



Voices from the North

GALLAHER'S





2 - GALLAHER'S TOBACCO FACTORY

GALLAHER'S - The Origins



Sir Walter Raleigh

Sir Walter Raleigh brought tobacco and potatoes into Great Britain in the year 1585. However we find evidence of smoking in Ireland from much earlier times. Smoking pipes of bronze and baked clay are frequently found in ancient burial tombs and sites in all parts of the island. Some are dated from 1227 and earlier. They were probably smoked using a mixture of herbs.



Thomas Gallaher



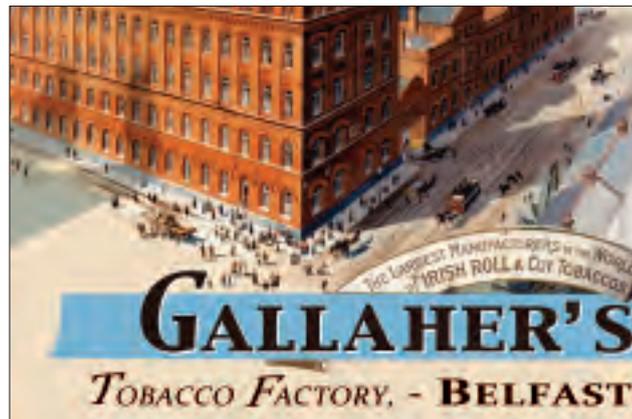
Gallaher warehouse at Stephenson's wharf.

In 1857 Tom Gallaher founded the Gallaher Tobacco business in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. He acquired the old York Road Linen Mill in Belfast and by 1896, built the largest tobacco factory in the world. The factory was designed by Samuel Stevenson.

The same year Gallaher became a limited company with a capital of £1 million, earning Tom Gallaher the name '**Tobacco King.**' In 1900 Thomas Gallaher wrote a cheque to HM Customs for £142,227, the largest sum they received in one go.

The first machine made cigarette brand was Park Drive in 1902. By 1935 a large new wing was built solely for cigarette manufacture. Thus a tobacco factory and a cigarette factory operating in a twelve acre site was in full production at York Road.

Thomas Gallaher was a JP and a prominent member of Belfast's business elite. In addition to his tobacco business, he was a shareholder in the Belfast Ropeworks and chairman of the Belfast Steamship Company.



During the 1907 **dockers' and carters' strike**. Gallaher arranged for the Shipping Federation to supply scab labour to the employers in the dispute, and refused to meet with trade unionist leader James Larkin. In return, Larkin attacked Gallaher's character on many occasions. James Larkin considered Gallaher's trading with tobacco plantations as supporting slavery. Slaves were still employed under extremely harsh conditions to pick and prepare the tobacco. Scab labour became known as '**blacklegs**', a racial term which originated in the United States in the late nineteenth century and became the prevalent term of abuse in the labour movement.

By now his fame had spread far and wide. He travelled unfailingly each year to the United States to buy leaf and gained a reputation as one of the shrewdest buyers in the business. He continued to work hard and was quoted as saying "**I worked harder myself than I ever asked anyone to work for me.**"

He was a tough, but benevolent employer, much admired and respected by his employees, although they came to fear a poke from his ever-present blackthorn stick.

Even so, cigarettes did not become particularly popular until the arrival on the scene of an American, **James Buchanan Duke**. He was born in 1856, the very year when Tom Gallaher first started making his tobacco products. Duke's parents grew tobacco and that ambitious young man decided that his fortune lay in cigarettes.

By perfecting the Bonsack cigarette-making machine he turned out tightly-rolled cigarettes in such quantities that he revolutionised their manufacture. Employing fiercely competitive means, he so undermined the competition that the result was that five major companies in America merged to form the American Tobacco Company, with Duke in charge. He then cast his eyes across the water to Britain and in 1901, to overcome tariff barriers and other restraints on trade, he bought tobacco-makers Ogden of Liverpool.

That brought him into contact with Tom Gallaher, and with it, an offer for his business. There are conflicting accounts of what was said at their meeting, but one thing is clear: Tom Gallaher rejected Duke's bid.



Other British tobacco companies, some 13 in total, alarmed at the threat from Duke, immediately announced they were to merge and become The Imperial Tobacco Company. Duke realised he had little hope of breaking into the UK market and sold Ogden's to Imperial. Gallaher's first successful cigarette brand was **Park Drive**, which helped drive the firm's continuing prosperity and independence in the early part of the 20th Century.

At the beginning of World War I there was a boom in production but it proved somewhat transient. Tobacco import duties were raised by 50 per cent in 1915 in a bid to reduce home consumption. Six months later, as U-boats threatened British shipping, a proclamation was signed prohibiting the importation of tobacco, except under special license.

