

*THOMAS KENNEDY DIED IN A
PLACE THAT COULD NOT BE
NAMED
BY PETER GIBSON*

Life and work

Thomas Kennedy was born in Portadown, County Armagh in 1861. By the time he joined the Post Office as a Sorter in 1880 his family had moved to Belfast.

Thomas never married and he lived with his parents (James and Susannah) until the death of his widowed father in December 1900. Between then and census night in April 1901, Thomas had retired from his work and moved to live with his sister Susan, her husband Francis McCullough, and their children. He lived with the McCullough family until he died in 1910.

When Thomas retired on grounds of ill health in early 1901 he was working as a Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist. After twenty-one years' service he was awarded a pension of £36 10s per year.

His cause of death may have been related to the reason for his retirement

One of the areas of interest of the *Addressing Health* project is the relationship between the reasons for postal workers retiring on health grounds and the later causes of their deaths.

Unfortunately at present (May 2021) it is not possible to access the records in the archive at the Postal Museum that give the reason for Thomas Kennedy's retirement. However, it is possible that the cause of his death, nine years later, is relevant: he died of rheumatic arthritis and heart failure.

The *Addressing Health* project has already demonstrated that many telegraphists retired on health grounds – some for reasons relating to the constant use of the telegraph key to send messages, resulting in a condition commonly known as telegraphist's cramp. It is therefore possible that Thomas Kennedy's disease was related to this and that the resulting restricted movements of his hands and fingers meant that he could not carry out the duties of either a telegraphist or a sorting clerk.

In a major medical textbook published the year Kennedy retired, Sir Frederick Taylor (sometime President of the Royal Society of Physicians and President of the Royal Society of Medicine) deals with the disease known by a number of names, including rheumatic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis under the name of "Osteo-Arthritis". Taylor further advised that patients should be cared for in warm dry atmospheres and changes of temperature should be

avoided. He recommended health resorts and spas such as “Buxton, Bath and Strathpeffer at home and Aix-les-Bains, Aix-la-Chapelle, Baden-Baden and Wiesbaden abroad.”

Spending time at one of these resorts was probably out of the question for Thomas Kennedy, so he may have been prescribed some of the medication advised by Taylor. Taylor recommended arsenic, sodium salicylate, iodine of iron and cod-liver oil, adding that “[t]he arsenic should be given in full doses.” In another contemporary medical textbook, Fothergill and Murrell note that attacks of acute rheumatism can injure the heart. Heart failure was the second cause of Thomas Kennedy’s death.

Thomas Kennedy’s place of death – an unnamed hospital

According to the record of his death, Thomas Kennedy died on 8th April 1910 at 51 Lisburn Road, Belfast.

Anyone who undertakes family history research in Belfast, over time, will discover that, according to death records, a great number of people died at this address. Indeed, the burial records for the cemeteries in Belfast confirm this.

51 Lisburn Road was the street address of the Belfast Union Workhouse. It seems that the registrar for Belfast and those responsible for the cemeteries may have felt that surviving relatives may have been embarrassed if the proper name of the building where people died was recorded on death and burial records.

The Belfast Workhouse had been built in the 1841 and, initially, would have included an infirmary for the paper inmates who were unwell. However, across Ireland, over the decades, workhouse infirmaries and hospitals expanded in size and became the only places where people of limited means, (but who were not necessarily destitute) could receive any medical care.

By the early years of the 20th century, medical students at Queen’s University, Belfast were being trained in the Belfast Workhouse Hospital. Earlier, from the 1880s, the workhouse trained and employed nurses.

This sensitivity about naming workhouse hospitals or infirmaries on death (and birth) records seems to have occurred only in Belfast. Other registrars did not follow this practice. The death record of my great-great-grandmother (who was not destitute – she owned a small farm that was sold after her death) states that she died in 1908 in “Workhouse, Newtownards”, without even mentioning that it was in the infirmary.

To receive the medical care he needed, Thomas Kennedy (and my relative) would have been admitted to the workhouse for what was termed “Indoor Relief” – the same process that destitute paupers followed. When the Poor Law ended in Northern Ireland in 1948, many workhouse infirmaries and hospitals became part of the NHS.

The workhouse where my ancestor died is now the Ards Hospital. If Thomas Kennedy had died a century later, in 2010, the place of his death would have been recorded as “Belfast City Hospital”.

References:

Talks

- Dr Olwen Purdue “Surviving the Industrial City. Poverty, Health and the Poor Law in Belfast, 1850-1914”. Talk given on 15th March 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwRZ1UfcQ1U>

Books and other printed material:

- Frederick Taylor, A Manual of the Practice of Medicine(London: J&A Churchill, 1901, 6th. ed)
- J M Fothergill and W Murrell The Practitioner’s Handbook of Treatment (Lea: London, 1897, 4th ed.).

