

# *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.*

## **Elizabeth HODGEN's Story (1866-1947)**

### **Introduction**

The HODGEN family lived in rural Ballymacormick in Dromore, County Down, Ireland. There are 3 maps available online related to this story: Figure 1, County Down;<sup>1</sup> Figure 2, the location of Dromore within County Down;<sup>2</sup> and Figure 3, the Townland of Ballymacormick.<sup>3</sup> Due to copyright issues these images cannot be reproduced here.

Throughout the research there were several variants of the surname – HODGES, HODGINS, HODGENS and HODGEN. HODGEN appears to be the

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<sup>1</sup> GENUKI. Map showing counties of Ireland. <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/Ireland> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Civil Parish Map - County Down. <https://ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/getting-started/ulster-civil-parish-maps/county-down> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, Ros. (2001) Townlands in Dromore Parish. <https://rosdavies.com/MAPS/DromoreTownlands.htm> : accessed 5 December 2025.

dominant name in use, especially in later 20<sup>th</sup> century records, so I have used this throughout.

## Elizabeth's Early Life

Elizabeth HODGEN was born on 17 June 1866 in the rural townland of Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down, Ireland.<sup>4</sup> She was the youngest of 6 known children of George HODGEN (c. 1812-1895)<sup>5</sup> and his wife Margaret McLAUGHLIN (c. 1828-1906)<sup>6,7</sup>. Elizabeth's birth certificate shows her father was a farmer in Ballymacormick and confirms her mother's maiden name. Her parents had married 13 years prior to her birth on 26 February 1853 at the Dromore Presbyterian Church.<sup>8</sup> The simple family tree in Figure 4 shows Elizabeth, her siblings, and their parents.

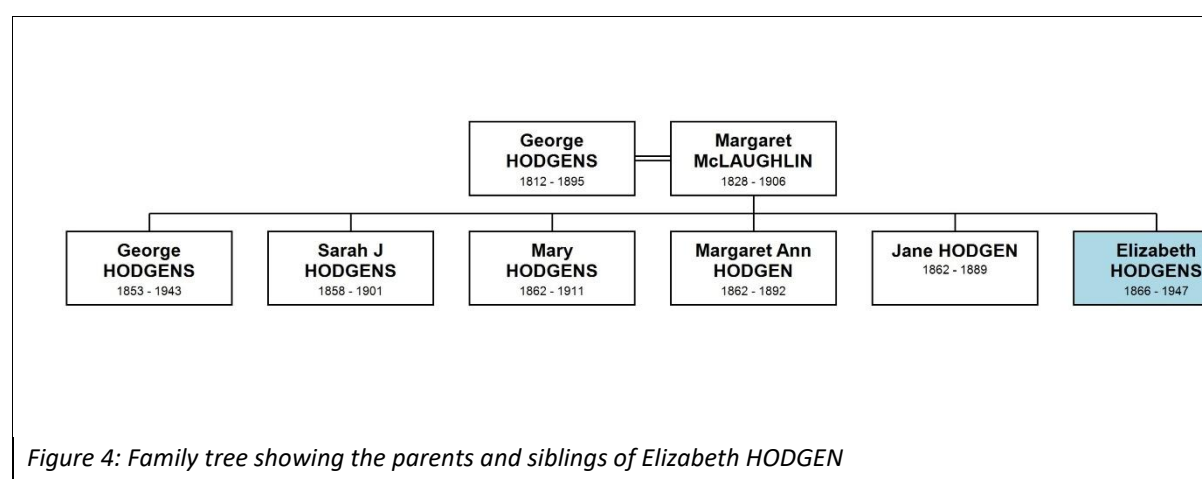


Figure 4: Family tree showing the parents and siblings of Elizabeth HODGEN

Both Elizabeth's parents had lived through the Great Famine, 1845-1850, when the population of Ireland fell from around 8 million to about 5 million. As many

