

The Mystery of Ormonde

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Aspects of the history of a family



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The Ascent of Miss Ann Watt

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I was born Carl Robert Halling at the tail end of West London's Goldhawk Road which is a bit of a no-man's-land inasmuch as it's the only part of the road that prominently featured Franc Roddam's 1979 film of the Who's Quadrophenia - not to bisect Shepherd's Bush, being officially in Hammersmith, but considered by some to be part of the more bourgeois area of Chiswick. My first home was a small workman's cottage in Notting Hill, but by the time of my brother's birth on the 2nd May 1958, the family had already moved to nearby Bedford Park, which while also in Chiswick, but by postcode this time, is part of the Southfields ward of South Acton.

My father had been born in Rowella in Tasmania's Tamar Valley, but largely raised in Sydney, the son of an Englishwoman, Phyllis Mary Pinnock, probably hailing from the Dulwich area of south London, and a Dane by the name of Carl Halling. However, his paternity is uncertain, given that his two siblings, Peter and Suzanne, had been born in Britain to a British army officer by the name of Peter Robinson, and Phyllis had left her husband while already pregnant with Patrick.

According to Phyllis's younger sister Joan, their maternal grandmother's maiden name had been Butler, which allegedly links the family to the Butlers of Ormond, a dynasty of Anglo-Norman nobles named after the Earldom they went on to rule in Munster, Ireland, although Walter was the name by which they were first known.

The Butler saga begins in earnest with the Norman Invasions of Ireland, which took place in 1169 at the behest of Dermot MacMurrough the King of Leinster, one of five kingdoms of pre-Norman Ireland. A beautiful land once given over to Druidry and the worship of the Sidhe or Faery Folk, Ireland had long been Christian (although paganism had persisted). Nonetheless, an invasion had already been authorised by the first and only - English Pope Adrian IV in 1155, and was destined to be blessed by his successor, Pope Alexander III.

MacMurrough had been forced into exile in 1166 by a coalition of forces led by the High King of Ireland Rory O'Connor, and had fled allegedly to Bristol first and then to France. There are various accounts of what happened next, but it's certain he asked Henry II, first English King of the House of Plantagenet, for help in regaining his kingdom. Henry offered his support, after which MacMurrough began recruiting allies in Wales, Richard de Clare, the man known as Strongbow, foremost among them.

In 1167, he returned to Ireland with a small army of mercenaries, but it wasn't until 1169 that a full-scale invasion by the Anglo-Normans and their Welsh and Flemish allies - and led by Strongbow - got under way. Contemporary accounts apparently refer to the invaders as English, although they have also been described as Anglo-Norman, Cambro-Norman and Anglo-French. The Flemish contingent was culled largely from those Flemings who'd arrived in Britain with William I, and had been settled in Wales by Henry I, to be perceived by the hostile Welsh as English. Also believed to have taken part in the invasion was one Theobald Walter, patriarch of the Butlers of Ormond.

Two years afterwards, Henry II set foot in Ireland, the first English King to do so, and so High Kingship was brought to an end, to be replaced by over 750 years of English rule. Henry was an ancestor of future generations of Butlers, and a grandson of William the Conqueror, which may provide a kinship with the mysterious Merovingian dynasty of Frankish Kings. When Henry's son with Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the future King John of England Prince John arrived in Ireland in 1185, he was accompanied by Theobald Walter, and as his father had been Butler of England, he was appointed Butler of Ireland and given a portion of land in eastern Munster that would become known as Ormond. Hence the name, the Butlers of Ormond.

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Theobald wed Maud le Vavasour around 1200, and they had one son, Theobald le Botiller, 2nd Baron Butler (1200-1230), whose son with Joan du Marais married Margery de Burgh, a descendant of both Dermot McMurrough and the legendary Brian Boru, thereby bringing royal Gaelic blood into the Butler bloodline. One of their grand-children James Butler was appointed Earl of Ormond in 1328. He had been born to yet another Theobald and the beautiful Eleanor de Bohun, grand-daughter of Edward I of the House of Plantagenet - also known as the Angevins from their origins in Anjou, France. Dubbed The Hammer of the Scots, he was the Anglo-Norman monarch who'd had Scottish landowner Sir William Wallace executed in 1305 for having led a resistance during the Wars of Scottish independence.