In 1917, duties were again increased, a move that met with opposition among smokers. Consumption dropped and Government revenues fell so dramatically that the Chancellor changed tack and halved the increase. Thomas Gallaher died in 1927, aged 87. He is buried in Belfast City Cemetery. The reins of power passed to his nephew John Gallaher Michaels who sold the Company a few years later.



GALLAHER, LIMITED
CIGARETTE STRIPPING
DEPT
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GALLAHER'S - The Stories



Elizabeth

I was having my second baby and the company said to me "you are only allowed one more after that one." That's it - I said I wouldn't be having any more after this anyway. It was the nurse who said it to me one day.



Sue

Snuff! The smell of it - you smelt it even before you went into the factory. It was a terrible smell - and the tobacco, it just stuck to you like mad. The Craic that went on was really good. If your machine broke down it was great - you were able to go in the 'PADDIES' (toilets) and get your ears pierced or your hair done for going out that night.

I got my bonus, put money to it and bought a bedroom suite in Stronge's, York Street.

When I was getting married the girls I worked with got a pram decorated in Gallahers and wheeled me straight down to the docks where Dan worked. Then they wheeled me all around the docks and York Street and back into Gallahers. I didn't get out of the pram till about 5 o'clock that night.





Bernie

Sue there said she didn't like the snuff house and the leaf. But I worked with the leaf and I loved the snuff house. It was a wee quiet room without much noise or activity. We got the stems of the leaf as they came down and were getting grinded. If you had a cold the only place you wanted to be was the snuff house. Everybody came down to the snuff house.

We prepared the snuff material taking the stems out and the 'creepy crawlies'. You wore your overall and 'turban' and steel toe capped shoes. If you look at all these beautiful women on company posters - and someone came into the room to see us we were anything but beautiful.



Head wrap 'Turban' apron and steel toe capped shoes were worn in the factory.

One day I had no turban on and I got a flea in my ear. It was like thunder - I was squealing. The nurse poured something into my ear and i tilted my head for a minute then flicked my head over and it came out.





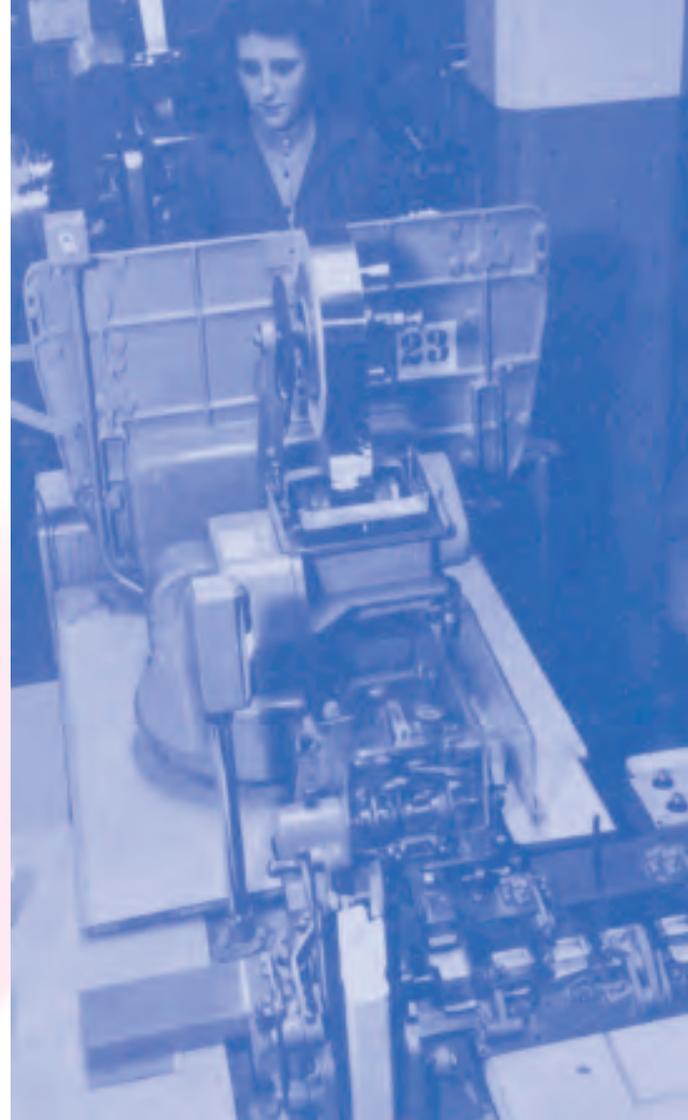
Bernie

I was never allowed to open my pay packet. In other jobs I had earned two pounds 15 shillings per week or so. In Gallahers I was earning five pounds nineteen shillings and six pence, which was a great wage for those days. My mother gave me the nineteen shillings and I thought I was rich. We also had good bonus and holidays in Gallahers.. My mammy and daddy had no jobs so my wage was our main money. The cigarette allowance meant that my daddy didn't have to buy any - he would always say not to leave that job.



