



The Legendary 'Lugs Branigan' - Ireland's Most Famed Garda: How One Man became Dublin's Tough Justice Legend

Kevin C. Kearns

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Garda and guardian. Protector and punisher. This is 'Lugs' Branigan: the man, the legend.

The story of 'Lugs' Branigan is a tale that is long overdue. It is a story of extraordinary courage and compassion, a story of heroism and altruism, a story of crime, punishment and redemption. The legend of 'Lugs''s career as Ireland's most famous garda (police officer), founded on his physical strength and the manner in which he faced up to the criminal gangs of Dublin over the course of fifty years, is part of Dublin's folk history.

In *The Legendary 'Lugs' Branigan*, bestselling historian Kevin C. Kearns presents a revealing and unvarnished portrait of the man and his life, authenticated by the oral testimony of family members, friends and Garda mates who stood with him through the most harrowing and poignant experiences.

Born in the Liberties of Dublin in 1910, Jim Branigan was, by his own admission, a shy, scrawny 'sissy' as a lad. Cruelly beaten by bullies in the railway yard where he worked during his teens, he refused to fight back. Yet he went on to become a heavyweight boxing champion and to earn the 'undisputed reputation as the country's toughest and bravest garda'. Chief Superintendent Edmund Doherty proclaimed him 'one of those people who become a legend in his own time'.

As a garda he refused to carry a baton, relying upon his fists. He took on the vicious 'animal gangs' of the 1930s and 40s and in the 'Battle of Baldoyle' broke their reign of terror. In the 1950s he quelled the wild 'rock-and-roll riots' and tamed the ruffian Teddy boys with their flick-knives. All the while, he was dealing with Dublin's full array of gurrriers and criminals.

As a devotee of American Western films and books, Branigan emulated the sheriffs by doling out his unique 'showdown' brand of summary justice to hooligans and thugs on the street. In the 1960s his riot squad with its Garda 'posse' patrolled Dublin's roughest districts in their 'black Maria'. They contended with the most dangerous rows and riots in the streets, dancehalls and pubs. The cry 'Lugs is here!' could instantly scatter a disorderly crowd.

Ironically, for all his fame as a tough, fearless garda, he was most beloved for his humanity and compassion. His role as guardian of the battered women of the tenements and as protector and father figure of the city's piteous prostitutes—or 'pavement hostesses', as he called them—was unrecorded in the press and hushed up by the Garda brass. Yet, Garda John Collins vouches, 'Women ... oh, he was God to them!' Upon retirement he entered his 'old gunfighter' years; ageing and vulnerable, he became a target for old foes bent on revenge and for 'young guns' seeking a quick reputation.

A man with a reputation powerful enough to echo through generations of Dubliners, the legendary 'Lugs' Branigan finally has a book worthy of his story.

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