

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.

Margaret Ludlow 's Story

Margaret Ludlow was born on 8 July 1869. She was the third of ten children born to William Ludlow, a labourer, and his wife Sarah née White. At the time, the family lived in the rural townland of Derrycrew, in the parish of Loughgall, Co Armagh. Derrycrew was situated about half way between the towns of Portadown and Moy, and within the 'Linen Triangle', a heartland of textile production in south-east Ulster.

When Margaret was around 13, the family moved to the village of Moygashel, on the outskirts of Dungannon, Co Tyrone. Her father William worked in a factory there, and it is likely that Margaret did too. It is not known what type of factory William worked in, but Moygashel had a number of beetling mills, where linen was beaten with water-driven hammers over several days to give the surface of the fabric a distinctive sheen.

By the time of the 1901 Census, the family was back in Co Armagh, living in New Street, Portadown (probably on or near where Duke Street stands today).

While her father had returned to working as a farm labourer, '29'-year-old Margaret (who was actually 31) and her five sisters were working in the textile industry – Margaret and her younger sister Susan were linen yarn winders (winding the spun thread onto bobbins in preparation for weaving); eldest sister Mary Jane was a cotton weaver; and the other three were linen weavers. Margaret's brother James, who by that time had left the family home and was living with his wife elsewhere in Portadown, was a tenter – someone who kept the textile looms repaired and working to capacity. There were a number of textile factories in Portadown at this time, several within a few hundred yards of New Street. Other information that can be gleaned from the 1901 Census includes that Margaret, her parents and her older sister Mary Jane were able to read, while her younger sisters could read and write, and that the family were members of the protestant Church of Ireland.

On 30 March 1903, Margaret married widower Thomas Holland in St Mark's Church, Portadown, a large Georgian church a short walk from her home. Thomas worked as a carpenter, and unusually Margaret's occupation was also recorded in the marriage register – she was a 'Factory Worker'. By the time of the 1911 Census, the couple had three children, daughters Sarah and Annie and baby Thomas William. Margaret's occupation was given as 'Housewife', and it is not known if she continued to work in the textile industry after her marriage and motherhood. The family was living in the townland of Clownagh (Drumcree parish), on the western edge of Portadown and very close to New Street, where Margaret's widowed father and three of her sisters still lived. The Hollands were living in what was termed a 'second class' house, similar to the one where Margaret had lived in 1901. It was a single-family dwelling, with the walls and roof made of 'non-perishable' materials, and consisting of three rooms, with three windows in the front. Their landlord was a local farmer, Thomas Andrew Ripley.

While the 1911 Census gives us a glimpse into Margaret's life and living conditions, it does not show the most significant thing that was happening in the family at that time. Margaret's two-month-old son Thomas was not living with the family – instead he was in hospital in nearby Lurgan suffering from diphtheria and septicaemia. Sadly, he died there the day the Census was taken, 2 April 1911.

Margaret gave birth to another son the following year, also called Thomas, but he too died in infancy, just 11 days after he was born, after suffering from convulsions. The Hollands did not have any more children after this.

In 1912, the Hollands were also caught up in political events. Margaret and Thomas were both against the proposal for Home Rule in Ireland, preferring to remain as part of the United Kingdom. On 'Ulster Day', Saturday 28 September 1912, Thomas was one of 100,000s of men who signed 'Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant' (better known as the Ulster Covenant), in protest at the British Government's Third Home Rule Bill. Margaret signed the 'Women's Declaration', making her mark on the document at Portadown Orange Hall.

Thomas died on 6 April 1925, leaving Margaret a widow. She remained in Portadown, living near her daughters and siblings and, later, her grandchildren. In later life, Margaret developed heart trouble, and died suddenly on 1 January 1938, being found in her bed after she failed to turn up for her daily visit to her daughter's home. 68-year-old Margaret was buried alongside husband Thomas in Drumcree Churchyard.

The LUDLOW Family

William LUDLOW (c.1846-1920) m. Sarah WHITE (c.1846-1903)

- Mary Jane (1866-1912)
- James (b.1867)
- **Margaret (1869-1938) – later HOLLAND**
- Sarah (b.1871) – later MELLON
- Ellen (b.1873) – later SHORT
- Ann Eliza (b.1875) – later WILSON
- William Robert (1877-1882)
- Susanna (b.1879)
- Rachel (b.1882) – later HOBSON
- Matilda (1888-1890)

The HOLLAND Family

Thomas HOLLAND (c.1853-1925) m. **Margaret LUDLOW (1869-1938)**

- Sarah (b.1905) – later KING

- Annie (b.1908) – later WILLIS
- Thomas William (Feb 1911 – Apr 1911)
- Thomas (Jun 1912 – Jul 1912)

Researched by Allie Nickell

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