

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



### **JOHN LUKE (1906-1975): Painter**

John Luke was born in Belfast at 4 Lewis Street on 19 January 1906. The son of a boilerman, Luke worked in the shipyard and the York Street Flax Spinning Mill before winning a scholarship to the School of Art. He went on to the Slade School in London, where Tom Carr and F. E. McWilliam were his contemporaries. After exhibiting in London, he returned to Belfast in 1931. In 1938 he was commissioned to paint a frieze for the Ulster Pavilion in the Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. During the second world war he stopped painting for a time and retired to a cottage in Co. Armagh, earning his living by teaching art at Manor House school. From 1953 he lectured at Belfast College of Art.

In 1951, for the Festival of Britain, Luke painted a large mural representing the history of Belfast on the tympanum of the dome of the City Hall. It is in his characteristic, highly formalized style. There is another mural of his in the Masonic Hall, Rosemary Street, Belfast, and an oil *The Old Callan Bridge* in the County Museum, Armagh.

Luke spent his last years in relative poverty and solitude in a flat in Duncairn Gardens, Belfast and died in the Mater Hospital in 1975. The Arts Councils of Ireland mounted a comprehensive exhibition of his work the following year.

**Victor Price**