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# Divergent Political Views

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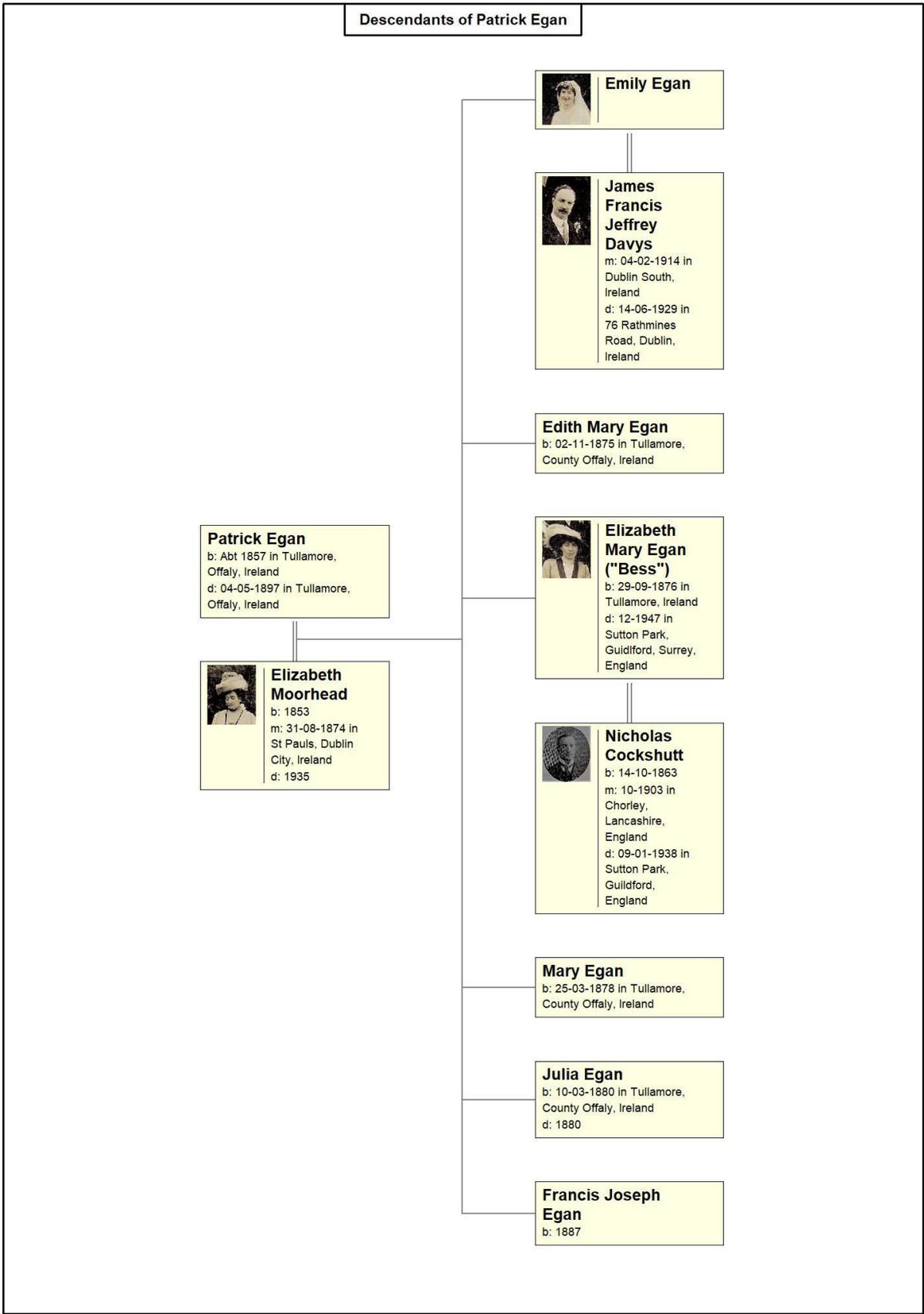
The story of the Egan  
family in the Irish Civil War

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Story by Maurice Egan with  
introduction, charts and comments by  
Ted Flack, PhD. JP

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**Patrick Egan's (1857-1897) family showing the connection with the Cockshutt family. "Bess" Cockshutt, nee Egan was the wife of our great-grand uncle, Nicholas Cockshutt.**

## **Divergent political views and a family torn apart for many years.**

### **Introduction**

This history was written by Maurice Egan. It provides a sad and yet positive narrative of the life and times of the Egan family of Tullamore, County Offaly, Ireland and the political and economic turmoil through which they lived.

Their story is of interest because of their connection with our paternal grandmother's Cockshutt family.

