

The Leading Manufacturing Firms in 1920s Dublin

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Introduction

The Irish economy at independence was overwhelmingly agricultural. Northern Ireland, though far smaller, had more than one and a half times the number of manufacturing jobs as the Free State. There was significant industrial activity in the cities however, with half of manufacturing employment located in the Dublin region.

About 45 percent of the Free State manufacturing workforce was employed in food, drink and tobacco, a further 20 percent in textiles, clothing and footwear, 15 percent in metals, engineering and building products, 10 percent in paper and publishing, and the remaining 10 percent in chemicals and other miscellaneous sectors. This paper identifies the leading firms in Dublin in each of these manufacturing categories. As the focus is on manufacturing, sectors such as transport, construction and power generation are not considered.

There were only around two dozen manufacturing firms in the Free State of the 1920s that employed 400 or more workers. Surprisingly perhaps, more than one-third of these large firms were based outside Dublin. These included the Ford plant in Cork, the Goodbody jute factory at Clara, Martin Mahony's Blarney Woollen Mills, the Limerick Clothing Company and Pierce's agricultural machinery and cycle factory in Wexford. Sectors such as grain milling, bacon curing and fertilizer production were also largely based outside Dublin.

Food

While dairying and butter production were primarily located in Munster, Dublin by the 1920s had a well-developed milk-distribution business. Much of the city's milk supply came from cows that were kept in city yards over the winter and pastured over the summer on land owned or rented close to the city. The milk-distribution companies sourced their milk from further afield and most began to pasteurise their supplies in the 1920s. Though the sale of unpasteurised milk survived into the 1960s, most of the urban cow sheds had disappeared by then.

Hughes Brothers of Rathfarnham began trading as Hazelbrook Dairies in 1900 and pioneered the pasteurisation process in 1924. Production of HB ice cream began two years later. The other leading milk distributors, Merville Dairies of Finglas, which was owned by the Craigie Brothers, dated from 1890 and commenced pasteurisation in 1925.

Like most of the other leading firms of the time, both Merville and HB were Protestant-owned. Smaller distributors included Lucan Dairies and the exotically-named Tel-el-Kebir of Monkstown. The latter, which was owned by a Catholic family, the Suttons, derived its name from a battle in Egypt at which one of the family had distinguished himself by saving the regimental colours. Tel-el-Kebir, which drew its milk supplies from Wexford and Wicklow, was established in 1884 and commenced pasteurisation in 1926. Dublin Dairies, which

would amalgamate with Merville and Sutton's in 1966 to form Premier Dairies, was established only in 1947.



Since pigs could be fed cheaply on the skim milk that the creameries returned to the farmer, the bacon sector too was concentrated in Munster. Donnelly's of the Coombe was the largest of the Dublin bacon factories. Many of the pigs the Dublin factories purchased were reared locally on household scraps. Of the 'Big 4' bacon companies of the time – Henry Denny & Son, Matterson, Shaw and O'Mara – only the O'Maras were Catholic. Several generations of the family had served as Home Rule MPs, though the family divided on the issue of the Treaty. The O'Maras bought out Donnelly's in 1906, making them the second largest bacon company in the country after Denny's.

Bread had become the staple of the Irish diet after the Great Famine and, since wheat was largely imported, Dublin had a large flour-milling industry. The largest Dublin bakers of the time – Boland's and Johnston, Mooney & O'Brien – produced most of their own flour. Each employed a workforce of around 500 across their various operations, making them – along with Denny's – among the 20 or so largest manufacturing employers in the state.

Boland's original bakery was on Capel St., though by 1916 it was operating the large industrial bakery on Grand Canal St. that served as de Valera's headquarters during the rising. This building was demolished in the 1940s and a vast replacement bakery constructed. Flour-milling took place at the nearby mills on the Grand Canal Basin – formerly known as Pim's Mills – that Boland's had purchased in the 1870s.

Johnston, Mooney & O'Brien operated the Clonliffe Flour Mills on Jones's Road. They had two bakeries – on Leinster Street and in Ballsbridge – and ten bread and cake shops across Dublin and Dun Laoghaire. The third large Dublin firm was Kennedy's, which operated six bakeries, the largest of which was St Peter's Bakery on Parnell St. In the 1920s, their bread-delivery fleet consisted of 150 horse-drawn vehicles and a number of motor vans.



