

Harry Boland's grandparents, Patrick Boland and Eliza Kelly emigrated to Manchester during the post-famine period, from Roscommon and east Galway respectively. Eliza was from a well-to-do family in Mountbellew. It was unlikely to have been an arranged marriage. It is quite possible that they eloped to Manchester, such was the disparity in their respective backgrounds.

Fenianism had deep roots in the Boland family. It is likely, but we do not have documentary evidence, that Eliza was a cousin of Colonel Thomas J. Kelly, the Fenian leader of the 1867 Rising. Colonel Kelly had previously served as a Captain in the Union Army during the American Civil War, serving mainly with the 10th Ohio Infantry, known as the "The Bloody 10th". Arrested in Manchester in 1867, he was among the 2 Fenian leaders who escaped in the jail van attack that subsequently gave rise to the execution of 3 of the attackers who became known as the Manchester Martyrs.

Whereas we cannot be certain of Eliza's exact link to Colonel Kelly, we do know that her son, James (Jim) Boland, aged 11, acted as a lookout in that Manchester jail break of 1867. Jim became a prominent Fenian with possible links to the Invincibles attack in the Phoenix Park on 6 May 1882. Jim married Catherine (known as Kate) Woods from Carlingford, Co. Louth, descended from a local blacksmith, James Woods, who forged pikes for the Rebels of 1798. Jim died at the young age of 37, following complications from blow to the back of his head that he sustained during a fracas following a disorderly meeting of Parnellites during the time of their split.

When the 1916 Rising broke out, Harry told his mother, "I have to go out. The other boys are going." Given this family background, it is not surprising that the widowed Kate Boland replied "Go, in the Name of God! Your father would haunt you if you did not do the right thing." Harry set forth on a path that led to his death 6 years later, on 1 August 1922, an early victim of the Civil War.

In commenting upon the legacy of this family history, I must preface my remarks by emphasizing that I speak only for myself. I have no basis on which to speak for my aunt Eileen Barrington, niece of Harry Boland, or for any of my siblings or cousins. The descendants of Harry's brother, Gerald Boland, who followed Éamon de Valera into Fianna Fáil, will have a different perspective and experience.

My grandmother, Kathleen Boland, sister of Harry Boland, endured great tragedies during her life. She lost her father, Jim Boland, at a young age and two of her three brothers, Harry, as described above, and Ned, who died in New York later in the 1920s. My grandmother also lost two sons, Con, as a toddler, and Harry as a teenager, following a tragic accident. Too much sadness and loss, but Kathleen Boland was an extraordinarily brave and resilient woman who also had a great sense of humour.

After Harry's death, Kathleen traveled to the US with Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington on behalf of the Prisoners' Dependents' Fund. Kathleen visited 28 different States during 14 months. They also took in Montreal, Quebec and Toronto and raised a great deal of money. On her return from the US, Kathleen married her fiancé, Sean O'Donovan from Clonakilty, Co. Cork. They wed in Manchester because it was not safe for them to return to Ireland in the aftermath of the civil war. Kathleen continued to support people in need and causes until her death in 1954.

My grandmother did carry with her bitterness from the Civil War period. She particularly resented the Free State's refusal to parole Harry's brother, Gerald, from Mountjoy to visit Harry upon his deathbed. Of great significance were Harry's deathbed wishes, as expressed to his sister, Kathleen:

"It was a friend of my own that was in prison with me that fired the shot. I'll never tell the name and don't try to find out. I forgive him and I want no reprisals. I want to be buried in the grave with Cathal Brugha"

These were remarkable words of forgiveness and reconciliation which the family have respected over the decades. Historians are aware of who shot Harry Boland but the family have never gone there.

Looking at Harry Boland's career, it has always been highly appealing and interesting to me. The US Mission did not achieve recognition of the Irish Republic but was highly successful in other respects. This was openly discussed in our family. For example, a beautiful silver cup was presented to Harry Boland by the New York Chapter of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic on 26 December 1921, the eve of Harry's third and final departure from the US to return to Dublin to participate in the Treaty Debate at Dáil Éireann. This silver cup sat on the sideboard in the family home across the decades and prompted many discussions as to its origin. When my mother died in 2013, the family decided to find a suitable public home for this artefact, now over 100 years old. We are very pleased that the cup is now on display at the Residence of the Irish Ambassador in Washington DC.

Similarly, the stranger than fiction tale of the \$20,000 loan Harry granted to the Soviet Delegation to the US in 1920, secured against Russian Crown Jewels has always fascinated both family members and others. I won't recount the full story here, which played out across several decades and ended in the mid-1950s with the USSR repaying the loan in full and the jewels being returned by the then Government to the Kremlin.

Harry Boland's role in negotiating the Pact Election of 1922 is also appealing. This was a genuine and creative attempt to avoid the calamity which ensued. It reflected the reality that there was not a binary split between pro and anti-treaty. The reality was more complex and nuanced. There was dissent among those who opposed the treaty about tactics and how to effect their opposition. Likewise, on the pro-treaty side, Michael Collins was closer to the Republicans than those on his own side for whom, subsequently, the Oath of Allegiance became an article of faith.

Achieving a settlement was exceptionally difficult because there was a malign external force not necessarily interested to avoid further conflict. Contrast this with the congruence of exceptionally hard work, genuine compromise and best intentions that was required to achieve the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Years of subsequent talks were also required and here we are in 2022 with the prospect of a prolonged suspension of the Assembly and Executive.

I attribute an absence of intergenerational trauma in our family arising from the tragic death of Harry Boland to two factors. Firstly, Harry was not on the front line of the War of Independence. His deathbed wishes quoted above were effective in avoiding a legacy of bitterness or revenge. Secondly, my grandmother was exceptionally resilient and moved on from her own experiences. She saw Ireland's relationship with Europe as being our path to a better future decades before others. The extent to which she was ahead of her time is reflected in her sending her two daughters to France during the late 1940s and early 50s, so soon after the War.

Five Fallen Leaders of 1922: Cathal Brugha, Harry Boland, Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and Erskine Childers. To me, they are giants of Irish history, patriots who believed in an independent Ireland, free from the shackles of the past. Each followed what he believed to be the correct course of action in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Each paid the highest price.

As did many others who died or suffered great loss during the tragedy that was our civil war. For me, they were the outstanding generation of Irishmen and Irishwomen. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha dílis.

Tadhg Crowley
Grandnephew of Harry Boland
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