Thomas Mangan

Thomas Mangan was the most famous of all the Balbriggan hosiers working for Smyth & Co. Established in 1780 Smyth & Co. was a major manufacturer of hosiery, providing very significant employment in the town. They gradually and steadily prospered and gained in reputation through the excellence, quality, and style of their goods. One of the Mangan family started as an apprentice in 1805, learning the fundamentals of the hosiery business. He later passed all of this on to his son Thomas Mangan and set the standard for the industry not only in Ireland but for the world market. Among their customers were the Empress of Austria, Princess Eugenie, the Czarina and, of course, Queen Victoria.

Thomas Mangan (1826-1902)

Smyth & Co from Balbriggan Railway Station, 1893

Having won the Queen's approval by providing stockings which weighed only three and a half ounces for a dozen pairs, Thomas continued to hand-make stockings for Victoria for a period of 65 years. This dedicated service was rewarded on 25th September 1898 when he was presented with a photograph of Her Majesty bearing an autographed signature; part of the citation reads "... having come to her notice that you have been for more than 60 years a conscientious worker, though in a humble position, in which you hitherto escaped the notice of the public". Balbriggan was rightly proud of Thomas Mangan and his superior skill at hosiery-making, and it still is!

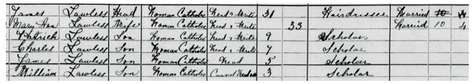
Smyth & Co also won numerous honours at major world exhibitions including Philadelphia, London and Paris, and some of these are recorded on medallions on the outside of the building near Balbriggan Railway station. Indeed, as a result of the extensive use of the stockings and the brand "Real Balbriggans", the word 'Balbriggan' made its way into the Oxford English Dictionary and is defined as a "knitted cotton fabric".

1901 Census, Mangan entry

Smyth & Co. Medallions

Mary Ann Lawless (née Woodhead)

Mary Ann Lawless was the widow of James Lawless of Bridge St, who, along with John Gibbons, was killed by the British Crown Forces during the Sack of Balbriggan. The 1901 Census shows Mary Ann married and living with her husband James in Dublin St with his parents Patrick and Mary, but by the 1911 Census they had moved to Bridge St where he operated his barber business. By this time, they had four boys (Patrick, Charles, James and William); they subsequently had four more children, as seen in the 1926 Census (Hannah, Annie, Stephen and Kevin).



1911 Census, Lawless entry

Lawless Family

On the night of 20th September 1920 the Black and Tans sacked the town in reprisal for the earlier shooting of two RIC men (one of whom died, the other being injured). James Lawless was forcibly removed from his family house and taken in for questioning along with John Gibbons, and some time later they were "brutally done to death". Their bodies were found in the early hours of the following morning. Sadly the 1926 Census shows us Mary Ann in the same Bridge St house and with her she has only four of her children. Her eldest son Patrick is then in Dublin St working as a motor mechanic for George A Daly while some of her other children have been sent to America to try to make a better life for themselves.

1926 Census, Lawless entry. STAT/1/10/54 Bridge Street/Residents of a House form. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Director of the National Archives

Mary Ann proved herself to be a very brave and tenacious woman who always tried to make the best life for her family given the enormous challenges she encountered. When she eventually received compensation from the British Government, she used it to open a sweet shop in the former barber shop.

Lawless & Gibbons memorial, Bridge Street, Balbriggan

Lewis Whyte

Lewis Whyte was the Managing Director of Smyth & Co Hosiery Manufacturers (Smyco). He took over the company in 1900 on the death of his father. He had studied the technical side of the business in England and Germany. The company's stockings, known as 'Balbriggans', were world famous. He appears in the 1911 Census living in George's Hill with his wife Dorothy (née Hudman) and two sons, Devereaux and Morris, along with a cook, housemaid and governess. In the 1926 Census another son Alan is listed, aged 14.

Lewis and Dorethea's 25th Wedding Anniversary, c.1928

Lewis was very involved in many activities in the town. He was a member of the Balrothery Board of Guardians and, until 1922, was a Justice of the Peace, presiding over the Petty Sessions Court. He was also a member of the Select Vestry of St George's Church and served on the committee to establish the Carnegie Library. He was Chairman of the committee formed to collect funds for those made homeless after the Sack of Balbriggan in 1920, to which fund he donated £50. With his wife, he became involved in amateur dramatics; he produced and acted in plays and entertainments in the Workmen's Club in the factory. He was a member of the Horticultural Society and helped to revive the Society's Show. In addition, he was active in the rugby and cricket clubs, and in the 1930s helped to organise the Inter-Street Cricket championship. He was a keen innovative photographer and together with Percival Warren assembled a beautiful album of photographs which they displayed to the public c.1893. This album captured a very unique insight into life in Balbriggan in that year with portraits of various people of the town, both the rich and the poor, and Balbriggan & District Historical Society are very proud to have successfully obtained this important original album for our archives.

