

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SWEETNAM FAMILY

The name Sweetnam is said to be a form of the name Swetenham sometimes written Swetnam whilst the form Sweetman is said to have a completely different origin; nevertheless both Sweetnam and Sweetman are found as father and son on the same gravestone in Co. Cork, where in the Skibbereen area our branch of the family has had its roots since at least the 18th century.

Family tradition is that our Sweetnams are descended from members of Cromwell's army. Many years ago Tom Warner (born 1906) told me that "that the late Dr Kelly, Bishop of the Diocese of Ross, found in some old records in the Four Courts in Dublin the name Sweatenham and that there were three brothers of this name in Cromwell's army, Mathew, John and Thomas, who afterwards settled in the Diocese of Ross. No trace of this record has been found and, in his old age, Tom denied ever hearing of it.

The earliest reference to the family name in West Cork appears in the Census of Ireland of 1659 where Matthew Sweetman is shown holding 3 gneeves of land at Dromonadna in the Parish of Dromaleage. He is the only one of the name in the Barony. The Book of Survey listing the distribution of land to disbanded Cromwellian soldiers following the Act of Settlement of 1652 shows that Matthew Sweetman was confirmed in his holding of 110 acres of good land in the Parish of Drumallige (Drimoleague); the land being part of Laghernott, some two miles East of Drimoleague.

It is very possible that the Cromwellian tradition is correct. There are also very slight indications that the first Mathew might have been connected to the Swettenhams of Somerford Booth in Cheshire who were strongly of the Parliamentary party. However the name Sweetnam in all its forms is found widely not only in Cheshire but also in the Midlands and South of England, and troops for Ireland could have been levied in many places. The name was also present in Ireland long before the time of the Cromwellian wars but not in the West Cork area as far as any records show at present.

The earliest ancestors of our's for which there is both oral and documentary evidence are **Mathew and Elizabeth (nee Connell) Sweetnam** who were married in 1812. He was a tall man and came from Murrahin in the Parish of Kilcoe. Mathew had eight children : Samuel, Richard, **Thomas**, Mathew, Martha, Elizabeth, Margaret and Jane (birth order uncertain). **Thomas**, who was born about 1817, married Catherine Vickery at Caheragh Church on the 13th July 1848. He was Land Agent to the Newman Estate and took over Clohane farm in 1845, which is in the townland of Shanavalla. His brother, Samuel, took over another Newman property, Betsborough, near by. Thomas went blind when about 50 years old. It is on our direct line of descent from that **Mathew** and Elizabeth that this article concentrates. A fuller list of descendants is set out in the 'Clohane' Family Tree. The family tree for a related branch of Sweetnams descended from John Sweetnam, who also originated in Murrahin and lived at Killinga near Leap, together with one for Sweetnams of Mardyke House, Skibbereen, gives an indication of how many there are of

that name in the area. There are, however, many more whose relationship I have been unable to ascertain living in both East and West County Cork.

Many of the Clohane Sweetnams are buried at the old church Aghadown on the bank of the Ilen river in the old unmarked dry stone vault at the north west gable of the tower. The last to be buried there was Martha, daughter of Thomas and Catherine.

Thomas and Catherine had seven children; Bessie, Mathew; Martha, Thomas, Francis, **George**, and Molly who married Samuel Warner . Thomas, born 1861, stayed on the farm at Clohane. **George**, born in 1866, graduated at Trinity College, Dublin, in Divinity and became a Clergyman as did his brother, Mathew. George married Sara Clark of Upperlands, Co. Derry and had four children; **Thomas** born 1893, William born 1895, Marian born 1897, who died of pneumonia in 1909, and Kathleen born 1905 who married Archie Thompson. **George** was Rector of Swatragh, Co. Derry and lived at Killylagh Rectory until his death in 1930.

Thomas, born 1893, graduated as a doctor at T.C.D., and , after war service in the R.A.M.C, practiced at Wimbledon Park, London until he rejoined the R.A.M.C in 1940. At the end of the War he returned to Ulster and lived at Portstewart, Hollywood and latterly at Bryansford. He married Margaret Black of Ballyleck, Monaghan, in 1918 and had three sons; **Cecil**, born in 1919, **Jim**, born in 1920, and **Robin**, born in 1922 ,all of whom were educated at Kings College, Wimbledon and at Trinity College, Dublin.

Cecil graduated in medicine and practiced in Bourne, Lincolnshire. He married Jean Atkin in 1953 and had three children; **David**, born in 1956, **Judy**, born in 1959 and **Katie** born in 1964.

Jim graduated in medicine and, after service in the R.A.M.C. practiced in Antrim and then engaged in industrial medicine. He married Rosemary Porterfield in 1950 and had two children; **Christopher**, born in 1952, and **Jill**, born in 1954.

Robin graduated in Civil Engineering and joined the staff of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners in 1942 until taking early retirement in 1975. He married first Agnes Gordon in 1960 and had a son, **Tom** born in 1964. After Agnes' death in 1985 he married his first cousin, Sheelagh, daughter of William Sweetnam and Irene Black, sister of Margaret Black. He lived in Belfast and at Bryansford and, after his second marriage, in Weybridge and in South Cheriton, Somerset.