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# Patricia Lynch:

# A Storyteller's Childhood revisited

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As the author of nearly fifty children's books, including *The Turfcutter's Donkey* and the *Brogeen* series, Patricia Lynch can rightly be called the "godmother of Irish children's literature". <sup>1</sup> But perhaps her best work of imagination was the story she wove about her own childhood. *Historyeye* goes on the trail of the author's elusive family history.

Patricia Lynch as a young woman. Photograph taken at D.C. Glenn Studios, 29 Grafton St, Dublin, in the early 1920s. (The Papers of Patricia Lynch, 40,395/5, courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.)

Many authors credit Patricia Lynch as a major influence in their decision to take up the pen. Her writing is characterised by a clear, descriptive style. As Anne Griffin notes in her thesis on Lynch, her work "appears effortless and each new story has its own freshness". <sup>2</sup> It makes her style particularly appealing to children. But what of Lynch's own childhood? Few would dispute that accounts of her early life read a little strangely, coming across like a plot in one of her novels.

The gist of Lynch's official biography goes as follows. She was born Patricia Nora Lynch in **Sunday's Well**, **Cork City**, in the 1890s (either 1894 or 1898 depending on which source is consulted <sup>3</sup>). Her parents were Thomas and Nora Lynch, both Cork natives. Her father Thomas (also known as Timothy) was an adventurer of sorts: a stockbroker and journalist with a fascination for Egypt. This is where he died in 1900, leaving a messy but potentially lucrative estate. (Gold

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Patricia Egan, "Patricia Lynch — Storyteller", *The Cork Review.* Cork Writers and Writing (1993), page 34. Quoting Dr Pat Donlon.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> National Library of Ireland, Collection list No. 79. Papers of Patricia Lynch and RM Fox. MS 34,931. *The Life and Work of Patricia Lynch*, unpublished thesis by Anne M. Griffin. 1992, page 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Lynch's marriage certificate for 4th Oct,1922, Tottenham, Middlesex gives DOB as 1894. Patricia also claimed that she posed as a schoolgirl when she managed to slip through the lockdown after the 1916 Rising, giving her birth year as 1898.

mine deeds/ cotton factory shares). From then on Patricia's family consisted of a tightly-knit trio: herself, her mother Nora and her adored older brother - the sensible, bookish Patrick Henry. The story continues that Patricia was often left behind in Cork while Nora and Patrick travelled to London and further afield in pursuit of Thomas Lynch's estate. Sometimes she was left with an interesting maternal grandfather called **Tighe Lynch** and his large family at **Fair Hill, Cork City**. She was also fostered out to a *shanachie* called **Mrs Hennessy** in the Bantry area. Patricia was eventually re-united with her beloved mother and brother in London. On the way a variety of schools were attended<sup>4</sup> and a host of characters encountered (all apparently with their real names changed in her autobiography).

How much of this story is true? Or is it simply a reworking of the facts with a novelist's touch? Piecing together the facts of Lynch's early years should be an easy matter. After all she was born long after civil registration came about and her childhood coincides with many readily available census records. Lynch also left behind no less than two autobiographies - *A Storyteller's Childhood* published in 1947, and *A Storyteller Grows Up*, which is available among her papers at the National Library of Ireland. Consequently there is no shortage of biographical material to consult. Additional sources can be found from her many biographers. There is, for instance, Phil Young's comprehensive 2005 biography, *Patricia Lynch Storyteller*. This book relies largely on Lynch's own account of her childhood, however. And the many other writers on Lynch have understandably concentrated on her large literary output.

In a brief biographical sketch accompanying one of her book reviews, Patricia claimed Spanish descent "like Eamon de Valera". <sup>5</sup> But preliminary research indicates that her birth was never registered in Ireland, or at least nobody bearing that name can be identified. Nor can she be found in census records for either Ireland or Britain for the census years 1901 and 1911. The 1911 absence can perhaps be explained. Many suffragists and socialists either defaced their returns or boycotted the census outright, and Lynch was a known activist in the Votes for Women campaign.

When it comes to her main autobiographical work, *A Storyteller's Childhood*, there are few details about where she lived as a child, apart from the beloved Cork locations that she so vividly evokes. After the Lynch family moves to London, locations are left vague. Many times in the book the young Patricia sits down to a hearty meal of tea and toast somewhere in London. And while the tea and toast are described in loving detail, the street where the meal is consumed remains unnamed.

There is nothing particularly strange in this. It reflects how a child remembers the past. However the net result of all these deficits is that what should be a straightforward exercise begins to present itself as a bit of a mystery.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In a newspaper extract called "Where the Stories Come From", Lynch claimed to have spent some of her childhood in Edinburgh and to have gone as a day pupil to Dumfries Academy, the school where children's writer JM Barrie was educated.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Notes on Contributors", *The Bookmark*, Summer 1934, page 28.

## **Granduncle Charles**

Patricia Lynch's papers are kept in the National Library of Ireland along with those of her journalist husband, Richard Michael (RM) Fox, who served two years in Wormwood Scrubs during World War I for being a conscientious objector. Surprisingly, the vast bulk of family material in this archive relates to RM Fox's side of the family, which according to census evidence had long-standing Yorkshire connections on both his mother's (Rathmell) and father's side.

On the other hand, Lynch's surviving family history material consists of confusing fragments of letters and photographs, nearly all undated and unsigned.<sup>6</sup> There is a treasure trove of Gaelic and Arabic dictionaries, the travel journal of a mysterious "T. Lynch" from the 1860s and 1870s. An amazing-looking Egyptian travel document from a bygone era. A page of Katharevousa<sup>7</sup>. All these are fascinating in their own way and completely in keeping with Patricia's childhood narrative, but they are of little genealogical value.

There is also an absence of personal letters from Lynch's immediate family in the archive. But in the context of Lynch's known back story, this is all bound to make sense when records are examined in more detail. The Egyptian document in particular will surely be a major piece of evidence in unravelling the author's background.

A particular collection of letters from Lynch's papers gives perhaps the strongest clue to her family tree. <sup>8</sup> One is dated the 6th of February 1873 and is written by "your Cousin Henry Lynch". It is addressed to "My Dear Cousin" from Bruges, where the writer says he is attending college for four months. There is a reference to "Charles" going to sea, bound for India on a ship called *Southern Queen*. He will be gone for two years the writer expects. There is reference to a Kate who is said to be at Verviers, Belgium. <sup>9</sup> There is a reference to the recipient of the letter going to Egypt *again*. "I am sorry that you intend going", Cousin Henry says.

Another letter, dated January 1873, is from a different cousin, this time Robert Walter Lynch, who writes from St. Mary's Roman Catholic College, Woolhampton. According to the letter, "Charles is at sea". Henry is at Bruges. The writer refers to the recent death of "poor Papa".

Who were these individuals from the early 1870s and who were they writing to? Was it to Patricia's peripatetic father, Thomas. Was it to her mother, Nora, who often talked of a "Cousin Kate" in Patricia's writing?

1871 English census records reveal that the four individuals mentioned in these letters, Henry, Robert, Charles and Kate Lynch, were all children of a **Captain<sup>10</sup> Charles Lynch** (1817-1872), Clerk of Works to the Royal Engineers at the port of **Dover.** In 1873 when the letters were sent, Kate would have been 31 years old, Charles 19, Henry 17, and Robert 16. Charles Lynch senior

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> National Library of Ireland, Collection list No. 79. Papers of Patricia Lynch and RM Fox. MS 40,402/1 &40,402/2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Half-way between ancient and modern Greek and used for official purposes in Greece in the 19th century.

<sup>8</sup> National Library of Ireland, Collection list No. 79. Papers of Patricia Lynch and RM Fox, MS 40,327/9.

<sup>9\*</sup>Verviers Convent is associated with the Notre Dame de Namur order of nuns and there is a convent belonging to this order at London's St Mary's, Clapham also.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Although Charles Lynch's rank was given as captain in newspaper accounts,this rank didn't appear to come from the Royal Engineers as there was no record of his name in the army lists of the time. It is thought that the title may be a naval one although this isn't fully established.

was dead by 1873, as indeed one of the letters mentions. It is possible that his death may have prompted the correspondence.



