

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.

Annie Donaldson 's Story

Annie Donaldson was born on 26th May 1869 in Gilford, County Down. She was the eldest of two children born to Joseph Donaldson and his second wife, Mary Ann Donaldson (née Trotter, formerly Pershaw). ¹

Annie's younger brother, Joseph, was born on 15th December 1870, also in Gilford. His birth certificate records their mother's name as Eliza Ann Donaldson (née Trotter), likely an administrative error or perhaps a name she was commonly known by within the family. ²

Tragedy struck on 1st September 1895 when Annie's mother, Mary Ann, passed away at Cochrane's Row at the age of 47. Her death was attributed to chronic bronchitis and heart disease (for three years) and with dropsy (for one month). Annie was present at her mother's death. ³

The 1901 Irish Census records Annie living at 9 Cochrane's Row, Gilford, with her widowed father, Joseph Donaldson, then aged 80. Their home was described as a second-class house built of stone, brick, or concrete, with a slate or tiled roof, comprising of three rooms. Annie worked as a flax spinner, while her father was employed bleaching yarn. They both likely worked for the Gilford Flax Spinning Mill, operated by Dunbar, McMaster & Co., later part of the Linen Thread Company Ltd. Founded in 1834, the mill played a significant part in Gilford's economy and community life until its closure in 1986. ⁴

1901 Census Transcript									
Surname	Forename	Age	Sex	Birthplace	Occupation	Religion	Literacy	Relation to Head of Household	Marital Status
Donaldson	Joseph	80	M	Co Down	Yarn Bleacher in Thread Factory	Presbyterian	Can Read and Write	Head	Widower
Donaldson	Annie	26	F	Co Down	Spinner of Flax in Thread Factory	Presbyterian	Can Read and Write	Daughter	Not Married

On the 18th September 1903, Annie married James Curran in the Parish Church of Tandragee, County Armagh, by licence. ⁵ James was born on 23rd July 1871 in Tandragee, the son of Thomas Curran, a baker, and Jane Curran (née Sifton).⁶

At the time of their marriage, both Annie and James were residing in Gilford. James was employed as a labourer, while Annie was recorded as having no occupation. She possibly gave up spinning to marry. Their witnesses were David Curran (James's younger brother) and Maria Bell. James signed the marriage register with his mark (an "X").

Five months after the wedding Annie's brother Joseph enlists aged 30 with the 83rd Foot (Royal Irish Rifles) on the 22nd February 1904. Service number 3581.⁷

Annie and James went on to have three children:

- Grace Curran born 10th April 1904 in Loughans⁸; died 21st September 1964 at 11 Stramore Road, Gilford.⁹ She never married.
- William Curran, born 31st May 1906 in Cochrane's Row, Gilford.¹⁰
- Joseph Curran, born 6th December 1908 at Stramore Road, Gilford¹¹; died 28th October 1957.¹² He married Mary Ann and had a daughter. His probate was granted on the 22nd March 1960.¹³

Curran, Joseph of 11 Stramore Road Gilford County Down, Oiler died 28 October 1957 at Main Street, Gilford. Administration: Belfast 22nd March to Mary Ann Curran the widow. Effects £295.

The 1911 Irish Census again records Annie and James living at 9 Cochrane's Row, along with their three young children and Annie's elderly father, now 91 years old.¹⁴

1911 Census Transcript									
Surname	Forename	Age	Sex	Birthplace	Occupation	Religion	Literacy	Relation to Head of Household	Marital Status
Donaldson	Joseph	91	M	Co Down	Old Age Pensioner	Presbyterian	Can Read and Write	Head	Widower
Curran	James	39	M	Co Armagh	Labourer	Church of Ireland	Read only	Son-in-law	Married
Curran	Annie	41	F	Co Down	-	Church of Ireland	Can Read and Write	Daughter	Married
Curran	Grace	6	F	Co Down	Scholar	Church of Ireland	-	Grandaughter	Single
Curran	William	4	M	Co Down	Scholar	Church of Ireland	-	Grandson	Single
Curran	Joseph	2	M	Co Down		Church of Ireland	-	Grandson	

The following year, Annie's father Joseph Donaldson passed away at Stramore Road on 4th March 1912, from Senile Decay. His age was recorded as 85 years. Annie was once again present at his death.¹⁵

According to Griffiths Valuation¹⁶ and the Valuation Revision Books,¹⁷ Cochrane's Row was owned by Hugh Cochrane and later Mary Elsmore. The property was situated in Stramore Road. Joseph was paying £2 in rent for the

house per year. When Joseph passed away, it appears that James Curran took over the lease.

