



"An Enthusiast,
A Lover of Life."



**Seán Hollywood Blue Plaque Unveiling
At St. Colman's College, Newry.
Tuesday 12th December 2023..**

OUR SHARED HISTORY PROJECT

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**Mickey Keenan
Modern Fireplace Company & Monumental Works Newry.**

Compiled by James Mc Arevey.



Seán HOLLYWOOD BLUE PLAQUE AWARD.

We are indebted to the Ulster History Circle for accepting our nomination of Seán for the award of this signal honour today.

This prestigious Blue Plaque recognises the achievements and the lasting legacy of the person awarded the accolade of "Man of the Century" by the people of Newry.

Our special thanks and appreciation go to Maud Hamill who led the project on behalf of the Ulster History Circle.

OUR THANKS.



THE MODERN FIREPLACE COMPANY AND MONUMENTAL WORKS NEWRY.

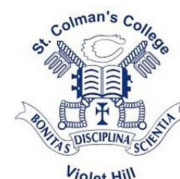
All at Newry Maritime Association (NMA) wish to thank most sincerely, Mickey Keenan, whose generous sponsorship has enabled the delivery of this project. Mickey founded his business, Modern Fireplace Company, back in 1968 in the former Collins livestock yard on Dominic Street.

Over the intervening 55 years, the family firm has established itself at the forefront of the commercial sector in Newry and the wider hinterland.

NMA is very proud to register the business as a much-valued Corporate Member who has made important hands-on contributions to our projects over the last decade.

Many, many thanks to Mickey, Martin, Paul and all the team.

ST.COLMANS COLLEGE NEWRY.



Several months ago an approach was made to the College requesting that the Blue Plaque to be awarded to Seán Hollywood be cited here.

We were able to meet a positive and enthusiastic response from the Principal, Mr Cormac Mc Kinney, and the Board of Governors. Most generously, they

are hosting the catering after the event today and what an occasion to conclude the Bi-Centennial celebrations at Violet Hill where Seán made such a vibrant contribution over 31 years.

We extend our thanks and appreciation and congratulate everyone at St Colman's College on reaching their Bi-Centenary.

The Development of the Port of Newry.

The port of Newry was the catalyst in the development of the town and we can trace our maritime heritage right back to the arrival of Cistercian monks in the 12th century.

Evidence of the importance of Newry as a port can be gleaned from the relocation of Customs and Excise from Carlingford to the town in 1726. The old port was configured in the River Street area and the Customs house was built nearby whilst an imposing residence was also built for the Collector of Customs and Excise. The discovery of coal in Co Tyrone led to the construction of the Newry Inland Canal which linked Newry to Lough Neagh. This, the first summit-level canal to be built in Ireland or Britain took 11 years to build and was opened in 1742.

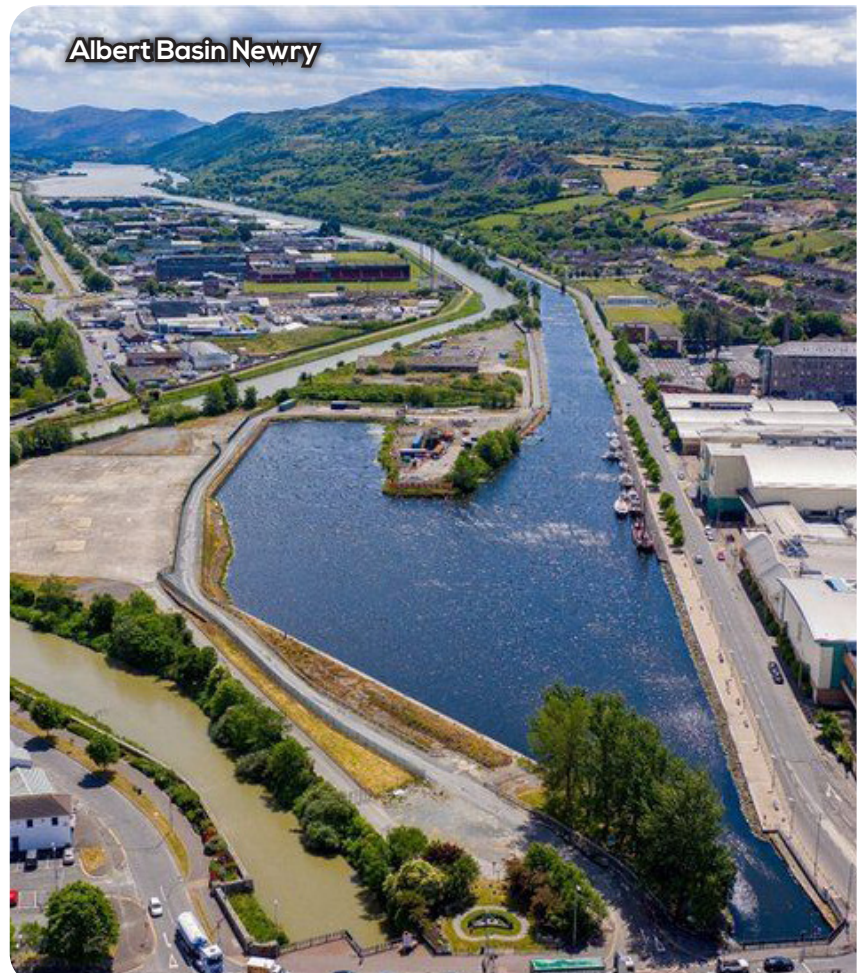
A lock facilitated access to the river and the lockmaster's cottage remained intact until the late 1960s when the Mc Grath family were tenants of Newry Port and Harbour Trust.