Dover Docks in the mid 19th century. Charles Lynch was clerk of works with the Royal Engineers there in the 1860s and early 1870s. From Dover Library. Courtesy of doverhistorian.com

The census records for this family confirm that Charles Lynch was born in Ireland in approximately 1817 and all his children were also born there, mostly at Fermoy where Charles Lynch must have

been stationed with the Royal Engineers. His children's baptismal records show that his wife was an Ann Dempsey whom he had married at Kinsale, Cork, in July 1841.<sup>11</sup> Charles's address at the time was Scilly. He was a widower by 1861 according to his census return and was living in Maidstone, Kent. Newspaper reports from the time revealed that he was in charge of a Royal Engineer project to enlarge the cavalry barracks there in 1862.

Sometime in the 1860s Charles Lynch moved to Dover, where he lived at Maison Dieu Road until his sudden death on 21 June, 1872. He was the subject of a detailed obituary in the local papers .<sup>12</sup> While it didn't reveal the identity of his wider family, the obituary did disclose that Lynch had worked for the government for 32 years and had served all over the world, including in the West Indies. According to the notice he had just retired due to heart problems and had been planning to return to Ireland. His daughter Kate, the only legal adult in the family at the time, was the sole executor of his estate. (He had died without leaving a will.)

The sea apparently ran in the blood. Charles' eldest surviving son, also Charles, who was mentioned in Cousin Henry's 1873 letter, was identified as merchant naval officer, C.R. Lynch, whose career at sea was cut short when he died of illness on board the *HMS Chimborazo* <sup>13</sup> in 1886 aged 33.

This batch of letters provides strong evidence that Charles Lynch of the Royal Engineers, Dover, was an uncle of Patricia's father, Thomas, and so gives vital clues about the wider Lynch family tree.

## Cousin Kate

In an unusual twist, Charles Lynch was also very likely an uncle of Patricia's mother, Nora. There are several references to Patricia Lynch's parents being close cousins, perhaps even first cousins.

<sup>11</sup> www.irishgenealogy.ie, CORK & ROSS (RC), Kinsale.

Marriage of CHARLES LYNCH of SCILLY and ANN DEMPSY of N/R on 22 July 1841. Parents' names not given.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>The Dover Express and East Kent Intelligencer, June 28, 1872, page 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 24th April 1886. Third Officer Charles Robert Lynch died of cystitis on board the Chimborazo.

Further evidence for this stems from a photograph of a woman in Lynch's papers. The back of the photograph identifies her as "Cousin Kate", although the photographer's studio was at West Smethwick,near Birmingham: not a place known to be associated with Kate or her family. Readers of Lynch will be familiar with the figure of a "Cousin Kate", a maternal cousin, coming to the rescue in difficult situations.

Kate Lynch, the only surviving daughter of Charles Lynch, married **Dr Frederick Josiah Burgess** (1812-1893), a surgeon and physician, in London in 1875. One-time army surgeon and veteran of the 1835 Spanish Civil War, Dr Burgess was a widower when he married Kate and was many years her senior. Kate herself died in 1901 at a lady's boarding house run by an Irishwoman called Mary Beatty at 11 Park Street, Dover. Her last will and testament was granted to her only son, **Harold Lynch Burgess.** A Nora and family failed to be remembered in the will.

A medical doctor of the West African Service, Harold Lynch Burgess was drowned at sea in 1917 aged 39. The newspapers didn't specify where the vessel went down, but his death bears an uncanny similarity to Patricia's account of the "Uncle Henry lost at sea on his first voyage during a storm off the Algerian coast." 16



In A Storyteller's Childhood, Patricia has her mother's "Cousin Kate" living at Macroom,Co. Cork along with a fictional brother called Ulick. The real-life Kate, the suggested model for this figure, lived in various London addresses such as Hackney, Bethnal Green and finally Tottenham.

19th century photograph of woman in Lynch's papers. On the back of the photo is written 'To Nora from her Cousin Kate'. Much of Patricia's fictional writings feature a character called Cousin Kate coming to the rescue of the main protagonist's cashstrapped family. Surprisingly the photograph was taken at the studios of Thomas Mallin, West Smethwick, near Birmingham, which is not a place readily associated with Kate Lynch. The Papers of Patricia Lynch, MS 40,402/1, Courtesy of National Library of Ireland,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>H.L. Burgess married Mabel Elizabeth Wearn in 1906 and they had a son and a daughter.

<sup>15</sup> https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/#wills, Will of Kate Burgess, London, 17 December 1901.

<sup>16</sup>Patricia Lynch, A Storyteller's Childhood, page 4.

## **Thomas & Nora**

The first appearance of Patricia's parents as a couple in primary sources occurs in 1870 with their marriage record. They didn't marry in Ireland but in London. They also chose not to marry in a church but at the St Pancras registry office instead. Their address, 2 Rochester Road, was a lodging house run by a Maria Dollin from Somerset, according to the 1871 census the following year. It would be interesting to know what had brought the couple to London at such an early date. Had they gone there to get married or were one or both already established in the British capital at the time? The document confirmed that both bride and groom shared the same surname and, as already mentioned, were likely to have been close cousins. <sup>17</sup>

When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Hank or Profession C	Residence at the time of Marriage,	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Path
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Marriage cert of Nora and Thomas Lynch 16 April 1870. Registry office of Pancras, Middlesex

date	name	age	condition	profession	address	father's name	father's profession
16 April 1870	Thomas Lynch	36	bachelor	merchant	2 Rochester Road	Jeremiah Lynch (dec'd)	farmer
	Nora Lynch	21	spinster		2 Rochester Road	Timothy Lynch	engineer

The fact that both shared the surname Lynch can be a genealogical disadvantage as it becomes harder to differentiate the maternal from paternal families in documentary evidence. Surprisingly Nora left her mark rather than a signature on the marriage cert and so there is every indication that she couldn't write at the time. This would call into question Patricia's account in her autobiography of her mother being educated at a convent in Verviers, Belgium, like "Cousin Kate". Thomas gave his occupation as "merchant".

Attempts to locate Thomas and Nora in the London 1871 census were unsuccessful and the next mention of the couple occurred with the birth of their son, Henry Patrick, in 1872. This was undoubtedly Patricia's beloved older brother who was to feature so prominently in her autobiographical work. At the time the family were living at Number 3, **St John's Street, Islington**, and Thomas was described not as a merchant but as a "commercial clerk" on the child's birth record.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Phil Young, *Patricia Lynch- storyteller*, page 14. Also Robert Dunbar's entry for Patricia Lynch in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* refers to Patricia's parents as first cousins.

In Lynch's papers at the National Library there is a rough draft of a letter addressed to a **William Campbell** Esq., British Consul at Helsingfor, (Helsinki) Finland on Feb 1, 1873. A person of this name did indeed hold a consular position at that time. William Campbell (1825-1901) was a career diplomat who had seen long service in Finland and died there in 1901. Likewise there is an envelope addressed to a JD Psimari c/o Gabriel Macri via Brindisi. While JD Psimari's identity remains obscure, Gabriel Macri checks out in real life. He was grocer to the British garrison on the Greek island of Zante, (Zakynthos), until British rule ended there in 1864.

The likeliest explanation for these documents is that they were drafted by Thomas Lynch in connection with his job as a writer for a commercial firm. An alternative explanation is that the letters were connected with government business and that Thomas worked for the civil service. It is not known for sure where Thomas was working at the time, or whether he had a mercantile business of his own, but the couple's home was near the Smithfield area of London, which is strongly associated with the meat and poultry markets.

Larcom Street, Walworth, best known as the birth place of Charles Babbage (1791-1871), where Thomas(Timothy) Lynch died in 1883



The birth of a daughter, Laura, occurred at 123 Princes Road (now Black Prince Road) Lambeth, in 1874. Thomas was witness to the birth and was again described as a "commercial clerk". If he had gone to Egypt, as cousin Henry's 1873 letter suggested, he had obviously returned by this time or alternatively he hadn't yet gone. The birth and census records show that Thomas and Nora moved around a good deal during their married years in London. Every milestone in their lives found them at a new address, although they stayed within a broadly similar part of south London, namely Newington, Lambeth and Southwark.

The movements of Thomas and Nora for the years 1875-1880 are undocumented. Thomas's visits to the Middle East can't be ruled out during this time. This gap also coincides with the date of a journal found among Patricia Lynch's papers and signed simply "T Lynch". Most of the entries date from 1876. The journal includes poems, themes on Irish mythology and religion, including a discourse on faith and repentance running to 20 pages. There is some evidence of religiosity here. There are also travel writings that come across more like research than travelogue. They include notes on the Egyptian Petrified Forest and rocks of the Aqueous Deposit behind the Citadel, Cairo.

