



BARKING MAD: Dilemma over ownership of family heirlooms

Well-travelled ornaments present troubling conundrum

I'M NOT planning on dying soon, but there has been a feverish discussion at home about the fate of a pair of Staffordshire china dogs that have pride of place on the mantelpiece. They once belonged to my grandmother, and I remember them on a shelf in her kitchen in the sixties.

Granny Collins lived in a terrace cottage in Limerick city, literally a stone's throw from the River Shannon. Cottage makes it sound idyllic, and to a child it was, though it was built, I think, of clay bricks, and it quickly crumbled after the family stopped living in it.

There was a house across the street made of red brick. They were the aristocracy of Old Clare Street, and we marvelled at the house in the way a tourist would admire a stately home.

My dad, born in 1929, was a near contemporary of Frank McCourt, author of *Angela's Ashes*. Dad was proud of his city, and he was deeply unimpressed by McCourt's depiction of poverty in Limerick in the thirties. The McCourts, he said, were comparatively well off. (Though the word comparatively is pretty imprecise.)

I suspect the McCourts had a tough enough time. But Frank's book was banned from our household and I would be desecrating my father's memory if I ever opened a copy. Such is the power of books.

The yard out the back was covered over with a plastic corrugated roof, so the toilet was neither inside nor out. Once I flushed a slice of home-made wheat bread down it. I hadn't wanted to offend by refusing it, but I was caught when the bread was found later, floating in the pan. The shame.

Tom COLLINS



There was a blue plastic film over the black and white television. In my naivety I assumed it was a colour television (which it was, in a way). There was a vinegar plant – now that's something the hipsters might want to revive – the 'mother' lived in a glass bottle like some sort of alien. I imagine it died with my granny.

When we went to the market for the Sunday roast, my granny would pick her chicken and the farmer would wring its neck there and then. Plucking was a chore we don't have to

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endure these days. My older cousins would frighten the younger ones by operating the hen's feet – pulling on the tendons as they chased us down the street.

I brought embarrassment to the household one summer holiday. I was sent down to pick up some laundry from the convent at the end of the road. It was an imposing building. The cleaned clothes were dispensed by a nun behind a window that operated as a hatch. I'd been sent down with a cousin to pick up some clothes with sixpence or six shillings, I can't remember which.

It wasn't enough, but we were given the clothes and the nun told us how much she was still owed.

Putting the coins in my hands, my granny – a devout woman – told me jokingly, 'tell those nuns they're robbers'. I dutifully did, slapping the money on the sill and running away as fast as if the devil were after me; and in a sense, he was – though in a habit. The building housed a Magdalene laundry, once accepted as part of Irish life and now an indictment of it.

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My mother thought they should be sent back to Limerick after dad died, but they stayed until she died and they travelled with me to Scotland.

The laws of primogeniture suggest they should go to my first-born son. But my daughter has staked a claim. What's to be done? Answers on a postcard please.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 27 1920

More 'Reprisal' Victims

FURTHER particulars are now available regarding the murder of Michael Ryan of Curraghduff [and William Gleeson of Moher [Co Tipperary] on Monday. A visit to the scene of these occurrences revealed a state of terror and indignation prevailing all over the district and at the approach of motors people fled for shelter.

At Ryan's house, a number of neighbours had gathered, appalled at what happened. Michael Ryan, the only son of a widow, lay dead in his room, riddled with bullets. A man of magnificent physique, over six feet and in the prime of life, he was the mainstay of his mother. He acted as Registrar of the local [Republican] Arbitration Court, was always anxious for peace and was in great demand in the settlement of local disputes.

Miss Margaret Ryan, interviewed, said that about 12.30 a.m., when the family were in bed, a knock came on the front door. Two men entered and said they were Secret Service agents. They insisted on seeing my brother. I was thrust out of the room and immediately four shots went off.

Minister Shot by Troops

THE Rev Jones Whittle, Methodist minister, Enniskillen and formerly of Newtownards, was returning from Ballinamallard harvest festival services on Monday night and had approached the West Bridge, Enniskillen when he was called upon to halt by the military. The motor he was driving did not answer immediately to the brake with the result that the military fired. Rev Whittle was so badly wounded in the arm that it is understood the limb has had to be amputated.

Man Killed in Barrack Raid

THERE was considerable excitement in Tempo, County Fermanagh when the police barrack was invaded and all the arms and ammunition captured. The attack took place when only a sergeant and constable were on the premises. Sergeant Lucas, however, managed to escape when he was shot in the back and seriously wounded. Phil Breen, Tempo, was shot dead in the street during the raid and John Bogue was shot in the arm.

US Anger Over MacSwiney Death

A REUTER'S New York telegram says: The death of Alderman MacSwiney has caused a great wave of excitement among Irish elements in New York. Mayor Hylan of New York, himself an Irishman, today ordered that the American flag over the City Hall should be flown at half-mast.

The daily news coverage of The Irish News confirms that Ireland was now in a state of war with IRA attacks and British reprisals escalating daily. Inexplicably, de Valera would remain in the US until Christmas, leaving Michael Collins in effective control at home.

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