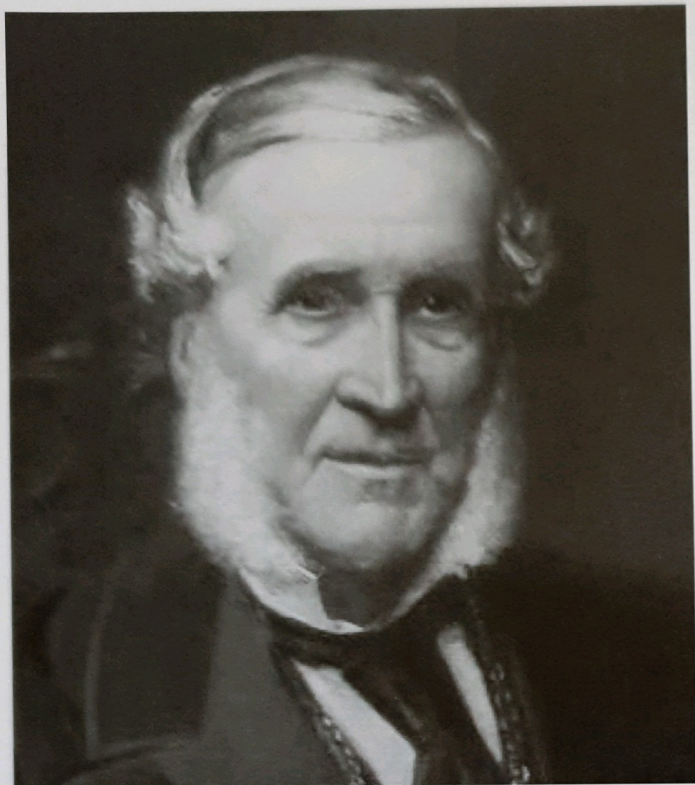


## Mill Owners' Biographies – Card 1

### William Ewart (1817–1889)



William Ewart was an Ulster-Scot who was born in Sydenham, east Belfast. He attended Belfast Royal Academy before inheriting the mill business from his father. He went on to develop mills in Belfast, England and New York until he had one of the largest linen mill businesses in the world. His home was Glenmachan House, Belfast, a sprawling mansion when compared with the houses of his workers.

During the trade depression of the mid-1880s, to protect the family wealth, Ewart turned the business into a company. The six business partners were Ewart himself and his five sons. Two of them lived in New York and looked after the American sales.

By 1889 Ewart's firm had between 5,000 and 6,000 employees and an annual wage bill of £150,000, which was a lot of money back then. It operated 33,500 spindles and 2,000 power looms.

Conditions for the workers were harsh when compared with working conditions today. The hours were long – from six in the morning until six in the evening with an hour for lunch. A large factory like Ewart's was very noisy and many workers learned to lip read to help them communicate with one another. The mills were also hot and smelly due to the steam and oil fumes from the machinery.

William was a leading figure in Belfast. He was a member of the Belfast Corporation for 25 years, Mayor of Belfast from 1859 to 1860 and served as MP for Belfast City from 1878 to 1885, and Belfast North from 1885 until his death in 1889. He was President of the Irish Linen Trade and Flax Supply Associations and in 1878 was made a baronet.

C. S. Lewis, the famous writer, was a second cousin of the Ewarts and often visited Glenmachan House.

Card 1:

## Mill Worker's House (Belfast)

These were terraced houses built for the workers in the mills. They were typically 'two up, two down' houses meaning that a living room and kitchen were downstairs and upstairs there were two bedrooms. There was little light or fresh air in the houses and no running water, so people found it difficult to keep clean. The houses were often damp because they were built from cheap materials. Toilets, located outside at the end of the row, were shared among all the houses. There were no yards, gardens or open spaces.



Card 3:

## **Mill Owner's House (Glenmachan, Belfast)**

Land at Glenmachan off the Old Holywood Road in east Belfast was purchased by the prominent Belfast architect of the time, Thomas Jackson, who proceeded to build Glenmachan House as his own residence. It was completed in 1879 and sold to Sir William Ewart one of the best known linen mill owners in Ulster.

Glenmachan House, a large house with four sitting rooms and eight bedrooms was set in its own extensive grounds of 33 acres. The house also had stables, a conservatory and a sweeping entrance. It had two bathrooms and a lavatory with 'ample pantries and culinary accommodation'.

C.S. Lewis, the famous author, visited this house on many occasions and would have known it very well. Mill owners' houses tended to be far away from their factories and were surrounded by large gardens. They were ornately decorated with stained glass and had expensive furnishings.