Thomas wasn't the only 19th century Corkonian called Lynch to have a fascination with Egypt. In 1890, an Californian *bon viveur* and journalist called **Jeremiah Lynch**, whose parents came from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Letter addressed from 5 Child Place, London WC1 off Earl's Court Road, London.

Dunmanway<sup>19</sup>, published a popular travel guide called *Egyptian Sketches* which sold well on both sides of the Atlantic.

Some of "T. Lynch's" journals from 1876 were written up at an address in Cork City identified as **89 Clarence Street**. This street is now called Gerald Griffin Street, but it was home in the early 1870s to a cooper called Patrick Lynch<sup>20</sup>. The surname is probably more than mere coincidence and it is likely that this individual was a relative of Thomas Lynch. Further enquiry found that the street was home to a 53 year-old Charles Patrick Lynch, again a cooper, mentioned by the press in a minor court case in 1877. The same Charles Lynch addressed a meeting in 1870 in support of the infamous **Tailor's Strike**, an early bitter industrial dispute in Cork which led to rioting in the streets.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that as a body of tradesmen, coopers were known to be the most militant, often using strong arm tactics to advance working conditions. <sup>22</sup>

By 1881, the year of the next London census, Thomas and Nora Lynch were staying at **19 Delverton Road, Southwark**. Like Charles Dicken's father, Thomas was now a "clerk of the Admiralty". His central London addresses would suggest that he was based at Admiralty House in Whitehall. Surprisingly he gave Scotland as his birthplace in this census return, although research of available Scottish records failed to track down his birth or baptismal record there. Nor could any trace of him or his stated father, Jeremiah Lynch, be found in available census records for Scotland.

Another daughter, Winifred, was born to Thomas and Nora in 1882 at **New Street, Kennington Park Road.** Thomas wasn't a witness to the birth this time. That responsibility fell to Nora. Winifred turned out to be their last child. **Larcom Street** is a quiet street off the Walworth Road, made a lot more attractive by the presence of the small, picturesque church of St John. It is perhaps best known as the home of mathematician Charles Babbage(1791-1871). In the late 19th century this was a popular neighbourhood for music hall artists. Many pages of *The Stage* and *Era* newspapers featured this address. Charles Chaplin's parents were married in St John's Church in 1885.

According to Patricia's account of her childhood, her father Thomas died in Egypt in 1900. In reality Thomas (or Timothy) Lynch died in the aforementioned Larcom Street, London, on 27th of February, 1883<sup>23</sup>, at least eleven years before Patricia's stated birth. His age was given as 54 on his death cert and cause of death was heart disease. Nora was the witness to her husband's death. Thomas died without leaving a will. His estate, which was valued at £86, was granted to Nora.

Thomas' death left Nora in London facing an uncertain future. She had three children under the age of twelve to provide for. The youngest, Winifred, was barely eight months old.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>Daniel Lynch and Bridget Callahan married at Carrigeens, parish of Dunmanway, 12 Feb 1839. Address Grilagh/Grillogh.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Valuation Office Dublin, Valuation Book for Clarence Street, Cork Municipal No. 4 North West, 1874-1894.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>Cork Examiner, June 27, 1870.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>Michael Lenihan, *Hidden Cork: Charmers, Chancers and Cute Hoors*, page 208.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> GRO England, copy of death cert of Timothy Lynch. Newington Surrey, 1883. Vol 1d, page 114.

## Mallow

Fortunately, a certain amount of material could be found about Nora's background because she happened to state in her 1891 census return that she had been born in **Mallow**, Cork. Her baptism was duly tracked down in the catholic parish registers there for 1847, during the height of the Great Famine. It revealed that her parents were Timothy Lynch and Honora Burke. <sup>24</sup> Named in all likelihood after her mother, Nora was the couple's third daughter as Patricia accurately states in her autobiography, <sup>25</sup>. She was one of at least seven children in the family. <sup>26</sup>

Records show that the maternal Lynches were Mallow natives from at least the 1830s. <sup>27</sup> Home to Thomas Davis and Edmund Burke, Mallow was a market town and an important coaching stage. It was also famous as a fashionable spa in the 18th century due to the popularity of a hot spring called **Lady's Well**, which was believed to have medicinal properties. Timothy and Honora, who would have been born in approximately 1816 or earlier, had married at Mallow on 31st October, 1837. Unfortunately their parents' names were omitted from their marriage record, so further insight into the previous generation couldn't be determined. But a small clue is provided by the baptismal record of their first son who was named Charles.

Timothy Lynch and Honora Burke lived for many decades in the townland and village of **Ballydahin**(heen), situated on the south bank of the town. Many of their children's baptisms make reference to this location, which was also the birth place of nationalist politician William O'Brien



(1852-1928). The area became better known through the poorly-received memoir written by O'Brien's wife, Sophie Raffalovich, in the 1930s. <sup>28</sup> As early as 1775, Ballydaheen was a long lane extending out from the bridge over the river and consisted of 120 houses.

Over the river bank from Ballydahin stood a large house called *Fairyhill*. A local family called **Carmichael**<sup>29</sup> gave their name to one of the lanes off Main Street. The lane was home to a 38 year-old Timothy Lynch in 1911.

Timothy and Nora did not move from the area during the Famine years as their last documented daughter, Ellen, was

4 Cotham Street, Walworth, where Nora Lynch and family lived for most of the 1890s and the early 1900s

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> National Library of Ireland, Roman Catholic parish registers for Mallow. M/F P4997,P4998.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Patricia Lynch, *A Storyteller's Childhood*, page 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Timothy Canty, a cooper from Ballydahin, was a sponsor in the 1847 baptism of Nora Lynch. This is very likely the same Canty who was named as a witness in a conspiracy rumbled by the "Protestant Priest", Father Thomas Barry, to blow up the protestant church in Mallow in 1798.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Nobody of that name was listed in the Tithe Applotment books for the area in the 1820s.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup>Sophie Raffalovich, Around Broom Lane, 1931.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup>In *A Storyteller's Childhood*, a Miss Carmichael , travel writer and Egyptian adventurer, suggests to the young Patricia that writing may be her goldmine. Page 341.

born there in 1854. They must also have weathered the severe flood which struck the town in November 1853, causing wholesale destruction of property and livestock, including at Ballydaheen.

Directories from the 1840s and 1850s identify Ballydahin as the address of a Timothy Lynch, cooper. This was almost certainly Patricia's maternal grandfather. It also matches the name of Nora's father in her 1870 marriage cert, although Nora described her father as "an engineer". Two other Lynches, Michael and John, worked as tinsmen and braziers at the same time and were based at the unusually-named Shoulder In Lane in the town. They were probably relatives of Timothy Lynch as people of this name appear as godparents in the baptisms of Timothy's children.

Coopers would have been much in demand in early 19th century Mallow. There was a brewery in the town, owned by the family of historian, Daniel Owen Madden, and there were four flour mills. The Great Southern and Western railway was under construction in the Mallow area during the mid 1840s and helped to reduce some of the catastrophic effects of those years in the town, although starvation and disease were still considerable.

By 1881, Timothy Lynch was gone from the area as far as trade directories were concerned, but a Timothy Lynch was operating as a brazier at the aforementioned Shoulder In. <sup>31</sup> Did the Lynch family stay on in Mallow? Did Nora's brothers and sisters marry and raise families there? Did they gravitate to Cork City? There is no certain evidence that they did. What is interesting is that some property deeds registered at the Registry of Deeds, Dublin, point to a link between the Mallow Lynches and a family of the same surname who had associations with Macroom and with a drapery shop in Barrack Street, Bantry. <sup>32</sup> But the exact nature of the connection couldn't be established with the limited sources available, particularly the tendency in relevant parish registers to omit parents' names from marriage records.

Lynch mentions Mallow three times in her autobiography: twice in passing and once as the home town of her mother's grand-aunt, Eliza. <sup>33</sup> But it is never written about as a place where she stayed in the course of her own childhood and it was certainly never identified as her mother's home town.