### **Ireland: A Turbulent and Tumultuous Period. 1919 to 1923**

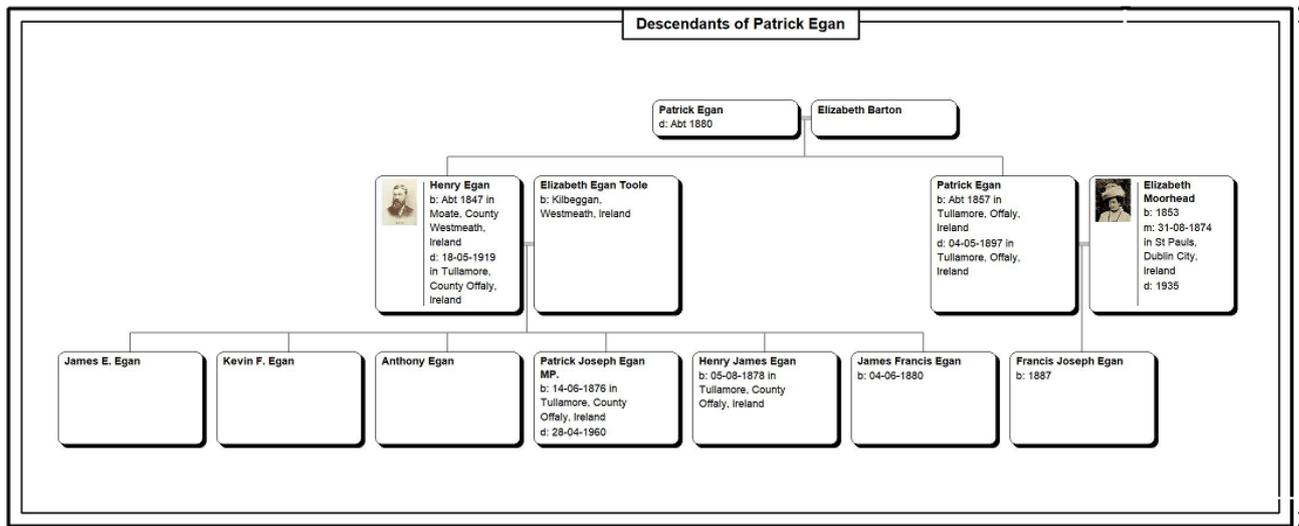
*World War One ended on the eleventh of the eleventh 1918. It's impact on the world and the old societal order was irreversible. Devastatingly, millions had died, and millions were displaced. Returning servicemen were often jobless, many were injured, and many were unemployable. Shortly thereafter, the impact of the Irish War of Independence from 1919 to 1921 had enormous British and Irish political implications. It was the pre-cursor to the dreadful Irish Civil war which lasted a painstakingly long 10 months, three weeks and five days. The bitterness that developed between once fellow friends and soldiers from the Anglo-Irish war days left the political landscape split and shaped political allegiances to this day.*

*'The Irish War of Independence started on 21 January 1919. A truce was called between the forces of Britain and Ireland, coming into effect at noon on 11 July 1921. Over 2,000 people had been killed in the conflict, including 550 IRA volunteers, 410 Royal Irish Constabulary members and over 700 civilians.'*<sup>1</sup>

*On 11 October 1919, a delegation from Ireland, led by Arthur Griffiths arrived in London to begin negotiations with representatives of the British government. The negotiated agreement was signed on 6 December and ratified in the Irish Dail on 7 January 1920. However, all was not well regarding the acceptability of the agreed to treaty. Some still wanted a full breakaway from Britain. 'The Irish General Election held on 16 June 1922, was won by pro-Treaty Sinn Fein, who gained 58 seats to defeat the anti-Treaty Sinn Fein's 36. In advance of the election, Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera had drawn up a pact to ensure that Sinn Fein representatives on both sides would not run in opposition to each other.'*<sup>1</sup> Obviously this pact did not hold.

*Anti-Treaty Sinn Fein or Republicans had occupied the Four Courts since 14 April and refused to leave post the elections. Under pressure from the British Government, who themselves threatened bombardment of the Four Court Buildings and its occupiers, Michael Collins moved ahead with his Free State Army and eventually removed the Republicans on 3 July. This was considered by many as the point at which a wedge was driven between the parties and commenced the bitter and hostile Civil War between pro-treaty Cumann na nGaedheal (later Fine Gael) and the anti-Treaty Republicans (later Fianna Fail) that ended on May 1923.*

*The political tensions of the day impacted upon all families across the island of Ireland.*



**Henry Egan and Patrick Egan's family.**

Henry Egan was a staunch Nationalist, but after the 1890 'Parnell Affair' he was unable to continue his life-long association with the Parliamentary Party. He nevertheless remained close to his friend Charles Stuart Parnell. An advocate of Home Rule he was a staunch supporter of unity with Britain. Henry died, age 72, at the family home The Hall, Tullamore on 8 May 1919. He had been a sufferer of heart disease for ten years and increasingly withdrew from public life. He had the misfortune of overseeing the turbulent times towards the end of his life which affected both his family and business interests.



