

EDWARD BENSON (1872-1939)
BY PETER GIBSON

Edward Francis Benson worked as telegraphist and sorting clerk for the Post Office in Dublin. He was orphaned at the age of twelve, had retired by the age of twenty-nine and spent more than half his life in a mental hospital.

Edward Benson's parents, Francis Benson (a widower with a daughter aged six years old) and Jane Jones were married at the Dublin Registrar's Office on 21st March 1872. At the time of the marriage they were both living in a boarding house at 24 Holles Street, Dublin, which was run by the Walters – the parents of Francis Benson's deceased first wife.

Before his first marriage, in 1862, Francis Benson lived in his father's house at 13 Pembroke Street Upper. The house was part of a grand Georgian terrace in a fashionable street between St. Stephen's Green and Merrion Square. On the record of his marriage to Jane Jones, Francis Benson was described as being a "gentleman". However other records variously describe him as being a clerk, a bookkeeper and a railway official.

Edward Francis Benson (the postal pensioner) was born in 24 Holles Street on 21st April 1872 – exactly one month after his parents' marriage.

The Bensons moved to live in a house in St Vincent's Street North where their second son, John Samuel, was born in July 1875. Francis Benson died a few months later, in October 1875.

When their mother Jane died at 24 Holles Street in July 1884 aged forty-three, Edward and Samuel were orphaned, aged twelve and nine years old.

It is not known what arrangements were made for the two boys, but it is possible that they lived at 24 Holles Street with their half-sister, Florence. She was then aged eighteen and lived with her grandparents, the Walters, who ran the boarding house.

In April 1889, following an open competition, Edward Francis Benson, aged seventeen, was appointed to be a telegraph learner in the Post Office in Dublin.

At the time of the 1901 census he was working as a telegraphist for the Post Office and was boarding in a house at 6 Emor Street, Dublin.

Later in 1901, he retired on ill health grounds from his post as sorting clerk and telegraphist after twelve years' service, at the age of twenty-nine. His salary had been £105 17s 4d per year and he was awarded a pension of £21 3s 4d per year.

Not long after his retirement he was admitted to the Richmond Lunatic Asylum. The asylum had been founded in 1815 to serve Dublin and the surrounding counties. From 1925 it was known as Grangegorman Mental Hospital and later, from 1958, as St Brendan's Hospital. It closed in 2010.

In the asylum's return for the 1911 census Edward Benson was listed as patient "E. B.". He was thirty-seven years old, single, a Telegraph Clerk who was a member of the Church of Ireland. He had been suffering from Paranoia for nine years, which suggests that he was first admitted to the hospital in 1902. The "ascertained or presumed cause of [his] Insanity" was "Syphilis and Drink".

Paranoia can be a consequence of both alcohol addiction and the form of syphilis known as neurosyphilis. Neurosyphilis can occur when a syphilis infection is not treated for many years and it invades the brain or spinal cord.

Edward Benson may well have benefitted from the improvements made in the treatment of syphilis in the first three decades of the 20th century. Instead of mercury-based treatments, salvarsan and neosalvarsan (which were arsenic-based drugs) were used to treat syphilis. However, these drugs would not have restored the damage which Edward's body and mind had already sustained.

Edward Benson died in Grangegorman Mental Hospital, as it was then called, on 20th December 1939. He was recorded as being from 6 Emor Street (his address at the time of the 1901 census) and was sixty-seven years old. The cause of his death was "Myocardial degeneration. Cardiac Failure. Certified."

Edward Benson had been a patient in the mental hospital for about thirty-seven years – more than half of his lifetime.

Fact Sheet: Edward Benson

Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> Edward Benson
<i>Person ID:</i> IR1017
<i>Your name:</i> Peter Gibson
<i>U3A group:</i> Northern Ireland
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
Edward Francis Benson was born in 24 Holles Street, Dublin on 21 April 1872.
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)
Edward Benson's father was Francis Benson . His date of birth is not known, however he was probably born in Dublin. He died in Charlemont Street, Dublin on 14 October 1875. His death record has not been found but the entry in the Will Calendar for 1875 records that the administration of his estate ("Effects under £600") was granted to his widow, Jane. Edward Benson's mother was Jane Benson (nee Jones) . She was born about 1841 and died in 24 Holles Street, Dublin on 27 July 1884. Edward's parents, Francis and Jane were married in the Dublin Registrar's office on 21 March 1872. At the time of the marriage they were both living in 24 Holles Street. Francis, a widower, was recorded as being a "Gentleman". His father, also Francis, was recorded as "house steward". Jane's father was Samuel, a miller. The marriage took place one month before the birth of Edward Benson. Francis and Jane moved from Holles Street to 2 St Vincent Street North before the birth of their second son, John Samuel, in 1873. Francis Benson – Edward's father Griffith's Valuation for County Dublin (1854) records that Francis Benson (Edward's grandfather) occupied 13 Pembroke Street Upper, Dublin. A newspaper notice of Francis Benson's first marriage (in 1862), he was described as "Francis Benson, jnr. Esq. of Upper Pembroke Street". Francis married Sarah Walters in St. Peter's Church of Ireland Parish Church on 03 September 1862. Francis was a clerk and his father was (?) a Crier. Sarah lived at 24 Holles Street and her father, George, was a College Porter.

In Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory for 1881 (page 198), 24 Holles Street is listed under "Boarding and Lodging Houses" and operated by George Walters. Sarah gave birth to a daughter, Florence, on 10 December 1866 in 24 Holles Street. Francis was recorded as being a Railway Official.

No other records of children of Francis and Sarah Benson have been found.

Sarah Benson (nee Walters) died in 1867, aged 28, in Dublin South registration district. (Her death notice is not yet available online.)

Francis and Sarah may have lived in her father's house in Holles Street.

Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory for 1870 (page 30) includes Francis Benson, jnr, Esq., of 13 Pembroke Street Upper in its list of "Nobility, Gentry and Clergy".

By the time of his second marriage, in 1872, Francis was living at 24 Holles Street and Edward was born there.

Francis Benson's "rank, profession or occupation" varied over time.

- At the time of his first marriage, in 1862, he was recorded as being a clerk.
- In 1866, at Florence's birth, he was a Railway Official.
- At the time of his second marriage in March 1872, he was a Gentleman.
- When Edward was born in April 1872 he had no occupation.
- When his John Samuel was born in 1875, he was a book keeper.
- After his death, in 1875, the entry in the Will Calendar described him as "formerly of 24 Holles Street, Dublin, Railway Official and late of 2 St Vincent Street, Dublin, Gentleman".
- In Jane's death record, in 1884, she was described as the "Widow of a Gentleman".
- In his daughter, Florence's, marriage record, in 1889, he was a clerk.

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)

Edward Benson's brother, **John Samuel Benson**, was born on 26 July 1875 at 2 St Vincent Street North, Dublin.

No other record has been found of him. However, in 1901 "George" Benson (aged 26) was living with Edward Benson in Emor Street, Dublin (see details in Part Four). This may have been Edward's brother.

Edward Benson's half-sister, Florence Margaret Benson, had been born on 10 December 1866 (see above).

Florence married **Harry Van Maanen** on 15 July 1889 in St Stephen's Church of Ireland, Dublin. Florence had been living at 24 Holles Street. Her father, Francis was recorded as a clerk.

Harry was a clerk living at Summerville Terrace. His father, James Cornelius Van Maanen, who was Dutch, was the band master of the Royal Irish Constabulary Band. In 1901 and 1911 the Van Maanen family lived in Bray, County Wicklow. By 1911, Florence had given birth to three children, all of whom were living.

When their mother, Jane, died in 1885, Edward and John Samuel were orphaned aged 12 and 10. Given that she died in 24 Holles Street, it is possible that the two boys remained there, in the care of their older half-sister, Florence and Florence's grandparents – the Walters.

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)

Edward Benson did not marry.

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)

No records of children of Edward Benson have been found.

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

In April 1889, following an open competition, Edward Francis Benson was appointed to be a Telegraph Learner in the Post Office in Dublin.

In 1901 he retired on grounds of ill health from his post as Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist after 12 years service. He was awarded a pension of £21 3s 4d per annum.

In the 1901 Census, he was incorrectly recorded as Forename: "Benson", Surname: "Edward F". He was a Telegraphist boarding at 6 Emor Street, Dublin.

In 1911 Edward Benson was a patient in a mental hospital (see Part Four, below).

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

In 1901 the other boarders at 6 Emor Street were George Benson, a clerk, aged 26, who may have been his brother (see Part Two, above) and Daniel O'Connell Mackin, a butcher. The head of the household, Florence Allen, was a housekeeper and her niece, Mabel Pattison, was a scholar.

Part Four: Anything Else

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

Edward Benson's hospitalisation and death

In the 1911 Census, Edward Benson was included in the "Return of all Lunatics and Idiots who were under treatment in the Public Lunatic Asylum of Richmond, Upper Grangegorman Street, Dublin".

The Richmond Lunatic Asylum was founded in 1815. From 1925 it was known as Grangegorman Mental Hospital and later, from 1958, as St Brendan's Hospital. It closed in 2010.