Nothing could be found out about Nora's maternal Burke side in Mallow. No Burkes appeared as witnesses in the parish records relating to Timothy and Honora during their marriage, although Ballydaheen was home to a John and Frederick Burke in the Tithe Applotment records of the townland in 1823. <sup>34</sup> Trade directories for the town indicate that John Bourke was an apothecary and Frederick a tanner. <sup>35</sup> But there is no proof that these individuals can be tied in with Honora Burke's family. Lynch's Burke connections in Mallow remain to be explored.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Henry F. Twiss, "Mallow and Some Mallow Men", *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Ser. 2. XXIV, 1918, page 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Slater's Directory (Cork City and County) 1881. page 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup>Registry of Deeds, Henrietta Street, 1878, book 18, no. 10.Daniel Lynch, draper Macroom and Mallow to Thomas Lynch, draper, Barrack Street, Bantry. (In 1866 a Thomas Lynch draper ,Bantry was arrested for suspected Fenian activities. Police file stated he was born in Kerry.) Witness to the deed, John Canty.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Lynch, A Storyteller's Childhood, page 296.

<sup>34</sup> http://titheapplotmentbooks.nationalarchives.ie

<sup>35</sup> Pigots Directory Cork City and County, 1824.

A combination of census, school and electoral records indicate that Nora Lynch remained in London for almost the rest of her life. A list of her known addresses is provided below. She didn't remarry after Thomas's death in 1883. Whatever she did to make ends meet in the 1880s is uncertain, but by the 1890s she seemed to be enjoying a measure of stability. For instance she spent many years at the same address in **Walworth: 4 Cotham Street.** This may have been because her two eldest children, now adults, were increasingly able to support her as her census return from this period indicates.

Perhaps the most baffling piece of information to come to light was Nora's subsequent 1911 census return. Now living in the Tottenham area, she described herself as the "sister" of the person she was staying with in the house: a Greenwich-born music hall artist twenty years her junior called Lily Marmorini. There is no logical explanation why Nora would choose to fill in her census in this way as she did not have a sister of this name and age. It adds to the mystery surrounding the Lynches. But perhaps further research would shed light on this matter.

### **London Addresses of Nora Lynch 1870-1918**

- 1870: 2 Rochester Road, St Pancras (marriage cert)
- 1872: 3 St John's Street, St Peter's, Islington. (birth record of Henry Lynch). Address unoccupied in 1871 census
- 1874: 123 Princes Road, Lambeth according to birth record of Laura Lynch
- 1881: 19 Delverton Road, Southwark. (Census)
- 1882: June, 69 New Street, Kennington Park Road, Newington as per birth record of youngest daughter, Winifred Lynch.
- 1883: 4 Orient Street, Southwark (per the will of Thomas Lynch). Thomas was staying at 22 (32?) Larcom Street ,Walworth, at time of death earlier in 1883.
- 1890: 118 Locksley Street. (As per admission to Thomas Road School, Limehouse, of her two daughters.)
- 1891: Census. 34 Turner's Road. Limehouse. Ecclesiastical parish of St Paul's. Henry and Laura staying. No Winifred. She is at Cliffe, Kent. Living at 12 Millcroft Rd with a William and Ann Keogh. Both Cork-born. William is a cooper.
- 1894: 4 Cotham Street, Walthamstow, near Lambeth. Civil parish of Newington. Ecclesiastical parish of Walworth, St John's . Nearest RC church is English Martyrs, 142 Rodney Road? Carmelite. Founded in 1890. Nearest school Notre Dame RC, St George's Road. There was also a nearby music hall called the Palace Theatre, opened in 1903.
- 1895: same
- 1899: same
- 1901: census still at 4 Cotham Street with Henry, Laura & Winifred this time.
- 1904: 46 Bruce Grove Tottenham
- 1908: 3 New King Street Deptford.
- 1910: 21 Waltheof Avenue, off Lordship Lane, Tottenham, N17.Courtesy of Electoral Registers. 1907 *Stage Newspaper* has an ad from this address advertising for the Aspiotis Troupe. Also Daisy Carlton (Mrs Will Hook) advertises from this address.
- 1911: Census, 5 Stanley villas, Boundary Road, Wood Green, Tottenham. A Maurice and Lily Marmorini there too.
- 1916: 201 Albion Road, Stoke Newington, (Death of Henry P. Lynch)
- 1917: 10 Whitehall Mansions, Clapton. (Admin papers of Henry P. Lynch)
- 1918: 69 Manor Rd, Leyton. (near Boundary Road.) Notebooks of RM Fox.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ancestry.com.1911 England Census, Class: RG14; Piece: 7302; Schedule Number: 71.

Ireland and Cork in particular were a sort of El Dorado for the Lynches. Nora took the opportunity to return when Patricia's political and journalistic activities took her to Dublin in the early 1920s. Nonetheless it came as a surprise to discover that Nora Lynch died in Bray, Co Wicklow, in January 1922. Her death wasn't officially registered, perhaps because of the disturbed state of the country. Her last known address was 13 Castle Street, Bray, Wicklow. Nora's grave was purchased by Patricia and is to be found at St Peter's Cemetery in Little Bray. 37



Headstone of Patricia's mother, Nora Lynch, at St. Peter's Cemetery, Little Bray, Wicklow. The grave was purchased by Patricia in January 1922.

# **Comrade Harry Lynch**

Henry P. Lynch is a constant presence in the works of Patricia Lynch, who plainly worshipped her much older brother. In her autobiographies she reversed his name to Patrick Henry, the brother who had a knack with figures and a love of history and languages, including Gaelic, Arabic and Greek. Henry was also the potential inspiration for several characters in Lynch's fiction, for example the violin-playing Jimmy in *The Green Dragon* and Hugh Patrick in *Delia Daly of Galloping Green*.

The sparse facts of his life are these. He was born in Islington in 1872 and was living with Thomas and Nora at Delverton Road, Southwark, when the 1881 census occurred. By 1891,18 year-old Henry was already a "carrier's clerk" helping to support his now widowed mother who was living in Limehouse. His career appeared to mirror his father's. By 1901 he was a "mercantile clerk" and was resident at Cotham Street, Walworth.

In the following years he became active in the trade union movement and joined the **Industrial Workers of the World** <sup>38</sup>. The "Wobblies", a radical organization founded originally in the United States in 1905, was to establish links with James Connolly and other figures of the Irish labour and

<sup>37</sup>Plot XA76.

<sup>38</sup> A revolutionary youth - Harold Edwards, https://libcom.org/history/revolutionary-youth

nationalist movements in the lead up to the 1913 Lockout and then the 1916 Rising in Dublin. It is thought that "Harry" Lynch, as he was known, became friendly with Connolly and with R.M.Fox through this organization.

Like Patricia, Henry Lynch couldn't be found in the 1911 census. It is possible that he boycotted it as many socialists did at the time. It is not known how his militant union activities affected his employment situation during this time.

After the outbreak of WW1, he became a prominent anti-war campaigner and an official of the North London Branch of the militant pro-union, prosuffragette **Herald League**, eventually becoming its treasurer .<sup>39</sup> According to Patricia he risked imprisonment for his pacifist views, but unlike RM Fox he escaped a spell in Wormwood Scrubs because of ill-health and ultimately because of an untimely death. <sup>40</sup>

Henry died of pneumonia on the 4th of December, 1916, at **201 Albion Road, Stoke Newington**, aged just 44. The *Daily Herald* of December 16th paid tribute to "Comrade Harry Lynch" for his hard work and diligence in a cause that he appeared to live for.

Henry never married. His letters of administration were granted on the 24th of April 1917 to his mother, Nora Lynch, who oddly was described in the index as his "only next of kin". He is mentioned on Nora's headstone at Little Bray cemetery, although there is no record that he was buried there.



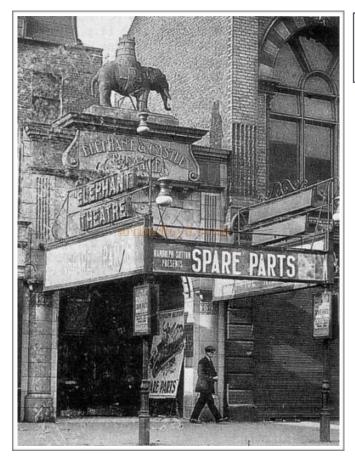
Patricia's brother, Henry Lynch (1872-1916)
The Papers of Patricia Lynch and R.M. Fox, MS
40,402 /1
Courtesy of the National Library Dublin

<sup>39</sup> Daily Herald, Dec 16, 1916. page 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

# **Laura Lynch: Music Hall Artist**

Nora and Thomas' second child, Laura Lynch, was just two years younger than Patricia's beloved brother, Henry Patrick, who features continuously in Lynch's autobiographical work. By contrast Laura never gets a mention.