Fact Sheet: Thomas Kennedy

Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> Thomas Kennedy
<i>Person ID:</i> IR1004
<i>Your name:</i> Brendan Mullan
<i>U3A group:</i> Causeway
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
Thomas Kennedy was born on 28 March 1861 in Portadown, County Armagh.
2: Who were your pensioners' parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)
Thomas' parents were James and Susanna Kennedy. They were members of the Church of Ireland. In 1879, when Thomas was applying to join the Post Office, they lived at 38 Ghent Street, Belfast. James Kennedy was a labourer and was unable to write. Susannah Kennedy died on 13 December 1887, aged 61. The cause of her death was "Paralysis, 10 days. Certified." James Kennedy died on 16 December, 1900, aged 76. The cause of his death was "Senile decay, Cardiac failure. Certified." Both Susannah and James died at 38 Ghent Street.
3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation)
Sister Susan <ul style="list-style-type: none">• His sister Susan married Francis McCullough, 9th April 1890 at Albert St Church, Belfast.: https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1890/10697/5899236.pdf• Francis McCullough died 5th Apr 1974: https://billiongraves.com/grave/Francis-McCullough/22945265
Niece Eliza Margaret McCullough <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Born 12th April 1891: https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1891/02392/1892072.pdf

- Eliza married William Rankin, 19th Oct 1910 at Cliftonville, Shankhill, Belfast.
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1910/09997/5635730.pdf
- Elizabeth McCullough died 10th Mar 1942: <https://billiongraves.com/grave/Francis-McCullough/22945265>

Nephew Archibald McCulloch

- Nephew was Archibald McCullough, born 27th Jul 1893:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1893/02296/1861307.pdf
- Archibald married Kathleen Stedman, 5th Jul 1920, at Willowfield Church, Co Down
I found (and lost) a family tree which recorded that Archibald emigrated to USA, 5 Sep 1924
- Archibald died 17th Sep 1962 and is buried in Carnmoney Cemetery in Thomas Kennedy's grave
- Archibald's wife, Kathleen died 31st Jul 1988 and is buried in the same grave.
<https://billiongraves.com/grave/Archibald-T-McCullough/17442633>

Part Two: Marriage and children

1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation)

No. He died a bachelor according to his death certificate.

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

I have not found any evidence that he had any children.

Part Three: Work

1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

Thomas Kennedy joined the Post Office in Belfast in 1880 as Sorter. He retired on grounds of ill health in 1901, after 21 years' service. His salary as a Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist was £106 0s 4p per year. He was awarded a pension of £36 10s per year.

2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

1901 Census of Ireland

My pensioner is recorded as a boarder with the McCullough family (his sister's family)

- Francis McCullough, head of the family, had the occupation of Clerk in Rent Office
- Susan McCullough, wife, no occupation
- Eliza McCullough, daughter and Archibald McCullough, Son, recorded as scholars

1911 Census of Ireland

Frances McCullough, head of the family, had the occupation of Clerk to Estate Agent

Susan McCullough, wife, no occupation

Archibald McCullough, Son, had the occupation of Apprenticeship Draughtsman

Niece was Eliza McCullough, born approx. 1892. Roselawn Cemetery, Belfast has a burial record, dated 22 Feb 1975, of Eliza McCullough, 83, last address 33 Castlereagh Place.

Nephew was Archibald McCullough, married Kathleen Stedman 5 Jul 1920 CofI Church, Willowfield, Co. Down, emigrated to USA 5 Sep 1924, died 17 Sep 1962, buried Carnmoney Cemetery, in his uncle's grave.

Part Four: Anything Else

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner

Thomas Kennedy died on 08 April 1901 at the Union Infirmary, Lisburn Road, Belfast aged 48. The cause of his death was "Rheumatic Arthritis. Cardiac Failure. Certified." He had been living with the McCullough family at 26 Newington Avenue.

His death notice from The Belfast News-Letter of 9th April 1910 reads: "April 8 at the Hospital Lisburn Road. Thomas Kennedy. Funeral from above for Carmoney Cemetery tomorrow (Sunday) morning, 20th inst, at ten o'clock. F.M. McCullough"

His gravestone at Carmoney Cemetery reads:

"THOMAS KENNEDY
Died 8th April 1910
Aged 49 years
His nephew
ARCHIBALD T. MCCULLOUGH
Died 17th September 1962
Aged 63 years
Also his wife
KATHLEEN MCCULLOUGH
Died 31st July 1988
In her ninetieth year"

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

Thomas Kennedy

- Civil Service Evidence of Age:
<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBOR%2FCSEOA%2F098%2F0594&parentid=GBOR%2FCSEOA%2F00031723>
- Appointment to Post Office 1880: British Postal Museum and Archive; Series: POST 58; Reference Number: 87
- Death 1910:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1910/05430/4518201.pdf
- McCullough household Newington Avenue, Belfast (1901 Census):
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Antrim/Duncairn_Ward/Newington_Avenue/938278/

James Kennedy (Father)

- Death 1901:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1900/05747/4623121.pdf

Susan Kennedy (Mother)

- Death 1887:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1887/06199/4773033.pdf

Eliza Margaret McCullough (niece)

- Birth 1891:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1891/02392/1892072.pdf
- McCullough household Newington Avenue, Belfast (1911 Census):
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Antrim/Duncairn/Newington_Avenue/142243/

Archibald McCullough (nephew)

- Birth 1893:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1893/02296/1861307.pdf
- McCullough household Newington Avenue, Belfast (1911 Census):
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Antrim/Duncairn/Newington_Avenue/142243/