

Frank Duff's Public House, 50 Main Street, Bray, Co. Wicklow

Frank Duff's is a well-known and popular pub at the top Main Street near the Town Hall in Bray. There has been a pub at this location for nearly 200 years, and when it is put up for sale in 1890 it was described as “..one of the oldest licenced houses in the County of Wicklow, in which the late John Dalton carried on a most successful business for over 60 years”. It had a garden , yard and stables at the rear and around nine or ten small one or two-roomed cottages, most probably owned by the publican, on what was known as Dalton's Lane. Described as ‘unfit for habitation’ in 1912, they were demolished in the 1930's.

In 1896 the license at No. 50 was acquired by Mrs Anne Farnworth. She appeared in court in 1899 charged with selling drink to a Frederick Keogh who was arrested for being drunk. In her defence, Mr Craig, solicitor, claimed that “this public-house was the oldest established one in Bray, and the police have no records against it”. District Inspector Mr Shaw of the RUC concurred, pointing out that the magistrate ought to know the character of the house. Mrs Farnworth pleaded not guilty and deposed that her daughter had served the drink, and she had not been in the pub at the time. Keogh was fined 10 shillings or seven days for being drunk, and Mrs Farnworth was fined 20 shillings and costs, not to be endorsed on her licence. At the time of the 1910 Census Mrs Farnworth was recorded as a widow aged 60 living over the pub with her cousin, one female assistant, and three visitors.

In 1901 James Murray applied for a transfer to him of the licence at No 50. Subsequently the pub was called Lanigan's (or Lannigan's) and a hand painted sign board on the shopfront read ‘Lanigan & Co’. There was a bottling plant at one side and stencilled signs for draught and bottled Guinness, Bass, Burton Ale, etc on the front walls. A discreet sign at the side door directed to patrons to a ‘select bar’ at the rear. The side door provided access to the accommodation upstairs. Adjoining it was a shop with four windows at the first floor which was later incorporated into the premises. John Lanigan who held the licence, in conjunction with others, was an active member of the local community and in 1901 he was elected to Bray Emmets Gaelic Athletic Club.

In 1905 Lanigan organised the catering for the annual excursion of the Bray branch of the Irish National Foresters, a nationalist friendly society, whose premises were not far away on the other side of the street. Coaches were hired to ferry the party to Glendalough, and according to reports, lunch was served t the roadside of the Long Hill, dinner at Glendalough at 2.30, tea at Murphy's hotel at 6.30 and refreshments were served again at the Long Hill on the return journey. Songs were sung by Misses Murphy and Carr, Messrs. Jas. Tully, J. Short, Cloake, J.Carr, J. Hanlon and M. Forde (who sang in Irish and English). According to the report: “The catering was left in the hands of Mr J. Lannigan, Main -street, who won from the excursionists the highest credit for the manner in which the arrangements was carried out. So pleased were they, in fact, that

they considered it their duty to record their deep sense of satisfaction by passing a vote of thanks to him, and to commend his catering to the public generally”.

The public house changed hands several times in the early twentieth century. In 1906 Patrick F Shannon was granted a transfer of the licence formerly attached to Lanigans at No. 50. Three years later, Patrick Farrell applied for a licence for the pub which by that stage. was described as formerly licenced in the name of James Frances Ryan. Patrick Shannon appears to have been running the pub in 1910 and George Pearce was listed there in the 1911 census. In about 1946 the pub was bought by the eponymous Frank (Francis) Duff. He was a son of Patrick and Bridget Duff, Piercetown, Ardee, Co. Meath., and he and his wife, Sheila, ran the pub successfully until this death in 1979. The pub was the taken over by their son Ken, a gentleman and cycling enthusiast who supported many local groups and organisations including the Bray Wheelers, the Bray Musical Society and others. Following his death in 2017, the pub was run by his sister until sold to the Duggan family in 2021.