The large Dublin bread firms were all under Catholic ownership, though the largest bakery in Cork was owned by a Methodist family. In 1924 Kennedy's joined with the Church of Ireland milling family the Odlums – whose main milling interests were in south Leinster – to form the Dublin Port Milling Company at Alexandra Basin. Another well-known milling business was operated by the Shackletons, a Quaker family whose operations included the large Anna Liffey mill at Lucan that closed only in 1998.

Turning now from bread and milk to jam, by 1906 Williams & Woods of Parnell St. was reported to have shifted completely from imported to Irish-produced fruit, which would arrive in from Armagh twice daily by passenger train. By 1924 the company – which was the country's largest producer of jams, sweets and chocolates – had established its own fruit farm at Kilsallaghan in north county Dublin, which also supplied it with the milk it used for the production of toffee and chocolate.

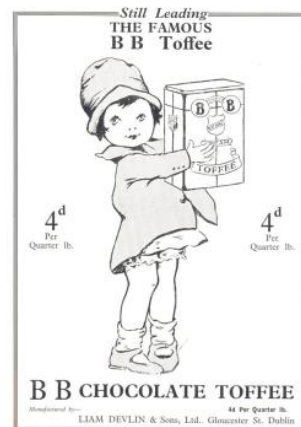
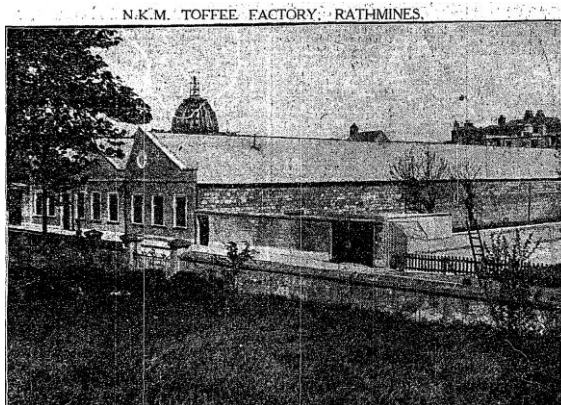
Another well-known Dublin sweet-maker was the Methodist firm Lemon's, of the Confectioners' Hall on Lower O'Connell St. Leopold Bloom visits the shop, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and muses memorably on its being 'lozenge and comfit manufacturer to His Majesty the King. God. Save. Our. Sitting on his throne sucking red jujubes white.'

The Dublin confectionery sector received a massive boost when Cumann na nGaedheal introduced a tariff on confectionery products in 1924. This led to a number of new firms, both Irish and British, establishing operations in the city.

One of the new firms that would later grow to substantial size was Urney Chocolates. Named for the parish in West Tyrone where the business had been established in 1917, Urney's shifted production to Tallaght in 1924 following a fire at its Tyrone factory. The proprietors, Eileen and Harry Gallagher, were Catholic, but there was a Quaker connection, common in the industry, on Harry Gallagher's mother's side. Urney's employed over 200 by 1928.

Liam Devlin, whose pub on Parnell St. had served as unofficial headquarters for Collins's intelligence team during the war of independence, set up a new sweet factory on Gloucester St. (now Sean McDermott St.) in 1924. The factory would later move to the Cork St. area and come under the ownership of Urney's. By 1929 employment at this factory would also breach the 200 mark. Another sweet factory was established in Drumcondra by Joseph Milroy, founder and president of the Federation of Saorstát Industries. Milroy's produced the much-loved macaroon bar.

The tariffs also induced a number of British firms to establish operations in Dublin. In 1926 Rowntree took over Savoy Confectionery of Inchicore to produce its products for the Irish market. Similarly Macintosh bought out the North Kerry Manufacturing Company and built a new factory in Rathmines. NKM, as the name suggests, had originally been established in Kerry but its Protestant proprietor reportedly moved to Dublin to avoid sectarian harassment. Williams & Woods took on several hundred extra workers following the imposition of the tariff and was reported to have an employment level of 900 when purchased by UK firm Crosse & Blackwell in 1928.



By the 1920s, the biscuit company Jacob's of Aungier St. was also experimenting with chocolate. The firm's famous *Club Milk* dates from this era. The Dublin factory employed around 3,000 in 1928. Its subsidiary factory at Aintree, which went into production in 1914, had been spun off into a separate company (for tax purposes) at independence. The Jacobs were Quakers, though some of the family had converted to the Church of Ireland by the time of the 1911 census.