Fig 1. Henry Egan      Fig 2. P.J. (Pat) Egan.      Fig 3. Harry Egan.      Fig 4. Gerald J. Egan

His brother and business partner, Patrick Egan, the commercial genius behind the firm P. & H. Egan Limited, died suddenly in May 1897. Only a year later Henry's wife Lizzie died, age only 40, resulting in him having to look after his eleven surviving children. Henry's second eldest son, Henry (Harry) James Egan, graduated first class honours from Dublin University's Trinity Law School and was a leader and dedicated Nationalist and editor of the Irish Ireland newsletter. He was friends of Arthur Griffith and Mimi Plunkett of Cumann na mBan. Together with his brother James Francis Egan, Harry was active nationally in the revival of the Gaelic language.

Irish classes were started often, but they faded out for want of teachers. Some of the Egan family, the brewers, were sympathetic to the Irish cause. It was in their house that Mimi Plunkett stayed when she came to found Cumann na mBan.<sup>12</sup> Their younger brothers Kevin and Gerald

were also strong Nationalists and even stronger advocates of unity. Unlike their brothers they joined the British army to fight in World War One. Roseleen Egan their eldest sister married P. F. Adams, a Land Leaguer, who was jailed for his leadership in the era of 'cattle drives' throughout the Midlands. These actions were designed by the Land League to force Anglo landowners of large estates to relinquish their land to 'their rightful owners'.

Divergent political views would have made for highly robust debates around the Egan dinner tables. Presumably to escape the constant political debates, Henry's son William Joseph Egan emigrated to New Zealand in 1906. Soon thereafter in 1909, he was joined by his brother Gerald Joseph Egan and first cousin Francis (Frank) Joseph Egan. William, an orchardist and hotelier died in 1916 of pneumonia at Moteuka, New Zealand. He was 34. Frank, only son, of the late Patrick Egan returned from New Zealand in October 1909. Harry had set up his successful law firm on High Street, Tullamore, we know it today as Conway and Kearney Solicitors.

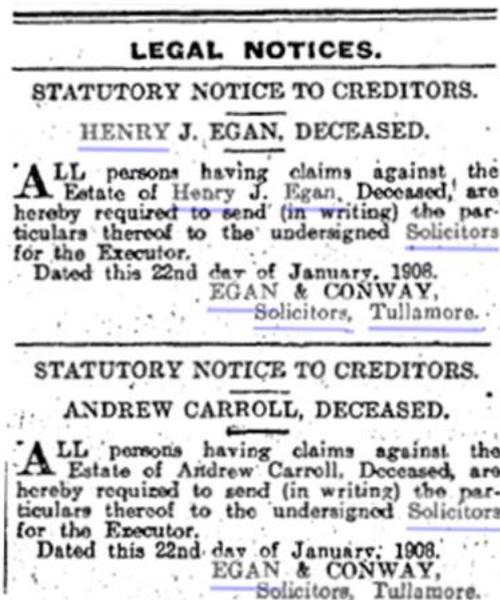


Fig 5. Westmeath Independent, 25 January 1908.

Suffering from TB, he died at the early age of 29 on 7 November, 1907. His remains were the first ever recorded in Gaelic at Clonminch cemetery, Tullamore. When war broke out, Gerald Egan joined the Canterbury Infantry Regiment, as a private, in 1914. His brother Kevin Egan signed up in December 1915 and joined the Royal Irish Rifles as a 2nd lieutenant.

During 1916, the 'Tullamore Affair' saw a-number-of P. & H. Egan Ltd. employees, like Peadar Bracken and John Spain arrested for the fracas in March that year. This incident witnessed the first shots of the 1916 Easter Rising. Two of Henry's sons Gerald Joseph Egan and Kevin Fergus Egan were already fighting for the British Army on the western front, both having somehow survived the disastrous battle of Gallipoli, in January that year. Yet, Henry stood by his employees and kept them in critical employment. John, then an apprentice carpenter continued in Egan's employ his whole life.

During 1918, Henry had to agonisingly witness his nephew Francis (Frank) J. Egan (31) sue his mother Elizabeth Egan. The painful high court proceedings brought into the public eye, the desire of a young man to direct his mother to exercise a covenant espoused by his late father in his will and to hand over the significant inheritance due to him since turning age 25. This was contested by Frank's two eldest sisters and ended in family bitterness. The legal arguments ended as a

result of what was called the 'Cockshutt Settlement' circa., September 1918.<sup>3</sup> Frank's sister, Edith Egan had married Lt. Colonel John O'Hagan of the R.A.M.C., D.S.O., T.D., F.R.C.S.I. in 1904. John also survived and received the distinguished service medal at Gallipoli, age 55.