Tilly

I left Woolworth's to go into Gallahers and I really didn't want to leave Woolworths. Sweeping the floor was my first duty in the tobacco factory. then I was promoted to picking the dirt out of the tobacco. You worked a lying week and the I got my first wage, and when I got my wages I didn't smell nothing.





Dolores

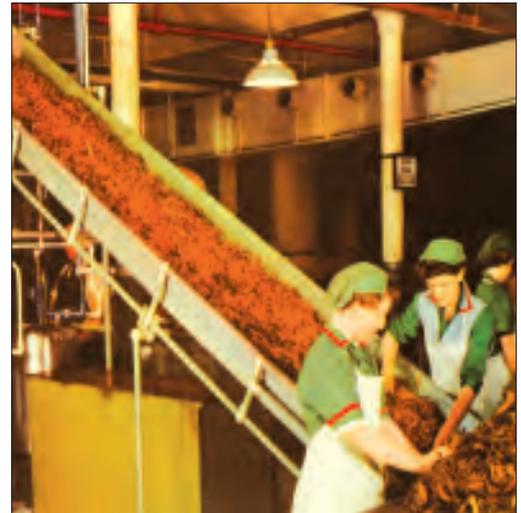
I started in gallahers in 1962. The work was tedious because you were sitting all day weighing the tobacco and wrapping it. You had to have so much work in - so many boxes and anything after that was a bonus. But I never made any bonus. They used to come round every Monday and say to all the girls what bonus you had. Coming to me they'd say 'Dolores, nothing - you talk too much.' So I never made bonus.

Rejects that had fallen on the floor - I was taking them into the toilet and smoking them. Until somebody told me 'Don't do that you will get the sack!' They were swept up and reopened to use the tobacco, but i didn't know that. It was like heaven - I was smoking cigarettes that length (12 -13 cm long).

There was about 200 women in the room I worked in. We were always going to the toilet - smoking, getting our nails done and we used to play the 'weejaa board.'

I was in wrapping pipe tobacco - Condor Sliced and Warhorse. The money was great. When you were a Gallaher's Girl in the sixties you were loaded. Boyfriends - i'm not going there but we were never short of cigarettes!.

Regarding health issues we had no protection whatsoever from smoke. We had no masks. Neither had we gloves handling the tobacco. I was working with heavy dark tobacco that was moist and it stained your fingers





Eileen

I started in Gallahers in 1975 to 1995. A shopsteward persuaded me to run for union office. Since the factory was mainly comprised of girls this made a lot of sense. I got this post of shopsteward and I had good working relationships with a lot of the managers. If something wasn't right I could go and say 'Better get this sorted or they will down tools.'

If you were caught with cigarettes, more than three, you were sacked. no question about it.



Maureen

All my friend's were in Gallahers so I got a job there and the money was a bit better right enough.

The first week I went in there was about six of us and we went to give our notice in - didn't like it. The foreman talked us out of it and I was there for 31 years.

We were 'Strippers' and we stripped the long leaf stem out of the tobacco leaf. The stem went into the snuff. I had some bad time-keeping and so was suspended for a week. My Christmas bonus was taken off me and the girls I worked with had a collection of money for me. I couldn't take the money and so gave it all back to the girls.





*Gallaher girls with actor
Richard Todd who visited
the factory in York Street.*

GALLAHER'S - Marketing

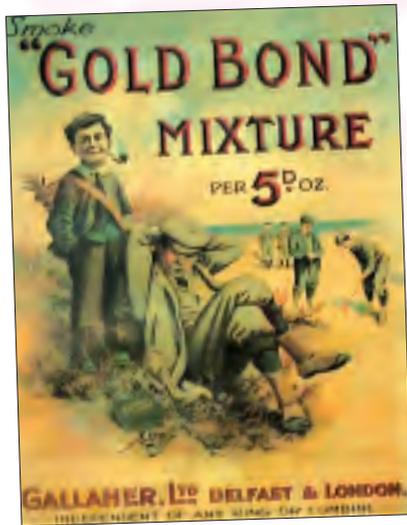
Gallaher's were innovative and forward thinking in their approach to marketing. This involved adverts in Cinema, Newspaper and a variety of visual printed mirrors, plates and masterfully executed pictures. Famous people were often employed to take part in Public Relations and appearance events. A helicopter was used in a film to launch the 'Ariel' brand of cigarette.



GALLAHER'S

DE LUXE CIGARETTES







GALLAHER'S - Rewarding good service



Eileen

This watch was presented to my grandmother Mary Boyle when she retired from Gallahers after 43 years service. It was presented to her in the early 1960's. My granny never wore the watch. when she brought it home she gave the watch to my mother and we always remember mummy wearing this watch.