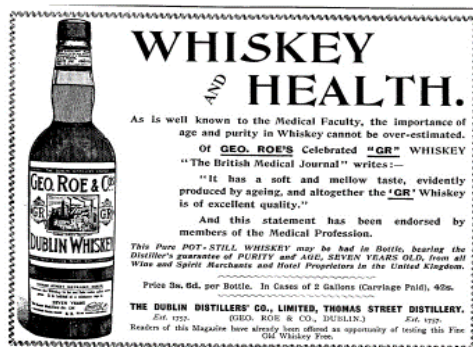
Drink and Tobacco

The Guinness company archives register an employment level of 3,210 at St. James' Gate in 1929, at a time when the next largest breweries in the country employed only around 200. Guinness's had been founded in 1759 on the site of an older brewery. The principals of the family – Lords Ardilaun and Iveagh – were conservative unionists (two of Iveagh's sons represented English constituencies at Westminster) and members of the Church of Ireland.

There were three other Dublin breweries in the 1920s. The Anchor Brewery on Usher St. – maker of D'Arcy's Dublin Porter – had been founded in 1740 and would close in 1926. Watkins, Jameson & Pim of Ardee St. was an amalgamation of several separate breweries, the earliest of which dated from 1736, though brewing had taken place on the site on Ardee St. since ancient times. This brewery would close in 1939. The third, the Mountjoy Brewery on Russell St., was owned by the Presbyterian Findlater family. Dating from 1852, it would close in 1956.

Having been outcompeted by Scotch by the turn of the century, and suffering the effects of prohibition in America and a strong temperance lobby in the UK parliament, the Irish whiskey industry was in the doldrums in the 1920s, with only 400 employed in distilling across the entire state.

The three Dublin whiskey firms of the time were John Jameson, whose distillery was on Bow St. (Smithfield), John Power, whose distillery at John's Lane now houses the National College of Art and Design, and the Dublin Distillers Company (DDC). The latter was an amalgamation, dating from around 1890, of three separate distilleries: George Roe's of Thomas St., William Jameson's of Marrowbone Lane and the Dublin Whiskey Co. of Jones Road. The DDC did not survive the decade. Two of its three distilleries closed in 1923 and the third in 1926. The (Scottish) Distillers Company had already closed its Phoenix Park distillery at Chapelizod in 1921. The Powers were the only Catholics among the Dublin whiskey firms, though they too had been unionist in their politics.



Mineral water production was the other segment of the drinks industry. Thwaite's Mineral Waters had been established by Dublin chemist Augustine Thwaite in the late 1700s. Thwaite's would amalgamate with a number of other firms, including the Belfast firm of Cantrell & Cochrane, to form Mineral Water Distributers (from whence derives the name 'MiWadi') in 1927.

Like confectionery, the tobacco sector also changed dramatically in the 1920s. Prior to independence there had been two leading southern Irish firms, Goodbody's and Carroll's. The Goodbody tobacco operation had moved, along with its workers, to the South Circular Road (the site of the later Players-Wills factory) when its Tullamore factory burnt down in 1886. The Dublin factory registered an employment level of 320 in 1908, and was described at the time as much larger than Carroll's of Dundalk.

Three British firms – Player's, Wills, and pipe tobacco and snuff producer William Clarke & Son – built factories in Dublin when excise duties on international trade in tobacco products came into effect in 1923. The Player's factory was at Botanic Rd., Glasnevin; Wills were at Marrowbone Lane, and Clarke at South Circular Rd., to which Wills moved upon amalgamation in 1928.

All three were members of the Imperial Tobacco conglomerate and by 1928 had a combined employment level of 1,500. In the face of this increased competition on the Irish market, the Goodbodys sold their tobacco interests to Carroll's in the late 1920s, raising Carroll's employment in Dundalk to around 400.

Textiles, Clothing and Footwear

Cork was the centre of the woollen and worsted industry. This was generally under Catholic ownership, while non-woollen textile firms were generally 'Protestant'. There were two exceptions to this pattern in Dublin. The Lucan woollen firm of Hill & Son was owned by a Quaker family, while the Balbriggan linen firm of Charles Gallen & Co. was owned by a Catholic family with roots in Northern Ireland.

One of the largest southern linen firms of the time was Greenmount & Boyne. Greenmount Weaving, which had been operating in Harold's Cross since 1808, was owned by the Quaker family, the Pims. Boyne Weaving had been established in Drogheda in the 1860s by a Protestant (Congregationalist) Liberal MP for the town. Greenmount & Boyne was formed in 1925 when Boyne Weaving acquired the assets of the Dublin operation. It employed around 300 in each of its two factories in 1929, making it another of the largest firms in the state.

