

'Black Jack' Blennerhassett and the County Limerick Gentry of 1735

Captain John, 'Black Jack', Blennerhassett, Williamite soldier, family genealogist and co-heir to the seignory around Killorglin founded in Elizabethan times by the Welsh captain Jenkin Conway, has left a remarkable record of the Limerick and Kerry gentry over three generations, cited hereafter as 'Black Jack's book'.¹ Yet he remains virtually unknown; Killorglin, originally *Castle Conway*, is more commonly identified with an annual festival in honour of a puck goat.²

Part of the reason for Black Jack's obscurity is his politics. He was a Whig, one of the 'Galway Prisoners of (16)88' along with the first Lord Southwell and 200 others intercepted and held at Galway by the Jacobites until the victory of the Boyne effected their liberation. Black Jack appears at the top of the list of those from Kerry marked down for forfeiture of their estates by the Jacobite Parliament. Another difficulty for researchers is the sheer proliferation of the Blennerhassetts, and the recurrence of Christian names: Charles Smith referred to them as 'a very numerous and flourishing family', they having spread in all directions from their two early settlements, Tralee and Castle Conway.

The first Blennerhassett had settled near Tralee on a lease from the Dennys as part of the Plantation of Munster that followed the overthrow of the earl of Desmond and the earl's death in November 1583. Later the family identified with the Cromwellian and the Williamite revolutions. Irish historians, certainly those of the twentieth century, have tended to give pride of place to the royalist and Jacobite traditions. It is a blinkered view. Black Jack should be considered a moderate and popular political influence; and how could he be otherwise when we know that in 1717 he gave one of his daughters, Anne, in marriage to 'The McGillicuddy' of the Reeks? A century previously, the chieftain of the Reeks, a leading local support of the earl of Desmond, was killed in the Desmond rebellion.³ The McGillicuddy of Black Jack's time had fought in a Jacobite regiment at the Boyne, but the McGillicuddy Papers reveal the next generation entering the forces of William of Orange in Holland, while Denis McGillicuddy who married Black Jack's daughter converted to the Established Church around the time of his marriage. Black Jack's politics too were amenable to revision. 'Bills of Discov-

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ery', i.e. trust arrangements to protect Jacobite families against loss of estate were very common in Kerry. Blennerhassett and others of the Whig persuasion came to recognise that they were not surrounded by a countryside filled with evangelical crusaders; moreover, the Whig victory at the Boyne – a victory over 'popery, slavery, brass money and wooden shoes' – soon gave way to the disenchantment we associate with the first of the Hanoverians, George I; it is the era of Dean Jonathan Swift's patriotic Drapier's letters.⁴

The justification for including Black Jack's genealogical record in the present journal is that so many County Limerick gentry were his blood relatives.⁵ His father, Robert Blennerhassett, married one of the Conway heiresses, Avice, thereby founding the Killorglin branch of the Blennerhassetts, the Conway name dying out for her want of a brother. Avice's sister, Alice Conway, married Patrick Dowdall of Cappa in County Limerick.

Patrick Dowdall predeceased his wife Alice, who remarried, to Edmund Lacy of Rathcahill, a relative of the renowned Peter Lacy (1678-1751). According to 'Black Jack's Book', this Edmund's son, also Edmund, went to France after the surrender of Limerick in 1691. Here is Black Jack's entry on this matter:

And on the death of Patrick Dowdall Alice Conway married to her second husband Edmund Lacy of Rathcahill Esq. and by him left two sons, Edmund who went to France after the surrender of Lymerick in 1691, and Patrick and also two daughters, viz: Honora and Elizabeth Lacy. Patrick Lacy second son of Edmund and Alice, by Lucy Anketill daughter of John Anketill of Farrihy in the county of Lymerick Esq. nas issue three sons, viz: Edmund, Patrick, and William and four daughters ...

