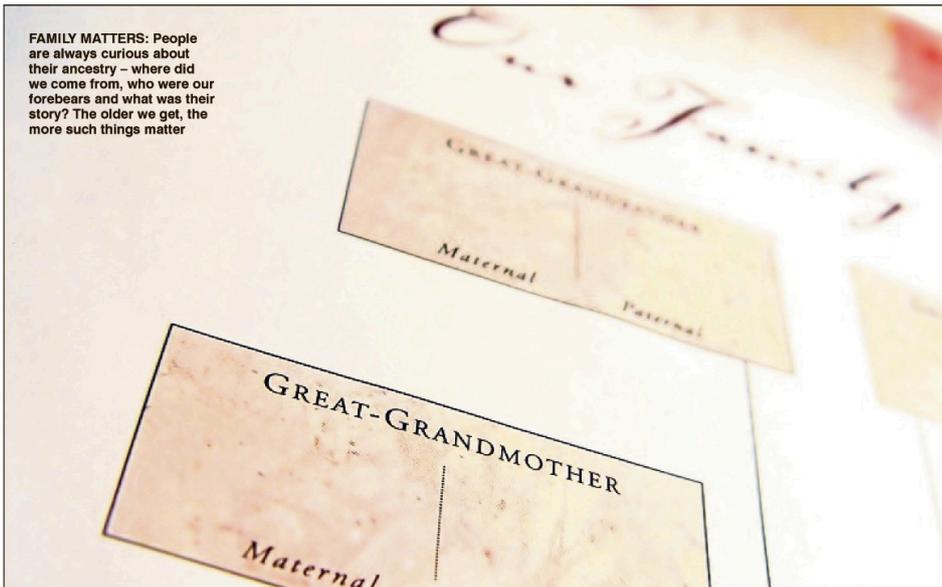


**FAMILY MATTERS:** People are always curious about their ancestry – where did we come from, who were our forebears and what was their story? The older we get, the more such things matter



# Comfort in knowing where we fit in the chain of kinship

**S**OME people have used the enforced leisure of the past 12 months gainfully. Never mind the predictable orgy of deep-cleaning, redecorating, taking up running or yoga, learning a language, bridge or baking – what is this obsession with banana bread and brownies? – a nephew-by-marriage of mine has embarked upon compiling a family tree of his own connections and that of my niece.

Lordship, the ramification of our side of the house alone will be a life's work. There's a County Down village graveyard chock full of our paternal and maternal ancestors buried in close proximity to each other that was a morbid 'must visit' of my every childhood holiday. As the 'wee late one', I missed out on the questionable joys of a mostly rural rearing, for which I am devoutly grateful. "That one was born wearing high heels," remarked a far-out country-bred relative.

Arriving so much later than the rest of my siblings (all but one deceased) I'm of limited assistance to the chronicler. All I have to contribute to his research is four drawers of unsorted sepia-tinted photographs of anonymous people identifiable only by the family nose. Auntie Mollie became, by dint of outliving the rest, the family archivist and I fell heir to her vast collection of memorabilia and her not always reliable or unbiased store of family lore. It only took a small glass of Harvey's Bristol Cream to get her started. Had she been a teetotaler, I'd know little of my own origins.

Never has genealogy been more popular. In uncertain times we want the reassurance of knowing who we are and where we fit on the ever-evolving map of family history, the comfort of belonging, each of us a link in the chain of kinship. People are always curious

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about their ancestry – where did we come from, who were our forebears and what was their story? The older we get, the more such things matter.

We're all preoccupied with ourselves, eager to know where our features, personalities and talents originated. This is why series such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* are so fascinating.

My paternal grandparents, whom I never knew, were master and mistress of a village school and reared 13 children, five of whom became teachers themselves. My mother, the eldest of eight, her own mother being

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widowed young, took over the running of the household when barely in double figures.