In that same month, Henry welcomed back his son Kevin Egan from the western front where he was invalided. Kevin later became a director of the firm's malting business and he and his wife Maye (Hoey) resided at Twickenham House, Ballycumber.

Gerald Joseph lost his right leg to a gunshot wound at the Battle of Messines in June 1917, returning to home base in New Zealand in Jan 1918. He was discharged on army pension in April 1918. He was never to marry or to return to the country of his birth.

### **Change in the Political Landscape.**

Since the Kilmainham Jail execution of the 14 leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916, political tensions had caused a significant polarisation within the island of Ireland. Returning Irish soldiers and officers of the British forces were often ostracised and treated as if they were enemies of the newly 'proclaimed' Irish State. Such polarisation made groups to band together for security and common purpose. Such known hostilities were presumed the reason Gerald Egan never returned from New Zealand. His brother Kevin accepted the Presidency in August 1919, of the newly formed group called Comrades of the Great War, Midlands region. He joined along with his friend Captain John Williams, Vice Presedient<sup>4</sup> (best man at Frank Egan's marriage in 1915).

Across Ireland random criminal acts targeted businesses, farms, private homes, and infrastructure. Despite the family's Nationalist credentials, the firm's branches were targeted at Ballcommon, managed by Joseph Digan and driver James Bolger, at Egan's 'Cat and Bagpipes' in Tubber, managed by James McPhillips and at Ballycommon managed by Charles Whelahan and his assistant Thomas Fagan. Kevin Egan's home at Twickenham House was robbed in 1922 in a clear act of intimidation. Like many former soldiers he was forced to consider his and his family's safety. Additionally, local families like the Williams', Odlum's, Morris', Homan Mulock, Goodbody's and many others relocated. In April 1920, Kevin Egan put up for sale 8 of his houses in Chapel Street, Tullamore. On 3 May 1923 he had his home Twickenham with 30 acres advertised for auction.<sup>5</sup> Only three weeks earlier, his neighbour F. B. Homan Mulock had similarly auctioned his total household furnishings for sale.<sup>6</sup>



Fig 6. Twickenham House, Ballycumber, Co. Offaly.



Fig 7. Auction 1923.

Kevin Egan and his wife left Ireland for London in 1923, only returning to live in Dublin around 1942. John O'Hagan and his wife Edith left for Liverpool, where he practiced medicine at Aigburth, before retiring to live in Dublin in 1934. Patrick Egan's youngest and unmarried daughter Dorothy Egan emigrated to Argentina in August 1923. She became a naturalised Argentinian and only returned to live in Dublin around 1966.

Meanwhile, Henry's eldest son P. J. (Pat) Egan took over from his father as Managing Director of the family firm. He was a member of Cumann na nGaedhael and became a serving elected member of the third Dail between 1923 and 1927. He served under the first President of the third Dail and President of the Provisional Government, W.T. Cosgrave. William Cosgrave and Pat Egan became firm friends and the President spent a night with Pat Egan's family at Annaghmore on 14 September 1929.



Fig 8. Patrick Egan Fig 9. Dorothy Mackinnon, nee Egan. Fig 10. Edith O'Hagan Fig 11. Frank Egan

### Aftermath of the Ceasefire.

'Controversy continues to this day about the extent of intimidation of Protestants and others at that time. Many left Ireland during and after the Civil War. Dr Andy Bielenberg of [UCC](#) considers that about 41,000 who were not linked to the former British administration left [Southern Ireland](#) between 1919 and 1923. He has found that a "high-water mark" of this, 41,000 left between 1921 and 1923. In all, from 1911 to 1926, the Protestant population of the 26 counties fell from some 10.4% of the total population to 7.4%.<sup>7,8</sup>

The divergent political views held, directly impacted on Irish families and 100 years later, it remains unclear how many Irish in total were forced to leave their country.



Fig 12. Grave memorial, inscription in Gaelic of Henry Egan d. 1907. Clonminch Cemetery, Tullamore.

## References

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<sup>2</sup> Ni Riain, A., 19-13-21. *Statement by Witnesses*. [document] Bureau of Military History. Dublin.

<sup>3</sup> *'The Kings County Chronicle'*. (1918), 11 July.

<sup>4</sup> *'Westmeath Independent'*. (1919), 2 August, pp. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *'Westmeath Independent'*. (1923), 21 April, pp. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *'Offaly Independent'*. (1923), 21 April, pp. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Bielenberg, A. '(2013) 'The Emigration of Southern Irish Protestants during the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War', *Past & Present*, volume (218) [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gts029> (Accessed: 2 July 2019)

<sup>8</sup> 'Irish Civil War: Aftermath of the Ceasefire' (2019) *Wikipedia*. Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish\\_Civil\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Civil_War) (Accessed: 2 July 2019).