Elephant and Castle Theatre opened on the New Kent Road, Walworth in 1879 She was born in Lambeth on November the 8th, 1874. Records reveal she attended the local St Thomas's School, Limehouse for a

short time until the end of her education in 1891. 41 Her entry states that her mother was resident at nearby Locksley Street and that she, Laura, was "late of convent". It isn't known which convent this refers to. The nearest convent to the school would have been Our Lady Roman Catholic School (formerly known as Limehouse Roman Catholic School).

In the 1901 census, Laura Lynch was living with Nora and Henry at 4 Cotham Street, Walworth, and described herself as a "music hall artiste, own account". She may have started out in some of the venues of Walworth's thriving music halls and dance palaces: the South London Palace or The Elephant and Castle Theatre, for instance.

It is unlikely that she performed under her own name but her stage name couldn't be

discovered. Her star wasn't big enough to get a mention in compendia such as *British Music Hall Who's Who from 1850s* or *My Ancestors worked in the Theatre. The Stage* newspaper archive identifies a "**Daisy Carlton**" advertising from 4 Cotham Street, which was Nora's address, in the 1890s. But further research appeared to show that this was the stage name of a different individual called **Annie Florence Cooper** (also born in 1874). In 1899 Cooper went on to marry music hall artist, Will Hook, and they performed under the comedy duo *Hook & Eye*.

What happened to Laura Lynch? Her life is a complete mystery after 1901. She didn't appear to marry. Nor was her death recorded. More specifically, what did Laura Lynch do to be completely excluded from Patricia's life story? Reading Lynch's autobiographical work, it would come as a complete surprise to discover that she had a sister at all. Laura doesn't merit a solitary mention.

There are little hints of a possible reason for this in some of Lynch's fiction, but they are no more than that. Unlike the works of Dickens, Lynch's villains are never particularly villainous, her colourful characters are never particularly grotesque. However themes do crop up that Patricia may have borrowed from real life. For instance, sibling rivalry features throughout her 1953 novel *Delia Daly of Galloping Green*, in which a younger sister is done out of a good boarding school education in favour of a more glamorous older sister in love with the stage. This sister, Nuala, is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup>London Metropolitan Archives, School Admissions and Discharges, 1840-1911. Thomas Street School (0321), Tower Hamlets. LCC/EO/DIV05/THO/AD/001.

portrayed as a self-centred notice box with no genuine interest in school work. Yet in spite of the injustice there is little animosity between the two sisters in the book. If anything their relationship is good-natured and loyal.

Delia Daly of Galloping Green also features "Cousin Kate", her mother's cousin, coming to the rescue and serving as a catalyst for change in the lives of the children. This is a favourite Lynch trope. So often in her work a sophisticated character with this name appears out of the blue to provide money for clothes, education or travel, leading to the suspicion that this reflected some sort of real-life situation for the Lynches, or else a situation that was often wished for.

An early 1922 work by Lynch, a novella called *The House on Rochester Square*, <sup>42</sup> is perhaps the only work to feature a real address from the author's past. (Her parents were living just off this London address at the time of their marriage in 1870.) The story is built around one-time orphan, Cathy Meagher, who is fired from her typing job when she tackles an unreasonable boss over a pay rise. Luckily Cathy learns on the day of her dismissal that she is to inherit a large fortune, including a somewhat creepy mansion at Rochester Square. But there follows a constant drain on Cathy's new money in the shape of a feckless hanger-on called Louise - a friend from orphanage days and now an unemployed actress, who was always "dazzling me not a little with her stories of theatrical life". <sup>43</sup> Might Louise have been modelled on sister Laura?

Unfortunately there will never be any real evidence to back up these theories. But interestingly Patricia Lynch was a faithful first-night theatregoer for over fifty years and had a life-long fascination for actors and the stage. 44

Photo of unidentified woman in Patricia Lynch's papers taken at Streuli & Muller Studios, Alexandria, Egypt . Patricia Lynch Papers , Ms 40,402/1 Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

## Egypt

Included among Patricia Lynch's papers is an official Egyptian travel document in both French and what looked like Arabic. Naturally it was assumed that this document most likely referred to the travels in Egypt of Thomas (Timothy) Lynch. At the very least it may have belonged to either Nora or Henry.

When this document was translated it was astonishing to discover that it was the 1903 passport of an individual called **Yani Espiyoti** (sometimes referred to in the document as **Jean Ispatis** as local Egyptian officials struggled with the foreignness of the name).

Who on earth was Yanni Espiyoti and what was his passport doing among Patricia Lynch's papers? He appeared to have nothing to do with the Lynch family in the sources already looked at. And he certainly couldn't have been a relative.

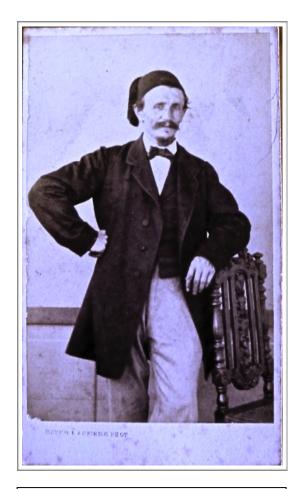


<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Published in the Family Herald Supplement, Dec 30th,1922.

<sup>43 &</sup>quot;The House on Rochester Square", Family Herald Supplement, Dec 30th, 1922, Chapter II, page 4.

<sup>44</sup> The Stage Newspaper obituary of Patricia Lynch, 21/9/1972.

# Monsieur Jean: "lightning fencer and sword juggler" 45



Portrait of unidentified man taken at Royer & Aufiere Studios, Cairo, Egypt. It is most likely to be of Greek-born music hall artist, Jean Aspiotis, (~1861-1915)
Patricia Lynch Papers, Ms 40,402/1
Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

A search of English newspapers from the 1890s revealed that this exotically-named entertainer, or someone with a very similar stage name, was playing in popular British music hall venues. Through the summer of 1894, he performed at the *Gaiety Theatre* Birmingham, and the *Aston Theatre Royal*, usually accompanied by a female partner, dubbed **Madame Aspiotis.** Play bills promoted the couple as "cleverest French wizards", performing amusing feats of illusion and incorporating the comical "world's mesmerist, Professor Henri" .46 The two would also conjure a live woman from a skeleton. 47 And they performed a regular act called "**The Missing Lady**", where a woman would vanish before the audience with magic speed.

More is known about Jean or Yanni Aspeotis (Aspiotis) thanks to the chance discovery of his aforementioned Egyptian passport among Lynch's papers. It described him as a 36 year old actor from Izmir (Smyrna) who was staying in Alexandria. The document was giving permission to Aspeotis to travel in Egypt without hindrance from the authorities. Written largely in the now defunct language Ottoman-Turkish,<sup>48</sup> it gave a physical description of the actor and several of his locations and destinations. The passport revealed that he was not traveling alone but was heading on to Thessalonika with his spouse, 23 year old "Lily Josepha." It also revealed the genealogical information that he was the son of a man named Nikolai Aspeotis from Izmir (Smyrna).

How did Jean Aspiotis became acquainted with the Lynches? Maybe their paths crossed through Laura Lynch's music hall career and the circles she moved

in. Laura may have been part of the act, may even have been "Madame Aspiotis" in the 1894 Birmingham play bills, although there was no hard evidence of this. What became apparent was that Nora Lynch and Jean Aspiotis shared several London addresses over a long period of years<sup>49</sup> and they also appeared to have a common interest in an act called the *Sisters Morley*. This acrobatic dance act, who needless to say were not sisters at all, were mentioned in *Era* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Patricia Lynch, *The Green Dragon*, page 36. Harup. 1925.

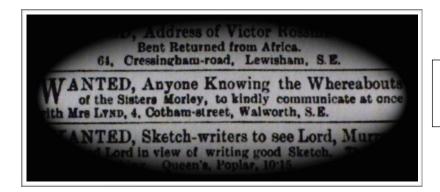
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Birmingham Daily Post, June 5 1894. page 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> The Era, June 9, 1894. page 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> The official language of the Ottoman empire until 1928.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Evidence from newspaper, census and electoral register sources.

Newspaper as far back as 1889. They were described as "Duetists and Dancers", appearing in venues such as the *People's Palace*. Portsmouth, in 1900.



Ad from the *Era* Newspaper October 6,1900, from 4 Cotham Street

In October of 1900, an intriguing notice appeared in *Era* Newspaper. It said: "Wanted. Anyone knowing the whereabouts of the Sisters Morley to kindly communicate at once with Mrs Lynd. 4 Cotham Street, Walworth, SE".

