

The Achill Heinrich Böll Association are pleased to present an illustrated lecture on the life and work of **Alexander Williams RHA**, by **Gordon Ledbetter**. This marks the publication of *Privilege and Poverty; The life and times of an Irish Painter and Naturalist Alexander Williams RHA 1846 -1930*. Special guest speaker **John O’ Shea**. Lecture at the **Cyril Gray Memorial Hall**, Dugort Achill. On Saturday evening **September 25th 2010** at 8.30pm.

Privilege: the Lord Lieutenant and the ‘Castle’ set An artist who exhibited at the RHA annually for sixty-one years – a unique record – **Alexander Williams’** exhibitions and recitals were social events attended by well-known figures such as Bram Stoker, W. B. Yeats, Percy French and William Orpen.

Poverty: the subsistence living of the Achill Islanders and the disappearing slums of Dublin. Williams worked shoulder to shoulder with the people of Achill to build a house and garden on the edge of Bleanaskill Bay, both now open to the public. He also sketched ‘Bits of Old Dublin’ that showed the dilapidated streets of the inner city, pictures that seemed to be imbued with a strong sense of community in spite of the squalor. Sadly, and despite being a prodigious painter, Williams died almost a pauper.

Comfortable on both sides of the social divide in Victorian Ireland, Williams led a remarkably wide-ranging life: he was also an apprentice hatter, a taxidermist and a professional singer, as well as being the first artist to open the West of Ireland, particularly Achill Island, to a wide audience.

Williams’ thirty-five volumes of diaries, memoirs, letters and accounts paint an engrossing portrait of this era. The papers remained in the possession of one family, unknown and unpublished, for more than a century. Here they provide the basis for a beautifully illustrated biography of an extraordinary life, and an absorbing social history.

Gordon T. Ledbetter from Dublin is author of seven books including *The Great Irish Tenor*, a biography of John McCormack (1884–1945). He wrote and presented an acclaimed DVD documentary *The People’s Tenor* (Zampano Productions), and has broadcast and lectured extensively. For further information; www.heinrichboellcottage.com 086 2325516.

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