<sup>4</sup> Births (CR) Ireland. RD Banbridge, Dromore, County Down. 17 June 1866. HODGENS, Elizabeth. Reg. ID: 7903064. SN 297. p. 221. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 2 December 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Deaths (CR) Ireland. RD Banbridge, County Down. 12 April 1895. HODGEN, George. Reg. ID: 3593233/04685336. SN 325. p. 138. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 31 March 1901. HODGENS, Margaret. [https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Deaths (CR) Ireland. RD Banbridge, County Down. 12 October 1892. HODGEN, Margaret Anne. Reg. ID: 3842987/04714323. SN 467. p. 123. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Marriages (PR) Ireland. Dromore, County Down. 26 February 1853. HODGES, George and McLAUGHLIN, Margaret. Reg. ID: 3232919. SN 69. p. 34. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 2 December 2025.

as 1 million died from hunger and disease, whilst another 2 million were forced to emigrate.<sup>9</sup> Although the northern counties of Ireland were somewhat protected by the textile industry, the suffering had still been immense. For example, the death rates in Belfast's Workhouse soared from an average of 300 per year to 1,500 annually during the worst year of 1847.<sup>10</sup>

There are no records telling us about Elizabeth and her family throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the census records of 1841-1891 have not survived. By 1901, Elizabeth's father was deceased and her widowed mother Margaret headed the family home at 9 Ballymacormick; described in the census as a second-class rural dwelling with stone walls, a thatched or wooden roof, four rooms and several outbuildings, including a cow house, piggery, fowl house and shed.<sup>11</sup> Living with Margaret were her adult children: George, a farmer's son; Sarah Jane, a farmer's daughter; Mary, a cambric weaver; and Elizabeth herself, also a cambric weaver. They were all single, literate and recorded as Unitarians,<sup>12</sup> a small dissenting community in a district otherwise dominated by Presbyterian and Church of Ireland congregations.

Since at least 1864, the family had owned and farmed their smallholding in Ballymacormick measuring 4 acres, 2 rods and 55 perches, which also

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<sup>9</sup> Davies, Ros. *Famine in Co. Down, Ireland 1845-1850*. <https://rosdavies.com/WORDS/Famine.htm> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 31 March 1901. HODGENS, Margaret. [https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

<sup>12</sup> *Why were we called Unitarians? Why are we no longer called Unitarians?*. <http://www.dromorencp.church/1/post/2022/07/why-were-we-called-unitarians-why-are-we-no-longer-called-unitarians.html> : accessed 7 December 2025.

accommodated an office and a house.<sup>13,14,15,16</sup> After the death of both parents the Valuation Revision Books of 1909-1930 show the family landholding was reduced to a much smaller area, 2 rods and 10 perches, and contained no buildings.<sup>17</sup> It is not possible to know what caused the family to reduce their landholding and find alternative accommodation in Ballymacormick. It is likely they moved from the long-term family home at 9 Ballymacormick to 52 Ballymacormick around 1908 based on the Valuation Revision Books information. The image in Figure 5 shows the rural location of Ballymacormick Road, home of the HODGEN family for at least 90 years.

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<sup>13</sup> Valuation Revision Books. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 1864-1878. HODGINS, George. VAL/12/B/16/10A. p. 111. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-valuation-revision-books> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Valuation Revision Books. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 1879-1891. HODGINS, George. VAL/12/B/16/10B. p. 147. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-valuation-revision-books> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Valuation Revision Books. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 1892-1898. HODGINS, George. VAL/12/B/16/10D. p. 177. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-valuation-revision-books> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Valuation Revision Books. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 1899-1908. HODGINS, George. VAL/12/B/16/10E. p. 8. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-valuation-revision-books> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Valuation Revision Books. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 1909-1930. HODGENS, George. VAL/12/B/16/10F. SN 4589. p. 7. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-valuation-revision-books> : accessed 7 December 2025.



