

Introduction

Such is the self-absorption of childhood that few of us have any curiosity during our formative years about our parents' origins and upbringing which led them to become the sort of people we grew up with. So it was with me.

Although I know quite a bit about my mother's side of the family, I know little of my father's beyond his own father's places of birth and education in India.

I am not alone in this. None of my two brothers and two sisters, nor any of our three cousins who were born into the same O'Leary clan, were either interested or curious enough during our parents' lifetimes to question them about our fathers' origins.

Perhaps one or two of our own children or grandchildren, who have been brought up in the age of information retrieval via the worldwide computer network will, as a consequence of these memoirs, be inspired to carry out some genealogical research as to their Irish ancestry.



Mother and wife,
the two stalwarts in my life



1. *My Parents and Grandparents*

My knowledge of my father's antecedents is almost nonexistent. He was born on 28 February 1895 in Waltair on India's East coast and was christened Maurice Patrick. He was the second of four sons, all born in that country to Charles and Mary O'Leary.

The eldest son, Denis, died of enteric fever at age seven and the youngest, Dermot, emigrated to and disappeared in Australia in the 1930s.



My O'Leary grandparents, Charles and Mary,
with their sons Michael, Maurice and Dermot

Michael the third son had, like Father, a career in the Indian Army. He married Daphne Osmaston, a younger sister of Olive Osmaston, my mother. Thus two O'Learys married two Osmastons.

All three surviving brothers were educated at St Joseph's College in Naini Tal, a 'hill station' in Northern India. The school was run by Irish Christian Brothers for children of Irish and British expatriates as well as for well-to-do Indians and Anglo-Indians.

My O'Leary grandfather, Charles, was also born in India just a few miles north of Father's birthplace in a largish town now named Vishakhapatnam. He was educated at the well-regarded school La Martinere in Lucknow.

I have no knowledge of what brought his parents to India from Ireland or indeed what brought his wife-to-be, Mary Murphy, my paternal grandmother to that country from, I think, Tipperary. Charles became a railway engineer and no doubt had a significant role in the planning and development of India's extensive and very well-used railway system. My cousin Ian is the only one of his grandchildren who remembers meeting him. Ian was very impressed by Grandpa's private rail road car, the existence of which suggests that he must have been someone of considerable importance in Indian railways.

That I came to learn quite a bit of Mother's side of the family is partly due to the accounts of several members of her generation of the doings of their Victorian forebears. More importantly though was the fact that after Mother's parents returned on retirement to England we lived very close to them in Westgate-on-Sea in Kent and then, during and after the Second World War, with them in their Oxford home.

Mother's father, Bertram Osmaston, had a spectacularly interesting career in India. This is very well described in the book written by his youngest son, Gordon, entitled *Wild Life and Adventures in Indian Forests*. This was developed from Grandpa's diaries, which as a trained Naturalist he wrote up meticulously.

Grandpa Osmaston was one of a very large family whose lineage tree is shown in the next chapter. His tertiary education was at the School of Forestry at Coopers Hill, London, from which he graduated and joined the Indian Forestry Service in 1888 aged 21. He travelled out to India that year on a P&O (Peninsular & Oriental) liner.

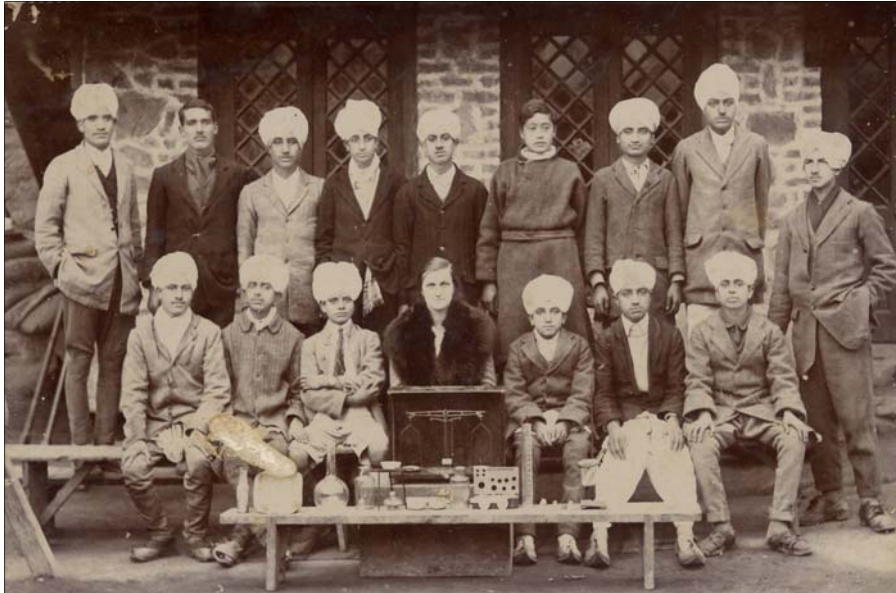
Also on board were Mrs C.C. Hutchinson and her daughter Catherine Mary (known as May). A shipboard romance ensued and the young pair became engaged by the time the ship docked at Bombay (now Mumbai). It was not until 1892 however that they married in England.



My Osmaston grandparents,
Bertram and Catherine, in Kohat, 1924

They had seven children, the first, a daughter Sylvia, dying in infancy. Three boys followed all of whom fought in World War One, the youngest, Oswald, being killed on the Somme. Then came three daughters, my mother Olive, the eldest, being born on 17 March 1900 in Chakrata, India.

Mother's schooling was in England at St George's, Harpenden, Herts, from which she gained entry to London University in 1918 where she studied Science, graduating in 1920. She returned to India joining her parents in Kashmir. In Kashmir at that time was a school started by an enlightened educationalist, Dr Tindall Biscoe. It became quite famous. The school catered for the sons of (presumably rich) Kashmiri parents. Mother joined the school as a Science teacher to discover that some of her students were older than her, a few being married men.



Mother and pupils

Mother and her younger sisters Daphne and Myrtle were living with their parents in Kashmir when Father and his brother Michael, both Indian Army officers, made increasingly frequent visits to the family when they were on leave. The two marriages were a later result.



Picnic in Kashmir, c.1922. From left: Granny Osmaston, Daphne, Myrtle, Father, Mother (Olive). The botanical names of the three Osmaston daughters were a reflection of Grandpa's Natural History background