The more famous Peter Lacy was born at Killeedy, near Rathcahill and by the time Black Jack recorded the marriage of his kinsman Edmund Lacy, Peter had already achieved great fame in Europe. He is reputed to have fought at his father's side in the defence of Limerick against the

Williamites, but this is doubtful in view of his youth. He became a commander for the Russians in the Great Northern War, which ended in 1720. He was then created Governor of Livonia, and in 1733 he fought in Poland to depose Stanislav Leschinsky and enthrone August III.⁶

We return to Alice Conway of Killorglin's first marriage. The heir to Patrick Dowdall and wife Alice was John Dowdall, 'an able lawyer' and 'hitherto unmarried' according to his cousin german Black Jack Blennerhassett. John Dowdall's legal activities drew him to London; he appears in the 'Lismore papers' of Richard Boyle, the first and 'Great Earl' of Cork. He never did marry, it would seem, and Limerick tradition has it that he died following a fall from his horse.⁷ About 1720 Black Jack is believed to have bought out John Dowdall's share of the Conway inheritance in Kerry, thus becoming the sole owner of Killorglin, or Castle Conway.⁸

John Dowdall's Limerick lands are believed to have transferred to one of his sisters: Katherine, the wife of Patrick Peppard of Kilmacow.⁹ The Peppards, or Pipard in County Louth, settled in that county before the year 1300. The historian Mary Hickson traced their progress to Limerick by way of land acquisitions at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries under Elizabeth I and the suppression of the earldom of Desmond. In 1583, according to Mary Hickson, 'Elizabeth Stukely and Anthony Peppard, gentleman, had a Crown lease of "the cell of the priory of Glas-carrick, with its possessions"'. In 1586 Anthony Peppard 'had further Crown leases of lands in Kildare, Kilkenny, Dublin and Galway' as well as 'tithes and rectories in Kildare, for 60 years'. Hickson quoted Sir Bernard Burke who believed that the grandson of Anthony Peppard of Glas-carrick, in 1587, was Patrick Peppard, whose grandson Patrick, in 1660-70, settled at Kilmacow, in Limerick.¹⁰

We turn from the Conway heiresses to the Blennerhassetts. The Blennerhassetts were already long established in County Limerick by the time that Alice Conway married Patrick Dowdall. An Arthur Blennerhassett 'of Lough Gur', a son of the first (Tralee) Blennerhassett, married Mary FitzGerald of Ballynard. Their grandson is the famous Judge Arthur Blennerhassett of Riddlestown whose portrait hangs in Glin Castle. Black Jack introduces him thus:

'Arthur Blennerhassett, an able lawyer, King's Counsel and member of Parliament chosen for the Burrough of Tralee, married Mary Pope heiress of Derryknockane in county of Limerick and has yet no issue, anno 1733...'

Arthur resigned the Tralee seat in 1743 to become a judge of the King's Bench, precipitating a tempestuous by-election in which one candidate provided four tons of wine and twenty bullocks to influence the electors.¹¹ The Judge married twice but left no children.

The marriage of Black Jack's sister Avice forged a connection with the county Limerick support for the last and tragic earl of Desmond. Avice's husband was Thomas Spring, son of Captain Thomas Spring, the first of that name in Kerry 'by his wife Annabella Brown daughter of John Brown of Knockany and Katherine O'Ryan of Sullaghode'. John Brown is no less a figure than the Master of Awney (the Hospitaller foundation at Knockainy), being also the 'wisest counsellor' of the Earl of Desmond mentioned in English state papers. Brown died in the Desmond rebellion. Black Jack was fascinated with this, and he carefully noted Annabella Brown's first marriage to William Apsley, the Elizabethan soldier who succeeded his father-in-law as Master of Awney; when Black Jack was writing his genealogies he was able to include their descendant's marriages into the Elizabethan Brownes and the family of Sir Richard Boyle, Great Earl of Cork.

In Black Jack's declining years, Kilfinny became a source of interest. The very Protestant and conservative figure of Morgan O'Connell had moved to Kilfinny in time to make his appearance in Black Jack's genealogy. O'Connell married Constance, one of the daughters of Katherine Dowdall and Patrick Peppard. O'Connell had lived previously at Newtown, now Ballyhea, near Charleville.

Patrick Peppard's and Katherine Dowdall's son Patrick married Faith Standish. Patrick and Katherine's daughter Cicely married Richard Stephenson. These Stephensons descend from Oliver Stephenson, Constable of Glin Castle during the suppression of the earldom of Desmond and subsequent grantee of Dunmoylan. But intermarriage with the Gael turned his descendants into Catholics and they became leaders of the Irish in the wars of the 1640s and the Jacobite-Williamite conflict.