4 Cotham Street was Nora Lynch's electoral address throughout most of the 1890s and also in the 1901 census. And so it is thought that 'Mrs Lynd' in the notice was really Nora Lynch. Why would Nora put a notice like this in *Era Newspaper*? Might the reason be that Laura Lynch was a member of the *Sisters Morley* act at the time? Alternatively might it also be possible that Nora was in some way involved in the management of these music hall acts, perhaps even acting as theatrical agent.

By 1905, the *Sisters Morley* were advertising themselves as *Anona and Virginia*, Soubrettes and Continental dancers. They had appeared that year in the *Sinbad* pantomime at the *Wedgwood Theatre*, Burslem. <sup>50</sup> By 1907 they had made their name a little more continental, performing as the *Marletti Sisters* or *Soeurs Marletti*.

Jean Aspiotis' address in an ad in *The Stage* newspaper, for Aug 1st, 1907, was 21 Waltheof Avenue: the same as Nora Lynch's 1911 census address. As a

BU-VAL, Galety, Dundee.

WANTED, Engagements by the Troupe ASPIOTIS, Living Statues, representing Classic Statues from the Museum of Athens. Spiendid Miss-en-scens. Nothing immodest. Just finished long tour in all the biggest theatres of Paris. The Troupe Aspiotis do another Number under the name of Socurs Marletti Original National Dancers Rouman. These two Numbers are performed by four persons, and are entirely different. Lithos for both numbers. Aspiotis Attraction.—Address, 21, Waltheof Avenue, Lordship Lane, Tottenham, N.

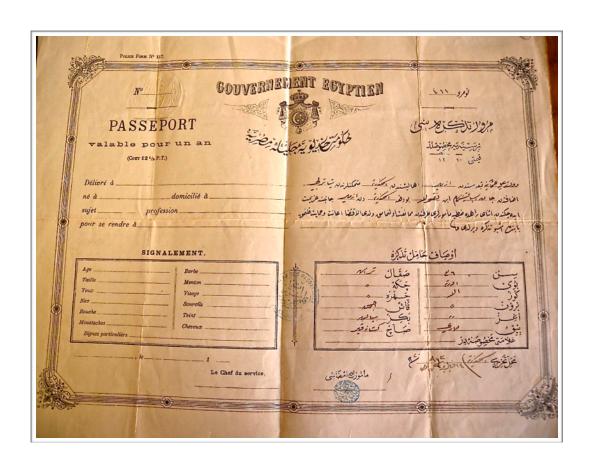
performer, Jean Aspiotis was incredibly well travelled. Apart from Egypt, he took his troupe all over Europe and to Russia, where they performed in front of Tsar Nicholas. <sup>51</sup>

In about 1903, during a tour of the Continent with the variety act, Jean Aspiotis married one of the *Marletti Sisters*, Lillian Morley. This individual is very likely to be the "Lily" mentioned to be accompanying Aspeotis in his 1903 Egyptian passport. She also may well have been the "Lily Marmorini" living with Nora Lynch and her son in Lynch's enigmatic 1911 census return at Boundary Road, Wood Green.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> The Stage, Mar 23, 1905.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Conversation with descendant of Jean Aspiotis, December 2014.

Aspiotis spent his last years in London and died at the early age of 54 on 21st of September 1915 at Camberwell Infirmary.



Egyptian passport in Ottoman-Turk found among the papers of Patricia Lynch. It was thought that this document was connected in some way to Patricia's father, Thomas Lynch, but translation of the document showed that it belonged to Greek music hall artist, Yanni Aspiotis, who spent much of his time in London.

Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Ms 40,402/1



# **Winifred Lynch**

Laura Lynch was not the only sister never to get a mention in Patricia's autobiographical works. It would appear that Nora and Thomas's youngest daughter, Winifred, suffered a similar fate.

Winifred was born on the 7th of June 1882 at 69 New Street, Kennington Park Road. Like her sister, Laura, she attended Thomas Street School, Tower Hamlets, from June 1890, having previously been at an unnamed convent school. She was taken out of Thomas Street in January 1891 but no reason was given for her removal. Three months later, when the 1891 census was undertaken, the eight year-old Winifred appeared to be staying with a childless couple called William and Ann Keogh at 12 Millcroft Road, in the Kent village of Cliffe (at Hoo). Both of the Keoghs were Cork-born and William was a cooper. <sup>52</sup>, the same occupation as many of the Mallow Lynches. It's possible that this couple were relatives of the Lynches but they couldn't be traced in subsequent records to confirm this theory. By 1901 Winifred was back in London, living at Cotham Street with the other members of the family - Nora, Henry and Laura.

Winifred's life after this time can be pieced together because she took a job with the **Royal Mail** for a number of years, following the same career path as many Corkonians who would feature in the 1916 Rising, such as Michael Collins, JJ Walsh and Jeremiah Lynch.

Available postal employee records are kept at the Royal Mail Archive, Mount Pleasant, London<sup>53</sup>. They show that she started as a post office sorter at the Post Office Bank in 1898. Following an open competition, she advanced in July 1901 to the position of clerk, 2nd class, at the Clearing House Branch of the Accountant General's Department, GPO. The job would have involved shorthand and typing. By 1904 her salary was £60 and rose by £2 and then by £5 increments each year after this. By 1910 she was on a salary of £80 per year.

Winifred Lynch was based in the GPO at **St Martin's Le Grand Street**, London,near St Paul's Cathedral. An imposing Neo-Classical building much like the GPO in O'Connell Street, Dublin, it was demolished in 1911.



GRO birth record of Winifred Lynch, 7 June 1882, at 69 New Street, Kennington Road, Newington, London

It was learned that the female clerks with the Royal Mail set up a union in 1901 called the **Association of Post Office Women Clerks.** One of the first unions of its kind, it fought for the employment rights of the female clerks, especially in relation to equality with men in the post office. Was Winifred Lynch a member of this association, getting her first taste of union and women's rights activism which was so characteristic of the Lynches? The catalogue of the union's members

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> According to Patricia's second biographical work, *A Storyteller Grows Up*, her aunt Mary and uncle Liam were offered a home at Cliff at Hoo, Kent, when a friend of Aunt Mary's married an Englishman. National Library of Ireland, Collection No. 79, The Papers of Patricia Lynch and RM Fox, MS 40,290/1.

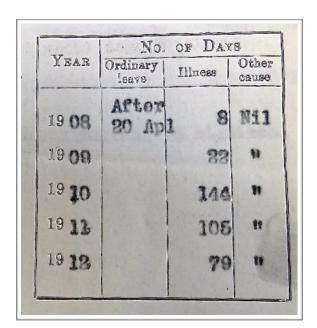
<sup>53</sup> The Royal Mail Archive, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X0DL.

is kept at the Women's Library in the London School of Economics. 516 members are recorded in the records of the Association of Women Post Office Clerks.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Winifred Lynch was not among them.

The postal career of Winifred Lynch ended prematurely in February 1912, when she was awarded a pension of £18 per annum on the grounds of ill-health. Her illness wasn't specified in the file. It was unusual for someone to receive a gratuity like this after only thirteen years of service and at barely thirty years of age. It must have been granted on compassionate grounds.<sup>55</sup> The lack of any detail on the sickness leads to the suspicion that it may have been a sensitive condition like tuberculosis, but this isn't certain.

Winifred Lynch's work attendance record in her file<sup>56</sup> shows an enormous level of days lost due to illness in the five years leading up to her departure. 1910 was a particularly bad year with 144 days lost.1911 was not much better at 105 days.

In spite of her poor attendance record, Winifred got a good final write up: "Miss Winifred Lynch has discharged her duties with diligence and fidelity to the satisfaction of his(sic) superior officers" the assistant secretary of the GPO wrote in the file.



After this date, Winifred disappears from view as far as available primary records are concerned. She appeared not to marry and there is no record of her death having occurred either, in spite of what looks like years of ill-health. Her name is not recorded in subsequent electoral registers for London. Like Laura Lynch, the rest of her life is shrouded in mystery.

Chart outlining days missed by Winifred Lynch from 1908-1912. Treasury Letter 1912, Post 1/471. Vol. 332. No. 346. Pages 346-348. © Royal Mail Group 2014, courtesy of the British Postal Museum & Archive.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> London School of Economics Women's Library. 6 APC. Annual General Meetings 1902-1915 of the Assoc. of Women Post Office Clerks.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Conversation with archivist at the Royal Mail Archive , Freeling House, London. Oct 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup>Treasury Letter 1912, Post 1/471. Vol. 332. No. 346. Pages 346-348. © Royal Mail Group 2014, courtesy of the British Postal Museum & Archive.