Much of the clothing produced in Dublin in the 1920s was made at the seven large department stores of the time: Switzer's and Brown Thomas of Grafton St., Pim's of South Great George's St., McBirney's of Aston Quay, Clery's of O'Connell St., Arnott's of Henry St., and Todd, Burns & Co. of Mary St. Of these, only Clery's was under Catholic nationalist ownership, though Brown Thomas had been bought in 1919 by the London-based American entrepreneur Harry Gordon Selfridge. The largest of the department stores employed workforces of around 500, though most were engaged in sales and service rather than manufacturing.



TODD, BURNS & Co., Ltd., Dublin.
THE LEADING DRAPERS and HOUSE FURNISHERS



The most famous hosiery manufacturer in the state was Smyth & Co. of Balbriggan, which had been founded in the 1700s. A particular type of hosiery product had come to be known worldwide as 'balbriggans' – the term is sometimes encountered in Hollywood 'westerns' – though Smyth & Co. had failed to trademark the name. The company employed around 500, of whom many were outworkers. Another hosiery factory, Sea Mills, owned by the British company Deeds, Templar & Co., had located close to the Smyth factory to benefit from the local pool of skilled labour and the prestige of the location's name, but had failed to reopen after being burnt down by the Black and Tans when the town was sacked in 1920.

By the time of independence Smyth and Co. was owned by a local Protestant unionist family, the Whytes. The leading Dublin footwear company of the time, Winstanley's of Back Lane in the Liberties, was also owned by a Church of Ireland family. It employed around 180.

Metals, Engineering, Building Products, Wood and Furniture

Much of the metalwork of the time was carried out at local foundries, which boasted that they could produce ‘anything from a needle to an anchor’. The largest was the Hammond Lane Foundry, which had been revived by Scotsman David Frame in 1902. Frame gifted 86 acres of Bray Head for the development of a public park in 1922 and would go on to establish Irish Steel in the 1930s. Another major foundry was the Newcomen Ironworks of Smith and Pearson, which started as a joint venture between a British ironworks and a local Quaker entrepreneur in 1901. It employed around 200 in the 1920s.

Other well-known engineering firms included W. Spence & Son of Cork St., which built locomotives and other equipment for Guinness, Murphy’s and Jameson’s, and George Watt Ltd., engineers and boilermakers of Bridgefoot St. Spence & Son employed around 80; George Watt around 50.

Two foundries that left an enduring legacy were J. & C. McGloughlin of Great Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.) and Tonge & Taggart, which operated from various locations including Windmill Lane, the South City Foundry at 41 Bishop St. and, latterly, East Wall.

McGloughlin, which dated from 1875, was known for its artwork, which included the metal canopy above the entrance to the Mansion House and the decorative entrance to the Phoenix Park at Islandbridge. Patrick Pearse’s half-sister Mary Emily married into the family, whose workshop was close to the Pearse family home. McGloughlin’s employed 120 in 1914.

Tonge & Taggart had been established in 1869 and is famous today for its manhole covers, inscribed with the company name and/or the logo “Cast in the South City Foundry”.



Some foundry work was also carried out at the shipyards. Employment fluctuated hugely at the Dublin dockyards in the 1920s, though 300 were employed there at a particularly busy period in 1930. Employment at the Ringsend dockyard, by contrast, was fairly consistent at around 100. Ringsend had long been famous for its glass bottle industry but this too fared poorly in the 1920s. Two of the three glass bottle companies in Ringsend amalgamated early in the decade but closed in 1927. Like a number of other industries, it would be rejuvenated in the 1930s under Fianna Fáil’s protectionist policies.

Smaller metalworking jobs were conducted at the builders’ provisioning yards. Builders’ provisioning was another strongly Protestant-dominated sector. By the early 1900s the leading firms were Brooks Thomas and Dockrell’s. The principal of the latter, Sir Maurice Dockrell, was one of the last Unionist MPs elected for a Dublin constituency. Other Protestant firms in related sectors included Chadwick’s and Baxendale’s and coal distributors Heiton’s and Tedcastle McCormick, though the timber merchants T. & C. Martin were Catholic.

As in the case of clothing, much of the furniture of the era was produced by the department stores. One specialist furniture manufacturer, reported at the time to be 'of substantial size' (it would employ 250 in the 1930s), was the Dublin mattress maker Michael O'Dea. The firm would become famous later for its 'O'Dearest' mattresses.