Charles Smith, who arrived in Kerry shortly after Black Jack's death, consulted Black Jack's genealogy for his forthcoming history of Kerry and noted accurately the Dowdall marriage of the Conway heiress.¹² About a century later, the Tralee antiquarian Rev. Arthur B. Rowan (d. 1861), a relative of Black Jack, published 'Black Jack's Book' and wrote a preface. Rowan may have drawn the attention of Sir William Betham, Ulster King of Arms from 1820 to 1853, to Black Jack as a genealogical source; and Sir Bernard Burke, Bentham's successor, seems to have used 'Black Jack's Book' for his famous genealogies of Irish families. But Mary Hickson

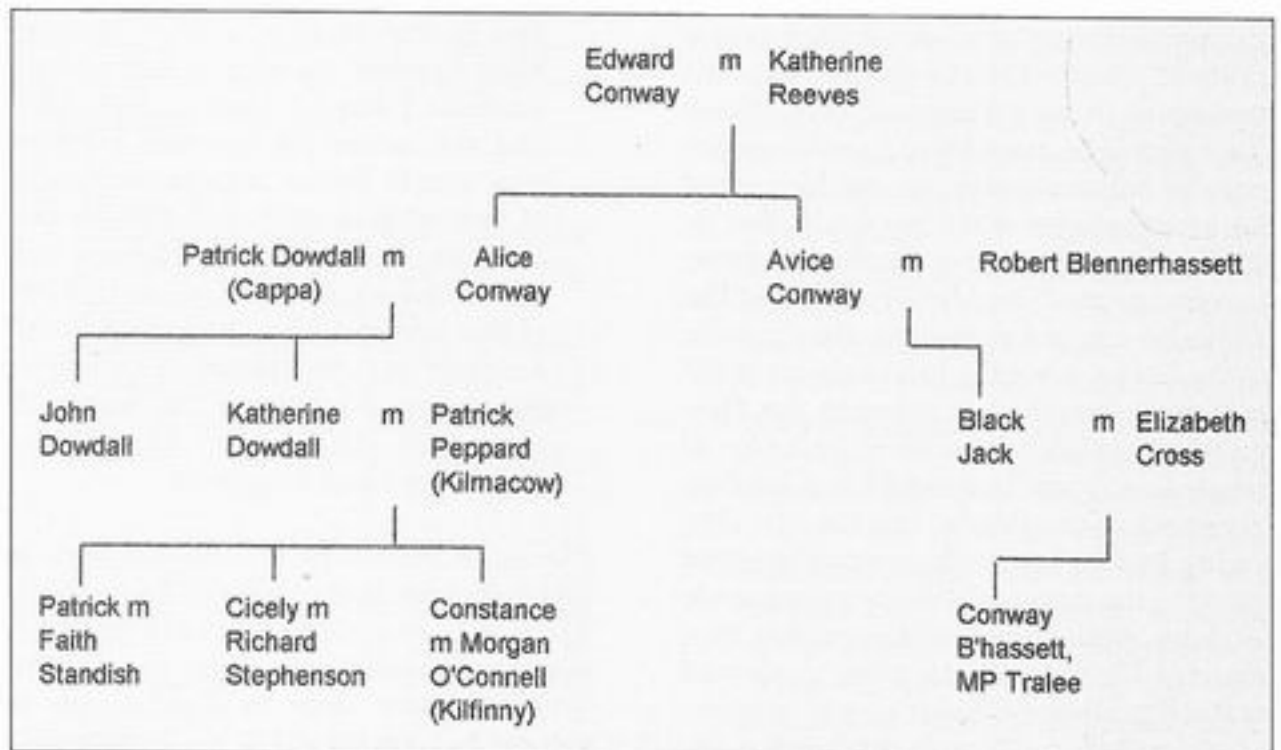


Judge Arthur Blennerhassett

(d. 1899), claiming a better knowledge of the originals, took aim at what she called the 'absurd errors' in the entry for the Blennerhassett baronet in Burke's *Peerage and Baronage*.¹³ Hickson was a direct descendant of Black Jack. Being very aware of the destruction of parish records and

family papers in the Desmond wars and the wars of the seventeenth century, she found inaccuracies in many pedigrees commissioned by families subsequently:

The wholesale destruction of parish registers in Ireland in old times, and of



Dowdall and Peppard lineage

family papers, has made it impossible to obtain legal contemporary proofs of marriages and births, &c, even in families of rank and wealth; and tradition in such matters is not to be always depended on.¹⁴

Hickson frequently stated her high estimate of her ancestor Black Jack as a genealogist; she shared his interest in Geraldine-Jacobite partisans like the Lacys and published 'Black Jack's Book' in the first series of *Old Kerry Records*.¹⁵ (It might be an exaggeration to say that Black Jack was her sole ancestral inspiration: her father, John James Hickson, a Tralee solicitor, was an avid historian, and a friend of Rowan, and he had inspected the McGillycuddy archive between 1827 and 1837 when doing legal work for the family.)

Rev. Rowan and later Mary Hickson inspected Black Jack's manuscript at Fenit House, the home of John Charles Hurly. The answer to the question of how the manuscript found its way to Fenit lies is another Limerick family connection. Hurly was a descendant of Black Jack's sister, who was the wife of Hurly of Knocklong.

Sir John Dowdall acquired Kilfinny and Castletown in the time of the Elizabethan conquest after the defeat of the Earl of Desmond. Castletown was the confiscated property of the Knights of Glin. Sir John's

son, another Sir John Dowdall, married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Thomas Southwell of Ponlong, County Cork. This Elizabeth, Lady Dowdall, is notable in Limerick history for her spirited defence, lasting many weeks, of Kilfinny Castle against the Irish in 1642. Both her and Dowdall's daughter Elizabeth married Sir Hardress Waller the regicide; one of those who signed the death warrant of Charles I. Waller's daughter with Elizabeth married Sir William Petty, Cromwell's cartographer. Waller survived the restoration of Charles II and some believe that the spirited defence of Kilfinny Castle by his royalist mother-in-law played no small part.¹⁶ We can never be sure. Nor can we be sure of the precise relationship between these Dowdalls and their namesakes of Cappa.