Edward Benson was listed as patient E. B.. He was 37 years old, a single Telegraph Clerk who was a member of the Church of Ireland. He had been born in Dublin and had been admitted to the hospital from Dublin city.

He had been suffering from Paranoia for 9 years, which suggests that he was first admitted to the hospital in 1902 – probably within a year of his retirement on grounds of ill health from the Post Office.

The "ascertained or presumed cause of [his] Insanity" was "Syphilis and Drink".

Edward appears to have remained in hospital for about 37 years - more than half his lifetime.

He died in Grangegorman Mental Hospital, as it was then called, on 20 December 1939. He was recorded as being from 6 Emor Street and was 66 years old. The cause of his death was "Myocardial degeneration. Cardiac Failure. Certified".

Houses associated with the Benson family



Above: 13 Pembroke Street Upper. Source: Google Street View.

In Victorian times, this was an up-market area of large family houses, close to St Stephen's Green, Trinity College and the city centre.

Edward Benson's grandfather lived in this house and it was his father's home before his first marriage.

In 1901 it was classified as being a first class house with 11 rooms.

Today many of the houses in the street have been converted into offices for organisations and businesses seeking proximity to the Dail and government offices.



Above: 24 Holles Street. Source: Google Street View

Edward Benson, and his half-sister, Florence were born in this house and his father, Francis, lived there with both his families. It was a boarding house operated by George Walters (Edward's step-grandfather). After Edward's mother died in the house, he may have lived there, perhaps even until George Walters died in 1898.

In 1901 24 Holles Street was classified as a first class house. In 1911, nine households occupied one room each in the house.

Today, the building used as an office. It is beside a modern extension to the National Maternity Hospital (known as Holles Street Hospital) which is, by far, the largest building in the street.



Above: 2 St Vincent's Street North. Source: Google Street View.

Edward Benson's family moved to this house, from Holles Street, and his brother, John Samuel was born here in 1873.

In 1901 it was classified as a second class house with 4 rooms.



Above: 6 Emor Street. Source: Google Street View.

Edward Benson boarded in this house in 1901, before his retirement from the Post Office. It was a second class house with six rooms.

Edward Benson was admitted to Richmond Asylum from this house and it remained his address when he died in hospital about 37 years later.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Rosemary Finan, a fellow Postal researcher, for her excellent detective work in finding the 1901 and 1911 Census returns for Edward Benson after I had failed to locate them.

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

Edward Francis Benson (EFB – Postal Pensioner)

- Birth 1872:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1872/03250/2190933.pdf
- Appointment to Post Office 1889: British Postal Museum and Archive; Series: POST 58; Reference Number: 91
- Census 1901: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003807134/>
- Census 1911: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000097791/>
- Death 1939:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1939/04736/4267269.pdf

Francis Benson (grandfather of EFB)

- Griffith's Valuation 1854:
[http://griffiths.askaboutireland.ie/gv4/z/zoomifyDynamicViewer.php?file=087176&path=../pix/087/&rs=16&showpage=1&mysession=2744969853096&width=&height="](http://griffiths.askaboutireland.ie/gv4/z/zoomifyDynamicViewer.php?file=087176&path=../pix/087/&rs=16&showpage=1&mysession=2744969853096&width=&height=)
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Francis Benson (father of EFB)

- Marriage 1862:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1862/09629/5492339.pdf (also see *Freeman's Journal* 13 September 1862, page 8 column 4)
- Marriage 1872:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1872/11297/8144428.pdf
- Will Calendar 1875:
http://www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/reels/cwa/005014891/005014891_00389.pdf

Sarah Benson (nee Walters) (step-mother of EFB)

- Death 1867:
<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=IRE%2FBMD%2FD%2F616936575>

Florence Margaret Van Maanen (nee Benson) (half sister of EFB)

- Birth 1866:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1866/03510/2290761.pdf
- Marriage 1889:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1889/10742/5916927.pdf
- Census 1901: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai001309676/>
- Census 1911: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003635645/>

Jane Benson (nee Jones) (mother of EFB)

- Death 1884:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1884/06316/4811350.pdf

John Samuel Benson (brother of EFB)

- Birth 1873:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1875/03092/2133477.pdf

George Walters (step-grandfather of EFB)

- Death 1898:
https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1898/05814/4646002a.pdf

Houses in 1901 Census

- 13 Upper Pembroke Street:
<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003810799/>
- 24 Holles Street: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003817742/>
- 2 St Vincent Street North:
<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003702649/>
- 6 Emor Street: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003807122/>