Figure 5: Ballymacormick Road, Dromore <sup>18</sup>

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Whilst we have no proof as to what the family farmed on their small-holding it is highly possible they were growing flax, the essential component of the linen trade, as there were very few people in the farming industry not involved in the linen industry.<sup>19</sup> Flax is the strongest natural fibre in the world and at one point all the fields near the River Lagan were planted with flax.<sup>20</sup> From the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Lagan Valley's mild, moist climate and fast-flowing tributaries made it ideal for flax growing and water-powered finishing, and by 1800 the linen industry had become Ulster's major export, fully integrated into the farm economy so that oats, potatoes, flax and milk emerged from the same smallholdings that also produced yarn and cloth.<sup>21</sup> Dromore's primary role in

<sup>18</sup> Images: Photograph. Ballymacormick Road, Dromore. Flannagan, P. 2009. Wikimedia Commons Geograph. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ballymacormick\\_Road,\\_Dromore\\_-\\_geograph.org.uk\\_-\\_1209994.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ballymacormick_Road,_Dromore_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1209994.jpg) : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Irish Linen Documentary. (2020) 'Farming Flax in Ireland'. Thompson Video Productions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqntI3Ec8Ew> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>20</sup> Videos of Irish Farming Life. (2019) 'How did Ireland become a player in the flax and linen industry?' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAIFSjC0ICA> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Dewart, Mark. (ND) The Birth and Early Growth of the Linen Industry c. 1700-1800. *Dromore and District Local Historical Group Journal*. 4 <https://lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-4/journal-4-5.html> : accessed 5 December 2025.

the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was as a market centre for linen and agriculture, boasting the only flax market in the Lagan Valley, with Saturday markets for meal, potatoes and linen alongside annual fairs for cattle, sheep, horses and pigs.<sup>22</sup>

### **Elizabeth and Her Siblings**

Elizabeth's older brother, George, eventually inherited the family farm at Ballymacormick and appears in the 1911 census as head of the household, still single, aged 58, and farming.<sup>23</sup> Her sisters' lives were more precarious: Jane worked as a factory worker and died young, aged 27, in 1889 from tuberculosis (phthisis);<sup>24</sup> while Margaret Ann, described as a weaver, died aged 30 in 1892 from an ovarian tumour.<sup>25</sup> Sarah, recorded as a 43 year old farmer's daughter on the 1901 census,<sup>26</sup> disappears from the records and I have not been able to trace her. By 1911 only three HODGEN siblings remained in the home at 52 Ballymacormick: George, Mary and Elizabeth, again in a second-class thatched farmhouse with four rooms, five front windows and four farm outbuildings.<sup>27</sup> Mary, aged 49, still worked as a cambric weaver, while Elizabeth, now in her mid-forties, had no occupation recorded, suggesting that she increasingly carried the unpaid but essential work of managing the household, supporting

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<sup>22</sup> Martin, Trevor. (1991) 'Flax Production in Dromore.' In: Mulligan, J. F ed. *A Ramble Through Dromore*. Banbridge, County Down: Dromore and District Local Historical Group. <https://www.lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-1/journal-1-1.html> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 2 April 1911. HODGEN, George (Head of family). [https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/207404/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/207404/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Deaths (CR) Ireland. RD Banbridge, County Down. 16 June 1889. HODGEN, Jane. Reg. ID: 6265182/04752396. SN 472. p. 121. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>25</sup> Deaths (CR) Ireland. RD Banbridge, County Down. 12 October 1892. HODGEN, Margaret Anne. Reg. ID: 3842987/04714323. SN 467. p. 123. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 31 March 1901. HODGENS, Margaret. [https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 2 April 1911. HODGEN, George (Head of family). [https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/207404/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/207404/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

her brother's farming. The probate records for both George (d. 1943) and Elizabeth (d. 1947) show that, although modest, the family estate remained rooted in Ballymacormick and that Elizabeth herself was described at death as a farmer, indicating that she moved from cambric weaver to principal holder of the small farm in later life.<sup>28,29</sup>

### **Elizabeth, The Cambric Weaver**

In 1901 the census lists Elizabeth's occupation as cambric weaver, placing her directly within Ulster's fine-linen trade. Cambric was an especially fine, closely woven linen cloth used for handkerchiefs and delicate garments, and the wider Lurgan–Portadown–Banbridge area around Dromore was internationally known by the later 19<sup>th</sup> century for this cambric trade, with many factories and workshops specializing in fine handkerchief linens.<sup>30,31,32,33</sup> Much of this work was still organised on a cottage basis, with hand-loom weaving done in farmhouses and small weaving sheds, so a woman like Elizabeth may have moved between the loom and the cowshed in the same yard. Alternatively, she may have worked at Thomas McMurray and Co., a factory in Dromore