The coal mining in Tyrone was short-lived as the coal was of poor calorific quality and was expensive to mine as the seams lay deep beneath the surface. The demise of coal mining had little impact on the Newry Canal. The hinterland of Newry had been greatly enhanced and barges could carry multiples of the volume of a horse and cart.

The tidal Clanrye River was restricted in the size of ships it could handle so it was decided to extend the Canal to access deeper water at Lower Fathom.

This 3 miles of waterway, and lock, was completed in 1767 and Newry became a global trade hub. Ever-increasing problems with the lighthouse at Cranfield Point led the Newry merchants to petition the Ballast Board in Dublin for a replacement. Their request was granted and George Halpin started the construction of Haulbowline Lighthouse at Cranfield in 1817. The 34-metre tower was completed some 7 years later and the first light was exhibited on 1st September 1824 and next year marks its Bi-Centenary.

The Port was ever busier and once again the forward-looking and ambitious Newry merchants craved deeper waters thus giving access to larger ships.



In 1842 Sir John Rennie and William Dargan embarked on a tremendous feat of engineering which gave us the modern Ship Canal as we know it today. Sir John Rennie is reputed to have "emptied the workhouse in Newry" and deployed the inmates as navvies.

They deepened the channel at Narrow Water.

They built Victoria Lock at Fathom along with 1.5 miles of waterway to link up with the existing canal.

The final piece of the navigation was the construction of the Albert Basin which became the hub of the Port of Newry. Sir John Rennie and William Dargan completed this masterclass in Victorian engineering in 8 years.

In 1852, Joseph Fisher, a young shipping clerk from Ballymartin established a coal-importing business which was a dynasty and a staple of the Port for well over a century. Joseph later became a shipowner and the Newry registered ships of the famed Fisher Fleet were a familiar sight in ports across Ireland Britain and North West Europe.

Seán HOLLYWOOD. PORTRAIT OF NEWRY & MOURNE MAN OF THE CENTURY.

The Port was a key economic driver in the development of Newry. The docks created a big tranche of employment, directly and also in a secondary capacity.

One of the most important sectors of employment was the provision of jobs for sailors. Fishers alone, employed over 200 seamen to crew their fleet of coasters which numbered 17 at its peak. Many families in the town, and surrounding areas, depended on wages coming from employment in the port. One rural area, the Townland of Fathom, became synonymous with seafaring. Fathom is a beautiful mountainous area but the land was unsuitable for profitable farming enterprises. The Townland was contiguous to the Port and it attracted the men seeking employment to support their families. Two such families feature strongly in the life of Seán Hollywood.