Later that year Annie and James signed the Ulster Covenant, Annie at Mission Hall and James at Orange Hall. Both demonstrating their support for maintaining the union with Britain during the Home Rule crisis of 1912. Annie's brother Joseph also signs the Covenant at Victoria Orange Hall and he is recorded as residing in Greenock, Scotland.¹⁸

At the outbreak of WWI Joseph Donaldson re-enlisted. His British Army service record details his address as 32 Ingleston Street, Greenock. He is 37 years and 345 days old, single and his occupation is driller. His previous service was with the 5th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles.¹⁹ During WWI Joseph sees fighting with the 1st Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers in the Dardanelles campaign, which was a failed Allied attempt to gain control of the Dardanelles strait in Turkey. Annie receives an official letter.²⁰

GILFORD SOLDIER WOUNDED

Mrs James Curran Stramore Road, Gilford has received official intimation that her brother, Private Joseph Donaldson, 1st Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers, has been wounded in the leg and shoulder in action at the Dardanelles. Prior to rejoining he was working in Glasgow.

IN FEW LINES ²¹

Private Joseph Donaldson, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, is at present at the residence of his brother-in-law, Stramore Road, Gilford, having received five bullet wounds at the Dardanelles. He is suffering from wounds in the right shoulder and left side. Private Donaldson, who was a time-expired man, served with the 5th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles in the South

African Campaign, for which he holds the Queen's medal and four bars. On the outbreak of the present hostilities he offered his services to King and Country, and volunteered for the Inniskillings.

On 29th January 1929, Annie passed away at her home on Stramore Road at the age of 52. The cause of death was recorded as carcinoma of the stomach, from which she had suffered for two months and seven days. Her husband, James, was present at her death.²²

Just over two years later, on 21st March 1931, James died suddenly at the same address, aged 53. His death was attributed to heart failure.²³ His obituary reads as follows:²⁴

SUDDEN DEATH AT GILFORD

On Saturday afternoon Mr. James Curran passed away with tragic suddenness at this residence. Stramore Road, Gilford. He had attended a local football match, but not feeling too well left for home some time before the end of the game. On reaching home he apprised his daughter of being unwell and retired to bed. His daughter set about preparing something for him and on bringing it to his room found that he had expired. An inquest was not considered necessary, the cause of death being heart failure.

The deceased served in the South African War and volunteered again on the outbreak of the Great War, but was found unfit. He was a member of the Orange Institution and for some time was Deputy Master of Gilford Chosen Few L.O.L. No. 940, and was vice-present of the local branch of the Apprentice Boys of Derry Club.

Much sympathy is extended to the bereaved daughter, two sons and other relatives.

The funeral too place on Monday afternoon to the family burying-ground at Tullylish. Apart from the general mourners the cortege included members of the Orange Order and Apprentice Boys of Derry.

Wreaths were sent by Gilford Chosen Few L.O.L. No 940, and the local branch of the Apprentice Boys of Derry Club. Rev. Dr. Orr officiated at the church and graveside.

On the 22nd March 1955 Joseph passed away at the Banbridge Hospital at the age of 84. It appears he remained at Stramore Road following his WWI injuries. He was an old age pensioner who died from 1. congestive cardiac failure due to myocardial degeneration and 2. Senility. He remained unmarried during his lifetime.²⁵

Annie Donaldson's life is a portrait of quiet strength, like that of so many ordinary working-class women in rural Ulster at the turn of the 20th century. Born in the heart of Gilford's linen industry, she lived through an era defined by industrial change, war, and political upheaval, yet her story remained steadfastly local. From her early years as a flax spinner alongside her aging father to her later life as wife and mother on Stramore Road. Annie's world was shaped by family and community.

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