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<sup>28</sup> Testamentary records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, County Down. 22 October 1945 (Death: 9 March 1943). HODGEN, George. Collection: Will Calendars. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-will-calendars> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>29</sup> Testamentary records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, County Down. 16 August 1948 (Death: 12 February 1947). HODGEN, Elizabeth. Collection: Will Calendars. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-will-calendars> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Dewart, Mark. (ND) The Birth and Early Growth of the Linen Industry c. 1700-1800. *Dromore and District Local Historical Group Journal*. 4 <https://lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-4/journal-4-5.html> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Dewart, Mark. (ND) The Movement of the Linen Industry into Dromore c. 1800-1840. *Dromore and District Local Historical Group Journal*. 4 <https://lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-4/journal-4-5.html> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>32</sup> BBC Bitesize (2020). 'The history of linen in Ulster.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7cvAEypFLE> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>33</sup> Aghalee Parish Church. (2023) The Linen Industry. <https://aghalee.dromore.anglican.org/about-the-heritage-project/the-linen-industry/> : accessed 8 December 2025.

established in 1832, connected with the manufacture of linen and specifically, cambric linens.<sup>34</sup>

Local histories of the Dromore district describe linen production as having started as a domestic farm-based industry and only gradually shifting towards more centralised weaving and hemstitching factories in nearby towns.<sup>35</sup> In such a system, families like the HODGENs typically combined small mixed farms with spinning and weaving: men might tend fields and manage markets, while women and girls spun flax, wove cloth, or later worked in factories or as out-workers for larger linen firms. Elizabeth's transition from cambric weaver in 1901 to farmer at her death in 1947 mirrors the wider story of Ulster linen, which peaked in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and then slowly declined, leaving many rural families to fall back more heavily on agriculture.<sup>36,37</sup>

### **The Religion and Politics of the HODGENs**

The HODGEN family were Unitarians,<sup>38,39</sup> a religious minority in Ireland. This denomination, which rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and emphasized reason and individual conscience, had a small but significant presence in Ulster. Their Unitarian faith set them somewhat apart in a region dominated by

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, Samuel. (1837) *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*. 2 vols. London: S. Lewis & Co.  
<https://www.libraryireland.com/topog> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>35</sup> Dewart, Mark. (ND) The Movement of the Linen Industry into Dromore c. 1800-1840. *Dromore and District Local Historical Group Journal*. 4 <https://lisburn.com/books/dromore-historical/Journal-4/journal-4-5.html> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 31 March 1901. HODGENS, Margaret.  
[https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Testamentary records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, County Down. 16 August 1948 (Death: 12 February 1947). HODGEN, Elizabeth. Collection: Will Calendars. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-will-calendars> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 31 March 1901. HODGENS, Margaret.  
[https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/1205570/) : accessed 23 October 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Census Records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, Dromore, County Down. 2 April 1911. HODGEN, George (Head of family).  
[https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Down/Dromore\\_Rural/Ballymacormick/207404/](https://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Down/Dromore_Rural/Ballymacormick/207404/) : accessed 23 October 2025.



Presbyterians and members of the Church of Ireland.<sup>40</sup> George and Margaret had previously married in the Presbyterian Church in Dromore so presumably had changed to the Unitarian faith sometime after 1853.<sup>41</sup>

On 28 September 1912, a 'Lizzie' HODGEN of Ballymacormick signed the Ulster Covenant opposing Irish Home Rule.<sup>42</sup> This is not the first time we see Elizabeth use the name 'Lizzie'; she used it as Informant for her mother's death in 1906.<sup>43</sup> This is very likely the same Elizabeth and shows her engaging in one of the defining political movements of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ulster. There are also signatures from a Mary HODGEN, likely her sister;<sup>44</sup> and her brother George HODGEN.<sup>45</sup> The Ulster Covenant was a response to the Liberal government's third Home Rule Bill, which would have given Ireland limited autonomy. This mass demonstration against Home Rule saw nearly half a million people sign the Ulster Covenant, including 234,046 women who signed a corresponding women's declaration.<sup>46</sup> For Elizabeth and her family, loyalty to the Union was clearly important and their participation suggests that they all remained attuned to the politics shaping Protestant rural society in County Down in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>40</sup> *Why were we called Unitarians? Why are we no longer called Unitarians?.*