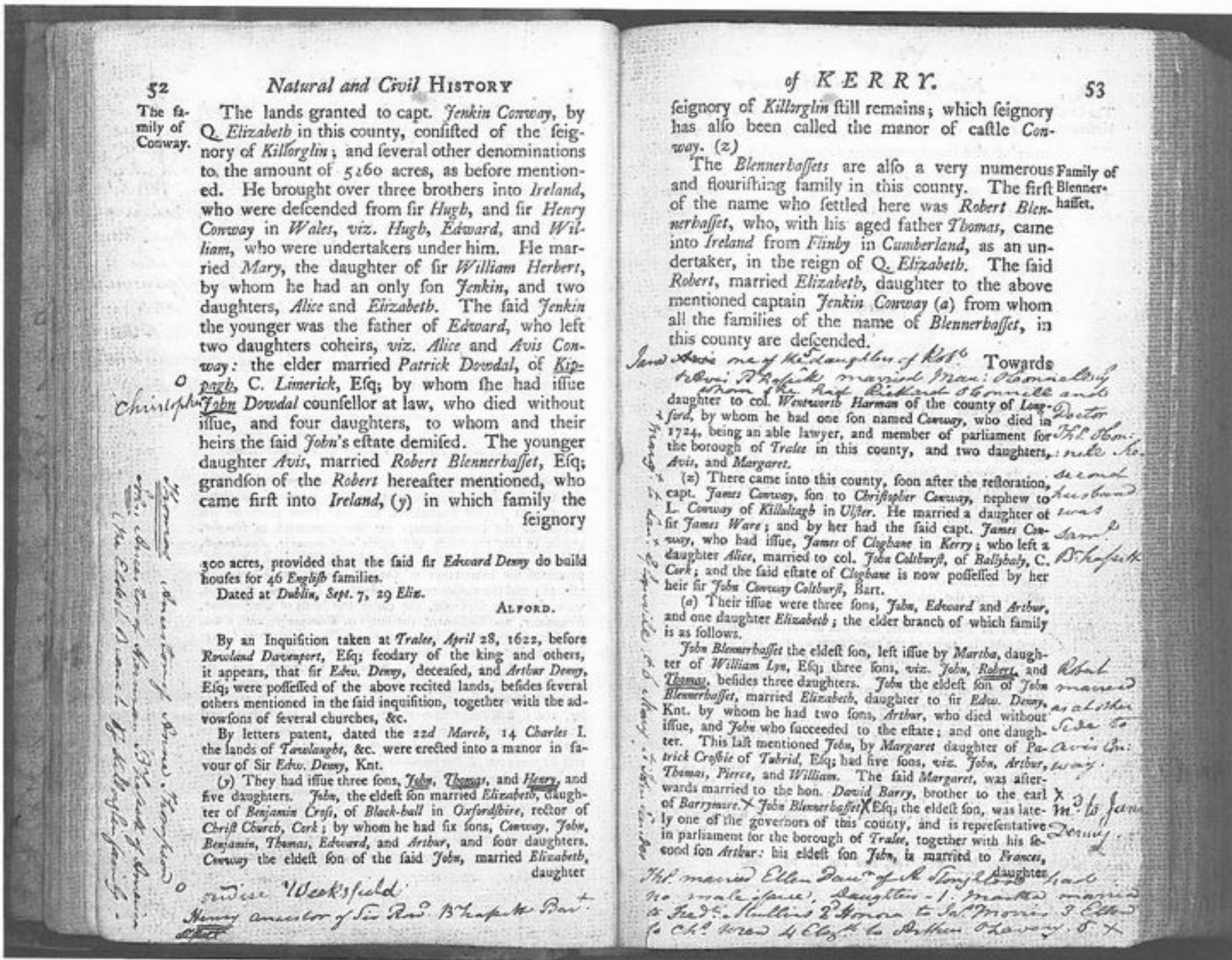
From the perspective of Limerick, city and county, these Kilfinny Dowdall's are of great interest. Elizabeth Dowdall/Waller's sister married Casey of Rathcannon Castle, in Athlaca. This much is in the history of Limerick by FitzGerald and McGregor, but no more. Her name was Bridget Dowdall and her marriage to Thomas Casey provides the explanation, as follows, for the presence of the name Glentworth so familiar in Limerick today. A daughter of this couple, Anne Casey, married Sir Drury Wray, 9th bart. (b. 1633) of Glentworth in Lincolnshire. Wray was a County Limerick

landowner who suffered forfeiture as William of Orange won the throne with his war in Ireland, but he later had his lands restored. His and Anne Casey's daughter, Diana Wray, became the wife of Rev. Twigge, Archdeacon of Limerick; the Twigge's daughter, Jane, married Rev. Stackpole Pery, whose son, successively Bishop of Killaloe and Limerick, became the first baron Glentworth and Mallow in 1790.¹⁷

Black Jack Blennerhassett makes no mention of the Kilfinny Dowdalls, though he surely knew them, given that he bought out the Killorglin estate of the Cappa Dowdalls. Yet his genealogies are full of Limerick interest, sufficient to generate a far longer study than this article, even if such a study were confined to the many daughters of John Brown, the Master of Awney.

Black Jack and his wife suffered the sad loss of children so common in bygone days. His wife was Elizabeth Cross, the daughter of Doctor Benjamin Cross, first Rector of Christ Church in Cork. It was a family of clergymen: Black Jack's mother-in-law was Anne Eveleigh, the second daughter of Dean John Eveleigh ('of or near Bandon in county Cork') by his wife Mildred Coldwell. Black Jack's son with Elizabeth Cross, Conway Blennerhassett, married Elizabeth Harman, of Moyle, County Longford.

The Harman marriage brings us to the eighteenth century and to the alienation of



Charles Smith's *History of Kerry*, which was owned by John James Hickson and now in the possession of Gerald O'Carroll



Kilfinny Castle

(Courtesy Joseph Lennon)