I don't remember my granny talking about Gallahers but my mammy, - I think she was a 'Stripper' - I think she enjoyed the comradery with her friends.



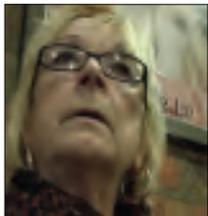
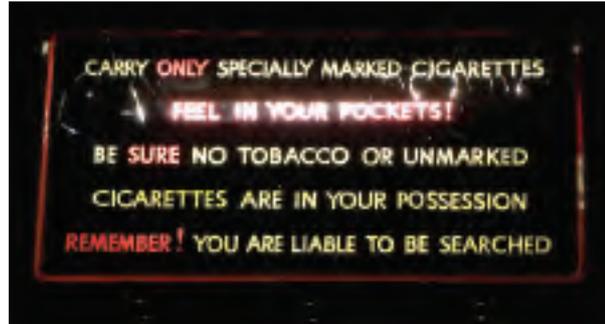


Eileen

We'd a guy called 'Tommy Applecake'. He used to bring applecakes in to sell at break times. It was a tradition on Friday mornings to bring in a Belfast Bap with cheese and cooked ham. A couple of characters would come in every day and ask for a bit of bap. We told them to get their wives to make them instead of eating ours. So one day after no donations of bap to these guys they came in with the fire hose and hosed water all over our lovely baps! "Enjoy your bap they shouted." We couldn't eat them.

Soon after this some of the women baked buns and put laxative in them and gave them to the men on the machines - they would eat anything! All day we laughed as they ran to the 'Paddies' shouting let me in, let me in! It was so funny.

Cigarette allowances



Marie

They used to do spot searches - if you were coming out of work you may be singled out 'Right you in here.' In the work place during the day you could have smoked eighty or a hundred cigarettes. On your break you could smoke as many as you wanted - but you were not allowed to walk out with even one that had dropped into your overall.



Elizabeth

They were stuffing cigarettes in their lunch boxes and if caught taking them out were sacked and lost their whole pension and everything. You would have lost everything - not worth it. I never smoked but some people were smoking two or three at a time!

Troubled times

The Sectarian strife that flourished in North Belfast over many years is witnessed by the following Newspaper reports of 1922:

Wednesday evening, 17/5/1922; A series of shooting incidents took place during the evening in York St., which left one person dead, and another 3 injured.

Those wounded who had been on their way to work at Gallagher's Tobacco Factory. They were; Maggie Hanvey, (23), 24 Lagan St., shot in arm. (Not serious, allowed home.) Nellie McMullan, (22), 8 Keegan St., shot number of times in abdomen and hand, resulting in the lost of a finger. (died 3am.) The had just reached the junction of Gt. Patrick St. and Nelson St. when, 'from the lower end' of Nelson St., - a notorious resort of Loyalist gunmen—fire was opened, hitting both women, who fell. A number of brave young men ran to help them, and carrying them to a place of safety, where they were treated, until the ambulance arrived, took them to the Mater.

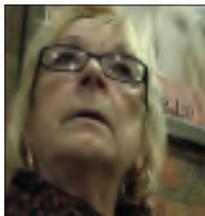
Further instances of sectarian hatred were apparent during the 1970's and 1980's.....



Eileen

There were tensions around those areas. That's why the flags and emblems act came in.... that changed that. If it offended two or three people that was enough. Being a trade unionist I didn't take sides. If it was right it was done if it was wrong - it was wrong.

There was too much distrust then. People might have felt vulnerable. The troubles weren't talked about. They talked about things like their children, their education, where they were going on holiday, going into town together - more of a social conversation and what was happening outside was happening outside.



Marie

They put union jacks all around your machine. You had to work under that. I refused to work with this. They brought me into the office and said I would have to go home for my own safety. My ma brought me straight back down and asked if I was getting paid. They said no and so she brought me into my machine and made me get to work. The girls switched all the machines off and wanted me out of there but there was nothing they could do, they had to get the machines back on.

I was going down to work with my overalls on. A wee white van which a couple weeks before was down outside Gallagher's. So it opened up and I said 'God Blessus' what's that? You were just covering yourself, your head mostly. The I felt like a burning in my leg. I didn't even realise then that I had been hit like. I was in hospital a brave while because there was poison going through my leg. I was in for ten weeks.

GALLAHER'S 1986 - Closure of Belfast Factory



The site of Gallaher's Factory at York Road is now a busy Retail, Cinema and Leisure facility.



E: multimediaheritage@yahoo.co.uk
www.multimediaheritage.com
T: 07989 521 275

Design: Creative Design