

Talking to Brian Blennerhassett:

Dun Laoghaire, Dublin

Brian is the grandson of James of Sligo, the 2nd brother who stayed in Ireland when the family of 6 left in 1874. James had to find work so went to Sligo and worked in Lyons Store there, becoming a director in later years. James lived till he was 91, and still played golf, and didn't wear glasses. At 66, he produced, with his second wife, a son Rowland, James, Giles - Brian's father, and Brian have all married twice. Giles died 10 years ago. Jane Giles their Great Grandmother of Frank and Brian was 6'1" tall and a very imposing woman (She is the one Nancy Blennerhassett remembers with a walking stick that she used to swish and say - "my stick is looking for blood" - terrified Nancy) According to ^{Brian} she was a very tough lady, and had had land at Newcastle West. Her husband William Thomas was small, and, Brian thought, delicate and not physically strong. He'd been a surveyor, farmer and died suddenly. Brian said he'd died reasonably young of a broken heart after going bail for "a friend" he'd had to sell the Newcastle land to pay the forfeited bail (but later we saw a death of a W.T. Bat age 78 and neither Tom of Gortalea, or Nancy of Tralee had heard any of this story so wonder at it). Brian said the Old lady had brought up the children and they had to leave the place to get work and to fend ^{plum} for themselves. Afterwards she went to live with ^{plum} (Giles and his second wife. The Merciers were supposed to have looked after her 6 monthly but it didn't work out that way. She was a right old battleaxe who made life hell for the wife and cussed well. She lived till 92 and was very strong physically. They had to watch everything she did and at one stage physically attacked Oonah with a knife she'd hung on to from a meal. She brought the vigour and size into the family.

A strong mathematical bent is evident all through the family. Brian remembers James totalling a sum of money in £.s.d. He used to run down it, putting pencil marks alongside, then go back up and cross the marks and added it all up together, not the pence, then the

2 shillings and finally the pounds.

Brian has a son James, who at 16 is very good with maths. It runs in the family - (we had noticed this with our family as well as the ones in New Zealand)

Jane married Mercier. She was mean and should have taken the old lady. James had her first and never got rid of her. James worked as a Drapery apprentice at Lyons in Sligo, and had a daughter Conah who married Mr Budd a lawyer who became later Justice Budd. James was the accountant at Lyons. They needed someone to keep control of the shop so at 22-23 he got the job and later became a shareholder + director. He was a good man, and level headed. He was a good man to go to if you had any problems, and always gave good advice.

Jane married Mercier, had a son Cecil who married Esme who was still alive and living at Limerick.

James had Cites, Conah, Cathleen and Eva.

Cathleen married Pettigrew and had 3 sons - Stanley is the rector at Wicklow.

Eva died a few years ago and had married Roy Sockett.

Brian remembers her as a sweet tiny little thing who at 80 still used to swing her legs while sitting at a chair.

Her son was an engineer, while her daughter ^(Pam?) married a Prof. of Gynecology.

~~Brian was married first to ~~Edwina~~ who died of ~~MS~~.~~

There was Brian married to Maureen

Edwina, married in England, and their mother died when young. John Blawhassett is 15 years younger than Brian and has a home dressmaking shop in Rathmines in Dublin. He married Felicity Rowntree (of the chocolate family, a Quaker, but was Church of Ireland.)

$\frac{1}{2}$ sister Anne is married to Dennis O'Neill, Northampton
Brian said Frank ^(Benign word) was like his grandfather James, who was one of the finest singers in ^{Western} Ireland. He had a magnificent tenor voice and did a lot of singing. The singer John McCormack modelled himself on James in singing Irish ballads.

3 James married a Noble, and Giles took after the Nobles being taller + thinner, whereas Oonah took after the Blomerhassetts. They were small, good coolers and housekeepers.

When James wife was pregnant with a child and so couldn't go to a funeral at Ballyseedy¹⁸⁹⁵ he wrote a letter to her about the funeral - "They'd gone to the crypt. 8 men carrying the coffin, out on a gravel path, opened a creaking door, the chap in front said - "let her go" and the coffin bounced down 6 steps, splintering of wood, closed the door", and he said - "don't bury me in Ballyseedy, bury me in Sligo. We mentioned this story to Tom + Nancy which they queried, but if this was about the turn of the Century, there is a large mausoleum in Ballyseedy old cemetery which could quite well have been the family vault as it's about 25' square and has a door on the side which would lead down to steps. (Plenty of room inside)

Potato famine was 1845.

James never had time for the old days, as he said they weren't good. He was born 1865 and died at 92. Knew the Anglo Irish history of Sligo and had no nostalgia for the Old days - "No, I do not, they were not happy days, when 100 children needed shoes or a slice of bread and money spent other ways.

When Brian was taking his Grandfather James to Tralee at one stage, at a bend about 2 miles from Tralee, James told him that was where he'd taken a toss from his penny farthing bike - If there was a brick in the road, you had to hit it

James was a marvellous singer, and a stalwart of St Idms Cof I. Sligo, being on the vestry, and in the choir. Giles donated the Bishop's throne in memory of James.

All 3 generations married twice. Brian's wife had Ms and with his second wife they have a young family. Oonah, daughter of James, went to Trinity College Dublin in 1925 which was most unusual for that day. She was called to the Bar, was a Barrister, but no

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one would give her a job because she was a woman, so she became a secretary. (Her husband was a Supreme Court Judge) Good law degrees, heaps of brains, Scholar of Trinity. She was physically strong - came from the old bird (Jane Giles)

Jane was a snob, one day she was entertaining her cronies to tea, when James arrived from his shop job - and Jane said to her cronies "Here comes my best lad peddling son James"

Giles was a representative for the Church of Ireland, a leading light in the laity, he just about ran the place

One of the Blennerhassetts married the Knight of Glin, dau. married a Lord, had Blennerhassett silver, ^{Queen Anne} 1700, and it was cleaned glowly by a silversmith. She died, and the silversmith was it summoned and when the old boy died 5 years later, the executors found the old fellow had sold all the silverware. Heabettors, the jewellers of Dublin, in 1755 told Brian they had sold 6 teaspoons with the Blennerhassett crest the year before. Brian would love to have had it.

A building was left to the Church, so Giles went down and it was made into a holiday place for the clergy, and for conferences. There was a bound book in longhand of the Blennerhassett tree (where is it now?)

In 17th widow woman (but can't remember who he said) married & remarried into R.C. family. so in 19th a division of RC people.

He said about Hilda in 1922 and the Irish arrived to burn the Castle, and gave them 20 minutes to get themselves and the servants out. Hilda said - fair enough, I can see why you want to do it, and your point of view, while the servants are dressing, and it's such a cold night, so come in and have a drink while you are waiting, so the pottew was broached and drinks poured and they drank till 7ish, they sobered up, thanked her and went off - the Castle still stands.

James was always a Kerry man, put o'

Giles was an ace in 1st war. Brian joined in the 2nd war flying bomber command. In 1940, the door

opened and his Grandfather James was standing there. At 75, he'd driven up from Sligo saying - "Where's your father, boy." "Dad's out on business - what's wrong?" "Did Cites make you join up with English?" He'd come up from Sligo to tell Brian that he didn't have to join up with the English as he was an Irishman. Brian's Grandfather was an Irishman first - he liked England but had no loyalty to England.

At the time of troubles, a man had an accountant by his side in Sligo, with a son in the IRA. They approached James to see if they could make their uniforms for the IRA. The Black + Tans went to Sligo with guns, fired a bullet somewhere near to James and the old man was so incensed that he said they would make the uniforms.