Black Jack's estate in the decade of Revolution. Conway was, according to his father, an 'able lawyer; and he represented the borough of Tralee in Parliament. But he died young, aged 31, in 1724.¹⁸ Harman Blennerhassett, the United Irishman, was a grandson of this young MP. This Harman came to embody the revolutionary spirit of his Williamite ancestor. He trained for the Bar and dabbled in revolution during the 1790, the decade in which he sold the entire Blennerhassett (Killorglin) estate to Lord Ventry (Mullins) before making his escape to America. There he became an ally of Aaron Burr, the American vice-president who was accused of treason. He appears in all the biographies of Burr and went to live on Blennerhassett Island on the Ohio River. Black Jack could not have foreseen such dissolution of the Blennerhassett estate. The other tradition of Irish revolution – that represented by the Gaelic and Old English traditions – is represented in Black Jack family by the marriage of his daughter Anne to 'The McGillicuddy of the Reeks', the 'Denis McGillicuddy of Carruebeg' in 'Black Jack's Book'. He too died young. The book gives the date: 'anno 1730 (and) has issue living, anno 1733, four sons and three daughters'. Black Jack Blennerhassett died about 1738.

REFERENCES

- 1 'Black Jack's Book' can be visited in a ms by that name from Archdeacon Arthur Blennerhassett Rowan in the National Library of Ireland, and in Mary Hickson's *Old Kerry Records*, vol. 1, 1872. A cd rom of Hickson's *Old Kerry Records* (2 vols, 1872, 1874) was published by Archive CD Books Ireland, Unit 1, Trinity Enterprise Centre.
- 2 National Library of Ireland, *Abstracts of Charters and Grants to Corporate towns in Ireland from Henry II to Charles II inclusive*: Jenkin Conway, Esq., October 10, 1613, a Thursday market and a fair on August 1 and the day following.
- 3 The McGillicuddys suffered confiscation for their support of Charles I, but later regained their land. Black Jack's cousin, also John Blennerhassett, made a well-known agreement with the leading insurgent Florence MacCarthy in 1642 to take care of his estates while Blennerhassett escaped from Kerry.
- 4 The 'Drapier Letters' was a series of seven pamphlets written between 1724 and 1725 to arouse public opinion in Ireland against the imposition of a privately minted copper coinage that Swift believed to be inferior in quality. As Swift was advocating constitutional and financial independence for Ireland, he wrote under the pseudonym M. B. Drapier.
- 5 National Library of Ireland, ms. 2771, *Black Jack's Book*, editor Rev. Arthur B. Rowan.
- 6 Seamus Martin, 'From Limerick to Livonia', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 2009, passim.
- 7 Mary Hickson, 'The Dowdalls of Killorglin and Peppards of Limerick', in *The Kerry Evening Post*, May 7, 1892.
- 8 Ibid; *KEP*, October 24, 1891.
- 9 Hickson, 'The Dowdalls of Killorglin and Peppards of Limerick', in *The Kerry Evening Post*, October 24, 1891.
- 10 Hickson, 'The Dowdalls of Killorglin and Peppards of Limerick', in *The Kerry Evening Post*, 20 April, 1892.
- 11 David Dickson, *Old World Colony, Cork and South Munster 1630-1830*, 2005, p. 109. The author does not state which candidate distributed this largesse.
- 12 Charles Smith, *The antient and present state of the county of Kerry. Being a natural, civil, ecclesiastical, historical, and topographical description thereof*. ... (Dublin 1756)
- 13 Susan Hood, *Royal Roots Republican Inheritance, The Survival of the Office of Arms*, 2002, intro., xx-7; Hickson, *Kerry Evening Post*, July 6, 1910, reprint of 1891 issue.
- 14 Hickson, 'The Dowdalls of Killorglin and Peppards of Limerick', in *The Kerry Evening Post*, April 30, 1892.
- 15 Mary Agnes Hickson, *Selections from Old Kerry Records Vol. 1 1872 and Vol. 2 1874*.
- 16 Mary Hickson, *Ireland in the seventeenth century, or, The Irish massacres of 1641-2: their causes and results* (1884), vol. 2, p. 94.
- 17 See: <http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online> Cracroft's Peerage, The Complete Guide to the British Peerage and Baronetage, Wray, of Glentworth, co. Lincoln; Calendar S. P. Domestic, 1698, p. 380, August 19-29, 1698: warrant to grant, by way of custodian, to Major Christopher Wray, lands in co. Limerick forfeited by the attainder of his father, Sir Drury Wray.)
- 18 Gerald O'Carroll, *The History of Tralee, Its Charter and Governance*, 2009, p. 136.