

This is A Few Forgotten Women Story

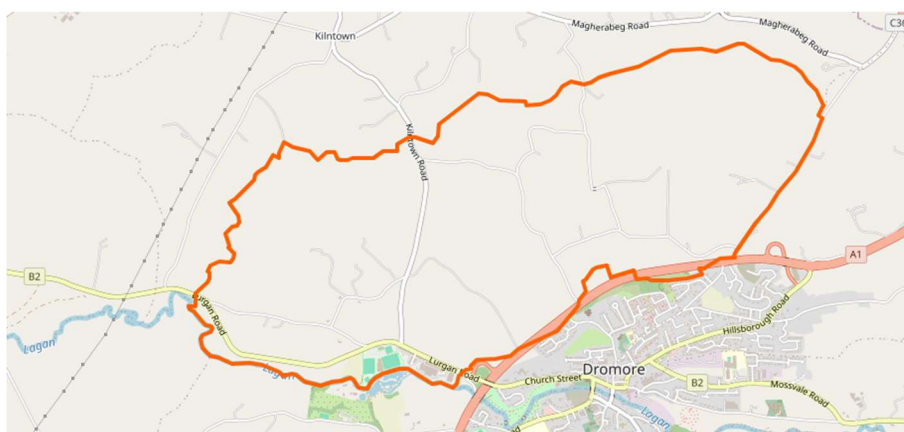


This story was written, in October 2025, as one of a series resulting from the 'A Few Forgotten Women Friday' collaborative research project, investigating the lives of women who were working in the Ulster linen industry.

Hannah Cargin's Story

We first meet Hannah Cargin in the 1901 census, when she is living in Ballynaris, Dromore, Co. Down, with her widowed mother and eight younger siblings; a younger brother, James, having died at the age of two of bronchitis. An older sister and an older brother had already left home. Ballynaris, or Baile an Árais, was a rural area to the north of Dromore town.

Hannah had been born on 10 June 1874 in Ballykeel, the daughter of James Cargin, a linen weaver and Hannah Cargin née Tate. Ballykeel, is six miles to the west of Ballynaris, on the far side of Dromore. No birth registration exists for Hannah, under Cargin or Tate or variations of those surnames but certificates exist for all her younger siblings, showing that the family were living in Ballykeel between 1877 and 1894. Further investigation reveals a marriage for a James Massey and Hannah Tate in Drumlough, Dromore in 1871; James' father is recorded as John Cargin. Hannah was not registered at Massey either.



Ballynaris



Ballynaris

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Hannah's father, James Cargin, died of asthma and pneumonia, in 1895, probably exacerbated by his work in the mills, where hot and damp conditions and poor ventilation made workers prone to lung conditions. There is however no sign of a mill in the immediate vicinity of Ballykeel; it is possible that James worked from home. The linen industry predominated in Dromore from the eighteenth century until the early 1900s. The area was particularly suited to flax growing, the fast flowing rivers in the Lagan Valley providing the force of water to power the machinery.¹ In 1901, Hannah and all but one of her siblings of working age, fourteen and over, were working in the linen industry. The exception was twenty-two year old Robert, who was a shoemaker. Sixteen year old Agnes was a drawer-in in a linen factory but Hannah and her other four working sisters were all cambric weavers. Cambric is a very fine linen cloth, of the kind that might be used for handkerchiefs, delicate underwear or high quality shirts.

¹ <https://lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-4/journal-4-5.html>.

In 1901, the family were living in a three roomed brick cottage at Holm Terrace, which along with the neighbouring properties, was owned by Murphy and Stevenson, who operated Holm Mill. Maps of Ballynaris clearly show the presence of Holm Mill, which opened in 1897 and this is almost certainly what prompted the family to move. Murphy and Stevenson advertised in *The Banbridge Chronicle* of 20 February 1897 for weavers and winders for their 'new' factory.



Holm Terrace

Wikimedia Commons Geograph ©Dean Molyneaux used under Creative Commons

The family had received some education, as according to the census, all the household, including Hannah's mother, could read and write. The census also indicates that they worshipped in the Presbyterian Church.



Ballynaria

OS Map 1888-1915 6 inch to the mile, via <https://maps.nls.uk/>

By the early years of the twentieth century, a combination of a depression in the linen industry and enticing advertisements in the local papers, meant that some of the Cargin siblings decided to emigrate. Robert was probably the first to leave Ireland, in 1907, spending some time in the US before moving to Canada. Depending which Canadian census you believe, Hannah left for Toronto in 1909 or 1910; Susan, Lucy and Samuel followed her. On 20 July 1911,

at Port Rowan, Norfolk County, Hannah married Oswald Caldwell, a widower with one daughter. Hannah was described as a nurse and her address was given as Toronto City.

Oswald and Hannah had a short-lived son, Albert, in 1913, followed by a daughter, Florence Lillian, the following year. By 1921, the family were living at Lot 6 Charlotteville Township, on the north shore of Lake Erie, where Oswald was farming. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the farming in this area was predominantly fruit farming for the canning industry but after this, tobacco was the main crop. The 1931 census provides us with additional information. The family had abandoned Presbyterianism and were now Baptists. They were living in nine rooms and had no radio. Oswald had earned \$700 the previous year. Hannah died on 9 July 1942 from lymphatic leukaemia and was buried at Hillcrest Cemetery, Forestville, Norfolk County.

Sources

Birth, marriage and death registrations www.irishgenealogy.ie

1901 census for Holm Terrace, Ballynaris, Dromore, Co. Down, via www.census.nationalarchives.ie

1911 census for Dromore, Co. Down, via www.census.nationalarchives.ie

1921 census for Ontario, Canada, via www.ancestry.co.uk

FindaGrave www.findagrave.com

Ontario birth, marriage and death certificates, via www.ancestry.co.uk

OpenStreetMap www.openstreetmap.org/relation/4755772

OS Map 1888-1915 6 inch to the mile, via <https://maps.nls.uk/>

Dromore Historical Journal

<https://lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-4/journal-4-5.html> accessed 17 October 2025.