Tom and Mary Hollywood lived on Kate Lenaghans Loanin (Hillhead Road today) in Fathom and reared a family of 10, equally split between boys and girls. Three sons, Hughie Matt and Paddy answered the call of the sea. Matt and Paddy became Captains in the Merchant Navy whilst Hughie became a Marine Engineer. Hollywood was the prevailing name in Fathom and to differentiate between them, families were designated with nicknames. This was a matter of necessity with no hint of disrespect. Tom and Mary and their family were known as "The Taws" The Keeley family lived on Chapel Hill, Newry and had a family of nine, 5 girls and 4 boys. Two of the sisters married seamen. Brigid married a Fathom sailor, Matt O Hanlon, who later became a Merchant Navy Captain. In September 1942 Molly married "Hughie Taw", a marine engineer and they set up a home at Upper Chapel Street. Later they moved to a mid-terraced house, 13 St. Colmans Park just off Hill Street. Another, unrelated, Hughie Hollywood from Fathom owned a pub on the corner of the Park and later, another neighbour from Fathom, Dominic Clarke, bought over the bar which today is home to Dineen Office Supplies.



Seán Hollywood

A sister of Hughie, Dympna, also married a marine engineer, Peter Murphy, and they lived in nearby Bridge Street. Peter, a Killeavy man, was the son of Barney Murphy, also a marine engineer, who was



Credit: Patricia Slevin

Hughie and Molly

awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for heroism displayed at Dunkirk in June 1940. He was a member of the crew of the Liverpool registered collier, "SS Dorrien Rose", which repatriated 1600 men in 2 trips from the beaches of Dunkirk to Folkestone. Another Newry man involved was Terry O Hanlon, Mate on the ship, who also received the DSC. Terry was a brother to Matt, who married Brigid Keeley.

Ethel Fitzpatrick was a local primary school teacher whose name was synonymous with nurturing local talent on the stage. The acclaimed Royal Shakespeare Company member and cousin of Seán, the late Gerard Murphy, also was a protege of "Miss Ethel". Having completed his tenure in the primary Seán moved down to the decaying Abbey Grammar School building on Abbey Yard in September 1955.



Christmas came early for Hughie and Molly the following year.

On 12th December 1943 Molly gave birth to the first of the couple's 6 children in Nurse Murphys Nursing Home which was located on Upper Mill Street and adjacent to the modern multi-storey car park.

Anthony Gerard Seán, his unabridged title, was followed by, Monica, Bronagh, Tommy (RIP) Patricia and Rita and with Dad, Hughie, at sea, Molly was a virtual single parent to her brood. **Molly coped under a dark cloud. Her husband Hughie, as a merchant seaman, had a very dangerous occupation. Over 30,000 men, roughly 27% of the sailors employed, were killed during WW2.**

Proportionately this was a higher rate of casualties than that sustained by any of the Armed Forces. Seán began his education when he was enrolled in the Abbey Primary School in September 1948 and was also a pupil of the legendary "Miss Ethel".

He developed a keen interest in GAA and the Arts during his time in The Abbey and having completed his A Levels in June 1962, Seán was accepted into Queens University, Belfast in September and

graduated in the summer of 1966.

Seán usually came home to Newry at weekends while studying in Queens to pursue his interests in sports with Newry Shamrocks and drama with Newpoint. Despite the GAA ban on "Foreign Games" Seán played soccer in the Carnbane League. Later, he played hurling at the County and Provincial level and adapted to managerial roles whilst becoming a doyen of Newpoint Players as an acclaimed actor, producer and director. One of his great legacies is the Newpoint Youth Group which he created in 1980 and which has produced leading performers and technicians over decades.

Under his tutelage, both he and Newpoint won a raft of awards as his name became synonymous with success.

Seán was truly a multi-faceted character and excelled in everything he got involved in.

Career-wise, Seán took up a position as a teacher of English and Drama at St. Colman's College in 1967 and later was the Head of Department. At this time the political temperature was rising and Nationalist opposition to the Unionist government at Stormont exploded in Derry on 5th October 1968.

A prohibited civil rights march was confronted by RUC personnel and the marchers were subjected to heavy-handed treatment which sparked days of rioting. **This seismic episode is viewed by many as the beginning of 30 years of violence and civil unrest across the North.**

Seán became involved in the campaign for the delivery of civil rights for the Catholic minority and was in Derry to attend a huge civil rights march on Sunday 31st January 1972.

Once again, the march was halted and violence ensued only this time the outcome was devastating. Soldiers of the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment shot dead 13 innocent and unarmed civilians and later a 14th succumbed to his injuries. That awful day's terrible outcome is known as "Bloody Sunday".