The Earldom of Ormond was created for Theobald's grandson, James Butler, son of Sir Edmund and Lady Joan Fitzgerald in 1328. Through their issue all subsequent Earls of Ormonde were descended. The 7th Earl, Thomas Butler was the great-grandfather of Anne and Mary Boleyn. On his death, Piers Roe Butler became the 8th Earl, but as the King wanted the Earldom of Ormond for Thomas Boleyn, father of Anne and Mary, Piers resigned his claim in 1528. Ten years later, it was restored to him, heralding the title's third creation. By this time, England had become a Protestant nation, and the Anglican faith established in Ireland as the state religion, despite the fact that the vast majority of the people were Catholic.

Years of vicious feuding between Thomas Butler, 10th Earl of Ormond - known as the Black Earl - and his own mother's family the Fitzgeralds, culminated in a victory for the Butlers in 1565 at the Battle of Afane, which helped provoke the Desmond Rebellions of 1569-73 and 1579-83, the second of which was bolstered by hundreds of Papal troops. Defeated by the Elizabethan Armies and their Irish allies - Court favourites the Butlers predominant among them - they were succeeded by the first English Plantations carried out in a devastated Munster.

A few years later in 1609 the first Ulster Plantation came into being in the wake of the Nine Years War which was largely fought in Ulster, the island's most Gaelic region, between Ulster chieftains and their Catholic allies, including in 1601-1602, 6000 Spanish soldiers sent by Phillip II, and the Protestant Elizabethan government. The routing of the Ulster Earls and their allies led to the famous Flight of the Earls to Europe, the end of the Gaelic Clan system, and the colonization of Ulster by English and Scottish Protestants.

As for the Earldom of Ormond, the fifth Earl of its third creation James Butler was placed in command of English government forces based in Dublin following The Irish Rebellion of 1641, which was an uprising by the Old English Catholic gentry who had become more Irish than the Irish themselves. Most of the country was taken by the Catholic rebels, whose leader was the Duke's own cousin Richard Butler, 3rd Viscount Mountgarret, and in time it evolved into a conflict between the native Irish and the newly arrived Protestant settlers from Britain which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Protestants, the precise number being a matter of much debate.

A year later, with the English Civil War (1641-1651) under way, Ormonde, who was a Royalist sympathizer, despatched an estimated 4000 troops to England to fight for King Charles I of the Scottish House of Stuart against the English Calvinist Roundheads under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, and was made Lord Lieutenant of Ireland by Royal Appointment in 1643.

By 1649, Ireland had become a stronghold of support for the King with Ormonde in overall charge of the Royalist forces and Irish Confederation of native Gaels and Old English Catholics, all of which had the effect of attracting the attention of Cromwell and his New Model Army. Ormonde attempted to thwart the English Puritan invaders by holding a line of fortified towns across the country, but their leader defeated them one after the other, beginning in 1649 with the Siege of Drogheda.

In the summer of 1650, following a long series of humiliating defeats for the Irish, Ormonde, having been deserted by Protestants and Catholics alike, was urged to leave the country by the Catholic clergy, which he promptly did, seeking refuge in Paris with the exiled Charles II. On the Restoration of the Stuart Monarchy in 1660, James Butler was showered with honours by the new King of England, Scotland and Ireland and was made Duke of Ormonde in the peerage of Ireland in the spring of '61.

Eight year later, he fell from favour as a result, allegedly, of courtly intrigue on the part of Royal favourite James Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham. In 1671, an attempt was made on his life by an Irish adventurer named Thomas Blood, but Ormonde escaped, convinced that Buckingham had put him up to it, but nothing was ever proven. In 1682, he became Duke of Ormonde in the peerage of England, dying four years later in

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Dorset, and soon after his death, a poem was published which celebrated his great nobility of character, an essential decency that was never compromised.

One of his sons, the 2nd Duke of Ormonde, commanded a regiment at the Battle of the Boyne under William of Orange, and took part in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715. His son was the third and final Duke of Ormonde. The Earldom, however, lasted until the end of the 20th Century, becoming dormant in October 1997 with the death of James Butler the 7th Marquess of Ormonde, who had two daughters, but no sons. It may be that I am a distant relative of theirs and if so, then I'm also related to many perhaps even all of the most blue-blooded families not just in Europe but the entire world.

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Joan's sister, my grandmother was born Phyllis Mary Pinnock sometime towards the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century.