I dimly remember that grandmother, a small silent woman in a crossover pinny, who sat by the kitchen stove, recognised nobody and died when I was six. She was only in her sixties.

It fell to Auntie Mollie by default, to sacrifice her life to nursing a succession of sisters and an elderly uncle until they died. Only once, in her nineties, did she betray her bitterness at a life lived through others.

I look at my nieces and nephews and see their genetic inheritance. My father and his brother's distinctive bass voices echo in my own brother and his son. An acquaintance meeting my eldest niece recognised her speech and body language identical to mine, though not a feature in our faces is the same. My friends look at Daughter Dear and see me. I look at her and see her father. Photographs of her as an adolescent bear a startling resemblance to great-aunts two generations back. One abiding twinge of gene grief – of a family of five redheads born of red-headed parents, not one of us has produced a ginger nut.

I'm sorry to say we're notably short on connections to the famous, or even mildly notorious, unless you include my second cousin Brendan McWilliams who managed to make meteorology exciting in his well-regarded column in *The Irish Times* called 'The Weathered Eye', and great-aunt Sarah who went to America, married well and sent wonderful parcels full of exotica, including a pony-skin coat for my mother, which I got a second turn out of as a student in Belfast.

Now I'm an accidental keeper of a largely unidentifiable archive. Why did I wait till there's nobody left to ask? Time to pass it on...

## ON THIS DAY

MARCH 30 1971

### 'Direct Rule' likely

WITH Mr Brian Faulkner, the new PM, facing a crucial meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, opinion was hardening in political circles in London that if, like his predecessors, Mr Terence O'Neill and Mr James Chichester-Clark, he is unseated by right wing pressure, he will be NI's last PM.

Mr Faulkner is facing a motion of no confidence in the government. It is likely that the SDLP will propose an amendment to the motion. Earlier speculation that Westminster may already have prepared a plan to take over if Mr Faulkner goes was being accepted as fact in London over the weekend. Bluntly, The Sunday Times stated that he was "firmly recognised as the Stormont government's last chance". Staff writer, John Whale, said Westminster had decided to "step in at once and impose direct rule" if Mr Faulkner lost his political grip.

### Nationalist Chairman Under Fire

RODERICK O'Connor MP chairman of the Nationalist Parliamentary Party, came under fire from a Civil Rights Committee and the SDLP following a TV appearance.

Carrickmore-Beragh Civil Rights Committee said: "Mr O'Connor wasted valuable TV time and speculated on the personality cults, political playacting and skulduggery with which Mr Brian Faulkner is attempting to select a cast that can put a new face on the old body of Unionism. Instead of indulging in raptures of joy about the appointment of Mr Harry West [as Agriculture Minister], Mr O'Connor could have highlighted the malpractices which still continue in the Omagh area."

Paddy Devlin MP, the SDLP whip at Stormont, said Mr O'Connor's "falsome praise for Mr Faulkner's recent Cabinet changes does not reflect the views of the SDLP".

### Alliance 'Real Threat to Unionism'

ALLIANCE is the real threat to Unionism. This is the view which members and officials of the year-old party feel has been confirmed following their recent conference. Mr Richard Ferguson, former Unionist MP for South Antrim has now joined Alliance.

Alliance has 10 vice-presidents including Professor David Bates of QUB; Dr Joe Cosgrove of Derry; Mr Jack Fawcett, Portrush hotelier and Mr Hugh Wilson, retired surgeon, Larne. Among the observers at Saturday's conference was Mr Robert McConnell, the Unionist MP for Bangor and two Fine Gael TDs, Mr Paddy Harte and Mr Billy Fox [later assassinated]. (Significantly, the accession of Brian Faulkner, viewed in London as a hardliner, saw heavy Whitehall briefing on the possibility of Direct Rule. As liberal Unionism began to gravitate to Alliance, Roddy O'Connor's praise for Faulkner showed how remote the old Nationalist Party was from minority opinion.)

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