The appalling behaviour of the British Army hardened the resolve of the Nationalist community and the Civil Rights Association and another march was organised for Newry the following Sunday. Rory Mc Shane was the Chairman of Newry CRA and ably assisted by Kevin Boyle, Margot Collins, Paul Hoben and many other local activists. Seán was the Chief March Steward and supervised 150 volunteers wearing blue armbands. As was now the norm, the Stormont government banned the march and a huge force of



police and army were deployed to Newry. A crowd above 50,000 gathered at Derrybeg on Sunday 6th February 1972, British Army helicopters monitored proceedings and there was a mixed atmosphere of tension, apprehension and uncertainty as the march moved off on the Camlough Road towards Newry.

The world media were watching and waiting to report developments. In what is acknowledged as a masterclass in strategy, Seán Hollywood redirected the march down Pighall Loanin and into Rooneys Meadow where the rally was held. The police and army had been outwitted. There was no confrontation, no violence and the event passed off peacefully and shortly after, Stormont collapsed.

This momentous occasion reveals the integrity, bravery and steely determination of Seán and how he faced up to his onerous responsibilities that day. Seán was committed to seeking change through peaceful means and was amongst the founding members of the SDLP in 1973. He was elected as a councillor for Newry and Mourne and appointed security spokesman.

Hughie Hollywoods Last ship, MV Walnut. Berthed at Newry with Timber from Scandinavia



In 1974 Seán was the SDLP candidate for South Down, a traditional Unionist stronghold, in 2 Westminster General Elections. Captain LPS Orr was the sitting member with a majority of over 15,000 which Seán reduced to just over 5,000 in February of that year. A snap election was called in October 1974 and following the retirement of Captain Orr, the Unionist Party selected the former Tory MP, Enoch Powell, as their candidate. Once again, Seán was the SDLP representative and in a herculean struggle, he reduced the Unionist majority still further to 3567 votes.

Seán finished his council term but was unhappy with some policies within the party and stepped down from political life to focus on his career and his passion for drama and sport.

The Newpoint Players and Newry Shamrocks GAC were the benefactors of the



talents of this hugely talented man. **The Fermanagh businessman, Seán Quinn, was the founder of the Quinn Group and their motto, "Strength In Diversity" applies to Seán Hollywood. The signal honour bestowed on him today is testimony to that. The thread that runs through the many facets of Seán's persona is excellence.**

As an academic, thespian, politician, activist, sportsman and motivator he was the one who stood out from the crowd. A man of courage, honour and integrity laced with a strong moral fibre, a man who stood by his convictions.



Seán Hollywood

Credit Paul Hoben

AU REVOIR

Very sadly, Seán died suddenly and most unexpectedly on Sunday 19th July 1998 and his passing has left a void that can't be filled. He was a very familiar face on the streets of Newry, a non-driver, as he walked around town. Seán was indigenous, someone who was part of the fabric of Newry and was proud of his roots in equal measure.

The first purpose-built Arts Centre in Northern Ireland was opened in Newry by the Council on 19th February 1982. Newry and Mourne District Council named it the Seán Hollywood Arts Centre in May 2003 in recognition of Seán, his achievements and his legacy.

Newry Cathedral was filled to overflowing for Seán's funeral on Wednesday 22nd July 1998 and the grief in the town was palpable. The large cortege made its way to St. Marys Cemetery where Seán was laid to rest with his parents. The throngs of people were reminiscent of that Sunday back in 1972 when Seán was also the focal point but now people were bidding farewell to one of their own, Seán Hollywood, a Newry man.

In an interview with the "Newry Reporter" just a year before his unexpected death Seán, when asked what he would like his epitaph to be replied,

"An Enthusiast, a lover of life".

This illustrates the depth of Seán's literary credentials and profound intellect as it is a quote from an article written by the well respected and admired poet and critic, Anthony Thwaite in 1969, in respect of Poet Laureate, Sir John Betjeman.

NEWRY AND MOURNE PERSON OF THE CENTURY.

In a contest held in November 2000 to find the person of the Century Seán triumphed over a field of high profile candidates with a 44% share of the vote.
The great man was centre stage.....again.



Perhaps the most apt tribute paid to Seán that day was voiced by no less a personage than the then **President of Ireland, Mary Mc Aleese, who said,**

"He loved his community, he loved his country and he placed his life at the service of others."

SEÁN HOLLYWOOD MAY HAVE LEFT THE STAGE BUT WHAT A LEGACY HE BEQUEATHED US ALL.



We wish to thank,
Maud Hamill.
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For their help and support of this project.



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**THE MODERN FIREPLACE COMPANY
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