According to my father's account, her first true love David Wilson was a scion of the Wilson Line of Hull which had developed into the largest privately owned shipping firm in the world in the early part of the century. Sadly, he perished during the First World War like so many of England's most gilded young men, the flower of England, immortalised in Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth".

She subsequently married an officer in the British army, the aforesaid Peter Robinson, and they had two children, Peter Bevan who went on to become a successful musician, and Suzanne, known as Dinny. At some point between Peter's birth and that of Patrick, Phyllis decamped with her husband to Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, with the purpose of working as a tea planter. In Ceylon, two other men were working as tea planters at the same time as her, namely, Carl Halling, a mysterious seeker and student of Eastern mysticism fluent in Sanscrit who was to become her second husband, and Christopher Evans, an engineer who went on to become her third.

At some point after becoming pregnant with her third child, she took off with Carl to Tasmania, where the child was born Patrick Clancy Halling, to be raised as Carl's son, but largely in Sydney, New South Wales. It was in Sydney that Carl contracted multiple sclerosis, after which according to family accounts, Mary made a living variously as a journalist, and teacher.

Her three children were musically gifted, Patrick as a violinist, Peter as a cellist and Suzanne as a pianist, but of all of them Pat was the true prodigy. At just eight years old, he won a scholarship to the Sydney Conservatory of Music, soloing for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra a year later, but he reserved his real passion for the water, this love of the sea and ships and specifically sailing being a legacy from his mother Mary - as she went on to be known by Pat and his immediate family - who spent much of her adult life by the sea.

Soon after Carl's death on the eve of the second world war, Mary and her family set off for Denmark, Carl having wished to be buried in his native country, and then to London where Pat studied both at the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama under the tutelage of the great Austrian violinist Max Rostal.

He joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra while still a teenager during the Blitz on London during which he served in the Sea Cadets as a signaller, seeing action as such on the hospital ships of the Thames River Emergency Service, which, formed in 1938, lasted for three years, using converted Thames pleasure steamers as floating ambulances or first aid stations.

Following his time with the LPO, Pat played with the London Symphony Orchestra together with his brother Peter, going on to specialize in Chamber music, his career including eight years with the Hirsch quartet, led by Leonard Hirsch, and the formation of his own string quartet, the Quartet Pro Musica. He also played with the Virtuoso Ensemble, whose distinctions included first UK performances of works by Peter Racine Fricker and Humphrey Searle, among other British 20th Century composers.

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In the late 1940s, Patrick Clancy Halling married my mother, the Canadian singer Ann Watt - born Angela Jean Watt to British-born parents in the city of Brandon, Manitoba. Her father a builder and electrician had been born into a Presbyterian family of probable Scottish extraction in Castlederg, County Tyrone, Ireland while her mother was from Glasgow; her own father a Mr Hazeldine possibly from Liverpool or Manchester, and her mother, a Scotswoman, which means that my mother is of mixed Lowland Scottish, Scots-Irish and English ancestry, not that thereâs any real difference between these three ethnicities. My mother is an ethnic Briton.

My paternal grandfather was probably a descendant of the planters sent by the English to Ulster, many of them originally inhabitants of the Anglo-Scottish border country and the Lowland region of Scotland. According to some sources, Lowlanders are distinct from their Highland counterparts, being of Anglo-Saxon rather than Gaelic ancestry, although how true this is Iâm not qualified to say. Whatever the truth, the sensible view is surely that their bloodline contains a variety of kindred strains including as well as Anglo-Saxon, Gaelic, Pictish, Norman and so on, depending on the exact region.

Thousands of these Ulster Scots emigrated to the United States in the 1600s, and their descendants are to be found all throughout the US, but most famously perhaps in the South, where the greatest proportion of those identifying as just American are believed to be the descendants of the original Colonials and therefore mainly of British (English and Scots-Irish) ancestry.

Angela Watt was the youngest of six children - with only five surviving - born to James and Elizabeth Watt and the only one not to be born in either Scotland or Ireland. While Angela was still an infant, the family moved to the Grandview area of East Vancouver where James found work as a carpenter. By this time, James had abandoned the extreme Presbyterian Calvinism of his Ulster boyhood and youth for the sake of the Wesleyan theology of the Salvation Army, and my mother was raised in the Army at a time when their approach to Scripture was what would be described as fundamental today, and one of its zealots was my paternal grandfather James Watt, who was opposed to worldly pleasures such as dancing and the theatre, and in his day, even the drinking of tea or coffee was frowned upon.

