the Second World War he joined the U.S Secret Service, and was appointed to the White House Staff in November 1950. Over the next thirteen years he worked as a chauffeur for three U.S. Presidents, Harry S. Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy.

Although Bill Greer spent most of his life in America, he never forgot his homeland, and made several visits to friends and relatives in the Stewartstown area and Belfast. On one occasion, President Eisenhower gave him leave to visit County Tyrone during a Presidential visit to Dublin. In the 1970's he visited the Ballyveeney district to enquire about his old school friends, and to visit the grave of his parents in Ballyclog churchyard. William Greer died on 23rd February, 1985.

*The full story of Bill Greer is told by John Glendinning in his article "Bill Greer" which appeared in Vol. 11 of The Bell, the Journal of the Stewartstown and District Local History Society. pp 46-48*