## Clues from journalism



First edition title of the *Woman's Dreadnought* Saturday May 23, 1914

When the name Patricia Lynch appears in primary sources for the first time, it does so out of the blue and with a flourish. It is the name of a prominent activist in the suffrage movement, in this case the **East London Federation of Suffragettes**. <sup>57</sup> Based on the Old Ford Road, the ELFS represented Sylvia Pankhurst's attempts to have the concerns of working class women heard within the largely well-heeled suffrage movement. <sup>58</sup> The weekly newspaper, *The Women's Dreadnought*, later *The Worker's Dreadnought*, was started up in 1914 and acted as the mouthpiece for the ELFS. It had a circulation of 20,000 and kept its price low. Its pages reveal that Patricia Lynch was an active organiser of federation meetings from the end of 1915. By 1917 she was a speaker at its rallies. <sup>59</sup>



Lynch's card during her time as campaigner with the Sylvia Pankhurst's Worker's Suffrage Federation, London. Papers of Patricia Lynch, Ms 40,334/2 Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

An Irishwoman, **May O'Callaghan** (1881-1973), was sub-editor and head of the Information Bureau at *The Dreadnought*. Very little is known about this individual who wrote pieces on Constance Markievicz and Laurence Ginnell in the wake of the Easter Rising, and who lived virtually her entire life in London, outliving Patricia Lynch by a year. (She died at Hendon in June 1973). A contemporary of Winifred Lynch, May O'Callaghan may have known the Lynches before her time with the ELFS.

<sup>57</sup> http://eastlondonsuffragettes.tumblr.com/history

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> The ELFS records and archives are deposited in the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/p/ARCH01029full.php

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> The Herald, September 1, 1917, page 13.

One of Lynch's address books in her papers contains long lists of names and addresses of women who were members of the East London Federation of Suffragettes. All the entries are in pencil (Lynch's favourite writing tool) under headings such as "Whitechapel Branch". They were written over in some cases by addresses of friends and acquaintances from Lynch's later life after she settled in Ireland in the 1920s.

Although Lynch's fiction for children overshadows the rest of her work, she contributed a great deal of journalistic work on the East End of London during this time, and she was an astute observer on the area. Lynch was aware that the new phenomenon of the well off and the poor rubbing shoulders in a common cause resulted in awkward situations. In one newspaper piece entitled the "Charity Concert", she describes the excruciating experience of a group of East End women invited to attend a concert thrown by "Madame L" at her vast home near Hyde Park.

Our East End contingent arrived late, during the first interval, not out of rudeness, but from self-respect, lest they appear too eager. They suffered agonies on that endless journey from the hall door to the studio. They were visibly conscious of their origin, their clothes, their lack of elegance. They were very obviously in their very best.<sup>60</sup>

Lynch casts herself as bystander at the scene, but there is a sense that it may have been more personal than that. It is possible that Lynch's own family circumstances shaped her radical political views more than any other factor.

During this time, Lynch's best-known work of journalism was a riveting first-hand account of the aftermath of the 1916 Rising in Dublin, published in the May 13th edition of the *Worker's Dreadnought*. With a sense of danger coming from every page, "**Scenes from the Rebellion**" featured vivid descriptions of the ruined city streets and interviews with bewildered bystanders, waitresses and shop workers. The piece noted among other details how the soldiers looked like dwarfs beside the giants of the Dublin Metropolitan Police and how a little paper shop beside Liberty Hall lay completely untouched by the damage and mayhem around it.

As Lynch sat in a room in Trinity College waiting for her travel pass to be issued, her military interrogator asked who her people were, how long she was living in England, who her relations in Ireland were . All questions that it would have been very interesting to hear answered for this essay.

"Scenes from the Rebellion" was the first overtly pro-rebel newspaper piece to be published in a climate of heavy press censorship. It was a genuine coup for the *Worker's Dreadnought*, which tripled its circulation in the following weeks. Lynch was supposed to have been organising a suffrage meeting at London's Osborne Street on April 30th and at Bow Women's Hall on May 1st 1916, and had only been despatched to Dublin by Pankhurst and O'Callaghan because of her anonymity and her enthusiasm for the assignment. In a *Storyteller Grows Up* it was even claimed that the slightly-built Lynch donned the uniform of a schoolgirl in order to make her way around Dublin.

"Scenes form the Rebellion" went a long way towards winning for Lynch the affection of many figures in the Irish nationalist movement. She became a trusted friend of Maude Gonne MacBride, Eva Gore Booth, Louis Bennet and Hannah Sheehy Skeffington.

### The O'Dwyers of 6 Sussex Terrace Donnybrook

A Storyteller Grows Up revealed that Lynch stayed with the family of a Hugh and Ann O'Dwyer at 6 Sussex Terrace, Leeson Street Bridge, Donnybrook, during her eventful days in Dublin. She stayed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> National Library of Ireland, Col. List No. 79. The Papers of Patricia Lynch & RM Fox, MS, 40,298. Newspaper cutting of "The Charity Concert", from *The Co-Operative News?* Date unknown.

with the same couple again for up to two years before her marriage in London in 1922. <sup>61</sup> Was this just a random occurrence or might the O'Dwyers have been related to Lynch in some way? What supports this theory is that Hugh O'Dwyer, a Corkman, was born in Bantry in 1878, to William O'Dwyer, (born circa 1830) fisherman, and Julia Harrington. (b circa 1845), both living at **42 Barrack Road, Bantry** in 1901. In 1878, Thomas Lynch had a draper's shop on the same street <sup>62</sup>. and a John Lynch (born 1853) was living up the road at 24 Barrack Road in 1901. According to *A Storyteller Grows Up*, Hugh O'Dwyer claimed to know "The Boss", (a possible reference to Lynch's grandfather?) which again reinforces the Bantry connection with the immediate Lynch family.





No.6 Sussex Terrace, Ballsbridge, home to Hugh and Ann O'Dwyer. Lynch stayed with the O'Dwyers when she was sent by Sylvia Pankhurst to report on the 1916 Rising and for a time before her marriage in London in 1922.

#### "Dear Old Patrick"

Lynch's papers revealed that she kept up a regular correspondence with members of an English family called the Newtons. **Ethel, Daisy and Edith Newton** were children of Annie and John Curtis Newton and had grown up on the Wandsworth Road, Lambeth. They are one of the few people from her earlier London years that Patricia kept in touch with after she moved to Dublin for good with R.M. Fox in the 1920s. In their letters, the Newton sisters religiously addressed Patricia as "Dear Old Patrick". <sup>63</sup> It is possible that they knew Lynch from the ELFS, although their involvement in that organisation hasn't been established.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Marriage of Patricia Lynch and Richard Michael Fox ,4th October 1922, RC church of St Francis de Sales, High Road, Tottenham, London.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Registry of Deeds, Henrietta Street, Lynch to Lynch, 1878 -18-10.

<sup>63</sup> National Library of Ireland, Col. List No. 79. Papers of Patricia Lynch and RM Fox. MS 40,327/14.

## The Green Dragon

Lynch credits an early encounter with **Edith Nesbit**, (1858-1922) author of *The Railway Children*, as the major inspiration for her own career in children's fiction. Sometime after WW1 she was sent to interview Nesbit at her home in Well Hall, Eltham, Kent. In the course of this article Lynch described her mother, Nora, as an invalid and was given a bunch of flowers by Nesbit, whose own sister was tubercular. <sup>64</sup>

Lynch's first children's book , *The Green Dragon*, was published in 1925 by JM Dent, London. It set her on the career that made her name. Unlike most of her subsequent fiction, *The Green Dragon* is not set in Ireland. It features a family of out of luck strolling players who manage to get a job at "Boss Lee's" circus. There they meet a collection of entertainers including a *Monsieur Jean*, a well known "lightning fencer and sword juggler". The main character is a gypsy-like child called Gay-Anne whose singing and dancing skills are much in demand wherever she goes. But she is embarrassed by her crooked foster parents, Madam Anne, and her conceited step-father Professor Gabriel, because they steal from a man who offers them hospitality. Egypt, a frequent trope in Lynch's fictional work, is the work destination for this generous man, John Graham, who buys curios there for a living to sell back in England. At one point John Graham asks Gay-Anne of Madam Anne "Is that woman really your mother? ..... I wish she wasn't".