At the age of 14, Angela joined her friend Marie and Marieâs mother on a car trip just beyond the US-Canadian border into the state of Washington, where she saw her very first movie, a romantic civil war picture entitled â Only the Braveâ starring Gary Cooper and Mary Brian. Its effect on her was little short of seismic, as by her own admission it introduced worldly ideas into her psyche for the very first time.

After leaving school, Angela trained as a secretary before working as such, until she was able to make her living exclusively as a soprano singer. Many of her greatest triumphs took place at the Theatre Under the Stars, one of Vancouverâs most famous musical theatres, which officially opened on August the 6th 1940. At the TUTS, Miss Ann Watt as she became known played the lead in such classic operettas - which were the musical comedies of their day - as Oscar Strausâ â The Chocolate Soldierâ (1908), based on George Bernard Shawâs â Arms and the Manâ, â Naughty Mariettaâ (1910) by Victor Herbert, with libretto by Rida Johnson Young, and â The Student Princeâ (1924) by Sigmund Romberg, with libretto by Dorothy Donnelly.

For the CBC with full orchestra, she broadcast many popular classics. With the accompaniment of Percy Harvey and the Golden Strings she sang Noel Cowardâs â Iâll See You Againâ from â Bittersweetâ as well as two songs by Victor Herbert, â A Kiss in the Darkâ from â Orange Blossomsâ, and with â Sweetheartâ with the baritone singer Greg Miller. She also sang another lovely song by Herbert, â Neath the Southern Moonâ from â Naughty Mariettaâ, â Strange Musicâ from â The Song of Norwayâ (1942), adapted by Wright and Forrest from Griegâs â Wedding in Trolldhaugenâ and â Canât Help Singingâ by Kern and Yarburt from the 1944 movie of the same name. She also broadcast Classical songs such as â les Filles de Cadizâ by Delibes and â Depuis le Jourâ from Gustave Charpentierâs â Louiseâ, and German lieder sung in English - due to wartime restrictions on the German language - to the piano accompaniment of Phyllis Dylworth,

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among these Schubert's "To be Sung on the Water", and Richard Strauss's exquisite "Night" (Die Nacht).

After the war, she hoped to expand her career either in the US or the UK, but despite a successful audition for the San Francisco Light Opera Company, she ultimately opted for England, once a ticket to sail had become available to her.

She set sail for Britain laden with letters of recommendation from her singing teacher Avis Phillips, as well as presumably - numerous press cuttings from her brilliant Canadian career. She'd been led to believe that once in London, she'd effectively take the singing world by storm, at Drury Lane and elsewhere. Sadly though, soon after arriving, she failed an audition for the internationally famous Glyndebourne Opera House, home of the annual festival of the same name.

However, she did land a small role in the Ivor Novello musical, "King's Rhapsody" which opened at the Palace Theatre on the 15th of September 1949, with its author one-time matinee idol Novello in the title role. It ran for 841 performances, surviving Novello who died in 1951. She also broadcast for the BBC, and among the songs she performed were Debussy's "Des Fleurs", and the popular Harry Ralton standard "I Remember the Cornfields" with lyrics by Martin Mayne, and appeared in an early television show called "Picture Post". Sadly though, it wasn't long after her arrival in London that she realized her voice was deteriorating - this being especially true of her top notes - possibly as a result of sleeping difficulties, although mention must be made of her former lifestyle in Vancouver, where in the city's many night clubs she loved to dance, drink and smoke until the small hours.

She went from one singing teacher after the other in the hope that her once near-perfect voice might be restored to her but little came of her efforts, although one of her tutors, who just happened to be the great German soprano Elisabeth Schumann did offer some hope. Schumann suggested to my mother that once her time in England was over she recorded her last lieder in London with the British pianist Gerald Moore - she accompany her back to New York City where she'd been resident since 1918.

My mother, however, turned the great Schumann down, feeling she'd already spent enough money on lessons, and besides she was seriously involved with a London-based musician my father Patrick Halling, whom she married in June 1949, and so uprooting would not have been easy, and they were far from rich. They spent the next seven years living the *vie de bohème* in a peaceful post-war London and on the continent, travelling by car or motorcycle, just happy being young and in love in that relatively innocent period between the end of the Second World War and the birth of the Youth-Rock culture, after which things would never be quite the same again!

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