1911 Census, Whyte entry and 1926 Census, Whyte entry. STAT/1/10/3 George's Hill/Residents of a House form. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Comhairle Contae Fhine Gall
Fingal County Council
Ceangal
Cur leis Chomhairle Oidhreachta i Heritage Council programme

All photos courtesy of Balbriggan & District Historical Society unless otherwise stated.

Changing Fingal

Stories from my Place...

BALBRIGGAN

Our Place

Changing Fingal – Balbriggan, Our Place

Introduction

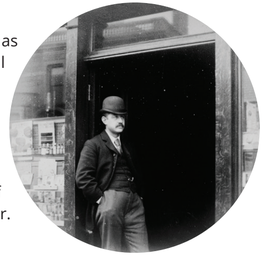
Balbriggan has a rich and varied industrial, maritime and social history. Down through the years events in the town have been of vital local, national and international importance and have had reverberations globally.

From the expertise of the manufacturing process of stockings for Queen Victoria to the tragic circumstances of the Sack of Balbriggan, all was reported in detail across the world.

Looking at the public records that remain we can see some of the significant players and individuals and understand some of the particular family circumstances that pertained at that time, and without doubt the release of the 1926 Census has greatly enhanced our understanding of this. Here we have selected a number of these individuals who witnessed first-hand key moments in our town's history, and review what we can learn from the various records.

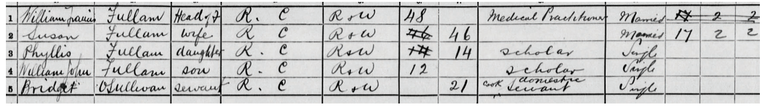
Dr William Fullam

Dr William James Fullam was born in Drogheda and worked tirelessly as General Practitioner throughout his life in Balbriggan and had a pivotal role in many significant events in the town's history. During the Sack of Balbriggan, he tended to many injured and distraught locals and made several appeals to the Black and Tans to cease their wanton destruction. He also played a significant role in trying to help the people of the town after the atrocity, visiting Dublin Castle with other local representatives, along with Lewis Whyte, Managing Director of Smyth & Co, Rev Canon Eugene Byrne, PP and Rev Jameson, Rector.



Dr Fullam outside his Drogheda St house from the 1893 photo album by Lewis Whyte and Percival Warren

Dr Fullam is recorded in the 1911 Census with his wife, two children and his domestic servant. By 1926 the Census shows him with his wife, one child, Phyllis, and a domestic servant. Fullam Street, which joins Clonard Street to Chapel Street, was named to honour such an important local hero.



1	William James	Fullam	Head of Family	R. C	R & W	48		Medical Practitioner	Married		2	2
2	Susan	Fullam	wife	R C	R & W	46			Married	17	2	2
3	Phyllis	Fullam	daughter	R. C	R & W	14		scholar	Single			
4	Fullam John	Fullam	son	R. C	R & W	12		scholar	Single			
5	Bridget	O'Sullivan	servant	R. C	R & W		21	domestic servant	Single			

1911 Census, Fullam entry

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(k)
1	Fullam William	Head	63	M	married	Drogheda	Ireland	R. C	Retired Practitioner
2	Fullam Susan	wife	56	M	married	Drogheda	Ireland	Roman C	home duties
3	Fullam Phyllis	daughter	28	M	single	Drogheda	Ireland	Roman C	home duties

1926 Census, Fullam entry STAT/1/10/3 Drogheda Street/Residents of a House form. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Director of the National Archives

Richard Henry (Harry) Reynolds

Harry was born in Balbriggan in 1874 and had a very keen interest in cycling. From 1892 to 1906 he won every Irish championship available to him. He used to push himself to extremes and he regularly raced the Dublin train from the County Bridge, Balbriggan to Ardgillan and it was said that he never lost! On 15th August 1896 he won the World Amateur Mile Championship title in Copenhagen.

As he was being presented with the Gold Medal by the King of Denmark the band began to play "God Save the Queen" as the Union Jack was raised. Harry was furious and demanded that officials raise a green flag and for the band to play an Irish tune, and they played the only Irish tune they knew - "The Wearing of the Green". He returned home to a national hero's welcome.

Signed photograph of Harry Reynolds

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