Recurring themes crop up in her literature. Children running away, often from their own parents. Cruelty to animals. A love of food. Someone learning the violin and having their life transformed by this. People getting fired from their jobs when they ask for a rise from an unreasonable boss.

## **Victorian Travelling Fair**

Lynch's work also shows that she was more than familiar with the sites of the Victorian fairground and its characters. A phenomenon of her era, it was the perfect crucible for the groups who feature liberally in her writing. Elements of the Travelling community, of theatre people and variety acts, of travelling showmen, acrobats, contortionists, illusionists. All part of a rather off-beat but at the same time closed community.

Patricia Lynch outlived RM Fox by 3 years and spent the remaining years of her life in the company of her good friends, Mai and Eugene Lambert, before her death in 1972<sup>65</sup>. She is buried at Glasnevin Cemetery.

<sup>64</sup> Puffin Post, Vol 1, No. 3, Autumn 1967.

<sup>65</sup> Age on death cert given as 74 (so born 1898).

## Conclusion

To paraphrase Lady Bracknell: to forget one sister may be regarded as a misfortune; to forget both looks like carelessness. In this writer's opinion, it is likely that Winifred Lynch, the youngest



Promotional photograph of Lynch from her London publishers J.M. Dent, about the time of the publication of The House by Lough Neagh, 1963. Papers of Patricia Lynch, MS 40,395/5 Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

daughter of Nora and Thomas Lynch, ditched her first name (which she possibly may not have liked) and reinvented herself as Patricia Lynch some time after the serious illness that forced her to quit her postal job in London. Throughout her biographical works, Lynch hints at poor health as a child, specifically the prevalence of a chronic cough. The bad health is cited as the reason why Patricia is so often left behind by Nora and Patrick Henry as they embark on their improbable pursuit of Thomas Lynch's elusive estate or of his equally elusive business partner, Stephen Blanchard. <sup>66</sup>

The shorthand and typing skills that she acquired during her years in the post office would have served her well in a subsequent journalistic career. There is also the coincidence that Winifred and Patricia had the same birthday (June 7th<sup>67</sup>) and Winifred's 1891 census return at the Kent village, Cliff-at-Hoo, is the same place that young Patricia claimed she was packed off to for a time in *A Storyteller Grows Up*.

If Winifred was Patricia, then of course she would have been considerably older than her stated age. The timeline of her childhood would then indicate that she would have returned to Cork as a young child in the 1880s. But one would have expected her destination to have been Mallow, where her maternal side had long-standing roots, rather than the Fair Hill area of Cork City.

It is also possible from the evidence available that Patricia saw little, if any, of her beloved Cork and

the other rural Munster settings that she described. Rather her childhood was much more likely to have been spent in the London areas of Walworth and Elephant and Castle, and would have been about as Irish a childhood as Charlie Chaplin's<sup>68</sup>.

The fact remains that if Patricia was not Winifred, then Thomas and Nora Lynch cannot have been her parents and some alternative theory has to be put forward. What is certain is that Thomas (Timothy) Lynch did not die in Egypt. But perhaps somebody else in the family did. Might that

<sup>66</sup> Also referred to as Miles Justin Blanchard in A Storyteller's Childhood.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Entry from an address book of RM Fox giving Patricia's birthday as June 7. Papers of Patricia Lynch & RM Fox, Col. List No.79, MS 40,333. Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

<sup>68</sup> Interestingly Chaplin invented a rebel Cork background for his London-born grandfather, Charles Hill, whose rheumatism he put down to hiding in rain-sodden fields from the authorities. *Charles Chaplin*, David Robinson, *My Autobiography*. Penguin Modern Classics . 2003. Page 16.

person have been Laura Lynch, the elusive sister and music hall artist who seems to disappear from available primary records after her 1901 London census entry? The sister who is left out of Patricia's life story altogether? Unlike the others, Laura would have had a good chance of making it to Egypt if she had been a member of Jean Aspiotis's Troupe. And it is significant that the only surviving travel document found among Lynch's papers is the Egyptian passport of the muchtravelled Aspiotis.

One could easily imagine a scenario where this and other indecipherable documents and artefacts such as his red fez were left lying about Nora's house in London and Patricia's imagination went to work on them. With a father dead within a year of her birth, she would have been relying for family lore on what she was told by Nora, whom she frequently refers to as a *shanachie*. "In my own life I was accustomed to a struggle with poverty but my mother's stories of her grand days made up for it all". <sup>69</sup>



Entry from an address book of RM Fox giving Patricia's birthday as June 7.
Papers of Patricia Lynch & RM Fox, MS 40,333.
Courtesy of National Library of Ireland

In a 1958 article entitled *There is a Place for Fantasy,* Lynch wrote that "imagination means looking deeper and seeing beyond the veil." Perhaps reality was the veil for Lynch in her own life. Like many people who chose a career in the arts from this era, (for example Michael MacLiammoir of the Gate Theatre) Lynch gave herself the back story that she wanted, not the one that she had been given by circumstance. No doubt this process of invention was essential to her development as a writer and storyteller.

There may have been a further dimension. Pat Donlon points out that the subject matter of Lynch's writing was part of the official iconography of the new Irish State. <sup>71</sup> This unique position would have almost forced Lynch to assume an Irish upbringing. The sweet, magical children's tales of Lynch's fiction belie the hard-nosed political radicalism that marked her early career in journalism. The obvious Cork brogue she gives herself in the dialogue passages of her autobiography is at odds with her life-long London accent. She was a Londoner with an apparent pre-occupation with Irish rural settings and at the same time an archetypal Irish writer who found a home for her books with a non-Irish publisher. <sup>72</sup> The circumstances of Patricia Lynch's life are tripping over with contradictions but they haven't yet given up their mysteries completely. The facts of this story, such as they can be made out, reveal that the power of Lynch's imagination must have been all the more extraordinary.

## "You have given the world a deep draft of joy and gladness" 73

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> National Library of Ireland. Collection No. 72. Papers of Patricia Lynch and Richard M. Fox. "A Storyteller Grows Up", page 42, MS 40,290/1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Patricia Lynch, Secret Lands, page 22. Ed. Robert Dunbar, O'Brien Press, 1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Clare Hutton & Patrick Walsh, "Books for Irish Children", by Pat Donlon, Chapter 15, *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol V: The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, page 367.

<sup>72</sup> JM Dent & Sons.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> National Library of Ireland, Col. List No. 79. Papers of Patricia Lynch and RM Fox. MS 40,327/1. Letter of Louis Bennet to Patricia Lynch,Oct 18, circa 1950s.

## Acknowledgement

The British Postal Museum & Archive is building a new, national museum showcasing its world-class collections charting five centuries of communication and social history. The Postal Museum, located in Central London, will reveal the extraordinary stories of global ingenuity undertaken by the Post Office and the constant endeavour to keep people across the globe in touch. For more information please visit: http://postalmuseum.org/

Many thanks to DCU Language Services for translation work.



# **Suggested Family Tree of Patricia Lynch**

Charles & Johanna Lynch?



Jeremiah Lynch

**Timothy** Lynch b? m Mallow 1837 d?

**Honora** Burke b Mallow m Mallow 1837 Charles Lynch b Cork 1817 m Kinsale,Cork 1841 d Dover, Kent 1872

Thomas (Timothy) Lynch b Scotland ?~ 1823 m St Pancras London 1870 d Walworth London 1883 Nora Lynch b Mallow 1847 m London 1870 d Bray,Wicklow 1922

Kate\* b: 1842, m: 1875 d: 1901 Louisa E b: 1845 died young Charles Robert b 1853 d: 1886 Henry William b 1855

Robert Walter b 1856 Eliza b 1857 died young

**Henry** Patrick Lynch b Islington 1872 d London 1916 Laura Lynch b Lambeth 1874 d? Winifred Lynch (Patricia Nora?) b Newington 1882 m Richard M Fox Tottenham 1922 d Dublin 1972

## Other children of Timothy Lynch and Honora Burke:

Johanna b Mallow, Cork Sep 14, 1838 Charles b Mallow Jan 1,1841 Catherine b Mallow Dec 4,1842 Timothy b Mallow, Dec 22,1844 Mary b Mallow Oct 28,1849 Ellen b Mallow Sep 4,1854 \* Notes on Cousin Kate Lynch Married Dr Frederick Josiah Burgess in London 1875.

One son, Harold Lynch Burgess, (born 1878) who married Mabel Wearn in Hackney,1906. Died 1917 at sea off the coast of Africa

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