Two further wood products firms of note were Kapp & Peterson and I. S. Varian. The tobacco pipe-maker Kapp & Peterson had been established in 1895 and employed around 200 in the 1920s, while the brush-making firm Varian's of Talbot St. – owned by a Unitarian family – had been established in Cork in 1798 but moved to Dublin in 1856. It employed around 100.

There were 18 establishments producing bricks in Dublin City in 1926. In total, these employed 606 workers, of which the Dublin Brick Co. at Dolphin's Barn accounted for around 100.

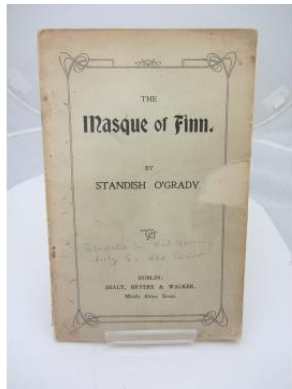
Pulp and Paper, Printing and Publishing

The paper milling industry also fared poorly in the first decade of independence. The various mills to the south and west of the city went through frequent changes of ownership and long periods of inactivity. By 1928 employment in the sector stood at only 41, though it too would be rejuvenated over the following decade.

Production of stationery and packaging materials tended to overlap with printing and publishing. The largest printers and publishers of the time was Alexander Thom & Co. and Hely's. Both were Protestant-owned and each employed around 400.

There were a large number of printing firms employing around 200 workers. These included Cherry & Smalldridge; Cahill & Co.; Bailey, Son & Gibson; Armstrong & Co.; P. O'Reilly; Browne & Nolan, and Sealy, Bryers & Walker. James Walker, one of the owners of Sealy, Bryers & Walker, had a separate colour-printing house, the first in the country, which also employed around 200. The owners of these firms were of various religious denominations, with some having grown to prominence in the Victorian era by catering to the captive Catholic and nationalist market.

There was also a thriving newspaper sector in the country, with the Dublin-based producers of national newspapers being of course the largest firms in the industry. The Fianna Fáil paper, the *Irish Press*, would commence production only in 1931. The *Irish Times*, which at the time served a largely Protestant and unionist readership, employed fewer than 100. The *Irish Independent* was much larger. Until the 1980s its masthead noted that it 'incorporated the *Freeman's Journal*', which it took over upon the latter's demise in 1924. Employment at the *Independent* rose to around 600 after the closure of the *Freeman's Journal*.



Chemicals

The chemicals sector of the 1920s was dominated by fertiliser production, and fertiliser production was dominated by Goulding's. Established in Cork in 1856, Goulding's built a new factory at East Wall in 1869. By 1881 it was reported to be the largest fertiliser producer in these islands. In 1899 Goulding's purchased a controlling interest in the Dublin docklands company Morgan Mooney & Co. and in 1919 acquired both the Drogheda Chemical Manure Company and the Dublin & Wicklow Manure Company. The latter in turn owned the Dublin Vitriol Works. By 1920 Goulding's had at least six plants – employing in total perhaps around 700 – in what would shortly become the Free State, with a further two plants north of the border.

Another significant Dublin chemicals firm, employing around 300, was phosphorus match producer Maguire & Paterson, whose factory was at Hammond Lane. The final chemicals segment to be considered was engaged in the production of soap and candles. This segment also experienced dramatic change as a result of the Cumann na nGaedheal tariffs of 1924.

By the turn of the century the soap bar had become a common household item. The ornate friezes of the Sunlight Chambers building on Essex Quay – built in 1901 as the Irish headquarters of the British firm Lever Brothers of Port Sunlight in Cheshire – were designed to advertise the company's products.

Following the imposition of tariffs Lever Brothers opened the Castle Forbes works on Sheriff St. to produce soap and soap powders for the Irish market. Barrington's – the old Dublin Quaker soap manufacturer that Lever Brothers had acquired in 1910 – was integrated into the new operation and by 1929 the Castle Forbes works employed more than 300 (largely female) staff.

James Crean of North King St. was the other main Dublin soap producer of the time, but was significantly smaller in scale. It also produced candles. The final firm to be considered, the candle maker Rathborne, which moved its premises to East Wall in 1925, is particularly noteworthy. Founded in 1488, it has the distinction of being today the longest-surviving manufacturing firm in these islands.



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