<http://www.dromorenp.church/1/post/2022/07/why-were-we-called-unitarians-why-are-we-no-longer-called-unitarians.html> : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Marriages (PR) Ireland. Dromore, County Down. 26 February 1853. HODGES, George and McLAUGHLIN, Margaret. Reg. ID: 3232919. SN 69. p. 34. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 2 December 2025.

<sup>42</sup> Ulster Covenant. (Women). Dromore, West Down. 28 September 1912. HODGEN, Lizzie. D1327/3/2797. Sheet: 6. <https://apps.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenant/> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Deaths (CR) Ireland. D Banbridge, County Down. 7 April 1906. HODGEN, Margaret. Reg. ID: 3618201/04562137. SN 203. p. 129. <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>44</sup> Ulster Covenant (Women). Dromore, West Down. 28 September 1912. HODGEN, Mary. D1327/3/2796. Sheet: 5. <https://apps.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenant/> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Ulster Covenant (Men). Dromore, West Down. 28 September 1912. HODGEN, George Henry. D1327/3/2881 Sheet: 4. <https://apps.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenant/> : accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>46</sup> PRONI. *The Ulster Covenant*. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-ulster-covenant> : accessed 8 December 2025.

The Ulster Covenant is the last record I have found for Mary HODGEN. I have not been able to locate death, burial or probate records for her, or any evidence that she married or emigrated.

### **Elizabeth's Later Life and Death in 1947**

Elizabeth lived a long life until the age of 80. She outlived her brother George by 4 years, who himself lived to the good old age of 90.<sup>47</sup> There are no records after 1912 where we can find further facts regarding the life of Elizabeth until her probate record of 1948 which confirms she was a farmer, like her brother, that she never married, and lived her whole life in Ballymacormick, Dromore.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, we know that Elizabeth and George would have lived through the turbulent times of WW1, the Irish Civil War and the subsequent creation of Northern Ireland in 1921, and in the final years of their lives also WW2.

Elizabeth died on 12 February 1947 in Banbridge District Hospital. Probate records valued her estate at just over £328 (approx. £16,400 in 2025),<sup>49,50</sup> a respectable sum for a smallholder and evidence that she had managed to preserve family land and resources through decades of economic and social change.

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<sup>47</sup> Testamentary records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, County Down. 22 October 1945 (Death: 9 March 1943). HODGEN, George. Collection: Will Calendars. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-will-calendars> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Testamentary records. Ireland. Ballymacormick, County Down. 16 August 1948 (Death: 12 February 1947). HODGEN, Elizabeth. Collection: Will Calendars. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-will-calendars> : accessed 6 December 2025.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance. *UK Inflation Calculator: GBP from 1751 to 2025*. <https://www.officialdata.org/UK-inflation> : accessed 26 February 2025.



Figure 6: Banbridge District Hospital, County Down <sup>51</sup>

© Unknown author. Wikimedia Commons

As far as I am aware, Elizabeth HODGEN was the last member of her generation as there is no evidence any of her siblings married or had children themselves. She leaves a legacy of a woman born into a farming–weaving household in the linen heartland of rural Dromore who, over 80 years, carried forward both the land and the skills that had sustained her parents, embodying the quiet resilience of Ulster’s rural linen families.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Images: Photograph. Banbridge District Hospital, Co. Down. Unknown. 2020. Wikimedia Commons.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:District\\_Hospital\\_Banbridge\\_Co\\_Down.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:District_Hospital_Banbridge_Co_Down.jpg) : accessed 7 December 2025.

<sup>52</sup> Aghalee Parish Church. (2023) The Linen Industry. <https://aghalee.dromore.anglican.org/about-the-heritage-project/the-linen-industry/> : accessed 8 December 2025.