and she found it increasingly difficult to complete her commissions. Plagued by rheumatism and failing sight, she lived out her final years in her small Kensington bedsitter and was found dead there on 10 August, 1955, just five months after the death of her younger and better known protegé, Evie Hone.

Wilhelmina's windows have had a varied history. Five have been destroyed (some by war and the Northern Ireland Troubles), one is in packing cases, another boarded up and two (in Dublin) obscured by adjacent buildings, while others are in a perilous condition. In Ireland most of her surviving windows are in Belfast and Dublin while several of her works are to be found throughout England, Wales, New Zealand, Canada and Belgium. Nearer home, two splendid examples of her craft may be seen in St Ninnidh's Church, (1912), Inishmacsaint, Derrygonnelly, Co Fermanagh (her first full scale window) and in nearby St Molaise's Church (1913), Monea, NW of Enniskillen.

Wilhelmina Geddes was a highly articulate and well-read woman (Interestingly, she was interviewed on television about her work as early as July, 1938). Of independent mind, she was a keen supporter of the suffragette movement. Her obituary in The Times of London in 1955 described her as 'the greatest stained glass artist of our time', a significant tribute when it is remembered that Harry Clarke and Evie Hone were her contemporaries. Happily, the achievements of Wilhelmina Geddes, one of Ireland's foremost creative artists, for so long shamefully neglected, are now being properly acknowledged and the reputation of this daughter of County Leitrim, until recently eclipsed by her more high profile compatriots, is now, belatedly, receiving the recognition it richly deserves.

Dr Nicola Gordon Bowe, Lecturer, National College of Art and Design, is currently preparing a book on Wilhelmina Geddes.

Wilhelmina Geddes's ***Innocence in the Fields of Paradise****, (1913)*
St Molaise's, Monea, Co Fermanagh.

Wakes...celebratory occasions

Pat Fitzpatrick

WAKES WERE HELD in houses where a death had taken place up until the middle of the 20th century. One would imagine that a wake would be a very solemn and sad occasion but in bygone days it became an occasion for story telling, asking riddles, and playing of games, feats of strength and singing—all of course accompanied by a goodly supply of whiskey and stout.

All the neighbours crowded into the corpse house and after praying and mourning and lamenting the loss of the departed one, the rest of the night had to be passed in as entertaining a manner as possible. This manner of waking the corpse was possibly pagan in origin and may have been a way of saying goodbye to the dead person or a means of helping the remaining family to get over the emotional stress caused by losing a loved member.

Some wakes were known to have lasted several days. People were superstitious about death and signs which heralded a death in the famil—a picture falling from the wall, a bird pecking at the window, a donkey braying, a falling star, a black frog in the house at night, a grey mouse or the wailing of the banshee.

A sighting of the death coach travelling towards the graveyard at the dead of night was of very grave significance to even the not so superstitious. When a person died the clocks in the house were stopped and all the mirrors in the house were covered until after the funeral. It was the custom to supply clay pipes, tobacco and snuff to those attending the wake and provide refreshments both edible and liquid to all comers.

A wake was seen as an occasion to show hospitality and to give a good send off to the deceased. Coffins were made by local carpenters and they were simple plain boxes covered over by black material. The black coffin was preferred to the deal or red coffin which were considered to be the pauper's coffin. All linen used on the bed where the corpse had lain was hand washed by the neighbouring women after the funeral.

From the 20th century onwards the remains was taken to the local church on the second day with the burial taking place on the third day. Offerings were collected after the mass. If the deceased was well known or popular then the offerings were high. Thankfully the collecting of offerings was abolished as the rattle of money being paid did not help in any way the grief of the family. Grave digging was carried out by the neighbours on the instructions of the undertaker—a custom which still lasts to the present day.